Forging a Romantic Identity:  
Herbert Croft’s *Love and Madness*  
and W.H. Ireland’s Shakespeare MS

Robert Miles

W. H. Ireland was the last of the great eighteenth-century literary forgers. To use the period’s own sense of this genealogy, the line includes William Lauder, Psalmanazar, James Macpherson, and Thomas Chatterton, and culminates in the forgery of the Shakespeare manuscripts, which in 1795 and 1796 enthralled the capital, before the forgeries were put to the test of public opinion through the performance of *Vortigern and Rowena* at Drury Lane, where they spectacularly failed.

Ireland’s career in forgery has frequently received the attention of Shakespeareans, or those with an eye for a story.1 Recently the material has been reinvestigated as critical interest in the history of literary forgery has grown, an interest K.K. Ruthven links to “two intellectual developments in the final decades of the twentieth century”: post-structuralist critical theory and the “continuing anatomy of ... the

---


EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION, Volume 17, Number 4, July 2005

---
postmodern condition.” The first development forced a rethinking of traditional assumptions about “authorship, originality, authenticity and value,” while the second fundamentally undermined commonsense apprehensions of the real and the simulated. Ruthven outlines two broad approaches to “faking” generated by these developments, one synchronic, the other concerned with differences. Ruthven characterizes the ambitions of the latter approach. Instead of grand, synoptic narratives, “we should pay scrupulous attention to the specificities of particular works which congregate within the same chronotope, and knuckle down to the task of producing archivally based ‘thick descriptions’ of them which will enable their microhistories to be written.” In the last decade or so, critics have knuckled down to Ireland, situating his forgeries within the ideological contradictions of an eighteenth-century print culture undergoing rapid change. Such approaches tend to focus on the history of the copyright acts together with the pressures these acts place upon notions of originality and authenticity; on the rise of “original genius,” a locution which, while it might satisfy the imperatives of copyright, flies in the face of the allusive facts of art; and on the deep connections between the cult of bardic or original genius and the rise of nationalist ideologies. For these approaches, forgery is the necessary other of the modern—which is to say Romantic—construction of authorship. To focus on the legal and epistemological anxieties attendant upon ideas of authenticity, especially as regards documents, paper money, and literary fabrications, is to find oneself in the discursive underpinnings of the modern state. In all of these areas, Ireland’s spectacular career as the forger of the national Bard is peculiarly important, as Ian Haywood, Paul Baines, and Nick Groom have all recently pointed out.

My aim in the present article is to contribute to this growing body of critical literature by producing a micro-history with a complementary yet altered focus. Although I retell the story, I do so selectively, with a view to highlighting details germane to my focus. By “forging a Romantic identity” I mean, primarily, its social construction. The

---

3 Ruthven, 60–61.
kinds of concern that Haywood, Baines, and Groom have teased out in relation to Ireland and forgery are implicit in my argument; however, I want to redirect attention to this question: to what extent is the historical formation of what we now call Romanticism itself an effect of the proliferation of print? My central contention is that, in forging Shakespeare, Ireland also forged—or constructed—a Romantic identity. Or rather, he attempted to. If identity is, as some critics have argued, performative, then Ireland’s self-fashioning constitutes what J.L. Austin terms a “misfire.” Ireland is the historical infelicity that stands in articulate contrast to Wordsworth’s accomplished utterance. To put it another way, Ireland both mimicked and mocked common Romantic attitudes.

My altered focus is produced by filtering Ireland’s story through the theoretical framework of print culture, by which I mean the sociological understanding of the relationship between print and its consumers pioneered by Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu. I revisit Habermas’s theory of the public sphere in order to foreground a few short but suggestive comments that Habermas made on the role of the novel in the development of the bourgeois public sphere, comments that take us deep within the wheels within wheels that constitute the Ireland story. The story itself has its origin in late eighteenth-century print culture, the matrix of W.H. Ireland’s identity.

As Nick Groom has recently argued, this matrix has a primal scene. In Confessions, published in 1805 to restore his damaged “literary character,” William Henry Ireland recounts how his father, Samuel, was in the habit of reading aloud to the family after dinner. The text was often Shakespeare, a “God among men” (6) in the Ireland household, but on another momentous occasion it was the Chatterton sections from Herbert Croft’s Love and Madness (1780), which included eight original Chatterton letters as well as one of the earliest and most

---

5 As regards Ireland’s relationship to Romanticism, the work closest to my own is Groom’s. In contrast with what I outline in the introduction, Groom focuses on how the “author was increasingly defined as a legal identity” (253).
6 For more on the historical formation of Romanticism and the proliferation of print, see Clifford Siskin, The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
8 Groom, 247–48.
important lives of the poet. William Henry Ireland has a reason for telling his readers this fact: it explains how he first heard of the genius Chatterton, whose example proved so calamitously irresistible. But William does not explain other reasons of equal moment. *Love and Madness* is itself the forged love letters of the tragic celebrities James Hackman, a respectable clergyman, and Martha Ray, the long-term mistress of the Earl of Sandwich. What William Henry Ireland does not mention is that his mother, Mrs Freeman, was herself a former mistress of the Earl of Sandwich, a published poet in her own right, and the present mistress of Samuel. Although of good family, Mrs Freeman had become déclassé owing to her liaison with Sandwich. Although he had progressive ideas regarding animal rights and politics, in his sexual mores Samuel Ireland was old-fashioned and drew the line at marrying the cast-off mistress of an aristocrat, despite her being the mother of his children. In the fraught aftermath of the Shakespeare scandal, William Henry Ireland for a time changed his name to Freeman, reminding his father that Samuel had long intimated that a mystery was attached to his birth. Almost all of Ireland’s biographers conclude that he believed, or chose to believe, that he was not his father’s son after all, and that he was possibly Sandwich’s son. William Henry felt himself doubly a bastard: in blood terms, a counterfeit of a counterfeit. As regards his entry into print culture, Ireland’s primal scene was the family reading of *Love and Madness*, an event shadowing his own identity, with Ray as a figuration of his mother, Hackman/Croft as the paternal imago, and Chatterton—and his literary progenitor, Richard Savage—as himself. In Althusserian terms, Ireland was interpellated into eighteenth-century print culture in the role of the bastard, the illegitimate forger-trickster who rises, self-propelled, through the force of his own genius.

10 See Maria Grazia Lolla, “‘Truth Sacrificing to the Muses’: The Rowley Controversy and the Genesis of the Romantic Chatterton,” in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 151–171; and David Fairer, “Chatterton’s Poetic Afterlife, 1770–1794: A Context for Coleridge’s Monody,” in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, 228–252. According to Lolla, Croft’s Chatterton material in *Love and Madness* was the fullest life so far and only the second since Chatterton’s death in 1770, the other being Thomas Tyrwhitt’s extended footnote in 1777 (151). According to Fairer, *Love and Madness* provided the first “full picture of Chatterton’s London activities” (233).

11 Grebanier, 50–53.

12 W.H. Ireland to Samuel Ireland (n.d.), British Library MSS, “Papers and Correspondence of Samuel Ireland, relating to the alleged discovery and publication of the supposed Shakespeare MSS., forged by his son Samuel William Henry Ireland,” 2 vols., Add. 30346 and 30347, see Add. 30346, p. 307.

13 Although Richard Savage only makes a fleeting appearance in *Love and Madness*, Ireland’s
The moment I wish to describe, thickly, is Ireland’s primal scene, a moment stretching forward to his forgeries and their exposure and backwards to a point in their genesis, the appearance of Love and Madness. Consequently, this article focuses as much on Croft’s text as it does on William Henry Ireland, for four main reasons. I will begin by considering two of these: (1) Croft’s “novel”—his fabrication of the real-life story—is integral to the production of Ireland’s Romantic subjectivity, and (2) it is itself a sharp reflection on the print culture forces that shaped Ireland and deserves to be better known.14 In one of two recent articles on Croft, Brian Goldberg focuses on the 1790s, when Croft was hounded in the press by Robert Southey for purloining Chatterton’s letters from his sister, Mrs Newton, the very ones that had formed such a substantial portion of Love and Madness. An impoverished baronet with a title and not much else, Herbert Croft was a member of the pseudo-gentry: although he was indubitably a gentleman, Croft’s status was also insecure, because unbuttressed by land.15 Goldberg contrasts Croft with Southey, who was not just upwardly mobile but categorically different, because belonging to a new, professional grouping: the class of writers securing their living entirely from a marketplace divorced from aristocratic models of patronage. Goldberg uses this contrast between an identity drawn from rank (defined by family connections and “blood”) and one drawn from class (defined by work or profession) to posit a theory of Romantic identity.16 Southey’s is a Romantic identity, and Croft’s an eighteenth-century one, because Southey, however inchoately and incoherently, is beginning to forge an identity in which character is defined by internal qualities, such as genius (his class signature), rather than by the status attached to rank.

Bourgeois individualism has long been seen as a leading characteristic of Romanticism. More recently, critics have rethought and identification with Savage is revealed in the three “Bastard” poems he wrote in homage to Savage’s famous “The Bastard”: Rhymes (London: Longman and Rees, 1803), 61–71.

---

14. Love and Madness has been poorly served by the quantity of critical attention devoted to it, but it has been the subject of two excellent articles: Maximillian E. Novak, “The Sensibility of Sir Herbert Croft in Love and Madness and the ‘Life of Edward Young,’” The Age of Johnson 8 (1997): 189–207; and Brian Goldberg, “Romantic Professionalism in 1800: Robert Southey, Herbert Croft, and the Letters and Legacy of Thomas Chatterton,” ELH 63 (1996): 681–706. As Novak comments, “Love and Madness was a huge success and one of the truly important works of fiction written during the twenty years following ... Humphry Clinker” (189–90).


refined what this means. Clifford Siskin, for instance, has defined how the discipline of literature—the work of writing—constitutes an institutionalized form of exo-socialization in which writing (“Romantic discourse”) produces and reinforces “behaviours that configure the psychologized self.” Similarly, Marilyn Butler has noted how, in the Romantic period, writing was increasingly promoted on the basis of the writer’s personality—on his or her depth—as a means of establishing a saleable identity or brand in an expanding, increasingly anonymous, commercial market. Both Butler and Siskin tend to see this phenomenon in terms of poetry: hence Romanticism’s “lyric turn” to self-expressive inwardness; but as Nancy Armstrong argues, inwardness and social mobility were also the province of the novelist: “In place of the intricate status system that had long dominated British thinking, [novelists] began to represent an individual’s value in terms of his, but more often in terms of her, essential qualities of mind.” As Franco Moretti puts it, the novel of education, or Bildungsroman, was “the symbolic form” of modernity, where mobility and interiority were its chief symbolic concerns. Like Susan Price in Mansfield Park, one floats above one’s rank, buoyed by the glamour of essential qualities of mind.

Mobility and interiority (depth or psychology) are integral facets of what I mean by Romantic subjectivity. The issue has two principal sides: the rise of celebrity culture (mobility) and what Roland Barthes might call the birth of the Author (interiority). As the cliché has it, the Romantic Author is a man of genius with depths measureless to man, like Kubla Khan’s; and on these depths he rises, borne aloft by a media-generated, vampiric, charisma. Which brings me to the final two reasons why I look closely at Love and Madness in this article: (3) it reinforces the argument that if Romantic subjectivity is primarily

viewed as an effect of print culture, then the novel plays a more central role in its formation than has generally been allowed; and (4) as a “faction,” it highlights the crucial border between celebrity (as a function of media) and genius.

Interiority, the Novel, and the Public Sphere

“The bourgeois public sphere,” writes Habermas, “may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public.” In Habermas’s theory, the bourgeois public sphere comes into being as a result of the post-Renaissance split between state and society, and as a means of protecting the interests of a newly constituted civil society (grounded on the private exchange of goods and services) against the ambitions of the state. The concept of a public sphere theoretically committed to class-blind rationality in the deliberation of public affairs is clear enough. What Habermas has to say about a newly emergent privacy is more opaque, or, at any rate, more challenging. The bourgeois public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was historically specific and unique, but so too was the private sphere, which complemented it. Indeed, for Habermas, the bourgeois private and public spheres are a single, inseparable dyad. Habermas teases out the nuances of this new sense of privacy by contrasting it, first with the classical Greek sense of the private, and then with the aristocratic “representative publicness” that it supplanted. Whereas for the Greeks the home was a realm of necessity, of economy in the sense of husbandry (hence the equation privacy/privation), for the emerging European bourgeoisie (that is, for those with property and leisure) the home was a site of freedom to be protected from the incursions of the state, especially as the state sought to control or limit the economic activity that underpinned this new, private freedom. And whereas the European aristocracy had organized the domus around the courtyard, where status could be rehearsed with and before the extended household, the bourgeois home was atomized into numerous private and individual spaces, integrally linked to a new, and different, public space: the salon or coffee house. Habermas describes the bourgeois sense of the private as a historically new subjectivity, one based on interiority. He also imagines a dynamic relation between it and the public sphere. This new subjectivity was partly created, and partly reinforced, by letters, by the literary arts, but
above all by the novel, which had the task of rehearsing, and staging, interiority for the very consumers who had a vested interest in it. Thus, in Habermas’s reckoning, the literary public sphere precedes the political one, although the two eventually work in tandem as a single, undifferentiated sphere. The object of the public sphere is to secure the imperatives of bourgeois subjectivity. The (relatively) new institutions of the coffee house, the press, professional criticism, and circulating libraries “form the public sphere of a rational-critical debate in the world of letters within which the subjectivity originating in the interiority of the conjugal family, by communicating with itself, attained clarity about itself.”

While the above has been much rehearsed, scant attention has been paid to the status Habermas attributes to the novel as a key agent in the formation of Enlightenment privacy: “The relations between author, work, and public changed. They became intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was ‘human,’ in self-knowledge, and in empathy.” The psychological novel was the site where these “intimate mutual relationships” were most intense. Moreover, “the psychological novel fashioned for the first time the kind of realism that allowed anyone to enter into the literary action as a substitute for his own, to use the relationships between the figures, between the author, the characters, and the reader as substitute relationships for reality.” By following the logic of this dissolution of the boundary between “reality and illusion,” we gain a quite different perspective on the Ireland affair from that afforded by the critical literature, which has generally dealt with the Ireland episode in terms of forgery, situating its meaning within the ramifications of literary property and notions of authorship. Habermas, to the contrary, invites a reconsideration of the Ireland story in terms of an emergent privacy that was itself an integral part of a public sphere grounded in proto-capitalism. Both issues (the blurring of reality and illusion and Habermas’s materialist reading of privacy) are constitutive elements of what I have called Ireland’s primal scene, the family reading of Herbert Croft’s *Love and Madness.*


23 Habermas, 50.
Samuel Ireland and the Profits of Imagination

As one might expect, the dominant factor in William Henry Ireland’s family environment was his father, Samuel, whose entrepreneurial career in late eighteenth-century print culture fits Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, like a hand to a glove. Although unmentioned by John Brewer in his *Pleasures of the Imagination*, Samuel Ireland is at one with the many others whom Brewer documents, who assiduously laid up their store of cultural capital in order to raise their social status, in the eventual hope of material gain. Samuel Ireland’s only difference was his deep understanding of the process and his great success at it. He rose from a middling-low position in life to a middling-high one, where, at his apogee, he could expect to be entertained by royalty and to mix with the leading literary men of his day. This rise was not lost on the public. As contemporary accounts never tired of pointing out, Samuel Ireland began his career as a Spitalfield weaver. Apparently an autodidact, Ireland made a number of shrewd investments in artistic commodities—in Hogarth and Shakespeare—whose values were about to rocket. Both Hogarth and Shakespeare were to rise on a tide of artistic nationalism that flooded the literary public sphere, explicable, in part, as an anti-court animus. Ireland became a noted authority on Hogarth, compiling a large private collection of Hogarthiana, which formed the basis of his deluxe edition of the artist’s works. As an author, Ireland next cashed in on the fashion for the picturesque travel book, publishing four lavishly illustrated works between 1790 and 1795. *A Picturesque Tour Through Holland, Brabant and Part of France: Made in the Autumn of 1789* is a typical production. Ireland represents himself as the soul of clubbability—of Enlightenment sociability—taking his readers round the picturesque sights, when in the country, and in Amsterdam, when not waxing lyrical over paintings, slyly taking the reader along with him on his purely investigative tour of a brothel. He is *à la mode* in his overt support for the French Revolution; and, as the subtitle informs the reader, his book is commercially as well as artistically up to date: *Illustrated with Copper Plates in Acqua Tinta From Drawings Made on the Spot by Samuel Ireland*. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* from the same year explains the significance of this announcement in an article entitled “The Progress of Engraving in England, and the

Effects thereof in Promoting Magnificent works, and Extending Commerce." As the writer triumphantly notes, British exports of prints outweighed imports to the tune of £60,000 per annum, partly due to the success of Boydell’s Shakespeare, and partly owing to the discovery of *acqua tinta*, which had revolutionized print production by reducing costs: “The new method (which was first attempted, it is said, by a Frenchman) Mr Sandby and six or seven English artists have brought to a degree of perfection which no foreigner has yet been able to equal.”25 Samuel Ireland (Sandby’s student) was at the vanguard of this patriotic cultural commerce.26

In 1790, Samuel Ireland was able to move from the artisanal environment of Spitalfields to the upmarket address of Norfolk Street, in the West End, although whether this was entirely owing to his own cultural entrepeneurship is unclear. Bernard Grebanier speculates that the Earl of Sandwich provided Samuel Ireland with his stake, as a reward for taking Mrs Freeman off his hands:27 there were four children, the eldest, also named Samuel, who died as an infant; William Henry, born in 1775;28 and two sisters. Samuel completed the transition from weaver to respectable bourgeois by apprenticing William Henry to the law, in the chambers of William Bingley of New Inn, sometime in the early 1790s.

Samuel’s road to ruin began with his bardolatry. In 1793, he took his son on the field trip that was to produce, in 1795, *Picturesque Views on the Upper, or Warwickshire Avon*. While visiting Stratford, they scoured the countryside for relics. Frequently hearing his father say that nothing would please him better than to possess an authentic Shakespearean document, William Henry set to work in his solicitor’s chambers—where he was frequently left on his own, under-employed, for long hours—and armed with a piece of old parchment, black ink, and soot, produced one: a title deed. This first deception led to ever more elaborate entanglements, with William Henry feeding his father’s insatiable appetite for discoveries with a succession of bogus documents, including (among sundry others): a profession of faith (establishing the poet’s Protestant credentials); a thank-you letter from Queen Elizabeth; a love letter to “Anne Hatherrwaye”;  

26 According to W.H. Ireland, Sandby was Samuel Ireland’s art teacher, whose instruction rendered Ireland’s style “more free” (Huntington Library, YI Folio Ireland, W. 287917).  
27 Grebanier, 50–53.  
28 See Schoenbaum, 132.
annotated books from Shakespeare’s libraries; a manuscript draft of Lear, with the play’s “vulgarisms” excised; a portrait of Shakespeare as Shylock; a deed of gift from Shakespeare to W.H. Ireland (an alleged ancestor), signing over to him the possession of his papers as a reward for having saved Shakespeare from drowning; and, finally, the lost Shakespeare plays, Vortigern and Rowena and Henry II. As Edmond Malone later argued, in these matters provenance is all, but to Samuel’s urgings to disclose where he procured his treasures, William Henry would only respond, from a wealthy gentleman to whom the value of the relics meant nothing, and who wished, for reasons of his own, to remain anonymous. The literary world—indeed, one is tempted to say the entire literary public sphere of London—was agog at the news, with many streaming to Norfolk Street to view the relics, including, famously, Boswell, who, after a stiff shot of brandy, fell on his knees in veneration, thanking God that he had lived long enough to see them. Samuel Parr and Joseph Warton publicly pronounced on the transcendent genius of the profession of faith, much to their later embarrassment. Samuel Ireland was not slow to profit from his cultural windfall. On Christmas Eve 1795, he published a magnificent facsimile edition of the manuscripts, minus the plays, still being hurriedly written by William Henry, priced four guineas, with a list of 118 prominent “believers.”

In the first excited flush of the discoveries, Sheridan contracted to stage Vortigern, a decision he apparently soon regretted, possibly as a result of the sceptical reception of the manuscripts (the Chattertonian multiplication of consonants, and y’s and e’s, was mercilessly lampooned), possibly as a result of conversations with his friend, Edmond Malone, who made no secret of his contempt for the forgeries, or of his intention to expose them. Indeed, Vortigern was put on, just after April Fool’s Day 1796, under the impending shadow of Malone’s demolition. There is still debate over whether the play failed because the audience, smelling a rat, spontaneously rioted, or whether its failure was owing to subversion by the actors, especially by Kemble, whose sepulchral delivery of the line “When this solemn mockery is o’er ... ” was allegedly the prearranged signal for the play’s enemies to revolt. Whatever the cause, the play ended in uproar. Although the


controversy rumbled on, the Shakespeare bubble had burst. To make matters worse, Malone’s Inquiry appeared on the eve of the debacle: nearly four hundred pages of lifelong Shakespearean scholarship, it appeared an absolutely irrefutable destruction of the Irelands’ claims.

As the reviews made clear, Samuel’s “credit” was gone; his art and travel books no longer possessed cultural currency, and sales plummeted. James Gillray caricatured Samuel Ireland’s self-portrait under the strap line “Notorious Characters.” Gillray’s single lethal alteration was to change Samuel’s lips from a smile to a smirk, while William Mason appended lines suggesting Samuel was merely the latest in a line of forgers, stretching from Laud, through Chatterton and Macpherson. Claiming that he wished to avert these unwarranted assaults on his father’s reputation, William Henry published his Authentic Account (1796), in which he confessed to fabricating the papers, but to no avail. Samuel Ireland refused to believe his dull-witted son capable of forging the documents, in which he still maintained his faith. The public disagreement of the two over the papers’ authorship merely inclined the sceptical to see the father and son as a pair of scoundrels falling out as a result of their exposure. Samuel’s ruin was complete.

The Confessions

William Henry Ireland three times sought to justify himself before the public: first, with an Authentic Account, a pamphlet so clumsily written some thought it undermined his claims to the authorship of the forgeries, next, with his more mature, developed Confessions (1805); and finally, and at the close of his life, in his preface to the 1832 publication of Vortigern. In all three, he maintained that he had embarked upon his forgeries with no premeditated plans for authorship but was helplessly drawn into the tangled web that enveloped him, with no other motivation than the desire to please his father. Such an

31 Review of An Authentic Account of the Shakespearian Forgeries, by W.H. Ireland, Gentleman’s Magazine 66 (1796): 1101. See also True Briton, 22 December 1796; Herald, 23 December 1796; and Oracle, 26 December 1796, collected in British Library MSS, Add. 30349, pp. 107, 110.

32 W.H. Ireland, An Authentic Account of the Shakespearian Manuscripts (London: J. Debrett, 1796); and Ireland, Vortigern; An Historical Play; With an Original Preface (London: Joseph Thomas, 1832). Ireland made numerous short defences of his fabrications, first in the preface to The Abbess: a Romance (1799; New York: Arno Press, 1974), and then anonymously in later works such as Chalographimania; or, the Portrait-Collector and Printseller’s Chronicle (London: R.S. Kirkby, 1814), and Scribbleomania; or, the Printer’s Devil’s Polichronicon (London: Neely and Jones, 1815).
account is implicitly contradicted by *Confessions*, where William’s construction of himself bears close examination. At the beginning of his narrative, under the rubric “first impressions,” William relates that he gradually imbibed his father’s “fondness and veneration for everything that bore a reference” to the divine Shakespeare. Next, he writes that he contracted his father’s predilection for old books: his father’s antiquarian enthusiasm “naturally impressed itself on my mind” (7). William’s fondness for ancient books led him to “peruse their contents”; as a consequence he became enamoured first with Chaucer, then with “various old romances and tales of knights-errant ... to such a degree that I have often sighed to be the inmate of some gloomy castle; or that having lost my way upon a dreary heath, I might, like Sir Bertram, have been conducted to some enchanted mansion” (8). According to the implicit, dis-inculpating narrative of *Confessions*, W.H. Ireland is indeed a “Sir Bertram,” led astray by the factitious glamour of print culture, with its enchanting promises of fame. He then relates how Walpole’s *Otranto* and Percy’s *Reliques* inspired his childhood reveries. This reconstruction of the inner life of the child ends with a section entitled “Love and Madness,” in which Ireland relates the pilgrimage he made to Bristol, in the wake of his disgrace, where he pays homage to “the unfortunate and neglected Chatterton; whose talents I revere, and whose fate I commiserate with unfeigned tears of sympathy” (17).

Ireland’s representation of his childhood trajectory is not as innocent as it may appear. The key to understanding it is lightly buried in the short “Love and Madness” section: “I cannot call to mind on what occasion Mr Samuel Ireland read aloud some of the letters in Mr Herbert Croft’s very entertaining work.” Inspired by its references to Chatterton, William read the whole, “when the fate of Chatterton so strongly interested me, that I used frequently to envy his fate, and desire nothing so ardently as the termination of my existence in a similar cause” (11). In other words, Croft’s *Love and Madness*—with its story of Chatterton—was part of the furniture of Ireland’s childhood mind; more than that, it structured his subjectivity. Far from being a spur-of-the-moment “frolic,” Ireland’s Chattertonian forgeries had very deep roots indeed.

Interiority is a key aspect of Ireland’s self-construction, which is best read backwards, inferentially, from his representation of Chatterton:

“From the contiguity of their residence to Redcliff church, [Mrs Newton] also told me, he continually frequented the interior of that Gothic structure, where he would sit for hours, reading, beside the tomb of Canning” (15). This passage sounds two recurring motifs in Ireland’s version of Chatterton: his inwardness (his delight in reading) and his veneration of the Gothic. Ireland asks if Chatterton ever did “betray any extraordinary symptoms when young” (14), in the process making genius both a pathology and a fetish. Mrs Newton says there was none, apart from a refusal to take his reading “lessons from any book of modern type,” but only “black letter.” In another anecdote Chatterton is described as reserved and “fond of seclusion” (13), and, after a long absence, he was chastised, whereupon he complained that it was “hard indeed to be whipped for reading” (14). In another, the young Chatterton flew into a passion after his sister had turned his old parchments to domestic use, saying she had destroyed “what would have been to the family a fortune for ever” (15).

Ireland’s sketch of Chatterton is simultaneously autobiography. He too has a fondness for Gothic antiquity—for olde English things—and is inward and dreamy, a bookworm whose spirit of “emulation” (7) promises to enhance the family fortune forever. Via Chatterton, Ireland imagines himself internalized in a Gothic—which is to say, a patriotic—structure. Chatterton reads beside the tomb of “Canning,” Rowley’s supposed and Chatterton’s imagined patron, Maecenus, and surrogate father. The sentence is constructed like a Chinese nesting doll, as the syntax relays three different versions of interiority, one within the other: Chatterton immured within the Gothic church built by Canning, his spiritual father; Chatterton inwardly revolved, reading Gothic matter; and next to him, Canning interred within his tomb. Read as a secret autobiography, this becomes Ireland enamoured with a Gothic taste, which prompts his own interiority—his reading, and by extension, writing—in turn linked to a homage to an imaginary father, either his own invented Canning (the mysterious Mr H) or an idealized version of his true father, possibly Samuel Ireland, but now transformed into an appreciative paternal imago.

In both the 1805 Confessions and the 1832 preface to Vortigern, the Gothic is a central reference, its meaning following the term’s changing significance. The key, dis-inculpating trope of the later text is borrowed from “a German amalgamator of the horrific.” Ireland believed a single forged document would satisfy his father’s passion for Shakspeariana: “Your German writer of the marvellous would ex-
claim: ‘No, no! it was then too late: you had fallen into the demon’s snare—was spell-bound—within the vortex of his machinations ... :’ be this as it may, I was not permitted to continue passive.” Insofar as Ireland is active in the forgery, it is owing to his “evil genius.” 34 In Confessions the Gothic represents both a patriotic taste in English antiquities and a series of examples that license his fabrications. We pass from the authentic Gothic of Chaucer to a series of respectable pastiches, imitations, and creative editorial practices that constitute a self-validating genealogy: the Aikins, Walpole, Percy, Chatterton, Ireland. The Gothic was thus an architectural style and a literary fashion, but in both cases pastiche. At the beginning of his career, Ireland represents the two as reasonably distinct, but by the end the irresistible glamour of the literary fad, with its promise of celebrity, has been internalized, pathologized, and troped, as a Gothic evil genius, as if the printer’s devil had seduced Ireland, his will thrown into abeyance. The meaning of his forgery, however, is embedded less in his seduction by the Gothic and more in the example of yet another fabrication: Croft’s Love and Madness.

Love and Madness and Print Culture

Croft’s Love and Madness (1780) purported to be the letters of two real-life characters, James Hackman and Martha Ray, the central actors in one of the most sensational stories of the late eighteenth century. Hackman was a young clergyman of respectable family who contracted a hopeless passion for Ray. Ten years older than Hackman, Ray was the long-term mistress of John Montagu, the fourth Earl of Sandwich. 35 Plucked from obscurity as a Clerkenwell mantua-maker at the age of sixteen, Ray bore Montagu five surviving children, including Basil, a friend of Wordsworth. In 1775, when she and Hackman first met, she was still only thirty. Hackman, then a young calvary officer, was overwhelmed by her beauty and her accomplishments. Surrendering his commission to be near her, and taking orders as a profession more propitious for marriage, he fruitlessly pressed his suit. Under the impression that Ray had a new suitor, and mad with jealousy, Hackman lay in wait for her outside the Haymarket theatre in Covent Garden, armed with two pistols, with the intention

34 Ireland, Vortigern, iii–iv.
of putting an end to his miserable existence in the presence of his beloved. His mind spontaneously “convulsed” at the sight of Ray’s male escort, Hackman put a pistol to Ray’s head, and shot her dead. Hackman then turned the pistol on himself, but somehow missed. He was apprehended by passersby, even while he was attempting to finish the business by beating out his own brains with the pistol butt. Arming himself with two pistols was held to be a clear contradiction of Hackman’s plea that he had no premeditated plan to kill Ray, and he was hanged at Tyburn two weeks later.

The status of the characters involved ensured that the story was received as one of extreme sensibility and sensation; as the Gentleman’s Magazine reported, its narration “struck every feeling heart with horror.” The germ for Croft’s project appears to be this report of Hackman’s hanging, also from the Gentleman’s Magazine: “A Particular account of a man who could perpetuate such a murder will no doubt be expected; and when any authentic materials appear, our readers shall be gratified.” Croft set out to gratify readers, but with fabricated, rather than authentic, materials. In doing so, Croft was merely seizing an opportunity, which was already well formed. Shortly after the murder, The Case and Memoirs of the Late Rev. Mr James Hackman was published by G. Kearsly, who appears to have cultivated a line in scandalous and sentimental material. Favourable to Hackman, this publication sought to make the case that violence produced by the madness of love, in persons of otherwise good standing, ought not to be put on the same level with murder. In other words, it sought to embed Hackman’s story within a sentimental narrative of excessive love, a moment’s irrationality, and sincere and noble repentance. Hackman’s speech to the jury at Newgate was commended by the judge for its “manliness,” in that it was frank, honest, and lachrymose. His speech was the “transcript of his heart”: “A very brilliant and crowded auditory was softened into tears by it.” Hackman went to his death like a gentleman—“not with the horrors attendant on a savage assassin when about to receive the due of his deserts, but with the composure and anxiety of a man who had survived every thing near and dear to him.”

37 The Case and Memoirs of the Late Rev. Mr James Hackman, and his Acquaintance with the Late Miss Martha Ray: with a Commentary on his Conviction, Distinguishing between his Crime in Particular, and That of Others Who Have Been Condemned for Murder, 7th ed. (London: G. Kearsly, 1779).
38 The Case and Memoirs of the Late Rev. Mr James Hackman, 15–16.
of their own, *The Case and Memoirs of Miss Martha Reay*. This work differed primarily in attributing Ray’s seduction by the Earl of Sandwich to the connivance of her own father and a notorious bawd (in the pro-Hackman pamphlet, she is picked up in the park in a way suggesting willingness) and in denying the earlier pamphlet’s claim that they cuckolded the Earl under his own roof (a detail retained in Croft’s version). Fourdinier published the pro-Ray pamphlet, but within the year Kearsly published the two together as a fifth edition. Frederick Booth, Hackman’s brother-in-law, contested the authenticity of both versions. In addition, engravings of the two protagonists were quickly produced, Ray’s based on a painting by N. Dance R.A. from 1777, and Hackman’s based on a likeness taken by “Mr Dighton” on the morning of his execution and etched by Isaac Taylor, in which Hackman is portrayed as an extremely youthful-looking clergyman, head bowed in contrition, with the bruise from his self-administered pistol-whipping prominently displayed. Kearsly published this image too. A poem also appeared, written by Hackman the morning of his execution, in which he again protests that Ray was dearer to him than life itself. The poem seems to have initiated its own minigenre—thereafter several poetic effusions appeared, affecting to be either Hackman’s last poetic words, or the poetic consequences of Hackman’s moving death.

In several respects the affair was seen as being absolutely of the moment, and therefore original and unprecedented. Or rather, it was constructed in such a way as to play up its supposedly novel features. The affair was seen almost entirely from Hackman’s perspective. Observers were especially struck by the “fact” that Hackman was motivated by love. For the believers, his courtroom speech was gospel: “I protest with that regard to truth, which becomes my situation, that the wish to destroy her, who was ever dearer to me than life, was never mine until a momentary phrenzy overcame me, and induced me to commit the deed I now deplore.” Observers also commented on another unprecedented aspect of the case: Hackman’s love increased, rather than diminished, with sexual gratification; in other words, he did not love her and leave her, a course of action advanced as the expected behaviour in such matters. In the pro-Hackman version


(echoed by Croft), the clergyman himself curtails their sex, swearing he will not enjoy his mistress under any other circumstances than wedlock. As Hackman’s personality increasingly adapted itself to the tenets of sensibility in the course of the affair, so his apparent rationality increased. His representation was moulded to fit the normative psychology of the bourgeois subject in order to make the contrast with his momentary frenzy all the more pointed. As Novak comments, Hackman was, or appeared to be, or was construed as, “that ideal of the age—a man of exquisite feeling, who had seemingly sacrificed all for love.”

Celebrity, Peter Briggs argues, “is finally a collaborative form and process, a sort of dance, a coming together of attitudes, aspirations, and behaviours on the part of the celebrity with patterns of expectation and response on the part of an audience.” Hackman was famous because he performed his half of the dance to perfection. As an example of an infelicitous performance, one might cite the contrasting case of John Vincent, who was “convicted of feloniously killing and slaying Mary Dollard,” his long-time lover, “by shooting and wounding her in the Back and Shoulder” (or “hinder parts,” as in another report) “with a Gun loaded with Powder and Shot, of which Wound she languished some time, and then died, in the Parish of Fulham.” Vincent was convicted of manslaughter and “was immediately burnt in the Hand, and discharged.” Happening at virtually the same time as Hackman’s trial, the case was virtually ignored, even by Croft, who otherwise assiduously collected analogues of Hackman’s crime: but then neither Vincent nor his crime conformed with the print-readership’s expectations of a gentleman of exquisite feeling sacrificing all for love.

As subsequent newspaper reports reveal another novel aspect of the case, much feared, was contagion: for some time after, the press reported various copycat incidences from around the country. Another, implicit aspect to this, as most up-to-date observers would have known, was that Hackman’s actions eerily echoed those imagined by Goethe in *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), “the seemingly dominant text for the way he conceives of the world.” Hackman’s

---

41 Novak, 193.
42 Briggs, 255.
43 *St. James’s Chronicle, or British Evening Post*, Thursday 15 April to Saturday 17 April 1779; *General Advertiser, and Morning Intelligencer*, Monday 19 April 1779.
44 Novak, 193.
assertion that his actions were the work of a momentary frenzy were of a piece with this sinister duplication of Werther, as it suggested that the contagion of example was unconscious. As Croft was to put it in Love and Madness, in the guise of Hackman, glamorous crimes of the Wertherian sort possessed an “indisputable magnetism” (295). The construction of Hackman as a sentimental hero (including Hackman’s self-construction) was one aspect of his perceived modernity; another was the dangerous glamour of the press; and yet another was the press’s expressions of alarm at the very thing it perpetuated for monetary purposes. The statement by the author of the Hackman memoirs, that he wrote not “to catch the penny of the curious,” is fittingly supplemented by the information that the pamphlet, in fact, costs a shilling.\footnote{The statement occurs at least as early as the fifth edition. According to Gilbert Burgess, the author of Case and Memoirs was Mannasseh Daws. The Love Letters of Mr. H. and Miss R. 1775–1779, ed. Gilbert Burgess (London: William Heinemann, 1995), xiv.}

Croft’s genius was to understand the issues arising out of the glamour of fame produced by print culture with utter thoroughness, if not complete cynicism. In this understanding he was aided by Kearsly, who published Love and Madness, as he did nearly everything else that the affair produced. It seems Hackmania had a significant audience. By publishing the work as the actual correspondence of Hackman and Ray (although mostly Hackman’s), Croft and Kearsly could expect the forgery to produce maximum returns. The Gentleman’s Magazine seized the point: “In this age of literary fraud we are not surprised that a tale so bloody should give rise to a suppositious correspondence.” Hackman and Ray, “it is needless to add, never penned a line of these 65 letters, except the 57th, which was printed in the session-paper.” The reviewer is fair-minded in his appraisal: “Yet, granting the imposition, and considering only their contents, they have some intrinsic merits.” The reviewer indicates what these merits are. He singles out letter 49, in which Hackman, ostensibly to satisfy his mistress’s curiosity on the point, relates the history of Chatterton, strongly arguing for the marvellous boy as the author of the entire Rowley oeuvre, while including much new, valuable material on the subject (eight unpublished Chatterton letters and a “life”). The reviewer then praises “our author” (the pseudonymous Croft) for his shrewd riposte to Walpole. After citing Walpole’s famously harsh censure on Chatterton, that “all of the house of forgery are relations,” Croft rejoins that Walpole’s Otranto and Richard III were both,
themselves, forgeries and the objects of Chatterton’s emulation. The reviewer next commends Croft’s clever self-reflexivity: “with some amusing anecdotes this writer has interwoven so many horrid catastrophes (similar to [Hackman’s]) of murders, execution, &c.”

Interiority and the Novel

Readers of Ireland’s *Confessions* are confronted by wheels within wheels. In justifying his own fabrications, Ireland cites the work of Croft, a respectable forger. In reconstructing his childhood influences, Ireland singles out two other alleged inmates of the house of forgery, Percy and Walpole, whose example Croft has already mobilized in defence of his own dubious practice. Ireland’s highly mediated rhetoric may appear to be aimed at withdrawing the sting from the accusation of forgery, through the marshalling of sanctified precedents—Percy, Walpole, Chatterton, Croft—but its significance is more far-reaching than that, as becomes apparent once we situate it within Habermas’s *mise-en-scène* of the conjugal family rehearsing the “interiority” intimately linked to entrance into the literary public sphere. In so doing, two fundamental questions confront us: “What is the nature of this new subjectivity?” and “What relationship does it bear to the erasure of the boundary between illusion and reality, truth and fiction?”

The answers lead to the uncanny literalization of Habermas’s theoretical scenario. Samuel, in the private space of the Ireland family, as its patriarchal head, reads aloud *Love and Madness*, a work that in itself comprised the two halves of Habermas’s argument about the novel: through Hackman it focuses on “what was ‘human,’” the possibility of self-knowledge and empathy, and through the Chatterton material it provides a real-life example for the vicarious experience of rising, of sharing the psychological glamour, and gains, of genius. Interiority, as Habermas speaks of it, acts as a form of power, much as Michel Foucault argues in the *History of Sexuality* when he opposes the bourgeois concern with health (with its associated technologies) against aristocratic blood (with its juridical deployment of kinship), as a discursive matter; or as Bourdieu does when he speaks of distinction as an instrument of class power. In Bourdieu’s terms, interiority

---

conveys distinction, and with it, cultural capital, transferable in a social marketplace. In Foucault’s terms, the discourse of interiority is a form of knowledge, regulation, and therefore power.\textsuperscript{48} Samuel Ireland’s response to the rising value of interiority (by which one rises) is to accumulate its external manifestations: the relics—the books and pictures—of past instances of genius, which is to say, of transformative interiority. As the father nurtures interiority within his son—the primal scene of reading aloud \textit{Love and Madness} in the family circle, with its multiple affiliations to the Irelands—the son internalizes what is external in the father: interiority becomes more than the mark of distinction that procures entrance to an exclusive club, but an identity. William Henry lives out the life of Chatterton, thus reversing the trajectory of \textit{Love and Madness}, so that from-life-to-fiction becomes from-fiction-to-life. The key opportunity Croft’s novel exploits is that, in the eighteenth century, a permeable zone exists between fiction (where interiority and power are nurtured) and fact, where they might be realized. Part of the uncanniness of this literalization of Habermas’s theory is that \textit{Love and Madness} explicitly plays with that zone of permeability.

In \textit{Love and Madness} the relationship between the real and the illusory, the authentic and the fabricated, the true and the forged, is both the occasion and the meaning of the work. In the manner of the recent film \textit{The Blair Witch Project}, Croft has found a way of reinvigorating the shock of the real through veridical imposture. Unlike Chatterton or Macpherson, Croft does not forge the work of a supposed artist, but fabricates the letters of real people, dissolving the boundary between the epistolary novel and “fact.” In an early letter, Croft, writing as Hackman, introduces the theory of his “true life novel” with reference to Defoe’s \textit{Robinson Crusoe}:

\begin{quote}
That fertile genius improved upon his materials, and composed the celebrated story of Robinson Crusoe. The consequence was that Selkirk, who soon after made his appearance in print, was considered as a bastard of Crusoe, with which spurious offspring the press often teems. In De Foe, undoubtedly, this was not honest \ldots I can easily conceive a writer making his own use of a known fact, and filling up the outlines which have been sketched by the bold and hasty hand of fate. A moral may be added, by such means, to a particular incident; characters may be placed in their just and proper lights; mankind may be amused (and amusements sometimes prevent crimes), or, if the story be criminal, mankind
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} For a Foucauldian interpretation of how interiority is expressed as power in Romantic aesthetics, see Siskin, \textit{Historicity}, 12–13.
may be bettered, through the channel of their curiosity. But I would not be dishonest, like De Foe, nor would I pain the breast of a single individual connected with the story. (32–33)

The passage is ironically self-referential. It not only plays with the issue of legitimacy and the literary public sphere (in Selkirk becoming his own textual bastard) but also undercuts the very theory that it advances, for Croft sets out to do what Hackman criticizes in Defoe: to so improve upon his sketchy real-life material as to produce an artifact capable of overturning the order of the real. Like Defoe, Croft “dishonestly” makes his story more real than the truth, by turning his “fertile genius upon it.” Moreover, Croft neither spares the numerous relatives of the victims, by rushing his sensationalized story into print, nor provides a useful moral.

Or rather, he provides one, only to undercut it. Hackman advances a theory in which “factions” are defended on the grounds that the writer should construct a cautionary tale, supplying the “proper lights” omitted by the “bold and hasty” hand of fate. In this way, “amusements may prevent crimes.” Hackman then expatiates on what he means by a useful, criminal story: “Faldini and Theresa might have been prevented from making any proselytes, if they ever have made any, by working up their most affecting story so as to take the edge off the dangerous example” (33; emphasis added). Hackman knows of the fatal couple through Jermingham’s poem, based on the true story of Faldini and Theresa Meunier, who committed suicide with pistols to the head, in a direct prolepsis of Hackman’s fate, in Lyons in the summer of 1770 (according to Voltaire, an act, in turn, based on the example of Auria and Paetus). Hackman’s moral stands doubly confuted. Even as he works up the Meuniers’ “affecting story,” the reader knows that Hackman will become their most celebrated proselyte, as if contemplation and contamination were one and the same. Moreover, Hackman knows of the couple through an artful amusement, Jermingham’s poem, which ought to have blunted the story’s “dangerous edge.” The irony is multi-layered: a real-life couple, the Meuniers, copy a fiction, before they, in turn, are transformed into text, thus serving as an unconscious model for another real-life couple, Hackman and Ray, whose life has been fictionalized and thus rendered dangerous. Croft drives the lesson home by cramming the book with real-life variations of what Hackman was himself to suffer. In his letters, Hackman continuously arranges the raw material of
daily tragedies—of doomed love affairs and suicides—into useful narratives, thus taking the edge off their danger. If such stories truly had a prophylactic effect, Hackman, above all, should be safe. Instead, he stands as living proof of the contagious glamour of “true stories,” no matter how swaddled with moral glosses, or how artfully arranged, a glamour cynically exploited by Croft in his bid to sell books and establish his fame.

Love and Madness sets out to erase the boundaries of the illusory and the real—through the pretence of being the letters of real people, by actually including real letters by real people, by continually referring to real events, and by begging the question of the relationship between truth and fiction—in order, above all else, to evoke empathy (terror and pity) in the reader. Hackman’s reference to morality in fiction is not Croft providing himself with self-justifying camouflage but an integral part of the larger project. At one point, Hackman scoffingly asks whether he should “pistol myself,” just because he has read Werther (74). The point of this grimly ironic prolepsis is that fiction is more real than our common-sense apprehensions of the probable. The moral aligned with this point—if moral it be—is best summed up by the initial Gentleman’s Magazine report of the catastrophe: “This murder affords a melancholy proof that there is no act so contrary to reason that reasonable men will not commit when under the domination of their passions.”

The self-knowledge that Love and Madness offers to the reader is that no insight into the self is capable of deflecting the fatal course of the passions. The reason Hackman and Ray’s case struck readers of the Gentleman’s Magazine with such peculiar horror was because Hackman was one of them: by all accounts, a reasonable man of status, place, and education, in other words, the embodiment of the rational. Even so, the numerous cautionary tales that Hackman himself relates to his mistress—real-life stories couched in a moral light—proved useless: the self that drove Hackman on, was, finally, unknowable, even to Hackman. Hackman’s death is the final source of pathos for the story, as it is only in his final moments, when all is lost and the end irrevocable, that he abandons his prevarication, taking sufficient control of himself to die with discipline, that is to say, like a gentleman.

The extensive Chatterton section in Love and Madness has often been seen as extraneous to the whole; for example, the only connection that the Gentleman’s Magazine can find is one of shared
interest: “We are not surprised that the forger of these letters should endeavour to extenuate the forgeries of Chatterton.” In fact, the link is fundamental to the whole. Croft locates the origin for his title in a poem by Dryden, which identifies love with madness; but as the “novel” unfolds it becomes clear that madness is a synonym for genius. Croft does not advance the view that all madness is genius, but he does suggest something like the converse. Love and Madness is an important text in the genealogy of Romantic genius, partly because it was a significant intervention in the promotion of Chatterton as its modern archetype—precocious, reclusive, driven, misunderstood, and prone to excess—and partly because it is one of the few texts that steps outside the discursive formulations of the aesthetic mainstream, of, for instance, William Duff and Alexander Gerard. Rather than the theory of genius, Croft gives us genius “novelized,” and as such the inflections of the figure are different from either Duff’s or Gerard’s. Croft’s Chatterton is actually closer to Edward Young’s notions of the original genius, in not only being firmly allied against classical learning and art, as a genius child of nature, but also in being open to his daemon, to, as Young puts it, the “stranger” within. As Croft’s alter ego, Hackman is split between madness as genius and madness as love. In comparison to the letters of Ray—few, and perfunctory—Hackman’s are a cascade of self-invention and self-fabulation, as he indefatigably gathers together, and expatiates on, prolepses of his own fate. Hackman in the end is a genius manqué, for a reason Croft discloses through his version of Chatterton, whom he presents not as licentious but chaste, whereas Hackman squanders his madness on sexual love. What Croft offers the reader is the view that genius, like sexual passion, is a fatality.

Inflecting what Habermas has to say about the private sphere with Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital will help us understand why this view was so appealing to Croft’s readership. As we saw for Habermas, the bourgeois private sphere has a close, dynamic relationship with the public; one way of understanding this is that the subjectivity the bourgeoisie endlessly rehearsed—through the medium of letters—was a means of raising cultural capital. Habermas’s “empathy” was thus a zone of crisis. Empathy promised the magic assimilation of the cultural value inhering within the subjectivity represented before the

50 Gentleman’s Magazine 50 (1780): 287.
FORGING A ROMANTIC IDENTITY

reader. To become absorbed in the life of genius promised cultural profit. Admiring Chatterton was the first step to emulation and distinction, but at the price of “fatality,” of opening one’s door to the stranger within. The risk one ran was that one’s inner self—the self unknowable—was, like Hackman’s, flawed. “Genius” may be the means of rising in the literary public sphere—as in Chatterton’s rapid, posthumous assent—but the implicit crossing of social boundaries mobilized intense anxieties. Croft’s erasure of the boundaries between the fictive and the real attested to the contagious power of the “fictive,” and by fictive I mean stories (regardless of provenance) transformed into print. Croft attempts to contain its threat by bringing Hackman back within his proper sphere, by having Hackman end as he begins, as a Christian gentleman. As with Hackman’s life of Chatterton, however, it is not enough to contain the dangerous glamour of example. In one of the British Library’s editions of Love and Madness, someone has pasted newspaper clippings of would-be Hackmans following his desperate expedient in their bids for fame by shooting their lovers and themselves.

What, then, is the nature of this new subjectivity of the mid-eighteenth-century novel? According to the narrow evidence of Croft’s “faction,” and William Henry Ireland’s internalization of it, the nature of this new subjectivity is the self-validating nature of genius. Genius dissolves customary boundaries, as between the real and the fictive (the example of Croft), the authentic and the forged (Chatterton as well as Croft), the ordinary and the extreme (Hackman and Chatterton). If assiduous reading, as a means of raising cultural capital, is the equivalent of dripping savings into a bank account, genius is the equivalent of the lottery. Once won, everything changes, and old rules no longer apply.

Through the persona of Hackman, Croft wonders over the story of the servant’s love affair that finds its way into the pages of the Spectator; of how, through sheer happenstance, two very ordinary people—a footman and his below-stairs sweetheart—have been transmogrified into famous individuals (77). Croft worries over a new fact of modern print culture: one can become famous for nothing. Inured as we are to daily examples of this in the twenty-first century, we can easily overlook the modern feel of the phenomenon during the eighteenth century. Another aspect of this expanding print culture was that identity had become a commodity: if it was printable, it was marketable. When Habermas considers the relationship between the
novel and the private/public sphere, he imagines a situation in which readers rehearse and strengthen their interiority through an identification with psychologically complex characters made identifiable through new, literary techniques of realism. But what, we might ask, is this “interiority”? At its simplest, it is a mark of difference between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, a token of the privacy that the former defend through an emergent public sphere. At its most complex, it is an ideological structure that conditions the personality of individuals.

From Bourdieu’s point of view, it is a mark of distinction translatable into cultural capital. From a print-culture perspective, it is a marketable identity, a narrative. In constructing Hackman Croft confers “genius” upon him because it is the highest status mark of interiority, and sentimentalism because it conforms with the bourgeois ideology of the inward subject. At the same time Croft shrouds Hackman with the glamour of print, of life transformed into narrative, as a promise/threat to the readers that they, too, are potentially newsworthy, or famous. One could say that Habermas’s own scenario of empathetic readers developing their interiority through novelistic projection is itself caught up within the bourgeois ideology of the subject. Regarded more dispassionately, one might characterize the reading process as a desire for the glamour—the distinction and value—of the identity that a novel celebrates; and for this process, a facsimile of depth does just as well as the real thing. What Croft may be said to have supplied his readers was just such a facsimile.

At the beginning of this section, I asked two questions: “What was the nature of the new subjectivity Habermas refers to?” and “What relationship does it bear to the erasure of the boundary between the real and the fictive?” My answer was that this subjectivity is linked to the emerging cult of original genius, which we might characterize, in Bourdieu’s terms, as a sign for the radical fluidity of cultural capital (or what Moretti terms “mobility”). I referred to Edward Young’s figuration of genius as turning to the “stranger within.” A similar phrase appears in Anna Letitia Barbauld’s “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (1773), where, in the sublime moment of meditation, of ecstasy, “the self-collected soul / Turns inward, and beholds a stranger there / Of high descent, and more than mortal rank; / An embryo God, a spark of fire Divine ...” 52 In Miltonic blank verse, Barbauld

FORGING A ROMANTIC IDENTITY 625

then describes the feminine soul launching forth, Lucifer-like, across the cosmos, to look upon the face of God. I cite Barbauld because her poem brings out the Evangelical and Dissenting inflections of the phrase “the stranger within” as well as its implicit transgressiveness and mobility, as in the example Barbauld gives, of the female soul bounding across space in Miltonic language. Habermas dwells upon the slow accumulation of cultural capital, the disciplined cultivation of interiority gained through the reading of fiction; but Croft exploits the radical fluidity of cultural capital when exemplified through the marketable real, which is to say, of fame as a print-culture commodity.

Ireland’s Romantic Identity

Judging from his confessions, and from what we know of his life, William Henry Ireland fully internalized the Chattertonian subjectivity represented in Croft’s *Love and Madness*. When he relates that on his visit to Bristol, in the aftermath of his exposure, he wept unfeigned tears of sympathy for Chatterton, we can believe him, for Chatterton—or rather, the cultural construction of Chatterton—is Ireland’s own self-image. So strong was this identification that, once freed from his father’s house, he began to live out the emerging myth of Romantic (Chattertonian) genius, taking up with unrespectable women, growing his hair long, and rambling about the country in unconventional clothes. Ireland constructs himself as a Chattertonian genius retrospectively in his 1805 *Confessions*; but that this was how he saw himself, in the midst of his forgeries, is attested to by this letter from 1796, written from near Bristol, to Byng, one of his father’s intermediaries:

At length my Dear Sir I think I have a situation which is at once perfectly retired as well as Romantick—I am within a mile of the finest spot in the kingdom which overlooks all the Bristol channel the sea and the welsh mountains. It is within 6 miles of the ferry which crosses the river Severn to Chepstow ... I went to Chatterton’s sister and made enquiries about that unhappy young man I learned but little more than I had already heard and read in *Love and Madness* I also saw the chests in which he is said to have found the parchments I firmly believe he did find some papers containing in prose & verse stories which he afterwards embellished & work’d up into poetry Be it as it may he was a wonderful young man.53

In many other respects, Ireland’s identity was “Romantick.” For example, consider this fashion statement (Ireland writes to his father

Samuel in the guise of the gentleman owner of the manuscripts):

Feb 23 1795: I saw my young friend yesterday morning we spoke on the subject of the new [taxes]. I was surprised by what he said to find you a friend to [Ministry] when by what he has always told me I thought you of the Minority. You must allow that all who contribute their guineas for powder give money for the support of the war as I have never been a friend to it in any one instance neither will I in this and I do no [?] on my Honour my hair is now combed to its real colour and will remain hanging loosely on my shoulders “that ladys may now perfume it with their balmy kisses.” Besides you cannot be an enemy to the manner in which our Willy wore his hair let me beseech you see your son with flowing locks it is not only Manly but showing yourself averse to blood shed I should not even regret to see you yourself out of powder. But however your son I should lay a stress on as he also seems to wish it.54

In this note written by his mother, we glimpse William’s self-fashioning as a Romantic genius:

to quiet (as he may think) the public mind, he has invented some story that will involve the mystery still deeper, & my opinion is strengthened by a determined resolution he has formed to quit the kingdom immediately, though he says that of late he has been inspired with all the furor of a Divine Poet. Such is the pitiable situation in which we are likely to be left, nor does he seem to feel a grain of remorse in the occasion, but has deserted his office (for a genius, like his, he says cannot condescend to sit at a Desk) and does nothing but lounge about the streets and drive about either on Horseback, or in a curracle with a groom after him like a man of the first fashion. The curracle & horses he told us, about 3 weeks since, cost 100 guineas and were given him by the Gent. But we find they are to cost 70, 50 of which has been paid by him, no other gent. having had any thing to do in the business.55

So when I earlier wrote that W.H. Ireland’s identity was Romantic, in a precise sense, I meant that his self-fashioning typified a certain strain within 1790s youth culture. Like all such self-fashionings, it has a history—hence my investigation into Croft’s Love and Madness—but it is also Romantic in another sense. One might characterize Jerome McGann’s Romantic ideology as an elaboration of the concept of “genius.” As an act of “false consciousness” such an expression, by definition, conceals and obfuscates a material reality. As I have been suggesting, the rise of print culture keys us into the material reality underpinning the Romantic ideology—in particular, that personality had become a commodity and fame bankable. In Love and Madness,

54 British Library MSS, Add. 30346, p. 52.
Chatterton boasts to his sister that once you write an essay and the author is inquired of “you may bring the booksellers to your own terms” (181). As Oliver Goldsmith put it, “In the populous city ... to be known was almost synonymous with being in the road to fortune.”

W.H. Ireland’s genius was his ability to live out, and so literalize, the ideological contradictions of the underlying material reality. In Briggs’s terms, he achieved a negative celebrity, for, instead of dramatizing, he exposed the inconsistencies in the views of his rapt public. For this W.H. Ireland was never forgiven. Years later, James Boaden, himself badly caught out by the forgeries, explained why: “You must be aware, sir, of the enormous crime you committed against the divinity of Shakespeare. Why, the act, sir, was nothing short of sacrilege; it was precisely the same thing as taking the holy chalice from the altar; and ******** therein!” Through his forgeries Ireland parodied the divinity of genius on which the Romantic ideology rested, and in so doing he brought the porous boundary that separates the real from the fake in an age of mechanical print production uncomfortably close to the surface. Read in the light of the Ireland story, one could say that the canonical Romantics did not invent the figure of the Romantic genius so much as they rescued it. Ireland had a long writing career, but owing to his infamy, he was unable to establish a name, or identity. Without a centre of gravity—a public identity on which he could build—his works were essentially flighty and parodic. In them we encounter Romanticism in form but without substance. The great architect of Romantic substance, in the decades immediately following his death, was Wordsworth, who succeeded in transforming the giddy figure of the genius by weighing it down with gravitas and “depth.” W.H. Ireland’s career nevertheless serves to remind us that what we think of as Romantic subjectivity (the genius as the self-creating individual) first of all begins as parody, as the lived-out consequences of eighteenth-century print culture, before being rescued, and ennobled, by the canonical Romantics.

University of Victoria

56 Cited in Briggs, 269.
57 Ireland, Vortigern, xiii.