EDMOND MALONE UNMASKING FORGERY: THOMAS CHATTERTON AND THE ROWLEY CONTROVERSY

By Nick Groom

Edmond Malone played a central role in exposing literary forgery: ‘unmasking’, as he put it, Thomas Chatterton in the ‘Rowley Controversy’ (usually dated 1777–82), and William Henry Ireland in the affair of the ‘Shakspeare Papers’ (1795–6). ¹ This essay on Chatterton, and its companion piece on Ireland (due in a future issue of the Bodleian Library Record), significantly revise the chronology of these episodes and in doing so reposition Malone’s own role and reconsider the implications of his work.

In his biography of Edmond Malone (1995), Peter Martin gives his subject a central part in the Rowley Controversy, presenting him as a key player in establishing that the collection of poetry and prose, allegedly written in the fifteenth century by Thomas Rowley and his circle in Bristol, supposedly discovered by Thomas Chatterton in the church of St Mary Redcliffe, and subsequently published to critical acclaim in 1777, were in fact modern productions composed by the teenaged Chatterton.² Martin observes that Malone responded very promptly to Jacob Bryant’s Observations upon Rowley, his lengthy defence of the authenticity of the Rowley works, published in December 1781. Malone’s retort was indeed almost instant, a two-part essay in the Gentleman’s Magazine for December 1781 and January 1782, published under the name of ‘Misopiclerus’.³ By the end of January he had expanded this into a pamphlet, Cursory Observations, published at the beginning of February 1782 and warmly

¹ I am grateful to Dr Alan Coates, Prof. John Goodridge, Prof. Jack Lynch, the University of Exeter Library, and the BLR’s editor and anonymous readers for their support and help with this essay. Malone also exposed the elderly Irish actor and playwright Charles Macklin in 1790, demolishing a minor Jonsonian forgery he had perpetrated in 1748.
³ ‘Misopiclerus’ may be an ironic pseudonym derived from misoponos (‘labour-hating’ in ancient Greek), a term used by Plato in the Republic for those who avoided both physical and intellectual labour, and so occasionally adopted as an allegorical character name by Renaissance writers.
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received by the literary antiquaries Thomas Percy, Thomas Tyrwhitt and Thomas Warton, and the Gothic connoisseur Horace Walpole. Malone was the first to respond to the renewed assault by the ‘Pro-Rowleians’ Jeremiah Milles (President of the Society of Antiquaries and editor of a weighty edition of the Rowley poems, 1782) and the afore-mentioned mythographer Bryant. According to Percy, who wrote on 19 February 1782 to thank Malone for the gift of Cursory Observations, the latter’s attack was ‘in many points I think quite decisive of the Question’.

But the controversy did not end there, and more significantly for our purposes here, neither had it begun with the publication of Bryant’s Observations in 1781, nor indeed with the edition of the Rowley Poems published in 1777 (edited by none other than Thomas Tyrwhitt, with the apparent assistance of George Steevens). There is, it transpires, a lengthy prehistory to the Rowley Controversy, which begins immediately after the death of the young Chatterton in 1770, the full story of which is yet to be told. What follows is a necessarily brief account, but one that demonstrates the complexities of the affair both before and during Edmond Malone’s involvement, and the sophisticated nature of his own contribution.

Thomas Chatterton died in London on the night of 24 August 1770. News reached Bristol while Dr Thomas Fry, President of St John’s College, Oxford, was visiting the city. Fry was a Bristolian and an alumnus of


6 For further dimensions, see Pat Rogers, ‘Chatterton and the Club’, and my own chapter, ‘Fragments, Reliques, & MSS: Chatterton and Percy’, both in Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture, ed. Nick Groom (London and New York, 1999), pp. 121–50 and 188–209, respectively (the present article builds on the latter essay).

7 Fry had been there since the end of June: ‘June 30. I went to Bristol and returned Oct. 12, 1770 – ’ (St John’s College, Oxford, Muniments [hereafter ‘SJCO Muniments’], LXXXVI. D. 7). Fry kept a diary covering the last four years of his life (1768–72); although
Bristol Grammar School, and a regular visitor to the city – he owned a property there and spent fifteen weeks in Bristol in the summer of 1768, and again in 1770. Fry certainly had contact with Dr Francis Woodward (himself an alumnus of both the grammar school and St John’s), who was by then a physician practicing in Bath, and Woodward was a friend of George Catcott, the Bristol antiquary who, with William Barrett, acted as a semi-patron to Chatterton – so it is highly likely that it was through Woodward that Fry heard of the Rowley poems. Indeed, Woodward and Fry subsequently spent time together in Bristol on Chatterton’s trail. Whatever the connection, Fry clearly had access to Catcott and was permitted to borrow from him – and copy – ten pieces of Rowleian poetry and prose, although Catcott stipulated that Fry should not allow any further copies to be made. Fry returned the texts on 25 September, having inaccurately copied Catcott’s already inaccurate versions into a manuscript book. It is tempting to conclude that Fry would have made this book known in Oxford, though there is no record that he did so in his

currently in private hands there are two transcripts in St John’s College, Oxford: details of Fry’s movements are accordingly taken from the transcript made by W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley (SJCO Muniments, LXXXVI. D. 8), compared with that made by A. L. Poole (SJCO Muniments, LXXXVI. D. 7). Sadly, Fry did not make any diary entries during his stays in Bristol. For Fry, see W. Haythorne [Mrs R. A. Parsons], ‘The Twentieth President of St. John Baptist College’, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, 213 (January 1923), 28–36; and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

8 SJCO Muniments, LXXXVI. D. 8, fols. 28r, 33r.
9 Dr Francis Woodward had resigned from the Bristol infirmary in 1769 for a practice utilizing the therapeutic waters of Bath; among his later patients were a young Horatio Nelson (1781) and Sophia Thrale, daughter of Samuel Johnson’s friends Henry and Hester and a favourite of Johnson’s (1783). Fry occasionally mentions a ‘Woodward’ in his diary, but in the entry for 12 April 1770, despite the fact that it records Woodward going to Bristol, this is in fact ‘Dean Woodward’, i.e. Richard Woodward, Dean of Clogher (SJCO Muniments, LXXXVI. D. 8, fol. 56r). Ironically, Dean Woodward had himself visited Bath on 5 February 1769 ‘on account of a Bilious Cholic’ (SJCO Muniments, LXXXVI. D. 8, fol. 36r).

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(admittedly brief) diary entries – although he did set to work on an essay asserting the authenticity of the Rowley papers.13

The next record of activity appears to be 5 April 1771, when Woodward introduced Oliver Goldsmith to Catcott via a letter of introduction; Goldsmith allegedly offered Catcott £200 for the papers, but failed to secure them. Less than three weeks later, Goldsmith met Horace Walpole at the Academy dinner on 23 April. Walpole later remembered that:

Dr. Goldsmith drew the attention of the company with an account of a marvellous treasure of ancient poems lately discovered at Bristol, and expressed enthusiastic belief in them, for which he was laughed at by Dr. Johnson, who was present.14

Two years earlier, in March 1769, Chatterton had courted Walpole’s patronage by sending him ‘The Ryse of Penycteynge yn Englāde’, ‘Historie of Peynters yn Englande’, and various other Rowleian pieces. However, Walpole’s initial enthusiasm for Rowley had been dampened by Thomas Gray and William Mason, who pronounced the works forgeries, and so after a bitter exchange the papers were apparently returned to Chatterton, without Walpole having made copies.15 But Goldsmith’s news at the Academy dinner of the boy’s death certainly shocked ‘baron Otranto’.16 Lord Hardwicke, meanwhile, was intrigued enough by hearing of the affair at the dinner that he wrote to Goldsmith declaring that he would inquire into the character of Chatterton during his season at Bath: ‘The circumstances of the young man’s history who sent some of the poems to Mr. Walpole will greatly tend to clear up this matter …. He may either have been the forger or the mender of them.’17

One question that begs to be answered, however, is how on earth Samuel Johnson suddenly became such an expert in a controversy that had barely begun? Was Rowley being hotly debated at Oxford in early 1771, coming to Johnson’s ear through the agency of Thomas Warton? It is just possible, because Warton is another thread in the reception of the Rowley works. He wrote in 1782 that he was shown a collection ‘About ten

13 BRL, B5342 (paginated), pp. 179–81; see also Manuscripts and Correspondence of Charlemont, i, pp. 315–16.
14 Horace Walpole, A Letter to the Editor of the Miscellanies of Thomas Chatterton (Strawberry Hill, 1779), p. 37.
16 Chatterton’s disdainful name for Walpole in ‘Memoirs of a Sad Dog’ (see Chatterton, Works, i, pp. 651–62, at p. 658; published 1770).
17 Meyerstein, Life of Chatterton, p. 452; Philip Yorke, second Earl of Hardwicke, was described by Walpole in 1757 as ‘historically curious and political’ (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography).
years ago’ by the Earl of Lichfield: ‘I expressed my suspicions that they were probably spurious.’\(^\text{18}\) He then admitted that Dr Fry had written ‘a plausible and ingenious letter in defence of their originality ... not the first doctor in divinity destined to be a dupe to this egregious imposture’.\(^\text{19}\) Alternatively, Walpole’s own memory may have been faulty: in his defensive *Letter to the Editor of the Miscellanies* (1779) he was writing at a distance of eight years and frequently admits to having forgotten details.

Word certainly spread throughout 1771. The Revd John Chapman (vicar of Weston, near Bath), wrote to the oddball antiquary and librarian Dr Andrew Ducarel on 15 December 1771 in response to two inquiries about Chatterton and Rowley. He reported:

> I was all day yesterday with Mr. Catcott, who read the tragedy to me, and the other poetical pieces, with which I was charmed .... I begged with most earnest importunity for a copy of this song, which I dare say was a favourite song in Shakespeare’s time, for he puts the burthen of it into the mouth of Ophelia in the play of Hamlet. But, earnest as I was, I could not prevail upon Mr. Catcott to suffer me to copy it.\(^\text{20}\)

That was to be expected, except that Catcott then broke his own cardinal rule: ‘All I could get from him was the extract I have inclosed’ – which amounted to a truncated and inaccurate copy of the description of spring and autumn in the first minstrels’ song (ll. 278–307). Chapman also repeated the story that Catcott had been offered £200 for the works, but put this down to rumour and suggested he might accept £100.

Ducarel did not hesitate in communicating the extract to Thomas Percy, editor of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), friend and clubman of Johnson, and later friend and correspondent of Malone. He announced on 13 January 1772 that,

> Dr. Percy has seen many former specimens of the same verses, and heard a great deal of the history of the discovery; which, when he has the pleasure to see Dr. Ducarel, he will relate at large: at present he can only say, that their genuineness is rather doubted till the original MS. can be produced.\(^\text{21}\)

Again it is unclear how Percy could have inspected any Rowley works this early, unless it was again through Fry (with whom he has no recorded contact), or Oxford intellectual gossip more generally – yet although he


\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 2.


was a graduate of Christ Church himself, and despite regular trips to London and Northumberland, Percy does not appear to have visited Oxford in 1770–71; moreover it is evident he was not yet correspond ing with Warton on the subject.\textsuperscript{22} It is more likely that copies of Fry’s transcripts had found their way to London, as it appears that at least the ‘Songe toe Ella’ was circulating. But even if Percy’s remark on having ‘seen many former specimens of the same verses’ may be an exaggeration, it does nevertheless indicate an appetite for news of Rowley and suggests an obligation to make up one’s mind on the subject of authenti city. Percy may also have informed Johnson of his opinion, as on 1 February 1772\textsuperscript{23}, Barrett wrote that, ‘M’. S. Johnson I hear has denied ye Authenticity of “the Song to Ella”.\textsuperscript{23} Again, Johnson’s judgement appears remarkably early.

Barrett then corresponded with Ducarel through Matthew Brickdale, MP for Bristol, who on 14 March forwarded Barrett’s letter of a week before (7 March) to Ducarel, including a copy of the increasingly ubiquitous ‘Songe toe Ella’. Meanwhile on 10 April 1772 Catcott agreed to publication of \textit{Sir Charles Bawdin}, which appeared in early May. Fry, with whom he had corresponded during this period, was disappointed at the decision to publish the ‘Bristowe Tragedie’, writing on 14 April 1772 that ‘It will do no honour to Mr. Rowley’s memory.’\textsuperscript{24} Fry was right: the publication of \textit{Sir Charles Bawdin} was a disaster, and Catcott had to re think his strategy.\textsuperscript{25} On 12 September, a jubilant Chapman wrote to Ducarel that he had visited Catcott again, who had now dropped his price to £50, ‘and I believe would have taken forty’.\textsuperscript{26} But neither Chapman nor Ducarel bought the pieces.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{22} No letters to or from Warton survive from this period, and in any case, Warton’s to Percy on 29 July 1774 indicates that they had not as yet discussed Chatterton.
\textsuperscript{23} BRL, B11457, fol. 72\textsuperscript{.}
\textsuperscript{24} Meyerstein, \textit{Life of Chatterton}, p. 451.
\textsuperscript{25} See Groom, ‘\textit{Fragments, Reliques,} & MSS’, pp. 194–5. Fry now drops out of the story: he died on 22 November 1772.
\textsuperscript{26} Nichols, \textit{Illustrations}, iv, p. 584.
\textsuperscript{27} Chapman, garrulous and tactless, declared: <Q>I hope some man of genius and fortune, if they can be found in one man, will take some pains to unite these excellent pieces, and be at the expence of purchasing and presenting them to the publick in the form and manner they deserve. You must know that this Catcott is a pewterer, and though very fond of scribbling, especially since he has got Rowley’s Works, is extremely ignorant and illiterate. He is, however, very vain, and fancies himself almost as great a genius as the great Rowley himself. (Nichols, \textit{Illustrations}, iv, p. 584)\textsuperscript{.}

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Chapman’s suggestion for a new strategy was to target ‘some man of genius and fortune’.28 Thus it was that in the same month of September 1772 Catcott’s physician friend Woodward informed his patient Lady Charlemont of the discovery of the works of Rowley, who in turn casually conveyed the news to her husband.29 James Caulfeild, earl of Charlemont, was a connoisseur and Irish diplomat who the following year would be elected to Johnson’s Club.30 Charlemont’s interest was piqued by the news. He and his wife were staying at Hot Wells, and so promptly visited Catcott at home in Bristol the very next morning at 11 o’clock. Catcott described the visit:

they came accordingly, and staid several Hours; during which time, his Lordship … made many judicious remarks on the beauty of the Poems, which he was pleased to say, was greatly superior to the Compositions of Rowley’s Contemporaries, and hardly equal’d by any of our modern Writers.31

The day after, Charlemont visited again and asked to be introduced to Barrett in order to examine the original MSS, ‘and after a very minute Examination said he was perfectly satisfied of their Authenticity’.32 Charlemont then ordered a set of transcripts of ‘The Tournament’, ‘Ælla’, and the Prologue and Chorus to ‘The Tragedy of Godwynn’, for which he paid Catcott fifteen guineas.33

Importantly, however, the pieces were effectively only lent: Catcott drew up a memorandum which Charlemont signed on 12 October 1772, agreeing not to disseminate the poems except by reading them aloud. In this memorandum Charlemont undertakes not to print the documents, ‘And I do also promise, that I will not lend said Mss out of my Possession, so as that they may be learn’d by heart, or transcrib’d by any Person whatever’.34 For his part, Charlemont stipulated precisely how the manuscript book should look: size, paper, layout and conventions of

28 Ibid.
29 Meyerstein, Life of Chatterton, p. 453; Charlemont later (21 July 1778) received an account of Chatterton’s life from Woodward (Manuscripts and Correspondence of Charlemont, i, pp. 340–42).
30 ‘Among the new recruits were Lord Charlemont, Garrick, William Jones, and Boswell in 1773; George Steevens, Charles James Fox, and Gibbon in 1774; Adam Smith in 1775; Joseph Warton and Sheridan in 1777; Malone and Thomas Warton in 1782; and Charles Burney in 1784’ (Rogers, ‘Chatterton and the Club’, p. 123; see also Correspondence of Percy and Malone, ed. Tillotson, p. 235). Caulfeild is also sometimes spelt ‘Caulfield’.
31 BRL, B5342, pp. 172–3.
32 Ibid., p. 172.
33 Cambridge University Library, Additional 6295 (see Chatterton, Works, ii, p. 923).
34 BRL, B5342, p. 173.
transcription.³⁵ Considering this transaction, had Catcott really considered surrendering the manuscripts for £40, or was Chapman now quoting the price for transcripts?

In November, Catcott was invited to dine with Lords Dacre and Camden. They were also spending the season at Bath, were likewise patients of the inescapable Woodward, and so through his agency were themselves now introduced to Rowley. Catcott was instructed to bring his texts and the three of them read ‘Ælla’, ‘The Tournament’, and ‘Sir Charles Bawdin’ ‘quite thro’’: ‘they were greatly surpris’d at the exact measure and smoothness of the Verse, as well as the numerous beautiful Similes with which the Poetry abounded; so much superior to the Times in which they were supposed to have been written’.³⁶ They believed that ‘Sir Charles Bawdin’ had been modernized by Chatterton (it had of course already been published by this time), but accepted entirely the authenticity of the other pieces. Catcott was delighted: ‘Lord Camden assured me, that if I would print them in his Name, with my Introduction ... Lord Dacre and himself, would each subscribe twenty Guineas towards defraying the Expence.’³⁷ Catcott was evidently now being extremely cautious in laying his plans for publication in London: his strategy was to pique the interest of aristocrats via Woodward’s medical practice, exhibit to them his transcripts, and finally allow an inspection of the manuscripts; any copies taken were hedged with restrictions against further copying. All this might have been fine and dandy for the Pro-Rowleians, were it not for Barrett doing the exact opposite: in the very same month that Catcott and Woodward were trying to tempt men of genius and fortune to invest in the publication, Barrett lent Lord Dacre the actual ‘originals’ of ‘Songe toe Ella’ and the ‘Yellowe Rolle’.³⁸ Barrett hoped to have these manuscripts authenticated in London, but they would end up in the hands of Percy, who would not only help to torpedo the entire enterprise, but who would also cause this crucial evidence to be mislaid for several decades.³⁹

³⁵ Ibid., p. 175.
³⁶ Ibid., p. 154.
³⁷ Ibid., p. 154; there are also transcriptions in Catcott’s hand of his correspondence with Camden at BRL, B5304, pp. 153–73.
³⁸ Meyerstein, Life of Chatterton, pp. 454–5.
³⁹ Percy lent the Dacre manuscripts to Justice Robert Chambers, who unfortunately left for Bengal with them; they were rediscovered by his widow in 1803, which exonerated Percy of having interfered with the evidence. Joseph Cooper Walker in 1797 relayed the matter to Catcott, reporting Percy’s surprise that Catcott was ignorant of the facts; Catcott replied on 10 May 1797 that he finally accepted Percy’s version of events: see Nichols, Illustrations, vii, pp. 740–41; and BRL, B5304, pp. 178–88; in 1783, Percy described the incident to Thomas James Mathias (Nichols, Illustrations, viii, pp. 213–14).
Camden wrote to Catcott on 27 December for more Rowley pieces. Catcott replied on 1 January 1773 with copies of eight examples, and asked that Camden should introduce the pieces to the literati in London as ‘I have been credibly inform’d several Gentlemen well-known in the literary World, particularly M’. Horace Walpole, Dr. Johnson &c have not only expressed their Doubts concerning the Antiquity of Rowley’s writings, but have even gone so far, as to treat the whole as a forgery.’ Catcott insisted on the same restrictions against further copying that he had levied on Charlemont, excepting copies being made for Dacre. Camden responded on 11 January:

I … shall make it my Business to propagate my own Opinion of their Authenticity, & more particularly to M’ Horace Walpole the first time I see him. As to Dr. Johnson, I am not acquainted with him, and so can do no more than communicate my Sentiments to M’ Garrick, who is intimately acquainted wth. him.42

Despite sending another extract, Catcott heard nothing further for the next six months.

Yet the lords were not idle in bruiting Rowley. On 26 March 1773, Percy recorded: ‘I was at the Club: ... L’d. Charlemont read the Bristoll Poetry’ – presumably reading from the deluxe book prepared for him by Catcott.43 Again on 16 April, ‘Was at the Club: M’ Garrick produced Chatterton’s Letters’; these precipitated a tremendous row between Percy and Goldsmith, of which Joseph Cradock sadly remarked, ‘I was witness to an entire separation between Percy and Goldsmith, about Rowley’s Poems.’44 Perhaps he was – but the very next day Percy and Goldsmith went together to visit Chatterton’s garret, as Percy recorded: ‘Went with Dr. Goldsmith & Mr. Jones [Sir William Jones]: to inquire after the House where Chatterton died. Harry [Percy’s son] with me.’45 On 22

40 BRL, B5342, p. 155.
41 Ibid., pp. 156, 157.
42 Ibid., p. 159.
43 British Library (hereafter ‘BL’), Additional MS. 32336, fol. 175v. On 13 March 1773, Percy had also dined at Dacre’s with Camden; it is difficult to imagine that Rowley was not discussed, as Chatterton was clearly a major topic of conversation over the next few weeks (BL, Additional MS. 32336, fol. 174v).
April, ‘I was with Lord Camden a good part of the Morning […] he gave me some of Chatterton’s Publications.’46 Shortly afterwards, on 28 April, Dacre sent him a transcript of the parchments obtained from Barrett.47

On 19 August, during the summer season of 1773, Catcott again wrote imploringly to Camden. He admitted that publishing Sir Charles Bawdin had been a mistake, though he was not yet aware that his latest tactic was also going awry: ‘I am very anxious to know what your Lordship’s Friends, particularly Mr. Garrick, Dr. Johnson, & Mr. Walpole, think of the Authenticity of the Poems in your Lordship’s Possession … I am inform’d, they are universally admir’d for the elegance of the Compositions; but that their Authenticity with some few, still remains a doubt, and that this incredulity, is chiefly founded on the unfortunate Publication of Sir Charles Bawdin.’48 But in any case, the fate of Rowley now lay in the hands of Thomas Percy, whom Camden had consulted and who from July to October was lodged in Alnwick Castle in Northumberland. Camden replied to Catcott on 27 August 1773:

I shall know the Opinion of Dr. Piercy before I come to Bath in the Autumn, at which time, if I have the pleasure of seeing you, I will acquaint you, with every thing I have been able to collect in London touching this most extraordinary youth.49

Catcott waited until he ‘knew Dr. Piercy’s final Opinion’ before he replied a month later.50 Percy wrote to Dacre at length from Alnwick on 6 September. He had decided to dismiss the pieces after consulting the palaeographer Thomas Butler: the poems were ‘undoubtedly spurious and modern … in every respect the most glaring & undoubted Fraud’.51

On 14 September Dacre explained to Barrett: ‘As to myself, whatever I might have thought on a cursory view of these Parchments, Dr. Piercy’s and Mr. Butler’s Opinion have great weight with me.’52

Percy had scuppered the publication, and support drifted away. Catcott changed his tactics a third time and wrote to Camden again on 5 November 1773, quoting Percy’s letter, of which he had evidently

46 BL, Additional MS. 32336, fol. 178v. Percy visited the club again the next day.
47 Davis, Percy: A Scholar-Cleric, p. 202; presumably the ‘Bridge Narrative’ and ‘Elinour and Juga’ were also sent at this time.
48 BRL, B5342, p. 161.
50 BRL, B5342, p. 163.
52 BRL, B5304, p. 195.
received a copy from Barrett, on the grounds that ‘Dr. Piercy does ’em the justice to say they are highly deserving [of] Publication on Account of their great Poetical Merit.’ On the same day Catcott also wrote to Charlemont again, to inform him that Percy had declared the Rowley manuscripts to be forged. His hopes had been dashed, ‘when I fondly imagin’d they were just on the Eve of Publication’. In the meantime (c.1773 or 1774), Joseph Warton acquired some fragments from Catcott, and Barrett corresponded with Joseph’s brother Thomas, sending him the ‘original’ of the ‘Acconte of W. Canynges Feast’ – a document that was to become iconic as an engraved leaf in subsequent printed editions. Catcott then apparently offered Thomas Warton ‘the whole collection for seventy pounds’.

Warton applied to Percy for his opinion on 29 July 1774 – curiously oblivious of Percy’s offstage commentary and the racket the controversy had inspired over the Club’s dinner table, and impatient for a reply: ‘I request the favour of your Answer immediately,’ Unfortunately, Percy’s response has not survived, but the gist of it must have been unambiguous. In the Rowley section of his History of English Poetry (published in 1778, the year after the Rowley Poems were eventually published), Warton graciously acknowledged Barrett’s assistance, but concluded that the works were forged, describing the parchments of ‘Songe toe Ella’ and the ‘Yellowe Rolle’ acquired by Percy via Dacre: ‘This was shewn to an ingenious critic and intelligent antiquary of my acquaintance; who assures me, that the writing was a gross and palpable forgery.’ Nevertheless, Warton was extravagant in his praise for Chatterton, whom he described as ‘a prodigy of genius’.

While Warton prepared his History for the press and Catcott licked his wounds, the debate rattled on. Charlemont maintained his belief in Rowley throughout this turbulent period, writing to Woodward on 28 February 1775:

As to our Friend Rowley my endeavours have succeeded so far as to render him a general subject of Conversation, but I cannot flatter myself, that

53 BRL, B5342, pp. 164–5.
54 Ibid., pp. 179–81; see also Manuscripts and Correspondence of Charlemont, i, pp. 315–16.
55 Warton, Enquiry, p. 2.
58 Ibid., p. 157; see also Warton, Enquiry, p. 9.
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I have made many Converts to my own Opinion concerning his work. Horace Walpole is still an Infidel, and in general I find a great deal of Incredulity with regard to his claims of Antiquity, tho’ all concur in admiring his Poetry.\(^5^9\)

Then word came to Catcott that Percy had lost the ‘originals’ he had had in his possession. Catcott smelt a conspiracy and complained to Charlemont on 20 March 1775:

I am sorry to acquaint you, that Dr Piercy and his Friend Mr Butler, have lost or mislaid Mr Barretts curious originals of the Ode to Ælla & the yellow Roll ... which were sent them for their inspection, the latter of these MSS mentioned (as your Lordship well knows) the whole Contents of Mr. Canynge’s Folio Ledger, certain it is, they never yet have, nor probably never will be returnd, which in my humble Opinion, is a very convincing Proof those Gentlemen them selves, are well convinced (had they Candor enough to own it,) they are too authentick to be doubted.\(^6^0\)

The Pro-Rowleian faction unsurprisingly capitalized on the loss of these parchments in the ensuing controversy, and Percy was held responsible for destroying vital evidence.\(^6^1\) It took more than twenty years for Catcott to accept Percy’s more mundane version of events.\(^6^2\)

Catcott now turned all his attention to getting a wider audience for Rowley. Having learnt the hard way how to manage the press from his hamfisted publication of *The Bristowe Tragedy*, he now needed to entice an establishment scholar to front the edition. On 19 January 1776 that tireless Rowleian fixer Dr Francis Woodward recommended to Catcott that Thomas Tyrwhitt be appointed to edit the *Rowley Poems*.\(^6^3\) Tyrwhitt and the Shakespearian authority George Steevens paid fifty guineas for the privilege of publishing the transcripts, and wasted no time in editing the texts for an edition printed by Thomas Payne; neither did they waste any time by tarrying to consult the ‘originals’ before they bought the right to publish.\(^6^4\) Why were the actual manuscripts not consulted?\(^6^5\)

59  BRL, B5342, p. 183.
60  Ibid., pp. 182–3.
62  See note 39.
65  Powell notes that Thomas Warton ‘was similarly incurious; although he was four or five times in Bristol, he never made any attempt to see the manuscripts’ (Powell, ‘Tyrwhitt and the Rowley Poems’, p. 317n.): see Warton, *Enquiry*, pp. 3–4, 125.
later argued that the authenticity or otherwise of the ‘fragments upon vel-lum’ was of less significance than the internal evidence of the poems, as the parchments themselves could have been counterfeited by Chatterton.

So the arc of authentication was broadly as follows: audiences were first treated to the poems being read aloud; a few opinion-formers were shown the parchment originals; and eventually printed publication, including a facsimile of one of the manuscripts, was prepared by two reputable editors. For a Pro-Rowleian audience listening before publication in 1777, the guarantee of authenticity was the experience of hearing the verses read smoothly (possibly with a Somerset burr, as the West Country man Jacob Bryant later proposed, suggesting that a trace of an oral accent persisted in Rowley).66 Indeed, as is evident from comments already quoted, both sides of the debate praised the merit of the lines. For the Catcotts and Charlemonts of the eighteenth century, the beauty of the lines was their most telling aspect; the Wartons and the Percies had different agendas and criteria – as did Samuel Johnson.67

Johnson’s role in this prehistory is particularly intriguing, as he and James Boswell did examine the Rowley ‘originals’ during a famous trip to Bristol on 29 April 1776, and so it is worth commenting on his interventions in the matter of Rowley. Having taken rooms in The White Lion, Broad Street, they were visited by ‘Honest’ Catcott, who invited Johnson to read aloud a selection of Rowley’s verse, ‘moving himself like a pendulum and beating time with his feet’.68 They next visited Barrett to inspect the ‘originals’, before Catcott insisted they see the muniment room. Johnson laboured up the narrow spiral staircase of the north porch of St Mary Redcliffe led by a gleeful Catcott, who in great excitement presented the chest in which Chatterton had supposedly discovered the

66 Jacob Bryant was criticized for this by Tyrwhitt (see Thomas Tyrwhitt, A Vindication of the Appendix to the Poems, called Rowley’s, in Reply to The Answers of the Dean of Exeter, Jacob Bryant, Esquire, and a Third Anonymous Writer; with some further Observations upon those Poems, and an Examination of the Evidence which has been Produced in Support of their Authenticity (London, 1782), pp. 4–6).


trove: ‘There ... there is the very chest itself’. Boswell archly observed that, ‘After this *ocular [sic] demonstration*, there was no more to be said.’

On his return to London, Johnson was contacted by Steevens, as mentioned in his letter of 16 May to Hester Thrale:

Steevens seems to be connected with Tyrwhit in publishing Chatterton’s poems; he came very anxiously to know the result of our enquiries, and though he says, he always thought them forged, is not quite pleased to find us so fully convinced.

Johnson appears to have been up to something. Six days later he wrote again to Hester Thrale on the subject: ‘Woodward, I hear, is gone to Bristol, in deep dudgeon at Barret’s declaration against Chatterton’s productions.’ There is no other evidence that Barret ever declared against Rowley; indeed, many years later he used Rowleian material in his *History of Bristol*, published in 1789 – well after the issue had been settled for the nation (if not for the city of Bristol). But on 3 June Johnson repeated the charge in an even more elaborate – and inaccurate – way to Henry Thrale: ‘Catcot has been convinced by Barret, and has written his recantation to Tyrwhitt, who still persists in his edition of the poems, and perhaps is not much pleased to find himself mistaken.

As we have seen, Catcott was Rowley’s staunchest advocate, and barely wavered on the question of authenticity. So what is Johnson doing, so soon after having seen the irrepressible double-act of Catcott and Barret first-hand? Johnson is so outrageously wrong in his information about Barret that one wonders whether there is more here than him simply being mistaken. Just as his laughter at Goldsmith five years earlier was, I think, primarily a provocative gesture designed to rile his friend, Johnson’s comments in these letters are making mischief at the expense of Tyrwhitt and his (and Johnson’s) collaborator, Steevens. If designed to provoke, Johnson’s rumour-mongering certainly worked: on 19 August 1776, four months after submitting their edition to the press, Tyrwhitt

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and Steevens spent the best part of a week in Bristol, examining the Rowley material amongst Barrett’s papers. According to Catcott, who recounted this years later, Steevens ‘no more doubted their Authenticity, than his own Existence’. Shortly afterwards, however, Steevens went on to become one of the fiercest and most prolific Anti-Rowleian journalists. The Rowley Controversy was, then, as much about personalities as it was about the identification of literary forgery.

As we have seen, the Rowley controversy had a long history behind it before Edmond Malone entered the fray, but when he did, he acted with remarkable speed and efficiency. Malone’s Cursory Observations (about which he cultivated some ambiguity regarding his authorship) developed his two-part essay for the Gentleman’s Magazine into a sixty-page pamphlet that went to press around 31 January 1782. His demolition of the authenticity of Rowley proceeded on four fronts: 1) their modern versification; 2) the borrowings from post-Rowley authors in the texts; 3) the appearance of anachronisms; and 4) the handwriting. The very ‘smoothness’ of the lines that had so appealed to the Rowleians – ‘smoothness’ referring to word order and the familiarity of the grammatical construction of the sentences – was criticized by Malone as evidence of modern composition. He compared the opening lines of other medieval poems to Rowley’s verses, not so much analysing as accumulating evidence. Malone, as he observed to Percy, accordingly considered Chatterton ‘the greatest genius that England has produced since the days of Shakspeare’; in other words, Rowley was simply too good. Chatterton could not

75 For example, see the bibliographical letter in the St. James’s Chronicle for 4 April 1782, signed ‘R.F Cambridge’, which although attributed to George Steevens may be by Richard Farmer, of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (Sherbo, Achievement of Steevens, p. 191 credits Steevens with this letter): it notes ‘Cursory Observations on the Poems, &c. Attributed to Mr. Malone’ (my emphasis); see also Joseph Haslewood’s collection of ‘Chattertoniana’ lent to Joseph Cottle and Robert Southey (BL, C.39.h.20), and a letter from George Steevens to the St. James’s Chronicle, 4 April 1782 (see Sherbo, Achievement of Steevens, p. 174); finally, see ‘Advertisement’ to Malone, Cursory Observations.
76 Malone, Cursory Observations, p. 4.
77 Ibid., pp. 5ff.
78 Correspondence of Percy and Malone, ed. Tillotson, pp. 93–4; Malone, Cursory Observations, p. 41. William Hazlitt, in his lecture ‘On Burns, and the Old English Ballads’, argues (partly in response to John Keats’s dismay at his criticism of Chatterton at the end of the previous lecture) that:

<Q>the whole controversy might have been settled by any one but the learned antiquaries themselves, who had the smallest share of their learning, from this single
escape modern phraseology, could not forget the Whiggish progress and improvement of poetry over three centuries.\textsuperscript{79} Hence the language comprised old stones held together by a modern cement, leading Malone to praise Walpole, who had recognized that Chatterton ‘copied ancient language, but ancient style he has never been able to imitate’.\textsuperscript{80} Much of the poetry Malone attributed to reworkings of canonical writers – Shakespeare, Dryden, Rowe, Pope and so forth, as well as translations of Homer.\textsuperscript{81} This source-hunting was to prove a staple of Anti-Rowleian attacks, especially in the \textit{St. James’s Chronicle}.\textsuperscript{82} For Malone, though, the principal problem was that ‘The versification is too modern; the language is often too ancient.’\textsuperscript{83} And the handwriting was forensically wrong.\textsuperscript{84} Finally, he also argued that the Walpolian antiquarianism and connoisseurship of Rowley’s patron William Canynge in collecting drawings and manuscripts was simply anachronistic. All in all, Malone decided that the literary critic requires a ‘taste for English poetry’, and a thorough knowledge of the history of poetry from Chaucer to Pope.\textsuperscript{85}

Malone’s damning pamphlet concluded on three thought-provoking points. First, a warning against over-interpretation. Responding to the assumption that ‘every author must know his own meaning’, he suggests that texts may contain ‘a latent and significant meaning’ independent of a writer’s intentions. As Malone puts it, ‘a man’s book is sometimes wiser than himself’.\textsuperscript{86} Secondly, he satirizes the supporters of Rowley by condemning them to be locked up in the St Mary Redcliffe muniment circumstance, that the poems read as smooth as any modern poems, if you read them as modern compositions; and that you cannot read them, or make verse of them at all, if you pronounce or accent the words as they were spoken at the time when the poems were pretended to have been written. The whole secret of the imposture, which nothing but a deal of learned dust, raised by collecting and removing a great deal of learned rubbish, could have prevented our laborious critics from seeing through, lies on the face of it (to say nothing of the burlesque air which is scarcely disguised throughout) in the repetition of a few obsolete words, and in the mis-spelling of common ones. (William Hazlitt, \textit{Lectures on the English Poets}, 2nd edn (London, 1819), pp. 245–82, at p. 248); my thanks to Dr Sam Ward for this reference.)

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., pp. 11–12. Walpole’s own annotated copy of \textit{Cursory Observations} highlighted Malone’s comment that ‘It is not the language of any particular period of antiquity, but of two entire centuries’ (Lewis Walpole Library, 49 3690 v.4, at p. 32).
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., pp. 16ff, 27.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., pp. 24, 33.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 2.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp. 41–2 (much more could of course be said of this arresting aperçu).
room where Chatterton claimed to have discovered Rowley’s papers, in order to calculate how many of Rowley’s diminutive parchments could fit into the chests there, surviving the while on artisan bread, supposedly dating from the fifteenth century. And, most significantly, Malone translates the opening of one of Chatterton’s contemporary pieces (the anti-slavery eclogue ‘Narva and Mored’) into Rowleian language, and the opening of one of Rowley’s eclogues into modern English, demonstrating ‘CHATTERTON in Masquerade’ and ‘CHATTERTON Unmasked’, respectively.

Malone’s strikingly radical critical comments were ignored, his satire was somewhat clumsy, but the masking and unmasking of Rowleian language was a palpable hit. This was effective precisely because of the oral delivery of the poems before publication. Reading the poetry aloud gave the Middle Ages life – made it continuous with the present – and was therefore implicitly opposed to the archival archaeology of the editors of antiquarian literature. The technique of oral dissemination assumed that the poetry would be understood in performance, dissolving historical difference. Hence the archaism of the Rowley verses was diminished when read aloud: reduced to a small vocabulary of obsolete words. On the page, however, different factors of authenticity came into play – such as the bizarre spelling conventions that have mesmerized readers ever since. Malone was the only commentator who addressed the oral authentication of the poems. By modernizing Rowley and divesting the verses of all their medieval ornamentation, he mimicked and thereby undermined how they had been received and authenticated by audiences for the first seven years of their dissemination: as aural experiences. Why did he take such pains to do so? The answer is that Malone had to be supremely careful in dismantling this oral aspect of Rowleian verification in order to disabuse Lord Charlemont of his support for the Rowleian cause as diplomatically as he could.

In the very year in which the Rowley Poems were published, 1777, Malone began his friendship with James Caulfeild, Lord Charlemont – who as I have shown was one of the most assiduous supporters of Rowley. If Charlemont was not exactly a patron, Malone nevertheless benefitted enormously from Charlemont’s taste for old English literature and his

87 Ibid., pp. 58ff.
88 Ibid., pp. 48–9.
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book-collecting, and their extensive and highly informed correspondence survives in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. Charlemont employed Malone (whom he occasionally addressed as ‘my dear Ned’) as his agent in purchasing antiquarian books for his library: for example, on 5 April 1779 Malone informed Charlemont that he had acquired ‘near 120 of rare old Quarto’s’, in addition to purchasing the 1609 Shakespeare Sonnets and a first edition of The Rape of Lucrece for two guineas. Their letters discuss in detail book sales and the best way to bind old editions, Malone’s ‘Shakespearomania’, the attributions of the Shakespeare apocrypha (particularly Pericles), textual cruces such as ‘fillip me with a three-man beetle’, and Samuel Johnson’s idleness in producing both The Lives of the Poets and his own edition of the Bard.

It was only when Bryant went into print in late 1781 with his Observations that the shadow of Rowley fell over their friendship. Charlemont’s Pro-Rowleian sympathies suddenly revived, and on 2 January 1782 he asked in a postscript to Malone, ‘What is become of the Rowleian Contraversy [sic]?’ Malone replied in some detail on 8 January: ‘The Rowley Controversy, about which you enquire, is going on ding-dong.’ He summarized the debate politely – if frankly – explaining that he had already published on the affair in the Gentleman’s Magazine, and was planning to reissue his essay as a pamphlet.

D’. Mills’s Quarto, & M’. Bryant’s octavos, are now on my table, ready to be packed in your parcel. They have said everything that cd. be said, [on] of their side of the question, and & have staggered some. – Warton is preparing an answer, which will be out soon; only a shilling pamphlet. The cautious Tyrwhitt is slower in his operation. He means, I believe, to enter deeply into the business & it will therefore be some time before we shall see his Vindication. – I am, you know, a professed Anti-Rowleian, – and have just sent a little brat into the world to seek his fortune. As I did not choose to sign my name, I preferred, for the sake of a more general perusal, to give my cursory remarks to a Magazine, in consequence of which they appear rather awkwardly; one half in that for December, & the other

90 Royal Irish Academy (hereafter ‘RIA’), 12 R 13, 18 August 1779, fol. 1’ (this correspondence is published in Manuscripts and Correspondence of Charlemont; where relevant it has been freshly transcribed for the present article); RIA, 12 R 13, 5 April 1779, fol. 1’.

91 RIA, 12 R 13 (5 April 1779), fol. 2’; RIA, 12 R 13 (5 April 1779), fols 4’, 5’: referring to Falstaff’s remark in 2.Henry IV; Malone benefitted from his role, transcribing copies of scarce texts for his own use: Bodl., MS. Malone 32, for example, consists of facsimile transcriptions of ‘Old Plays’, mainly from David Garrick’s collection, but Malone does note on the first endpaper recto that ‘James [the] Fourth from Lord Charlemonts Copy, the only one known to be extant’.

92 RIA, 12 R 13 (2 Jan 1782), fol. 1’.

I41
in the Supplement, which is to be published in a few days – When I can get a perfect copy, I will send it to you, for I have flatter myself your partiality to me will incline you to run your eye over it, notwithstanding your leaning to the other side of the question. Tyrwhitt wants me still to make a pamphlet of it – in order to bind up with all the other pieces which that most wonderful youth, Chatterton, has given occasion to.

He then recommended Herbert Croft’s opportunistic novel Love and Madness (1780), which includes a long interlude on Chatterton: ‘It will, I think, entertain you.’

Charlemont picked up the theme over eighteen months later; he had been reading Bryant’s Observations again:

As to Bryant He ought, I think, to be answer’d by some of you Chattertonians, or Rowley may still have some Chance with Posterity – tho the Laugh be now against him – The Arguments of his Defender are sometimes weak, but in many Instances if not answer’d, [critically and not merrily, are] strong enough to support his Claim at least to some Part of the Poems attributed to him –

He concluded, ‘Rowley may regain his Rank among English Bards.’

By this stage, and having already published Cursory Observations against Bryant’s display of cranky antiquarianism, Malone’s response was exasperated: ‘I am afraid we Chattertonians should not be able to convert you, even though we brought one from the dead.’ He quoted from his own pamphlet, and forwarded Thomas Tyrwhitt’s pamphlet (A Vindication of the Appendix to the Poems, called Rowley’s, 1782), ‘which I think the most candid, accurate & satisfactory controversial tract that ever I have perused’. He also offered to ‘sound Tyrwhitt’ on any further objections, as ‘He seems to have entirely shut up the Controversy.’

Malone’s tactful approach in undermining the oral dissemination did

93 RIA, 12 R 11 (8 Jan 1782), fols 2r–3v. ‘Milles’s Quarto’ and ‘Bryant’s octavos’ refer to the edition of Poems, Supposed to have been Written at Bristol, in the Fifteenth Century, by Thomas Rowley, Priest, &c. (London, 1782) and the two-part Observations upon the Poems of Thomas Rowley: in which the Authenticity of those Poems is Ascertained (London, 1781), respectively; Milles’s edition is dated 1782 on the title-page, but was first advertised in early December 1781, being published a few days after Bryant’s work (see Cook, Chatterton and Neglected Genius, pp. 106, 224n.).

94 RIA, 12 R 13 (4 October 1782), fol. 1r.

95 RIA, 12 R 13 (19 November 1782), fol. 1r. Incidentally, this same letter mentions the querulousness of Joseph Ritson (spelt ‘Wrightson’, which may indicate how some pronounced his name), and also makes the (unlikely) suggestion that he had a hand in An Archaeological Epistle to the Reverend and Worshipful Jeremiah Milles, D. D. Dean of Exeter, President of the Society of Antiquaries, and Editor of a Superb Edition of the Poems of Thomas Rowley, Priest (London, 1782), usually attributed to William Mason (RIA, 12 R 13 (19 November 1782), fol. 2v).
not appear to make much of an impression on Charlemont – but that hardly mattered. By the end of 1782 Thomas Rowley was history and it was Thomas Chatterton who was now being hailed as a maverick genius, adopted as the darling of succeeding generations of writers – not least in and around Bristol itself.

**Conclusion**

The Rowley Controversy can be seen as the response to the unbelievable and the unthinkable. The discovery of antique poetry with the potential to turn literary history upside down was astonishing; that it should have been discovered in the peripheral backwater of the West Country was inconceivable. The affair reveals a distinctly uncomfortable relationship between Bristol cultural life, provincial and embattled, and London intellectual society, which runs the gamut from Walpole’s prim Gothicism to the fractious dinners of the Club – presided over by the combative taunting of the ‘Great Cham’ himself. The landscape of the debate soon extends beyond these two poles: Oxford offers a bridge between the worlds of Bristol and London through the more merciful interest of Fry and Warton, Bath becomes a key recruiting ground for sympathizers, while Percy glides in and out of the capital’s orbit to solicit expertise from as far afield as Northumberland. Johnson’s sardonic encounter with the self-appointed Bristol literati can consequently be seen as a confrontation between the capital’s literary establishment and upstart parochialism. But as it emerges, the debate is also impossibly entangled in individuals and their various prejudices, and so this clash is also simply a bookish spat between two opinionated literary prize-fighters – Samuel Johnson and George Catcott.

Malone cuts through the personalities and pettiness by returning attention to the texts. He focuses on making the very means of authentication the basis of falsity and fraudulence: in other words, his strategy is to make the works conspire to undermine themselves. He identifies the authenticating aspect of oral delivery (coterie readings aloud of Rowley’s poems) by presenting the poems as they would actually sound: ‘unmasked’, as he puts it – stripped of archaism. Simultaneously he highlights the printed dissemination of the *Rowley Poems* by emphasizing the literate status of the texts, forensic details of the manuscripts, and a passing reference to Rowley’s supposed printing press.

Although it cannot be stressed too strongly that the Rowley Controversy had already been live for seven years before Tyrwhitt’s
publication, if Malone did not have the last word (and was himself gracious enough to promote Tyrwhitt’s Anti-Rowleian pamphlet), his attack was certainly instrumental in winding up the debate. But he was also mindful of Lord Charlemont’s regrettable role in promoting the Pro-Rowleian cause and the potential embarrassment that that could attract. In his *Cursory Observations*, Malone was aware that his friend and fellow clubman had got involved on the wrong side of the debate. He accordingly exercised tact, sensitivity, but above all wit in extracting Charlemont from this scrape.

Malone’s critical approach was, then, anchored in evidence, substantiation, and judgement: in other words, in legal method. He emphasized that literary expertise and historical knowledge are necessary acquisitions in understanding and appreciating poetry. And he proposed that it is only after the textual facts have been ascertained that a scholar may consider the wider public interest by seasoning their case with a little droll satire, a comic coda. In doing so, Edmond Malone’s contributions to the Rowley Controversy helped to bring the pungency of the bar to late eighteenth-century English literary debate.

**APPENDIX: CHATTERTONIANA AND THE MALONE APOCRYPHA**

Like many involved in the Rowley Controversy, Edmond Malone compiled a scrapbook of ‘Chattertoniana’. While this is very incomplete in its magazine clippings, it does contain various contributions to the *St. James’s Chronicle* from the Shakespearian scholar George Steevens, as well as other papers, that later provided invaluable information for Joseph Haslewood, who consulted it for the bibliography he prepared for the 1803 edition of Chatterton’s *Works* edited by Robert Southey and Joseph Cottle. Southey and Cottle also attributed some unsigned contributions to the *St. James’s Chronicle* to Malone himself, including ‘The Remonstrance of Mr. Bryant’ and an impromptu verse, ‘On seeing some late incomprehensible STRICTURES on Mr. Malone’s “Cursory Observations”…’.98

96 Boston Public Library, 1873.XG.3843.
98 Cuttings from *St James’s Chronicle*, 28 May 1782 and 25 May 1782; also in *Gentleman’s Magazine*, lii (June 1782), p. 303: also recorded in George Catcott’s ‘Chattertoniana’ (BRL, B5259). The *St. James’s Chronicle* cuttings in the Bodleian
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THE REMONSTRANCE of Mr. BRYANT,
on a Pamphlet being published in his Defence
by Edward Burnaby Greene, Esq.99

Call you that backing of your Friends? A Plague upon such backing!
Shakspeare.100

SAYS Bryant to Burnaby, what do you mean?
The Cause of old Rowley you’ve ruin’d quite clean.
I had taught Folk to think by my learned Farrago,
That Drydens and Popes wrote three Centuries ago;
Though they stared at my Comments, and sometimes might slumber,
Yet the Truth they might fancy beneath all my lumber:
But your stupid Jargon is seen through instanter,
And your Works give the Wits new Subjects for Banter.
Such clear-obscure Aid may I meet again never!
For now Milles and I will be laugh’d at for ever.

IMPROMPTU
On seeing some late incomprehensible STRICTURES on Mr. Malone’s ‘Cursory Observations on the Poems attributed to Rowley,’ and Mr. Thomas Warton’s ENQUIRY into the authenticity of the same Productions.

MALONE and T. Warton with one Blow to hit,
And destroy all the Force of their sense and their Wit,
Lo! Greene wields the Pen with which long he had scribbled,
And levelled old Pindar* with Pomfret and Tibbadl.

In Nonsense, ’tis said, that no Fallacy lies,
For it nothing affirms, it nothing denies:
Yield the Palm then, ye Wits, to this senseless DRAWCANSIR,
Whom, writing till Doomsday, you never can answer.

99 Referring to Strictures upon a Pamphlet intitled, Cursory Observations on the Poems attributed to Rowley, a Priest of the Fifteenth Century (London, 1782); Greene (d. 1788) was a poet and translator of classical literature; see Martin, Edmond Malone, p. 80.

100 1. Henry IV, II. v. 150–51.
* The Odes of Pindar translated by Mr. Burnaby Greene. This Gentleman has likewise published Translations of Anacreon, Juvenal, Apollonius Rhodius, &c. &c. all of which may be seen at Mr. Birch’s Pastry-Shop (late Horton’s) opposite the Royal Exchange; and at all the principal Cheesemongers in London and Westminster.

These are not, however, attested elsewhere, and so constitute part of the Malone apocrypha.

101 Samuel Birch (1757–1841), memorably described by ODNB as ‘politician, playwright, and pastrycook’, worked alongside his father at the pastry shop at 15 Cornhill, adjacent to the Royal Exchange; the business had been founded by a Mr Horton in the time of George I. In December 1781, Samuel Birch was elected to the Common Council for the Cornhill ward, and by 1814 was Lord Mayor of London.