

BRISTOL

A Poetic City



A FREE
COMIC BOOK
PUBLICATION

ILYA
WILLEM HAMPSON

BRISTOL – A Poetic City

About the Project:

A Poetic City is a multi-partner, city-wide programme led by Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP) that explores the legacy of the iconic literary figure Thomas Chatterton, who died in 1770. It builds on existing knowledge of Chatterton's life and times; celebrates Bristol's current vibrant and diverse poetry scene; and aims to inspire poets of the future. It includes new publications, exhibitions, talks, workshops and walking tours. For the latest news visit the Facebook page @bristolpoeticcity. #bristolpoeticcity

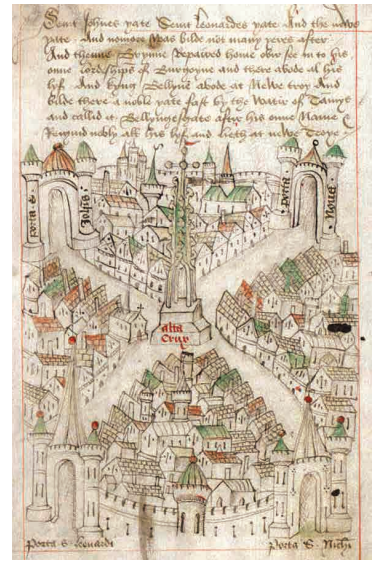
Much of the dialogue in the comic is based on historical accounts. You might meet occasional wording that seems unusual or unfamiliar. Most often, solving any mystery needs only a moment's pause. What might 'cap acquaintances' be, for instance? Puzzle out 'hat friends' – people that you'd raise your hat to, but not much else – and you have it. Still unsure and need more clues? Try Google. Plus, check online anyway for all sorts of extra goodies – blog notes, inside track info, and lively discussions about the comic. Or you can always please excuse our poetic licence. In a poetic city, this is how we roll.

TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE THEMES ARE PRESENT: PLEASE REFER TO THE RESOURCES LISTED ON PAGE 20 IF YOU FIND YOURSELF AT ALL AFFECTED BY ANY OF THIS CONTENT. THANK YOU.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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proof-readers – Debra Britton, Jacqueline Gerrard, Alison Miles Manning, Katy Noyes, Glenys Wynne Jones. ILYA would like to extend thanks to his Lockdown Lushes, Vyla Rollins and Victor Perez. His every effort is dedicated in loving memory of Reg Hillyer, Ethel Rollins, and most especially Mum Pat – 'I am your Chatterton'. Willem Hampson would like to thank Mum, Dad, and Sandra Wright for the endless creative support; Oli Scotton for the design advice, and ILYA for being his first comic mentor.



- Robert Ricart's *The Maire of Bristowe* is *Kalendar* 1480-1508. (Bristol Archives 04720)

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We hope you enjoy reading this comic. Please send us your feedback when you have finished. There's an online survey at smartsurvey.co.uk/s/apoeticcity and you can also post comments on our Facebook page @bristolpoeticcity

We look forward to hearing from you.

WE BUILT THIS CITY...

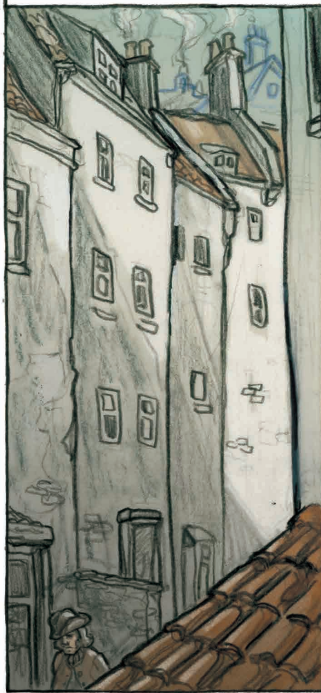
1752: England's second city, Bristol, is a hotbed of merchants and trade: in soap, salt, cheese, gunpowder, in woollens and stockings and so much more. Can it, does it, even have a soul? And if it should, is that soul allowed a voice? What then would that voice say... ?



BRISTOL IN THE MID 18TH CENTURY IS A BUSY 'CITY OF COMMERCE', THE SECOND-LARGEST IN ENGLAND (POPULATION CLOSE TO 50,000)...



... A CROWDING METROPOLIS BUILT ON SUGAR AND SLAVERY.



THE PAVEMENTS, MUD-SLICK – WORN SMOOTH BY HORSE-DRAWN SLEDS USED TO TRANSPORT HEAVY GOODS – ARE TREACHEROUS IN WET WEATHER.



'WAAH!'

?!'

INTO THESE NARROWS THOMAS CHATTERTON IS BORN, 20 NOVEMBER 1752.

"CHILD OF SORROW, SON OF MISERY" HIS FATHER, THOMAS SENIOR, MASTER OF THE PILE STREET SCHOOL, HAS BEEN DEAD 3 MONTHS. AND THAT'S NOT ALL...



... like poor Baby Giles

1755

What this?

Where from?

These papers were your father's

He... took them from Saint Mary's



From... Mary?

The Big Church

You know the one



Towers over us, day in and day out

CHATTERTON'S MOTHER MAKES UNWITTING USE OF ANTIQUE MEDIEVAL PARCHMENTS, ARTEFACTS THAT FASCINATE HER YOUNG SON...



IS ONLY INHERITANCE, AROUND 150 BOOKS.

FROM THE ILLUMINATED CAPITALS OF AN OLD MUSIC FOLIO, HE LEARNS HIS ALPHABET...



'A'

1757

Mister Love has expelled him from the School, saying that he's 'dull' in learning!

He's just partic'lar in his tastes, is all

He has always objected to read in a *small* book...



And, from a priceless black-letter Testament, the penniless Chatterton teaches himself how to read.

Oh, he reads now?



Thomas thirsted
after knowledge

Read from the moment he
waked, which was early, until
bedtime... if I should only
let 'im



I s'll make a better life for us

I will become wealthy
and famous!

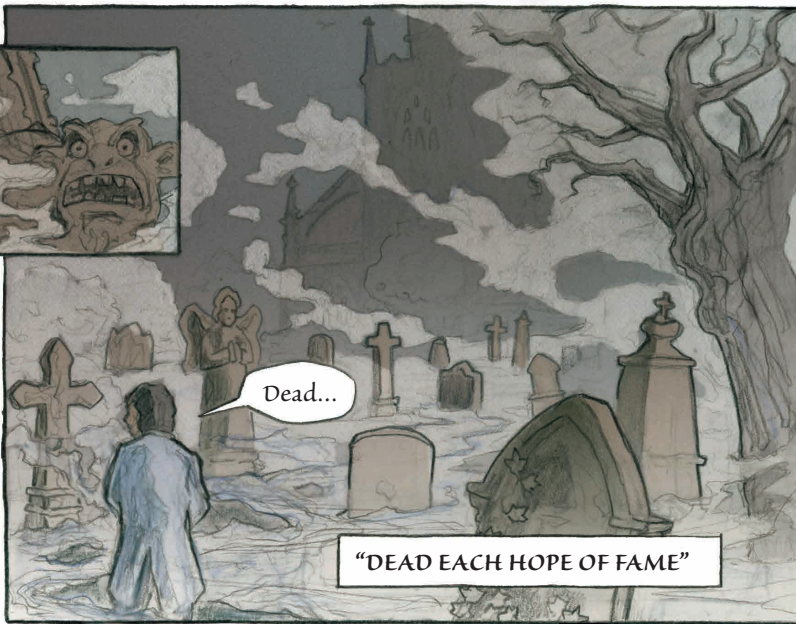
Will you
now?

And which
comes
first?

3 AUGUST 1760. AGED EIGHT,
CHATTERTON IS FORCED TO ENROL INTO
COLSTON'S HOSPITAL (CHARITY SCHOOL).



I can not learn so much
at school as I can at home!



Dead...

"DEAD EACH HOPE OF FAME"



W-Who
goes there?!



Who's askin'?



I have been
sexton here, man
and boy, thirty
years

D-digging
graves?

Pulling
weeds



Nearly knocked you
in the mazzard with
my spade...

'M-Mazzard'?

In the head, boy...
you're altogether too
much in your head...



'A pick-axe,
and a spade, a
spade...'

Fanfare for the Common Man

Literature in the 1750s/60s/70s



*Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*

- lines from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', credited as 'most-quoted in the English language', widely translated, and the 'best-known, best-loved' poem of this particular time – the middle years of the eighteenth century.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

The eighteenth century covered the years 1700-1799. Historian Edward Bell referred to its mid-point – when Chatterton was born – as 'a valley of dry bones', 'lifeless in neglect of the inheritance received from preceding ages'. What did he mean by this Biblical reference? This was the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in England, marked by a significant population shift from country to town. Field hands were becoming factory workers. In the commercial terms of trade and industry (Bristol's lifeblood), great profits were being achieved. The cost, however, was to the human spirit – a loss of imagination. In pursuit of the future we risked forgetting past glories, such as Gothic architecture, and lessons from ancient wisdom.

Charity schools such as the one Chatterton attended had been set up to help educate the poor – although often from a mix of philanthropic good intent with cynical self-promotion on the part of wealthy benefactors. These schools' textbook was the Bible, closely followed by Shakespeare – revived, revised and on his way to becoming the darling of the English language. With education came literacy. Literacy produced readers. And readers demanded ever more to read. Print output (kickstarted in Germany with Gutenberg's invention of movable type in 1450) was doubling. Knowledge spread like wildfire in this Age of Enlightenment. The Bible, two new translations being prepared in Bristol at this time, now faced serious competition. The printed word was up for grabs... and everybody wanted in on it.

WORD UP (EVERYBODY SAYS)

The first truly modern English dictionary wasn't published until 1755. Wannabe wordsmiths played with the language freely. New writers explored new modes and subjects – autobiography, satire, subjective and political opinion. The novel was still a new thing. Having debuted in 1719 with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, it had only just begun to find form, to take shape. Poetry, meanwhile, proliferated. With a popular press (daily

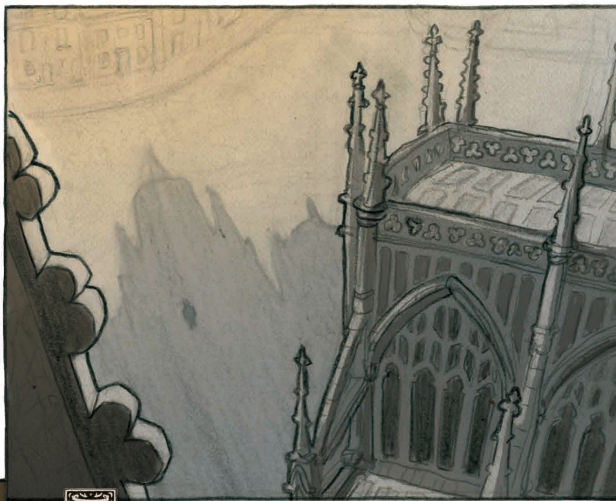
newspapers), along came *vox pop* – the voice of the people. Reading and literature being made more available inevitably encouraged a broader range of literary expression. When Classicism Met Sentimentalism: in literary terms, sparks flew. ('I'll have what she's having', folks said.) Intellectual clarity and restraint – principles from Ancient Greece or Rome, predominant since the Renaissance – gave way before a splurge of emotions and feelings. Inspiration was sought and found in Nature, in introspection (literary selfies). Love and Death became favourite subjects. Emerging themes, just like the country itself, would become increasingly urban.

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

As trade and travel across borders surged, people took with them the seeds of cultural exchange. Imported forms, such as folk and fairy tale, flourished and spread outwards from migrant and immigrant communities. In colonial America (not the United States until Independence in 1776), Samuel Sewall's *Diary* mirrored the rise of more personal writing: in Spanish-speaking countries, Diego Villaruel's *Vida* did much the same. Russian literature, influenced by European trends, would follow suit – but lagging behind by a couple of decades. In Qing Dynasty China, Cao Xueqin's novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* was written closer to contemporary speech than in Classical form – something yet to occur in another ancient culture, Arabia, even today. African tradition, meanwhile, remained largely oral.

COMMON PEOPLE

Back in Britain, class tensions arose. Aristocratic amateurs, with leisure-time always on hand, disdained the rise of their professional rivals – mere 'tradesmen' – even as these workaday authors and (horrors!) newspaper journalists honed a newly critical and political edge to the once and former gentlemanly art of writing. And then, of course, there was the rise of the feminine voice... Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) bracket this same period. Significantly, however, these were produced anonymously. Correction of the massive gender imbalance had barely begun, with the contributions of these women authors only recognised 200 years later. It had been expected print would strengthen religion and monarchy but, in truth, increased literacy undermined them both (those who felt threatened actually campaigned against it). Knowledge and expression becoming common only provoked ideas toward liberty. Ideas that would prove fatal for some...

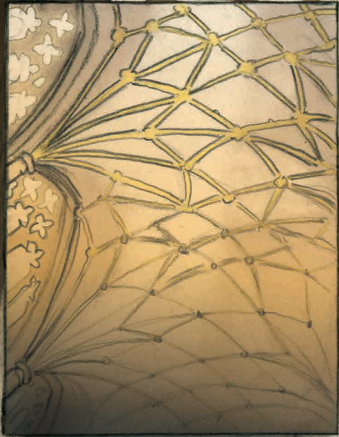


THE CHURCH OF ST MARY REDCLIFFE.

NORTH PORCH.



'Step into Radclift Church...



'Look at the Noble Arches...

'Observe the Symmetry, the Regularity of the whole.'



'Step Aside A Little...

'You see minute Carvings of Minute Designs...

'Examine all the Laborious Sculpture...

'... and turn Your Attentions to the Ornaments of a Pillar of the Chapel.'

Fal, lal

'... whose Chief Beauties are deformity or Intricacy.'

'... Is there any Part of it worth the Trouble it must have Cost the Artist?'

A SITE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP FOR WELL OVER 1,000 YEARS, PARTS OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH CHURCH OF ST MARY REDCLIFFE, CELEBRATED FOR ITS GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE, DATE BACK TO THE 12TH CENTURY. IT IS AMONG THE LARGEST IN ENGLAND, AND ITS SINCE-RESTORED SPIRE, THE TALLEST.



He was so wayward...

'Colston's was a boarding school. Only allowed home at weekends or on holidays, Thomas often seemed neither to hear nor care what was said to him...'



'... his moods sometime so gloom'd, that for many days straight he would say very little. Absent of mind, and then, storms of tears!'

What's the matter?!



Pay attention, boy!

Or you'll earn yourself a caning

"...Cayninge..."

'Accustomed he was, to remain fixed, for hours at a time, quite motionless, and then he would snatch up a pen and write incessantly.'

Chatterton?

Whatever are you about?



WILLIAM CANYNGE, BORN 1402, 'THE GREATEST MERCHANT OF THE CENTURY' AND FIVE TIMES MAYOR OF BRISTOL. AS A MASON, PATRON AND REBUILDER OF ST MARY REDCLIFFE. 'THE GREAT, THE CHARITABLE AND GOOD, NOBLE AS KINGS IF NOT OF KINGLY BLOOD'.

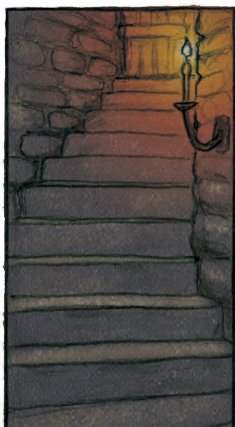


'Mr. William Caning, ye Richest marchant of ye towne of Bristow.'



IN WILLIAM CANYNGE, CHATTERTON HAS FOUND, AND WILL GO ON TO FASHION FOR HIMSELF, A FATHER FIGURE FROM THE 15th CENTURY.

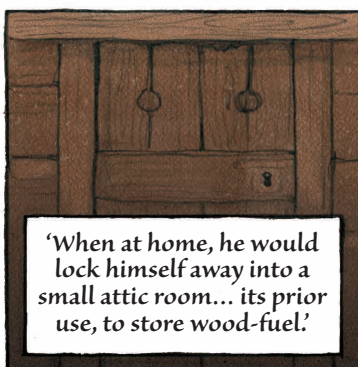
'No age nor time can wear out well won fame.'



AND IN THE MUNIMENTS ROOM ABOVE THE NORTH PORCH, HE BENDS TO EXACTING STUDY OF THE CHURCH RECORDS...



... PARCHMENT DEEDS, CENTURIES OLD, FROM SEVEN OAK CHESTS. THE HUGEST ONE, BOUND WITH IRON, 'CYSTA SERRATA CUM SEX CLAVIBUS', (SECURED WITH SIX KEYS)... 'CANYNGE'S COFFER': KEYS LOST, LOCKS FORCED, THE UNGUARDING DOCUMENTS LEFT FORGOTTEN.



'When at home, he would lock himself away into a small attic room... its prior use, to store wood-fuel.'



'He kept the key, and suffered no-one else to have it...'



Come away, Tom

You hurt your health, and make yourself dirty

'... only to emerge, dreadfully begrimed.



'We feared he meant to run away and join some gypsies, so unhappy he appeared with his station in life.'

The Literary Adventurer

Moving in Bristol's Literary Circles

*Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
A youth, to fortune and to fame unknown:
Fair science frown'd not on his humble birth,
And melancholy mark'd him for her own.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

*O Education, ever in the wrong,
To thee the curses of mankind belong;
Thou first great author of our future state,
Chief source of our religion, passions, fate.*

- Chatterton, 'Happiness'

NO DARK SARCASM IN THE CLASSROOM

The Education Act, making school attendance compulsory ('YAY!/'BOOO!' – delete as applicable), wouldn't come into force until much later, in 1870. But already, funded or charity church schools helped educate the poor – if only to provide industry with better workers. Merchant and MP Edward Colston, like William Canynge before him, had made his fortune from 'The African Trade' – a business dependent upon the labour and lives of enslaved peoples (and Bristol's main source of prosperity for centuries). He'd founded his 'ragged' or 'blue coat' boys boarding school in 1710. Chatterton stayed there for six years, from the ages of eight to 14. The limited curriculum of the so-called 3 Rs – Reading, (w)Riting and (a)Rithmetic – plus church catechism (religious instruction) most likely greatly frustrated him. This was 'mercantile, ledger and day-book' education and, much like a modern NVQ, work-based: to prepare him for a life of service, either at sea, or else apprenticed to a trade.

MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

'Excellent and pithy was the saying of Mr Canynge, "Trade is the Soul of the World, but Money is the Soul of Trade". And alas Money is now the Soul of many.' Thomas Chatterton put these words (Trade, Soul, Money) into the mouths of his literary 'creations', Canynge and Rowley, in his pretend-medieval 'Yellowe Rolle'. A side-effect of Bristol's characteristic trade mentality was the chance that a person might succeed in society despite circumstances of low birth – equivalent to the so-called 'American Dream'.

Aristocracy had its strongholds within the city – the spa at Hotwells (like neighbouring Bath) a fashionable place to be and be seen; Clifton, looking down at everyone. Writers, properly-speaking gentlemen of leisure, dabbled for their own amusement and that of their tight circle of friends. Literary folk however deemed the literary life 'not for everyone'. To be an author first required social status. The ability even to aspire to such heights was very much the preserve of the middle classes – doctors, lawyers, schoolteachers and the clergy. Chatterton's contemporary Hannah More (1745–1833) was a 'bluestocking' – an intellectual woman – also the child of a schoolteacher but, unlike him, middle class (which stood to her advantage) and

female (which didn't). Her circle was primarily religious – Quakers and evangelists – morally upstanding and very much part of the establishment. She briefly toyed with a protégée (student) in Ann Yearsley (1753-1806), aka 'Lactilla', 'the political milkwoman' – a description loaded with cultural snobbery. Yearsley was a poet married to a farmer. The working classes had to fight for a place at this high table. It really was time to kick out the jams.



WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

From age ten (circa 1762), Chatterton borrowed books from 'circulating libraries' such as Mr Goodal's, across from Cider House Passage, Broad Street. (Lactilla herself would grow up to run another). With Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, editor Elizabeth Cooper's anthology of verse, and many others, he supplemented his school education.

THE WEEKLY ROUND-UP

People were hungry for information then in a way that we, in an info-sick twenty-first century, can only imagine. Mass-circulation newspapers, plus other types of popular local press (such as *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, every Saturday from 1742) provided a forum to publish the works of new writers like Chatterton. This, then, was his secret hobby: he read and wrote poetry. Like many other Bristolians of his time, verse was his best means to put forth his ideas, whether political, or personal.

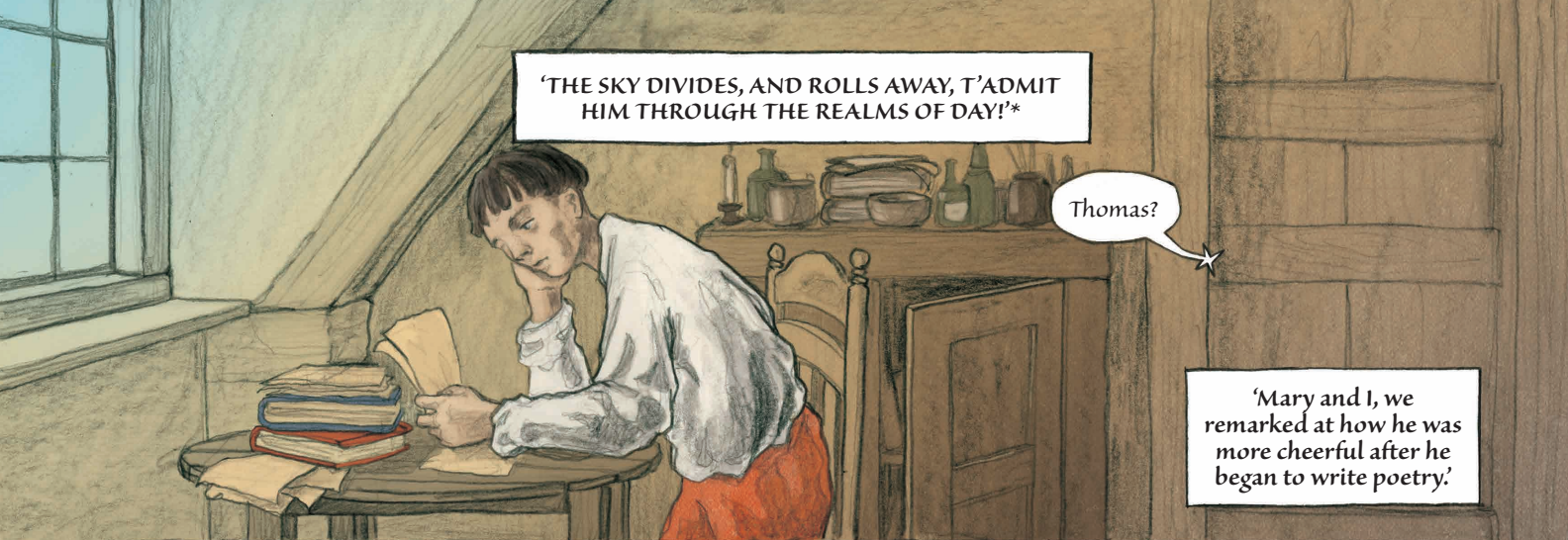
*The Sinners fear, and Saints rejoice;
For now the awful hour is come
When every tenant of the tomb
Must rise, and take his everlasting doom.*

- Chatterton, 'On the Last Epiphany;
or, Christ Coming to Judgement'

Now what does that sound like? (apart from Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'!) It riffs on the Bible – Job and Isaiah: but also, shades of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy'. These lines are from Chatterton's first poem ever published, in the *Bristol Journal* for 8 January 1763, written when he was only ten years old. A vital spur, perhaps, towards his future vocation... but also his doom.

Inspired by the parchments that his dead father had probably taken from the muniments room of St Mary's – and possibly, too, what he himself discovered there – young Thomas found himself in a unique position. A starting point, from where he might forge ahead in his chosen career as a literary adventurer...





'THE SKY DIVIDES, AND ROLLS AWAY, T'ADMIT HIM THROUGH THE REALMS OF DAY!'

Thomas?

'Mary and I, we remarked at how he was more cheerful after he began to write poetry.'



'Yet still...'

Tommy?

Dearest? Here is a hot dinner waiting for you



I have a work in hand, Mother...

... and must not make myself more stupid than God has made me

'in hand', spfff!

Hush, Mary!



'He would seldom eat animal food' (meat) 'because he supposed it to impair the intellect.'

His spirits do seem... uneven

And he's meant to be on his holiday!



BACK AT SCHOOL...

???



What are you doing?

Quiet, Baker... I'm busy

PUPILS AT COLSTON'S HAVE TO SHARE BOARD, TWO TO THREE IN EVERY BED.

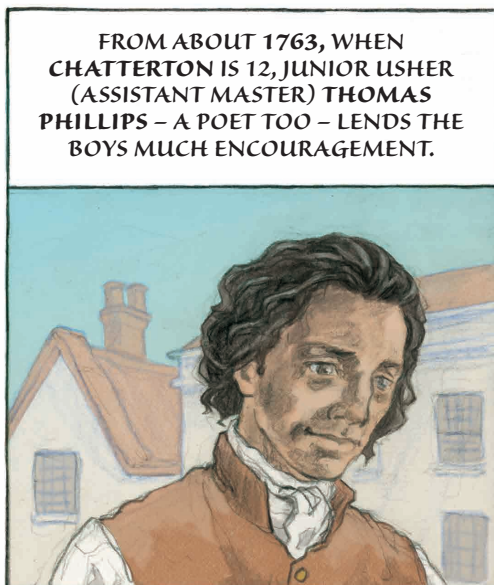


CHATTERTON'S BED-MATE, JOHN BAKER, WILL BECOME HIS LIFELONG FRIEND.

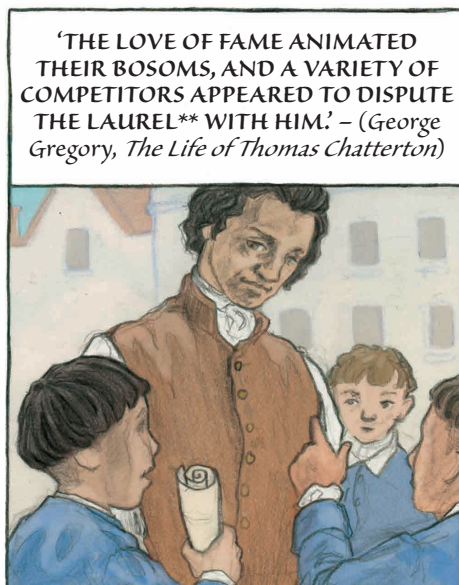
You write poetry?

Hoy, oy! I might have a job for you there...

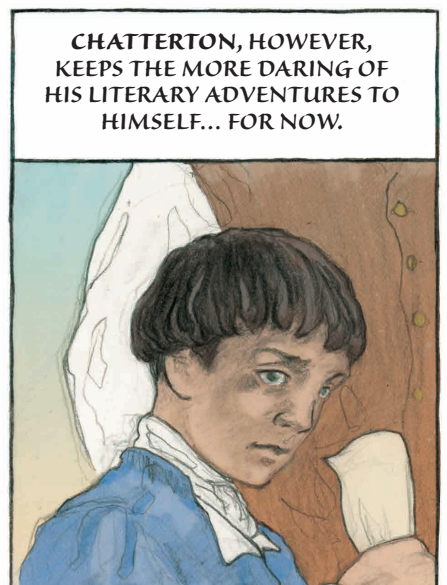
shhh



FROM ABOUT 1763, WHEN CHATTERTON IS 12, JUNIOR USHER (ASSISTANT MASTER) THOMAS PHILLIPS – A POET TOO – LENDS THE BOYS MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT.



'THE LOVE OF FAME ANIMATED THEIR BOSOMS, AND A VARIETY OF COMPETITORS APPEARED TO DISPUTE THE LAUREL** WITH HIM.' – (George Gregory, *The Life of Thomas Chatterton*)



CHATTERTON, HOWEVER, KEEPS THE MORE DARING OF HIS LITERARY ADVENTURES TO HIMSELF... FOR NOW.

*On the Last Epiphany: or, Christ Coming to Judgement' (1762) **Praise, even a prize: Honours in recognition of an achievement.

'He spent his little pocket monies on even more books, from the lending library... as if we did not have enough already!'



... AMONG THEM, A BLACK LETTER COPY OF SPEGHT'S EDITION OF THE MIDDLE AGES POET, CHAUCER



FROM THESE, CHATTERTON COMPILES FOR HIMSELF A GLOSSARY OF TERMS...



... HE FORMULATES AND MAKES RECORD OF AN ENTIRELY INVENTED FAUX-MEDIEVAL LANGUAGE.



GROWING IN CONFIDENCE, CHATTERTON SHARES HIS 'FIND' OF SOME FAKED ROWLEY MANUSCRIPTS WITH PHILLIPS, WHO - ENTIRELY TAKEN IN BY THE DECEPTION - GIVES HIS SEAL OF APPROVAL.



Rowley: The Bristowe Tragedie

A Comedy of Errors

*The thoughtless world to majesty may bow,
Exalt the brave, and idolize success;
But more to innocence their safety owe,
Than pow'r or genius e'er conspir'd to bless.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

*My nobil leige! All my request
Ys for a nobile knyghte,
Who, tho' may hap hee has donne wronge;
Hee thoghte ytte style was ryghte*

- Looks mad, doesn't it? Spelling all over the place. But all you need do to get a good sense of the meaning is simple. Try reading it ALOUD. The spelling is largely phonetic (true to how the word sounds when spoken).

This is how written English was in Chaucer and even Shakespeare's time, when most people couldn't read and before any such thing as a dictionary had been imagined to regulate the language (and 'spelink').

Transliteration:

*My noble liege! My only request
Is for a noble knight,
Who, though perhaps he has done wrong;
He thought its style was right*

WHAT'S GOING ON

There's a hidden meaning within the language here. Even as Chatterton spins his story, he seeks to excuse his fiction, the falsification in it – writing under the made-up and non-existent author name of the piece, Rowley. What he's doing is 'wrong' (pretend), but he hopes it's done in the 'right' (correct) way.

TRUE FAITH

So who was this 'Thomas Rowley'? According to Chatterton's footnotes to 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie: as wroten bie the gode Prieste Thomas Rowley, 1464', 'Born at Norton Mal-reward in Somersetshire, educated at the Convent of St Kenna at Keynesham, died at Westbury in Gloucestershire'. His imaginary fifteenth-century monk, 'lived in the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV' (Chatterton creating a full fantasy life here), but may have been rooted in fact – a 'Thomas Rouley' figures on a brass plaque in St John's Church, Bristol, dated 23 Jan 1478. Master Canynge (born 1402) was, according to Rowley, 'one who could happily blend the poet, the painter, the priest, and the Christian, perfect in each: a friend to all [in] distress, an honour to Bristol, and a glory to the church'. He probably came first, with Rowley, his 'friend and confessor', as a 'necessary afterthought' (Kaplan). The fantasy father (Canynge) begot the son's alter ego, or 'other self' (Rowley) – his role, as a patron of the arts, was to use his wealth for good. When looking for a patron In Real Life, Chatterton wasn't embarrassed to boast about his secretive accomplishments using the Rowley persona. 'T.Rowlie was a secular priest of Saint John's, in the

city; his merit as a biographer, historiographer, is great; as a poet still greater: some of his pieces would do honour 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.' This is Chatterton bigging *himself* up here, in a begging letter: Alexander Pope was about the most famous poet of this time.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Chatterton's Second Life/OpenSim avatar, his exemplary self, his self-inspiration and his 'escape', Rowley, came complete with its own made-up language ('a dialect entirely different from any that had ever been spoken in Great Britain' – Sir Walter Scott). His fairly anarchic 'fictitious diction' seems to have come from Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, combined with John Kersey's *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, both compiled into a glossary of 'Old Words' and their 'Modern English' equivalents, kept in a small red book that he carried everywhere.

TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

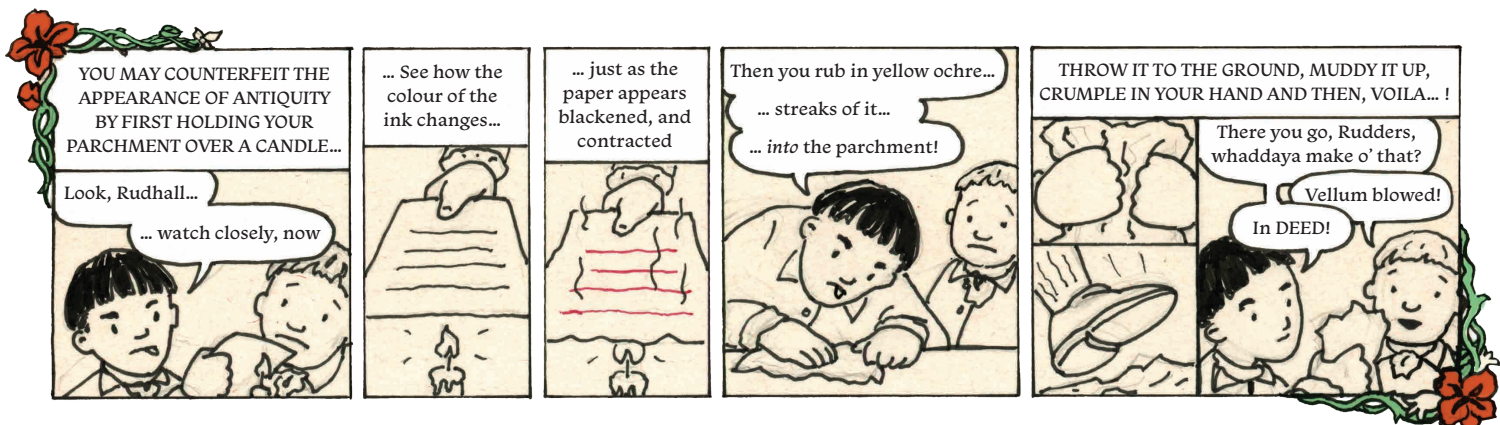
Chatterton's 'Rowleian' excursions overturned tradition, writing not about countryside beauty, but commenting – through an historic filter – on contemporary town life. He was a new breed, an Urban Poet, freestyling over sampled retro breakbeats. Colston's usher Thomas Phillips, reputedly shown one of Chatterton's Medieval Mysteries, was completely taken in. Success at deception only encouraged Chatterton to create more. 'Bridge Narrative' appeared in *Farley's Weekly Journal*, 1 October 1768: the 'discovery' of an ancient poem 'taken from an old Manuscript', by one DUNHELMAS BRISTOLIENSIS (Guess who?). It caused a sensation, and effectively unlocked the gates of the city to him.

OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY)

Desperately seeking benefactors, Chatterton first approached Henry Burgum, 'a vain and credulous man': then, his business partner, George Catcott, who boasted, 'there are no books in my library less than a hundred years old'. Catcott became the main dupe for his Rowley fakes – 'Tragedy of the Apostate', 'Song to Ælla' and, 'from Mr Canynge's Coffe', the 'Bristol Tragedy' (about which he admitted to his mother, 'I found [created] the argument, and versified it'). Payments for these (while they lasted) let Chatterton loose in the circulating libraries – only adding fuel to his ardent young fire.

DREAMER DECEIVER

The country might neglect its inheritance: Chatterton did not. He took up English literature's 'dry bones' and with them built a cathedral of the mind, to honour 'the genius and devotion of our ancestors' – even ones that hadn't actually existed.



1 JULY 1767

AGED 14, CHATTERTON IS APPRENTICED TO JOHN LAMBERT, A BRISTOL ATTORNEY WITH AN OFFICE ON THE FIRST FLOOR, 37 CORN STREET (OPPOSITE THE EXCHANGE).



HIS TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT DECREE: 'TAVERNS HE SHALL NOT FREQUENT, AT DICE HE SHALL NOT PLAY, FORNICATION HE SHALL NOT COMMIT, MATRIMONY HE SHALL NOT CONTRACT.'



THE HOURS ARE LONG – 7AM TO 8PM DAILY, ALL YEAR ROUND.



OFFICE DRUDGE CHATTERTON HAS TO SLEEP WITH THE 'FOOT-BOY' (SERVANT), TAKE HIS MEALS IN THE KITCHEN, AND IS ONLY ALLOWED HOME BETWEEN 8 AND 9PM (HIS MOTHER STILL WASHES AND MENDS FOR HIM).

He had little of his master's business to do. Sometimes not two hours in the day...



SISTER, MARY

As an apprentice, none has greater liberties, yet the thoughts of servitude kill me



CHATTERTON HATES THE 'MECHANICAL AND DETESTED DUTIES OF HIS CLERKSHIP'.



BRINGING HIS FATHER'S STOCK OF PURLOINED PARCHMENTS INTO THE OFFICE, HE RESUMES HIS

R

OWLEY ROMANCE.

LAMBERT KEEPS A MODEST REFERENCE LIBRARY. WHEN NOT MAKING UP HERALDIC FANTASIES, ELABORATING ON CANYNGE'S PEDIGREE, OR COMPOSING POETRY, CHATTERTON BONES UP ON HIS HISTORY.



HIS SELF-EDUCATION CONTINUES WITH STUDIES IN METAPHYSICS, ASTRONOMY, MEDICINE, MUSIC, ANTIQUITIES, MATHEMATICS, RELIGION, BIOGRAPHY...

ON SUNDAYS, HE RESTS: TAKING LONG COUNTRY RAMBLES, SKETCHING CHURCHES, AND RUINS.



He had many cap acquaintances, but, I am confident, few intimates

'They say he frequently walked with the young girls on College Green, who stately paraded there, to shew their finery.'



'Walked', you say?

'But I really believe he was no debauchee, though some have reported it.'

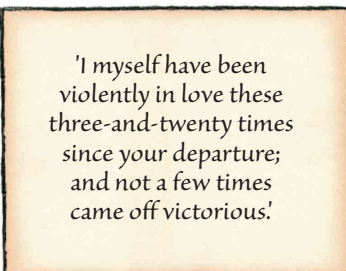
'Tis Smiles I only ask and Prize

And when the Smile is freely given
You're in the highway
Road to Heaven



'I'm flatt'ring impudent and free.'

'I myself have been violently in love these three-and-twenty times since your departure; and not a few times came off victorious.'



'My friendship is as firm as the white rock when the black waves roar around it.'

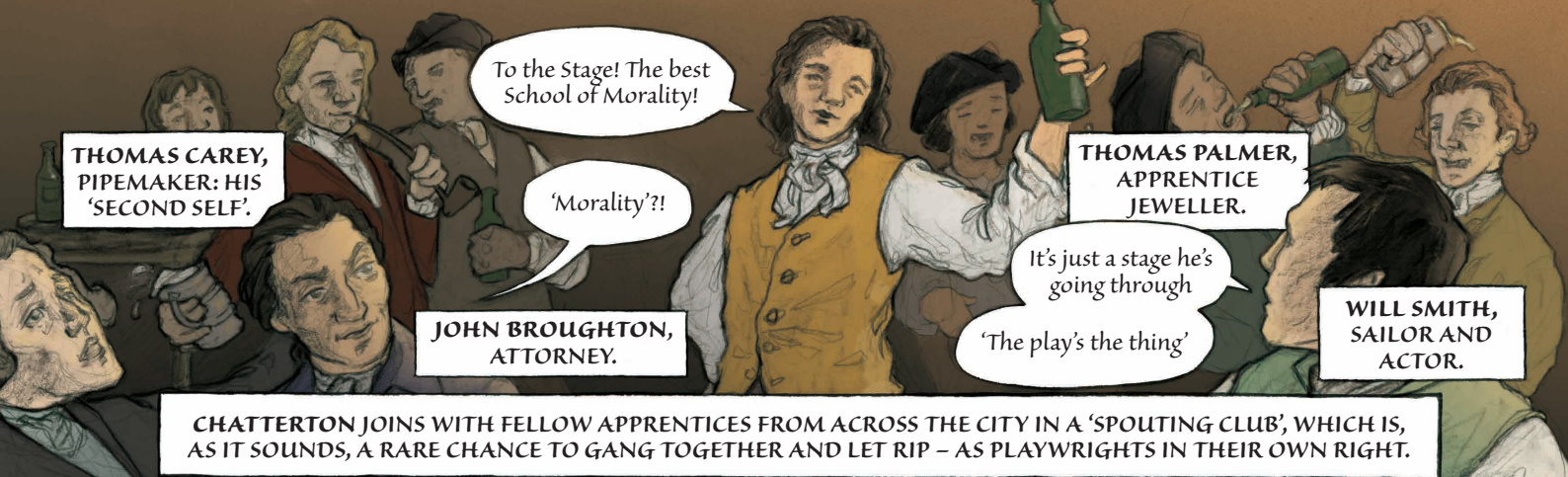


'Your faithful and constant friend,'

'till death do us part.

J.C.

(LETTER TO JOHN BAKER, NOW SETTLED IN AMERICA: 6 MARCH 1768)



THOMAS CAREY,
PIPEMAKER: HIS
'SECOND SELF'.

To the Stage! The best
School of Morality!

'Morality'?!
'The play's the thing'

JOHN BROUGHTON,
ATTORNEY.

THOMAS PALMER,
APPRENTICE
JEWELLER.

It's just a stage he's
going through

WILL SMITH,
SAILOR AND
ACTOR.

CHATTERTON JOINS WITH FELLOW APPRENTICES FROM ACROSS THE CITY IN A 'SPOUTING CLUB', WHICH IS, AS IT SOUNDS, A RARE CHANCE TO GANG TOGETHER AND LET RIP - AS PLAYWRIGHTS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT.

1768

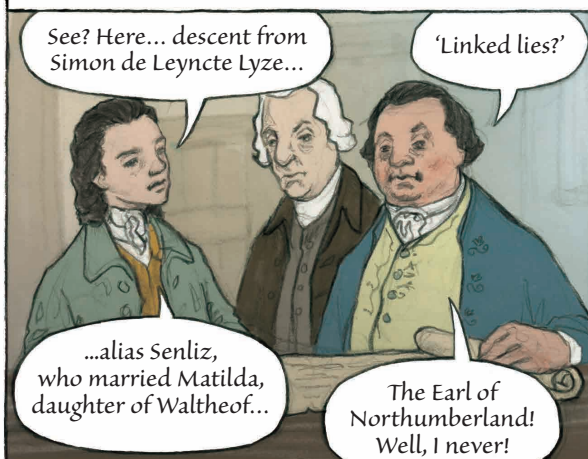
CHATTERTON APPROACHES
TWO TRADESMEN AT 2 BRIDGE
PARADE, MESSRS. BURGUM &
CATCOTT, PEWTERERS.



Mister Berg
Ham?

Burgum.
Yesss

HE PRESENTS HIS 'FIND' - A 'De Bergham' ARMS
AND PEDIGREE, PROVING THE MAN'S KNIGHTLY
DESCENT FROM THE TIME OF WILLIAM THE
CONQUEROR.



See? Here... descent from
Simon de Leyncte Lyze...

'Linked lies?'

...alias Senliz,
who married Matilda,
daughter of Waltheof...

The Earl of
Northumberland!
Well, I never!

THIS EARNS HIM
FIVE SHILLINGS.

THE NEXT WEEK
HE RETURNS WITH
ANOTHER PART, THE
SAME...



Et Cetera

Nobility?
Royalty? Me?

... AND A POEM 'WRITTEN BY
HIS ANCESTOR, ONE JOHN DE
BERGHAM, ABOUT 1320'.



'The Romaunte of
the Cnyghte'

'Romance of
the Knight'

Sorry?

ooh!



THOMAS CONTINUES
FORGING HIS BRISTOL
CONNECTIONS... BURGUM
BEGETS G. CATCOTT, BEGETS
BARRETT... THE REVEREND
A. CATCOTT... MICHAEL
CLAYFIELD... ETC. ETC.



His ambition
increased daily

WHENEVER LAMBERT, HIS EMPLOYER,
DISCOVERS THESE, HIS 'OTHER WORKS',
HE DESTROYS THEM.



Your
'stuff'!

HIS INDENTURES ABRUPTLY CANCELLED, A GUINEA
SUBSCRIPTION IS GOT UP AMONG A FEW FRIENDS...



The Muses
have no Credit
here!

... CHATTERTON GIVES OUT HANDFULS OF GINGERBREAD
(CONSIDERED AN APHRODISIAC AT THAT TIME)...

24 April 1770



... AND LEAVES BOUND FOR LONDON
ON THE ONE-DAY EXPRESS COACH,
NOT EVEN £5 TO HIS NAME.

'After riding
in the basket
to Brislington,
I mounted
the top of the
coach, and rid
easy.'



Last Will and Testament

‘Opinion is the only God we know.’

*Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

*Gods! what would Burgum give to get a name,
And snatch his blundering Dialect from Shame!
What would he give, to hand his Memory down
To time's remotest Boundary?—A Crown.
Would you ask more? his swelling Face looks blue;
Futurity he rates at Two Pounds Two.
Well. Burgum, take thy laurel to thy brow;
With a rich saddle decorate a sow;
Strut in Iambics, totter in an ode,
Promise, and never pay, and be the mode.*

- Bristol businessman Henry Burgum, a self-made man, ached to be somebody. Chatterton ridiculed his cheapskate former sponsor for such vanity: recognising perhaps what he saw, and despised, in himself – ideas 'above his station'. Not even Chatterton felt immune to cultural snobbery.

To Bristol, all my spirit and disinterestedness, parcells of goods
unknown on her quay since Canning (sic.) and Rowley!

(‘He resented patronage from his native city as
insufficient for his merits.’ - *Poetic Works*)

Dated Easter Eve, 14 April 1770, just over a week before his departure for London, Chatterton penned his riotous 'Will': a mix of artful verse and blunt prose, arch sincerity amid Tom foolery, that had become characteristic of his writings. His 'bequests' took potshots at his own patrons, attacking them where it hurt – their credit balance, their very reputations.

Item: I give all my vigour and fire of youth to Mr. George Catcott,
being sensible he is most in want of it.

*Thy friendship never could be so dear to me,
Since all I am is opposite to thee...
To be the wreck of promises and hopes,
A Boy of Learning, and a Bard of Tropes.*

(Chatterton felt disappointment in having to sell his talent, and cheaply.)

An introduction to George's elder brother, the Reverend Alexander Catcott, vicar of Temple Church, had given Chatterton access to the Bristol Library. The literary equivalent of letting a fox loose inside a henhouse, this led to yet more Rowleyisms: 'A Parliament of Sprites', 'Goddwyn' and 'Battle of Hastings' (all 1768). I leave the Reverend Mr. Catcott some little of my free thinking, that he may put on spectacles of reason and see how vilely he is duped in believing the scriptures literally. I wish he and his brother George would know how far I am their real enemy.

*To Barrett next. He has my Thanks sincere,
For all the little Knowledge I had here.*

William Barrett, retired surgeon, was compiling his own history of Bristol. Chatterton handily supplied him ammunition that contained just enough fact to appear convincing – including 'Account of William Canynge's Feast', by Rowley, parish 'prieste of St Johan's, Bristowe'. ('Hang on, I thought you said he was a monk?') Young Tom, wicked in wit, compared his task to mucking out an endlessly-refilled horses' stable.

*But what was Knowledge? Could it here succeed
When scarcely twenty in the Town can read?*

No one, it seems, was safe from this tongue lashing. 'When the strong fit of satire is upon me, I spare neither friend nor foe.' Nor does he spare himself:

*Wildly squand'ring ev'ry thing I got,
On books and learning, and the Lord knows what.*

Item. I leave the young ladies all the letters they have had from me, assuring them that they need be under no apprehensions from the appearance of my ghost, for I die for none of them. His ungallant tendency, to bite the hand that fed as well as the lips he'd kissed, was perhaps due to subtle guilt or shame for his fabrications – and for being so good at them. As Joseph Cottle the Bristol bookseller put it, Chatterton 'approached every man on his blind side'.

GOTTA ROCKET, IN YOUR POCKET

All this wrote between 11 and 2 o'Clock Saturday in the utmost Distress of Mind. Chatterton deliberately left his 'Will' out on his desk, for his employer John Lambert to see. An apparent suicide note, the tone is so cool and satirical it reads like more of his role play. It's as if Chatterton acts up on a dare. He declared: My death will happen tomorrow night before eight o'clock, being the Feast of the Resurrection – the same date his baby brother Giles Malpas had died. The likely intent was for the horrified Lambert to let him go, setting him free: and so it went.

BRISTOL NO MORE

Chatterton's humble origins frustrated his ambition. He craved stardom; or, at the very least, his liberty – the independent life of an artist able to support himself with his art. Yet the only literary circle he could access was limited to business-class enthusiasts. Convinced that he was smarter than his patrons, he hated having to rely on their money – when he could get it. The commercial city of his birth required him to have a professional career or else independent means (wealth). He'd fought hard to find a third way, but found local opportunities lacking.

EYE OF THE TIGER

Priming the London journals, Chatterton had been preparing for his departure for almost a year. 'I can procure Copys of several ancient Poems; and an Interlude, perhaps the oldest dramatic Piece extant' (letter to James Dodsley, main publisher of the time, 21 December 1768). From Corn Street he wrote to the aristocrat Horace Walpole, Lord Orford, 'a man of high standing, both in literature and the world', enclosing manuscripts. He'd overshot. His inventions, initially welcomed, were soon rumbled. Relations soured and, in the fallout, Chatterton possibly mourned the loss of a prospective patron less than an end to his new enterprise. 'I think myself injured, sir; did you not know my circumstances, you would not dare to treat me thus. 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 bit beyond it, by destroying all my useless lumber of literature, and never using my pen again but in the law. I am, Your most humble servant, THOMAS CHATTERTON.' 14 April 1769. (However petulant, his promise was anyway honoured by Lambert.)

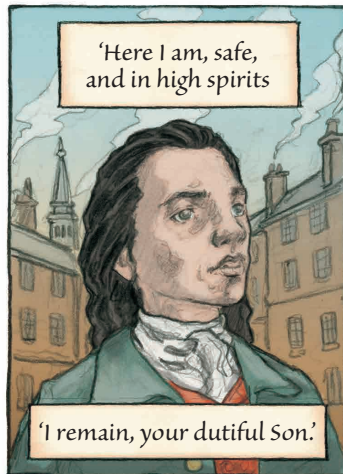
REMEMBER MY NAME

Inside his own mind, he was already gone. The most perfect Masters of Human Nature in Bristol, distinguish me by the Title of Mad Genius; therefore, if I do a mad action, it is conformable to every Action of my Life. I wrote my mind, nor hid the author's face. Item. I leave my mother and my sister to the protection of my friends, if I have any. It seems fair to assume that if he hadn't left town, he might have been run out of it.

26 April 1770

'Bristol's mercenary walls were never destined to hold me – there, I was out of my element.'

'Now, I am in it – LONDON!'



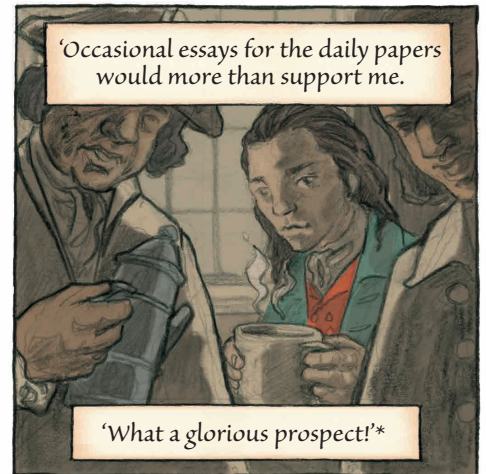
'Here I am, safe, and in high spirits'

'I remain, your dutiful Son.'

6 May

'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.'



'Occasional essays for the daily papers would more than support me.'

'What a glorious prospect!'



'Now, I have that for my labour, the first of my pleasures... and have still my liberty!'

'I employ my money in fitting myself fashionably, and getting into good company.'

30 May

'My company is courted everywhere – I must be among the great.'

'I have been introduced to the Lord Mayor.'

'William Beckford is his name. He graciously acknowledges a political address of mine, published in the *Freeholder's Magazine*, and salutes me as politely as a citizen could.'

'The devil of the matter is, Mary, there's no money to be got of this side of the question. Interest is of the other side.'

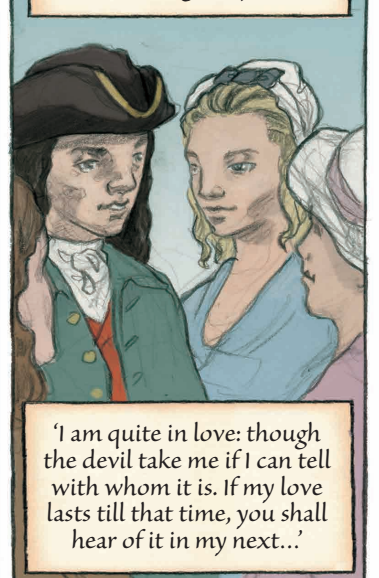
'But he is a poor author, who cannot write on both sides.'



'Can honest Conscience of doing Right, Provide a Dinner or a Girl at night?'



'There are so many pretty milliners, &c., that I have almost forgot myself.'



'I am quite in love: though the devil take me if I can tell with whom it is. If my love lasts till that time, you shall hear of it in my next...'

CHATTERTON SPENDS HIS FIRST SEVEN WEEKS IN THE CAPITAL IN SHOREDITCH, LODGING WITH A COUSIN, MRS BALLANCE, IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF A PLASTERER, MR WALMSLEY.

I do not know anything that Poet-folks are good for ... but to sit in a dirty cap and gown in a garret...



MRS. WALMSLEY.



'He would never suffer the room in which he read and wrote to be swept, because, he said, "poets hated brooms"!'

He never touched meat, and drank only water, and seemed to live on air



THE WALMSLEYS' NIECE.

'He would often look steadfastly into a person's face, without speaking, or seeming to see the person, for a quarter of an hour or more, till it was quite frightful.'



THE PLASTERER'S NEPHEW, OBLIGED TO SHARE A BED WITH THE MAD-SEEMING POET, IMAGINES HIM MORE OF A SPIRIT THAN HUMAN...



'The... the man, hardly ever slept. He sat up and wrote by moonlight... ... writing with a sort of fury, all through the night.'



MRS. BALLANCE (COUSIN)



And in the morning, he'd shed the rough drafts of his 'poettings'



2 MAY- 12 JUNE, TOTAL EARNINGS THESE TWO MONTHS: 12 SHILLINGS

You could always get a job, Cousin Tommy...



'Tommy' is not here, Mrs Ballance



'He was as proud as Lucifer.'

MR. WALMSLEY.

There was something manly and pleasing about him... ... and he did not dislike the wenches



IN JUNE, CHATTERTON MOVES TO 39 BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN, 'ONE OF THE POOREST AND MOST DISREPUTABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS OF LONDON'...



'A Brothel is his House and Bed...'

... TO LODGE WITH MRS ANGEL, A 'SACK-MAKER'.



'Serene with Bottle Pox and Whore, he's happy and requires no more'

6 July 1770

'Matters go on swimmingly.'

'Receiv'd: 5 pounds and 5 shillings for Copyright of (a musical extravaganza, or 'burlletta') The Revenge.'



Thomas had promised my mother and me a deal of finery when he grew up, as a reward of her care

His every wish, to relieve and assist her...

... and for me 'to walk in silk attire'...



'See what he has sent us! Just see all we have got!'

'- Be assured, whenever I have the power, my will won't be wanting to testify that I remember you.'

'I shall be able to serve you the more by it.'

'I shall ever make your wants, my wants.'

T. Chatterton.

Emergence From Nothing

Chatterton in London

*No more, with reason and thyself at strife,
Give anxious cares and endless wishes room;
But through the cool sequester'd vale of life
Pursue the silent tenor of thy doom.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

*There was a Young Genius from Bristol
Who fancied himself quite the pistol
But in going 'up London'
He soon became undone
That lusty Young Genius from Bristol*

- His gambit a failure, after rejection from Walpole Chatterton trod water for a time – but an 'idle' sulk? Only by his own prolific standards. June to September 1769 he had produced 'an Ossian imitation, three elegies, a musical burletta, and a confused poem', conflicted about the satirical impulse vs. self-serving prudence, entitled 'Interest': 'Flattery's a cloak and I will put it on'.

Chatterton may have had other reasons for wanting to leave Bristol: 'I left Miss Singer, I am sorry to say it, in a very bad way; that is, in a way to be married.' (letter, 14 May.) Meaning: pregnant. Strangely, none of his many biographers seem to make much of this, other than to say: 'He believed he was on his way to becoming a genuine man of the world. The great imposter was becoming a garden-variety narcissist' (Kaplan). His writings preceded him, already appearing in London periodicals, such as the new *Town and Country Magazine* (18 contributions alone through 1769, including 'On Thomas Phillips's Death'):

*Immortal shadow of my much-loved friend!
Clothed in thy native virtue meet my soul,
When on the fatal bed, my passions bend,
And curb my floods of anguish as they roll.*

LOOKS GOOD, FEELS GOOD TOO

He submitted one of his medievalisms, 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie', but it was rejected. Undeterred, Chatterton continued to pump out and pimp his increasingly diverse catalogue during an extraordinarily prolific period of writing, his *Englysh Metamorphosis*: 31 credits in seven different venues, five of them London publications – *Freeholder's Magazine*, *Middlesex Journal*, the *Political Register*, *London Museum*, and *Gospel Magazine* ('For a whim I write in it.'). His yen for disguise and pretense continuing, his works appeared under a dizzying variety of pseudonyms (false or 'pen' names): 'Asaphides', 'Astrea Brokage', 'Celorimon', 'Q', 'Libertas', 'A Hunter of Oddities', 'Harry Wildfire', 'Menenius', 'Z. A.', 'Hasmot Tnchaorett' (Has Much Writ?), and as 'The POLITE ADVERTISER, Sir Butterfly Feather'! Plus he surely wrote a great deal more than what was published.

MONEY! IT'S A DRAG

*Mie Sonne, mie sonne, of this mie speech take hede,
Nothyng ye good thatte bryngeth not to purse.*

- 'The Worlde', a poem 'by Canynge'.

'Nothing is good that bringeth not to purse' – in other words, anything that doesn't make money is no good. Chatterton could never escape the pressing issue of income. Despite his apparent success as a poet, he struggled to earn his living. He knew the terms of his trade, but despised his part in the bargain – as a writer-for-hire (in 'The Advice', 'His muse with tatter'd fragments graced', he invents a rich merchant, one Mr. Barter).

THE STRONG FIT OF SATIRE

Chatterton, a free thinker upset by the hypocrisy he witnessed within organised religion, questioned the moral strictures of the church. (This helped to inform his new credo, as something of a libertine, or playboy.) Doubtful of belief, his sense of trust eroded, he took considerable influence from Charles Churchill, a notorious satirist. Following the deaths of the previous generation's great wits (Pope in 1744, Swift in 1745), and European trends, English literature was in transition – away from dry reverence, toward emotionally erratic *Sturm und Drang* ('Storm and Drive' – both of which uninhibited young Chatterton exhibited in droves). Classicism, and class, be damned. Considering his pen mightiest, he feared nothing and no one. Wisely, though, he cloaked his true identity, wary of his targets: 'Tis dangerous on such men to pass a joke... Men will not have the ridicule of boys.'

(YOU DON'T NEED TO) TEAR AWAY

Publication of 'The Constabliad' (January 1770, before his departure for London) confirmed Chatterton's new political phase. George III was King, Lord North was Tory PM: in opposition, London's Lord Mayor, William Beckford. Notices in the press (as Decimus) brought Chatterton attention, but his rising star just as swiftly flamed out with the arrest of his editorial contacts, Wilkes, Fell, and Edmunds. Paid work dried up – and hadn't paid so very well in the first place. His solution was simply to switch and play both sides (as 'Moderator' writing in support of North, and 'Probus' for Beckford: *both* letters signed 26 May).

CRUEL SUMMER

Beckford's sudden death on 21 June, according to Mrs Angel, sent Chatterton, 'out of his mind. He said he was ruined'. Ill himself, he faced the usual summer downturn – the capital's great and good gone to the seaside, theatres shut, newspapers inert. All of his great promise and potential, come to nothing. Feast then famine, ever the freelance existence – Chatterton accounted himself 'another Savage to be starv'd.' Yet, in the midst of these doldrums and dire straits, he spent his first serious earnings on 'London gauds and Parisian vanities', gifts to send home to his family – and not forgetting Grandma, or even their lodger, Mrs. Thorne.

PRIDE (IN THE NAME OF LOVE)

In a letter meant for Michael Clayfield, distiller (about the only person Chatterton had a good word to say about in his Last Will), he writes: 'It is my PRIDE, my damn'd, native, unconquerable PRIDE, that plunges me into distraction. You must know that the 19/20th of my Composition is Pride.' (i.e. 95%. In acute turn of phrase he refers to both his physical body and his writing, as if they were one and the same). 'I must either live as a Slave – or DIE. I will endeavour to learn humility... What it will cost me in the trial, Heaven knows!'

For now, Heaven wasn't telling...



N, AND ON...

Calomel*
And some
Vitriol*



'I have a most horrible wheezing in the throat.
But, I don't repent that I have this cold, Mary;

Are you
sure...?

Vitriol, God
Damn it!

'For there are so many nostrums here, that 'tis worth a
man's while to get a distemper he can be cured so cheap.'

And the
Arsenic
Magnet*?

I must
caution you
against too-
free use of
these

I know
what I am
doing

*treatments for venereal disease.

'And... have you
a little something
extra... for the pain?'

'Here... if a man dresses
well, he has taste;
'If careless, he has his own
reasons for so doing, and is
prudent.
'Yours, &c. to the end of
the chapter,

J. Chatterton.



I must be
among the
great... I
must be

... UNTIL THERE IS NO MORE.

'I am now about an Oratorio,
which, when finished, will
purchase you a gown, Mary.
'You will be certain of seeing
me before the 1st January, 1771.
Almost all the next *Town and
Country Magazine* is mine.'



Thomas...

Thomas? Mister
Chatterton!

Use a trumpet,
Angel

... if you're going to
blow my name about!

Join us for supper,
do... on the house

... You haven't
eaten for three
days!

I'm not
hungry



OW MUST close my
poetical labours.'

I keep no worse
company than
myself



24 August 1770



Since we can die but
once, what matters it,

Rope or Garter,
Poison, Pistol,
Sword,

Curtail

the Miserys of
human Life?

Slow wasting
Sickness,

or the sudden burst
Of Valve Arterial in
the noble Parts,

Tho' varied is the
Cause, the Effect's
the same;

All to one common
Dissolution tends.

'Executed in the Presence of Omniscience.'



'Dead, lifeless,
and inelegant.'

28 AUGUST 1770

HIS REMAINS, 'ENCLOSED IN A SHELL',
ARE INTERRED IN THE BURYING-
GROUND OF THE SHOE LANE
WORKHOUSE, IN THE UPPER LIBERTY
OF THE PARISH OF ST ANDREW'S,
HOLBORN – A 'POTTER'S FIELD', OR
PAUPER'S MASS-GRAVE...

... HIS IMMORTAL NAME MISRECORDED
AS 'WILLIAM CHATTERON' – ONE
FINAL HUMILIATION FOR A POOR
YOUNG POET WHO JUST WANTED,
MORE THAN ANYTHING, FOR HIS
WORKS TO BE CELEBRATED.

SUICIDE INTERVENTION

Information about targeted mental health / suicide-prevention programmes – a list of helplines and other organisations that might be useful. Contact details were correct at time of going to print, but do check websites for the latest news.

If you are in crisis and need immediate support, dial 111 or call the Samaritans on 116 123 (free from any phone). If you'd prefer to write, please email jo@samaritans.org. Samaritans volunteers answer each email that comes through. Samaritans is a 24-hours / 7-days a week service for anybody needing to talk anonymously about anything that is upsetting them. The Bristol branch can sometimes be visited in person if you'd prefer face-to-face contact. Website: samaritans.org

Bristol area Mental Health support

Eighteen public and voluntary sector organisations have been brought together under the banner of Bristol Mental Health to provide NHS-funded services in the city. You can call Bristol Mental Health on 0300 555 0334, 24/7, if you are having a mental health crisis and do not have an existing care plan. Website: bristolmentalhealth.org

Second Step aims to support people with mental health problems in their homes, working alongside clients in whatever emotional state they find themselves. Recovery, Peer Support, Coproduction and being Psychologically Informed are their four main approaches. Please be advised: for mental health support, you will first need a referral from the NHS or local authority to access their services. For more details telephone 0117 909 6630 or visit their website: second-step.co.uk

Missing Link – mental health support services for women. They also provide domestic abuse support services and independent support for victims of rape and sexual abuse. Website: missinglinkhousing.co.uk

Off the Record is a social movement run by and for people aged 11-25 living in Bristol and South Gloucestershire that provides safe and relaxed spaces in which to learn about mental health and self-care. Website: otrbristol.org.uk

Nilaari Care specialise in BAME (Black And Minority Ethnic) community support. However, anyone in need can request their support by emailing zara.b@nilaari.co.uk or calling 0117 962 5742. Website: nilaari.co.uk

Freedom of Mind opens up discussion around mental health and wellbeing through a series of events across Bristol. The annual festival looks at all aspects of what mental health means and aims to create conversations, educate and bring about change. It is built on the work of a group of dedicated volunteers who are fighting the stigma attached to mental illness. Website: freedomofmind.org.uk

Bristol Independent Mental Health Network represents a diverse community of past, current and future users of Bristol's mental health services, as well as those with lived experiences of mental health. Website: bimhn.org.uk

At the national level, and broadening out from suicide prevention into general anxiety and mental health, you can find plenty of support and get resource materials from the following:

The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM). Website: thecalzone.net

Mind Infoline: an information and signposting service offered by Mind, the organisation that provides advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Hours: 9am-6pm Mon-Fri (except bank holidays). Tel: 0300 123 3393. There is also a Bristol MindLine open in the evenings. Check website for hours and further details: bristolmind.org.uk

Papyrus HOPELINEUK: a service for those under 35 struggling with suicidal feelings or concerned about a young person who might be struggling themselves. Hours: 10am-10pm weekdays, 2pm-10pm weekends and bank holidays. Tel: 0800 068 4141. Website: papyrus-uk.org

SANeline: out-of-hours service offering specialist emotional support, guidance and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers. Hours: 4.30pm-10.30pm daily. Tel: 0300 304 700. Website: sane.org.uk

The Mix: a free and confidential multi-channel service providing support for those aged under 25 who need help but don't know where to turn. Hours: 4pm-11pm daily. Tel: 0808 808 4994. Website: themix.org.uk

Nightline: a night-time listening service run by students for students. The service is confidential, anonymous, non-judgmental, non-directive. Check if your university or college offers this. Website: nightline.ac.uk

Switchboard: offering support and comfort for those identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender who are feeling anxiety. Hours: 10am-10pm daily. Tel: 0300 330 0630. Website: switchboard.lgbt

Online portals and apps that people find useful:

Loads of really useful information, advice and ideas on how best to manage your mental health:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing



Online hub designed to provide practical support and information that is useful for people living with or supporting people with mental illness:

www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/covid-19-support



Open University – a world leader in open and distance learning, all OpenLearn courses are free to study. Nearly 1,000 courses across eight different subject areas are offered. The courses are available to start right away. A growing selection of the courses offer a free Open University digital badge. www.open.edu/openlearn/education/free-courses

Amazing webpage with links to virtual tours of museums, zoos and theme parks. You can 'visit' British Museum in London, NASA, Disneyworld and many more from the comfort of your own home: www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/travel/a31784720/best-virtual-tours

Death by Misadventure

Neglect, Penury and Self-destruction*

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

**In blind confidence he rushed to the capital in pursuit of
renown. The result, we all know, was neglect, penury and
self-destruction.'*

- Henry Neele

Historical record states: 'The verdict of the inquest in Chatterton's death was suicide by reason of insanity' (although modern scholarship definitely leans toward an accidental death). Don't believe the M*A*S*H theme – lyrics reputedly written in five minutes by the director Robert Altman's son, aged 14: suicide *is* painful. The word is not even mentioned in Johnson's *Dictionary*. Self-murder, self-destruction, is a concept so loaded that it has ranged from unspeakable crime to mortal sin. In Chatterton's own words: 'It may seem a paradoxical assertion, that we cannot do wrong to ourselves, but it is certain that we have power over our own existence' – a reflection on the August 1769 suicide of his friend Will Smith's brother, following reprimand for keeping 'bad company' with 'profligates' such as... well, Chatterton. (Who probably wrote 'Sentiment', quoted in his death scene on page 19, as a result of this same incident. It was not a suicide note and should not be construed as such.)

'JUSTICE IS AT THE DOOR...'

No one reckons themselves more tortured than a frustrated artist. Obligated to 'sing for his supper', Chatterton found himself, for an extended time, unable to make a sale. That possibly made him doubt himself and his talents – perhaps for the first time. One after another his various 'father-figures' had deserted him: Canynge, Walpole, Barrett, Beckford. What if his powers should too? He might well have felt blocked, artistically – and his art, his ability to express himself, was his everything. Or maybe it seemed there wasn't any point in carrying on: no demand and no reward for his efforts.

'... AND THE AXE WILL DO ITS OFFICE.'

From 'To the Prime Minister'
(as Decimus, in the *Middlesex Journal*, May 1770)

No Song for the proud young poet might well have meant No Supper. There was no justification for his going short – not sleeping, missing meals – except perhaps for this fierce morality, as an extreme form of self-punishment for his present failure. And yet, in spite of the poverty of his circumstances, his many letters – the last to Carey and Catcott – showed resolve, still shared a positive lust for life. His genius, however neglected, was proven – recognised *and* celebrated. Arrived at a crossroads he simply took a wrong turn. Calomel and vitriol were known treatments for the so-called 'Foul Disease', syphilis; opium was a stimulant, but also a painkiller. In mixing his medications, whether accidentally or otherwise, his wouldn't be the first or last Rock Star Death. But suicide? The sad truth is we just can't know.

Staying true to his personal vision within a necessarily money-making profession was a torment to Chatterton, who valued agency – his artistic freedom – above all. At the time of his death, the worth of words remained fatally in the balance.

ON THEIR HANDS – A DEAD STAR

George Catcott, 'a vulgar, ignorant fellow', held the lion's share of Chatterton's Rowley writings. He promptly gathered the remainder from Chatterton's mother Sarah for only five guineas (about £5) – a pittance, given their true worth and significance. Yet this wasn't the worst of it. One Herbert Croft presented himself in Bristol and received Chatterton's letters home 'on loan' from his sister, Mary Newton (now married to a glass cutter) for a single guinea, the same from Sarah for half that, and disappeared with them. He published these without permission in 1780, paying the family off with £10, and not a penny more – resisting all entreaty for the next 20 years, as a reverend and a baronet, while Mary, widowed, lost three of her four children. To cap it all, Croft had been landlord to the Walmsleys in London, where Chatterton lodged, and so knew where the goods were to be had. *A Story Too True*. Not until 1803, and a subscription edition of Chatterton's *Works* published by the Romantic poet Robert Southey and leading bookseller Joseph Cottle, did his surviving relatives benefit, Sarah's old age at last 'rendered comfortable'.



- Chatterton, Henry Wallis, 1856.

© Tate, London. Photo © Tate.

www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wallis-chatterton-n01685



PAINT A VULGAR PICTURE

Henry Wallis first exhibited his much-celebrated oil painting, *The Death of Chatterton*, at the Royal Academy in 1856 – nowadays it is at Tate Britain. Highly idealised, it resembles nothing else in art so much as a reclining Venus. While far from the probably wretched truth, it does perhaps capture a little of the poet's essence for the pose being modelled by a 'struggling young writer'. Charles Dickens found it 'painful' (very moving). Critics however disapproved of such a good-looking corpse elevating Chatterton to tragic sainthood, or martyrdom, while at the same time 'sentimentalized into a pale powder'. 'Whatchu talkin' about, Wallis!'

When Two Tribes Go To War

Taking sides in the Rowley Controversy



'It is a sword that cuts both ways'

- Johnson.

TEAM ROWLEY

PRO-ROWLEIAN (Rowley was Real: against the idea of Chatterton as author)

1 - George Catcott, who had been gifted Rowley's 'Bristowe Tragedie' (printed in 1772), possessed most of the works. Later attempting to sell them for £200, he had a vested interest in their being believed genuine fifteenth-century artefacts.

2 - William Barrett, likewise, relied on many of Rowley's transcripts for his *History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (eventually published in 1789 to very little notice). He was caught in a trap – admitting belief in Rowley branded him a fool: knowing the truth, Chatterton's accomplice. Solution? He equivocated: 'They are not wholly genuine nor all forg'd'.

3 - James Thistlethwaite, a fellow schoolboy at Colston's: 'Had Chatterton been the author of the poems imputed to Rowley... he would have made it his first, his greatest pride' due to his 'vanity and inordinate thirst after praise'. Jealous much?

4/5 - Mother Sarah and sister Mary were obliged to be 'predictably congenial to the Pro-Rowleyans who left generous donations'. Surely at least suspecting their 'dear boy', when testifying, they naturally sought to preserve an impression of his good character – although not shy of reporting his many idiosyncrasies.

Mary, however, later shifted position – from resolutely Pro (insistent on the phrase 'the poems my brother copied from Rowley') to Anti – or at the very least suggestible that Thomas was the true author: 'Aye... anybody might have seen that with half an eye.'

6 - Jeremiah Milles 'interviewed Mrs Chatterton extensively', then wrote (and stuck to) his *Commentary, in which antiquity is considered and defended* (1782). Dean of Exeter, President of the Society of Antiquaries, he was notorious for his 'dreary arguments': Coleridge compared his writings on Chatterton to 'An owl mangling a poor dead nightingale.'; Walpole said, 'I had rather believe in Rowley than go through their proofs.'

TEAM CHATTERTON

ANTI-ROWLEIAN (Rowley was Chatterton: he is believed the true author)

7 - Thomas Tyrwhitt, a Chaucerian scholar, at first believed the Rowley poems medieval works, but soon reconsidered.

8 - (Doctor) Samuel Johnson, the celebrated lexicographer, paid a visit to Bristol in 1776 (written up in his 1791 *Boswell, Life*). Entirely unconvinced by Catcott and Barrett's performance on this occasion, he said of Chatterton: 'This is the most extraordinary young man that has encountered my knowledge. It is wonderful how the whelp has written such things.'

9 - Horace Walpole, 'cold as the reflection of the sun on ice', found himself widely blamed for Chatterton's early death. Accused 'an assassin of genius', he asserted: 'He was fonder of inventing great bards, than of being one. Still, the boy remains a prodigy.'

10 - Thomas Warton, historian, critic, poet, saw fit to include Rowley among the fifteenth-century poets in his *History of English Poetry* (1778), but went on record as not believing in the antiquity of the poems themselves.

11 - Edmond Malone, barrister, Irish Shakespearean scholar, started out pulling for Team Rowley, but soon and sure enough became a cheerleader for the anti-Rowleians.

TWO HEARTS BEAT AS ONE – A ROMANTIC ENDING

Even before 'the dulce downie Barbe beganne to gre' (bumfluff beard began to grow... not grey: it never got that chance), Chatterton had folks 'Wondryng at one soe wyse and yet soe yinge' (wondering at one so wise and yet so young). And as he matured, so too did his second self, Rowley, evolve: ideal patron Canynge's servant became his 'valued friend and companion'. But, eventually, their joint 'Storie of Wylliam Canynge' had to draw to a close. United in harmony with his first and foremost father-figure, 'dyspende owre remeyneyng years togyder', they spend their last remaining years... together. (letter 'from 1467', produced by Chatterton late February 1769).



Everlasting Posterity

Memorialising Chatterton in Bristol

*Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

*'Oh thou, or what remains of thee,
Ælla, the darling of futurity,
Let this, my song, bold as thy courage be,
As everlasting to posterity!'*

- 'Song to Ælla' (1768), in a modernised text version.



- *Rustic monument*, 1784, in the grounds of the Hermitage near Lansdowne Crescent, Bath, a short-lived 'folly' erected by wealthy eccentric Philip Thicknesse. Vicesimus Knox commented: 'An artificial ruin, the stones are mossy and old... the cement and workmanship of a modern mason.' (These weren't more of Chatterton's made-up names, but real people.)

Editor Thomas Tyrwhitt's collection of Rowley poems, published in 1777, brought them to wider public attention. Through the 1780s 'Rowleyomania' properly took hold – popularity later cemented when Walter W. Skeat modernised their mock medieval language (as above). Poetic tributes soon multiplied. First was Hannah Cowley (as 'Adelaide') in *The Morning Post* for 24 October 1778. Helena Maria Williams' 'Sonnet to Expression' followed (*Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 17 September 1782): Chatterton, one 'the muses lov'd – when hope forsook / His spirit.' Even Lactilla (Ann Yearsley) got in on the act with her 'Elegy on Mr. Chatterton' (1787): 'Scorning to fawn at Insult's knee, / My woes were doubled.' A commemorative handkerchief print from 1782 lamented the poet's suicide, and lines from 'Ælla, a Tragical Interlude', widely considered Chatterton's masterpiece, were set to a five-part madrigal, *O synge untoe mie roundelaie*, by 'the English Mozart', Bristolian Samuel Wesley.

*'Come, with acorn-cup and thorn,
Drain my heart's blood away;
Life and all its goods I scorn,
Dance by night, or feast by day.'*



- *Chatterton Monument*, Samuel Loxton (Bristol Reference Library B19670). John Flaxman exhibited designs for a lofty Chatterton memorial at St Mary Redcliffe as early as 1780. Over ensuing decades, literary luminaries such as Wordsworth and Joseph Cottle gave their support, until in April 1840 a cenotaph was erected, then removed (1846), and finally re-erected in 1857 (this time on unhallowed ground more suited to a 'sinner'). Supporters favoured lines from Chatterton's own 'Last Will and Testament' for an epitaph inscription, but church authorities, aware of the poet's spoof suicide note, would have none of it. The monument remained blank for another 20 years, before falling into disrepair: and was eventually taken down in 1967.

'To the Memory of Thomas Chatterton, One of England's Greatest Poets, and Sometime pupil at this school.' In 1886 Oscar Wilde pushed for a plaque to be sited at Colston's Hospital bearing that inscription, but without success. The Pile Street School, however, demolished during the construction of Redcliffe Way, had its façade saved and attached to the nearby house where Chatterton was born – where it may still be seen. Nineteenth-century paintings in the collection of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery include 'Chatterton Composing the Rowleian Manuscripts', 'Chatterton, 1765', and the watercolour, 'Chatterton's Room'. He also appears, as a boy, in 'Some Who Have Made Bristol Famous' by Ernest Board (1930), on display at M Shed, Bristol People Gallery. In St Mary Redcliffe's south transept a plaque by Canynge's tomb reads, 'THOMAS CHATTERTON of this parish, 1752-1770. Poet.'. Fittingly, the former muniments room is now known as 'the Chatterton Room'. A bronze statue sits in Millennium Square: and you can too.

BE HEARTENED... WE'RE A LEGEND

Nostalgic for the merits of bygone ages, neglected though they were, Chatterton's revival of Medievalism had – during his lifetime – gone against the cultural grain. But this wouldn't remain the case for very much longer...

BREAKIN' THE LAW – Was Chatterton A Forger?

Young Tom's nemesis Horace Walpole reasoned, 'it does not appear that his honesty was ever perverted. He never attempted to defraud, cheat, rob unpoetically'. His 'ingenuity in counterfeiting styles' was literary forgery (fully formed and well made, literally so). Discovered in his 'innocent deception' Chatterton carried on with 'the non-intervention of conscience' (*Edinburgh Review*).

Precedents for this sort of thing existed – in *Ossian* (*Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland*), James Macpherson's fake from 1760, and in Walpole's own *Castle of Otranto*, 1764 ('translated from medieval Italian' – at least until its second edition, when he fessed up). The Rowley persona allowed Chatterton to comment on his city life and be heard – only in this way, to speak more freely than any ordinary citizen could. Effie Wither posits his forgery 'the logical result' of hardship and misfortune. His life choices limited by working-class origins, Chatterton fell into the habit of seeing opportunity in each new acquaintance. Not for the sake of fooling them, or even making money. What he sought – desperately so, time and time again – was proof that his writings stood up, that they were convincing: of true worth, and not just as fakes. Receiving what amounted to a begging letter from a boy, however talented, from the 'lower orders', Walpole balked. Even he came to understand, and admit – too late – what youthful pride counted to 'the lad'. 'Chatterton had been willing to sacrifice the vanity of being applauded for the greater vanity of enjoying the dexterity of his sleight of hand... the more solid satisfaction of artifice and imposture' (Thomas Warton). He was a Dynamo!

IN DA REMIX

For the 'literary adventurer' (as Sir Walter Scott tagged him), this was role play, sport even. Chatterton 'knew that original genius consists of forming new and happy combinations rather than in searching after thoughts and ideas which never had occurred before' (Gregory). He sampled, freely – like an early precursor to Bristol's Wild Bunch. Finding he could earn money from his faux-medieval creations he produced more. Necessity mothered his invention but his falsehoods were inventive.

A consensus has been arrived at over time: 'He pictured himself the minstrel of a bygone romantic age; a genuine belief, not a forgery.' (Bristol's *Evening Post*, 20 November 1952); 'We may forget the imposter in the enthusiast, and forgive the falsehood for its beauty and ingenuity.' (Campbell); 'With Rowley, Chatterton has not reproduced a literary voice from the past. He has invented a new and completely original language.' (Kaplan).

Dead Poet's Society

The Rise of the Romantics

*For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate...*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

Concerned with more than countryside peasant poverty, Gray's mournful verse was a lament for undiscovered talent. Consigned to obscurity by the random circumstance of low (poor) birth, their almost certain fate would be to remain unknown. This, of course, could have so easily applied to Thomas Chatterton.

In St Mary Redcliffe Church, in 1795, double-dating famous poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey were married – not to each other, you understand, but to Sara Fricker and her sister, Elizabeth, respectively. How very romantic...

MODERN ROMANCE

Stendhal, a realist, cheekily summarised Romanticism as 'the art of presenting to people the literary works which give them the greatest pleasure; Classicism, that which gave the greatest possible pleasure to their grandfathers.' Really though, both movements existed concurrently, progressing in harmony. 'Our age is pre-eminently the age of great cities' said Professor Robert Vaughan in 1843. The Industrial Revolution – steam power, factories, leading to so much pollution and destruction – made this a bleak time to live through. Romanticism, in reaction, represented further turns of the wheel – back to simpler times, of knights, love and fairy tales – as well as forward, toward 'the free expression of imagination and association' (Friedrich Schlegel in his *Dialogue on Poetry*, 1798). Writers commented subjectively on earlier forms, even oral traditions, just as Chatterton had: 'as the spirit moveth' (*European Magazine and London Review*, 1822) – answering with and to their own ideas, thoughts and feelings. As the art of writing spread (through greater publication), this birdsong-like element of call and response – poems and novels written in reply, one to another (a precursor of sorts to the boasts and 'burns' of rap music) – proliferated.



WILD BOYS

'And when we consider the influence Coleridge himself had upon the English Romantic movement generally, and especially upon Shelley and Keats, and the enormous influence these latter have had upon subsequent poets, it seems impossible to refuse to Chatterton the place of the father of the New Romantic school.' (Theodore Watts in *The English Poets*, 1880.)

Composed when still a bluecoat boy himself, as a school exercise, Coleridge's first published poem, in 1790, was his 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton': 'Chatterton! methinks I hear thy name, / For cold my Fancy grows, and dead each Hope of Fame' (lines removed from succeeding revisions. He would continue reworking it until his own death, in 1834).

'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever'.

John Keats (1795-1821) dedicated his 'Endymion', 'To the memory of the most English of poets except Shakespeare, Thomas Chatterton'. He also wrote a



sonnet, 'To Chatterton' – 'O Chatterton! how very sad thy fate' – before dying himself at a ridiculously young age: something commiserated by Percy Bysshe Shelley with 'Adonais', wherein mention of Chatterton reunited Keats with his muse.

Robert Southey (1774-1843) was another Bristol bard, who counted Chatterton first among 'the youths whom the Muses / Mark'd for themselves at birth', 'early lost and deplored' ('A Vision of Judgement', 1821). More importantly perhaps, in practical terms, his editorial work helped rescue the surviving family from poverty and ruin – allowing Chatterton's mother and sister some comfort in their old age via an income from publication of Thomas' work.

'Nature's Priest', William Wordsworth (1770-1850), most famously of all, dubbed Chatterton 'the Marvelous Boy, / The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride' – in 'Resolution and Independence', 1807. The huge impact of his and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, published in Bristol by bookseller Joseph Cottle in 1798, forever changed the poetical landscape. In looking back, they all continued to pay it forward.



KARMA CHAMELEON

So what was the secret of Chatterton's enduring appeal? Scottish writer Alexander Chalmers praised his ability, first to absorb, then to reproduce, so many different styles of writing – like a chameleon that 'imbibed the colours of all it looked on': but, ably so, also as a 'mocking-bird', that all the while 'had his own genuine song'. Merit alone, however, rarely affords recognition. Inspiration in itself, the widespread grief that Chatterton's story inspired – as much as, if not more than his works – touched hearts and nerves because he'd died young and unknown. 'Thou has a claim, a dear-bought claim, to our pity; nothing but thy death could purchase it. Hadst thou died quietly, and in peace, thou hadst died infamous' (Chatterton, as Decimus, 1770). Onlookers across the decades, more than merely rubbernecking, felt in his words – as well as recognised, communicated by his grand ambitions – an image of themselves, 'of their [own] inner struggles and their dejections' (Gautier, *History of Romanticism*). You need only think of the impact of the song 'Audition (the fools who dream)' from the film *La La Land*. Critic John Symonds expressed it best in a review of his *Poetical Works*, in 1871: Chatterton's 'pungent genius' had achieved 'an atmosphere surcharged with electricity'.

FADE TO GREY

'Too oft the wealthy to proud follies born / Have turn'd from letter'd Poverty with scorn' (William Hayley). Walpole's scorn for Chatterton was met with scorn. 'I am accused of blasting this promising genius,' he wrote, 'and of depriving the world of the lord knows what *Iliads* and *Lost Paradises*, which this youth might have procreated in his own or another name.' But Chatterton has the last and longest laugh: his entry in the old *Dictionary of National Biography* ran to 20 columns of text, while Walpole's filled only 11. Suck it, Horace!

After The Love Has Gone

Fast Forward to Today

'Stratford has her Shakespeare... Bristol has her Chatterton'

- Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*

MAD ABOUT THE BOY

Thomas Chatterton the tragic youth was gone, but his influence still characterised much of what followed. Regardless of whether or not it came down to simple morbid curiosity, enduring obsession with the boy poet resulted in a centuries-long media sensation – countless articles, reviews, engraved illustrations, popular prints and paintings – all crafted in commemoration.

THE TEMPEST

Unrest and uprisings swept across mainland Europe throughout the nineteenth century, 'the world, blowing in the storm of history' (von Herder). As Chatterton had, writers engaged with radical political protest: in the UK, perhaps most famously with Shelley's 'The Masque of Anarchy', a response to 1819's Peterloo Massacre. Frenchman Victor Hugo (1802-1885, author of barricades classic *Les Misérables*) became the voice of his generation. Three days of rioting scarred Bristol's Queen Square in 1831, when crowds demanded parliamentary reform. Risks of an English Revolution, although one never really transpired, were ever-present, and very real. Things got so bad that by 1848 it seemed as if the world itself might end: and after that, things couldn't stay the same. 'I feel within me the rebellious unspoken word. I will not be old. The horizon enlarges, the sky shifts around me. It is an age of shocks; so rapid and so whirling that only when it is at an end, if then, can I comprehend it.' Not the words of a poet, but the era's defining UK Prime Minister (William Gladstone). Everything in culture, as in life, was speeding up: people caught in the balance between looking back and surging forward – reflection, or action. 'The world is [the] mind precipitated' (Emerson).

70, 80, 90, PARTY (TIME ON MY HANDS)

1851

Charles Dickens, no less, performed two plays with his friend Wilkie Collins (*The Woman in White*) at the Victoria Rooms in Bristol. Spouting Club member Chatterton had always loved theatre: habitually attending, both in Bristol and during his London days.

1871

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe' (Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky', in *Wonderland* sequel *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*). 'It seems very pretty' said Alice, of this distinctly Rowleyesque language, 'but it's rather hard to understand. Somebody killed something: that's clear, at any rate'.

1883

Frederick William Hackwood's handbook for elementary schoolteachers declared Chatterton a bad influence, as were all 'who openly mutiny at their fate' – a sure sign that his legend had reached its zenith. It would be a slow roll downhill again from here.

1884

Henry Jones and Henry Herman's *Chatterton* the stage play debuted, and was included in celebrated actor Wilson Barrett's tour of America. 'What's the use of poetry?' – 'To live upon when one can't get bread and cheese.'

1885

Evelyn Pine's dramatic monologue 'A Poet's Death (Chatterton, August 1770)' was published: early female performance poetry – '*I am a genius!*'

CULTURE CLUB

The Pre-Raphaelite movement's every artistic expression – ravishing colour, decorative detail, their name itself a medievalist revival – freely acknowledged Chatterton's importance as their forebear, 'the *true* day-spring'. Foremost among them, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wasn't the first (and wouldn't be the last) to hold Chatterton in highest regard: 'Through Hamlet's doubt to Shakespeare near allied, / And kin to Milton through his Satan's pride' ('Five English Poets', 1881). Rossetti's idealised sonnet ends on his 'unrecorded face', 'sweet for ever'. Heart, not head – Romanticism remained all about the feels, 'the weird and mysterious'. Not everyone was a fan. 'Animal instincts,' said Courthope: 'Shameless nakedness', Robert Buchanan (*Contemporary Review*, 1871).

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING

Oscar Fingal Wilde (named for *Ossian*, twice over) – as with the Pre-Raphaelites and just like Chatterton, before them all – had a 'pendant [natural bent] for reviving long-outmoded styles' (Bristow and Mitchell). His *Decay of Lying* proposed deception as an art (and, I'm sure, vice versa). Lord Arthur Savile's *Crime* (1887), *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895): all betray Wilde's fascination for Chatterton's hall-of-mirrors fabrications, art-crime elevated almost to a genre. Wilde signed first editions of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, 1898, as 'C.3.3.' – his cell number there. He spoke too at the Victoria Rooms during his early lecture tour on Aesthetics. The last public talk he ever gave, in Bournemouth, 7 April 1888, concerned 'Thomas Chatterton: The Boy-Poet of the Eighteenth Century', 'precursor of Blake, Coleridge and Keats, the greatest poet of his time'.

SCARY MONSTERS (AND SUPER CREEPS)

By century's end, Romanticism curdled into its Gothic incarnation: 'motifs of darkness and light, of imprisonment and liberation, the classical temple and the castellated tower... themes of apocalypse, gigantism, and riot' (Tate curator Martin Myrone). The Romantic was a sandwich filling between Classic and the next phase, 'Reflective'. 'We dream of journeys through the cosmos; but is the cosmos not in us? Eternity, with its worlds of past and future, exists either within ourselves or not at all' (Novalis, navel-gazing). This was the start of the great journey inward – fashionable introspection: leading, ultimately, to neurosis (in or out). Further exploration of the subconscious, from self-regard, to Symbolism, to Surrealism, followed... From *Frankenstein*, to more Freudian monsters – the animated corpse, having got up and walked around for a bit, collapsed back into an enervated swoon.

HOW CAN WE CARRY ON?

Twentieth century, and now lightspeed ahead into the twenty-first. Arguably 'post literate', there's a determined return to oral traditions. Continued spread of spoken word, ranting, performance poetry, poetry slams, artful graffiti, agit-rap – you name it: somewhere, anywhere, it's all happening. And if it isn't, and you want it, then you can surely make it happen.

What are you waiting for?

Modern Bristol Poets



Miles Chambers, performance poet, graphic designer, cultural commentator, broadcaster, playwright and slam champion, was appointed Bristol's first City Poet in May 2016, following an impassioned performance of his work 'Bristol, Bristol' at the swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected Mayor, Marvin Rees.

Bristol Bristol

the city that was built on the bricks of heroic hardship.

Bristol Bristol

the place of dreams and possibilities, the place of creative aspirations, culture, commerce and its own seductive music

- 'Bristol, Bristol'



Rachael Boast won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry Prize, both in 2011. Her second collection was then shortlisted for the Griffin Prize and her third for the T. S. Eliot Prize. Her poem 'Belle Époque' won the 2015 Bristol Poetry Prize. She is co-editor of *The*

Echoing Gallery: Bristol Poets and Art in the City (2013). 'Quietly assured verse demonstrating real sophistication. She says such interesting things that you want to know what comes next.' – *The Independent*.

*The book is merely a cover. Inside it,
the slow work of love, errata of desire,
something written over what is written there.*

- 'Void Studies'



Helen Dunmore, novelist, poet and children's writer, was born in Yorkshire in 1952 but spent most of her adult life in Bristol, where she died in 2017. She wrote 11 collections of poetry, beginning with *The Apple Fall* in 1983. Among prizes she was awarded: Cardiff International Poetry Competition (1990); the National Poetry

Competition (2009); and Costa Book of the Year (posthumously, 2017). Her poetry has been described as sensuous, magical, delicate, strange, intimate and sure. In a 2005 interview for Bristol's Great Reading Adventure, she said what she looks for in a poem is 'that first shock of delight... almost a physical experience, like when you look at a certain picture. Full of emotion and feeling'.

*Bold flare of orange –
a struck match
against her mother's breast*

*he listens to her heartbeat
going yes yes yes*

- 'Baby Orang-utan'



Beth Calverley, collaborative poet and creative coach, specialises in 'bringing the wellbeing benefits of poetry to people in all kinds of places'. After hosting group writing sessions with the Teenage Cancer Trust, she was appointed Poet in Residence at UH Bristol NHS Foundation Trust (March 2019), co-

creating poems with patients, visitors and staff at the Bristol Royal Infirmary and South Bristol Community Hospital. 'Poems help them express their truths, recall memories and lift their spirits during a time of change' (interview in *oh mag*). Co-host of Milk Poetry, a nurturing platform for spoken word, Beth was on *Rife* magazine's 2018 list of the most influential young people in Bristol.

*Now, the mornings snap
like dark chocolate
saved for later. We put off
waiting.*

- 'Bittersweet'



Lawrence Hoo is a Bristol-based poet and activist who uses his poetry to challenge social inequality. He was Ujima Radio's Poet in Residence (2016) and recipient of a RISE award for Arts, Community and Entertainment (2018). In collaboration with other local artists, including Zeeks, Tanya Muneera Williams and

Massive Attack, he is currently developing CARGO, a new immersive multi-media experience based on his poems – an alternative narrative to stories of the transatlantic slave trade.

*Mary Seacole faced many obstacles due to her race and gender
But her will to help others meant that she would never surrender*

- 'Mother Seacole'



Vanessa Kisuule was appointed Bristol's second City Poet in May 2018. A spoken-word artist and performer, she was recipient of a Jerwood bursary in 2017 to undertake extensive dance training. She has won several poetry slams and has represented the UK at European slam championships. Awarded

a Leverhulme Arts Scholarship from Bristol Old Vic and highly commended by the Forward Prize, she has published two collections of poetry with Burning Eye Books.

*Many feel the long shadow of
Loneliness hang over them
Facing a future clear as fog*

...

*Wearing pride and shame on each shoulder
We walk forward – knowing with hard work
One of those forces can far outshine the other.*

- 'Tale of Two Cities'



And you thought Gladstone was funky. Well here comes **Dizraeli**, Bristolian poet, musician and rapper. Winning the Farrago UK Slam Championships and the BBC Radio 4 Poetry Slam, he's performed at Glastonbury and Latitude Festivals, the Eden Project, and the Royal Festival Hall. Unfailingly honest about his emotional

struggle, mental health and therapy, he's studied West African music in Senegal and written several hip-hop plays with Canada's Baba Brinkman. His latest album is *Unmaster*. 'I could not have coped with alone. Not a single note is solo'.

*Oi Oi,
Can anybody please explain
what the &\$!@ is happening?*



Caleb Parkin is a poet, performer, facilitator and filmmaker with passionate interests in inclusive environmentalism; wellbeing; arts, culture and heritage; and LGBT+ pride. His poems have been published widely in journals and online. His tutoring and facilitation work in schools, museums, universities, festivals and

beyond is extensive. In June 2020 he was appointed Bristol's third City Poet, a post he will hold until 2022.

*In a café, I exhume Bristol's prodigal poet
imposter. A teenage star fallen, re-enacted
on canvas, and finally scattered online.*

- 'The Death of Chatterton'

Thanks to the support of National Lottery Heritage Fund, using money raised by National Lottery players, this publication is being distributed for FREE.

'Imagine a world in which no one studied creative writing, art, or music, and the only beauty was prefaced by a symbol such as £, or \$ or €... I'm not disputing the value of maths or engineering; I just think we need a world in which beauty exists alongside technology and trade.'

- Dr Julie Hulme, Keele University, after then-Education Secretary Damian Hinds suggested 'low value' degrees should be dropped or revamped.



This dramatised version of Thomas Chatterton's life story is based on known facts, scholarly speculations and our own artistic interpretations. - ILYA and Willem Hampson

FIND OUT MORE

Some books that we've read on the way to putting together this publication.

Thomas Chatterton: The Marvelous Boy by Charles Edward Russell (Moffat, Yard and Co., 1908). 'By far the most sentimental version of C's life' and ooh boy is it ever. This one's dated very badly, but it can still be fun as an insight into the late Victorian mindset.

A Life of Thomas Chatterton by E. H. W. Meyerstein (Ingpen and Grant, 1930), seen by many as the definitive biography, gathering material from a great many sources – and yes, it's good.

Thomas Chatterton: Genius or Imposter by Effie Wither, dissertation written for her Master of Arts degree at the University of Ottawa in 1946. Effie did her homework!

The Family-Romance of the Imposter Poet Thomas Chatterton by Louise J. Kaplan (University of California Press, 1987). This well-researched book approaches Chatterton's life story from the perspective of a clinical psychologist. Intriguing and different.

The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton, edited by C. B. Willcox (Cambridge, 1842), free as an ebook on www.books.google.co.uk

Thomas Chatterton, Delphi Poets Series (Delphi Classics, 2014).

Chatterton, edited by John Richmond, in The Canterbury Poets series: a pocket-size collection with a good introduction, published in 1885 – with copies out there still affordable!

Oscar Wilde's Chatterton, Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell (Yale University Press, 2015) – the great nineteenth-century writer's appreciation of the eighteenth-century writer – in his own words and those of others, reproduced directly from personal notebooks. A treasure trove of wit and wisdom.

Chatterton, More and Bristol Cultural Life in the 1760s by Jonathan Barry (Redcliffe Press, 2005) – a densely-packed short essay that never mentions the word 'class', while making it very clear that this was a major factor in Chatterton's slim chance of fame or fortune.

Bristol and Romanticism Walking Guide by Amy O'Beirne (BCDP, 2015) – a guided walk in the footsteps of the Romantic poets in Bristol. A revised edition is included in the Poetic City anthology, which is available FREE of charge from local libraries and other city sites. It will also be available as a downloadable PDF. Check the Bristol Poetic City Facebook page for details.

From Gothic to Romantic: Thomas Chatterton's Bristol, edited by Alistair Heys (Redcliffe Press, 2005).

*Hark! how the sacred calm, that breathes around,
Bids every fierce tumultuous passion cease;
In still small accents whisp'ring from the ground,
A grateful earnest of eternal peace.*

- Gray, 'Elegy'

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