

FICTIONS AND FAKES

Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760–1845

MARGARET RUSSETT

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FICTIONS AND FAKES

British Romantic literature descends from a line of impostors, forgers and frauds. Through a series of case-studies – beginning with the golden age of forgery in the late eighteenth century and continuing through canonical Romanticism and its aftermath – Margaret Russett demonstrates how Romantic writers distinguished their fictions from the fakes surrounding them. The book examines canonical and lesser-known Romantic works alongside fakes such as Thomas Chatterton's medieval poems and "Caraboo," the impostor-princess. Through original readings of works by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Walter Scott, John Clare, and James Hogg, as well as chapters on impostors in popular culture, Russett's interdisciplinary and wide-ranging study offers a major reinterpretation of Romanticism and its continuing influence today.

MARGARET RUSSETT is Associate Professor of English at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *De Quincey's Romanticism: Canonical Minority and the Forms of Transmission* (Cambridge, 1997), and of articles published in journals such as *ELH*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *MLQ*, *Genre*, *Discourse*, and *Callaloo*.

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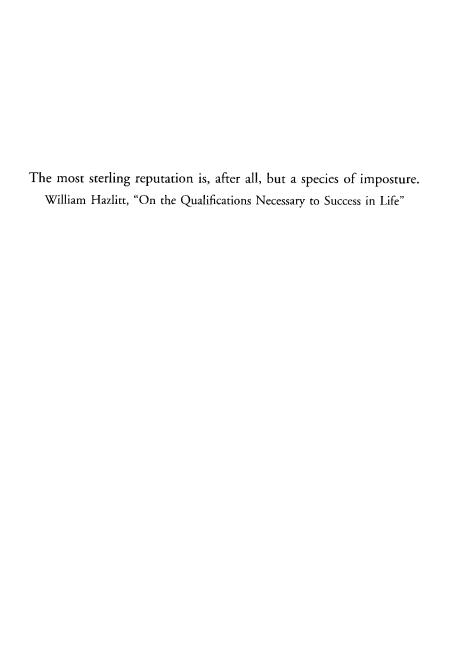
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This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those "great national events" that were "almost daily taking place": the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion, and literature were reworked in texts such as Frankenstein and Biographia Literaria; gender relations in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Don Juan; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content, and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of response or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of "literature" and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

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Acknowledgments

Shortly before this book went to press, an article in the *Independent* announced that a packet of manuscript letters by Percy Bysshe Shelley had been "discovered hidden in a trunk in the suburban semi-detached home of two elderly brothers." Written from Oxford to Ralph Wedgwood, the letters expand on the inflammatory arguments in *The Necessity of Atheism* that would shortly get Shelley expelled from university. The letters are expected to fill in significant details about Shelley's friendships and early career. But whatever scholarly importance they possess, it is of course the circumstances of their recovery that thrilled me and the subscribers to the NASSR listsery who circulated the story. "Life is sometimes stranger than fiction" was the inevitable comment from one frequent contributor.

A contemporary version of an insistent eighteenth-century fantasy, the tale of the rescued manuscripts recapitulates many themes of a book devoted to the proposition that life sometimes "out-romances romance." Coinciding with a personal moment of closure — inviting the reflexive turn implied in the subject of the book, and prescribed by the prefatory genre — it also serves as a needed reminder of incompletion. The discovery iterates the recursiveness of literary history and (to compare great things with small) underscores the likelihood that, in retracing my many debts, I will exaggerate some even while falling short of the whole.

Since I cannot follow Byron's advice to begin with the beginning, I imitate my subjects by beginning near the end. "The tardy product of the accumulated practice, experience, and invention, of previous writers," this book would have been tardier still without the timely aid of a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and a sabbatical leave from the University of Southern California. I am grateful to the series editors at

¹ Jonathan Brown, "Shelley Letters Saved from Car Boot Sale," *The Independent*, February 24, 2005.

Cambridge, and to my anonymous press readers, for their encouragement at a point when I badly needed a shot in the arm. Linda Bree and Maartje Scheltens have been both generous and patient in guiding the manuscript toward publication.

I have learned a great deal from presenting portions of the manuscript at Bilgi University, Boğaziçi University, Temple University, Vanderbilt University, and UCLA. Early versions of individual chapters were read at meetings of the Modern Language Association, the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, the International Conference on Romanticism, Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies, and the Poetics and Linguistics Association. I thank my students at USC, both graduate and undergraduate, for their creativity and toughmindedness, and for insights whose origins can never be adequately recognized. They have made me a better reader, a more inventive critic, and, I hope, a more generous person. Colleagues and friends at USC and elsewhere have provided an indispensable intellectual community. The many who have read sections, commented directly, or influenced the argument in other ways include Paul Alkon, Young An, Joe Boone, Leo Braudy, Fred Burwick, Julie Carlson, Tom Feigelson, Frances Ferguson, Alice Gambrell, Kevin Gilmartin, Judith Halberstam, Heather James, Carla Kaplan, Jim Kincaid, Michelle Latiolais, Alan Liu, Bennett Lowenthal, Bob Maniquis, Susan McCabe, Anne Mellor, Jay Miracle, David St. John, Susan Scheckel, Mark Schoenfield, Hilary Schor, Daniel Tiffany, Kim Wheatley, and Tom Wolfe. I would particularly like to thank Cevza and Alpar Sevgen, Oya Başak, Ian Almond, Nazmi Ağil, Özlem Öğüt, and Kim Fortuny, whose conversation and whose presence in my life has been more important to the completion of this book than any of them realize. My research assistants, Jennifer Conary, Andrew Allport, and Alice White, gave cheerfully of their time at the moment when I needed it most. Joseph Dane, my co-author on one essay, has also been a tireless intellectual sparring-partner and source of moral support. I thank Percival Everett for a brilliant, albeit unused, title suggestion and a great deal else. My parents, Cynthia and Bruce Russett, and my sister, Lucia Russett, have added astute and sympathetic criticism to the much greater debt I owe all my family.

Some contributions need to be acknowledged more formally. I would like to thank Marshall Brown for his sharp editorial eye and for permission to reproduce Chapter 2, which appeared in a shorter form in *Modern Language Quarterly*. My sincere thanks also to Robert Patten and the editorial staff of *SEL*, in which most of Chapter 3 was published under a

different title. Michael Macovski edited the issue of Romantic Praxis in which an earlier version of Chapter 6 was published in 1999. Tania Modleski deserves special thanks for encouraging me to publish "The 'Caraboo' Hoax: Romantic Woman as Mirror and Mirage," in Discourse 1994-95. Writing this book has not only allowed me to revisit my own favorite discovery but seems to have fulfilled an itinerary I barely glimpsed at that generative moment. Both in drafting these early chapters and in the later evolution of the book, I have benefited from the expert assistance of the research and reproductions staff at Yale University's Sterling and Beinecke Libraries, the University of Southern California Library, UCLA's Clark Library, the SUNY Stony Brook Library, the Columbia University Library, the New York Public Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Musée du Petit Palais, and the British Library. I am especially grateful for the illustrations that appear in Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7. Figure 1.1 ("anonymous broadside"), as well as Figures 5.1, 5.3, and 5.6 (from the 1817 narrative of Caraboo) were provided courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Figure 7.1, from Robert Chambers's 1825 Illustrations of the Author of Waverley, was also obtained from the Yale University Library. Figures 5.2 and 5.4, by P. J. de Loutherbourg and Thomas Allom, appear courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Figure 5.5, "Sultane Reine," courtesy of the Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris/ Pierrain. I thank the staff of the Feuchtwanger Collection at USC for Figures 2.1 (from Sharpe's 1794 edition of Rowley) and 4.1 (from Works of James Gillray, 1851).

This book first took shape as a book when I was ensconced in a treehouse-cum-private library in Stony Brook, Long Island. No more propitious habitat for a writer could be imagined, nor can there be warmer friends or more stimulating companions than my once (and future?) hosts. Although I discovered no long-lost manuscripts there, I found everything else I needed. The argument of the book hinges on a single casual remark which which its originator generously, if falsely, attributed to me. This is not the greatest or even the latest of the intellectual debts I owe him, but like the treehouse it will have to stand in for much more. I dedicate this book to my two most important teachers, Jerry Christensen and Peter Manning.

Abbreviations

Except where indicated otherwise, citations are by volume number (if relevant) and page, followed by line numbers for poetry. Complete references for the texts below are provided in the Bibliography.

BL	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria
Caraboo	John Mathew Gutch, Caraboo: A Narrative of a Singular Imposition
CL	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letters
Confessions	Thomas De Quincey, Confessions of an English Opium- Eater
CP	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poems
EOT	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Essays on His Times, vol. 1
JS	James Hogg, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner
Lay	Walter Scott, <i>The Lay of the Last Minstrel 1805</i> . Cited by canto and stanza (for verse) or by page (for prose notes)
LB	William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads
LJC	John Clare, Letters
LPJC	John Clare, Later Poems
Memoir	James Hogg, Memoir of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott
Prelude	William Wordsworth, <i>The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850</i> . References are to the 1805 version, cited by book and line
PWB	George Gordon, Lord Byron, Poetical Works

RL Thomas De Quincey, Recollections of the Lakes and the

Lake Poets

SE Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete

Psychological Works

TCW Thomas Chatterton, Complete Works

Waverley Walter Scott, Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since Wells John Wells, Princess Caraboo: Her True Story

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Introduction

It has long been recognized that eighteenth-century Britain abounded in sensational literary and cultural discoveries. Markets in novelties and knowledge expanded to absorb the wonders compassed by the imperial embrace. And with burgeoning commerce came "all specimens of man, / Through all the colours which the sun bestows . . . from remote / America, the hunter Indian; Moors, / Malays, Lascars, the Tartar and Chinese, / And Negro ladies in white muslin gowns" (Prelude VII:236-43). Omai was neither the first nor the most celebrated exotic informant to reach the metropole. As early as 1704, the language and topography of East Asia were authoritatively documented in A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa, written by a native of that island who had settled in England after circumnavigating the globe. Nor were the antipodes the only fields open to the intrepid. The revival of interest in indigenous traditions meant that treasures could be unearthed much nearer home. Gaelic poetry finally received its due with the 1761 translation of a lost epic dating from the third century AD. Within a few years of this revelation, an aristocratic dilettante would find and publish a twelfth-century Italian romance, while an obscure law-copyist in Bristol disclosed a yet more remarkable collection of poems, plays, and historical treatises by an unknown fifteenth-century monk. The greatest scholarly triumph, however, was reserved for the mid-1790s, when two forgotten plays by Shakespeare were uncovered in a private gentleman's cache of discarded law documents.

With the turn of the century, popular sensations took on an increasingly marvellous character. Extraordinary women began surfacing among the scenes of everyday life. A millenarian preacher conceived at the age of sixty-three, while another elderly spinster subsisted for years on no food at all. A waitress from the Lake District became an overnight celebrity, inspiring ballads, plays, novels and biographies, when she was suddenly

translated into the wife of a peer. In a replay of eighteenth-century social history, an Asian princess, evidently kidnapped by pirates from her island home, mysteriously appeared in the suburbs of Bristol. Fictional women attracted their own share of attention, some of it untoward; Coleridge's scandalous poem "Christabel," for instance, caused fits and hallucinations among readers long before it was published – apparently the effects of a spell found in Walter Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel, which Coleridge was rumored to have copied. Imaginary people could be dangerous in other ways, too; one killed a London editor in a duel. Another scandal ensued when the mummified corpse of a century-old suicide, along with a journal describing its author's satanic persecution, was disinterred by an illiterate shepherd and advertised in Blackwood's Magazine. Continuing this spate of well-publicized possessions, the spirit of Lord Byron transmigrated to the body of a rural laborer who began composing the sequels to Byron's unfinished narratives, Childe Harold and Don Juan.

It was indeed an age of wonders, though none of these events transpired exactly as I have described them. They were occasioned by a number of inventive and resourceful persons, each of them abetted by a willing public, during the period that enshrined the ideal of original genius associated with Romanticism. Retold according to the conventions of empirical literary history, the anecdotes should go something like this: a French conman calling himself Psalmanazar, and posing as a native of a country he had never visited, published a fictitious ethnography complete with invented language and alphabet; upon his exposure, Psalmanazar entered on a career of hack-writing that included the article on Formosa for the Universal Dictionary. James Macpherson, an upwardly-mobile young Scot hoping to make his name in literary London, pieced together assorted Scottish tales and ballads, arranged them into classical epic form, and attributed them to the bard Ossian who may have lived three hundred, but certainly not one thousand, years earlier. Horace Walpole published, anonymously, the first "gothic" novel, The Castle of Otranto, on Christmas Day of 1764; a few months later, he reissued the story under his own name, with a preface that described it as "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern." A charityschoolboy named Thomas Chatterton won posthumous fame for his pseudo-medieval poems, painstakingly copied onto "antiquated" parchments, after committing suicide at the age of seventeen. A Chatterton wannabe called William-Henry Ireland forged a series of legal papers, and then two plays, widely accepted as the work of Shakespeare; after the

disastrous single performance of *Vortigern and Rowena* and a withering critique by the textual authority Edmond Malone, Ireland survived by riding the wave of his *Confessions*. The frenzy of publicity generated by this last debacle elicited a tribute from the poet William Mason:

Four Forgers, born in one prolific age, Much critical acumen did engage. The First was soon by doughty Douglas scar'd, Tho' Johnson would have screen'd him, had he dar'd; The Next had all the cunning of a Scot; The Third, invention, genius — nay, what not? FRAUD, now exhausted, only could dispense To her Fourth son, their three-fold impudence.²

Among the avid followers of the Shakespeare story was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who reprinted an article on the discovery in his 1796 periodical *The Watchman* and boasted to Robert Southey a few years later that he had "ample materials for a most interesting Historical & Metaphysical Essay on Literary Forgery from the Hymns of Orpheus which deceived Aristotle to the Vortigern of Shakespere that deceived Dr Parr – but Dr Parr was the greater Booby" (*CL* 1:585). Coleridge's earliest literary experiments – Ossianics imitated from Macpherson, a "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" published in Sharpe's 1794 edition of the Rowley poems – attest to his intense interest in the question. The neo-Chattertonian author of that "ingenious forgery" and fantastic travelogue "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere," Coleridge imbibed from Ireland and his brethren a lasting fascination with copies, counterfeits, imitations, and the boundary between "illusion" and "delusion"; he himself figures directly or indirectly in most of the tales that follow.⁴

The year 1805, in which Ireland issued his Confessions, also saw the publication of Walter Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel, a pseudo-medieval romance composed under the spell of Coleridge, although its precursor would not see print until 1816 – at which point Coleridge feared being suspected of "plagiarism . . . from [him]self" (CP 187). While "Christabel" languished in manuscript, Coleridge, reporting for the Morning Post, broke the story of a bigamous forger and impostor who, as "The Honourable Alexander Augustus Hope," married a local beauty named Mary Robinson, herself already a noted tourist attraction. In a climate of media spectacles like Joanna Southcott's virgin pregnancy and the miraculous survival of "the fasting woman of Tetbury," a runaway servant achieved unlikely celebrity when, in 1817, she managed to convince the gentry of

Bristol that she was Caraboo, princess of the imaginary Asian island of Javasu. John Scott, editor of the London Magazine, lost his life in a quarrel over the use of fictional bylines and "personalities" in the rival publication Blackwood's. A few years later, James Hogg, an actual shepherd as well as a regular contributor to Blackwood's, published The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner after a letter announcing the discovery of a "Scots Mummy" appeared in that magazine. Two decades further on – shortly before Icodad George Gordon De Luna Byron, alleged "natural son of the poet," published his notorious Inedited Works of Lord Byron – another peasant-poet, John Clare, began writing poems with Byronic titles under the apparent conviction that he was in fact Lord Byron, reincarnated.

Some of these stories are better known than others, but a premise of this book is that each becomes more compelling, rather than less so, when the manifest narrative is excavated for the truth of its production. Great deceptions and minor scandals alike offer glimpses of the cultures that gave rise to them. In the more circumstantial narrations that follow, I focus primarily on the effects rather than the causes of the epiphenomena I describe. A short list of contributing factors must surely include the literal and figurative mobility achieved through international trade and colonial expansion; the rise of ethnographic discourse consequent on increasing contact with non-Anglophone cultures both within and without the British Isles; the dramatic material transformations of the literary market; the accompanying revaluation of the vernacular canon; and the new model of personhood associated, by J. G. A. Pocock and others, with the development of a credit economy.⁶ The ideology of self-making synonymous with commercial society found a philosophical grounding in Lockean empiricism, a point to which I return in Chapter 1.

Assuming rather than arguing much of this broader context, but dealing in turn with an array of particular manifestations, the case studies that follow examine how factitious discoveries and counterfeit beings helped to define the frontiers of literary discourse during the period in which "literature" assumed its modern disciplinary meaning. Beginning with the so-called golden age of forgery in the 1760s and continuing through canonical Romanticism and its aftermath, this book explores the relationship between literary and psychic origins by examining how fictions of textual creation articulate with the construction of Romantic subjectivity. The archaeology of the spurious clarifies the authenticating devices of the Romantic literary work, while also suggesting how canonical narratives of individual development naturalized the tropes of forgery