



Thomas Chatterton  
and Neglected Genius,  
1760–1830

Daniel Cook



# Thomas Chatterton and Neglected Genius, 1760–1830

*Also by Daniel Cook:*

THE LIVES OF JONATHAN SWIFT

WOMEN'S LIFE WRITING, 1700–1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship  
(*ed. with Amy Culley*)

# Thomas Chatterton and Neglected Genius, 1760–1830

Daniel Cook

*Lecturer in English, University of Dundee, UK*

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*Your pride is fallen – your chief, your great support,  
Lies mould'ring to his own primæval dust:  
To you, while living, ever was his court,  
Dead, in return, let not his mem'ry rust*  
T.C., 'Elegy, to the Memory of Mr. Thomas Chatterton'

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# List of Abbreviations

## Life and Works

- 1772            *The Execution of Sir Charles Bawdin* (London: F. Newberry and W. Goldsmith, 1772).
- 1777            *Poems, Supposed to have been Written at Bristol, by Thomas Rowley, and Others, in the Fifteenth Century; the greatest part now first published from the most authentic copies, with an engraved specimen of one of the MSS. To which are added a Preface, an Introductory Account of the Several Pieces, and a Glossary*, ed. Thomas Tyrwhitt (London: T. Payne and Son, 1777).
- 1778            *Poems, Supposed to have been Written at Bristol, by Thomas Rowley, and Others, in the Fifteenth Century. The Third Edition; to which is added an Appendix containing some observation upon the language of these poems; tending to prove, that they were written, not by any ancient author, but entirely by Thomas Chatterton*, ed. Thomas Tyrwhitt (London: T. Payne and Son, 1778).
- 1781            *Poems, Supposed to have been Written at Bristol, in the Fifteenth Century, by Thomas Rowley, Priest, &c.*, ed. Jeremiah Milles (London: T. Payne and Son, [1781]).
- 1794            *Poems, Supposed to have been Written at Bristol by Thomas Rowley, and Others, in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lancelot Sharpe (London: B. Flower, 1794).
- 1803            *The Works of Thomas Chatterton*, eds Joseph Cottle and Robert Southey, 3 vols (London: Longman and Rees, 1803).
- Bibliography*       Murray Warren, *A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography of Thomas Chatterton* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977).
- Chatterton's Art*     Donald S. Taylor, *Thomas Chatterton's Art: Experiments in Imagined History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- Enquiry*            Thomas Warton, *An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems attributed to Thomas Rowley. In which the*

- arguments of the Dean of Exeter, and Mr. Bryant are examined* (London: J. Dodsley, 1782).
- Family Romance* Louise J. Kaplan, *The Family Romance of the Imposter-Poet Thomas Chatterton* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).
- Forger's Shadow* Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002).
- From Gothic to Romantic History* Alistair Heys (ed.), *From Gothic to Romantic: Thomas Chatterton's Bristol* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 2005).  
Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh Century to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, 4 vols (London: J. Dodsley, 1774–81).
- Life* E. H. W. Meyerstein, *A Life of Thomas Chatterton* (London: Ingpen and Grant, 1930).
- Lolla, 'Genesis' Maria Grazia Lolla, "'Truth Sacrificing to the Muses": The Rowley Controversy and the Genesis of the Romantic Chatterton', *Romantic Culture*, pp. 151–71.
- Lolla, 'Monuments' Maria Grazia Lolla, "'Monuments" and "Texts": Antiquarianism and Literature in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1997).
- Love and Madness* Herbert Croft, *Love and Madness: A Story Too True in a Series of Letters Between Parties, whose Names would perhaps be mentioned, were they less known, or lamented* (London: G. Kearsley and R. Faulder, 1780).
- Miscellanies* *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse; by Thomas Chatterton* (London: Fielding and Walker, 1778).
- Romantic Culture* Nick Groom (ed.), *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, now Palgrave Macmillan, 1999; repr. 2003).
- Supplement* *A Supplement to the Miscellanies of Thomas Chatterton* (London: T. Becket, 1784).
- Supplement [Kew]* *Supplement to Chatterton's Miscellanies. Kew Gardens* (London, 1785?).
- Vindication* Thomas Tyrwhitt, *A Vindication of the Appendix to the Poems, called Rowley's, in Reply to the Answers of the Dean of Exeter, Jacob Bryant, Esquire, and a Third Anonymous Writer* (London: T. Payne and Son, 1782).

*Works*                    *The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton*, ed. Donald S. Taylor in association with Benjamin Hoover, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

## Other

*Anecdotes*                John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 9 vols (London: Printed for the author, 1812–16).

*Chalmers*                Alexander Chalmers (ed.), *The Works of the English Poets from Chaucer to Cowper*, 21 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1810).

*Illustrations*         John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols (London: Printed for the author, 1817–58).

*ODNB*                    *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004–).

*Walpole's Correspondence*     *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis et al., 48 vols (New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1937–83).

## Libraries

BL            The British Library  
BRL          Bristol Reference Library  
CUL          Cambridge University Library  
NPG          National Portrait Gallery, London

## Journals and newspapers

CR            *Critical Review*  
ECF          *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*  
ECL          *Eighteenth-Century Life*  
ECS          *Eighteenth-Century Studies*  
ELH          *English Literary History*  
EM            *European Magazine, and London Review*  
ER            *Edinburgh Review*  
FFBJ         *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*  
GM            *Gentleman's Magazine*  
KSJ          *Keats-Shelley Journal*  
KSR          *Keats-Shelley Review*

LM	<i>London Magazine</i>
LR	<i>London Review of English and Foreign Literature</i>
MLN	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
MLQ	<i>Modern Language Quarterly</i>
MLR	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
MM	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>
MMr	<i>Monthly Mirror</i>
MR	<i>Monthly Review</i>
N&Q	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
PMLA	<i>Papers of the Modern Language Association</i>
QR	<i>Quarterly Review</i>
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
SEL	<i>Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900</i>
SJC	<i>St James's Chronicle, or British Evening Post</i>
TCM	<i>Town and Country Magazine</i>
TLS	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>

# Note on Conventions

Throughout this book *Rowleian* and *anti-Rowleian* refer to the Rowley controversy and the debaters; when necessary I use *pro-Rowleian* in place of *Rowleian* to aid sense. *Rowleyan* refers to the works themselves and *Rowleyese* to the language. *William Canynge* refers to Chatterton's fictional character; William Canynges is the historical figure. Unless stated, Chatterton's texts are taken from *Works*.



# Introduction

Reading epitaphs in the St Pancras Churchyard in London, deep in conversation with a friend, Thomas Chatterton fell into a newly dug grave. His companion lent him a hand and cheerfully declared that he was only too happy to assist the resurrection of genius. Chatterton grinned, took him by the arm, and said, 'My dear friend, I feel the sting of a speedy dissolution – I have been at war with the grave for some time, and find it is not so easy to vanquish it as I imagined – we can find an asylum to hide from every creditor but that!'<sup>1</sup> Still only seventeen years old, he died three days later, on 24 August 1770, in a cramped garret room in Holborn. In this story we witness all at once the boy-poet's quick wit, a prescient obsession with his own untimely end, and even the stirrings of his resurrection in a literary afterlife. But the anecdote is a convenient fabrication. First printed a decade after the event, it met a gathering interest in the mysterious author behind the 'Rowley' papers, a newly recovered body of putatively medieval writings and sketches attributed to an unknown priest and his coterie in Bristol. *Poems, Supposed to have been Written at Bristol, by Thomas Rowley, and Others, in the Fifteenth Century* had appeared posthumously, in 1777, to great acclaim and ran to three editions in little over a year. Belatedly, the aspiring artist found a captive audience.

Undone by recklessness – his reputed act of self-destruction one hazy night in London – Chatterton became, and remains, the face of hubristic genius, the blueprint of the tragic young Romantic, an English *poète maudit*. Years later, in 1807, Wordsworth famously dubbed him 'the marvellous Boy / The sleepless Soul that perished in its pride' ('Resolution and Independence').<sup>2</sup> To be sure, there has always been a cultish fascination with Chatterton, ranging from printed handkerchiefs bearing a lurid stamp of his image in the early 1780s to Peter Ackroyd's

celebrated novel *Chatterton* (1987); from full-scale tragedies performed in nineteenth-century Paris through to modern-day operettas in Sydney.<sup>3</sup> Without doubt the most familiar impression of all remains the supine, dying hero of Henry Wallis's tricolored-tinted painting *The Death of Chatterton* (1856), which, fittingly, simultaneously hangs in the resplendent Tate Britain gallery in Millbank and adorns in mural form the grimy walls of the nearby Pimlico tube station. Young artists and littérateurs in particular have long been attracted to the heady mixture of despair and genius forever associated with the puckish, brooding prodigy. Mary Robinson, John Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and countless others penned sonnets and elegies to his memory. As an undergraduate at Cambridge in 1794 Lancelot Sharpe re-edited the Rowley works in an ornate gothic volume to which he added a Preface praising a poet he ranked among Britain's 'top four', along with a 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton', an ever evolving text first drafted at the age of seventeen by another charity-schoolboy from the West Country, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The teenage playwright and forger William Henry Ireland, meanwhile, sought to become the 'second Chatterton', as he put it, through a generous amount of encomiastic, maudlin imitations. Wearied by more than forty years of debate about the marvellous boy, by contrast, William Hazlitt, in his *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), took a stand against what he perceived to be a pervasive, yet unreflective, positioning of Chatterton in pride of place in the national pantheon. 'Great geniuses, like great kings', he insists, are too proud to commit suicide.<sup>4</sup>

This book examines competing scholarly and popular constructions of, and public responses to, Chatterton's life and writings, principally between his first appearance in print in the late 1760s and the 1803 publication of his 'monument edition', a three-volume collection painstakingly prepared by the future poet laureate Robert Southey and his publisher Joseph Cottle, followed by a relatively brisker treatment of the nineteenth century. It does so for two reasons. First, this period is today associated with the somewhat misleading romanticization of Chatterton, and so it is necessary to ground his reception materially in order to explain or, better yet, to challenge our inherited assumptions about the writer and his works. Second, Chatterton's corpus emerged most fully during these years as a clearly defined body of literary property rather than merely recovered artefacts. Disguised as a pseudo-ancient bard, Chatterton found himself, largely posthumously, at the forefront of the medievalism craze that first emerged with vigour in the second half of the eighteenth century; equally, in a period Samuel

Johnson sneeringly dubbed *The Age of Authors*, he had been but one of the many apprentices, footmen and cook-maids who tried to make a living by the pen.<sup>5</sup> Producing reams of fashionable verse and prose in all manner of styles and forms for an expanding reading nation, the marvellous boy displayed, and far exceeded, the ambitions typical of many other young writers in the bold new print culture of his age. Multivolume editions of the complete works of established authors, anthologies stuffed with canonical texts, along with miscellanies, beauties collections and biographies filled the bookshops and circulating libraries like never before; and scribblers flooded the periodical press with ingenious imitations, parodies and pastiches of famous poets or novelists (as well as infamous poetasters) on a daily basis. At the same time, readers and critics alike became increasingly interested in the long-forgotten, anonymous bards and balladeers of the British Isles. Neither an ancient nor a modern, neither securely an Augustan wit nor a Romantic genius, Chatterton throws into relief a whole host of related if often contradictory developments of the nascent discipline of English literature. Contemporaries read and debated the works in immense detail, often for specific purposes, whether for historiographical import or to illustrate the perils of an imagination untethered to the sterner faculties of taste and judgement; or, so some dared to confess, for idle pleasure. Chatterton's reputation was formed not in the immense blogosphere of today but amid the ebb and flow of eighteenth-century print culture; not within hours, but over decades. He was not – in terms of book history at least – a neglected genius.

A smattering of Chatterton's mock-ancient and modern works has been regularly published since the late 1760s, frequently in multivolume editions, selected works and major anthologies. Of the various collected works, the most notable to date remain Southey and Cottle's handsome three-volume edition of 1803, Walter Skeat's notorious modernized version in the late nineteenth century, and the now standard critical edition, Donald S. Taylor's *Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton* (1971) in two volumes. Today a handful of the poems excerpted from the Rowley papers – a veritable treasure trove of prose, verse and heraldic drawings – as well as some modern pieces (e.g., 'Sentiment') can be found in the standard teaching anthologies, including David Fairer and Christine Gerrard's *Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, Roger Lonsdale's *New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

In the 1770s and 1780s in particular, Chatterton featured prominently in debates surrounding the emergent national canon, either as

a transgressive counterweight or as a celebrated addition to the very highest echelons of British worthies alongside Shakespeare and Milton. Other debates concerned the dustiest parts of English antiquarianism and Church history, the establishment of critical authority, the art and function of literary scholarship, the innate character flaws of a creative personality and, above all, the nature of genius, not merely as a marker of a god-given talent (*ingenium*), an ancient definition revived in the Renaissance and beyond, but a product of the artist's environment. Contemporaries observed that Chatterton was precociously adept at a bewildering variety of traditional and modern literary forms, including cosmopolitan satire, topographical verse, elegy, mock-Saxon epic, epistle, drama, ballad, burletta, eclogue, proxy love poetry and devotional song, and able to inhabit at will the sentimental fashions of mid-century novels and magazine culture. Fashions, of course, change and so the most immediately successful of his works – his modern poetry and prose, specifically his occasional satires in support of the Radical politician John Wilkes – might have seemed to some observers starkly outdated after the American and French revolutions. The sheer scope of Chatterton's interests, nevertheless, secured a perennial interest among generations of readers.

In recent years there has even been a notable resurgence of scholarly interest in the boy-poet, which has manifested in an extraordinary variety of approaches, and includes psychoanalytical criticism, post-colonialism, biographical criticism, historical and cultural studies, postmodernism, and formalism. Chatterton has proven particularly germane to recent investigations into the generic tension between 'the literary' and the non-literary, or, to put it another way, between literature and the other disciplines. Why, Nick Groom asks, 'are the creative powers of the forger not straightforwardly ranked with those of the genius or with God?'<sup>6</sup> Much of the answer must lie in the fact that, although not illegal as such, literary forgeries were frequently described as counterfeits, as fakes, that threatened authorial proprietorship. Strictly speaking, Chatterton was not forging Rowley, if by *forging* we mean 'to make something in fraudulent imitation and pass it off as genuine', because the works were originals, as Groom rightly argues.<sup>7</sup> (I want to retain the word *forgery*, however, as it is the term most widely used in the period, often metaphorically or even facetiously). One of the aims of this book is to demonstrate that there has long been a serious (as well as what we might call a 'serio-comic') engagement with the works. Commentators often dismiss the 'Rowley controversy' of 1777–83 as one of the most embarrassing episodes in the history of

English literature. In fact, the nominal debate about the authenticity of the pseudo-medieval texts served as a useful vehicle for various established and new strands of historical and textual scholarship that helped to shape the burgeoning discipline of vernacular literary criticism as we would understand it today. The development of textual scholarship in the Renaissance and beyond, as Anthony Grafton outlines in *Forgers and Critics* (1990) and *Defenders of the Text* (1991), went hand in hand with a rise in the unravelling of textual forgeries. In *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2008), more recently, Jack Lynch has convincingly charted the growing sophistication of the historicist techniques used by the scholars embroiled in the many instances of forgery and hoaxing from the *Epistles of Phalaris* through to William Henry Ireland's concoctions of Shakespeare papers in the 1790s.

In addition to the indispensable monographs and articles by Grafton, Groom and Lynch, Chatterton also features prominently in the spate of important histories of forgery that have appeared in the past twenty-five years or so. The most pertinent for our present purposes are Ian Haywood's *The Making of History* (1986), Paul Baines's *The House of Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1999), K. K. Ruthven's *Faking Literature* (2001) and Margaret Russett's *Fictions and Fakes* (2006). Such studies have challenged the taint of forgery that has marginalized the marvellous boy's status as a literary figure. Russett's thorough investigation of the ontology of the 'forger' as against the 'imposter', in particular, extends the longstanding psychoanalytical school of Chatterton studies.<sup>8</sup> No less significantly, Susan Stewart reads the Rowley poems as 'imposture' arising from Chatterton's transgressive treatment of inherited literary genres.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, Marilyn Butler has suggested that Chatterton and James Macpherson, the man behind Ossian – 'The two most brilliant and imaginative mid-century poets' – are 'seldom now studied as serious writers'.<sup>10</sup> Because of contemporary bias, she argues, 'posterity has lost the key to the most exciting strand of mid-eighteenth-century poetry' by taking their works too literally as forgeries. As a qualification I would suggest that 'posterity' here must stand in for canonical Romanticism because, in terms of book history and the history of literary scholarship, editors and observers treated Chatterton as an innovative artist as much as a forger throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century. The assumption that Chatterton must be read in different terms – with a key now lost – is a modern one, I am suggesting. Contemporaries frequently characterized him as a sort of imitative genius, not just of pseudo-ancient relics but also of modern literature in the style of Ossian and Sterne. Indeed, it would be a gross

reduction of Chatterton's vast artistic output to consider him merely as a *poet*; but I shall retain the label here because his contemporaries sought to understand him as such and because his poetical pieces were the most widely available of his works at the time.

In the broader terms of canon formation, Chatterton moved from his prominent position as a counterfactual modern in the medieval section of the country's first substantial study of vernacular literary history, Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, in 1778, to increasingly smaller chapters devoted to the mid-eighteenth century in the large anthologies by Alexander Chalmers, Robert Walsh, Thomas Campbell and others in the 1810s and 1820s. The story of Chatterton's reception I will tell is, regrettably, one of gradual decline. As this book seeks to demonstrate, though, by mapping out a dwindling interest we can learn much about the often implicit ideological conflicts underpinning the rise of literary scholarship in the period. More specifically, my approach revisits the Pyrrhonism favoured by the new historicist Marilyn Butler: 'Historical criticism, which is skeptical and analytic, teaches a *healthy distrust* of all forms of history writing. There is a role there for reception theory, in uncovering a long series of *exemplary misreadings*' [my emphases].<sup>11</sup> Butler's oxymorons fail to eradicate a positivistic opposition between a misreading and a right reading, or infinite right readings, as though history is finally recoverable or critical perspicacity finally achievable. But the emphasis here on largely disjunctive dialectical exchanges usefully outlines my treatment of literary scholarship as a site of conflict that often manifests in subtle or surprising ways. Through the example of Chatterton and his readers, I want to build on our understanding of the art and function of criticism across a variety of formats in eighteenth-century print culture.

Readers in the period professedly pitied or chastised Chatterton. But how could scholars, as nominally disinterested authorities, judge his achievements under the shadow of what they collectively viewed as his self-defeating pride? How might we disentangle the works from these often hidden prejudices, if at all, today? One strategy is to investigate the otherwise shady facts of Chatterton's life and death thoroughly and thereby unsettle any lingering myths surrounding him. Richard Holmes and Nick Groom, for instance, have compellingly argued that the marvellous boy did not in fact commit suicide after all; on the contrary, he had high hopes for his future career in London.<sup>12</sup> My account is more concerned with what historical effects the assumption that Chatterton was suicidal had on treatments of his life and works and on the popular

conception of what hubristic genius looked like. Recent scholarship has also convincingly shown that, far from struggling, Chatterton thrived in the bustling coffee-house scene of the eighteenth century. Indeed, his most immediately successful works in the 1760s were, as Michael F. Suarez sj has amply demonstrated, political writings for the Patriot journals as well as canny imitations of prominent literary fashions, most obviously gossipy sentimental tales, African eclogues and Saxon 'translations' after the phenomenally successful Ossian.<sup>13</sup> The budding writer failed to get any Rowleyan poetry into print during his lifetime, by contrast, other than the eclogue 'Elinoure and Juga'. Again, I am interested in why, in academia and art alike, the Rowleyan daydream has long overshadowed the modern writings and what this says about cultural expectations for the actual role of authors in society. With this case we can glimpse more readily anxieties surrounding the rise of the modern hack-writer (particularly one with talent to waste) at the expense of the casual gentleman-author who thrived in the patronage culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Throughout this study I explore in detail the figuration and occlusion of Chatterton as an author within the production and reception of his works. To be more specific, this book in part seeks to redress the relative neglect of his seemingly perishable modern pieces, some of which he acknowledged, many of which can only be attributed to him by guesswork. Among early scholars these texts were often embroiled in familiar, as well as new, debates about authorship and genius. If the metaphor of forgery gave critics and poets alike a way of thinking through Chatterton's creativity, and literary creativity at large, the modern works offered a salutary reminder of the difficulties faced by ambitious young writers in the increasingly mercantile marketplace. Here I am concerned with why it became common practice to bifurcate Chatterton's corpus, to cleave his authorship so distinctly into works of antique genius and modern hack-writing. As the protagonist says in Herbert Croft's *Love and Madness* (1780), the first Chatterton biography of sorts, 'in his own character, he painted for booksellers and bread; in Rowley's, for fame and eternity'.<sup>14</sup> Whereas early commentators tended to laud the so-called forgeries, they subjected the fashion conscious modern works, often written in the sentimental styles popular in the 1750s and 1760s, to heavily moralistic readings in the 1780s and beyond. Although Chatterton often buried his own authorial signature beneath pre-existing pseudonyms and allonyms, his modern pieces were routinely treated as transparently autobiographical *cris de coeur*. He happened to write a bombastic poem about suicide entitled 'Sentiment'

and even his own 'Will' (which included mock-legalese). Both, in fact, belonged to fairly common literary subgenres in the mid-century. The works inadvertently found an uncomfortable resonance with the dire circumstances of Chatterton's real life and death.

Many major poets in the romantic period admired, and even emulated, the audaciousness of Chatterton's literary achievements. Indeed, Wordsworth and Keats, among others, were his most vocal supporters. And yet, like the scholars and journalists, even they were distracted by his youthful impetuosity and, on the whole, dealt uneasily with it. As a teenager Keats penned a sonnet in which he views his forebear as a 'half-blown flow'ret', a juvenile poet in whom 'Genius mildly flash'd' ('Sonnet to Chatterton'). In *Adonais*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's elegy for Keats, Chatterton cameos as merely a symbol of 'unfulfilled renown'. Most famously of all, Wordsworth etherealized him as a 'sleepless Soul that perished in its pride'. The latter phrase echoes one of Chatterton's best-known poems, 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie' (''Twas now the pride, the manhood of the year'), but it also has far bleaker connotations: *pride* – his rashness – had brought about his fall. For the belletrist Vicesimus Knox, writing in 1782, Chatterton's precocity cannot be divorced from self-destructiveness: he had 'all the tremulous sensibility of genius, all its eccentricities, *all its pride*, and all its spirit' [my emphasis].<sup>15</sup> Knox, like many others, finds himself torn between admiration for the poet and admonition of the boy.

In his continuation of Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779–81), published posthumously in 1846, Henry Francis Cary wishes that it were 'allowable for one who professes to write the lives of English poets to pass the name of Chatterton in silence'.<sup>16</sup> While Chatterton's case shames the noble art of literary history writing, to his mind, in practical terms Cary concedes that he may find a niche role for him to play, that of a cautionary example: 'the young will learn, that genius is likely to lead them into misery, if it be not accompanied by something that is better than genius'. Eighteenth-century commentators often set genius against such superior qualities as taste and judgement, particularly in educative addresses to young readers. As the author of a book-length poem *On the Preference of Virtue to Genius* writes,

Poets the charms of innocence may trace,  
 Yet live of noble talents the disgrace;  
 With foul and self degrading vice allied,  
 With envy, rancour, lewdness, slander, pride.<sup>17</sup>



Pride, it is said, is the deadliest of the mortal sins. It is also a virtuous vice that emboldens the great magnanimity of the soul. We can take pride in our achievements or the achievements of loved ones, our pride and joy. Pride cuts the individual off from society. At the same time, it vaingloriously seeks value in the judgement of others. To David Hume's mind, pride and love are 'agreeable passions' that lead to proper self-esteem.<sup>18</sup> For Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is reliant on other qualities but is nonetheless the crown of the virtues. Pride is at once an ingrained character trait, whether we mean a source of strength or a failing, and a spontaneous emotion we might feel at any time. It stands against humility and yet it might also be equated with personal integrity, a refusal to compromise one's beliefs in the face of prejudice. We can be full of national or local pride, or we can be in the pride, the prime, of our lives. Yet pride goes before destruction, warns Proverbs 16.18, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

In 1789, the first substantial biography of Chatterton considered the subject's actions largely in terms of Christian morality and concluded that 'Pride was the ruling passion of Chatterton'.<sup>19</sup> Later that year an antiquary (and one of Chatterton's patrons of sorts) provided firm proof of the boy's self-destructive nature in his very own words: 'it is my PRIDE, my damn'd, native, unconquerable PRIDE, that plunges me into distraction'.<sup>20</sup> To treat artistic pride as a sign of madness, to Percival Stockdale's mind, is to misrepresent the sublime energies of poetic creativity, 'those peculiarities which are unavoidable when the soul is under the rapturous dominion of its genius;— those peculiarities which fools call pride; and which doting antiquarians call insanity'.<sup>21</sup> In the original dedication of *Endymion*, Keats sought to shift the blame from the youngster and so imbue Chattertonian pride with new meaning, namely, belated admiration tainted by collective guilt:

Inscribed,  
 with every feeling of pride and regret,  
 and with a "bowed mind",  
 To the memory of  
 The most english [*sic*] of Poets except Shakespeare,  
 Thomas Chatterton —<sup>22</sup>

The final version, though, is shorn of these words; the guilt lays buried beneath a sterilized dedication 'to the Memory of Thomas Chatterton'. Keats's attempts to both celebrate and grieve for Chatterton seem to collapse under the weight of an increasingly wearied scepticism among

his peers (particularly Hazlitt) about the boy-poet's relevance to the modern age.

The Chatterton story most familiar to academia and popular culture alike still looks something like this: the canonical Romantics rescued their young forebear from neglect, belatedly reconstructing him as a 'poet's poet' in retaliation against the sangfroid of the scholars incapable of empathizing with the perils of the creative spirit. Chatterton's leading biographer, E. H. W. Meyerstein, memorably categorized the seemingly belated appreciation of the youngster as a movement 'from the antiquaries to the poets', that is, from unfeeling scholarship to literary encomia.<sup>23</sup> Genius could now prevail over the neoclassical limits of truth and reason. In this story the teenager was all too human, afflicted by pride and a host of other sins, but in his – in our – imagination he soars above like a spotless nightingale; freed from prejudice, Wordsworth's marvellous boy became the youthful avatar of Romantic poetics. But, in fact, Wordsworth was not the first to apply the tag to Chatterton. 'The Winter Day; or, A Prospect of Life', probably written in the 1780s by the then enfeebled and impoverished judge Lord Gardenstone, contains the lines:

Poor Chatterton taught by each eloquent muse,  
With pity to moisten the eye,  
Presum'd his admirers would blush to refuse  
Unfortunate worth some supply.

But a sage moral author deny'd with disdain,  
The request of the marvellous boy;  
For petrified pedants are proud to explain,  
The pleasures they dare not enjoy.<sup>24</sup>

This piece appeared in print sixteen years before Wordsworth's 1802 poem 'Resolution and Independence' (first published in 1807). As with the largely derivative Henry Wallis painting *The Death of Chatterton*, the marvellous boy tag and its associations – genius, pride, suicide – developed out of longstanding conflicts in larger critical and cultural trends. The dispassionate antiquaries – Gardenstone's 'petrified pedants' – jostle against those readers of sensibility who admired Chatterton's ability (through his life story and works) to 'moisten the eye'. Wordsworth's intervention has played a more insistent role in shaping Chatterton's public image, but ideologically, I am suggesting, it emerged from a set

of historical circumstances that lay buried within his very phrasing. In other words, the Chattertons evoked towards the end of the eighteenth century are tied up with the phenomenon of that which we still call Romanticism, specifically with ‘neglected genius’, as at once a tragic victim and a self-defeating villain – only insofar as this trend was not uniformly Romantic at all. It was, rather, the legacy of a phantom war between so-called unfeeling antiquaries and the self-appointed rescuers of Chatterton in the sentimental tradition. Throughout this study, we shall consider the interplay between concerted efforts to rehabilitate Chatterton as a man and a poet and concomitant attempts to undermine his claims to a pride of place in the English canon.

Within the sentimental backlash against the early academics, for example, Croft’s popular novel *Love and Madness*, along with a host of similar works, established a recurring image of Chatterton as a boy of excessive feeling, an unsuitable role model for polite readers. Croft’s image was widely augmented, as in the Reverend George Gregory’s 1789 *Life of Thomas Chatterton*, with choice samples of Chatterton’s most extravagant (and even, in ill-judged revisionism, his most pious) poems. Such emotionalist projects, I suggest, overwhelmed the more scholarly and pedagogical readings of Chatterton’s works and led to his eventual demise in mainstream literary culture. Indeed, many commentators often contrasted the Rowley controversy with the petty Walpole–Chatterton controversy, in which observers widely and shrilly criticized the aristocratic art historian Horace Walpole over his reported rejection of the young writer’s pleas for patronage years after the fact. Infighting overshadowed literary scholarship; partisanship buried the works. The author became a marginal figure in his own afterlife.

Many of the critical interventions in Chatterton’s reception came from acknowledged or self-appointed authorities: literary historians, antiquaries, textual critics and, later, periodical essayists, lecturers, poets and anthologists. To understand more fully the impact of these interventions, we need to consider the philological authority of the editors of the foundational mock-ancient and modern collections, as well as the critical assumptions of the antiquaries in the Rowley controversy, the self-styled sentimental readers, and finally the lecturers, anthologists and other littérateurs in the nineteenth century. Chapter 1 provides an outline of the various debates about literary genius and scholarship that will be germane to this study. Chapter 2 examines in detail the production and dissemination of the seminal edition of Chatterton’s pseudo-medieval poems, in which the editor Tyrwhitt dissociated the textual curiosities from the dominant trends in eighteenth-century editing

practice. At the same time, he tried to establish a consistent 'authorial' presence that is neither modern nor ancient but rather a strange hybrid that suited the polite refashioning of the rude Gothicism of England's literary past. Chapter 3 seeks to understand by what logic the modern collection, the *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1778), had been dismissively offset against the Rowley project. The editor of the *Miscellanies* attempts to showcase Chatterton's polyvocal talents, flattening out his notionally autobiographical poetry and prose but ultimately unsettling the author's claims to ownership over the texts. Chapter 4 examines the six-year Rowley controversy that chiefly ran from 1777 to 1783. Traditionally this controversy has been treated as a narrowly antiquarian (and hence pedantic) response to the recovered textual artefacts. Instead, I identify here the complexities in scholarly method present in the numerous editions, pamphlets, books and articles dedicated to Chatterton and his works, and hence the broader problems associated with authorship and authority in the literary criticism of the period. Set against the perceived indifference of the antiquaries, Chapter 5 outlines the conflicted treatments of 'poor Chatterton', who was at once rescued as an ideal of the neglected genius and chastised as a willing victim of his own (largely self-defined) pride. At the same time, these recuperative projects signalled the demise of Chatterton's prominence within the canons of the early nineteenth century, as Chapter 6 indicates. By this time, Chatterton's historiographical and critical usefulness had all but dwindled away; fraught critical strategies had permanently reduced him to the cliché of the failed artist. Throughout the years, academics and poets alike engaged with Chatterton, the fallen genius, and his works, amalgamations of all manner of styles, of the fictional and the fake, the ancient and the modern. And they were in equal parts inspired and troubled by his legacy.