

Identity, Authenticity, Class: John Clare and the Mask of Chatterton

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they have cut off my head and picked out all the letters of the alphabet--all the vowels and consonants--and brought them out through my ears; and then they want me to write poetry! I can't do it

John Clare in 1860, aged 66, as reported by Agnes Strickland [1]

Here, as so often with Clare's asylum statements, there is method, and indeed eloquence, in his madness. By 1860 the poet had spent nineteen years in the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, which he described routinely as a 'Bastile' or 'Prison', and variously as 'the purgatorial hell & French Bastile of English liberty', 'my Captivity among the Babylonians', and 'the Land of sodom where all the peoples brains are turned the wrong way'. [2] What he says to Agnes Strickland brings together the element of compulsion in his captivity, and the processes of intense scrutiny, commodification and fetishization to which his poetry and person had been subjected (and were still subjected by occasional visitors like Strickland), from the first flush of his success as a 'peasant poet' forty years earlier. Clare's anguished mind expresses its pain through this bizarre image--part torture, part medical operation--of his head being removed and the letters of the alphabet (the only tools of the only trade he could still pursue) being systematically pulled out through his ears: a sort of gothic lobotomy.

The image may seem a long way away from the subject of this essay, Chatterton's influence on Clare. Yet it may serve to remind us of the unease about linguistic and literary appropriations that invariably clings to questions of Chatterton's influence; and it is instructive to keep in mind the end of Clare's career, as we examine its beginning: this was a lesson that Wordsworth had already absorbed from Chatterton and Burns, viz:

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

Clare also learned from Chatterton something that Wordsworth had less reason to worry about, namely that in the matter of arranging the alphabet into words and

words into poetry, there was a vital question of ownership. As with other kind of ownership, dispossessed poets from humble backgrounds, like Clare and Chatterton, were especially vulnerable. Clare's sources on Chatterton made him an ardent believer in the wickedness of Walpole; but even without this touchstone he could clearly see that the authors of *The Castle of Otranto* and the *Rowley Poems* were playing essentially the same game, and that the respectability of one and the notoriety of the other had more to do with social and economic status than literary ethics. And while Clare would be unlikely to believe (as some eighteenth-century commentators believed) that Chatterton's guilt at his 'deception' or 'forgery' had caused the tragedy at Brooke Street, he could nevertheless see the danger in being thought to have stolen or lied about the words he was using. Clare had a lifelong fear of being accused of plagiarism (not doubt fuelled by the fact that he was so accused, in some quarters, from the start). He also feared having his own words stolen: whether by Southey's 'Old Servant' John Jones, whose robin (a 'Sweet social bird with breast of red') he felt too much resembled his own 'Sweet little bird in russet coat'; or through the nightmarish surgery he reports to Strickland. [3]

He also understood the danger in what E.H.W. Meyerstein would call Chatterton's 'ruling passion, thirst for fame', a passion he shared. [4] His concomitant anxiety on this subject indeed inspires Clare's first recorded mention of Chatterton, which occurs rather melodramatically, as an apparition at the feast of youthful Wordsworthian 'gladness', in Clare's first extant letter:

Sir

I send you some of my principal Subscribers which I have procured lately: the first of which is a Baronet!!! who speaks very highly of my 'Sonnet' in the prospectus--Good God, how great are my Expectations! what hopes do I cherish! As great as the unfortunate Chattertons were, on his first entrance into London, which is now pictured in my Mind--& undoubtedly like him I may be building 'Castles in the Air' but Time will prove it... [5]

The presence of an elegiac undercurrent throughout Clare's writings has often been noted. This early reference to Chatterton, even as Clare scores his first success, suggests that the marvellous boy stands, among other things, as a terrible warning to the new poet, a rather extreme form of *memento mori*. He will maintain this role in Clare's life, to be joined later by other favourites who died in melancholy circumstances. One of the several tombstone drawings among Clare's papers, dating from the early 1820s, is inscribed 'To the Memory of CHATTERTON KEATS and BLOOMFIELD'. From Keats of course he learned how (in Tony Harrison's succinct

precis) 'Melancholy dwells inside Delight'; and Clare absorbed the story of the critics destroying Keats, as he had absorbed the story of Walpole destroying Chatterton. Just in case he had missed the message's application to himself, John Taylor, the publisher he shared with Keats, announced the latter's death to him in a way that made it unavoidable:

The Life of poor Keats in ended at last: he died at the age of 25... Poor Fellow! Perhaps your Feeling will produce some Lines to his Memory. One of the very few Poets of this Day gone--let another beware of Stamford. [6]

'Stamford' means 'drinking in Stamford', a Clarean vice Taylor was particularly concerned about just then, perhaps fearing that beer might become Clare's nemesis--a suitably rustic and democratic equivalent of Walpole-induced suicide, or Quarterly-exacerbated tuberculosis. The fate of Bloomfield furnished an even more terrifying and direct warning to Clare, for here was a 'peasant poet' who had been far more successful than Clare, but whose life was drawing to an end (he died in 1823) in great poverty and neglect, and with what James Sambrook calls 'signs of growing insanity'. [7]

But the first and (one senses) the psychologically most important triumvir is Chatterton. This is not always an easy thing to measure, and one of the aims of this essay is to consider how we can measure Chatterton's influence. We shall see, for example, that the traditional procedure of tracing literary 'echoes' is inadequate in the case of Chatterton and Clare. We can trace by contrast an exact pattern of influence on Clare's poetry from his third triumvir, Keats: in early July 1820 Clare reads the *Lamia* volume, and thereafter his poetry regularly echoes (in particular) the great odes. The absence of a similarly clear pattern of Chattertonian literary influence on Clare suggests the weight of influence lies somewhere other than in the legacy of fine lines, memorable images, and what Keats in a slightly different context called a 'good Genius presiding over you'. [8] Where else the Chattertonian influence may lie has been touched on in my mention of a 'terrible warning': that is, a warning about Chatterton's precipitous and terribly early death. But there are other areas of influence. When Clare pauses to measure his 'great expectations' against Chatterton, the most obvious implication is that he may be heading for a fall, perhaps as great as Chatterton's. But he may also be thinking about Chatterton's literary trickery, his 'imposture', and so asking himself: am I faking it? Am I a real poet, and if so, what kind? It is a commonplace that 'identity' is a central theme in Clare's writings; and that doubts about his identity as a person, and as that most inauthentic literary construction a 'peasant poet', haunted and ultimately overwhelmed him. Chatterton

may have played an important role in his search for identity. To measure these sorts of issues may involve stepping outside merely pedantic procedures, being prepared to draw on psycho-biographical and other kinds of meta-literary information, indulging in some speculation, and thus also perhaps confronting our own imaginative roles as creative readers.

We shall need to consider too whether and how Clare experiences and deals with the social and economic pressures which force the protean poet into identity crisis, experiment and transformation, forces he shares with Chatterton, and whether and how Chatterton offers a role-model for dealing with these. Clare's first letter (quoted above) seems almost to foresee the tragic outcome represented by what he tells Agnes Strickland in 1860. In a sense both this outcome and that represented by Chatterton's suicide are inevitable and implicit in their attempts to become poets. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the amount of insanity, alcoholism and suicide among published self-taught poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth century was horrific; and as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch plainly stated in 1916, 'The poor poet has not in these days, nor has had for two hundred years, a dog's chance'. [9]

We have seen Clare's early consciousness of Chatterton manifesting itself as a moment of sudden doubt, in his private correspondence. In his autobiography Clare tells the story of his discovery of Chatterton, as a process which (like his imaginary tombstones) resists the orthodox channels of transmission (books and manuscripts), preferring to work through the more iconographic and popular medium of a souvenir handkerchief bought at a fair. Brought up in what he called a 'gloomy village in Northamptonshire, on the brink of the Lincolnshire fens', Clare had to supplement 'The few educational opportunities and literary tools which fell to him through luck...by careful and resourceful planning', as Johanne Clare puts it. [10] To the categories of 'luck' and 'planning' we may perhaps add a third: the benevolence of his family. For like Chatterton, Clare had his 'nested home-loves': here they are represented by Clare's mother (a woman who has been far too easily dismissed as 'illiterate', even if 'chance had the choice' of the gift she brings home):

My mother brought me a picturd pocket hankerchief from Deeping may fair as a fairing on which was a picture of Chatterton and his verses on Resignation chance had the choice of it she was mentioning the singular circumstance to me yesterday be asking me wether I rememberd it and saying that she little thought I shoud be a poet then as she shoud have felt fearful if she had for Chattertons name was clouded in mellancholly memorys while his extrodinary Genius was scarcely known[n] the common people knew he was a poet and

that was all they know the name of Shakspear as one but the ballad monger who prints and supplys hawkers with their ware are poets with them and they imagine one as great as the other so much for that envied emenence of common fame I was fond of imatating every thing I met with and therefore it was impossible to resist the oppertunity which this beautiful poem gave me I am not certain that this is the name of the poem my memory was freshend some few years ago to believe so in reading the life of Chatterton by (I think) someone of the name of Davy as I have the poem by me I will insert it [11]

In fact Clare does not insert the Chatterton poem, or indeed his own; but we can locate and compare them easily enough. [12] In doing so we find that Clare has not so much 'imitated' Chatterton as written a quite distinctively new poem; one that in fact has a markedly different perspective to Chatterton's 'Resignation'. The narrator of that poem resolves to live stoically, inspired and awed by God; and the poem ends with the 'gloomy Mantle of the Night' being triumphantly cast aside by the 'Morning Light / Which God, my East, my Sun reveals'. Chatterton 'resigns' himself to finding strength to endure in the power of the deity; but Clare's poem is, as its bracketted subtitle reveals, 'Supposed to be Written by the Unfortunate Chatterton Just Before he Took the Deadly Draught that Put a Period to his Existance'. Its narrator is accordingly 'resigning' himself to suicide. And although, following the opening passage on the vanity of life, Clare has a substantial central section of piety which is quite close to the Chatterton poem (and indeed imitates it here and there), the poem descends rapidly in its final section into gothic horror, sublime terror, and a melodramatic ending that faintly recalls the end of Gray's 'The Bard':

Ye Grizly Ghosts that seem to rise
And swim before these frantic eyes
My blood runs chill--your hollow screams
But serve to terrify my dreams
And make this hop[e]less heart of mine
Desist & shrink from its design

--But hush ye fears ye lengthen pain
Here fancy may imagine vain
No terrors need the soul attend
When we are gone our sorrows end
Or why (my kindred fortunes hate
Those victims sacrifis'd to fate)

Did they the self same road pursue
Unless they thought--& hop'd it true
And since that last resource is mine
Stern Fate resolve--& I resign (lines 51-66)

There are many interesting elements here (not least the clear hint of religious scepticism in Clare's un-Hamlet-like certainty about the post-mortem world, which emerges in this final passage). But what seems most striking to me is that it is inspired by Chatterton's suicide, not his poetry. Certainly Clare has read Chatterton's poem, but he has also read Chatterton's 'story' (probably elsewhere on the same embroidered handkerchief, in the first instance), and the latter has had the stronger impact. [13] The Tibbles are particularly alert to the biographical emphasis of this influence, noticing the way in which Chatterton's 'indomitable resolve' seems to have helped Clare in these difficult early years, and that the verses 'display more realisation of Chatterton's loneliness and anguish than poetic merit of Clare's'. They also take Clare's cue in seeing his poem as strongly imitative, and indeed describe it as 'the first instance of those imitations which Clare afterwards deliberately practised'. [14] By this reading 'The Resignation' marks a vital stage in Clare's absorption of the Chattertonian influence. For the 'deliberately practised' imitations Clare prepares for here will involve, as we shall see, some classically Chattertonian literary deception.

The story of the handkerchief from Deeping May Fair has a few other ramifications. There is a clear association of 'fame' with Chatterton. Clare's mother knows the name of Chatterton well enough to fear it (i.e. knows the story); and 'the common people' (whose esteem Clare so unconvincingly affects to despise) know the name too. I quote again the middle part of the passage (Autobiographical Writings, p. 83):

the common people knew he was a poet and that was all they know the name of Shakespear as one but the ballad monger who prints and supplys hawkers with their ware are poets with them and they imagine one as great as the other so much for that envied emenence of common fame

Clare seems interestingly to engage here with (and perhaps means to make ironic comment on) the common eighteenth-century habit of comparing Chatterton favourably with Shakespeare. (One also wonders what he knew about the Rowley Controversy, and the accusations that Chatterton had plagiarized Shakespeare.)

Clare also makes it clear that he has read 'Davey', which the Tibbles correctly identify as John Davis's Life of Chatterton (1806). In the jungle of Chatterton

biography Davis's Life is much less visible than its prominent neighbours, the robust eighteenth-century account by George Gregory (1789, reprinted in Kippis's Biographia Britannica and in the Southey and Cottle edition of 1803), and the equally high-profile, notoriously mendacious and romanticising account by John Dix (1837). Meyerstein straightforwardly canonised the former and condemned the latter, and tended to overlook Davis, which is a pity because it is an interesting biography which reflects its time very well. Meyerstein suggests that Dix (1837) represents the 'dawn of a sentimental era' though he concedes that the materials from which the view of Chatterton as the 'helpless starving boy-poet, who stoically resigned his life before his eighteenth birthday' were available 'early enough' (p. xii). In fact this view of Chatterton is already strongly present in Davis; and indeed in other contemporary materials Clare had access to, notably the short introduction to Chatterton given by Robert Southey in his Specimens of the Later English Poets (1807). [15]

Davis's Life, which we can perhaps call Clare's Chatterton, is in fact a mixture of sentiment and realism. It contains passages as purple as anything produced by Vicesimus Knox and his like, but the gushing style is often ameliorated by a certain intellectual toughness, as when in the midst of a routine exclamatory speech against Walpole, Davis nails the lie of the latter's 'I am a man of no interest' by the simple expedient of footnoting a list of his sinecures: 'He was usher of the exchequer, and held also the lucrative posts of comptroller of the pipe and clerk of the estreats' (p. 64). One can readily see how this account might appeal to Clare. Examples come readily to hand, such as the following characterisation of the alienated poet, so redolent of the poet-figures in Gray's Elegy and Beattie's Minstrel:

What was supposed to be dullness in Chatterton was genius. The symptoms of talents were misconstrued by his contemporaries. They were disgusted with his pride, which was a consciousness of pre-eminence of abilities. ...The silence, the solitude of Chatterton, his eccentric habits and singularities of behaviour, were not attributed to the right cause. ...Silent and unsuspected he was now soliciting the Muse in secret. (pp. 9-10)

One would expect Clare to respond particularly strongly to that final, gorgeously sibilant-rich sentence; for by his own account he spent his teenage years being a secret poet: hiding poems in holes in walls, scribbling lines of verse in the lining of his hat, hoarding tea and sugar wrappers to write on, and ducking into ditches to avoid being seen writing. The social aspects of Chatterton's struggle would also interest Clare: not only the shaping themes of isolation and tragedy, but the precious small advantages. Davis for instance describes a fellow enthusiast--the familiar figure

of a friend who owns and shares a few books, who was an essential element in the life of the self-taught poets, and appears in many autobiographical statements, from Stephen Duck's to Clare's itself:

[Mr. Clayfield] was a distiller in Castle-street, whose love of reading discovered a liberal mind. Chatterton delighted in his company, and would read to him out of Thompson's *Masque* and Pope's *Homer*. He borrowed of him many books... (p. 42)

The details are especially fortuitous, for Thomson and Pope were prominent in Clare's Pantheon. How strongly he responded to the idea of the marvellous boy reciting 'Rule Britannia' (the most famous part of James Thomson's *Alfred a Masque*, 1740) to his friend is not known. But we do know that Clare's discovery of the same author's *The Seasons* was one of the great literary events of his life; and it seems very likely he would respond to this kind of vignette.

One could consider a great deal of this kind of material of course (and there are other things we know Clare had read, such as Cary's 'Life of Chatterton', published in the *London Magazine* in June 1820: see below). But there are other, in some ways more important things to consider. There is for example the 'hard evidence' of Clare studying Chatterton and recording his impressions in a fairly serious and systematic way; and we must also look at the question of 'echoes'. Finally, there are Clare's intriguingly Chattertonian literary deceptions. We shall look at these areas in turn.

In September 1824, two of Clare's prose activities converged: his autobiographical impulse, which meant that he kept a *Journal* in 1824-5 and continued to write his life story; and his desire to write a 'Natural History' and insert phrases into it from the poets. Chatterton's appearance among these intertwined literary activities, over a three day period, is interesting if not especially surprising. The sequence of events is also interesting, and I preserve it unedited here:

Monday 13 Sept. 1824

Wrote two or three more pages of my life--read some of the Sonnets of shakspear which are great favourites of mine & lookd into the Poems of Chatterton to see what he says about flowers & have found that he speaks of the Lady smock

'So have I seen the lady smocks so white
'Bloom in the morning & mowd down at night'

as well as my favourite line of

'The king cups brasted with the morning dew'

Tuesday 14 Sept. 1824

Continued the reading of Chatterton in search for extracts to insert in my natural history inserted them in the Appendix see No. 2--I was struck with the many beautiful & remarkable passages which I found in them what a wonderful boy was this unfortunate Chatterton I hate the name of Walpole for his behaviour to this Genius & his sneering & cold blooded mention of him afterwards when his gossiping fribble had discovered them to be forgeries why did he not discover the genius of the author--no because they surpassed his Leadenhall forgery of 'Otranto'

Wednesday 15 Sept. 1824

Finishd the reading of Chatterton admire his tragedey of Ella & Battle of <h>Hastengs noticed a good description of a Thunder storm in the Ballad of Charity. v 29 &c & a beautiful one of a ladye inserted it in Appendix No 3 Chatterton seemd fond of taking his similes from nature his favourite flower seems to be the 'kingge coppe' & his favourite bird the 'pied Chelandrie' (Red cap) the only trees he speaks of are the oak & elm [16]

The next day he is ill, perhaps with a hangover ('nursing my head in my hand'), and gets distracted by the arrival of his friend Henderson (the discoverer of the Roman settlement of Durobrivae), who brings him Byron's poem Don Juan, onto which his attention now moves.

Clare has 'looked into' Chatterton in search of flowers, apparently also inspired by his session of autobiography writing, and a dip into Shakespeare's sonnets. By the second day of his reading he has become deeply engaged by his sense of Chatterton's genius and tragedy. The sense of the individual and his life stirs his outrage against Walpole: a familiar response. But the third day marks a new phase: for Clare digs deeply into the copy of the Rowley Poems he had acquired in 1821, reading Chatterton's longest pieces, 'Aella' and 'The Battle of Hastings' as well as 'An Excelente Balade of Charitie'; and finding (and copying into a notebook) one of the few interesting passages in the failed 'Battle of Hastings' project: a description of a beautiful woman, the mythical 'Kenewalchae faire', in the second of the epic's two fragments. [17]

It is interesting to see Shakespeare at the beginning of this sequence (he never seems to be too far away when Chatterton is on the agenda). But if we collate Clare's Letters against his Journal we discover a more specific reason he has turned to Chatterton at this particular moment. On 18 September 1824 he writes to his friend H. F. Cary (the translator of Dante), and tells him:

I have empolyd [for 'employed'] myself when able since I came home at writing my own life which if I live to finish it I shoud like to trouble you to read it & give your opinion of it for my own judgment in such matters is very often faulty your Life of Chatterton turnd me to read his poems over seriously I was very often struck with remarkable passages & happy expressions did the reading strike you as such I hope in your lives of the Poets you will think of Bloomfield he is a great favourite of mine... (Letters, p. 304).

This gives a prior cause for reading Chatterton, but that cause itself is unexplained: why is Clare reading Cary's 'Life of Chatterton' in a four-year-old periodical (the London Magazine for June 1820)? In the letter to Cary we see him bringing together (as on his sketched gravestones) his own life and what we might call the lives of the doomed poets: here, just Bloomfield and Chatterton. In the previous eighteen months Clare had suffered an unprecedented series of personal crises, bereavements, and illnesses. Such is the intricate complexity and inter-linked quality of Clare's life and writings that we need to go back a year to these events in order to understand why he is reading Chatterton, writing his own life, and pleading with Cary (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) to allow Bloomfield into the continuation of Johnson's Lives of the Poets Cary continued to produce for the London Magazine. In the Summer of 1823 Clare and his wife lost their youngest child, a daughter born in June; Clare himself was racked with nervous ailments; and two people whose lives were vitally important to him died: Bloomfield, most importantly, in August, and in poverty and neglect as we have seen; and also his friend and benefactor from Stamford, Octavius Gilchrist, the only local intellectual he was close to (and in this context, one thinks inevitably of Chatterton's desperate attempts to connect with local intellectuals like Alexander Catcott). These were bitter blows, and combined with other difficulties and the accumulated stress of many years they led by the end of the year to a period of intensified physical and mental distress. Throughout the winter and the spring of 1824 Clare suffered from what his patron Mrs Emmerson called 'high nervous debility'; and in May 1824, on John Taylor's advice, he made his third visit to London, to consult 'Dr Darling' whose advice he and Taylor so valued. He stayed there for four months (witnessing, by chance, Byron's funeral procession in July).

Somewhat recovered from this year of crisis, he returned in early August to Helpston, where we now find him in September, in the midst of literary activity. [18]

The intensity of this biographical background seems to me to eclipse any attempt to discuss abstract literary 'influence', even where (as with these September 1824 readings) we are conveniently given a list of works read and extracts made. What seems most important is the psycho-biographical context of the poet's reading; and that context suggests that Clare's reading goes far beyond satisfying his curiosity about an eighteenth-century poet or absorbing 'literary influences'. Rather, the reading of Chatterton seems part of a far larger quest in which Clare, prompted by bereavement, increasing literary failure and other life-crises, turns to the poets, and to the writing of his own life-story, and the story of his landscape, for consolation, and to learn how to endure. Chatterton's literary strategies give the lie to the pretence that art is arranged in a class-free, aesthetically-determined hierarchy of meaning and value. The 'failure' of his 'forgeries', and the myths that had accumulated around the idea of his life (which Meyerstein is wrong to dismiss as merely sentimental, as though that somehow rendered them meaningless), may well have helped Clare to see through the carefully concealed ideologies which society, in the particular shape of his patrons, and through the 'aesthetics' of poetry, continued to impose on him. If the melancholy fates of Chatterton, Bloomfield and Keats warned him that his tragedy was still to come, they also helped teach him how to live, and inspired him to continue writing, no matter what might happen.

Clare also found in the Rowley Poems the flowers he was seeking, of course, for Chatterton too had a good eye and a vivid descriptive style. Apart from the 'beautiful' description 'of a ladye' ('Kenewalchae faire', see above), he filled three pages of PMS A17 with quotations, ingeniously plundering Chatterton's epic similes for snippets of natural description, and even finding, in the bloodthirsty 'Battle of Hastings I' (of all places), a surprising piece of arboreal protest-writing, disguised as an epic simile. 'Erle Cuthbert', dying, objects to the fact that he appears to have been cut down by a common person ('Now sleyne, mayhap, of one of low degree'). The poet comments:

So have I seen a leafie Elm of Yore,
Have bin the pride and Glorie of the Pleine:
But when the spendyng Landlord is grown poore,
It falls bineth the Axe of some rude Sweine[s]
(lines 265-8, Chatterton's Works, pp. 34-5).

This cannot but have touched the heart of the author of 'To a Fallen Elm', who knew all about 'rude Sweine' with axes, and firmly believed that tree-felling was a kind of murder. In a sense Clare's extracts show that he is reading 'against the grain', looking for things which it is not Chatterton's first aim to deliver. One nevertheless finds oneself, having worked through his extracts (most of them single lines), looking anew at Chatterton's characteristic words and forms of writing. Clare, if one can put it this way, reads Chatterton to us in a way that is interesting and refreshing.

Clare's confident declaration of his 'favourite line' in Chatterton draws us inevitably into the slightly vexed question of echoes. There are three which we may consider here. Firstly, in 'Summer Images', there is a clear echo of Clare's 'favourite line', 'The king cups brasted with the morning dew' (this is modernised from 'Lyche kyngcuppes brastynge wythe the morning dew', 'Songe to Aella', line 6):

And slender king cup burnished with the dew
Of morning's early hours
Like gold yminted new

The antiquified 'yminted' is quite self-conscious, as I think is the echo. [19]

The second echo is recorded by Mark Storey, who quotes the last couplet of the sonnet 'The Crab Tree':

Till the heart stirring past as present seems
Save the bright sunshine of these fairy dreams

He describes this as a favourite image of Clare's that 'appears in various forms throughout the rough drafts, e.g. PMS. A50, p. 58, PMS. A18, p. 60'. He also quotes a similar couplet from PMS A50, p. 28 (which he says also occurs at PMS A31, p. 10):

Mary thou muse of all my simple themes
Thou fairey sunshine of youths summer dreams

And he draws attention to a similar line, 'And thought existence but a fairy dream', in Chatterton's 'Elegy [III]'. [20] This seems straightforward: Chatterton's editor does not note any other ancestor to the phrase, though perhaps it owes something to Puck's: 'And this weak and idle theme, / No more yielding but a dream...' (Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, V, i, 416-17).

Thirdly, Lubin, the quasi-autobiographical 'village minstrel' (or 'peasant boy'), who is the subject of Clare's long poem 'The Village Minstrel' (1819-21), likes to sit and muse on history:

Where ling clad heaths & pastures now may spread
He oft has heard of castle & of hall
& oft cur[i]osity his step hath led
To gaze on some old arch or fretting wall
Where ivy scrambles up to stop the fall
There woud he sit him down & look & sigh
& bye gone days back to his mind woud call
The bloody war[r]ing times of chivallry
When danes invading routs made unarmed britons fly

The stanza seems strongly Rowleian. Clare's Danes remind one of the Danes whose invasion so melodramatically interrupts Aella's wedding festivities:

Messengere.

Aella, the Danes ar thondrynge on our coaste;
Lyche scolles of locusts, caste oppe bie the sea...
Haste, haste O Aella, to the byker flie... [21]

More loosely, the 'bloody warring times of chivalry' may suggest the bloodthirstiness of Rowleian epic and drama. But it is the posture of Lubin in this stanza that most suggests Chatterton-Rowley: his 'cur[i]osity', the sense of seated or reclining enrapturement, and the 'gaze', 'sigh' and 'call' (i.e. recall or memory). It is a particular feature of Rowleian openings, such as that of 'Onn oure Ladies Chirch':

As onn a Hylle one Eve sittyng
At oure Ladie's Chirch mouche wonderyng
The counyng hendie worke so fine,
Han well nighe dazeled mine Eyne
(Chatterton, Works, p. 53).

And that of 'The Storie of Wyllyam Canyng':

Anent a Brooklette as I laie reclynde
Listenyng to heare the water glyde alonge...

(Chatterton, Works, pp. 241-2).

Moving from text to biography, Clare's stanza echoes a familiar image and anecdote of Chatterton (here told by Davis, pp. 33-4):

"There was one spot in particular," says Mr. Smith, "full in view of the church, where he seemed to take particular delight. He would frequently lay himself down, fix his eyes upon the church, and seem as if he was in a kind of trance. Then on a sudden, and abruptly, he would tell me, that steeple was burnt down by lightning; that was the place where they formerly acted plays..."

This sense of enraptured musing, and the dramatic conjuring up of the past, seems most strongly present in Chatterton's acknowledged poem 'Clifton' (Works, pp. 341-5), but I can find no evidence that Clare had read this. Nevertheless he has clearly captured something of the Chattertonian sense of re-creating history: not just contemplating it in a 'poetic' way, but bringing it to life himself.

These are quite interesting echoes of Chatterton, then: yet there seems something rather too detached and assured about them. The first is a straightforward homage to a line Clare has openly declared his admiration for on more than one occasion; while the second and third are, so to speak, generic. Mark Storey's diligence shows that with the second, Clare has taken a single idea from Chatterton and made it into his own, recyclable phrase. I hope that I have said enough about the third to show that its principal feature (reclining/musing/creating) is also generic: this time as a Chattertonian rather than a Clarean motif; and Clare's stanza offers a sample of its spirit. In short, Clare's echoes (as far as we have measured them so far) are imperturbably straightforward. They unostentatiously acknowledge their intertextuality. There is no mystery in them, or sense of unease.

Yet we know (and Clare is far too sensitive about questions of textual integrity not also to understand) that Chatterton's literary 'forgeries', the Rowley project, creates the uneasiest of intertextual equations, and threatens to fracture the whole idea of artistic integrity. That we do not find any trace of such tensions in the Clare's overt echoes of Chatterton is probably a result of Clare's ability to deploy the (deeply Chattertonian) defensive technique of excluding from his poetry certain tensions and contradictions that he did not want to appear there. This is especially apparent in the asylum verse, which (unlike many of Clare's recorded prose statements of that period) shows little sign of the kind of dissonant utterance we think

of as 'madness'. (For Chatterton the trait is strongest in the Rowley Poems, of course, where many of his frustrations and most of his rage is filtered out.) To find a more uneasy or subversive Chattertonian influence, we need to look behind as well as inside the literary product, and particularly in the 1820s, the period of greatest unresolved stress in Clare's work. And there, indeed, we find a small but important area of quasi-Rowleian activity.

In brief, Clare made several attempts in 1825, some of which were successful, to pass off his own poetry as the work of a group of well-known seventeenth century poets. This involved some strategies of 'forgery': lying to his patrons; disguising his handwriting and identity. Inevitably the 'sad non-identity' of Clare's later years, the apparent collapse of his sense of self, will be seen as the tragic epilogue to these events. Their prologue is clearly in the comic mode. In 1821 there is no Rowleian time-slip: just a little fancy-dress party. On 14 June 'Stephen Timms' writes to John Taylor, not this time in the latter's capacity as Clare's editor, but as the editor of the London Magazine (to which Clare had frequently contributed in propria persona):

Mr Editor,

I am a countryman in a very humble way & my friends will have it I may rise by trying my tallents at poetry which they consider as very exellent indeed

We learn about the author's 'Uncle Zebedee', and 'my poor Grandmother Ailsey Timms'. The author is 'mortgagously pleasd' with 'Humphrey Nixons letter', whereas 'Granny (as you might expect) is all for "Walter Selby"'. The accompanying poem, 'Some account of my Kin, my Tallents & myself' is slightly more seriously autobiographical, but also takes up some of the same timelessly familiar props of cod-rusticism: i.e. outlandish names, malapropisms, and general cultural cringe. The literary works mentioned refer to contemporary writing in the London Magazine, as Mark Storey notes. 'Humphrey Nixon' was thought to be one of J. H. Reynolds's many pseudonymns; 'Walter Selby' relates to the discussion of ballads. The letter is, in one aspect, a ventilation of Clare's anxieties about the way the London wits saw him, a parodic version of himself as yokel. The impression one gets from the sources is that the wits' attitudes seem to teeter delicately on the line between, on the one hand, genuine admiration and affection for Clare, and on the other, mockery and patronage. It is a borderline suggestively illustrated by Charles Lamb's witty nicknames for Clare: 'Princely Clare', 'Clarissimus', and (a propos the 'rustic' Hilton portrait of Clare) 'C in alt'. The rustic buffoonery of Stephen Timms is a conduit, or scapegoat, for the cultural anxieties these attitudes reflect. [22]

The letter also reflects Clare's desire to join in the games of the London Magazine crowd. We know that from his first trip to London in 1820, Clare took pleasure in the game of literary disguises: 'give my respects to Hessey, Hilton, Keats & "Tothill fields"', he writes to Taylor on 31 August 1820 (Letters, p. 90), obviously happy to be part of this circle, and enjoying his insider knowledge of J.H. Reynold's latest anonymous production ('The Fields of Tothill', published in The Fancy, 1820). The letter also perhaps serves warning to Taylor of something more serious: that peasant poet was a grotesque form of motley which Clare could not be expected to dress in forever. (Clare's unease in the costume may also be unconsciously signalled by the difficulty he has in writing 'peasant poet'--so that he more than once refers to himself as 'the Northamptonshire pheasant'-- my italics.) The warning may be read in the Timms poem, too, where a spark of Clarean satire begins to ignite:

Truth waits times touchstone as the just attacker
To burst the bubble & to put to rout
Each pompous sounding literary cracker--
Mine lives as long as many Ive no doubt
(Letters, p, 197)

Or as he would put it to Taylor more gloomily, three months later:

...but let me wait another year or two & t[h]e peep show will be over--& my vani[ty] if I have any will end in its proper mortification to know that obscurity is happiness & that John Clare the thresher in the outset & neglected ryhmer in the end are the only two comfortable periods of his life
(Letters, p. 215).

As part of its overt absurdity the Timms letter gives the game away by the handwriting and a postscript accidentally-on-purpose signed 'J. Clare'. But when on 19 October 1822 a second new poet, one 'Percey Green', wrote to Taylor enclosing a poem, the handwriting was disguised. Yet Clare still signalled his real identity clearly enough: if Taylor could not smoke it through the pastoral-rustic surname (Clare was teased and celebrated in London for the 'green' jacket he was so proud of), he certainly could not fail to miss it in the postscript, which also gets to the heart of the matter:

P.S. I have heard it affirmed that your predilection for the Northamptonshire Peasants poetry has made you blind to the more high & refined style be as it will I have made the attempt wether it be attended with success or not
yours again &c &c P.G.

(For once he spells 'Peasant' correctly.) High and low culture, and high and low class, are the theme of this hoax letter, which not only purports to offer something in the 'high and refined style' as a counterweight to peasant poetry, but also (while implicitly offering a crypto-Wordsworthian defence of simplicity) manages to link together and then mock, literary 'height' (the sublime 'Castrophe'), and the aristocracy:

I know a simple tale of love now a days (like a name without a title) is nothing without a Castrophe mine is the 'Suicide' thus much is sufficient

The 'Suicide' reference is to the title poem of the small collection of poems which Clare presumably sent with this letter, some of which found their way into the London Magazine. Mark Storey describes the manuscript as follow:

PMS A24 is a quarto MS book with a mock title-page: 'Edmund & Helen or the Suecide / A Story of Love / with other Poems / By Percey Green / "Kissing & cutting of throats" / Sir W. Scott' (Letters, p. 248n2).

But the racy sex-and-violence of the Scott epigraph cannot conceal the fact that 'Edmund and Helen' is a poor effort, which even Clare's editors, with their resurgent enthusiasm for his narrative poetry, cannot defend. As they put it, 'Clare found himself thinking "worse and worse" of this potboiler as he went, and modern readers might well agree'. [23]

The important Chattertonian features of these early impostures lie, not so much in their content (interesting--and redolent of Chatterton--as it sometimes is), but more in the way they reveal the temper of their author. By dressing up in his new disguises, Clare expresses his discomfort in the literary clothes he has been made to wear, just as Chatterton had resented the mundane exploitation of his ability to write, in Lambert's law office. Resentment and insecurity are strongly present in both writers, as they chafe uneasily within their narrow roles and look for ways out. Both tend to let off steam through satire (Chatterton's is more vicious; Clare's more laden with righteous anger). Both yearn for literary alternatives to their social existence, and they characteristically privilege particular spaces in their environments: for Chatterton, most especially, St Mary Redcliffe Church and its grounds; for Clare, the

familiar litany of places around Helpston: Swordy Well, Langley Bush, Round Oak Waters, and so on. [24]

Clare's 1825 forgeries are even more Chattertonian; this time in content, method and purpose as much as in general temper. Chatterton's Rowley creation had been an essentially utopian venture, had attempted to turn its back on the 'real world' and show by its idealistic example that there is another way to live. Clare's 1825 forgeries--or rather the concept towards which these forgeries were striving, also tries to do this, it seems to me. There is again nothing particularly unusual or outstanding about the poems produced, though they are far better than those of 1821. But the enterprise is a much less random, much more concerted attempt to imagine an alternative to the rapidly-receding hopes of Clare's patronage-dependent peasant poethood. There is also, as the Tibbles revealed, an important Clarean equivalent to Chatterton's 'Rowley Prose'--that curious miscellany of letters and chronicles, genealogical and archaeological history, sketches, mottoes and other odds and ends by means of which Chatterton provided background ambience, and generally patched together the whole stage-set of Rowleyism. Clare's Explayneals (to borrow a Rowleian term from Chatterton) take the form of a short fantasy-essay called 'Excursion with the Angler' (dated c. 1825). [25] It begins:

I have been having a weeks delightful Excursion with some delightful company the latchets of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose & yet were they very civil to me & seemed quite at home with my rudeness who were they think you why no less in honour then [for 'than'] the Exelent Angler & Poet Izaak Walton & his illustrious apostles of the Muse Sir Henry Wooton Sir Walter Raleigh Dr. Donne Charles Cotton Mr. George Herbert Mr. Richard Hooker...

The self-abasement at the beginning of the passage seems at first sight to be the familiar reflex bowing and scraping to authority traditionally required of the 'peasant poet'. It is only when one comes to this after having looked at the productions of Clare's seventeenth-century phase, that one realises that it is this--or rather what follows it (the poet's emergence into the near-egalitarian sunshine of '& yet were they very civil to me & seemed quite at home with my rudeness')--that is the key to the whole exercise.

Undoubtedly Clare admired the seventeenth-century poets qua poets; but he did not copy them particularly closely. None of the seven 'seventeenth-century' poems he launched in 1825 are particularly 'seventeenth-century' in tone: and certainly not remotely to the degree that the Rowley poems are 'Medieval'. One finds

a few seventeenth-century ideas among them: a Rochesterian 'Lifes ignis fatu[u]s', for example, in the middle of the otherwise thoroughly Gray's Elegy-like 'Thoughts in a Churchyard' (see The Midsummer Cushion, p. 89). But there is no real sense of homage, pastiche, allusion, echo or plain plagiarism. Indeed it is remarkable how well all seven poems--even the one originally entitled (with almost Chattertonian verve) 'To John Milton, From his Honoured friend William Davenant'--would later fit into Clare's mature collection The Midsummer Cushion. Admittedly, when that collection finally appeared in full in 1979, it was hailed as triumphant proof of Clare's extraordinary versatility and range: but the seven mock-seventeenth-century poems in it simply did not and do not clash in any way with the rest of Clare's mainstream mature poetry.

To the reader who has come to these poems from the perspective of their production as neo-Chattertonian literary forgeries, this seems extraordinary. It leads one to question the Chatterton influence: but the influence is unavoidably present. The two pseudonymous letters Clare wrote to William Hone on 23 June and 2 Aug 1825 (the first boldly signed by 'James Gilderoy', a romantic Scottish bandit whose story featured in Percy's Reliques) seem to imitate the style of, and even specifically echo Chatterton's first 'forgery' letter. In this he had offered his 'Bridge Narrative' and its two attendant poems to the editor of the Bristol local paper, Felix Farley's Bristol Journal. It began as follows:

Mr. Printer

The following Description of the Mayors first passing over the Old Bridge may not be unacceptable to the Generality of your Readers.

Whereas Clare's 23 June letter to William Hone begins:

Sir

I percieve by the perusal of your Every day book that the neglected poetry of other days has found a friend in your taste & I have fancied that the following verses may not be deemd unacceptable to your miscellany

Again, Chatterton's postscript to the 'Bridge Narrative' letter began:

Mr. Printer,

If you think the before mentioned and underwritten Songs worth inserting they are at your disposal.

And the second sentence in the final draft of Clare's 2 August letter to Hone, reads:

if they are worthy insertion in your every day book they are at your service
[26]

(I have not found any evidence that Clare had read the Chatterton letter: but as it appeared at the very front of Chatterton's 1782 Miscellanies he would have to do little more than open a copy of that--then fairly common--book to be sure of seeing it, and it is a short letter.) He genuinely seems to be imitating the Chatterton presentational style, with its charade of disinterestedness and studiedly casual obsequiousness.

But even if Clare had never heard of Chatterton, why go through with this literary charade, with all the potential problems it might bring, without any great commitment to (as opposed to interest in) the style and content of the type of poetry one is faking? What could be the point of Clare's 'seventeenth-century' poems? The 'Excursion with the Angler' seems to offer a solution in its key image of idealistic egalitarianism: '& yet were they very civil to me & seemed quite at home with my rudeness'. Chatterton's parallel fantasy, the Thomas Rowley/William Canynge relationship, has a similar sense of relief and gratitude at the idea of being well-treated by someone important. In 'A Brief Account of William Canynge', for instance (Chatterton, Works, p. 51), 'Mastere William' is 'mickle Courteous, and gave me manie Markes for my neede', before praising 'Rowley' (i. e. Chatterton) as a 'mickle larned Preeste'. Like Chatterton, Clare wants to be treated well and to be able to be himself and yet be liked. He could no more find this in the straightjacket of peasant poethood than Chatterton could find pleasure in Lambert's office, copying legal precedents.

I began this essay with an image of letters being taken out of a poet's head. It is tempting to read that, and other asylum statements by Clare, as evidence of a less literal but equally tragic destruction of a poet's mind: particularly tempting to do so, indeed, if we stick too closely to the rather deterministic sense of socio-economic inevitability I put forward at the beginning of this essay. But as we have seen, the statement can equally well be read as a poet's eloquent metaphor, a way of describing his experiences of literary restraint and oppression: linguistic confiscation, or literary censorship, as a form of personal violation.

What then do we make of what Clare told the journalist G. J. De Wilde, earlier in his asylum years:

We walked side by side towards Kingsthorpe, and at last he startled me with a quotation from Childe Harold and then one from Shakespeare. I do not recall what the passages were, but I was still more startled when he said they were his own. 'Yours!' I exclaimed, 'Who are you? These are Byron's and Shakespeare's verses, not yours!' 'It's all the same' he answered, changing a quid from one cheek to the other. 'I'm John Clare now. I was Byron and Shakespeare formerly. At different times you know I'm different people--that is the same person with different names'. [27]

It is easy to put this alongside other things Clare said: that he was the boxer Ben Caunt; that he was Nelson or Wellington and had had his head blown off at the Battle of Waterloo; that he had no pupils in his eyes, and so on; and to talk confidently of schizophrenia and delusional states. But again we may equally well read it metaphorically, as a rejection of the fetish of individual authorship, or as a personal statement about self-esteem and identity--a way of saying that he is just as important as Byron and Shakespeare, or even that it doesn't matter what his name is. These kinds of meanings, though they do not sit particularly easily with the Western idea of personal and literary identity, nevertheless contain wisdom. They enabled Clare to survive, for one thing (he had been badly harmed as a young poet by the pressures of praise and blame on 'his' poetry). They also help us, his readers, to think about literary identity, literary authority, authorship and authorisation. Chatterton, with his protean literary activities and his brilliantly subversive strategies, is a key figure in Clare's life and in the development of his thought on identity and related subjects. His influence goes far beyond literary modes and styles, as I hope this survey of the subject has begun to show.

NOTES

I would like to thank David Powell for supplying information on the poets in Clare's library, Paul Dawson for transcribing and identifying Clare's Chatterton quotations in PMS A17, Alison Ramsden and Helen Boden for reading and commenting on this essay with their usual generosity and care; and Nick Groom for his suggestions, encouragement, and patience.

The sigla PMS and NMS indicate Clare manuscripts in the Peterborough Museum (PMS) and the Northampton Library (NMS).

- [1] Cited in Edward Storey, A Right to Song, the Life of John Clare (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 295.
- [2] See The Letters of John Clare, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 654-84, passim. These quotations are from pp. 654, 661, 657, 661, and 657 respectively.
- [3] The Letters of John Clare, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford, 1985), pp. 537-8 and 545; Robert Southey, The Lives of the Uneducated Poets [1831], ed. J.S. Childers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 3; John Clare, The Midsummer Cushion, ed. Kelsey Thornton and Anne Tibble (Manchester: Carcanet and Ashington: Mid-Northumberland Arts Group, 1990), p. 122
- [4] E.H.W. Meyerstein, A Life of Thomas Chatterton (London: Ingpen and Grant, 1930), p. xv.
- [5] The Letters of John Clare, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 3.
- [6] The Letters of John Clare, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford, 1985), p. 172. Clare's Chatterton/Keats/Bloomfield tombstone drawing, which is in PMS A17, is described by Margaret Grainger in A Descriptive Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery (Peterborough: privately printed, 1973), p. 3 .
- [7] A.J. Sambrook, 'The Farmer's Boy: Robert Bloomfield, 1766-1823', English 16 (1967) 167-71. Bloomfield had been the most successful of the 'peasant poets'. The son of a tailor from Honington, Suffolk, brought up by his widowed mother (a village schoolmistress), he moved to London at 15 to work with his brothers as an errand boy, then an apprentice shoemaker. His first publication, The Farmer's Boy, a Rural Poem (1800), a blank verse descriptive poem in four books after the manner of Thomson's Seasons, was a huge success, selling some 30,000 copies and making its author into a celebrity. He continued to publish poetry, notably Rural Tales (1802), Wild Flowers (1806), and The Banks of Wye (1811). His success waned, and in 1814 he retired in increasing ill-health to Shefford where he died seven years later. Clare, as Donald Davie notes, considered Bloomfield 'in many ways his master'. Bloomfield's daughter Hannah visited Clare in the asylum. See C[apel] L[loft], 'Preface' and 'Supplement', in Bloomfield's The Farmer's Boy, a Rural Poem (London: Vernor

and Hood, fifth edition, 1801), iii-xxix; William Wickett and Nicholas Duval, The Farmer's Boy, the Story of a Suffolk Poet, Robert Bloomfield, His Life and Poems 1766-1823 (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1971); Donald Davie, 'More Hers than Hymns', Independent on Sunday, 25 April 1993, p. 38.

- [8] John Keats, Letters of John Keats, a Selection, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 12.
- [9] Cited by Virginia Woolf in A Room of Ones Own (London: Triad Grafton, 1987), pp. 101-2. I have not yet published my database of information on insanity, alcoholism and suicide among self-taught poets; but see John Goodridge 'Some Predecessors of Clare: Stephen Duck' and 'Some Predecessors of Clare: 2. The Response to Duck', in The John Clare Society Journal 8 (1989) 5-10; 9 (1990) 17-16.
- [10] Johanne Clare, John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), pp. 87-8.
- [11] John Clare, John Clare's Autobiographical Writings, ed. Eric Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 83. I have silently emended Robinson's 'which his extrodinary Genius was scarcely known[n]' to the reading in the Tibble's edition of Clare's Prose, 'while...', as the former makes no sense.
- [12] The Chatterton poem to which Clare is responding is 'The Resignation' and not the unrelated 'Resignation, A Poem' which Robinson and Powell mistakenly cite in their edition of Clare's Early Poems, I, p. 573n. The former is in Chatterton's Works, ed. Donald S. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 684-6. The Clare Poem is in Early Poems, I, pp. 325-7, where Robinson and Powell also footnote an interesting but highly fragmentary poem on Chatterton, from a torn page of PMS A7 (which is dated 1819-21):

Youths more then []
 Ah oer thy early da[]
 To hear the droop neath wants un[] sky
 When hopes weak rushlight longer [] to burn
 <& nights want around nor promisd days return>
 & left black night around & promisd no return

On Chatterton

Given Clare's spelling habits, 'the' in line 3 may well signify 'thee'.

- [13] According to J.W. and Anne Tibble in their 1972 Life (p. 30), 'Chatterton's tragic story was often depicted on handkerchiefs, as well as extracts from poems'. The combination of materials presumably varied somewhat: the Chatterton Handkerchief reproduced both by E.H.W. Meyerstein (opposite p. 476) and by Linda Kelly in The Marvellous Boy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), opposite p. 29, from a specimen in the British Museum (reference C. 39. h. 20), and which is dated by Kelly to 1781, has a portrait of 'the unfortunate CHATTERTON' flanked by a prose description of, and a poem inspired by, the portrait.
- [14] J.W. and Anne Tibble, John Clare, a Life (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 44-5.
- [15] John Davis, The Life of Thomas Chatterton (London: Thomas Tegg, 1806); George Gregory, 'The Life of Thomas Chatterton' in The Works of Thomas Chatterton, ed. Robert Southey and Joseph Cottle (London: Longman and Rees, 1803), three volumes, Vol. I, pp. i-clx; 'John Dix' [= George Spencer Phillips, c. 1800-1865], The Life of Thomas Chatterton (London: Hamilton Adams & Co, 1837); Robert Southey, Specimens of the Later English Poets (London, 1807), three volumes. Southey's comments on Chatterton are in Vol. II, p. 420: he calls Chatterton's suicide 'innocent', refers to his 'hunger', violently objects to the charge of forgery, and generally conforms to Meyerstein's caricature of 'sentimental Chatterton'. This collection is in Clare's library, though the acquisition date is not known: see [David Powell], Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library (Northampton: Northampton Public Libraries, 1964), Item 366.
- [16] Margaret Grainger (ed), The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 177-8. For greater clarity I italicise the dates and do not include all Grainger's textual markings.
- [17] The acquisition date of Clare's copy of the Rowley Poems, and other additional information on Clare's reading here, is based on Grainger's very thorough annotation, pp. 177-8. Clare transcribed the passage on Kenewalchae--omitting a few single lines--into an 'appendix' to his Journal (NMS 15, pp. 119-20).

- [18] Clare's biographers are all fairly slippery about chronology and dating; my summary of 1823-4 is collated from information in June Wilson, Green Shadows: the Life of John Clare (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), pp. 118-150; J.W and Anne Tibble, John Clare, a Life (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), pp. 169-220; and Edward Storey, A Right to Song: the Life of John Clare (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 183-91.
- [19] John Clare, The Oxford Authors: John Clare, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p 126. In her edition of Clare's Natural History Prose Writings Grainger, p. 178n2, also notes that 'Pied daisies, kynge-coppes' occur at l. 112 of Aella. Clare also quotes line 6 of 'Songe to Aella' in his 'Natural History Letter III' as evidence of remembering poets when one sees flowers (celandine for Wordsworth; daisy for Burns; and 'taller buttercup' for Chatterton). See the Grainger edition, p. 41.
- [20] Mark Storey, The Poetry of John Clare: a Critical Introduction (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 119-20, 212n17; Chatterton, Complete Works, ed. Donald S. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971, pp. 583-4)
- [21] 'The Village Minstrel', Verse 97, in The Early Poems of John Clare, ed. Robinson, Powell and Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), II, p. 161; 'Aella', lines 356-7 and 364, in The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton, ed. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 188.
- [22] See The Letters of John Clare, ed Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 196-8 and 196n2; Edward Storey, A Right to Song: the Life of John Clare (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 182; J.W. and Anne Tibble, A Life of John Clare (London: Michael Joseph. 1972), p. 125.
- [23] John Clare, Cottage Tales, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Manchester: Carcanet, and Ashington: Mid-Northumberland Arts Group, 1993), 'Introduction', p. xi. 'Edmund & Hellen A Story of Love' is in Clare's Early Poems, II, 549-76.
- [24] The urge to re-discover and share the transcendent qualities of these poets' sacred spots is witnessed by the overflowing visitor's book at St Mary Redcliffe Church, and the growing enthusiasm for 'Clare Country'. For the most recent

evidence of the latter see Peter Moyses, John Clare, the Poet and the Place (Helpston: Crossberry Press, 1993); Christopher Somerville, 'Under a Cloud with the Peasant Poet', Weekend Telegraph (3 July 1993), p. XXVII.

- [25] John and Anne Tibble, John Clare, His Life and Work (London: Heinemann, 1956), pp. 127-9; Chatterton, Works, pp. 67 ('Explayneals' is glossed by Taylor as 'explanations, supplements'); John Clare, The Prose of John Clare, ed. J.W. and Anne Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), pp. 234-6
- [26] Chatterton, Complete Works, ed. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 56-7; Clare, Letters, ed. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 335, 335n, 341.
- [27] As quoted in J.W. and Anne Tibble, A Life of Clare (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), pp. 372-3.

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