DONALD S. TAYLOR

Thomas Chatterton's Art

Experiments in Imagined History

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THOMAS CHATTERTON'S ART

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EXPERIMENTS IN IMAGINED HISTORY

Donald S. Taylor

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To Mary and Janet Taylor

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix
INTRODUCTION 3
The Problem: The Integrity of Individual Works vs. Historical Coherence 10
Major Theoretical Debts 15
Aesthetic Foundations 16
Historical Method 18
Immediacies, Sources, Influences 19
Narrative Continuity 25
I. SEVEN EARLY PIECES: 1763-1764 29
Christian History, *Lanx Satura,* Fable 30
The Early Achievement Surveyed 38
II. THE IMAGINATIVE MATRIX: THE ROWLEY WORLD AND ITS DOCUMENTS, 1768-1769 44
The Insistence on Authenticity 44
Free Fantasy and Exploitative Invention 52
Changing Functions of a Changing Imagined World 74
III. THE ROWLEYAN WORKS: EXPLORATIONS IN HEROIC MODES, 1768-1769 79
Native Epic: "Bristowe Tragedie" 80
Four Experimental Epic Fragments 86
The New Hero as Patron and Friend 104
Lyric Celebrations of Traditional Heroes 107
The Drama of Heroism Old and New 114
The New Hero and the Use of Riches 143
The Last of the Traditional Hero 159
IV. SATIRIC WORLDS AND MODES: 1769-1770 170
Satiric Stances and Models 171
Four Modes of Verse Satire 184
Rowley as Pope: Literary Targets 185
Satiric Experiments: Personal and Social Targets 192
For Publication: Religious and Political Targets 204
Flamboyant Insult and Anxious Revenge 217

Freethinking and Love 232
"The Art of Curlism" 243
The Satiric Reverse 260
V. IMAGINED PLACES AND POETRIES:
1768-1770 262
Ut Pictura et Musica Poesis 263
U.K. Ossianic 273
Pastoral Perspectives on the Heroic 284
Imagined Worlds 311
NOTES 313
INDEXES
Chatterton's Writings 333
General Index 338

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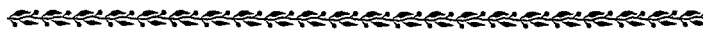
Eugene, Oregon
August 1977

THOMAS CHATTERTON'S ART

INTRODUCTION



> Why do you think I date everything I do? Because it is not enough to know an artist's works, you also have to know when he made them, why, how, in what circumstances. Some day there will probably exist a science—let's call it the "science of man"—which will attempt to go more deeply into man by way of the creative individual. I often think of that science and I want to leave posterity as complete a record as possible . . . . That's why I date everything I do.
> —Picasso, conversation with Brassaï, 6 December 1943[1]

There is still no clear understanding of why Chatterton's poetry should have caught for decades the imaginations of some of the most acute (as well as some of the dullest) minds in English letters. This book is a more elaborate attempt than has hitherto been made to explore his artistic achievement. It has been written when Chatterton's reputation is at a low point, but it is possible that this may be a propitious moment. Since Chatterton is no longer a cause, since the poets for whom he was a hero no longer dominate our skies, his own image and magnitude may now emerge in individual clarity, without borrowed lights. Though the positions, movements, and natures of planets have been deduced formerly from their influences, this particular planet is now directly available to disinterested scrutiny.

Some of the causes of Chatterton's present low reputation can only be welcomed. He appeared among the English poets shrouded in both the Thomas Rowley myth he created and the Marvelous Boy myth fostered by his admirers: historical investigation has by now pretty thoroughly demolished both myths. The Rowley myth had its linguistic props removed within a decade of Chatterton's death by the researches of Thomas Tyrwhitt and Thomas Warton, but knowledge about fifteenth-century poetry and language commanded so

little general awareness at the end of the eighteenth century and through most of the nineteenth that Walter Skeat's 1871 edition of Chatterton got broad recognition for doing a job that had been fairly adequately done one hundred years earlier. The Marvelous Boy myth is, to an extent, still with us, but the realization is growing that the story of the youthful genius, born in poverty and before his time, who opposed the rationalism and materialism of his century with the proud invention of a brilliant medieval world and a poetry to match it and who was driven by the literary establishment of his day to starvation and suicide, was a (perhaps necessary) fiction. Even the assumption that he committed suicide is now compellingly called into question.[2]

Yet the righting of historical error is often not the end of a story, for error itself can be a particularly eloquent sort of evidence if we put the right questions to it. The commotion in lettered England for so many years over Rowley and the stubborn persistence of the controversy long after Warton and Tyrwhitt ought logically to have silenced it testify that something more was involved than questions of authorship, period, and authenticity. Though the poems were indeed Chatterton's rather than Rowley's, they were not, in an important sense, the eighteenth century's. Something new had appeared momentarily on the horizon of English poetry and the persisting wish to locate it in a then vague and exotic fifteenth century was a kind of recognition of its radical and challenging strangeness. The Marvelous Boy myth was another symptom of the same awareness, for in it the poet was made the proto-martyr of a new poetic faith and his supposed persecutors—Horace Walpole and the rest—were fixed as the Scribes and Pharisees of the moribund orthodoxy he had challenged.

The later responses of poets push the point still further. Blake and Keats, both defiantly defensive about Chatterton, insisted on an essential genuineness, a *poetic* truth in Rowley that rendered irrelevant disputes about historical evidence. In a copy of Wordsworth's "Essay Supplementary to the Pref-

ace" (1815) Blake penciled, "I believe both Macpherson & Chatterton, that what they say is ancient is so." On the next page he wrote, "I own myself an admirer of Ossian equally with any other poet whatever Rowley & Chatterton also."[3] Keats dedicated *Endymion* to Chatterton, "the most English of poets except Shakespeare," and expanded this claim in a letter to his brother and sister-in-law:

> The purest English I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's. The Language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern [i.e., not Mediterranean, not classical]. I perfer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet.[4]

Wordsworth and D. G. Rossetti extended such claims to include Chatterton's modern writings and their defensiveness is seen in nothing so much as in their hyperbole. Crabb Robinson, cool from a recent reading of Chatterton, "asked Wordsworth . . . wherein Chatterton's excellence lay. He said his genius was universal; he excelled in every species of composition; so remarkable an instance of precocious talent was quite unexampled. His prose was excellent; his power of picturesque description and satire great."[5] Rossetti, in a series of letters to Hall Caine, takes particular pains to set right another skeptical inquirer. Chatterton

> is in the very first rank! . . . He was as great as any English poet whatever, and might absolutely, had he lived, have proved the only man in England's theatre of imagination who could have bandied parts with Shakespeare. . . . Read him carefully, and you will find his acknowledged work essentially as powerful as his antiques, though less evenly successful. . . . Strong derivative points are to be found in Keats and Coleridge from the study of Chatterton. . . . Not to know Chatterton is to be ignorant of the *true* day-spring of modern romantic

> poetry. . . . Among the modern poems *Narva and Mared* [*sic*], and the other *African Eclogues*. These are. . . *poetry absolute*. . . . Among the satirical and light modern pieces there are many of a first-rate order, though generally unequal. Perfect specimens, however, are *The Revenge* . . . *Verses to a Lady* ["To use a worn out Simile"]; *Journal Sixth* . . . ; *The Prophecy* [probably not Chatterton's]; and the opening of *Fragment* ["Intrest" (*sic*)]. . . . You must take care to be on the right tack about Chatterton. . . . I must protest finally about Chatterton, that he lacks nothing because lacking the gradual growth of the emotional in literature which becomes evident in Keats. . . . The finest of the Rowley poems . . . rank absolutely with the finest poetry in the language, and gain (not lose) by moderation.[6]

Such defiant faith in Chatterton's greatness has not yet received systematic critical investigation, though important advances were made in the later nineteenth century (with Rossetti's help) by Theodore Watts Dunton and have been made in the twentieth by Saintsbury, E.H.W. Meyerstein, and Bertrand Bronson. However, most study has dealt with his life, not his works. Before a systematic investigation of the works could be undertaken, two critical tools were required—a dependable biography and a critical edition. The first was provided in 1930 by Meyerstein's *Life of Thomas Chatterton* (cited hereafter as *Life*). Benjamin Hoover and I attempted the establishing of canon, texts, sequence of composition, and major sources in *The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton: A Bicentenary Edition* (cited hereafter as *Works*).[7] The present book tries to bring these researches to bear on the peculiar problems of a sequential critical history of Chatterton's writings.

As I see Chatterton, three such problems must be dealt with. Because of the melodrama of his life and of the Chatterton myth, the natures of individual works have hitherto been neglected; these must be accounted for in their own terms,

and here there are many surprises. Much that he wrote deserves to be restored to the canon of English literature, to be read and reread by poets and other readers. Second, Chatterton is, like Keats and Coleridge, a poet of many starts and few finishes; to understand him fully, the larger tendencies of the many literary problems he set himself need to be brought out. Finally, though he profoundly influenced the poets of the nineteenth century and though the history of that influence can perhaps be written once his own achievement is assessed, he had, like other later eighteenth-century poets, his own particular essence. Students of the eighteenth century tend to see him as symptomatic of disaffection, Romantic scholarship as groping toward something later realized. However, Blake scholarship has shown us the importance of dealing with poets of Chatterton's generation in their own terms lest our large-scale historical theses distort them. My task then was to work out a method that could deal with all three problems—the natures of individual works, the overall tendencies of a very fragmented career, and the internal essence of an achievement rather than its consequences as rejection of the past or as augury of the future. A study restricted to the larger issues would leave the individual works in their two-hundred-year limbo. A sequential account of individual works with running assignments of praise and blame would miss the larger tendencies and would be tedious to boot. In the next section of this introduction, I shall explain the chronological blocking-out and the modular narrative that is intended to solve these conflicting problems. For it was in modes—that midregion of convention and expectation between chosen subjects and achieved forms—that Chatterton most consistently set for himself his artistic problems and conducted his experiments.

The history does not deal with all of Chatterton's writings. Many of them seem to me perfunctory—designed for this or that market but not properly elements in his artistic development. Such are most of the brief documents manufactured for William Barrett's projected history of Bristol, most of the

amatory verse written for others, and many works that are little more than reflex responses to the stimuli of the London literary marketplace. When a knowledge of such writings conditions our understandings of more important efforts, these lesser works will enter the story, though not for analysis. To those who may feel that I have, even so, discussed too many works and gone into too much detail I can only plead that I am attempting a literary *history*. Though I hope to preserve proportions related to artistic interest, I have not limited the history to Chatterton's best, his most influential, or even his modestly successful works. As literary historian I feel obliged to deal with any work that can help us understand his artistic development.

Though there is some overlap, the first four chapters deal in chronological order with three distinct periods in Chatterton's career. Chapter one is concerned with his 1763–1764 hymns, fables, and satires; chapter two with the creation of the Rowley world from the summer of 1768 to the spring of 1769; chapter three with the Rowleyan literary works that were born of that imagined world and its nonliterary documents; chapter four with the satirical modes worked from the autumn of 1769 to his death in late summer of 1770. Chapter five, on the other hand, deals with three modes that Chatterton first attempted during the Rowleyan year and continued to work after Rowley had been abandoned. These three modes might have been as logically treated after chapters one or three, but since this work is the major evidence for continuity in his development and in the quality of his writing, it seemed to me both accurate and more cheerful to deal with it toward the end of the history. Note, however, that we do not reach Chatterton's best works until chapter three. Readers not concerned with the early achieved poetic craft (chapter one) later put to such different purposes, or with the richly imagined Bristol out of which the Rowley poems grew (chapter two) may wish to begin with chapter three, where the first major works are encountered.

Once we understand the intrinsic nature of Chatterton's

literary experiments in the various modes, we can begin to see what Blake, Keats, Wordsworth, and Rossetti were getting at: Chatterton is something more than a curiosity. His brief career is important evidence for understanding the larger movements of English letters in the later eighteenth century. Though the surviving evidence of his earliest works, the poems on which the first chapter is based, is clearly a small and only accidentally preserved sample of a larger body of work, certain patterns subsequently pursued are already established in this earliest extant material. There is a penchant for the immediate and the conventional in both subjects—the sacred, local scandals, and psychological oddities—and models—*The Book of Common Prayer* and John Gay's *Fables*. In this earliest work Chatterton's ability to characterize in quietly ironic action and diction is already striking. Chapters two through five, by tracing the extended impact of these ties to the past, have implications beyond Chatterton and his writings. These chapters deal with matters for which there are abundant analogues in the larger movements of art and thought from the eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Here we shall see the skillful poet of the everyday and the conventional moving in the direction of the heroic, the rhapsodic, the intensively subjective, yet never cutting his earlier roots. In Chatterton we have the transition from one sensibility to another—with constant interactions between old and new ways of thought—embodied in one brief career.

Chapters two and three suggest answers to questions that might be asked of many later eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century figures. What, for these poets, was the peculiar fascination of the still vague medieval, an age seen by the enlightened as "dark"? What was at the heart of the impulse, explicitly stated in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads,* to see the everyday as marvelous, exotic, magically resonant? Further, what strange transformations does the towering example of Pope undergo in this medieval reincarnation as Thomas Rowley? For nothing is clearer from close study of the Rowley writings than that Rowley is imagined as the

Pope who brought "correctness," dramatic sophistication, and a sense of artistic selfhood to a barbarous fifteenth-century literature.

Chapter four, which concerns Chatterton's contemporary satire, also looks both ways. It attempts to show what fruit grew from one branch of the Pope–Charles Churchill tree, a branch not so far from that which produced Byron's satires. It shows, further, that these satires are not unrelated to the same impulses that generated the Rowleyan heroic writings.

The works studied in chapter five also demonstrate that reaches for something artistically new—the descriptive lyric, the puzzling Ossianic mode, the exotic pastoral—grow from roots not just in the imagined remote past, but also from what are usually thought of as "Augustan" modes of thought. In his boldest experiments Chatterton never loses his grip on aspects of those strong predecessors who must have loomed in the imaginations of his generation much as Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, and Auden have loomed in the minds of later twentieth-century writers. The demonstration of these ties to a world against which Chatterton has traditionally been supposed to have been rebelling is, I believe, the most significant contribution this study makes toward getting a clearer picture of what happened to English letters in the last half of the eighteenth century.

THE PROBLEM: THE INTEGRITY OF INDIVIDUAL WORKS VS. HISTORICAL COHERENCE

When I began to think about this book, the task shaped itself as the writing of a coherent history of Chatterton's significant works that would emphasize the distinctive artistic nature of each. The works would be studied as acts of thought, as literary problems faced and solved, partially solved, or unsolved. The problems would be inferred from the works and from the conventions out of which they grew, as Chatterton perceived those conventions. The method would entail, for each

work, defining the subject, the language chosen (with its prosodic characteristics or prose movements), the manner of presentation (argument, persuasion, drama, narrative, and so on), and the subordinate techniques of arrangement and viewpoint that had shaped that subject, dealt with in that medium and manner, into a literary whole. My theoretical assumptions and my own experience as a writer had led me to look in each work for a shaping, organizing, informing principle by which these various elements were selected and worked toward particular effects, a principle that, in turn, presented the author with contingent problems in dealing with each element. The emphasis, therefore, would fall on these major and contingent constructional problems. Such a method, however, did not in itself suggest a solution to the problem of coherence: an element must be found *within* the works that would make the history something more than the stringing of analytic beads on a chronological thread.

A biographical coherence was not, it seemed to me, one of my options. Though Meyerstein's biography was indispensable to my work, the framework of a biography, as R. G. Collingwood has noted, is not a development of thought "but of natural process. Through this framework . . . the tides of thought . . . flow crosswise, regardless of its structure, like seawater through a stranded wreck."[8] This double movement plagues literary biographies: narrative lines are constantly interrupted by evaluative or philological statements about works, and yet such cross-tides can seldom be presented so as to show the direction of their flow, for the shape of the life itself usually works against this. I must try, then, to derive the coherence of my history from the works, just as we rightly expect the history of a soldier or a statesman, a philosopher or an economist to be organized along the lines of the practical or theoretical problems each chose or was forced to face.

Two other possible solutions to the problem of coherence seemed to me to quarrel with my wish to emphasize the works as distinct artistic problems. In Chatterton, as in all writers, there are dominant influences from the author's char-

acter and disposition, from the literary conventions he chose to follow, and from his experience as an individual and as a member of a particular society. Furthermore, as with all writers, apparently antithetical tendencies exist in his works. Both dominant influences and internal antitheses could be made to give the illusion of generating the works, but such procedures seemed to me causally fallacious. Also, they seemed to surrender from the start my wish to do justice both to the distinctive artistic natures of works and to Chatterton's thinking, shaping role as the artist constructing those works.

Let me briefly illustrate these rejected possibilities. With any author influences are so abundant as to present exceedingly difficult problems of discrimination and direction. I would clearly have to deal with multiple influences, whatever my method, but it must always be remembered—as we know from our own lives—that influences *are* multiple and that they are something used by us, not something that uses us. A particularly powerful influence on Chatterton has been traced to the fact of his father's death before the poet was born.[9] Many of his best works deal with fathers and sons or with characters in analogous relationships. Furthermore, his works change, sometimes subtly, sometimes radically, as he solicits the attention of actual or potential patrons, men who promise to embody in some way the ideally beneficent, admiring father he so clearly imagined. When this search for a father or patron can be shown to have entered a work in some shaping way, it is essential to bring this into the discussion. Yet to make the search for a father the narrative line of the history would reduce the works to the status of illustration or proof, would entirely neglect many works, and would slight the artistic natures of those works dealt with. Such a study might be a useful history of a psychological tendency, but it would certainly not be a history of the works themselves or of Chatterton's artistic development.

Similar drawbacks seemed to prohibit extracting the study's coherence from antitheses discovered within the works. The fact, for example, that Chatterton's works divide

rather neatly and chronologically into Rowleyan and non-Rowleyan writings and that the best of the former are heroic, of the latter, satiric—all of this must be treated as a matter requiring explanation, as a problem of literary history, rather than as a dialectic somehow generating the works. The further fact that the Rowleyan world seems to be *predominantly* the creation of Chatterton's imagination, whereas the modern writings seem predominantly modeled after works and authors successful in the literary marketplace, ought not, I felt, to be built into an inner-outer conflict that should then be proposed as the ultimate cause of the works. Tendencies, no matter how pervasive, are not causes. Concentrating on tendencies would, again, effectively deny the individual works their particular integrities and would shift my emphasis from the problems of their construction to a narrow selection of generative causes or of qualities in the finished works.

It would, of course, be absurd to ignore either influences or broad tendencies in Chatterton's works, but I hoped to derive my principle of coherence from the nature of his *artistic activity*. These austere resolutions having been taken, I went about my preliminary tasks of searching out informing principles and contingent artistic problems in the serene confidence that such investigations would lead me naturally and surely toward inner coherences in the canon. I was therefore surprised and dismayed to find few causal or even sequential connections among the multiplicity of principles and contingent problems uncovered. If, heroically resisting any favored-thesis organization, I fell back on mere chronology or on the simple fact of the fairly clear though frequently overlapping sequence of subjects—Rowleyan, satiric, market-determined—the history, though orderly, would be essentially an atomistic study rather than the narrative history of forms I hoped to write. The subjects of works are usually preconstructional—experiences and interests the author feeds into the work. Broad subject changes such as those just listed indicate major shifts of interest and artistic energy and consequent changes in artistic problems at all levels; to that extent

they would be germane to my aims. Yet if shifts of subject became the basic narrative line rather than a blocking-out device, the more artistically central constructional problems would be subordinated.

However, subject shifts eventually suggested a solution to this problem of coherence. I believe that Chatterton's artistic development can best be seen as a sequence of problems lying midway between such literary givens (or, rather, "takens") as the subjects that caught his energy and the emerging shaping principles of individual works. Here, between tentative directions and achieved forms, conventional possibilities in medium and technique and a consequent range of possible shaping principles, traditional or innovative, seem gradually to have presented themselves to his artistic awareness. I do not call these groupings of artistic possibility *genres* or *styles* because those terms have acquired meanings either too distinct or too discordant. The idea of genre has shifted radically from age to age. By Chatterton's day a hierarchy of interrelated kinds deduced, during the history of criticism, from broad similarities in subject, qualities, and manner was simultaneously recognized and subverted. The titles of most later eighteenth-century poems emphasize the recognition, their actual elements the subversion.[10] In our time we seem to have fewer genres per critical system but more competing systems, and hence more groupings of genres and more conflicting notions of the essence of genre. Still, these notions are based on broad similarities of subject and of qualities in finished works rather than on the actual problems and principles that have shaped works. *Style* too can mean too many things: most often it refers primarily to qualities of the finished work—usually qualities of language, rhythm, expressiveness. It only hints at subject and almost never suggests structural and presentational characteristics. I have therefore called these artistic midregions in which Chatterton worked *modes,* trusting that this is a more neutral term, more likely to lead us to the problems of individual works, to give entrée into his workshop.

A generally chronological sequence of the modes Chatter-

ton worked is, then, the ultimate narrative thread of this history. His shifts in subject signal major shifts of energy and consequent problems at all levels. These provide a blocking-out device, a loose unity for chapters that then proceed to study the variety of modes undertaken and the even greater variety of individual works. The section titles within chapters will usually indicate the sequence of modes with which he experimented. In these sections I briefly define the particular modes and suggest his probable sense of them. Rather than attempting here an abstracted definition of this concept of mode, I refer the reader to the definitions themselves: the first (*fable*, defined in the first section of chapter one) may serve as well as any for testing the concept and for judging its usefulness in suggesting both the groupings of traditional expectations and the range of constructional possibilities inherent in any mode.

MAJOR THEORETICAL DEBTS

My work with individual texts begins, I hope, with fidelity to them and thorough consideration of their sources and conventional contexts. This goes back, in ways so ingrained as to be no longer clear to me, to the meticulous criticism and scholarship experienced in the seminars, writings, and thesis direction of Bertrand Bronson, who continues to publish elegant, trenchant books and essays without suffering any of my own anxious wrestlings with theory.

The *theorists* who led me to the method of this history may seem an odd pair. My thinking about literary history attempts to synthesize and extrapolate from, specifically, R. G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (cited hereafter as *PA*) and *The Idea of History* (cited hereafter as *IH*) and Ronald Crane's theoretical and critical writings, but particularly his *Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History* (cited hereafter as *CHPLH*).[11] The rest of this introduction outlines my specific debts in theory and consequent method to these men.

After completing the book, I found further support in Hans

Robert Jauss, who seems to me to develop brilliantly the implications of Collingwood's philosophy of history for the special problems of literary history. I found also that certain critics—Harold Bloom, Michael Riffaterre, Ralph Cohen, and William K. Wimsatt—were germane either to my method or to particular conclusions, reassuring me with support or raising challenging questions. Jauss and these critics will be cited from time to time, but it would be misleading to suggest that historical and critical approaches they might well disavow grew from or were formed in reaction to their writings.

Aesthetic Foundations

Literary history is explicitly or implicitly grounded in aesthetics. Collingwood's concept of art as imaginative creation that explores and expresses selected feeling by transforming it into comtemplable idea and his insistence that imaginatively alert audiences reenact that exploration and expression—ideas most fully stated and argued in *The Principles of Art*—are the most satisfactory explanation I have yet seen of the fundamental nature and human necessity of art, of its role as foundation and accompaniment to all subsequent stages of thought, and of its workings in the minds of artists and audiences. This theory, carelessly read, has been dismissed as "expressionist" or "self-expressionist"—positions Collingwood explicitly and clearly disavows (*PA* 315-318).

At first glance, Collingwood's concept of art as expression through imaginative creation would seem to be irreconcilable with Crane's view of literature as the construction of artistic wholes having particular effects on audiences: Crane's hypothesized author is more manipulative, his audience more passive. Yet the two are dealing with distinct problems. Collingwood is trying to understand ultimate functions—how and why art in the largest sense works in the minds, first, of initiating artists and, then, of reenacting audiences. He largely ignores the middle ground—the special problems of understanding the particular works that must be the meeting

ground between these minds. Crane, on the other hand, is trying to understand this middle ground, the construction of these works, and he touches only lightly on ultimate collective significances. The common ground is suggested by Collingwood's insistence that the artist has, with each work, a problem of expression and hence of imaginative construction and by Crane's insistence that a work is best understood through its synthesizing principle and the contingent constructional problems of handling the various elements.

For Collingwood, the artist "has encountered some experience that stands out . . . as significant or moving; its unexpressed significance lies on his mind as a burden, challenging him to find some way of uttering it; and his labor in creating a work of art is his response to that challenge" (*IH* 315). Crane is more specific:

> a literary work is a concrete whole, or synthesis of parts . . . the generic character of which is determined by the fact that it is the product of an artist combining elements of speech . . . and elements of humanly interesting experience or thought by means of devices of technique and arrangement, for the sake of a particular organizing effect . . . on our opinions, emotions, or behaviour (*CHPLH* 12).

I do not wish to minimize the potential disagreements, but these approaches need each other precisely because the one argues ultimates, the other analyzes the middle ground between these ultimates. Moreover, the two positions share the concepts of *subject* and *artistic problems*.

For Collingwood the central problem is the artist's constant struggle to grasp and express what he feels. He addresses himself to retreats from and disavowals of feeling in himself and in his audience, and in this task the audience must collaborate actively if art is to realize its high, indispensable moral end: "Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness" (*PA* 217, 219-220, 251, 282-285, 336, and chapter 14 passim).[12]

Historical Method

Crane and Collingwood are in essential agreement that the logic of question and answer, of problem and solution, is central to any historical inquiry. Past acts are understood only by discovering the questions they attempted to answer, the problems they tried to solve.[13] The idea is as pervasive in Crane as in Collingwood. Crane puts it most explicitly in his constant insistence on understanding the larger artistic *use* to which any source, influence, element, or technique is put. He notes also how frequently *critics* are misunderstood because of an assumption that all of criticism is somehow a synchronic attempt to answer a cluster of eternal questions rather than particular answers to particular critical questions (*CHPLH* 91).[14] My own first step in this study, then, was to search out the problem for which each work was an attempted solution.

Collingwood is perhaps best known for positing "imaginative reenactment" as the only sure method for discovering these historical questions and problems.[15] Crane independently supports Collingwood's concept by his reiterated insistence on the necessity of reconstructing—from the work and from the contemporary artistic, critical, and social climates—the artistic choices that face an author in every aspect of his work.[16]

Collingwood's explanation of, and philosophical arguments for, the possibility of imaginative reenactment demand a closer reading of *The Idea of History* than many have been willing to give. Since Karl Popper is a substantial philosopher, his misunderstanding of the concept may be allowed to stand for the misapprehensions of many. Popper assumes that imaginative reenactment demands technical power, proficiency, and intellect in the historian equal to the abilities of the historical agent. The act studied "may be an artistic or literary or scientific or philosophic achievement of an excellence which far exceeds the historian's abilities. . . . No historian of art can be a Rembrandt and few will even be able to copy a great masterpiece."[17] Of course. But Collingwood never made such claims for imaginative reenactment, perhaps least

of all in the realm of art. For him the work of art is a mental act (existing, as Collingwood had long before demonstrated, though with a different terminology, in Popper's "third world" of "objective knowledge"). The writing of a poem, the painting of a picture, and so on, are the artist's sensuous means for carrying out the imaginative act and the audience's sensuous means for reenacting.

> A good painter . . . paints things because until he has painted them he doesn't know what they are like (*PA* 304). . . . when someone reads and understands a poem, he is not merely understanding the poet's expression of his, the poet's, emotions, he is expressing emotions of his own in the poet's words, which have thus become his own words. As Coleridge put it, we know a man for a poet by the fact that he makes us poets. We know that he is expressing his emotions by the fact that he is enabling us to express ours (*PA* 118).

Reenactment takes place where the work of art takes place—in the mind. The perceiver of the necessary sensuous accompaniment (poem, painting, score, performance) of the imaginative act need only be willing and knowledgeable to move from sensuous accompaniment to the more central mental world where the work lives. We do not understand Rembrandt by copying Rembrandts, but by imagining, by "reading" his painting to reach that imagined emotion for which the painting was physical means. We know Rembrandt for a painter, then, by the fact that he makes us painters. Both Popper and Collingwood's lesser and less sympathetic critics consistently misread him when they part company with him over imaginative reenactment.

Immediacies, Sources, Influences

What, then, do we imaginatively reenact? We reenact the constructional problems of the artist, and we reenact them within at least two contexts—our own twentieth-century

immediacies and, insofar as they can be reconstructed, the immediacies of the artist and of his first audience. Such immediacies are both moral and aesthetic, as Collingwood insists. He demonstrates that all acts of thought must live in immediacies and can be reenacted only in equally relevant (though not identical) subsequent immediacies.[18] Crane's monograph (*CHPLH*) is, thus far, the most systematic guide to reconstructing author's immediacies. He proposes a causal hierarchy in which "reasons of art" (the constructional causes of works) have primacy (*CHPLH* 61-105), and he suggests logical principles for conducting complex causal explanations (*CHPLH* 57-61, 73, 80-82).[19] His loyalty to the work's integrity and his desire for analytic clarity suggest, however, that constructional causes are rather neatly separable from personal, artistic, and social immediacies. This dams the necessarily chronological flow from "preconstructional" causes to the work and thence to the reader, dams it in the interest of special attention to the work. Collingwood provides a necessary corrective by suggesting throughout *The Idea of History* and *The Principles of Art* that, without dialogue between work and reader (with *his* immediacies), literary criticism and literary history are impossible.[20] Yet Crane also corrects Collingwood, since the necessary immediacies are never sufficient causes: a shaping principle must catalyze the intellect and emotion of both artist and audience. Between the two theorists, then, we shall find guidance in the search for both shaping principles and their contingent artistic problems (Crane) and for the immediacies from which these principles and problems necessarily grow (Collingwood and Crane).

Collingwood excludes himself, however, from helping with part of this problem because of his violent and unexamined (yet explainable) rejection of technical theories of art. This position forces him to assert that "There is . . . a history of art, but no history of artistic problems. . . . There is only the history of artistic achievements" (*IH* 314). His own philosophy of history denies this, since he tells us that history must be a reenactment of question, of problems.[21]

We must now bring these problems of immediacies of all sorts to the present case. Chatterton was a voracious, creative reader (and misreader) of poems, plays, every kind of prose, dictionaries, glossaries, histories, geographies, maps, architectural structures and ruins, even the streets and alleys of his neighborhood and his native city. He, in turn, was radically and creatively read (and misread) by several generations of major and minor Romantic poets (from Blake through the Edwardians) and, roughly from 1775 to 1875, by the belletristic world of England and the continent. The notes to *Works* demonstrate that, as in his Rowleyan language, nearly every feature of his writings can be traced to a borrowed source and that in using these features he nearly always disregarded their original contexts. This history can only instance a small part of this wholesale thievery, but it will attempt to show that he was a creative thief.

Since it is doubtful that any other poet has been such a devourer of sources, such an elaborately devious obliterator of his debts, Chatterton might seem an almost classic case of Harold Bloom's concept of "creative misprison" and its accompanying anxieties, strategies, and disguises.[22] However, Bloom's theory is not, it seems to me, a sufficient explanation for the production of any of Chatterton's works; it will never get at his protean creativity and imaginativeness or at the organizing principles that give their particular integrities to each text. The texts are transformations arising, not from guilt and anxiety about sources and influences, but from the irresistibility of his creativity and its hunger for materials. He imagined poetic worlds; he filled them with characters, buildings, streets, events, documents, poems, drawings, trivia of every imaginable sort. The deception involved in making it all "medieval" works to reify the imagined world rather than to conceal his sources, and for his imagined structures he is indebted finally to no one. *We* might feel that he *owed* guilt to his sources, but he was blithely unconcerned about such debts.

Collingwood, addressing modern artists and audiences,

argues that such behavior is not pathological or immoral, but an artistic necessity.

> If an artist may say nothing except what he has invented by his own sole efforts, it stands to reason he will be poor in ideas. If he could take whatever he wants wherever he could find it, as Euripides and Dante and Michelangelo and Shakespeare and Bach were free, his larder would always be full, and his cookery might be worth tasting. . . . Let all such artists as understand one another, therefore, plagiarize each other's works like men. . . . if he cannot improve on his friend's ideas, at least let him borrow them; it will do him good to try fitting them into works of his own, and it will be an advertisement for the creditor. An absurd suggestion? Well, I am only proposing that modern artists should treat each other as Greek dramatists or Renaissance painters or Elizabethan poets did (*PA* 325-326).

The passage might stand as Chatterton's artistic credo.

Three brief instances, handled more fully in the history proper. In *Ælla* Ælla is Othello, Birtha is Desdemona, Celmonde is Iago, and so on. The action too is borrowed from Shakespeare's play. However, Shakespeare's work is so radically altered by Chatterton's idea of heroism that Chatterton seems to be entering into a competition with his predecessor. I can show that Chatterton worried very much about the difficulties to which his concept of the hero brought his play and that he turned again, without perceptible guilt feeling, to Shakespeare's rhetoric to get him out of the artistic corner into which he had painted himself.

A second instance is an almost unknown but startling work: Rowley (read Edmund Gibson) writes an elaborately ammended version of Turgot's (read William Camden's) imagined Norman "Discorse on Brystowe" (Gibson's 1695 edition of *Camden's Britannia*). The idea is bold: it "disproves" Camden's and Gibson's suggestions that there was no Bristol

before the eleventh century. It establishes Rowley as a revisionist, empirical historian living over a century before Camden, over two centuries before Gibson. It gives to Bristol British, Roman, and Saxon pasts and, in doing so, establishes Chatterton's turf—Redcliff—as consistently prior to Bristol proper, across the Avon, in all facets of civic life. This is exuberant theft.

One further instance of such borrowing. Rowley, his patron William Canynge, and the lesser poetic lights that—with these two—form a snug elite in mindless fifteenth-century Bristol and post-Chaucerian England are almost certainly the Scriblerus Club (Rowley being the Swift Pope) translated two and a half centuries into the past. In all three of these cases, as in the invented (but stolen) Rowleyan language, there is creative zest. Chatterton's first fight was for fame in the present (he was confident about his future fame) and for the reality of his imagined worlds: any scrap from the past was grist to his mill. With Chatterton it is not anxiety about *influences* but the wholesale, cheerful appropriation of *sources* that we must learn to understand. His works are so much a reshaping of sources that until we grasp their extraordinary variety we shall not fully comprehend the reshapings, with their new organizing principles.

One needs guidelines in dealing with such a besourced and influenced poet, and I find them again in Collingwood and Crane. The first principle to be established is the concept of *use* in the understanding of artistic influence, collaboration, and theft. Though influence must be rejected as sufficient cause, it seems likely that a special situation obtained for lyric poetry in the late eighteenth century (its symptoms the reiterated laments concerning the Death of Poetry, the Withdrawal of the Muses, the Retreat of Fancy, the unapproachably mythic stature of Milton, and so on). Wimsatt deftly suggests some of the sorts of justice that can be done these poets by a learned, sensitive reader.[23] A helpful analogy occurs in Collingwood's argument that climate and geography do not determine history:

> . . . that certain people live, for example, on an island has in itself no effect on their history; what has an effect is the way they conceive that insular position; whether for example they regard the sea as a barrier or as a highway to traffic. . . . In itself [their position] is merely a raw material for historical activity, and the character of historical life depends on how this raw material is used (*IH* 200).

To be sure, great poets and poetic traditions form audience expectations. Collingwood acknowledges this even as he rejects the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics of artistic individualism.

> . . . a man, in his art as in everything else, is a finite being. Everything that he does is done in relation to others like himself. As artist, he is speaker; but a man speaks as he has been taught. . . . Even the most precocious poet hears and reads poetry before he writes it. Moreover, just as every artist stands in relation to other artists from whom he had acquired his art, so he stands in relation to some audience to whom he addresses it. . . . Like other speakers, they speak to those who understand. . . .
>
> All artists have modelled their style upon that of others, used subjects which others have used, and treated them as others have treated them already. A work of art so constructed is a work of collaboration. It is partly by the man whose name it bears, partly by those from whom he has borrowed. . . . If we look candidly at the history of art . . . we shall see that collaboration between artists has always been the rule. . . . Let painters and writers and musicians steal with both hands whatever they can use, wherever they can find it. (*PA* 316-320).

This concept of collaboration brings the problem of influence into a broader perspective, that of a constant condition of art.

In *The Idea of History* Collingwood, considering the wider question of influence in thought generally, suggests a reasonable credo for those studying influence in such poets as Chatterton.

> It is the historian's endeavor to discover [a thinker's] problem that gives importance to the study of "influences," which is so futile when influences are conceived as the decanting of ready-made thought out of one mind into another. An intelligent inquiry into the influence of Socrates on Plato, or Descartes on Newton, seeks to discover not the points of agreement but the way in which the conclusions reached by one thinker give rise to problems for the next (*IH* 313).

It is not difficult to extrapolate to the study of influence among artists.

There is, of course, an inferior art that is little more than the sum of its sources and influences, which caters to the acquired tastes of a passive, bored audience: this is Collingwood's deadening "amusement art" (*PA* chapter 5 passim and 278).[24] What Collingwood and Crane insist on in considering influences is the active, initiating function of each new artist and the integrity in imaginative concept of each new work of art. These enable the artist to initiate, no matter how much he borrows, no matter how much he is influenced. Influences and sources are *used* for the new artistic purpose.[25]

Narrative Continuity

It is unfortunate that Collingwood does not explicitly address the historian's problem of finding a meaningful continuity, since in all of his works that are historical in structure he has the surest of narrative instincts. Generally he uses a how-we-got-where-we-are method, and this is of little help with Chatterton, who is now distinctly not "where we are." In "Principles of Organization" (*CHPLH*) Crane treats the problem at length. He notes the limitations of pure chronology, rejects "dialectical" narrative lines as destructive of the integrity of works, cites favorably narrative-causal organizing principles for their explanatory power, but urges finally an extension of the narrative-causal pattern in terms of