


 In Praise Of Thomas Chatterton

Humdrum of helicopter dwindling off to the west,  
 Full moon in a night or two.  
 Why do I think of Chatterton, *the marvellous boy*,  
 Just seventeen and under the hill over two hundred years ago?  
 Is it the bulge of the moon?  
     Is it the double consonant of wind and the weather?

Both Keats and Wordsworth thought well of him.  
*The purest English, I think, is Chatterton's*, Keats wrote  
 In a letter to George in Louisville, Kentucky.  
 Wordsworth referred to him as *the sleepless soul that perished in his pride*,  
 Inventing his own vocabulary, dead by his own hand.

I remember seeing a picture once, an inked engraving, I think,  
 Of Chatterton as a suicide,  
 Sprawled on his bed, gargoyles and fanged, feathery creatures  
 Circling above him.  
 Outside the window, a moon like this one.  
     God rest him, *and happie bee hys dollie*.



## Rosso Venexiano

And here is a photograph of me taking a photograph  
Of Holly and me. In 1969, I think,  
In Venice,

Timothy Hennessey's wretched painting  
Behind us, the ornate Venetian mirror throwing us back  
Spotted, rejuvenate, shelved in two.

And that's not half bad, I'd say,  
Chihuly downstairs, and Luke Hodgkin, *acqua alta*  
Finally out the door,

*the schifo from the trattoria*  
Flushed through the ground floor hallway's side rooms,  
The lettuce flats and cardboard wine boxes  
sucked back toward Malamocco.

End of March, thirty-three years ago.  
Across the water, in S. Sebastiano, the Veronesi  
Are arc-lit and scaffolded,  
The Phantom Turk, square-rigged ghost ship,  
still moored on the Grand Canal  
In front of Palazzo Guggenheim.

Or so we imagined it,  
Corvo at large on the damp streets,  
Pound on his daily constitutional, as I've said before,  
Exhuming the Zattere and Innocenti,  
Fluttering candle-like guttering light  
At night in the windows high up in Palazzo Barbaro.

Our altered and unreal lives.  
How silly it all was, how delicious,  
Palazzo this and Palazzo that,  
Guardi and Canaletto from every bridge and opening,  
The gold-domed Dogana a harsh relief in the winter sun.  
Nobody sat on the steps that year,  
not I, not anyone.

What else is bereft in the camera's lens, or the mirror's eye?  
People, of course, and the future; Campo S. Polo:  
*Sabo, co fa scuro, Gran Balo Macabro*, the poster announced.  
Lord, the detritus.

*Write*, the voice said. *For whom?* came the response.  
*For the dead whom thou didst love*, came the instant reply.

*And will they read me?*

*Aye, for they return as posterity*, the voice answered one last time,  
Red of Titian's Assumption, red of the Doge's fingernail,  
Blood red of the *Serenissima*,

Lagoon light, sunset and cloudblaze,

red of the Cardinal entourage.

*c  
h  
a  
r  
l  
e  
s*

*w  
r  
i  
g  
h  
t*