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0521850789 - 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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The most sterling reputation is, after all, but a species of imposture.

William Hazlitt, "On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life"

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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.”¹ 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 listserv 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 incompleteness. 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.

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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

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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 Louthembourg 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 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.

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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.

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

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<i>RL</i>	Thomas De Quincey, <i>Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets</i>
<i>SE</i>	Sigmund Freud, <i>The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works</i>
<i>TCW</i>	Thomas Chatterton, <i>Complete Works</i>
<i>Waverley</i>	Walter Scott, <i>Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since</i>
<i>Wells</i>	John Wells, <i>Princess Caraboo: Her True Story</i>