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## Forging Literary History: Historical Fiction and Literary Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain

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## *Forging Literary History: Historical Fiction and Literary Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain*

ANNE H. STEVENS

**I**n his article "History's Greatest Forger: Science, Fiction, and Fraud Along the Seine," historian of science Ken Alder purports to have discovered a letter in a French archive by Denis Vrain-Lucas, a notorious nineteenth-century forger who made a fortune selling letters he claimed to have discovered in a hitherto-unknown casque of papers by such luminaries as Galileo, Alexander the Great, and Mary Magdalene (all written in French!). By creating his own invented letter to serve his larger intellectual purposes, Alder revisits Vrain-Lucas's acts of forgery, employing the familiar eighteenth-century framework of the discovered manuscript in order to muse theoretically on the nature of historical knowledge, and call for "a more expansive view of what counts as a credible account of the past." Both Alder the supposed translator of this letter and his alter-ego Vrain-Lucas discuss the creative element present in all acts of historical reconstruction. In his "translator's" introduction, Alder argues,

If a narrow descriptive facticity cannot exhaust the plenitude of nature, why should the plenitude of the human past be more easily encompassed? Yet many historians continue to represent the past in as positivist a mode as any scientist, and they continue to do so using literary technologies—

both forms of writing and the presentation of evidence—that historians borrowed back from the natural sciences in the nineteenth century.

Speaking in the voice of Vrain-Lucas defending his acts of forgery within his invented letter, Alder makes a related point: “Only when historians are obliged to work between the documents and fill in the gaps—for there are always gaps—do the imaginative faculties become engaged in storytelling, and only then can we paint the true picture of an age.”<sup>1</sup>

Alder characterizes the dominant mode of contemporary historiography as positivistic, exhibiting a “narrow descriptive facticity” that misses the forest for the trees, ignoring larger truths about the past in favor of antiquarian details. In contrast to this scientific attitude towards the past, Alder celebrates the historian’s work as an artistic endeavor, likening it to both literature (“storytelling”) and the visual arts (“paint the true picture of an age”), in a manner reminiscent of postmodern theorists of historiography such as Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur. In reaction to positivistic, scientific models of historical investigation, many postmodern critics react skeptically, doubting the possibility of actually recovering the past on its own terms.<sup>2</sup> Alder’s work of historical fiction couched as forgery, in contrast, takes this skepticism and channels it in a much more optimistic, even celebratory, direction in regards to the creative and imaginative dimensions of historical reconstruction.

In this essay, I wish to explore a similar dialectic of historical positivism and skepticism in eighteenth-century Britain. Over the course of the century, but particularly in the second half, new and more scientific standards of historical investigation developed, with practitioners expressing a greater confidence about their ability to know the past. During these years, a series of monumental achievements in historiography appeared: David Hume’s *History of England* (1754–62), Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), and William Robertson’s *History of Scotland* (1759), to name just three of the most celebrated. As part of this increased interest in the past and increased optimism about the ability to understand earlier historical periods, a range of new types of writing about the past proliferated, such as antiquarian studies, social and cultural history, literary history, universal history, and conjectural history.<sup>3</sup> While the study of history was developing much more rigorous standards of investigation and historical works were among the bestselling titles of the century, a strain of historical skepticism was gaining force, often finding expression in the writings of the very same people who were doing the confident historical investigation. This philosophical skepticism is perhaps most



dramatically illustrated in the writings of major historians such as Hume and Robertson.<sup>4</sup> The works of these philosophical historians were steeped in skepticism about both individual historical details and the possibility of achieving any kind of historical certainty.<sup>5</sup>

While many eighteenth-century historians such as Hume expressed skepticism about their own historical investigations, other writers celebrated the imaginative dimension of historical investigation, à la Alder. These imaginative manifestations of historical skepticism took the form of historical fictions and literary forgeries, both of which flourished in the late eighteenth century. My essay will survey a few examples of the historical forgeries and historical fictions of the late eighteenth century, placing them in the context of this dialectic of positivism and skepticism. In particular, I will examine some of the ways in which both modern scholars and eighteenth-century practitioners have connected those phenomena. Both literary forgery and historical fiction as practiced in the second half of the eighteenth century depend upon another of the age's notable intellectual developments, an emergent literary historicism: the idea that literature has a history, part of and parallel to a larger cultural history, and that literary style is a product of its historical moment, which can be reconstructed through scholarly analysis. As literature comes increasingly to be valued as a repository of history in the later eighteenth century, both literary forgers and historical novelists experiment with this new valuation, depositing their own interpretations of the past into new imaginative works.

While Hume famously called his own time "the historical age," it is no coincidence that the eighteenth century was also certainly the golden age of historical forgery. In recent years the phenomenon of literary forgery has attracted the attention of a number of scholars, including Paul Baines, Nick Groom, and Ian Haywood.<sup>6</sup> Eighteenth-century forgery is most often associated with its most famous practitioners, the paired figures of Thomas Chatterton and James Macpherson, although there were many other notorious forgers throughout the century. The eighteenth century is also widely regarded as the period in which the field of literary history came into its own, taking on many of its recognizably modern features.<sup>7</sup> Anthony Grafton, among others, has explored the reciprocal relationship between literary forgers and literary scholars: "For 2,500 years and more, forgery has amused its uninvolved observers, enraged its humiliated victims, flourished as a literary genre, and, most oddly of all, stimulated vital innovations in the technical method of scholars."<sup>8</sup> The phenomena of literary forgery and literary history are dialectically linked: as scholars evince an increasing interest in the past and confidence about their investigations,

forgers prey upon this interest by creating new documents meant to pass for historical artifacts.

Many of the milestones in both the history of literary forgery and the development of English literary history cluster around the 1760s and early 1770s. James Macpherson inaugurated the decade and his series of Ossian poems with *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in 1760. Thomas Percy published his monumental ballad collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765. The previous year, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* appeared, neither an act of forgery nor a literary history but a Gothic novel that borrows liberally from both genres, especially in its prefatory material. Although his Rowley forgeries were not published until several years after his death in 1770, in 1769 Thomas Chatterton famously and notoriously sought Walpole's opinion of his manuscripts, while debates about the authenticity of the Rowley poems appeared throughout the decade of the 1770s. And in 1774, the first volume of Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, the first English literary history, was published. The synchronicity and interconnectedness of notorious literary forgeries and groundbreaking literary histories becomes apparent by looking at the controversies surrounding Chatterton and Macpherson in particular. The greatest literary historical minds of the day, including Percy, Warton, Hugh Blair, Samuel Johnson, and Thomas Tyrwhitt, were all involved in debating the authenticity of these texts, and one byproduct of these debates was that they helped to develop more sophisticated critical principles of textual analysis and literary history. Both defenders and detractors of Chatterton and Macpherson based their arguments on a sense of literature as a repository of information about social and cultural history, alternately pointing out, for example, the historicity or the anachronisms of the texts' language, style, and subject matter.

A good deal of the recent scholarly literature on forgery has focused on the creative rather than the criminal dimensions of the act, or on the conjunctions between the two, as in Ken Alder's exploration of the mixed motivations of Denis Vrain-Lucas. In his 2001 book *Faking Literature*, for example, K. K. Ruthven uses a poststructuralist framework to examine and to celebrate forgery: "We ought to revalue literary forgery as an antinomian phenomenon produced by creative energies whose power is attested to by the resistance they engender in those who feel compelled to denounce and eradicate it." Forgeries, he contends, "exhibit a carnivalesque irreverence towards the sanctity of various conventions designed to limit what is permissible in literary production."<sup>9</sup> A version of this "carnavalesque irreverence" can be seen in Patricia Highsmith's 1970 novel *Ripley Under Ground*, where the main character, Tom Ripley, becomes enmeshed in a



complex scheme of art forgery. He defends his actions, arguing that "an artist does things naturally, without effort. Some power guides his hand. A forger struggles, and if he succeeds, it is a genuine achievement."<sup>10</sup> Though Ripley's championing of forgery as a form of artistic achievement and his refusal to distinguish between the authentic work of art and the copy sound seductively postmodern, even Baudrillardian, it is important to note that he not only celebrates the creative aspects of forgery but also commits identity theft and multiple murders.

My point here is not to express outrage over the "crimes of writing" of past centuries, but merely to articulate a reluctance to embrace a completely relativistic attitude towards truth.<sup>11</sup> A distinction should be made between forgery as a crime intended to deceive for profit and glory and the use of gestures of forgery for rhetorical effect or in order to mimic or recreate the style of another era, even though a Macpherson or Chatterton blurs those very boundaries.<sup>12</sup> In the first camp I would place the real Vrain-Lucas selling his forged letters to the credulous scholar Michel Chasles, in the second, Ken Alder inventing a new letter by Vrain-Lucas as a way of commenting upon historiography.

In *The Making of History*, Ian Haywood delineates a similar movement from outright forgery to the employment of the gestures of forgery in the transition from the poetry of Chatterton and Macpherson to the historical novel as practiced by Sir Walter Scott. For Haywood, "their aims were the same: the literary making of the past."<sup>13</sup> This is a tremendous leap to make from Macpherson's and Chatterton's forgeries in the 1760s to the Waverley Novels (1814–1832) on the basis of a common motivation to "make" history. But I agree with Haywood that there is a connection between literary forgery and historical fiction. Both are imaginative attempts to reconstruct the past, borne of a skeptical reaction to increasingly scientific attitudes towards history. In between these two points I would like to propose a number of moments in literary history that can be seen as intermediate steps between Macpherson and Scott, which I will explore in the remainder of this essay.

One line from forgery to historical fiction can be traced from Macpherson as an alleged folklorist, collecting fragments of ancient poetry, to Scott's work as a literary antiquary and ballad collector in his first publication, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). Scott's antiquarian background informs the construction of his novels, particularly in his use of antiquarian paratextual matter such as footnotes and multiple scholarly and pseudo-scholarly prefatory framing devices, while the debate over the authenticity of the poems of Ossian figures prominently in the plot of his novel *The Antiquary*.

Over the last several decades, Scott has been demoted from his traditional place in literary history as the inventor of the historical novel. Katie

Trumpener, one of the key figures in Scott's demotion, puts it succinctly: "Most of the conceptual innovations attributed to Scott were in 1814 already fully established commonplaces of the British novel."<sup>14</sup> In a similar way, he is not the first to connect historical fiction and literary forgery. In fact, some of the earliest English novels that employ historical settings play with this connection between fiction and forgery. Walpole famously and influentially began the preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* in the voice of an antiquary:

The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1520. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism.<sup>15</sup>

Although he confesses his authorship in subsequent editions, in the first edition Walpole employs a framing device that masks his novel as a much more ancient work, just as Macpherson and other forgers had done. And at least initially, some readers took the preface at its word. Even the *Critical Review*, for example, leaves the question of the text's authenticity open for debate:

The ingenious translator of this *very curious* performance informs us it was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England . . . . Whether he speaks seriously or ironically we neither know nor care. The publication of any work, at this time, in England composed of such rotten materials, is a phenomenon we cannot account for.<sup>16</sup>

Although the reviewer dismisses *The Castle of Otranto* as trash, he does not definitively state that it is a work of fiction, as later reviewers did. Instead, he dismisses the question of the text's authenticity as both unanswerable and irrelevant.

Walpole uses the discovered manuscript topos with much more pronounced and unambiguous irony in his later and less celebrated *Hieroglyphic Tales*: "The Hieroglyphic Tales were undoubtedly written a little before the creation of the world, and have ever since been preserved, by oral tradition, in the mountains of Crampcraggiri, an uninhabited island, not yet discovered."<sup>17</sup> Here Walpole parodies the discovered manuscript

convention by carrying it to an absurdist and paradoxical extreme—the text, written before the creation of the world, has been preserved by oral tradition, and on an uninhabited island, no less. Near the end of his preface, the author describes his next project:

I will not detain the reader longer from the perusal of this invaluable work; but I must beseech the public to be expeditious in taking off the whole impression, as fast as I can get it printed; because I must inform them that I have a more precious work in contemplation; namely, a new Roman history, in which I mean to ridicule, detect and expose, all ancient virtue, and patriotism, and shew from original papers which I am going to write, and which I shall afterwards bury in the ruins of Carthage and then dig up, that it appears by the letters of Hanno the Punic ambassador at Rome, that Scipio was in the pay of Hannibal, and that the dilatoriness of Fabius proceeded from his being a pensioner of the same general.<sup>18</sup>

Walpole takes on the persona of a not-very-subtle forger for his collection of outrageous tales, anarchically clearing a space for his fantastic and boundary-pushing narratives by casting doubt upon the validity of traditional historical narrative. In this way he deliberately yokes historical forgery and historical fiction, casting both in an ironic and absurdist light.

The ironic depiction of historical forgery in the *Hieroglyphic Tales* builds upon the skepticism that became much more pronounced in Walpole's thinking on historical matters in the 1760s and 1770s. Walpole's major work of historical scholarship in this period (which led to his complete break with the Society of Antiquaries), *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III* (1768), had tried to demonstrate through the example of the reputation of Richard III how received historical wisdom can be built upon flimsy and partisan foundations. He begins the work with an expression of extreme historical skepticism:

So incompetent has the generality of historians been, for the province they have undertaken, that it is almost a question, whether, if the dead of past ages could revive, they would be able to reconnoitre the events of their own times, as transmitted to us by ignorance and misrepresentation. All very ancient history, except that of the illuminated Jews, is a perfect fable.<sup>19</sup>



Walpole casts doubt upon received historical truths, such as the portrait of Richard III as a tyrant and a monster that Shakespeare helped to solidify in the minds of the English, and chooses not to replace these notions with any new historical certainty: "All I mean to show, is, that though he may have been as execrable as we are told he was, we have little or no reason to believe so."<sup>20</sup> Thus in both his serious critical work and his fantastic fictions Walpole gives voice to a strong strain of historical skepticism, leading to both the debunking of historical commonplaces and the inauguration of a new vogue for historical fictions.

One of Walpole's novelistic heirs, Sophia Lee, draws upon another set of historic doubts for her immensely popular historical novel *The Recess, or, A Tale of Other Times* (1783–85), which tells the story of two fictional daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots. Forgery pervades her work: she borrows her subtitle from Ossian and frames her tale as a discovered manuscript à la Chatterton. The historical uncertainties that make her fiction possible surround a number of ambiguous events in the life of Mary, Queen of Scots and in particular a set of possibly forged papers, the casket letters, which implicated her in adultery, conspiracy, and the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley.<sup>21</sup> In the opening paragraph of her advertisement to the novel, Lee employs the convention of the discovered manuscript in order to leave the door open for a fictional reimagining of the past:

Not being permitted to publish the means which enriched me with the manuscript from whence the following tale is extracted, its simplicity alone can authenticate it. —I make no apology for altering the language to that of the present age, since the obsolete stile of the author would be frequently unintelligible. —A wonderful coincidence of events stamps the narration at least with probability, and the reign of Elizabeth was that of romance. If this Lady was not the child of fancy, her fate can hardly be paralleled; and the line of which she came has been marked by an eminent historian, as one distinguished alike by splendor and misery.<sup>22</sup>

Here Lee coyly plays with issues of authenticity and fictionality. She cannot supply readers with information regarding the origins of her manuscript, but instead wants them to judge it on its style and emotional effect. She raises the possibility that the manuscript is invented a number of times, calling her heroine perhaps "the child of fancy," and highlighting the "romance" of the story. But she also suggests that in the sixteenth century history itself resembled romance, as anyone familiar with the

dramatic and improbable events of Mary's life would attest. By using the language of fiction ("probability," "fancy," "romance") Lee transfers doubts about the authenticity of the casket letters onto Lee's own invented manuscript. In other words, since the evidence indicting Mary may very well be a fiction, Lee counters with her own fictional exoneration of Mary, which she then presents in the guise of a discovered manuscript of questionable authenticity. While Walpole dramatically and anarchically connects historical fiction, forgery, and skepticism, casting "historic doubts" on any positive understanding of the past, here Lee performs a similar but more localized gesture, suggesting that "romance" is the only certainty we are left with when examining Mary's biography.

Almost twenty years after *The Castle of Otranto*, the *Critical Review* became more skeptical about the discovered manuscript convention:

She talks indeed of an obsolete manuscript, and of the wonderful coincidence of history; but these are subterfuges which no longer surprise or deceive us. It is new; it is instructive; it is highly interesting; and we wish that this new mode of writing were more frequent. We are more affected with even the pretended memoirs of the counsellors and generals of Elizabeth, than with Sir Charles Beverley or Colonel Belville; and if costume is properly preserved, may be often instructed by them.<sup>23</sup>

Juxtaposing the *Critical's* assessments of *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Recess* we can see an evolution of their criteria of judgment. In the former case, the reviewer declares himself unable to ascertain whether the work is published from an authentic manuscript or not, but dismisses the work as trash in any case. In the latter review, the subterfuge of the discovered manuscript no longer has any currency except as an empty novelistic gesture; however, the status of the novel has risen.<sup>24</sup> The reviewer praises the novelty of the work and particularly the inherent interest in seeing the private lives of historical personages as opposed to the Sir Charles Beverleys and Colonel Belvilles of the contemporary novel.

Following the examples of Walpole and Lee, dozens of historical novelists used the convention of the discovered manuscript to introduce their narratives, turning it into one of the age's great novelistic clichés. Though the language of these prefaces is often by-the-numbers, a few popular novelists engage with the intersections of the burgeoning field of literary history, Enlightenment skepticism, and literary forgery in surprising and thought-provoking ways. One of the more interesting examples of this can be found in *The Jesuit; or, the History of Anthony Babington, Esq. An*



*Historical Novel* (1799) by Mrs. F. C. Patrick. In the preface she claims her book is not a work of fiction but a modernization of an old manuscript. She assures readers of her veracity by reference to a recent forgery controversy:

Rejoice with me, then, good and amiable reader, that I was present at the very first opening of the chest which contained the famous Shakespearian Manuscripts; which, in spite of Mr. Ireland's assertions, and the manifold proofs of old spelling, moth-holes, mutilations, &c. (which we must not suppose were brought forward without a thorough conviction, on Mr. Ireland's part, that *we*, the ignorant herd, would be satisfied with them) some independent geniuses have hitherto cavilled at and disputed, nay even positively denied, that the Plays were Shakepeare's . . . . I protest, in the sincerity of my heart, they are as genuine as the manuscript I am now introducing; and, I believe, no impartial critick will attempt to prove that mine is not so.<sup>25</sup>

Patrick refers here to one of the most outrageous examples of eighteenth-century forgery, W. H. Ireland's Shakespeare manuscripts. In 1796, three years before *The Jesuit* was published, Ireland's Shakespearean forgery *Vortigern and Rowena* was laughed off the London stage. By saying that her manuscript is as genuine as Ireland's, then, Patrick is comparing herself to a recently disgraced forger, a national joke. Like Walpole in his preface to the *Hieroglyphic Tales*, Patrick brings up an obvious forger in order to satirize the staleness and utter improbability of the discovered manuscript convention. In the process, she also connects her type of imaginative historical re-creation with Ireland's, linking forgery and historical fiction as two versions of the "modern antique." Several years later, Ireland himself turned novelist, putting his experience as a creator of historical forgeries to more respectable uses by producing among other texts a historical novel, *The Catholic, An Historical Romance*, a fictionalized account of the Guy Fawkes affair that partakes of Patrick's anti-Catholic fervor.<sup>26</sup>

A more tangled relationship among literary history, historical mimicry, and historical fiction can be found in Helen Craik's novel *Henry of Northumberland, or the Hermit's Cell* (1800). In the preface, Craik describes how, while visiting at a friend's house, she discovers a chest of papers:

Amongst the number was a manuscript, much torn and defaced; which, on perusal of the contents, I found bore a strong similitude to the principal events mentioned in the modern and very beautiful poem of the "Hermit of Warkworth."



It appeared to be a simple, unadorned matter of fact journal of some occurrences relative to the noble family of the Percys during the reigns of Henry IV. and V.<sup>27</sup>

"The Hermit of Warkworth" was a long ballad-imitation in three "fits" by Thomas Percy.<sup>28</sup> Today the poem is most frequently remembered as the target of Johnson's caricature of ballad simplicity:

I put my hat upon my head  
And went into the Strand.  
And there I met another man  
Whose hat was in his hand.

But in its day, "The Hermit of Warkworth" was critically and commercially successful, going through three editions in 1771 alone and included in later editions of Percy's *Reliques*.<sup>29</sup>

Both Percy's poem and Craik's novel take place in fifteenth-century England, during the reigns of Henry IV and V. The narrative of Craik's three-volume novel contains considerably more incident than Percy's poem. As befits the scope of a novel, Craik begins her story with the infancy of her hero, Henry Percy (son of Hotspur), while Thomas Percy begins his narrative when Henry is a young man, in love with the fair Lady Eleanor Neville. As Percy's poem begins, and two-thirds of the way through the first volume of Craik's novel, the couple has been separated in the midst of a storm and are reunited in a hermit's cell near Warkworth Castle in Northumberland. The hermit shares his tale with the pair, the long interpolated "Hermit's Tale," which Craik adapts very closely from "The Hermit of Warkworth." Bertram, the friend of Percy's grandfather the first earl of Northumberland, loves Isabel. When she is kidnapped, he goes in search of her, and in the process of rescuing her he mistakenly murders her and his brother, who was aiding her escape. Bertram then retreats from the world to become the titular hermit. Bertram's narrative takes up most of Percy's poem, which ends with five brief stanzas detailing Henry and Eleanor's marriage and Henry's restoration to favor with Henry V. In contrast, Craik's novel pays considerably more attention to the story of Henry and Eleanor. After the hermit's story, Percy shares his own story of his adventures in Scotland. A large portion of the third volume of *Henry of Northumberland* concerns Percy's journeys to Florence, Bologna, and Milan. Like "The Hermit of Warkworth," however, the book ends with the protagonists' marriage and Percy's restoration to favor.

Like many novels of this time, *Henry of Northumberland* employs chapter epigraphs, often drawn from English poets like Shakespeare, Pope, and Goldsmith. Besides these conventional choices, quite a few of the chapters take their epigraphs from "The Hermit of Warkworth," so that Percy's poem functions as an intertext and shadowy presence throughout the novel. This symbiosis between ballad imitation and historical novel highlights the tangled connections between these two characteristic late eighteenth-century phenomena. To trace the path of literary circulation, a literary historian, Thomas Percy, collected and annotated ballad literature. Then he published a modern ballad imitation, "The Hermit of Warkworth," complete with critical and prefatory material that mimicked his scholarly work.<sup>30</sup> A couple of decades later, Helen Craik's *Henry of Northumberland* borrows much of its narrative and historical color from Percy's poem. A number of details from the poem migrate directly into the novel, such as the "dried fruits, and milk, and curds" that constitute the hermit's fare as well as several historical and biographical footnotes that Craik copies verbatim into her text. In her preface, she ironically claims to have discovered and modernized an old manuscript whose narrative resembles Percy's poem. She further blurs the line between fact and fiction throughout her narrative. For example, the novel opens with the first Earl of Northumberland in his castle waiting for intelligence from the Battle of Shrewsbury. A messenger arrives with news:

"The King," pursued Bardolp, "is mortally wounded, and Prince Henry slain by the conquering arm of your son; both the Blunts fell by the hand of Douglas; young Prince John, Westmorland, and Stafford, only secured their safety by a timely retreat from the field of battle; and Monmouth's worthy favourite, Sir John Falstaff, is prisoner to my Lord your son; as are likewise many more of greater rank and merit."<sup>31</sup>

It's within the realm of possibility that Craik includes an overtly fictional character in her catalogue of historical figures as a sly comment upon the imaginative dimensions of any act of historical understanding, echoing the sentiments of her novelistic forebears Walpole and Lee. Or perhaps to view it in that way would be merely to project modern critical concerns back onto Craik's eighteenth-century novel. As Alder has contended, however, every act of historical creation involves an imaginative leap and an act of projection.

The novels I have briefly glanced at in this essay illustrate some of the ways in which literary forgery and historical fiction are connected as two

skeptical reactions to the increasing scientific orientation of historiography in the eighteenth century. As a more positivistic approach to history develops in the second half of the century, in reaction to and alongside it there develops a skeptical, doubting attitude towards this confidence, which manifests itself in works as diverse as Ireland's *Vortigern and Rowena* and Craik's *Henry of Northumberland*. These novels also highlight some of the ways in which the high and the low, popular and scholarly writings interact in this period. Just as *Libra*, Don DeLillo's historical novel about the Kennedy assassination, bridged the gap between high theory and popular fiction by embodying the academic historical skepticism of the 1980s (while linking it to JFK conspiracy theories), so too the historical novels of the late eighteenth century suggest the pervasiveness and popular dissemination of skeptical attitudes towards historical certainty.

## NOTES

This article began as a paper at the 2006 ASECS conference in Montreal, in a session on "Writing Literary History" organized by Ruth Mack. Much of my research was conducted while attending a 2005 NEH Summer Seminar organized by Stephen Behrendt at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. I would like to thank Jeff Rufo, Will Kenton, Michael Rotenberg-Schwartz, and Philip Rusche for their comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

1. Ken Alder, "History's Greatest Forger: Science, Fiction, and Fraud along the Seine," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 703, 702, 707–08.

2. On the skeptical attitude towards the past see, for example, Mary Poovey, "The Structure of Anxiety in Political Economy and *Hard Times*," in *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 152: "A past 'event' only manifests itself as meaningful to the present reader through, and in the terms provided by, the interpretive response it occasion. . . . The way we delineate the beginning and ending of a text or an event—the way we identify the 'text' or the 'event' itself—derives from our present sense of its meaning *in relation to our own interpretative categories*, which exist to make the past meaningful to us now." We can only know the past, Poovey contends, by imposing our present terms upon it; we cannot know it on its own terms.

3. See Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).



4. I explore Hume and Robertson's skepticism and its relation to the novel more fully in my article "Sophia Lee's Illegitimate History," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 3 (2003): 263–91.

5. For an influential though now dated account of the skeptical turn in eighteenth-century historiography, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), esp. 48: "By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, this ambivalence had been transformed into Irony, which expressed itself in a historical epistemology that was Skeptical in the extreme and in an ethical attitude, generated by Skepticism, that was manifestly relativistic."

6. On literary forgery in general and eighteenth-century forgery in particular see Joseph Rosenblum, *Practice to Deceive: The Amazing Stories of Literary Forgery's Most Notorious Practitioners* (New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2000); John Whitehead, *This Solemn Mockery: The Art of Literary Forgery* (London: Arlington Books, 1973); Paul Baines, *The House of Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Ian Haywood, *The Making of History: A Study of the Literary Forgeries of James Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton in Relation to Eighteenth-Century Ideas of History and Fiction* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986). Most recently, Margaret Russett's *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760–1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) has charted new terrain in this field, exploring the connections, among other things, between the notion of forgery and the rise of the novel.

7. For a classic and a recent discussion of the development of literary history in the eighteenth century, see René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941) and Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*. On the related topic of the development of an English literary canon see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

8. Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 5.

9. Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, 3, 4.

10. Patricia Highsmith, *Ripley Under Ground* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 66.

11. See Susan Stewart, "Scandals of the Ballad," *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102–31.

12. In the same way, most teachers of literature would probably want to make a distinction between celebrated acts of literary plagiarism, such as Laurence Sterne's liberal borrowings from his source material in *Tristram Shandy*, and a student cutting and pasting a term paper from the Internet.

13. Haywood, *The Making of History*, 161. On Scott, history, and fiction, see also Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), Everett Zimmermann, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), and Harry Shaw, *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), among many other works.

14. Katie Trumpener, "National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of *Waverley*, 1806–1830," *ELH* 60 (1993): 687.

15. Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, ed. W. S. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

16. Review of *The Castle of Otranto*, *Critical Review* 19 (1765): 50–51.

17. Walpole, *Hieroglyphic Tales* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993), 7.

18. Walpole, *Hieroglyphic Tales*, 10.

19. Walpole, *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* (London: J. Dodsley, 1768), iii. I read his comment about "the illuminated Jews" ironically. By calling all ancient history a "fable" except for the Hebrew Bible, Walpole implicitly suggests that the Bible too may be filled with "ignorance and misrepresentation."

20. Walpole, *Historic Doubts*, 2. For an entertaining fictionalization of Walpole's doubts, see Josephine Tey, *The Daughter of Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1951).

21. On the casket letters in the eighteenth century, see Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, "Mary Stuart's 'Fatal Box': Sentimental History and the Revival of the Casket Letters Controversy," *The Age of Johnson* 7 (1996): 427–73, and Colin Kidd, "The Ideological Significance of the *History of Scotland*," in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 122–44.

22. Sophia Lee, *The Recess; or, a Tale of Other Times*, ed. April Alliston (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 5.

23. Review of *The Recess*, *Critical Review* 55 (1783): 233–34.

24. As late as 1784, however, reviewers were not yet completely jaded by the discovered manuscript convention, as evidenced in a review of William Godwin's Ossian-inspired novel *Imogen* in the October 1784 *Critical Review*: "Whether this be really a translation from the Welsh, and the original of great antiquity, as the editor affirms, it is impossible for us to determine without farther evidence. But we do not hesitate to pronounce that it abounds with tender sentiments, pleasing description, and an innocent simplicity of manners" (58: 312).

25. Mrs. F. C. Patrick, *The Jesuit; or, the History of Anthony Babington, Esq. An Historical Novel*, 3 vols. (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1799), 1: vii–viii.

26. See W. H. Ireland, *The Catholic: An Historical Romance* (London: W. Earle, 1807). The similarity of their novels and particularly their virulent anti-Catholicism raises the possibility that Patrick and Ireland may have been acquainted.

27. Helen Craik, *Henry of Northumberland, or the Hermit's Cell: A Tale of the Fifteenth Century*. 3 vols. (London: Minerva Press, 1800), 1: x-xi.

28. See Thomas Percy, "The Hermit of Warkworth," *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1873).

29. See Nick Groom, "Fragments, Reliques, and MSS: Chatterton and Percy," in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 192-93.

30. To further complicate matters, novelist Sophia Lee published a long narrative poem modeled on "The Hermit of Warkworth." See Lee, *A Hermit's Tale: Recorded by His Own Hand, and Found in His Cell* (London: T. Cadell, 1787).

31. Craik, *Henry of Northumberland*, 1:8.