

THOMAS CHATTERTON



Act I

The curtain rises on an attic in Brook Street, Holborn. Through the window, which is set deep in the sloping roof can be seen the roofs of eighteenth century London.

A pallet is pulled up close under the window. On it, lit by the last faint glow of the August sunset, lies the dead body of a boy of seventeen. His head has slipped from the dingy pillow and his long hair touches the open box on the floor beside him. This box is so crammed with torn papers that they have overflowed on to the bare boards. The boy's right hand, hanging laxly, still clasps a small flask. At the foot of the bed stands a table on which a candle gutters.

Thomas Chatterton, 1752-70, English poet. The posthumous son of a poor Bristol schoolmaster, he was already composing the Rowley Poems at the age of 12, claiming they were copies of 15th-century manuscripts at the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol. In 1769 he sent several of these poems to Horace Walpole, who was enthusiastic about them. When Walpole was advised that the poems were not genuine, he returned them and ended the correspondence. After this crushing defeat, Chatterton went to London in 1770, trying, with small success, to sell his poems to various magazines. On the point of starvation, too proud to borrow or beg, he poisoned himself and died at the age of 17. An original genius as well as an adept imitator, Chatterton used 15th-century vocabulary, but his rhythms and his approach to poetry were quite modern. The Rowley Poems were soon recognized as modern adaptations written in a 15th-century style, but the vigor and medieval beauty of such poems as *Mynstrelles Songe* and *Bristowe Tragedie* revealed Chatterton's poetic genius. This gifted, rebellious youth later became a hero to the romantic and Pre-Raphaelite poets, several of whom, notably Keats and Coleridge, wrote poems about him.

Apostate Will

In days of old, when Wesley's power
Gathered new strength by every hour;
Apostate Will, just sunk in trade,
Resolved his bargain should be made;
Then strait to Wesley he repairs,
And puts on grave and solemn airs;
Then thus the pious man addressed.
Good sir, I think your doctrine best;
Your servant will a Wesley be,
Therefore the principles teach me.
The preacher then instructions gave.
How he in this world should behave;
He hears, assents, and gives a nod,
Says every word's the word of God,
Then lifting his dissembling eyes,
How blessed is the sect! he cries;
Nor Bingham, Young, nor Stillingfleet,
Shall make me from this sect retreat.
He then his circumstances declared,
How hardly with him matters fared,
Begg'd him next morning for to make
A small collection for his sake.
The preacher said, Do not repine,
The whole collection shall be thine.
With looks demure and cringing bows,
About his business strait he goes.
His outward acts were grave and prim,
The methodist appear'd in him.
But, be his outward what it will,
His heart was an apostate's still.
He'd oft profess an hallow'd flame,
And every where preach'd Wesley's name;
He was a preacher, and what not,
As long as money could be got;
He'd oft profess, with holy fire.
The labourer's worthy of his hire.
It happen'd once upon a time,
When all his works were in their prime,
A noble place appear'd in view;
Then _____ to the methodists, adieu.
A methodist no more he'll be,
The protestants serve best for he.
Then to the curate strait he ran,
And thus address'd the rev'rend man:
I was a methodist, tis true;

With penitence I turn to you.
O that it were your bounteous will
That I the vacant place might fill!
With justice I'd myself acquit,
Do every thing that's right and fit.
The curate straitway gave consent--
To take the place he quickly went.
Accordingly he took the place,
And keeps it with dissembled grace.
April 14th, 1764

Sly Dick

Sharp was the frost, the wind was high
And sparkling stars bedeckt the sky
Sly Dick in arts of cunning skill'd,
Whose rapine all his pockets fill'd,
Had laid him down to take his rest
And soothe with sleep his anxious breast.
'Twas thus a dark infernal sprite
A native of the blackest night,
Portending mischief to devise
Upon Sly Dick he cast his eyes;
Then straight descends the infernal sprite,
And in his chamber does alight;
In visions he before him stands,
And his attention he commands.
Thus spake the sprite-- hearken my friend,
And to my counsels now attend.
Within the garret's spacious dome
There lies a well stor'd wealthy room,
Well stor'd with cloth and stockings too,
Which I suppose will do for you,
First from the cloth take thou a purse,
For thee it will not be the worse,
A noble purse rewards thy pains,
A purse to hold thy filching gains;
Then for the stockings let them reeve
And not a scrap behind thee leave,
Five bundles for a penny sell
And pence to thee will come pell mell;

See it be done with speed and care
Thus spake the sprite and sunk in air.
When in the morn with thoughts erect
Sly Dick did on his dreams reflect,
Why faith, thinks he, 'tis something too,
It might-- perhaps-- it might be true,
I'll go and see-- away he hies,
And to the garret quick he flies,
Enters the room, cuts up the clothes
And after that reeves up the hose;
Then of the cloth he purses made,
Purses to hold his filching trade.

February An Elegy

Begin, my muse, the imitative lay,
Aonian doxies sound the thrumming string;
Attempt no number of the plaintive Gay,
Let me like midnight cats, or Collins sing.
If in the trammels of the doleful line
The bounding hail, or drilling rain descend;
Come, brooding Melancholy, pow'r divine,
And ev'ry unform'd mass of words amend.

Now the rough goat withdraws his curling horns,
And the cold wat'rer twirls his circling mop:
Swift sudden anguish darts thro' alt'ring corns,
And the spruce mercer trembles in his shop.

Now infant authors, madd'ning for renown,
Extend the plume, and him about the stage,
Procure a benefit, amuse the town,
And proudly glitter in a title page.

Now, wrapt in ninefold fur, his squeamish grace
Defies the fury of the howling storm;
And whilst the tempest whistles round his face,
Exults to find his mantled carcase warm.

Now rumbling coaches furious drive along,

Full of the majesty of city dames,
Whose jewels sparkling in the gaudy throng,
Raise strange emotions and invidious flames.

Now Merit, happy in the calm of place,
To mortals as a highlander appears,
And conscious of the excellence of lace,
With spreading frogs and gleaming spangles glares.

Whilst Envy, on a tripod seated nigh,
In form a shoe-boy, daubs the valu'd fruit,
And darting lightnings from his vengeful eye,
Raves about Wilkes, and politics, and Bute.

Now Barry, taller than a grenadier,
Dwindles into a stripling of eighteen;
Or sabled in Othello breaks the ear,
Exerts his voice, and totters to the scene.

Now Foote, a looking-glass for all mankind,
Applies his wax to personal defects;
But leaves untouch'd the image of the mind,
His art no mental quality reflects.

Now Drury's potent kind extorts applause,
And pit, box, gallery, echo, "how divine!"
Whilst vers'd in all the drama's mystic laws,
His graceful action saves the wooden line.

Now-- but what further can the muses sing?
Now dropping particles of water fall;
Now vapours riding on the north wind's wing,
With transitory darkness shadow all.

Alas! how joyless the descriptive theme,
When sorrow on the writer's quiet preys
And like a mouse in Cheshire cheese supreme,
Devours the substance of the less'ning bays.

Come, February, lend thy darkest sky.
There teach the winter'd muse with clouds to soar;
Come, February, lift the number high;
Let the sharp strain like wind thro' alleys roar.

Ye channels, wand'ring thro' the spacious street,
In hollow murmurs roll the dirt along,
With inundations wet the sabled feet,
Whilst gouts responsive, join th'elegiac song.

Ye damsels fair, whose silver voices shrill,
Sound thro' meand'ring folds of Echo's horn;
Let the sweet cry of liberty be still,
No more let smoking cakes awake the morn.

O, Winter! Put away the snowy pride;
O, Spring! Neglect the cowslip and the bell;
O, Summer! Throw thy pears and plums aside;
O, Autumn! Bid the grape with poison swell.

The pension'd muse of Johnson is no more!
Drown'd in a butt of wine his genius lies;
Earth! Ocean! Heav'n! The wond'rous loss deplore,
The dregs of nature with her glory dies.

What iron Stoic can suppress the tear;
What sour reviewer read with vacant eye!
What bard but decks his literary bier!
Alas! I cannot sing-- I howl-- I cry--

A Hymn for Christmas Day

Almighty Framers of the Skies!
O let our pure devotion rise,
Like Incense in thy Sight!
Wrapt in impenetrable Shade
The Texture of our Souls were made
Till thy Command gave light.
The Sun of Glory gleam'd the Ray,
Refin'd the Darkness into Day,
And bid the Vapours fly;
Impell'd by his eternal Love
He left his Palaces above
To cheer our gloomy Sky.

How shall we celebrate the day,
When God appeared in mortal clay,
The mark of worldly scorn;
When the Archangel's heavenly Lays,
Attempted the Redeemer's Praise
And hail'd Salvation's Morn!

A Humble Form the Godhead wore,
The Pains of Poverty he bore,
To gaudy Pomp unknown;
Tho' in a human walk he trod
Still was the Man Almighty God
In Glory all his own.

Despis'd, oppress'd, the Godhead bears
The Torments of this Vale of tears;
Nor bade his Vengeance rise;
He saw the Creatures he had made,
Revile his Power, his Peace invade;
He saw with Mercy's Eyes.

How shall we celebrate his Name,
Who groan'd beneath a Life of shame
In all Afflictions tried!
The Soul is raptur'd to conceive
A Truth, which Being must believe,
The God Eternal died.

My Soul exert thy Powers, adore,
Upon Devotion's plumage soar
To celebrate the Day;
The God from whom Creation sprung
Shall animate my grateful Tongue;
From him I'll catch the Lay!

The Methodist

Says Tom to Jack, 'tis very odd,
These representatives of God,
In color, way of life and evil,
Should be so very like the devil.
Jack, understand, was one of those,
Who mould religion in the rose,
A red hot methodist; his face
Was full of puritanic grace,
His loose lank hair, his slow gradation,
Declared a late regeneration;
Among the daughters long renown'd,

For standing upon holy ground;
Never in carnal battle beat,
Tho' sometimes forced to a retreat.
But C____t, hero as he is,
Knight of incomparable phiz,
When pliant Doxy seems to yield,
Courageously forsakes the field.
Jack, or to write more gravely, John,
Thro' hills of Wesley's works had gone;
Could sing one hundred hymns by rote;
Hymns which would sanctify the throat;
But some indeed composed so odly,
You'd swear 'twas bawdy songs made godly.

Elegy on the Death of Mr. Phillips

No more I hail the morning's golden gleam,
No more the wonders of the view I sing;
Friendship requires a melancholy theme,
At her command the awful lyre I string!

Now as I wander through this leafless grove,
Where tempests howl, and blasts eternal rise,
How shall I teach the chorded shell to move,
Or stay the gushing torrent from my eyes?

Phillips! great master of the boundless lyre,
The would my soul-rack'd muse attempt to paint;
Give me a double portion of thy fire,
Or all the powers of language are too faint.

Say, soul unsullied by the filth of vice,
Say, meek-eyed spirit, where's thy tuneful shell,
Which when the silver stream was lock'd with ice,
Was wont to cheer the tempest-ravaged dell?

Oft as the filmy veil of evening drew
The thick'ning shade upon the vivid green,

Thou, lost in transport at the dying view,
Bid'st the ascending muse display the scene.

When golden Autumn, wreathed in ripen'd corn,
From purple clusters prest the foamy wine,
Thy genius did his fallow brows adorn,
And made the beauties of the season thine.

With rustling sound the yellow foliage flies,
And wantons with the wind in rapid whirls;
The gurgling riv'let to the valley hies,
Whilst on its bank the spangled serpent curls.

The joyous charms of Spring delighted saw
Their beauties doubly glaring in thy lay;
Nothing was Spring which Phillips did not draw,
And every image of his muse was May.

So rose the regal hyacinthial star,
So shone the verdure of the daisied bed,
So seemed the forest glimmering from afar;
You saw the real prospect as you read.

Majestic Summer's blooming flow'ry pride
Next claim'd the honour of his nervous song;
He taught the stream in hollow trills to glide,
And led the glories of the year along.

Pale rugged Winter bending o'er his tread,
His grizzled hair bedropt with icy dew;
His eyes, a dusky light congealed and dead,
His robe, a tinge of bright ethereal blue.

His train a motley'd, sanguine, sable cloud,
He limps along the russet, dreary moor,
Whilst rising whirlwinds, blasting, keen, and loud,
Roll the white surges to the sounding shore.

Nor were his pleasures unimproved by thee;
Pleasures he has, though horridly deform'd;
The polished lake, the silver'd hill we see,
Is by thy genius fired, preserved, and warm'd.

The rough October has his pleasures too;
But I'm insensible to every joy:
Farewell the laurel! now I grasp the yew,
And all my little powers in grief employ.

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.

In thee each virtue found a pleasing cell,
Thy mind was honour, thy soul divine;
With thee did every god of genius dwell,
Thou was the Helicon of all the nine.

Fancy, whose various figure-tinctured vest
Was ever changing to a different hue;
Her head, with varied bays and flow'rets drest,
Her eyes, two spangles of the morning dew.

With dancing attitude she swept thy string;
And now she soars, and now again descends;
And now reclining on the zephyr's wing,
Unto the velvet-vested mead she bends.

Peace, deck'd in all the softness of the dove,
Over thy passions spread her silver plume;
The rosy veil of harmony and love
Hung on thy soul in eternal bloom.

Peace, gentlest, softest of the virtues, spread
Her silver pinions, wet with dewy tears,
Upon her best distinguished poet's head,
And taught his lyre the music of the spheres.

Temp'rance, with health and beauty in her train,
And massy-muscled strength in graceful pride,
Pointed at scarlet luxury and pain,
And did at every frugal feast preside.

Black melancholy stealing to the shade
With raging madness, frantic, loud, and dire,
Whose bloody hand displays the reeking blade,
Were strangers to thy heaven-directed lyre.

Content, who smiles in every frown of fate,
Wreath'd thy pacific brow and sooth'd thy ill:
In thy own virtues and thy genius great,
The happy muse laid every trouble still.

But see! the sick'ning lamp of day retires,
And the meek evening shakes the dusky grey;
The west faint glimmers with the saffron fires,
And like thy life, O Phillips! dies away.

Here, stretched upon this heaven-ascending hill,
I'll wait the horrors of the coming night,
I'll imitate the gently-plaintive rill,
And by the glare of lambent vapours write.

Wet with the dew the yellow hawthorns bow;
The rustic whistles through the echoing cave;
Far o'er the lea the breathing cattle low,
And the full Avon lifts the darken'd wave.

Now, as the mantle of the evening swells
Upon my mind, I feel a thick'ning gloom!
Ah! could I charm by necromantic spells
The soul of Phillips from the deathly tomb!

Then would we wander through the darken'd vale,
In converse such as heavenly spirits use,
And, borne upon the pinions of the gale,
Hymn the Creator, and exert the muse.

But, horror to reflection! now no more
Will Phillips sing, the wonder of the plain!
When, doubting whether they might not adore,
Admiring mortals heard his nervous strain.

See! see! the pitchy vapour hides the lawn,
Nought but a doleful bell of death is heard,
Save where into a blasted oak withdrawn
The scream proclaims the curst nocturnal bird.

Now, rest my muse, but only rest to weep
A friend made dear by every sacred tie;
Unknown to me be comfort peace or sleep:
Phillips is dead-- 'tis pleasure then to die.

Few are the pleasures Chatterton e'er knew,
Short were the moments of his transient peace;
But melancholy robb'd him of those few,
And this hath bid all future comfort cease.

And can the muse be silent, Phillips gone!
And am I still alive? My soul, arise!
The robe of immortality put on,
And meet thy Phillips in his native skies.

The Resignation

O God, whose thunder shakes the sky,
Whose eye this atom globe surveys,
To thee, my only rock, I fly,
Thy mercy in thy justice praise.
The mystic mazes of thy will,
The shadows of celestial light,
Are past the pow'r of human skill,--
But what th' Eternal acts is right.

O teach me in the trying hour,
When anguish swells the dewy tear,
To still my sorrows, own thy pow'r,
Thy goodness love, thy justice fear.

If in this bosom aught but Thee
Encroaching sought a boundless sway,
Omniscience could the danger see,
And Mercy look the cause away.

Then why, my soul, dost thou complain?
Why drooping seek the dark recess?
Shake off the melancholy chain.
For God created all to bless.

But ah! my breast is human still;
The rising sigh, the falling tear,
My languid vitals' feeble rill,
The sickness of my soul declare.

But yet, with fortitude resigned,
I'll thank th' inflicter of the blow;
Forbid the sigh, compose my mind,
Nor let the gush of mis'ry flow.

The gloomy mantle of the night,
Which on my sinking spirit steals,
Will vanish at the morning light,
Which God, my East, my sun reveals.

AN EXCELENTE BALADE OF CHARITIE:

AS WROTEN BIE THE GODE PRIESTE THOMAS ROWLEY, 1464

In Virgyn{e} the sweltrie sun gan sheene,
And hotte upon the mees did caste his raie;
The apple rodded from its palie greene,
And the mole peare did bende the leafy spraie;
The peepe chelandri sunge the livelong daie;
'Twas nowe the pride, the manhode of the yeare,
And eke the grounde was dighte in its moste defte umere.
The sun was glemeing in the midde of daie,

Deadde still the aire, and eke the welken blue,
When from the sea arist in drear arraie
A hepe of cloudes of sable sullen hue,
The which full fast unto the woodlande drewe,
Hiltring attenes the sunnis fetive face,
And the blacke tempeste swolne and gatherd up apace.

Beneathe an holme, faste by a pathwaie side,
Which dide unto Seyncte Godwine's covent lede,
A hapless pilgrim moneynge did abide.
Pore in his newe, ungentle in his weede,
Longe bretful of the miseries of neede,
Where from the hail-stone coulde the almer flie?
He had no housen there, ne anie covent nie.

Look in his glommed face, his sprighte there scanne;
Howe woe-be-gone, how withered, forwynd, deade!
Haste to thie church-glebe-house, asshrewed manne!
Haste to thie kiste, thie onlie dortoure bedde.
Cale, as the claie whiche will gre on thie hedde,
Is Charitie and Love aminge highe elves;
Knightis and Barons live for pleasure and themselves.

The gatherd storme is rype; the bigge drops falle;
The forswat meadows smethe, and drenche the raine;
The comyng ghasstness do the cattle pall,
And the full flockes are drivyng ore the plaine;
Dashde from the cloudes the waters flott againe;
The welkin opes; the yellow levynne flies;
And the hot fierie smothe in the wide lowings dies.

Liste! now the thunder's rattling clymmynge sound
Cheves slowlie on, and then embollen clangs,
Shakes the hie spyre, and losst, dispended, drown'd,
Still on the gallard eare of terroure hanges;
The windes are up; the lofty elmen swanges;
Again the levynne and the thunder poures,
And the full cloudes are braste attenes in stonen showers.

Spurreyng his palfrie oere the watrie plaine,
The Abbote of Seyncte Godwynes convente came;
His chapournette was drented with the reine,
And his pencte gyrdle met with mickle shame;
He aynewarde tolde his bederoll at the same;
The storme encreasen, and he drew aside,
With the mist almes craver neere to the holme to bide.

His cope was all of Lyncolne clothe so fyne,
With a gold button fasten'd neere his chynne;
His autremete was edged with golden twynne,
And his shoone pyke a loverds mighte have binne;
Full well it shewn he thoughten coste no sinne:
The trammels of the palfrye pleasde his sighte,
For the horse-millanare his head with roses dighte.

"An almes, sir prieste!" the droppyng pilgrim saide,
"O! let me waite within your covente dore,
Till the sunne sheneth hie above our heade,
And the loude tempeste of the aire is oer;
Helpless and ould am I alas! and poor;
No house, ne friend, ne moneie in my pouche;
All yatte I call my owne is this my silver crouche."

"Varlet," replyd the Abbatte, "cease your dinne;
This is no season almes and prayers to give;
Mie porter never lets a faitour in;
None touch mie rynges who not in honour live."
And now the sonne with the blacke cloudes did stryve,
And shettyng on the grounde his glairie raie,
The Abbatte spurrd his steede, and eftsoones roadde awaie.

Once moe the skie was blacke, the thunder rolde;
Faste reyneyng oer the plaine a prieste was seen;
Ne dighte full proude, ne buttoned up in golde;
His cope and jape were graie, and eke were clene;
A Limitoure he was of order seene;
And from the pathwaie side then turned hee,
Where the pore almer laie binethe the holmen tree.

"An almes, sir priest!" the droppyng pilgrim sayde,
"For sweete Seyncte Marie and your order sake."
The Limitoure then loosen'd his pouche threade,
And did thereoute a groate of silver take;
The mister pilgrim dyd for halline shake.
"Here take this silver, it maie eathe thie care;
We are Goddes stewards all, nete of oure owne we bare.

"But ah! unhailie pilgrim, lerne of me,
Scathe anie give a rentrolle to their Lorde.
Here take my semecope, thou arte bare I see;
Tis thyne; the Seynctes will give me mie rewarde."
He left the pilgrim, and his waie aborde.
Virgynne and hallie Seyncte, who sitte yn gloure,
Or give the mittee will, or give the gode man power.

Chatterton's Last Days

By E. H. W. Meyerstein

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Johns Note: Most of this is utter twaddell.

Chatterton, found the coroner's jury, "swallowed arsenick in water."

In The Time Literary Supplement for June 25, 1931, I drew attention to the only contemporary medical opinion on Chatterton's death besides William Barrett's that is forthcoming, that of Dr. John Sherwen (1749-1826), whose notes, in Add. MS. 6389, written down between 1817 and 1820, date, many of them, prior to the publication of Barrett's "History of Bristol" (1789). Sherwen, whose interest in the poet started in 1774, only four years after his suicide, seems to have thought that Chatterton was treating himself with a solution of corrosive sublimate, or was carried off by cholera, in some of its features resembling the effects of metallic poison. "Lenitive electuary, or any other black electuary," he writes in reference to Barrett's opinion, "might have been found sticking in his teeth and under such circumstances easily imagined to be opium." I wish now to confirm this statement, only so far as lenitive electuary is concerned, by what I believe to be a new interpretation of the last three sentences in the letter Chatterton wrote to his young friend William Smith "about a fortnight before he died": "I am resolved to forsake the Parnassian Mount, and would advise you to do so too, and attain the mystery of composing Smegma. Think not I make a Mycterismus in mentioning Smegma. No: my Mnemosyne will let me see (unless I have an Amblyopia) your great services, which shall always be remembered by Hasmot Etchaorntt."

He addresses Smith as "Infallible Doctor," and apologizes for his long silence. He has been asked by him for a poem, but knows not "what it is best to compose: a Hendecasyllabum carmen, Hexastichon, Ogdastic, Tetrametrum or Septenarius." He has long been troubled with a poetical Cephalophonia, and no sooner begins an Acrostick but he wanders into a Threnodia. Then follows a description of the eight lines of an unknown poem ("the first line an Acatalectos," &c. "In short, an Emporium could not contain a greater Synchrony of such accidents without Syzygia."); and then the renunciation of poetry aforesaid. This letter has rightly been described as the key to the Rowley Poems, for all the hard words are in Kersey's "Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum" (1708), and the signature is "Thomas Chatterton" anagramatized. Kersey glosses "Cephalophonia" "A pain or heaviness in the head," "Emporium" "A mart-town; in Anatomy the common sensory in the brain," "Syzygia" "Confusion," "Smegma" "Soap," "Mycterismus" "A disdainful gibe or scoff," "Mnemosyne" "Memory," "Amblyophia" "Dullness or dimness of sight." The puzzle is "Smegma."

Skeat (ed. 1871, pp. xxxi-xxxiii) appears to interpret the word as a plain piece of advice to another scribbler to take up soap-boiling, as a more lucrative profession than the poet's. Professor Mabbott, with great ingenuity, has suggested to me that "composing Smegma" may mean "making a laver" and refer to Chatterton's project of "going abroad as a surgeon" (a barber-surgeon), which he mentions in his letter to George Catcott of August 12, 1770. In that, his last extant letter, he mentions that his Holborn landlady, Mrs. Angel, has raised his rent half a crown "finding I had connection with one of her assistants."

As against these interpretations the authority of the O.E.D., which defines smegma as "a sebaceous secretion, esp. that found under the prepuce," may be cited: "Phillips (ed. Kersey), Bailey &c., give 'Smegma, soap, or any thing that scours; a wash-ball,' but there is no evidence that the word was ever current in English in these senses." I had long obscurely felt that "composing Smegma" had some bearing on the memorandum of Michael Lort concerning Chatterton's death: "Mr. Cross says he had the foul disease which he would cure himself and had calomel and vitriol of Cross for that purpose who cautioned him against the too free use of these particularly the latter," but I knew of no passage where smegma was used in connexion with venereal disease, nor did it occur to me until I did that "composing" here might be used in the sense of "allaying, alleviating" (as in Chatterton's "The Resignation": "Forbid the sigh, compose my mind"), a still not uncommon usage. But suddenly, as is the way, I lighted on these lines near the end of Skelton's "Why come ye not to Court":--

For Smegma non est sinamomum
But de absentibus nil nisi bonum
Complaine or do what ye will
Of your complaint it shal not skill
This is the tenor of my bil
A daucocke ye be, and so shalbe still
Sequitur Epitoma
De morbiloso Thoma

The "Thomas" is Cardinal Wolsey, and Skelton is telling him that he has the morbus Neapolitanus. The 1736 issue of "Pithy Plesant and Profitable Workes of Maister Skelton," from which I quote (pp. 176,177), would have been easily accessible to Chatterton (Marshe's edition of 1568 prints "Smigma"). Can it be that this passage was running in his mind when he wrote to Smith? Can he even have visualized himself as "the diseased Thomas," using "composing" in its lenitive sense, hinting at micturition in "mycterismus" and the fear of actual blindness in "amblyopia"? In this case, under the words "Infallible Doctor" lurks an appeal for help, not merely contempt for one who did not realize that Thomas Rowley was Thomas Chatterton.

Chatterton can be presumed to have known Skelton's poems in a collected edition from the following circumstance. His lines in the character of Lydgate ("John Ladgate, a priest in London") to Rowley show the influence of Thomas Churchyard's lines on Skelton that stand at the beginning of the 1568 and 1736 editions. Churchyard writes:

Among the noble Grekes,
Was Homere full of skill:
And where that Ouid norish was
The soyll did flourish still.
With letters hie of style,
But Virgill wan the fraes, (ed. 1736, p.x.)
Chatterton echoes:
Amonge the Greeces Homer was
A Poett mouche renownde,
Amonge the Latyns Vyrgilius
Was beste of Poets founde.

I had previously ("A Life of Thomas Chatterton," p. 160) compared these with some lines of Lydgate ("Fall of Princes," ix, 2245 sqq., ed. Bergen); but a more convincing proof is that Churchyard's lines were familiar is

Thenn Stowe, the Bryghtstowe Carmelyte
Dydd bare awaie the belle
which can hardly have been written without knowledge of
Lord Vaus the make did beat.
And Phaer did hit the pricke, (ib. p. xii)

The poetical "bowtyng matche" between Rowley and Lydgate is clearly inspired by the colloquy of Skelton and Lydgate in "The Crowne of Lawrel" (ib. p. 23), which follows Churchyard's encomium of Skelton. It is also significant that in the "Balade of Charitie," sent to the printer of the Town and Country Magazine on July 4, 1770, the description of the "Abbote of Seyncte Godwynes convente"
His cope was all of Lyncolne clothe so fyne, &c., to whom the "almes craver" says

No house, ne friend, ne monie in my pouche;
All yatte I call my owne is this my silver crouche.
recalls the famous stanza in "The Bouge of Courte," describing "Ryotte," beginning (ib. p. 71)
His cote was chekerd with patches rede and blewe and ending.
And by his syde his whynarde and his pouche
The deull might dance therein for any crouche.

Johns Notes.

After reading this verbal garbage by Meyerstein, it is my honest opinion Thomas did not commit suicide, he was a master weaver of tales, and lets tell the truth - LIES. The whole fabric of his existance being a journey for the sake of the trip and the paths down which he can lead us, if Thomas thought dieing would sell his work, he, **or somebody**, would die for the poetry or whatever he was trying to sell at the time. Also: If Master Chatterton had stuck to writing his own material in his own name, none of the problems he suffered would have happened, was he just a liar, a twit, or both, I like his poems by the way.

Chatterton's Will. 1770.

All this written between 11 and 2 o'clock Saturday, in the utmost distress of mind. April 14, 1770.

[Note: Chatterton commit suicide on August 30, 1770. No note was ever found. This is the fake suicide note mentioned in the biography section, which was made to frighten his employer into releasing him from his indentures.]

N.B.____ In a dispute concerning the character of David, Mr. _____ argued that he must be a holy man, from the strains of piety that breathe through his whole works. I being of a contrary opinion, and knowing that a great genius can effect anything, endeavouring in the foregoing poems to represent an enthusiastic Methodist, intended to send it to Romaine, and impose it upon the infatuated world as a reality; but thanks to Burgum's generosity, I am now employed in matters of more importance.

Saturday, April 20, 1770

Burgum, I thank thee, thou hast let me see
That Bristol has impress'd her stamp on thee,
Thy generous spirit emulates the Mayor's,
Thy generous spirit with thy Bristol's pairs.
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.

[Burgum was a Bristol blacksmith who paid Chatterton for his first known pseudo-antique poem... It was a fake pedigree and family history of the "De Bergham"

family, ostensibly noble relatives of the coarse, yet overly proud man who paid the young man a crown for it. --Anne]

Catcott, for thee, I know thy heart is good,
But ah! thy merit's seldom understood;
Too bigoted to whimsies, which thy youth
Received to venerate as Gospel truth,
Thy friendship never could be so dear to me,
Since all I am is opposite to thee.
If ever obligated to thy purse,
Rowley discharges all-- my first chief curse!
For had I never known the antique lore,
I ne'er had ventured from my peaceful shore,
To be the wreck of promises and hopes,
A Boy of Learning, and a Bard of Tropes;
But happy in my humble sphere had moved,
Untroubled, unsuspected, unbelov'd.
To Barrett next, he has my thanks sincere,
For all the little knowledge I had here.
But what was knowledge? Could it here succeed
When scarcely twenty in the town can read?
Could knowledge bring in interest to maintain
The wild expenses of a Poet's brain;
Disinterested Burgum never meant
To take my knowledge for his gain per cent.
When wildly squand'ring ev'ry thing I got,
On books and learning, and the Lord knows what,
Could Burgum then, my critic, patron, friend!
Without security attempt to lend?
No, that would be imprudent in the man;
Accuse him of imprudence if you can.
He promis'd, I confess, and seem'd sincere;
Few keep an honorary promise here.
I thank thee, Barrett-- thy advice was right,
But 'twas ordain'd by fate that I should write.
Spite of the prudence of this prudent place,
I wrote my mind, nor hid the author's face.
Harris ere long, when reeking from the press,
My numbers make his self-importance less,
Will wrinkle up his face, and damn the day,
And drag my body to the triple way--

[I have never seen any notes in this section, although, from my knowledge, he is alluding here to the superstitious notion that those who commit suicide should be buried not on holy ground, but at the crossroads. (the triple way) --Anne] Poor superstitious mortals! wreak your hate
Upon my cold remains-----

This is the last Will and Testament of me, Thomas Chatterton, of the city of Bristol;

being sound in body, or it is the fault of my last surgeon: the soundness of my mind, the coroner and jury are to be the judges of, desiring them to take notice, that 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, which is all savoured of insanity.

Item. If after my death, which will happen tomorrow night before eight o'clock, being the Feast of the Resurrection, the coroner and jury bring it in lunacy, I will and direct, that Paul Farr, Esq. and Mr. John Flower, at their joint expense, cause my body to be interred in the tomb of my fathers, and raise the monument over my body to the height of four feet five inches, placing the present flat stone on the top, and adding six tablets.

On the first, to be engraved in Old English characters:--

[Note that Chatterton did not speak French and this Middle French inscription was probably copied from a gravestone he had seen on his many pilgrimages to area churches. The same is true for the Latin. Interesting that he did not go to church for God, but to admire the ancient architecture and the memorial stones. --Anne]

Vous qui par ici pavez
Pur l'ame Guateroine Chatterton priez
Le cors di oi ici gist
L'ame receyve Thu Crist. MCCX.

[This inscription, to the best of my ability, reads:
You who pass by here
Pray for the soul of Chatterton
Here lies his body
His soul is with Christ
--Anne]

On the second tablet, in Old English characters:-

Orate pro animabus Alanus Chatterton, et Alicia Uxeris eius, qui quidem Alanus obiitx die mensis Novemb. MCCCCXV, quorum animabus propinetur Deus Amen.

On the third tablet, in Roman characters:-

Sacred to the memory of
Thomas Chatterton

Subchaunter of the Cathedral of this city, whose ancestors were residents of St. Mary Redcliffe since the year 1140. He died the 7th of August, 1752. [Note, this is in memory of Thomas Chatterton, senior. --Anne]

On the fourth tablet, in Roman characters:-

To the memory of
Thomas Chatterton

Reader, judge not; if thou art a Christian-- believe that he shall be judged by a superior Power-- to that Power alone is he now answerable.

[This rather dreadful inscription was placed on the memorial erected to Chatterton in the early 19th century. --Anne.]

On the fifth and sixth tablets, which shall front each other:-

[Chatterton's hobby was heraldry, and the following is a description of a crest.]

Atchievements: viz. on the one, vest, a fess, or; crest, a mantle of estate, gules, supported by a spear, sable, headed, or. On the other, or, a fess vert, crest, a cross of Knights Templars.--And I will and direct that if the coroner's inquest bring it in felo-de-se, the said monument shall notwithstanding be erected. And if the said Paul Farr and John Flower have souls so Bristolish as to refuse this my request, they will transmit a copy of my will to the Society for supporting the Bill of Rights, whom I hereby empower to build the said monument according to the aforesaid directions. And if they the said Paul Farr and John Flower should build the said monument, I will and direct that the second edition of my Kew Gardens shall be dedicated to them in the following dedication:- To Paul Farr and John Flower, Esqrs. this book is most humbly dedicated by the Author's Ghost.

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

Item: From the same charitable motive, I give and bequeath unto the Reverent Mr. Camplin senior, all my humility. To Mr. Burgum all my prosody and grammar, --likewise one moiety of my modesty; the other moiety to any young lady who can prove without blushing that she wants that valuable commodity. To Bristol, all my spirit and disinterestedness, parcels of goods, unknown on her quay since Canning and Rowley! 'Tand direct is true, a charitable gentleman, one Mr. Colston, smuggled a considerable quantity of it, but it being proved that he was a papist, the Worshipful Society of Aldermen endeavoured to throttle him with the oath of allegiance. I also leave my religion to Dr. Cutts Barton, Dean of Bristol, hereby empowering the Sub-Sacrist to strike him on the head when he goes to sleep in church. My powers of utterance I give to the Reverend Mr. Broughton, hoping he will employ them to a better purpose than reading letters on the immortality of the soul. 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; but I have an unlucky way of raillery, and when the strong fit of satire is upon me, I spare neither friend nor foe. This is my excuse for what I have said of them elsewhere. I leave Mr. Clayfield the sincerest thanks my gratitude can give ; and I will and direct that whatever any person may think the pleasure of reading my works worth, they immediately pay their own valuation to him, since it is then become a lawful debt to me and to him as my executor in this case.

I leave my moderation to the politicians on both sides of the question. I leave my generosity to our present Right Worshipful Mayor, Thomas Harris, Esq. I give my abstinence to the company at the Sheriffs' annual feast in general, more particularly the Aldermen.

Item. I give and bequeath to Mr. Matthew Mease a mourning ring with this motto, "Alas, poor Chatterton!" provided he pays for it himself. 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.

Item. I leave all of my debts, the whole not five pounds, to the payment of the charitable and generous Chamber of Bristol, on penalty, if refused, to hinder every member from a good dinner by appearing in the form of a bailiff. If in defiance of this terrible spectre, they obstinately persist in refusing to discharge my debts, let my two creditors apply to the supporters of the Bill of Rights.

Item. I leave my mother and my sister to the protection of my friends, if I have any.
--Executed in the presence of Omniscience this 14th of April, 1770.

Thos. Chatterton

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