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FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
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Publishing the Private: Romantic Productions of Literacy Confession

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Publishing the Private: Romantic Productions of Literary Confession

By Matthew McDonald

A thesis presented to the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English Literature.

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395 Wellington Street
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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48640-5
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48640-5

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Abstract

After Rousseau's famous *Confessions*, Britain witnessed a surge in the production of literary confession. This thesis examines five Romantic-era confessions to show how this autobiographical form was reshaped in the period, concentrating on the way in which their writers operated through engagement with editors, publishers, audiences, and print forms. It argues that Romantic confessors exploited not only the genre and its popularity but also conventions of publication to establish themselves as distinctive author-figures within Britain's increasingly competitive and commercialized print culture.

Chapter One looks at the confessions of Thomas De Quincey and Charles Lamb, tracing their use of the literary magazine to develop reader-writer relationships. Chapter Two considers how William-Henry Ireland and William Hazlitt use the book format to construct their authorship, while Chapter Three turns to a fictional confession by James Hogg, whose structure mimics the process of publishing the private and raises questions about this act.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Ina Ferris of the Department of English at the University of Ottawa. One of her graduate seminars first ignited my interest in the culture of print of the Romantic period, but her encouragement and guidance have played a key role in the completion of this thesis. Thanks are also due my family and friends who have not only celebrated my progress but also supported me along the way. Special thanks go to my roommates for offering this support on a daily basis.

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INTRODUCTION

Literary Confession in an Age of Reading, Print, and Personality

This is confessedly the age of confession,—the era of individuality—the triumphant reign of the first person singular. Writers no longer talk in generals. All their observations are bounded in the narrow compass of self.

“The Confessions of an English Glutton,”
Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (1823)

Blackwood’s English Glutton considers himself a witness to “the age of confession”

(86).¹ Evoking in his title one of the period’s most prominent confessions, Thomas De Quincey’s 1821 “Confessions of an English Opium Eater,” he sees the “fashion” of confessional writing as symptomatic of a “common characteristic” of “Egotism,” which has become “as endemical to English literature as the plague to Egypt, or the scurvy to the northern climes” (86). The target of the English Glutton’s satiric critique is this disease brought to Britain with the English translation of Rousseau’s famous *Confessions*, published in 1782 and translated in 1783. He alludes to a number of British writers who suffer acutely from it, including the “inventor of Vortigern,” who produced *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* in 1805, and his essay offers a parody of confessional works of “periodical personality” by fellow magazine writers: the 1822 “Confessions of a Drunkard” by Charles Lamb the “Wine-Drinker”; the 1822 “Memoir of a Hypochondriac” by an anonymous “hypochondriacal” “scribbler”; and the aforementioned confession by “the Opium-eater” (86).² Such criticism had been circulating since the publication of Rousseau’s *Confessions*,

¹ “The Confessions of an English Glutton” is attributed to Thomas Colley Grattan; see Alan Lang Strout, *A Bibliography of Articles in Blackwood’s Magazine: Volumes I through XVII (1817-1825)*, Lubbock, TX: Library, Texas Technical College, 1959.

² The unsigned “Memoir of a Hypochondriac” was published in the September and October 1822 issues of the *London Magazine*. Bertram Dobell, in his 1903 *Sidelights on Charles Lamb*, claims the article “may be pretty

but the English Glutton's assertion of a national literary epidemic points to the surge of interest in literary confession on the part of writers, readers, and publishers in early nineteenth-century Britain. While confessional literature had circulated for centuries, Romantic-era Britain witnessed a sharp increase in its production. The success of Rousseau's autobiographical work inspired imitators like the book-seller James Lackington, who invoked his French predecessor with *The Confessions of J. Lackington* in 1804. At the same time, the tradition of criminal confessions remained active in the form of both contemporary publications and republications, as with the reprinting of *A true and genuine copy of the last speech, confession, and dying words of Nicol Muschet of Boghall* (1721) in Edinburgh in 1818. This particular republication in fact directly contributed to Romantic confessional writings by serving as a source for James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* of 1824. A fictional confession, Hogg's book also draws on the conventions of the Gothic novel, whose generic interest in confession is attested to by titles like Charlotte Dacre's *Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer* (1804). Parodies and satires also appeared, testifying to the genre's proliferation in Romantic print culture. *Blackwood's*, for example, published in 1823 not only the anonymous "Confessions of an English Glutton" cited above but also Henry Thomson's "Confessions of a Footman."

The tradition of written confessions, as exemplified by Augustine's paradigmatic *Confessions*, derives from the religious sacrament.³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, which critics such as James Treadwell identify as a seminal text in the "rise of

confidently ascribed to [Thomas Griffiths] Wainwright" (30). More recently, however, Margaret Russet has attributed the memoir to B.W. Proctor (*De Quincey's Romanticism* 127).

³ Popular eighteenth-century criminal confessions continued this Christian tradition, commonly concluding with words of penitence that reinforced the lessons and warnings of the gallows, but these works do not exemplify confession as a form of self-writing, because few of them were actually written by the criminals.

autobiography” (35), was a key work in the attenuation of the literary confession’s religious roots. Defining confession as self-revelation, Rousseau established a secularized form on which later Romantic confessors built. De Quincey, for instance, invokes Rousseau in his introductory address, “To The Reader,” in “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,” even as he cites him in order to distinguish himself as a specifically English writer. The important point, however, is that De Quincey, like most confessors of the period, streamlines the Rousseauvian model, detailing a distinct transgression instead of an entire life. Confessional works sharing this feature — the highlighting of shameful and often lurid details that shape a specific dimension of one’s life — are the focus of this study. De Quincey’s “Confessions of an Opium-Eater” and Lamb’s “Confessions of a Drunkard” centre on substance-use; *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* concentrates on its author’s acts of forgery; William Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris: Or, The New Pygmalion*, though not entitled a confession, was viewed as such because it published the private details of the married author’s love for a serving girl. While these four works are largely autobiographical, James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is a fictional autobiography, recounting a series of murders. While Hogg narrativizes an entire life, he does so by defining the confessor’s life through his crimes. Together, these five works indicate how the period witnessed a narrowing and reshaping of the confessional form, an aesthetic shift telling as much about the literary print culture in which these confessions were produced as about the formal history of the genre or the period’s sensibilities.

The transgressive quality of most post-Rousseauvian confessions has generally led critics to place the works within a psychological or psychoanalytical frame. It is to the twentieth-century interest in individual psychology, for example, that Hogg’s *Private*

Memoirs and Confessions owes its rescue from critical oblivion, and the only book-length study on confession as a literary form in the Romantic period, Susan M. Levin's *The Romantic Art of Confession*, takes a psychological approach. In studies like Levin's, confessional texts are generally seen as a symptom of the confessor's mind rather than as a literary production. She argues that confession is psychologically important for the confessor because the desire "to attain pardon through self-knowledge" complements the "attempt to set out a personal identity" (3). Similarly, in *Confession and Community in the Novel*, Terrence Doody sees confession as a means to fulfill both psychological and social needs, arguing that it is a "deliberate, self-conscious attempt of an individual to identify himself, to explain his nature to the audience who represents the kind of community he needs to exist in and confirm him" (185). More Foucauldian-inflected studies like that of Eve Sedgwick may complicate the role of confession in the construction of the self, but they too make subjectivity the focus of analysis. This study, by contrast, does not examine the writing of confession as a process of discovering the self, but considers the publishing of confession as a way for writers to consolidate a sense of personal authorship within British Romantic print culture.

Although psychological or sociological approaches may help to develop an understanding of the period as an "era of individuality" by attempting to penetrate the psyche's need for autonomy or community, they do not address what takes place when the identities of these individual confessors are transformed into print, and enter into the unknown and amorphous "community" of Britain's expanded reading public. Levin's study of confession as an "individual" quest for a "coherent self" through language, for example, considers this search as a cross-cultural exchange between British and French writers

(128-9). When the English Glutton characterized the period as “the age of confession,” however, he was articulating a concern with the way in which his national literature was noticeably shifting in the period, particularly in the reading activity of his “fellow citizens” (86, 87). Romantic confessors like De Quincey, Hazlitt, and Ireland were intent on imbuing their writerly identity with distinctiveness at a time when the British printing press was churning out an unprecedented number of publications. William-Henry Ireland seeks recognition as the great forger of Shakespeare in order to bolster a fledgling literary career, while Thomas De Quincey builds his career on his self-definition as “The Opium-Eater.” Marketing themselves to readers in an unexpectedly negative way, the Romantic confessors of this study confess in order to negotiate a place for themselves in the contemporary literary sphere.

Instead of emphasizing generic traits of confession then, I trace the way in which Romantic writers exploit the literary form to establish themselves as professional artists in an expanded and increasingly commercialized literary marketplace. De Quincey and Lamb, for example, capitalize on the intimacy characteristic of the genre to develop and maintain their readerships, revealing their personalities to create a distinct and lasting impression on their audiences. The community to which they appeal is one of readers and publishers, and their self-constructed personas help to extend their literary reputations. This confessional strategy is noted by the English Glutton, who suggests the following as a “common chorus” for his confessional counterparts:

What shall I do to be for ever known,

And make the age to come mine own? (86)

All the same, posterity was not the immediate concern for Romantic confessors, most of whom (as twentieth-century critics noted) were driven by the demands of pursuing literature as a profession. When De Quincey was writing “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,” for instance, he had to avoid his creditors until he could receive payment from the *London Magazine*. The English Glutton suggests as much when he appeals to “the melting charities of mankind” so that he can “return to my *old courses*” and “good living” (87, 93). Romantic confessors desired not only absolution but remuneration.

These writers, relying on public support instead of patronage, used their confessions to display their literary talents alongside their private selves, integrating their professional and personal lives to establish themselves as successful men of letters. In this sense, these literary confessions are highly invested in personal identity. They may be interested in attaining self-knowledge or producing truth, as Levin and Foucault suggest, but they are equally concerned with the production of a saleable personality for print, what the English Glutton called a “periodical personality” (86).

De Quincey, Lamb, Ireland, Hazlitt, and Hogg all tailor their confessions to the audiences and print forms of early nineteenth-century Britain. In order to examine the way they do so, I concentrate on three features that contributed to the act of publishing the private: authorial identity, print medium, and audience. Romantic confessions were published at a time when important shifts in the culture of literacy were taking place, and part of what these shifts entailed was a personalization of reading. As Roger Chartier has argued, around this time printed texts “penetrated” the “private world” of the public in an unprecedented way (233). Literary confessions, I suggest, both reveal and capitalize on profound changes in print culture, especially the changes in reader-writer relations. They are

as much part of a “revolution” in reading and print as features of the Romantic ethos of individuality that has dominated discussion of this genre.

In this period, as William St. Clair has recently argued, Britain became “a reading nation,” with an unprecedented number of people interested in and capable of reading (13). Britain’s population grew rapidly; at the same time, print production exploded.⁴ Most important, readers had greater access to books and periodicals through a growing number of circulating libraries and reading societies. James Lackington, the “Cheapest Bookseller in the WORLD” according to Thomas Tagg’s 1810 engraving of the “Temple of the Muses” bookshop in London, is said to have had a half million volumes available at all times (qtd. in St. Clair 197). In his 1791 *Memoirs*, Lackington claims that “all ranks and degrees now READ” and estimates that “four times the number of books are sold now than were sold twenty years since,” assessments St. Clair supports in his study of print production and the reading population (Lackington 257; St. Clair 118).

Because print production increased alongside readership, both writers and publishers were forced to develop audiences in a crowded market. This imperative is central to the shape of the confessions of Thomas De Quincey and Charles Lamb — the focus of Chapter One — both of which were crafted for the audience of the *London Magazine*. With the development of a large readership in the period, eagerly and regularly devouring the printed

⁴ According to St. Clair’s tables, the population of England rose (in millions) from approximately 7.2 in 1771 to 13.2 in 1831; in Scotland, it rose from 1.2 in 1750 to 1.6 in 1800, and was around 2.5 by 1850; in Ireland, the population grew from 4.8 in 1791 to 5 in 1800 and to 8.5 in 1845. Literacy rates are more difficult to quantify, however, because it is a challenge to measure what constitutes literacy. Even so, Kathryn Sutherland estimates that the reading public “quintupled in the whole period 1780 to 1830, from 1 ½ to 7 million (6).

St. Clair indicates that print capacity in London expanded from 124 master printers in 1785 to 306 in 1824. While much of this capacity was devoted to newspapers and commercial documents, literary production seems to have clearly risen as well, with the book-binding production expanding from 69 master binders in 1794 to 151 in 1813 (456-457). Between the 1780s and the 1830s, records exist for “5,000 new books of verse, 10,000 new editions, written by about 2,000 living poets [. . .] During the same period, the number of novels published was almost as large as for verse, with about 3,000 new prose fiction titles known to have been published between 1790 and 1830” (172-3).

word, periodical production thrived, providing access to a large number of readers, but with dozens of new and established literary magazines on the market, periodical publishing also became highly competitive. In fact, Heather Jackson describes such “competitive commercial activity” as an important catalyst for the “boom” in reading and print production in the early decades of the nineteenth century (9). Romantic periodicals were profoundly affected by this “boom,” forced to adapt in order to succeed or survive. As Jon Klancher observes in *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832*, both the Romantic literary magazine and its audience occupy a distinctive place in the history of British periodicals. Instead of the small specialized magazines of the eighteenth-century, which survived by “cementing the small audience while subdividing the larger public” into a “heterogeneous play of sociolects” (20), the new periodicals of the 1790s, in their search for a broader reading audience, exchanged “rigidly defined social categor[ies]” of readers for audiences united by aesthetic tastes and ideologies (39). The *Monthly Magazine*, launched in February 1796, is one of the earliest examples Klancher gives of a periodical redefining the conception of audience. No longer delineating it by profession, gender, or class, the *Monthly* united its readers through interest in philosophical radicalism (39). For the first time in Britain, periodicals did not publish with a pre-existing and well-defined audience in mind; each periodical was forced to seek out and develop its audience from within an ever-increasing reading population.

For literary magazines like the *London*, this shift had a profound impact on its content. With an increase of readers of the middling-classes, the British printing press saw a greater demand for popular literature; the literary magazine responded, soon becoming the middle-class reader’s literature of choice. It was able to achieve this status because literary

magazines not only incorporated popular genres but also mediated high-cultural ideas and literary forms for a middle-class audience that lacked a traditional literary education. As John Scott noted in the *London*, the magazinist must “please the million,” for “literature has become fairly popular, — since it no longer rests in mighty fountains of knowledge and vast reservoirs of learning” (1: 187). In an 1823 essay on “The Periodical Press” for *The Edinburgh Review*, Hazlitt analysed this literary and readerly shift, rallying his fellow periodical writers to embrace their role in this new culture of dissemination: “If we are superficial, let us be brilliant. If we cannot be profound, let us at least be popular” (*Works* 16: 219). At the same time, as Lucy Newlyn observes, Romantic literary magazines experienced a tension between a popular readership that could bring commercial success and “the doctrinaire concept of taste” (208). They were unwilling to resign themselves to a lowbrow taste like that of the sensationalist writing often found in the lower reaches of the book trade. Hazlitt may champion the popularization of literature in an essay like “The Periodical Press,” for example, but in his essay “On Reading Old Books,” published in 1821, he complains of “the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature,” criticizing both the mass production of literature and the reading practices of his contemporaries (*Works* 12:221). Such tensions and anxieties are evident in literary confession and its reception by reviewers. Romantic confessors themselves were acutely attentive to the construction of their writerly personas, attempting to maintain the decorum and respectability of their writing while simultaneously navigating the commercial interests of publishers and the readerships on which they relied.

Both literary magazines and the confessions within them appealed to a widespread taste for authorial personality among readers. This readerly interest has been highlighted by

critics such as Annette Cafarelli, who argues that a surge in literary biography in the period led readers to approach a number of literary forms with biographical interests in mind.⁵ David Higgins similarly argues in *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* that “writers and readers during the Romantic period were generally more interested in the private lives of ‘public characters’ than their eighteenth-century forbears had been,” claiming that by the early nineteenth century “the whole literary world was obsessed by ‘personality’” (46, 59). Over a decade before the confessions of De Quincey and Lamb appeared in the *London*, Coleridge used his magazine *The Friend* to denounce with fervour “this AGE OF PERSONALITY, this age of literary and political *Gossiping*, when the meanest insects are worshipped with a sort of Egyptian superstition” (*Works* 4.1: 210).⁶ Partaking in literary gossiping in series like the notorious “Noctes Ambrosianae” of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*,⁷ Romantic periodicals often disseminated literary biographical detail and affirmed its relevance in the reading of literature, as in De Quincey’s “Sketches of Life and Manners: from the Autobiography of an

⁵ According to St. Clair’s tabulations, the print runs of biographies like Hayley’s *Life of Cowper* far exceeded those of most novels and poetry (555). Interest in literary biography was so widespread that Cafarelli describes it as a “historical phenomenon,” one which created a disruption in “conventional hierarchies of reading”:
 it suggests widespread acceptance of not only biographical approaches to literature but also a kind of literary voyeurism that subordinated the text to the author. The fact that readers in the nineteenth century unhesitatingly equated Childe Harold with Byron and Prospero with Shakespeare raises the issue of whether the life of the poet was being used to read the works or the works to read the life.
 (7-8)

This mode of reading was directly encouraged by Romantic periodicals as well. In a review of Thomas Noon Talfourd’s biography of Lamb, for instance, De Quincey asserts that reading Lamb’s “character and temperament,” which is “dispersed in anagram” in his writing, is crucial to its understanding (qtd. in Cafarelli 168). Cafarelli argues that for De Quincey, as for other Romantic critics, the “literary text stood empty, if not indecipherable, without a biographical commentary understood as a subtext or critical appendage,” one that De Quincey often provides in the pages of the periodical as a literary biographer (168-9).

⁶ Coleridge first offered this statement in his essay “On The Errors of Party-Spirit: Or Extremes Meet,” *The Friend*, 10 (10 October 1809).

⁷ For a study of *Blackwood’s* ‘Noctes Ambrosianae,’ see chapter three of Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism*, 106-134.

English Opium Eater” for *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Higgins points out that Romantic critics and poets like Coleridge “often distinguished between ephemeral popularity and the lasting glory with which true genius would be rewarded,” but for the new mass readership, authorial personality, personal life, and character were often as fascinating as the literary texts themselves (“*Blackwood’s*” 123).⁸

Literary magazines both fostered and exploited such modes of reading in search of commercial success. The editors of *Blackwood’s*, for example, were not deterred by the £8,300 they paid out in libel damages and legal fees during their first five years as part of an “attempt to increase sales by personal attacks” (St. Clair 187). James Hogg, the “Ettrick Shepherd,” and “pimpled” Hazlitt discovered firsthand how personality-based criticism could affect the reception of their work.⁹ *Blackwood’s* success in quickly becoming one of Romantic Britain’s three main literary reviews, alongside the well-established *Quarterly Review* and *Edinburgh Review*, indicates that personality-based content drew audiences. In the expanding commercial literary sphere of Romantic Britain, as Marilyn Butler argues, it became increasingly necessary, in order to distinguish a work in the impersonal, prolific world of print production, to concentrate upon the producer or writer, “*characterizing the*

⁸ In *Romantic Readers: Evidence of Marginalia*, Heather J. Jackson examines this fascination through textual notes left by Romantic readers guessing the identity of the author behind an anonymous work. With pseudonymous writing, readers’ curiosity seems to have been similarly piqued. For example, many readers and reviewers attempted to work out the man behind “The Opium-Eater,” many believing it was Coleridge for some time. Nevertheless, pseudonyms, especially when used consistently as by De Quincey and Lamb, establish a form of authorial identity with a distinct personality and biography, even if the authorial signifier is not a real name.

⁹ These characterizations from *Blackwood’s* “Noctes Ambrosianae” series appear to have impacted readers substantially. Hazlitt, who had been attacked by *Blackwood’s* for years, took legal action on account of the “pimpled” comment (Parker 7). Hogg was received with surprise on his first and only visit to London in 1832 because his manner contrasted so sharply with the way in which he was portrayed in *Blackwood’s*. Such a reaction is recorded by William Howitt, whose “impression, derived from this source, of Hogg, and from prints of him, with open mouth and huge straggling teeth, in full roars of drunken laughter, that, on meeting him in London, I was quite amazed to find him so smooth, well-looking, and gentlemanly a sort of person (2:37)

writer for public consumption” (*Peacock* 3-4). Literary confession enters directly into this commercial literary sphere, and my interest lies in how writers themselves participated in this process.

Chapter One considers the agency of De Quincey and Lamb in the marketing of their print personalities through the literary magazine. Where critics like Jon Klancher and William St. Clair suggest that magazine writers were “more like piece workers than independent ‘authors’” (St. Clair 173), subject to the demands of editors and publishers, I argue that De Quincey and Lamb used the form of confession to exert control over their authorial persona in order to develop their professional literary careers. If magazines sought content that appealed to tastes of the market, magazine writers like De Quincey and Lamb set up a saleable personality to carve out their own readerships. In composing their confessions, they chose those private details that would appeal to the readership of the *London*, using the act of confession to engage with this audience on an intimate level, connecting with readers as individuals to develop loyalty and maintain a demand for their writing. For magazine writers, payment for articles could increase and become consistent when they developed a strong relationship with a magazine and its audience, as Lamb and De Quincey did with the *London* (St. Clair 158).

While Chapter One considers the advantages of developing a reliable readership through the periodical, Chapter Two investigates the way in which book publication could be manipulated to bolster confessional claims. Looking at *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* and *Liber Amoris: Or, The New Pygmalion*, the chapter probes the way in which their respective authors, Ireland and Hazlitt, used the authority of the book to negotiate both audience and identity. Both writers were well-known in the world of print

before publishing their confessions, but each had also recently experienced the denigration of his literary merit. Through their confessions, Ireland and Hazlitt countered such criticism, emphasizing the ways in which their personal and professional lives overlapped to assert themselves as competent men of letters. Their use of the book form was a key part of their strategy. Both take particular advantage of the way in which a book can be constructed as an assemblage, crafting their identities from a mix of public and private documents. They strove to create readerly trust by reproducing textual evidence, generating the effect of reliable documentation. If this was a deceptive effect, as later critics have pointed out, the appeal to authenticity was a central tactic in their negotiation of audience, for both published for publics that had reason to doubt some of their claims.

The confessions of Ireland and Hazlitt reveal the way in which an expanded market for literature allowed for the ambiguous intermingling of deception and disclosure, truth and artful fiction in the presentation of authors to readers. Such intermingling moves into focus the book that is the subject of Chapter Three: James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Published in 1824, it follows the works of De Quincey, Lamb, Ireland, and Hazlitt, offering in the form of a Gothic fiction a reflection on confessions as a print genre. Hogg himself was heavily involved in print culture, writing and publishing in Edinburgh, but he was at the same time deeply distrustful of it, an ambivalence that shapes his novel. *Private Memoirs and Confessions* presents itself as the publication of a recently unearthed text, and it includes authenticating devices such as a facsimile of the (fake) manuscript, along with an actual letter that Hogg wrote to *Blackwood's*. The text itself consists of two separate accounts of a series of murders in the early eighteenth century. "The Editor's Narrative" presents itself as a distanced historical account, a reliable frame for

the “Confessions of a Sinner” it then prints. This first-person confession of religious mania, haunting, and murder sharply diverges from the third-person editorial narrative, throwing into sharp relief the questions of trust and truth played out in the period’s confessional writing. Furthermore, this double structure literally mimics the process of publishing the private, and in doing so, it raises questions about this act. In particular, the novel’s representation of grave robbing as the source of the confessional text at the very end of the novel, along with its earlier association of publication with the work of the devil, suggests a disturbing element in publication itself. Through his use of the Gothic and the grotesque, Hogg implies that literary confession is a dark manifestation of Romantic print culture. Despite the intimacy and trust established in confessions then, it appears that demons, madmen, and villains impel the writing and publication of the confessional text.

CHAPTER ONE

Intimacy and Audience: Constructing the Confessional Reader in

De Quincey and Lamb

Responding to Coleridge's advice in *Biographia Literaria* that young men should never pursue the "trade of authorship," Thomas De Quincey asserts "that literature must decay unless we have a class 'wholly dedicated to that service, not pursuing it as an amusement only, with wearied and pre-occupied minds'" (*Essays* 244, 251). De Quincey draws from personal and professional experience in his discussion of the "business" of literature for his article, the first of two "Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected" for the *London Magazine* in 1823. It is through the *London Magazine* that De Quincey established himself in the "trade of authorship" several years before this article appeared. For De Quincey, as for Coleridge and many other Romantic writers, the periodical was an advantageous publication format through which a literary career could begin.

De Quincey had some reservations, however. He warned that relying on literature as "a means of livelihood" posed a number of challenges (*Essays* 245). One particular difficulty for Romantic writers was negotiation with publishers, who commonly bought copyrights from authors for a lump sum if they saw a work as saleable (St. Clair 160-1). Since literature of the period was bought and sold in a competitive, commercial, and often precarious marketplace, publishers exercised a substantial amount of control over literary production. The publication process, transmitting literature from author to reader, played a crucial role in the life of professional writers, as a number of recent studies have highlighted.

In *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism*, Mark Parker considers the practice of periodical publishing. Parker builds on Jon Klancher's argument that the Romantic periodical shaped the social codes and literary tastes of the middle-class readership it addressed, but he complicates Klancher's concept of the periodical as a "transauthorial discourse" (52). Parker re-establishes individual agency via the figure of the editor, who selected and placed articles to construct each magazine's editorial voice. A genre like literary confession, I want to argue, further challenges the claim that writers were subsumed by the periodicals in which they published. Certainly, even in the confessional essays they published in the *London Magazine*, authors such as De Quincey and Lamb used pseudonyms and collaborated with editors. However, they demonstrate that the magazine writer not only maintained his voice but also remained a key figure in the publishing trade, even if he was entangled in a complex print matrix of competing agents: editorial, authorial, and material. That the author-figure in the Romantic periodical is not dead is manifested in the audience's response and interest in authorial figures such as Elia and the Opium-Eater, reflecting the larger cultural context of what Coleridge, as noted in the introduction, called the "AGE OF PERSONALITY."

The *London*, interested in its writers as much as their writing, created a fertile space in which literary confession could take shape. Modeled after the new nineteenth-century literary magazine (and after *Blackwood's* in particular), the *London* built on the work of its predecessors to create a forum for some of the best-received magazine literature of the 1820s such as Hazlitt's "Table-Talk" series and Lamb's Elia essays. As the editor, John Scott, detailed in the magazine's 'Prospectus', the *London* sought "to offer the Public a periodical of the miscellaneous kind" (vii), so placing itself in competition with other literary

miscellanies in Britain. If the *London* did not distinguish itself in form, however, it did so in style, for the magazine sought to avoid participating in party polemics and ridicule; it sought to establish a spirit of civility, urbanity, and honesty (Bauer 65; 68). In attempting “to convey the very ‘image, form, and pressure’ of [London’s] ‘mighty heart’” (iv), a desire expressed in the ‘Prospectus’ of the magazine’s premiere issue, Scott found ways of bringing his contributors to life in the pages of the magazine. His “most salient characteristic,” as Bauer comments, was “profound respect for human personality” (69).

Romantic magazine culture actively fostered an interest in the writing and reading of author-centred literature. In the 1820s, the literary magazine was instrumental in developing a readerly preference for new and varied literary productions such as the imaginary conversations of Landor, the dialogic criticism of Hunt or the “Noctes Ambrosianae,” the familiar essay, and the literary confession. What these new miscellaneous generic forms shared was a desire to showcase the personality of the writer and to satisfy the tastes of shifting readerships. The confessions of Thomas De Quincey and Charles Lamb, published by the *London Magazine* in 1821 and 1822 respectively, are exemplary.

From the beginning, periodicals like the rival *London* and *Blackwood’s* engaged in what Kim Wheatley calls the “heightening of the literary pretensions of the miscellaneous magazine” (1). This process is most evident in the way that literary magazines sought to redefine their content as literary, refining themselves by means of an increasingly specialized class of magazine writers. Thus P.G. Patmore can claim in an 1822 essay “On Magazine Writers” for the *London* that magazines, “soaring aloft into higher spheres,” have “changed their place in the system of literature” (22). Literary magazines innovated in generic form, filling their pages with the “experiments in journalism” noted by Josephine Bauer (58).

Many of these literary experiments highlighted the author-figure, his personality, and life, appealing to the new mass readership for which writers were often as fascinating as the literary texts themselves (123).

Charles Lamb is a striking example, but a writer like Lamb did not simply reflect the literary tastes of the primarily middle-class readership. Like other familiar essayists, he engaged in the reshaping of the “very contours and self-definitions of the readerships they addressed” (Klancher 40). This reshaping involved an intensification of readerly loyalty not only to the magazine but also to the magazine writer. Just as literary magazines like the *London* capitalized on the loyalty created by the periodical form to persuade its readers to invest in the magazine writer himself and to connect with a personality in print, so too Romantic confessors like De Quincey and Lamb capitalized on the characteristic intimacy of confession to develop and maintain their readerships, revealing their personalities to create a distinct and lasting impression on their audiences.

In literary magazines like *Blackwood's* and the *London*, popular biographical reading practices were exploited through the development of generic forms that catered specifically to the author's personality. Writers like De Quincey, Lamb, and Hazlitt sought to capitalize on the periodical's influence, transforming their lives into print. Deirdre Lynch argues that Romantic essayists such as Thomas De Quincey and Charles Lamb “traded” in the “capacity for feeling that made them adepts at erasing the distinction between texts and the people who author them” (par. 9), while Edmund Baxter claims that De Quincey's oeuvre, most of which was originally published in magazines, constitutes a single autobiographical work (3). Baxter's argument may be overstated, but it does identify how familiar essays in the period tended toward the self-revelatory even when the text was not overtly autobiographical.

Numerous Romantic essayists found their subject in observations and experiences of their personal lives, cultivating both authorial distinctiveness and readerly friendship by sharing themselves with their audience. In literary confession, this chapter suggests, writing goes beyond the simply autobiographical to emphasize the interior life of the confessor, capitalizing on the periodical's power to intensify readerly interest and loyalty into a sense of intimate connection between reader and writer.

Meeting the Reader: De Quincey's "Opium-Eater" and the *London*

After the enormous success of "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" in 1821, De Quincey adopted the nom de plume of "The Opium-Eater" for much of his work, and others followed suit. In the fictional dialogues of *Blackwood's* "Noctes Ambrosianae," for example, "The Opium-Eater" is a regular player. De Quincey's use of this epithet in later works, which enforces both the pretense of anonymity and the familiarity of the persona, indicates the importance of marketing to a regular readership in the periodical context. Moreover, it invites periodical readers to view all of De Quincey's writing in the terms established by his "Confessions": the sensational personality, scholarly background, and reader-writer relationship, all of which were crucial to the success of the initial act of publication. While a number of critics have treated *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* in its editorial variations, reprints, expansion, and bookish form, I take as my focus "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" in its original periodical form: the September and

October 1821 issues of the *London Magazine*.¹ As Mark Parker has pointed out, studies of De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" rarely do more than mention the *London*, "although that magazine, which had made a point of recounting and analyzing unusual psychological experiences, had much to do with preparing for the initial, unexpected success of this work" (3). The Romantic literary magazine was a forum crucial to De Quincey's establishment of himself as a person in print. With its cultivation of interest in authorial personality and its informality, it was an appropriate medium in which such an authorial person and the reader might meet. In particular, the insistence of the *London*'s editor on honesty and civility extended comfort to both reader and confessor, furnishing the intimacy requisite to produce and receive the somewhat sordid revelation that follows this meeting. De Quincey rhetorically reinforced the *London*'s mission in his "Confessions," suggesting that he would reveal himself to his reader with candour as he would to a friend.

Before De Quincey could make his confession to the reader, however, he had to ensure that he and the reader actually connected within the pages of the *London*. The *London* might have had 1,100 to 2,000 potentially interested buyers (Parker 22), but De Quincey nevertheless had to market himself to this audience.² The miscellaneous nature of the literary magazine allowed selective reading on the part of the audience: publication within the *London* did not guarantee readership. In the September 1821 issue of the *London*,

¹ On the revisions, see in particular Edmund Baxter's *De Quincey's Art of Autobiography*, which focuses on the text as it was extensively revised and expanded in 1856. See also John C. Whale's *De Quincey's Reluctant Autobiography*, which unites De Quincey's autobiographical texts: the *Confessions*, *Suspira de Profundis*, *The English Mail-Coach*, *Autobiographic Sketches*, and *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*.

² Susan M. Levin states that 1,700 copies of the September 1821 issue were sold, although she does not indicate her source (25). William St. Clair estimates that in 1821, about 2,000 copies of the *London* were printed each month. He also cites a letter from John Taylor to his father from October 15, 1821, which states that 1,900 copies of the magazine's last number had sold (574). The *London*'s readership, however, was likely much larger. As with most reading material in the period, purchase was only one form of access to print, and most printed matter was read by more than one reader.

De Quincey's work is buried in the middle of the magazine, the penultimate entry in the literary portion and shortly before a section composed of "Gleanings from Foreign Journals." Moreover, "Confessions" is placed between the dilettantish "Recollections in a Country Churchyard" and a short anonymous poem titled "Love in a Mist." De Quincey receives no mention in the editorial section, "The Lion's Head," which opens the *London*, and he is given only twenty of its approximately one hundred and thirty pages. After the resounding success of the first part, however, part two of "Confessions" appeared as the lead article in the October issue, and received a larger percentage of the magazine's space.

When the first part of the "Confessions" was published, however, De Quincey had yet to establish himself as a literary personality, so he had to forge a readership for himself from within the audience of the *London*. To capture the reader's attention, he had to depend first of all on his title, which, though capitalized in the table of contents, is only one of many typographically varied titles on the page. De Quincey, who could not rely on his name to draw readerly attention, trusts primarily to a potential public interest in literary confessions, particularly in the wake of Rousseau's *Confessions*; secondly, he highlights opium use, a practice common enough in Britain but still shrouded in mystery. Although his title seems sensational to a modern reader, to a contemporary reader, "Opium-Eater" would have elicited thoughts more of medicinal practice than dangerous drug use. His title promises to prospective readers a narrative that merges confession with medicine.

Within the body of his article, however, De Quincey seeks to shift certain medical assumptions. He challenges the limited medical discourse on the subject, calling it all "lies! lies! lies!" because the "experimental knowledge" of science "is none at all" (356, 358). Print material on opium use was scanty in the period, and De Quincey is one of the earliest

to document the inebriating and addictive power of opium, though there seems to have been a growing acknowledgement of opium as having effects similar to alcohol. For example, in 1804 Thomas Trotter published *An Essay Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical on Drunkenness and its Effects on the Human Body*, in which he briefly considers how the “effects of opium [are] nearly alike to those of ardent spirit” (37). Usually mixed with wine to create laudanum, opium was commonly used to treat a variety of complaints, including headaches, arthritis, anxiety, and, as in De Quincey’s case, stomach problems. Its dangers, as Anya Talor notes, were only “belatedly learned”: many took opium medicinally, then “discovered the expanding perceptions and timelessness of the drug experience,” gradually becoming “so addicted to it that the brains, bowels and will were disrupted. In addition, many opium addicts also drank, intensifying the intoxication by cross-addiction, and further justifying a designation of the period as ‘The Age of Intoxication’” (28). In this light, De Quincey’s modest statement that “opium, not the opium-eater, is the true hero of the tale” seems less dubious (186).

While medical opium use had been common in Britain for a long time, the early nineteenth century evidenced a growing concern with recreational opium use amongst the working-classes, though the terms “recreational” and “addiction” are not generally found in Romantic discourse.³ De Quincey, however, exposes the widespread use of opium in Britain as a practice bound not by class or profession. In the address to the reader, he claims that the class of opium-eaters in England is a “numerous class”; within this class he knows

³ For detailed discussion of opium use in nineteenth-century Britain, see Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987); David Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001); Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber, 1968) ; and Barry Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995).

personally many men of high rank and birth. From this fact De Quincey infers that the “entire population of England would furnish a proportionable number” (294). This declaration, though not particularly germane to De Quincey’s personal confession, evokes a contemporary cultural urgency for his piece and reinforces his text as one of relevance to the wider British culture. Opium addiction penetrated the lives of both the obscure and well-known, including Coleridge, Dorothy Wordsworth, William Wilberforce, and Jane Austen’s mother (Taylor 28). Opium-eating seems to have figured so strongly in the public’s perception of Coleridge — who, in 1814, put himself under the care of Dr. Daniel for his opium addiction — that many mistook him as the anonymous writer of “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater.”⁴

De Quincey’s capitalization on an emerging interest in opium, however, is only a means of acquiring initial attention to his article; he does not rely entirely on the medicinal or sensational element of opium addiction in developing his readership. The curious addition of “Being an Extract of a Scholar” as a subtitle to his “Confessions” draws attention to his intellectual cultivation, a trait he emphasizes throughout the text. From stressing his fluency in Greek to showing his knowledge of Classical drama, De Quincey writes so as to appeal to the literary and intellectual aspirations that governed many middle-class magazine readers. As Susan Levin observes, “Intellectual brilliance was a logical trait to emphasize in a narrator to help ensure the commercial success of the work. Those who possess knowledge also possess manners and culture. To enter into the Opium-Eater’s confidence by reading his *Confessions* is in a way to become part of this cultured class” (Levin 25). De

⁴ For a discussion of how De Quincey may have purposely construed Coleridge as the “Opium-Eater,” a marketing strategy that I see as an exploitation and reinforcement of the readerly interest in personality, see Robert Morrison, “Opium-Eaters and Magazine Wars: De Quincey and Coleridge in 1821,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 30.1 (Spring 1997): 27-40.

Quincey, who had been immersed in periodical culture for only a short time, seems to have understood that successful literary magazinists “traded” in “taste and learning” (Lynch par. 9); he accurately anticipates the interest in culturally oriented and sophisticated pieces that Albert Goldman identifies in the amorphous magazine readership of the period (196).

Navigating his readership, De Quincey uses the lengthy opening entitled “To the Reader” to establish the relationship between himself and his reader as one of literary propriety. While his insistence here on the indecorum of literary confession suggests an awareness that his readers may very well not be genteel but solely interested in plot and sensation, he allows them to maintain a sense of themselves as respectable readers by placing himself in the lower place as the one who is confessing. He immediately calls the reader “courteous,” and apologizes for “breaking through that delicate and honourable reserve, which, for the most part, restrains us from the public exposure of our own errors and infirmities” (293). Nonetheless, he stifles any potential concern that he is one of the “demireps, adventurers, and swindlers” who make up Britain’s legacy of criminal confessions (293). He is educated and respectable enough to have “various patrician friends,” although he does not have “any pretensions to rank or high blood” (310), a status that allows him to appeal to a broader range of readers. In particular, his scholarly and cultivated persona allows readers to feel that while reading the “Confessions” they are heightening themselves in literary and cultural terms, establishing reciprocity between magazine, magazine writer, and magazine reader. He also distinguishes his own work from the “gratuitous self-humiliation” of French and German confessions (although he simultaneously banks on the renown of Rousseau’s *Confessions*) in order to identify himself

and his audience with a properly national and “decent and self-respecting part of society” (293).

Having drawn in his readers, De Quincey maintains their interest by creating a personal relationship with the reader. In the first part published in the September issue, De Quincey does not detail any part of his life as an opium-eater; instead, his focus is his childhood and the early years of his education, both of which he uses to generate interest in the person and personal history of the one who will confess. Remarking that “creating some previous interest of a personal sort in the confessing subject [. . .] cannot fail to render the confessions themselves more interesting” (295), De Quincey creates such interest in order to allow readers to develop a familiarity with him, similarly assuming one with them as he moves toward greater disclosure. Relying on the loyalty of readers to the *London*, he not only hopes that they will return to know him better in the next issue but also tries to create a bond that will make them specifically seek to reencounter him. As in a friendship, De Quincey must build intimacy before revealing his secrets.

Crucial to the relationship he seeks is a feeling of sympathy on the part of the reader. Asserting that his “self-accusation does not amount to a confession of guilt” (293), he constructs himself as an object of sympathy. His text is suggestive of an internal struggle, as he vacillates between stoic resignation to the consequences of his life and a “nervous state” of “mortification” (364). He resists painting himself to his reader as either an unfeeling degenerate or an “inhuman moralist” (364); neither does he want to depict himself as pathetic and wretched, risking boredom on the part of his “patient readers” (363). This strategy may account for his slippery wrestling with the question of guilt. Generating sympathy through an account of his pre-opium life, De Quincey highlights his difficult

period in London and his friendship with the young prostitute Ann, carefully dispelling the possibility of an illicit relationship to heighten its sentimental appeal and evoke sympathy from the reader, as when he “shed[s] tears” when they fail to find each other again (304, 306).

Once De Quincey has established sympathy, he focuses on readerly trust, deepening the intimacy of the reader-writer relationship. In the October issue of the “Confessions,” he insists that the reader’s confidence in him is crucial to his ability to make further revelations, supplicating his reader to “believe all that I ask of you” (364). He endeavours to make the reader part of his text, prefacing commentaries with phrases such as, “I know not whether my reader may have remarked, but *I* have often remarked” (299), or “if I could allow myself to amuse the reader at his expense” (303). In moments like these, De Quincey subtly allies himself with the reader, as they share jokes as part of their ever-increasing bond. By sharing laughter, De Quincey moves the reader emotionally to a place where reader and confessor may then also share tears. Frequently, he attempts to make the text conversational, anticipating the reader’s questions from what he “has often been asked” (295): “And how do I find my health after all this opium-eating? In short, how do I do? Why, pretty well, I thank you, reader: in the phrase of ladies in the straw, ‘as well as can be expected’” (363). As De Quincey anticipates the reader’s questions, he demonstrates that he knows the reader, just as the reader is coming to know him. John C. Whale describes this “rhetorical form of address and response, question and answer” as enacting a “mediatory function which could take place in a dialogue” (29). In evoking conversation, De Quincey exploits the informality of the monthly magazine, giving his text a “dramatic sense of the present moment” (29) and transforming the material form of the magazine into a virtual space of encounter.

Behind such tactics lies De Quincey's awareness that he must contend with the unknown, amorphous reading public that may read his "Confessions." Whale draws attention to De Quincey's "anticipations and forestallings" as a method of dealing with "a real, unknown and various audience on the one hand, and a constructed particularized reader on the other. He can carefully dictate and deflect anticipated reactions" (166). De Quincey specifically decreases readerly distance, setting up a closeness with the individual reader "into whose private ear I am confidentially whispering my confession" (368). Along with the rhetoric of oral confession governing the whole text, verbs of physical proximity such as "whispering," "listening," "sitting down and loitering" create an emotional closeness between author and confessor (368, 369, 364). They can then "walk forward about three years more" into De Quincey's life as an opium-eater (364). De Quincey soon invites the reader into the "inside of [his] house," intimating that the two of them may share a physical space of supreme personal importance in which De Quincey will relate his confessions (368). De Quincey intensifies the intimacy of this invitation when he asks the reader to paint the inside of his home, a symbolic invitation to do the same with his interior life (368). He offers details about personal effects like his library and large wine-decanter used for laudanum, also allowing the reader freedom to paint him "romantically" and "handsome" or quite "barbarously," confident in the reader that he "cannot fail [. . .] to be a gainer" (368). Such gestures create reciprocity with the reader, as both De Quincey and the reader seek to come to terms with the life of the "Opium-Eater." Once De Quincey and his reader have physically encountered each other through metaphor, and established sympathy, intimacy, and trust, he allows readers, by the second part, to hold his secret as though they are his

veritable friends, so that they do not view him as a subject of gossip in the periodical's pages.

In this way, the returning reader would have a different response than would a new reader to the editorial devices used to orient De Quincey's work in the October issue of the *London*, starting with "The Lion's Head" and its praise for the "Confessions" as a "deep, eloquent, and masterly paper" (351). Another such device is an addendum titled "Notice to the Reader" written by De Quincey for "The Lion's Head." The notice clarifies the chronology of the Opium-Eater's biography, which had been obscured by the difference between the dates of composition and publication.⁵ This addendum moves readers with a previous interest in the Opium-Eater's life to feel that they are coming to know the author better, and instills further confidence in the veracity of the Opium-Eater's confession. For new readers, however, having heard of the sensation of the piece, the rhetoric meant to increase readerly trust has the appearance of clues to the identity of the Opium-Eater.⁶ Similarly, the reader who knows from the Opium-Eater's "Preliminary Confessions" that much of his education was self-directed will view with suspicion the editor's authoritative assertion that "we *breed* our own critics" ("Lion's Head" 352). Moreover, returning readers, primed to understand the reading of the "Confessions" as the ongoing development of a reader-writer relationship, will not view the second part of the "Confessions," which includes descriptions of opium-induced dreams and hallucinations, in the context of the

⁵ In the "Notice to the Reader," De Quincey states that all references in the "Preliminary Confessions" to nineteen years earlier should be calculated from the previous Christmas (December 1820) when the narrative was drafted, not from September 1821 when it was published. He clarifies in detail that the "period of that narrative lies between the early part of July 1802 and the beginning or middle of March 1803" (IV, 351). In the original publication, De Quincey does not clearly date events.

⁶ For a thorough account of how the "Confessions" made De Quincey a sensation in both England and France, see John Hayden, "De Quincey's *Confessions* and the Reviewers," *The Wordsworth Circle* 6 (1975): 273-79. See also Berridge and Edwards (52-54) and Hayter (105-6).

articles of Gothic leanings in the October issue. De Quincey's piece is the first article in the October 1821 issue, and it is followed by "Estephania de Gantalmes, A Tale of the Middle Ages" and Elia's "Witches, and Other Night Fears." As commentaries of the time were eager to note, a readerly interest in sensation and the Gothic encouraged a rapid and thoughtless pace of reading. Even as De Quincey evokes the contemporary genre of the Gothic in making his readers privy to private details of a shocking nature, he does not indulge his readers in a sensationalist and plot-driven narrative that would promote such a mode of reading. Perhaps aware of sensational Gothic confessions like Rosa Matilda's 1804 novel, *Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, De Quincey carefully places the reader of his confession not as a voyeur or sensation-seeker but as a friend. At the same time as he overlaps with the Gothic in exploring socially and psychologically dark aspects of his life, he maintains a sense of careful reflection, slowly moving toward greater self-awareness.

By constructing himself in the first issue as an individual with feelings and personal struggles, De Quincey invites his readers to read his life meditatively, encouraging a personalized and thoughtful reading practice that results from an intimate relationship with the writer. In a letter "To the Press," written while revising his "Confessions" for his collected edition, De Quincey states that he "requires in addition a *Reader* that is not only singularly attentive, but also that has a surplus stock of *leisure time*" (qtd. in Baxter 17). Only such a reader will continue through the "Confessions": most of his text is a sustained introduction, in which he frequently thanks his audience for its patience as he furnishes preliminary and background details before moving on to the darker interior of his confession that closes the narrative. As in his later work as a literary biographer, De Quincey the confessor encourages a mode of reading that "subordinate[s] the text to the author" (Cafarelli

8), privileging the author as a human rather than textual object. With first-person narration modeled after the rhetoric of oral dialogue, he draws the reader even closer, rendering his “Confessions” an excerpt from a personal history rather than a scandalous tale. In particular, his emphasis on the useful and instructive nature of his work, a tactic often used in printed confessions, implies that his project is not to be seen in sensational terms. If the confession is useful, the reader has implicitly shared in the Opium-Eater’s experience. If not, the reader has been warned about opium use. In either case, the reader has developed a personal interest in the life of this new textual acquaintance.⁷

In general, confession presupposes usefulness for the one who confesses, not the one to whom personal details are revealed, but De Quincey seeks to reverse this tradition, placing the onus of reform on the reader instead of on himself. Charles J. Rzepka wittily elaborates on De Quincey’s modification of confessional tradition, reading the text of the “Confessions” as a material “gift” proffered by De Quincey to the reader:

Why confess at all, De Quincey asks, if one can only expose oneself to contempt and tax the courtesy of the reader? He answers, in effect, that only so can the *reader* benefit. The opium-eater implies that he is doing the reader a favor by telling him this sordid tale. The magnitude of the favor, however, will not appear “until the close of my confessions,” says the author, “where I shall present the reader with the *moral* of my narrative” (4). Thus, the unacknowledged but necessary condition for deciding whether to “accept” this present is first of all to buy it, as well as the next number of the *London Magazine*. (23)

⁷ De Quincey declares that the “moral of the narrative is addressed to the opium-eater; and therefore, of necessity, limited in its application. If he is taught to fear and tremble, enough has been effected” (87). De Quincey’s reader is not necessarily an opium-eater, but only those who eat opium will benefit from the moral application of the “Confessions.”

True enough, but more than sales are at stake, particularly for De Quincey who was not paid by the print run of the particular issue. Within his text, De Quincey concedes the quasi-priestly role of reception that the narrative of confession implies, allowing his readers the freedom to interpret him as “hero or criminal” (368). The benefit is not only the moral of the narrative but also the interpretive freedom bestowed on the reader not simply in passing judgement but in seeking to “read” the person of De Quincey. The exchange, then, is also relational: De Quincey offers the reader an intimacy with an author, a gift that transcends the physical or textual commodity. He teaches his reader to approach the text not as the printed product of an author (a textual authorial subject), but as something like a person in print, a person whom the reader has come to know through the magazine as an informal medium in which persons can meet.

Exploiting Intimacy: Lamb’s “Drunkard” and the Initiated Reader

Where De Quincey’s “Confessions” demonstrates the process by which the confessor must establish intimacy, a text like Lamb’s “Confessions of a Drunkard,” published in the same magazine, reveals how the conventions of confession can be manipulated once intimacy has already been established. By the time “Confessions of a Drunkard” appeared in the *London Magazine* in August 1822, Lamb — unlike De Quincey — had made his reputation in British periodical culture, with articles regularly appearing since 1820 under the pseudonym of Elia. In the Elia column, Lamb helped establish the informal essay in the magazine as a place where readers, instead of encountering anonymous voices, met

personalized writers. Readers, however, did not meet the author Lamb in the pages of the *London*; they met his persona, Elia. Personal observations and revelations made in the column were to be read as extracts from the life of the fictional Elia. At the same time, the identity of the writer behind the Elia essays was an open secret, and Lamb playfully manipulated the idea of authorial identity and personal biography in his column, his pieces resonating with both fact and fiction. Like De Quincey, Lamb used the regularity of the magazine to construct his persona over time, at once drawing from his own life and encouraging a disassociation between the man Lamb and the character of Elia. By establishing authorial identity as Elia, Lamb was able to capitalize in “Confessions of a Drunkard” on the magazine reader’s preference for author-centred literature, while simultaneously circumventing the increasing practice of reading literature biographically or, at the very least, displacing the biographical reading from himself to Elia.

Since Lamb had already established readerly trust in his Elia column and the familiar essay as a natural forum in which he might confess, his choice of the *London Magazine* as a venue for the republication of “Confessions of a Drunkard” was highly appropriate. The essay had previously appeared in *The Philanthropist* in 1813, and in Basil Montagu’s compilation, *Some Enquiries into the Effects of Spiritous Liquors*, in 1814. In re-establishing these earlier publication contexts, Bonnie Woodbery suggests that “Confessions of a Drunkard” was hijacked by *The Philanthropist* to serve its utilitarian purposes and that it was heavily edited in order to enforce a reading of teetotaling principles.⁸ Although Lamb

⁸ The publication process of “Confessions of a Drunkard” in *The Philanthropist* is obscure. “How it got there,” according to Woodbery, “is a bit of a mystery. One argument, and the one I believe to be most likely, is that Leigh Hunt had the essay together with other materials left over after his *Reflector* went defunct in 1811. Hunt was good friends with James Mill, one of the editors of *The Philanthropist* and may have passed the essay on to Mill, who decided to publish it [. . .] James Mill, the ‘fiery lieutenant’ of Jeremy Bentham, used the journal to promote Bentham’s utilitarian beliefs” (364). Woodbery details at length the passages that were edited in this and the Montagu versions

seems to have permitted Montagu to print the essay in 1814,⁹ here too it is subsumed by the evangelical and medical discourse of the compilation, and the editorial devices of the publication significantly alter the tenor of the piece (Woodbery 358).¹⁰ Woodbery observes, for example, that readers are led to view Lamb's "Drunkard" as "answering the query that heads every page of his text 'Do Fermented Liquors Contribute to Moral Excellence' with a resounding 'NO'" (370). Then, in 1822, Lamb encouraged the editors of the *London* to reprint his "Drunkard." Perhaps Lamb saw republication in the *London* during the confessional fervour of the early 1820s as a commercial advantage.¹¹ Perhaps Lamb was dissatisfied with these earlier contexts that fostered a reading wholly posited on autobiographical veracity: in the editorial section that opens the *London*, for example, he responds to the "Messieurs the Quarterly Reviewers" who recently pulled quotations from an earlier publication of "Drunkard" to "embellish" a "gratuitous" biographical reading drawn from their "peculiar brains" (*LM* VI 99).¹² Whatever the case, Lamb is able to shift meaning via a new context and through the restoration of previous editorial cuts.

The reception of Lamb's "Drunkard" in the *London* was conditioned not only by the generally informal nature of the magazine itself but also by the simple addition of the 'Elia'

⁹ In "The Lion's Head" of the August 1822 issue of the *London*, Lamb, in the voice of the editors, states that "[w]e have been induced, in the first instance, to re-print a Thing, which he put forth in a friend's volume some years since, entitled Confessions of a Drunkard (*The London Magazine: July to December 1822*, 99).

¹⁰ Woodbery notes that in "Montagu's text, excerpts from the writings of Dr. Thomas Trotter, Dr. Benjamin Rush (an American doctor and avid teetotaler), Erasmus Darwin, Samuel Johnson, Ben Franklin, influential clergymen, and other notables all emphasize the deleterious affects of alcohol on the body and mind" (369).

¹¹ "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" was republished as a book by Taylor and Hessey in the same month as Lamb's "Drunkard."

¹² Quotations from Lamb's "Confessions" were used in a review of *Reid's Hypochondriasis and other Nervous Afflictions* in the *Quarterly Review* (April 1822). The reviewer states that Lamb's confession presents a "fearful picture of the consequences of intemperance," one which "we have reason to know is a true tale" (Rev. of "Reid's Essays" 120).

signature to the essay in August 1822. Following Woodbery, who claims that “[r]eaders accustomed to the whimsical personal essays of Elia would immediately view the ‘Confessions’ in light of its author’s previous work” (374), I want to argue for the centrality of this signature to the reading of “Confessions of a Drunkard.” The essay, already available in print, acquired new value for readers interested in the unfolding biography and personality of ‘Elia.’ Furthermore, the rhetoric of “Confessions of a Drunkard” — a mixture of irony, glibness, sadness, and sincerity — is more easily understood in the context of Elia’s other work. Read as another of Elia’s erratic personality pieces, “Drunkard” is seen more clearly to break with the tradition of confession. The doubleness in Elia’s language eludes the question of guilt and dissuades the reader from passing judgment or viewing the confessor as an object of pity, a rhetorical strategy that highlights how the drunkard’s confession is decidedly non-religious and largely unrepentant. Instead, the piece is constructed as a confession that one might make to a friend, a revelation based on intimacy and trust, which avoids the gravity of both sacramental confession and moral reformation.

From the appearance of “Oxford in the Vacation,” Elia’s second essay for the *London*, in September 1820, readers were trained to view the column as the slowly unfolding response to the question that Elia thinks he hears the reader pose: “*Who is Elia?*” (“Oxford in the Vacation” 9). Although Elia, in this second essay, claims that he had earlier attempted to “divert” the reader from ascertaining his life and personality (9), he now uses the essay to initiate the reader into his narrative style, one which meanders through observations from his life in an unpredictable manner. The slow process of self-disclosure is akin to that of De Quincey, as Elia develops a reader-writer relationship before divulging details of a darker and more private nature. Over the course of the Elia essays, the reader has become privy to

details about Elia's childhood, bachelorhood, eating habits, and the death of his parents. Although readers were often drawn to such events from Elia's life through a rhetoric of sentiment and sincerity, Lamb had also accustomed his readers to a rhetoric of irony in which a serious subject such as impoverished beggars might be treated whimsically, and a seemingly ordinary topic like book-bindings could arouse Elia's "spleen" in mock anger ("Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" 195). As David Cecil has observed, over the essays, there "flickered, often and unpredictably, a gleam of impish irony" (38). Regular readers of the column, initiated into the shifting rhetoric and quasi-fictional biography of Elia, were familiar with the mixture of irony and sincerity with which Elia's revelations were infused.

In printing "Confessions of a Drunkard" as Elia, Lamb was thus able to avoid its direct translation into his own life while simultaneously cultivating interest in his authorial persona. His evasion of a verifiable outside-the-text identity was further complicated in "The Lion's Head," where Lamb also placed into question the possibility of reading the "Drunkard" in terms of Elia's fictional life. Lamb's successful Elia essays gave him clout in the *London*, and he was given access to the editorial voice, writing "*Re-Prints of ELIA*" in the editorial space of "The Lion's Head."¹³ In this section, Lamb plays with notions of authorial identity, highlighting the rhetorical exaggeration and whimsy with which Elia readers were familiar:

¹³ While "The Lion's Head" was generally written by the editor(s) of the *London*, Lamb seems to have written the section "*Re-Prints of ELIA*" at the beginning of the editorial section in the August 1822 issue. Lamb does not appear to have received regular access to the editorial voice of "The Lion's Head," but in this case, the editors seem to have allowed him a forum for directly responding to the comments made in the April issue of the *Quarterly Review* about an earlier publication of "Confessions of a Drunkard." Most Lamb scholars seem to agree that Lamb wrote this piece (Monsman 33; Woodbery 362); however, some are less sure (e.g., Levin 85).

The truth is, that our friend had been reading among the Essays of a contemporary, who has perversely been confounded with him, a paper in which *Edax* (or the *Great Eater*) humorously complaineth of an inordinate appetite; and it struck him, that a better paper — of deeper interest, and wider usefulness — might be made out of the imagined experiences of a *Great Drinker*. Accordingly he set to work, and with that mock fervor, and counterfeit earnestness, with which he is too apt to over-realise his descriptions, has given us—a frightful picture indeed—but no more resembling the man *Elia*, than the fictitious *Edax* may be supposed to identify itself with Mr. L[amb], its author. [. . .] We deny not that a portion of his own experiences may have passed into the picture (as who, that is not a washy fellow, but must at some time have felt the operation of a too-generous cup?) but then how heightened! how exaggerated! (*LM VI 99*)

Notwithstanding this preface, a number of Lamb's contemporaries would have read the piece biographically (particularly because it does contain more truth than "The Lion's Head" admits).¹⁴ Although Susan Levin contends that "[r]eaders seem to have insisted that Lamb be an empirical referent for his narrator" (86), the only direct evidence for such an argument is found amongst Lamb's personal and literary circle, and these readers would have been

¹⁴ For a treatment of the essay in strictly autobiographical terms, see Susan M. Levin's psychoanalytical analysis in *The Romantic Art of Confession*. She examines "Confessions of a Drunkard" in light of Lamb's life, noting references to drinking habits in his letters, and she considers parallels between Lamb and the narrator of the "Confessions." In *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer*, Gerald Monsman takes a similar psychoanalytical approach, describing the *Elia* persona as Lamb's way to "enclose the memory of September 22, 1796," the day of his sister's matricide (13). When "Lamb begins writing confessional autobiography, his guilt is too immediate and overwhelming to allow him to come close to the contours of his daily life" (32). Thus, in his confession, "the 'Drunkard's guilt is lifted from Lamb and dissolved in the benign *Elia* persona that everyone takes to be an actual projection of Lamb himself" (34). See also Anya Taylor's *Bacchus in Romantic England: Writers and Drink, 1780-1830*, in which she reads the "Confessions" as highly autobiographical because "Lamb was one of the notorious drunkards of the London scene during the Romantic era." She sees "Charles Lamb's lifelong drunkenness" as an "often dangerous response to his own and his sister's insanity," an inebriety that was both liberating and crippling, for it caused a fragmentation of identity, yet also "allowed him to feign other selves" in both his writing, and non-*Elia* life (68, 62).

acutely aware of the fictions within the Elia essays. The *London's* readers, however — the large group of middle-class magazine subscribers who knew Lamb only as the textual Elia — are the audience targeted by the magazine's editorial and authorial game. The magazine's playfulness with the question of the confessor's identity suggests that questions of biographical fact in "Confessions of a Drunkard" are insignificant.

Most important in "The Lion's Head" is the affirmation of Elia's relationship with the magazine and, by extension, with his regular readership. Familiarity with Elia, contained in phrases like "our friend," and knowledge of his "recent Continental tour" are scattered throughout the defense of Elia (99). This friendship is reinforced by an ode titled "To Elia" later in that same issue, a sonnet penned by an anonymous contributor in honour of Elia and his distinctive prose style (*London* 6:151). The poem attributes value specifically to the person of Elia, whose "themes thy gentle worth enhances" (151). Through "The Lion's Head" and the sonnet "To Elia," readers are imbued with a readerly preference for Elia, as well as for his "reveries and vision'd themes" (151). Such editorial processes both highlight Elia's fancy, a quality that undermines the realism of "Confessions of a Drunkard," and reinforce an intimacy with Elia and a familiarity with his narrative style.

This friendship, established in earlier Elia essays and reinforced in "The Lion's Head," is crucial to aligning the reader with Elia in "Confessions of a Drunkard." In the informal space of his column, Elia engages with the reader as one would with a friend in private. This form of writing, as Richard Haven observes, stands in contrast to "public discourse," for Elia "invites the reader to share a unique experience" (138). In these moments of experience-sharing, Elia accustoms the readers to the act of self-disclosure, frequently using "I confess" to reveal his proclivities in essays such as "New Year's Eve,"

“Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading,” and “The South Sea House.” In these familiar essays, as Nabholz suggests, Elia also draws the reader to him physically, a rhetorical strategy we have seen similarly employed by De Quincey. Commencing in Elia’s “Oxford in the Vacation,” Nabholz writes, the “reader has moved more fully into Elia’s experience, an internal, imaginative movement paralleling the external, physical movement from the outside walks and groves into the halls of the colleges” (24). Elia, who does not want to “repel my readers, from a mere incapacity of believing me” (“Drunkard” 118), ensures that readers implicitly continue to stand physically and metaphorically with him, as he fearfully offers his most private and personal revelation to date. Lamb situates his readers, in both his confession and his other Elia essays, in a place where they, as “friend-confessor[s],” can receive what he describes to Coleridge as the “same frankness, the same openness of heart, the same disclosure of all the most hidden and delicate affections of the mind” that Lamb found in Rousseau’s *Confessions* (*Letters* 1:59).¹⁵ Thus, when he admits his penchant for drink, his audience will recognize the confessional rhetoric as indicative of the intimate reader-writer relationship.

While “Confessions of a Drunkard” is less whimsical than Lamb’s other pieces and the sincerity of Elia’s voice makes the short bursts of satire slightly opaque, readerly familiarity with the persona ensures that readers do not “recoil” from his “overcharged picture” (“Drunkard” 119). In “Newspapers Thirty Five Years Ago,” Lamb describes how the magazine writer is “seemingly ever approximating something ‘not quite proper,’ while, like a skilful posture-master, balancing betwixt decorums and their opposites” (*Works* 2:

¹⁵ Lamb is telling Coleridge how much he cherishes their ongoing dialogues: “I love them as I love the *Confessions* of Rousseau, and for the same reason: the same frankness, the same openness of heart, the same disclosure of all the most hidden and delicate affections of the mind: they make me proud to be thus esteemed worthy of the place of friend-confessor, brother-confessor, to a man like Coleridge” (*Letters* 1:59).

251). “Confessions of a Drunkard,” an essay posited on the indecorum of drunkenness, pushes its self-revelatory sincerity to the point of astonishing the reader, only to pull back with sardonic moments parodying the decorum of moral reformers who willingly “trample” over “the ruins of a man” (117). Lucy Newlyn identifies the model of reading posited by Lamb as one based on “[i]n-jokes,” noting that “in an interpretative community where the reader’s kinship with the essayist is taken on trust, they thrive on minute—to a modern eye almost imperceptible—breaches of decorum” (213). The Elia-reader, familiar with his authorial voice, as well as with discourses of moral reform, knows how to navigate the jabs at the “sturdy moralist,” the melodramatic laments, as well as the moments of tearful sincerity (“Drunkard” 117). Elia rhetorically draws his familiar readers into his own experience of confessing, one that mixes the sincere with the cavalier. When Lamb closes, stating “I know not whether I shall be laughed at, or heard seriously” (121), he slyly winks at the knowing reader who has done both.

Having read Rousseau, Lamb knows that confession typically implies a narrative in which listeners or readers must be moved toward understanding before they are asked to judge the act being confessed. He seeks to reconstruct this mode of reception, using the doubleness in Elia’s rhetoric to prevent the simple judgement of an act. Instead, readers must come to know Elia and, in doing so, learn how to judge the text of the confession. Moreover, Lamb intensifies the reading process, making readers complicit in his own act of confession. John Nabholtz argues that in Elia’s early essays such as “The South-Sea House” and “Oxford in the Vacation,” the reader had to be “subtly moved toward Elia’s perspective,” whereas in later essays “there are shared assumptions from the start” (28). In “Confessions of a Drunkard,” Elia requires the maintenance of a shared perspective as he

draws his readers into a highly self-revelatory context that is even more intimate than the quirky confessions of the earlier essays.

Just as Lamb uses “The Lion’s Head” to cue readers to his flippant gestures, so he works within “Drunkard” to situate readers. The essay opens as a rational discourse on the immorality of drunkards in which the drunkard is the object of the essay. Readers returning to Elia’s column would immediately recognize the pedantic tone as uncharacteristic of Elia. Here Lamb ironically contextualizes his confession within the reformist dialogues of teetotalism. He cues his readers to notes of hyperbole, satirizing abstinence as a “remedy” that is as “simple” as “climbing a mountain” or “going through fire” (117). Not until the sixth paragraph does Elia concede, “the man of whom I speak is myself” (117). In this second narrative phase, as “the narrator become[s] both subject and object of his own discourse” (Woodbery 363), Elia posits his readers as morally distant from himself, flatteringly construing them as stronger-willed than he in their relationship with alcohol. However, Lamb’s resumption of the familiar Elian rhetoric of sentiment and sincerity diminishes the readerly distance. Now, instead of sharing a disparaging view of the drunkard, Elia makes his reader share the experience of the drunken confessor. In the latter portion of “Drunkard,” Elia reveals his “general feeling of deterioration” in his work, and states how he “perpetually catch[es him]self in tears, for any cause, or none” (121). While Elia’s shocking revelations might confirm or repulse the “sturdy moralist” who happens to read the confession, he tells the experienced Elia readers with whom he shares a fanciful wit to “[w]rite an essay, pen a character or description, — but not as I do now, with tears streaming down *your* cheeks (118; emphasis added). In one sentence, Lamb draws the reader into the subjecthood of the confessor, drunkard, and writer, as the sorrowful “tears”

now fall down the reader's "cheeks" as well. This shift, as Woodbery notes, "undermines the vice society's language of universal condemnation and eradication of the profligate drunkard" (363). Moreover, the conflation of reader and author subtly breaks down the distinction between drunkard and teetotaling reader, and pronoun referents for possessive adjectives like "our" in phrases such as "The secret of our drinking" become ambiguous ("Drunkard" 117).

Thus, when Elia asserts that he has "no puling apology to make to mankind" (117), the reader, who has been placed narratively and empathetically alongside him, must come to an understanding of Elia's confession. The text requires a reader familiar with Elia's rhetorical doubleness to comprehend the mixed emotions of shame and cynicism. Guilt, which both Lamb and De Quincey explicitly deny, is a question "Confessions of a Drunkard" forces the reader to work out. This denial, placed into doubt by the "sense of shame" (121) Elia tearfully reveals, forces the reader to "puzzle between the lines of the text" (Cafarelli 24) much as Elia puzzles through the complexities of his own problem, one that, like De Quincey's, is best examined by both reader and confessor. "Confessions of a Drunkard" thus stands less as the confession of a distinct "sin" than as the opportunity for the confessor to examine his problem with his friend or, (to borrow Naboltz's title) with the reader, his "fellow-labourer." Exploiting the informality of the magazine to re-envision their relationship with readers as one of intimacy and reciprocity, Romantic literary confessors like Lamb and De Quincey built on the regularity and familiarity of periodical publication, transforming the impersonal space of print into a place where writer and reader, as in De Quincey's "Confessions," are "sitting down and loitering" (60).

CHAPTER TWO

Authenticity and Document: Assembling Confessional Identity in Hazlitt and Ireland

In early-nineteenth-century Britain, decisions on a literary work's format, price, and print run were usually made by the publisher, while content was generally the writer's domain. Even if writers could not determine details such as their work's format, however, they could still craft their pieces for a particular medium. Moreover, writers were often actively engaged in the manufacturing of their works: ordering cancels and insertions, editing, even continuing to write after printing had already begun.¹ Print production and literary content could thus become entangled in the period, and such a connection is particularly evident in William-Henry Ireland's *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* (1805) and William Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris; Or, The New Pygmalion* (1823). Published as books, these two literary confessions were crafted specifically for their print format. Ireland and Hazlitt construct their bookish confessions by collating a curious mixture of personal letters, original poems, verse excerpts, recreated dialogue, and manuscript facsimiles. The two inscribe their confessional self-presentations by exploiting print's reproductive power, merging content and format in order to control and promote their literary identities to the reading public.

When Ireland and Hazlitt published their books, they addressed reading publics already conversant with their print personalities and the events to which they confessed.

¹ William Hazlitt, for example, was noted for last-minute changes during print production. As Geoffrey Keynes points out, "So many of Hazlitt's works show this evidence of second thoughts" that Keynes's *Bibliography of William Hazlitt* includes special headings to detail Hazlitt's numerous cancels and insertions (xiv-xv).

Ireland had gained renown in 1795 when he purported to have found a seemingly unending supply of Shakespeare's original papers. His name circulated alongside that of his father, Samuel Ireland, as the two both delighted and aroused suspicion among Shakespeare-lovers. After the manuscripts were revealed as forgeries, father and son gained public infamy in the pamphlet war and well-publicized literary tribunal that followed. In 1796 William-Henry confessed to orchestrating the forgeries in a pamphlet entitled *An Authentic Account of the Shaksperian Manuscripts* in which he explained his character, detailed his motivations, and defended the innocence of his father. In 1805, he revised and expanded his account into book form as *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland*, shaping his confession for a public that may have remembered the scandal of the previous decade but had neglected to recognize his own status as both forger and author.

Public knowledge of the events contained in Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* similarly preceded its publication. Freshly divorced and faced with the failure of a romantic entanglement with the young serving girl Sarah Walker, Hazlitt felt compelled in 1822 to divulge the particulars of the episode to his friends (and to their servants when his friends were unavailable).² Hazlitt did not limit his disclosure to his personal circle, however. Details about his romance circulated around London throughout 1822 and 1823 (Wu 23; Lahey 23). As Thomas De Quincey recounts, Hazlitt "went up and down London, raving about this girl" ("Recollections" 79). The collected volumes of Hazlitt's *Table Talk* essays, which Hazlitt edited and republished during his relationship with Walker, also contain a

² B.W. Proctor's relation of Hazlitt's eagerness to talk to anyone about his relationship with Walker is quoted in Richard Le Gallienne's privately printed edition of *Liber Amoris* (London, 1894), xxiv-xxv.

number of references to her.³ The *Literary Register*, reviewing the second volume of *Table Talk* on August 3 1822, criticized Hazlitt for publicizing his private affairs: “We may bluntly advise him [. . .] to put out of his head a puerile emulation of the weakest points of his unfortunate model, Rousseau. Let us have no more of his landlord’s daughter in italics” (4:60). At least part of the reading public was thus aware of Hazlitt’s relationship with “his landlord’s daughter” nine months before *Liber Amoris* was published on May 9, 1823. Neither Hazlitt nor Ireland, then, made a fresh revelation for the public. Rather, both sought to rectify public opinion, because their personal and professional reputations were at stake.

Book publication was instrumental in this project. Whereas De Quincey and Lamb used the magazine to address readers as private, singular individuals in an intimate and personal way, building readerly relationships that fostered disclosure, Ireland and Hazlitt published their books for members of a public audience, whom they attempt to convince of the veracity of their accounts. Ireland and Hazlitt were familiar with different print media, each having published in other literary forms for some time, but each chose book publication to make his case.⁴ The books present themselves as full, transparent confessions replete with private and sometimes shocking material, displaying numerous documents in order to lay out the truth for the public record. Both authors reproduce original papers as a form of textual evidence, appealing to a legal-scholarly mode of documentation. Manuscript facsimiles and reproductions serve to establish readerly trust and to authenticate the confessional accounts. Central to these bookish productions is thus the presentation of the confessor’s version of the

³ For an examination of Hazlitt’s references in the two volumes of *Table Talk*, see Duncan Wu’s “Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris*: A Defence.”

⁴ Hazlitt’s career is well known, especially as periodical writer, but that of Ireland is less so. Aside from the celebrated forgeries, he also produced several ballads, a didactic poem, a historical drama, and at least three four-volume romances before his 1805 *Confessions*.

well-known affairs as authentic. Yet, as critics of both Ireland and Hazlitt have noted, the veracity of each confession can be neither completely confirmed nor completely discounted. Although the works appear to be thorough accounts with full documentation, both confessors use selected and edited texts in order to characterize themselves, shifting between documents and carefully assembling them to revise their public identities.

By inscribing these identities through book publication, Ireland and Hazlitt exploited not only the more scholarly authority of the book (as opposed to periodicals or pamphlets) but also its literary status. Through a process of bookish self-fashioning, the two drew attention to their literary skill as they wove together private documents to display themselves as genuine men of letters. Taking advantage of the increased number of pages available in a book, they created their confessions as artistic products, with readers able to contemplate content alongside craftsmanship. By compiling books out of a generic range of varied texts, Ireland and Hazlitt connected their literary reputation to their intricately constructed confessional self-presentations, revealing an intimate relationship between authorship and the printed product.

Forging Identity: William-Henry Ireland and the Authentication of Authorship

Almost every work on William-Henry Ireland and the Shakespearean forgeries begins with a narrative attempting to reconstruct the somewhat unclear details of the well-known events.⁵ Contemporary accounts were split over which members of the Ireland

⁵ The generally accepted story is as follows, though even recent accounts vary somewhat due to the errors, fictions, and general opacity of many contemporary records. Many details of Ireland's life are only recounted in *Confessions*, which is particularly dubious as a historical record.

William-Henry Ireland lived in London with his (possibly biological) father Samuel Ireland. After failing out of a number of schools and becoming a great disappointment to Samuel, he began as a legal apprentice to William Bingley. Samuel, an amateur antiquarian and professional engraver, published picturesque travel guides, and in 1792 he took William-Henry to Stratford-upon-Avon on a research trip where he revealed to the boy his obsession with owning a Shakespearean relic. According to the *Confessions*, William-Henry wanted to satisfy Samuel's desire and vainly searched London bookstalls and junk shops to do so. An encounter with a bookbinder introduced him to an ink that gained an aged appearance when placed in front of fire. He began to experiment with the ink on paper from old books that he dismembered.

On November 22, 1794, he presented to Samuel his first forgery: a mortgage deed with Shakespeare's signature, which was copied from one of the few genuine extant manuscripts bearing the bard's writing. Four weeks later, he presented a forged "lease between William Shakspeare and John Heminge with one Michael Fraser and Elizabeth his wife" (*Confessions* 47). Samuel offered the documents to the public for inspection. William-Henry claimed that they were found in the trunk of a recent acquaintance, a "gentleman being possessed of a large fortune" whom William-Henry later called Mr. H— (66). The gentleman, as William-Henry explained, "did not think fit to subject himself to the impertinent questionings of every individual who conceived himself licensed to demand an explanation" and thus "gave" William-Henry "the documents as mere curiosities, exacting from [him] at the same time a most solemn asseveration that [he] would keep his name for ever concealed" (66).

The public's credulity and curiosity prompted William-Henry to produce dozens of manuscripts throughout 1795, including "William Shakspeare's Profession of Faith," which demonstrated the bard's Protestant affiliations, and a bowdlerized *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. A number of scholars such as George Chalmers, Dr. Parr, and Joseph Warton supported the authenticity of the manuscripts. As William-Henry continued to "find" Shakespearean relics, Samuel decided to publish them: *Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments under the Hand and Seal of William Shakspeare, including the Tragedy of King Lear and a Small Fragment of Hamlet, from the Original Manuscripts in the Possessions of Samuel Ireland, of Norfolk Street* was published on December 24, 1795. The forger became more audacious, creating a supposedly lost tragedy, *Vortigern and Rowena*, which was performed at Drury Lane on April 2, 1796.

Skepticism was emerging, however. In early 1796, James Boaden published *A letter to George Steevens, Esq. containing a critical examination of the papers of Shakspeare; published by Mr. Samuel Ireland*. On March 31, two days before *Vortigern's* premiere, Edmond Malone published *An Inquiry into the Authenticity of Certain Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments*, a detailed attack that proved the manuscripts to be forgeries. *Vortigern* was poorly received, and a committee was organized to investigate the Irelands and the manuscripts. The scandal was frequently discussed in newspapers, and although Samuel Ireland was seen by most as the primary forger, some suggested that the whole family operated the forgery factory.

In May 1796, William-Henry told his family that he was responsible for the forgeries. In December, he published his confession: *An Authentic Account of the Shaksperian Manuscripts*. The revelation fractured the Ireland family: William-Henry left home, Samuel published a refutation of William-Henry's confession, and the two argued by letter until Samuel's death in 1800. Many continued to hold Samuel responsible for the forgeries (and some critics, including Samuel Schoenbaum and Jeffrey Kahan, continue to suspect Samuel).

family — if not all of them — were responsible. Edward Malone, the lawyer and Shakespearean scholar who exposed the forgery, proposed his own version of the events in his lengthy *Inquiry*.⁶ Several of those who had supported the authenticity of the manuscripts later changed their stories: Samuel Parr claimed that he had never been fooled, while Joseph Warton denied not only inspecting the manuscripts but also ever visiting the Irelands' home.⁷ In a forty-three page pamphlet entitled *An Authentic Account of the Shaksperian Manuscripts*, William-Henry Ireland claimed culpability and asserted the historical authenticity of his "true account" (43). His father Samuel Ireland publicly disputed the confession.⁸ A number of other apologies, defences, and refutations also offered narratives opposing William-Henry's version of the scandal. However, since the publication of the second more detailed profession of guilt, *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland: Containing the Particulars of His Fabrication of the Shakspeare Manuscripts; Together with Anecdotes and Opinions of Many Distinguished Persons in the Literary, Political, and Theatrical World*, William-Henry Ireland has been generally taken at his word. Most

William-Henry had difficulty finding work and became a literary hack but with limited success because of his reputation for literary imposture. He published in a various genres under at least sixteen pseudonyms, dying in poverty in 1835.

⁶ Edmond Malone, *An Inquiry into the Authenticity of Certain Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments, Published Dec. 24, M DCC XCV. and attributed to Shakspeare, Queen Elizabeth, and Henry, Earl of Southampton: Illustrated by Fac-similes of the Genuine Hand-Writing of that Nobleman, and of Her Majesty; a New Fac-simile of the Hand-writing of Shakspeare, Never before Exhibited; and Other Authentick Documents*. (London: 1796).

⁷ In Parr's copy of Samuel Ireland's *Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments Under the Hand and Seal of William Shakspeare*, Parr wrote that William-Henry Ireland "told a LIE, when he imputed to me the words which Joseph Warton used" and that in his "subsequent conversation, I told him my change of opinion. But I thought it not worth while to dispute in print with a detected imposter" (*Bibliotheca Parriana* 522).

Warton's denial is recorded on page 8 of William T. Hastings, *Shakespeare Ireland's First Folio*, Reprinted from 1:4 *The Colophon, New Graphic Series*, for the Friends of the Library of Brown University, Windham: Hawthorn House, n.d.

⁸ See Samuel Ireland, *Mr. Ireland's Vindication of His Conduct Respecting the Publication of the Supposed Shakspeare Mss. Being a Preface or Introduction to a Reply to the Critical Labours of Mr. Malone in his "Enquiry Into the Authenticity of Certain Papers, &c., &c."* (London: 1796).

twentieth-century accounts have accepted the confession as accurate, using it as the primary source in reconstructing the events.⁹

Not until recent decades have critics reconsidered the paradoxical implications of the *Morning Chronicle*'s assertion in 1796 that Ireland's confession, "if true, proves him to be a liar" (qtd. in Ireland 269).¹⁰ Because Ireland's career is founded on deception, the veracity of his statements — even those that appear simple to verify — is difficult to ascertain. For example, he frequently omits dates in both of his confessions. He also insists that he was seventeen years of age when he began the forgeries and about nineteen when they were exposed (*Authentic Account* 21; *Confessions* 315). Another source, however, indicates that he was two years older than he claims.¹¹ As Jack Lynch observes of the difficulty of narrativizing the life of this "pathological liar," the "most basic biographical facts are in doubt, forcing us to backtrack and qualify" (85; 79-80). Lynch notes that even Ireland's parentage is unclear, thus placing the forger's biological identity in doubt as well (79).

Ireland's *Confessions*, then, is only one account of the events and yet another presentation of his character, but because most scholars seek to discern fact from fiction, *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* is generally treated as a piece of evidence (if rather dubious) in studies of the scandal itself or literary forgery or even of bardolatry. The title-page of the 1805 publication claims to record "The whole truth, and nothing but the truth,"

⁹ See, for example, Mair's *The Fourth Forger* (1938), Grebanier's *The Shakespeare Forgery* (1965), and Schoenbaum's *Shakespeare's Lives* (1970).

¹⁰ The only source for this quotation from the *Morning Chronicle* that I have been able to trace is in Ireland's *Confessions*. He does not give a specific date for it and cites from memory, dubiously stating that it "ran nearly as follows" before the quotation (269).

¹¹ Schoenbaum notes that the "Ireland family Bible, now in the possession of Stuart B. Schimmel of New York, records William-Henry's birth on 2 August 1775" (*William Shakespeare: Records and Images* 118). Incidentally, Ireland seems to have been successful in forging a new year of birth; most libraries and archives record his lifespan as 1777-1835.

to which Ireland “added in his own hand (in a Folger copy), ‘So help me God’” (Schoenbaum 118), yet Ireland’s *Confessions* is also a work of literature.¹² It is not simply a document useful for the reconstruction of a historical narrative; it is a literary narrative, even if it has not often been treated as such. What is most important to the work for a study of literary confession is not the veracity of the narrative but the manner in which Ireland presents himself to his readers. He is well aware of the risk he is taking in making his confession, declaring in his preface that the “revival of the subject [. . .] might rather tend to injure than benefit me as a literary character” (np). Nonetheless, what he seeks is to establish himself as precisely a “literary character,” and *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* is a bid for this character’s fame.

The *Confessions* was published in duodecimo, compact and portable, and hence able to circulate more widely and easily than volumes in larger formats like octavos. Small enough to have been placed in a pocket for transport, shared and discussed, it was an informal book even as it shared the authority associated with printed volumes. At the price of seven shillings six pence in boards, it was substantially less expensive than the twelve shillings William St. Clair records as average for similar productions in the first decade of the nineteenth century (203).¹³ Lower price meant not only that more people could afford to purchase it but that it was more accessible in circulating libraries, which often based rates for non-subscribers on the price of books.¹⁴ Ireland could thus market himself to a fairly wide

¹² The motto is not reproduced in the 1969 reproduction from which I am working.

¹³ Publication details of Ireland’s *Confessions* are drawn from an 1805 edition (18th-305) held in the Robert H. Taylor Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. My thanks to its curator, Mark Farrell, for details about the copy.

¹⁴ For example, Turner’s Circulating Library in Beverley based rates for non-subscribers on the price of books; here, readers would have paid threepence to borrow a title such as *Confessions*, which fell in the category of books valued between five shillings and seven shillings six pence (Potter 20).

audience of book readers, and it was among these that he sought to grasp at the prominence that accompanies notoriety, and turn it to his own authorial account.

Even as Ireland used his book as a tool to publicize his name and expand his readership, he had to contend with those who still questioned his guilt and ability to orchestrate the forgery successfully, as well as with a larger public that had heretofore encountered a variety of different accounts. Ireland makes a case for his standing as the great Shakespeare forger, but as James Treadwell points out in one of the few discussions of the *Confessions* as a literary work, Ireland wants to be judged by literary instead of ethical standards, so he turns his “narrative admission of fakery into a textual demonstration of real poetic writing” (161, 159). Treadwell argues that Ireland shifts from “quasi-legal testimon[y]” in the earlier *Authentic Account* to “literary performances” in the later *Confessions*: “Publication has gained a more complex rhetorical purpose, acknowledging and shaping the fluidity of the narrative’s status, rather than insisting on its use as evidence” (158, 160). Although Treadwell rightly points out that Ireland’s two texts engage in very different “autobiographical transactions,” he underplays the degree to which the *Confessions* is also constructed as a legal document ready for examination, recording Ireland’s motivations and forgery procedures, and (most importantly) reproducing the documents in question (155). The difference between the two confessions is not simply in their rhetoric: it lies in Ireland’s shift in focus from the forgeries to himself. By adopting book publication, Ireland not only enhances a sense of authenticity but also deploys the devices of authenticity to highlight his authorial status.

Ireland's first confession, though a commercial success, had been received with incredulity and failed to change dissenting opinion.¹⁵ *Authentic Account* included little documentation, but it was dismissed primarily on the literary-critical grounds that also governed the debate over Ireland's forgeries. As Thomas Warton put it when dealing with the Chatterton forgeries in 1782: "It is not from the complexion of ink or of parchment" or "from the information of cotemporaries [sic]" that "this controversy is to be finally and effectually adjusted. Our argument should be drawn from principles of taste [. . .] a familiarity with antient poetry" and "gradations of composition" (qtd. in Kahan 40). According to Ireland's contemporaries, the aesthetic quality of his first confession did not match that of the forgeries. The *True Briton*, for instance, did not find "a single spark of genius, talent or taste, nor the smallest portion of that *feeling* which certainly appears in various parts of the MSS" (qtd. in Mair 218).

In the *Confessions*, William-Henry responds to such criticism, describing his *Authentic Account* as the "production of perturbed moments": "I was not endeavouring to commit blank verse to paper: neither was it requisite for me to soar into 'the heaven of heavens,' in order to give the world 'a plain unvarnish'd tale'" (264). After nine years, he is not only less "perturbed" but also conscious of more scholarly modes of authentication such

¹⁵ Ireland details the commercial success of *Authentic Account* in his *Confessions*. He claims that the pamphlet, of which five hundred copies were printed, "so excited the public curiosity that the whole edition was disposed of in a few hours: and so great has been the eagerness to procure a copy, that, though originally published at one shilling, a single impression has been sold, in a public auction-room, at the extravagant price of a guinea" (Preface). Ireland himself claims to have paid eighteen shillings for a copy (263).

Despite the curiosity surrounding Ireland's *Authentic Account*, many still considered Samuel to be responsible. As Samuel Schoenbaum records in *Records and Images*, "one newspaper compared him with Abraham offering up his own son Isaac as a sacrifice" (132) and "William Mason's verses in 1797, vilifying the 'Four forgers born in one prolific age,' make Samuel — not William-Henry — the fourth son of Fraud, after Lauder, Macpherson, and Chatterton" (134). Even after Samuel's death in July 1800, an anonymous memorialist for *Gentleman's Magazine* noted in an obituary that "the forgery could not have been conducted by the son alone" (qtd. in Schoenbaum 134).

as those used by Malone.¹⁶ Malone's critical style, as Kahan summarizes, was the "culmination of a remarkable eighteenth-century scholarly movement toward the use of history and documents as a litmus test for authenticity" (39). The hastily written *Authentic Account*, though dictated by appeals similar to those in the 1805 confession, was not only less systematic in its explanation of motives and events but also less scholarly in format. It contained only a few lines from the forged papers and no facsimiles, whereas the later *Confessions* is an updated account, using the methods of documentation and appealing this time not only to emotion but also to the authority of literary scholarship.

Ireland concludes his work by claiming that the decision of the "literary world" — the "lovers of Greek and Latin" — to "vilify" and "upbraid" him stemmed in large part from his youth and lack of a genteel education:

had the papers been the production of a man of known science and learning, they then would have pardoned the abuse, because he would have been more on a level with themselves: and although they would have regarded him as a dangerous forger, they would have granted that he was a *very clever* man. (316-317)

Hence he cleverly uses his *Confessions* to forge a higher status for himself through the authority of printed document. By reproducing and examining the texts involved in the scandal, he attempts to dispel skepticism. He directly engages scholars such as George Chalmers who doubted him, implicitly asserting intellectual equality with them.¹⁷ Ireland

¹⁶ On Malone's examination of the forgeries in his *Inquiry*, see Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 193-223. For a study of the methods of scholarship with which eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholars worked and Malone contended, see Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

¹⁷ For instance, to George Chalmers' assertion in *Apology for the Believers* that a second document with a second John Heminges' signature could not have been forged so quickly, Ireland explains his foreknowledge of the disputed signature, the proximity between his forgery headquarters and place of questioning, as well as the well-developed system he had devised — all of which allowed him to produce a new forgery in just over one

now invites “the world” to read his new and improved explanation, complete with “a simple relation of the motives as they arose and operated on my conduct” (Preface). Only after reading the *Confessions*, Ireland insists, will the public be “enabled to judge between my contemners and me,” ready to free his “character” from the “stigmas with which it has so undeservedly been sullied” (Preface).

Even as Ireland uses legal and scholarly argumentation to vindicate his character, his cultivation of authenticity also grants him the authority he needs to counterfeit a specifically authorial identity. He is not actually concerned with accuracy, and the scholarly method of the *Confessions* is simply part of his confessional persona. Ireland crafts his book much like a fiction, omitting the dates of the forgeries so that they fit with his main storyline of an “unthinking and impetuous boy” desiring only to please his bardolatrous father (Preface). Changing the year of his birth, he becomes a seventeen- instead of nineteen- year-old forger, extenuating his guilt and making his presentation of literary precocity appear more compelling (even if his talent does not). The defence that he neither “intend[ed]” nor “really injured” anyone ignores the destroyed careers of Samuel Ireland and Dr. Parr, implying (as Malone points out in a marginal note) that “cheating 350 persons of four guineas each, is doing no injury to anyone: to say nothing of the general injury to literature by such a forger” (qtd. in Schoenbaum 136). Tensions and contradictions imbue the tale he wants to tell from the start. As Nick Groom observes of the forger’s literary game, Ireland is “playing hide-and-seek with authenticity” (23), declaring and documenting motives while subtly pursuing

hour (87-94). By specifying the limited knowledge of each member involved, he presents himself as a quasi-omniscient boy who maintained the deceit through chance, skill, and bravado. To ensure that readers now share in his knowledge, he includes facsimiles of the forged signatures beside Heminges’ autograph as well as an excerpt of Chalmers’ argument from the pamphlet (87; 94-95). After Ireland completes his narrative of the events, he deals with the publications of other dissenters more briefly but in a similar fashion. Near the end of the book, he offers a general apology to those who were “hoodwinked by the deception” (305).

others. By claiming responsibility yet obscuring truth, he desires to reveal his talents as a precocious and prolific forger, as well as a creative and intelligent author.

Despite activating the confessional pretext of seeking absolution for a youthful act that unexpectedly created injury and ignominy, Ireland did not want the public to forget his masterful deception. Nor did he, as per Grebanier's suggestion, need "to purge himself of the whole business of the forgeries by detailed recounting of the facts" (290). In the 1832 republication of *Vortigern*, for instance, Ireland appended yet another confession as a preface, clearly still unpurged.¹⁸ Ireland evidently thrived on the publicity that accompanies literary confession. In his 1807 production *Stultifera Navis, or The Modern Ship of Fools*, published anonymously, he footnotes a verse about antiquarians with a reference to himself: "Among the impostors of this nature should not be omitted the Rowleian Chatterton, and the Shaksperian Ireland, whose memories will live as long as old chests and old manuscripts stand on record" (qtd. in Grebanier 295). Similarly, in the 1832 preface to *Vortigern*, he records the acclaim he feels the Shakespeare forger should receive: "Invariably, when descanting with persons on the subject of the papers, they have applauded the cheat, expressed a wish of having been capable of deceiving the world in a similar manner" (viii). Despite claiming otherwise in the *Confessions*, then, Ireland was neither repentant nor interested in changing his behaviour; he wanted to be "applauded." He continued to seek recognition for his work throughout his life: he sold counterfeits of his original Shakespeare

¹⁸ Samuel Schoenbaum notes in *William Shakespeare: Records and Images* that William-Henry produced yet another confession, entitled *Full and Explanatory Account of the Shaksperian Forgery*. According to Schoenbaum, the unpublished manuscript, which is part of the Hyde Collection at Four Oaks Farm in New Jersey, "antedates the more cunningly rationalized 1805 *Confessions*" (134). One particularly interesting discrepancy between this manuscript and the 1805 *Confessions* is William-Henry's discussion of the Leicester receipts, which he had dated at 1590, two years after the Earl of Leicester died. In *Full and Explanatory Account*, Samuel discovers the inaccurate dating, countering William-Henry's desire to burn the receipt by simply tearing off the date. In the *Confessions*, however, William-Henry leaves out details of Samuel's participation, claiming that he noticed the problem moments before showing it to his father (Schoenbaum 134).

papers to a number of collectors, forging them as authentic forgeries.¹⁹ Whenever he was short on cash, he prepared new forgeries by anyone from Shakespeare to Byron. After Napoleon Bonaparte provided him with work as a librarian in the National Library in 1814, he forged Napoleon too.²⁰

Having thus associated himself with prominent figures throughout his life, Ireland also explicitly connects himself to a glamorized history of forgers, attaching himself in particular to the celebrated Thomas Chatterton.²¹ He does so early in the book as if Chatterton is central to the subsequent trajectory of his own life. After a rapid summary of childhood, he slows the narrative pace to discuss his early interest in Chatterton's life and forgeries.²² Ireland parades his childhood interest in other forgers and his skill at mimicking

¹⁹ For Ireland's continued work as a forger, see Jeffrey Kahan's *Reforging Shakespeare: The Story of a Theatrical Scandal* and Jack Lynch's "William Henry Ireland's Authentic Forgeries."

²⁰ Jack Lynch notes that Ireland "apparently greeted Napoleon on his return from Elba and served as a librarian in France's National Library during a nine-year residence in Paris" (84). Also, Jeffrey Kahan notes that Ireland exhibited a strong interest in publishing fiction, translations, and documents under Napoleon's name, one of which was an 1821 publication that he claimed as Napoleon's will (208). Some of these details may be inaccurate (as highlighted by Lynch's use of "apparently"). Neither Lynch nor Kahan gives a source for his information. Because of Ireland's anonymous and pseudonymous publications, as well as his critical neglect, biographical records vary.

²¹ As Paul Baines observes, the public often read fakers like Chatterton and Psalmanazar as "imaginative geniuses, not forgers" (181).

²² For an examination of Ireland's childhood in relation to Chatterton and Herbert Croft's *Love and Madness*, see Robert Miles, "Forging a Romantic Identity: Herbert Croft's *Love and Madness* and the Shakespeare MS." Miles argues that "Ireland's representation of his childhood trajectory is not as innocent as it may appear" and that the "key to understanding it is lightly buried in the short "Love and Madness" section [. . .] 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" (611). Miles's study considers Ireland's Romantic identity as one situated in the youth and print cultures of the 1790s and drawn particularly from his idolization of Chatterton: "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 [a] letter from 1796" (625).

In "Trouble in the Republic of Letters: The Reception of the Shakespeare Forgeries," Miles similarly suggests that Ireland's motivation in writing his Confessions was to be mythologized as the "boy genius who had successfully, for a time, counterfeited the great bard himself, as the prodigy who had out marvelled the marvelous boy [Chatterton]" (323).

the style of literary touchstones, associating his forgery career with the creative genius he identifies in the trade. Ireland reports that as a man, he “revere[s]” Chatterton’s “talents,” but as a child, he “used to frequently envy his fate, and desire nothing so ardently as the termination of [his] existence in a similar cause” (*Confessions* 17, 11). He pens an acrostic in Chatterton’s honour and “commiserate[s]” his “fate” with “unfeigned tears of sympathy (11, 17). Ireland twins himself with Chatterton — the marvelous boy — and the act of publishing the *Confessions* is in large part impelled by Ireland’s desire to achieve in life the iconic status that Chatterton only achieved in death.

The only absolution that Ireland thus desires is from the republic of letters. The *Confessions* enacts, represents, and pleads for the recognition of the authorial identity of William-Henry Ireland.²³ In a book that poses as an apology, Ireland makes what Paul Baines describes as a “jaunty claim to authorship” alongside the seemingly antithetical appeal for recognition as a champion forger (181). In a key move, Ireland unites the figures of the forger and the author under the rubric of artistry, detailing the creativity and skill behind his forgeries: the creation of the Quintin seal, the process of artificially aging the ink, the selection of blank sheets and endpapers from antique books (48-53, 37-40). The *Confessions* includes facsimiles of his forged signatures next to the autographs for readers to compare and admire. By describing — and displaying — his craftsmanship as a forger, he demonstrates his prowess as a maker of texts. By organizing facsimiles and manuscript

²³ Nick Groom argues in “From Forgery to Fish ‘N’ Chips” that Ireland “challenges the Romantic conception of authorship” with the “at least sixteen different pseudonyms [he uses] throughout his writing life” (22, 24). However, this “multifarious authorship” (26) that Groom proposes seems to have emerged after Ireland failed to restore his literary reputation under the name of William-Henry Ireland. Groom also highlights the fact that “Ireland” was not a real family name, but a “moniker of the forger, only about a twentieth of his eventual person”; Samuel had “adopted the name; he was christened ‘Irwin,’ but this man was not W.H.’s real father anyway” (26). The fiction of Ireland’s literary character in the *Confessions* is thus only part of a larger fiction that penetrated Ireland’s out-of-the-text identity.

reproductions within his work, he equally demonstrates that he is a skillful maker of books (158).²⁴

Such technical talents complement more strictly literary skills. Ireland demonstrates his literary talent by offering “various anecdotes” from the scandal, which are designed to provide “entertainment” and “amusement” (Preface). Throughout the text, he presents himself as an artist with the literary capacity for creating new characters to interest his audience: the fictional Mr. H— who supposedly supplied the manuscripts is the most developed. Ireland also boasts of his skill at concocting quick-witted explanation for the documents: one story of which he is particularly proud takes place after his fabricated “Promissory Note of Hand to John Heminges” is called into question. The shrewd fiction with which Ireland rebuffed doubt involves two John Heminges, whom Ireland “distinguishe[s]” with an air of historical authority for his contemporaries by the “appellations of the *tall* John Heminges of the Globe and the *short* John Heminges of the Curtain theatres” (91). Ireland invests his quixotic account with emotion and drama as he races through the streets of London, heightening the tale with fear as he barely escapes detection. Investing this part of the *Confessions* with a display of narrative skill, Ireland reveals the great literary expectations he holds for himself and the merit he believes his book exemplifies.

²⁴ For further discussion of Ireland’s role in the physical production of his literary works, see Jack Lynch, “William Henry Ireland’s Authentic Forgeries.” Lynch discusses Ireland’s reproduction and sale of his “original” Shakespeare forgeries as well as an extra-illustrated edition of *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* now held in the Robert H. Taylor Collection in the Princeton University Library. The Taylor copy appears to have been created in 1819 by Ireland. Lynch describes it as an “extensive, heterogeneous, and attractive” volume with printed pages from two prints of the *Confessions* pasted onto larger album pages (89). Each page “might bear as little as a single paragraph or as much as three long columns of the text of the *Confessions*” (90). In addition, the volume contains parts of Samuel Ireland’s *Miscellaneous Papers*, handwritten letters, sketches, “ostensible ‘authentic forgeries,’” much of which is “introduced by beautifully coloured and gilt section titles that mimic medieval manuscripts” (91).

Ireland foregrounds his poetic skill as well, reproducing his literary compositions to confirm himself as a precocious “boy” of letters deserving pardon and admiration. He selects as evidence those he viewed as the best parts of his poetic forgeries, such as the prologue to *Vortigern* and an excerpt from his *King Lear* purged of “ribaldry,” which the public — according to Ireland — “generally conceived” as proof “beyond doubt that Shakspeare was a much more finished writer than had ever before been imagined” (118). He also offers readers abundant samples of what he describes as his “poetic effusions” (Preface), which include an imitation of Chaucer, a speech from his unfinished play about William the Conqueror, and a number of compositions he had planned to pass off as Shakespeare’s. But his preferred poetic form appears to be acrostics, more than a dozen of which he reproduces based on the names of Elizabethan and Jacobean figures. Such works have little relevance in the history of the forgery, but they are important in Ireland’s insinuation of himself into literary tradition.²⁵ Acrostics celebrate names, and Ireland draws attention to the fact that in the Elizabethan age, it was a “very common” practice to “prefix to a work a complimentary acrostic on the author’s name” in “commendation of his genius or talents” (206). Not surprisingly, Ireland creates an acrostic praising an imaginary ancestor “Maister William-Henry Irelaunde” (211). Irelaunde, as Ireland reveals in another forged document, dramatically “savedde Shakspeare’s lyfe fromme drownynge whenne onne Thames,” and so the bard bequeathed the rights to his work to him (211).

²⁵ Many of the poetic excerpts were not written at the time of the forgery, as per Ireland’s claims (Mair 237). Those that were written at the time are often heavily edited and are placed out of chronological order. Like much of the book, the narrative follows a system of associations that serve to reinforce Ireland’s literary talents: for example, his “fondness for ancient books” and “LOVE OF CHIVALRY” leads to an acrostic on Chaucer in the “versification of that period” (8-9); and the reading of Herbert Croft’s *Love and Madness* evokes an acrostic on Chatterton (11-12).

Inheritance is a crucial part of Ireland's bid for literary fame. As his contemporary Stephen Jones speculated in 1812, the forger pursues the "strange and abominable idea of immortalizing himself," of "connect[ing him]self with the history of Shakspeare as long as British literature shall last" (1: 388). Even as Ireland apologizes in his *Confessions* for being "so arrogant as to believe" that he "would not injure the reputation of Shakspeare" (118), he forged himself not only as the rightful heir of the bard's papers but also, as various critics have noted, as part of an authentic Shakespearean tradition.²⁶ Indeed, Ireland uses his *Confessions* to point out that numerous critics who were regarded as "perfect judges of Shakspeare's style and his mode of expression" perceived literary merit in the forgeries, but Ireland is particularly proud of how his own authorship was confused with Shakespeare's in the epilogue of *Henry the Second* (170).²⁷ The final couplet, which Ireland claims was "meant to allude to [him]self," addresses the audience as follows: "I'll to our young and trembling author say, / Ye heard, ye smil'd, and did applaud his play" (175). In remarking that "believers in the paper supposed" the lines "to intimate that it was our bard who was young when the drama in question was written," Ireland reinforces the association of a skilled young Shakespeare with his "young and trembling" self (174-175). By connecting his writing to Shakespeare's, Ireland evokes a classical tradition in which authorship was an honoured form of imitation, thus authenticating his own standing as artist.

²⁶ See, for example, Michael Keevak, "Queer Sonnets and the Forgeries of William-Henry Ireland," in which he argues that with the forgeries, Ireland was "attempting to fashion himself as a true descendant of Shakespeare, both genealogically and artistically" (25).

²⁷ S. Austin Allibone briefly comments on the close of Ireland's *Henry the Second* forgery in his 1871 publication of *A critical dictionary of English literature and British and American authors*: "We happen to possess Ireland's own MS. of one of his forgeries, Henry the Second: the rascal seemed to feel but little penitence for his fraud; for at the conclusion he indulges in the self-gratulatory exclamation, 'Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!'" (934).

As much as Ireland exploits Shakespeare's prominence as England's national poet to bolster his own claims to authorship, the bard is only a point of departure. It is the appearance of Ireland's name in print that authorizes his authorial status. The Ireland family gained renown through the manuscript forgeries, but William-Henry first reinforced his own standing as the great Shakespeare forger through his printed pamphlet. In the *Authentic Account*, he insisted that he was "both the author and writer" of the "papers" "as well as the whole of this narration," but his sense of individual authorship was only beginning to materialize (42). Even as he made clear his literary ambition at the close of *Authentic Account*, he envisioned himself primarily as an imitator of Shakespearean form: "Should I attempt another play, or any other stage performance, I shall hope the public will lay aside all prejudice my conduct may have deserved, and grant me that kind indulgence which is the certain inmate of every Englishman's bosom" (43). In essence, he asks that he be indulged in a career that stems from the illegitimate act for which he claimed culpability. By the time he published his *Confessions*, however, he clearly anticipated a renewed and diversified literary life for himself, demonstrating that his talent consisted of more than simply literary impersonation.²⁸ Displaying himself as an author of drama, prose, and poetry, and unifying his artistry by assembling these genres within one printed volume, he consolidated his "literary character," even while maintaining its multiplicity. Piecing together an authorial status from the tradition of Shakespeare, the imaginative genius of imposture, along with the authority of literary scholarship and legal document, William-Henry Ireland rewrites infamy as a form of Romantic authorship.

²⁸ Tired of "bearing a more than merited portion of obloquy," he has "full conviction that the public" will leniently "judge" him after reading his outwardly heartfelt confession of 1805 and he will be "freed" from this state of literary neglect and persecution (Preface).

Assembling the Man of Letters: Disclosure and Document in Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*

In an 1820 review, William Hazlitt proclaimed that readers “translate words into things, and books into men” (*Complete Works* 16: 154). The occasion for this remark was a reprint of Joseph Spence's *Anecdotes, Observations, and Characters of Books and Men*, but Hazlitt also used this review to make observations on the reading process in order to counter Wordsworth's “objection to the biography of literary men” (16: 153). Hazlitt notes that contemporary readers try to “see how poets and philosophers ‘live, converse, and behave,’ like other men” (16:154). Privileging the interests of readers over the privacy of writers, he affirms the value of literary biographers, who are faced with the complex task he describes as the “difficulty of forming almost any inference at all from what men *write* to what they *are*” (16: 154). For Hazlitt, literary biography answers to a prevalent desire of readers, satisfying a readerly “curiosity,” because it is “the *ideal* and abstracted existence of authors that renders their personal character and private history a subject of so much interest” (16: 154).

When Hazlitt published his confessional *Liber Amoris: Or, The New Pygmalion* a few years later, however, he approached author-reader relations very differently. Dispensing with any ideal or abstracted notions of his own existence as an author-figure, Hazlitt generates *Liber Amoris* from his personal character and private romantic history with Sarah Walker so as to focus directly on the biographical subject that typically incited much readerly interest. What readers encounter in *Liber Amoris* is a compilation of texts drawn from personal correspondence. The first part of the book is a record of conversations between H— and S—, the central figures in *Liber Amoris*. These intimate discussions, as

transcribed by the confessor, take place in the private setting of H—'s rented room in a lodging house owned by S—'s family. Part II and III primarily contain letters exchanged between H— and his circle of friends and family. Throughout *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt sprinkles some of his private meditative writing, as well as various selections from other poets, but even these excerpts are imbued with personal significance and new meaning in the context of the confessor's romantic life. For example, a section titled "A Proposal of Love" consists of a passage from *Troilus and Cressida* and is identified as "Given to her in our early acquaintance" (46). Directly offering satisfaction of readerly curiosity, his book divulges many of the "domestic details" and "little peculiarities of temper" he had earlier described as a challenge for readers and biographers to decipher and uncover (16: 154). Such details are revealed through an assemblage of Hazlitt's personal documents, and their reproduction implicitly asserts that no inferences are necessary from what this man *writes* to what he *is*. In the enclosed texts of *Liber Amoris*, the "things" of Hazlitt's romantic life have become "words." Through their publication, man has been translated into book.

By publishing a record of private life, Hazlitt simplified the role he had identified for literary biographers. He constructs his book so that the only requisite inference is the identity of the writer who has translated himself into this anonymously-published volume. Readers of *Liber Amoris* were thus encouraged to engage in what Heather J. Jackson describes as a common "guessing game" in the period over anonymity: "readers colluded with publishers much as they do in the modern crossword puzzle, exercising their information and their wits with the help of carefully planted clues" (219, 222). Indeed, *Liber Amoris* offers ample hints of its author's identity: alongside simply disguising his name as "H—" and shortening his love interest Sarah Walker to "S—," Hazlitt also reveals the given

names of his wife Sarah and son William (135).²⁹ The generous whitespace and wide margins of Hazlitt's 1823 publication would have allowed readers to make notes and puzzle out its author's identity in the way Jackson has suggested. Because of Hazlitt's proclivity for discussing his experience with Walker — or, as Mark McCutcheon has suggested, because Hazlitt “effectively spread advance, word-of-mouth publicity” (441) — the author and characters of *Liber Amoris* were easily identified. This knowledge quickly circulated, and the periodical press publicly attributed the work to him, naming “H—” and “S—” as Hazlitt and Sarah Walker. Reviews alluding to Hazlitt as the author appeared just a few days after *Liber Amoris*'s publication on May 9, 1823. On May 17, for example, the *Literary Register* noted “Silly Billy” as its creator (305), and on the following day, the *British Luminary* claimed “we think we know the hand” (154). Hazlitt's contemporaries thus read “H—” in biographical terms similar to how they read De Quincey's “Opium-Eater” and Lamb's “Elia,” a reading process Hazlitt surely encouraged, given the book's transparent veiling of identities.

To Hazlitt's misfortune, this mode of reading resulted in critical rejection of *Liber Amoris*, derision of his writing ability, and contempt for his character.³⁰ *John Bull*, for example, declared in its review that “Hazlitt is an ass who writes bad English” (22 June 1823, 197), while the *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* acknowledged that “a man might have the folly or effrontery to confess his vices to his companions,” but found it

²⁹ Page references to *Liber Amoris* are to the 1823 publication as reproduced in Lahey's 1980 edition, not to the page numbers of Lahey's text. For a key to the book's characters as well as a discussion of how Hazlitt's other acquaintances and “fierce political prejudices” provided “easy internal evidence for identifying the true author,” see Lahey's introduction, 51-57.

³⁰ Although a few reviewers defended the book, most positive responses came either from Hazlitt's friends or from those who refused to believe that the esteemed critic was also what the *Museum* called “the veriest dunce of literature” who wrote “this disgusting mass of profligacy and dulness [sic]” (31 May 1823, 338-39).

shocking that “he might publish them to all the world” in a “wretched compound” of “nauseous sensuality” (28 June 1823, 409).³¹ Negative critical reactions are still common.³² In a 1998 biography of Hazlitt, for instance, Tom Paulin calls the book “emotional pornography,” censuring both it and Hazlitt on the grounds of “a nihilistic, self-flagellating desperation, a having-it-all ways irony, a masturbatory, taut flaccidity in [its] recycled clichés” (45). A number of critics have recently attempted to rescue *Liber Amoris* and its author from embarrassment by distancing the work from Hazlitt’s personal life, contesting what Marilyn Butler calls “straight” autobiographical readings.³³ For Butler, the referential relation between H— and Hazlitt is unstable, leading her to argue that the book is a “classic instance of the period’s skepticism and divided approach to the self” (158). But such arguments, in downplaying the more simply biographical readings that acts of publishing the private typically attracted in the Romantic period, overlook the way in which *Liber Amoris* was nevertheless highly invested in its author’s literary reputation. Hazlitt simply misfired.³⁴ He misread the scandalous nature of his revelation as he sought to cash in on the fashion for confessional literature in the 1820s. After all, Hazlitt not only highlights his identity as a

³¹ Many critics continue to express surprise in trying to account for Hazlitt’s motivation in publishing the book. Because *Liber Amoris* is often overshadowed by its negative critical reception, many theories foreground Hazlitt’s personal needs, believing that Hazlitt must have anticipated the book’s failure. Speculation ranges from Hazlitt’s desire to textually fetishize and worship Sarah Walker (Gross 712) to a need to “bury his obsession” (Dart 38).

³² For a book so heavily invested in itself as a textual and material production, *Liber Amoris* has rarely been republished. As John Barnard suggests, “Hazlitt’s book quickly became a non-book” as it passed into gossip and embarrassment (182). For an in-depth survey of *Liber Amoris*’s reception (until the 1970s), see Gerald Lahey, “Introduction,” *Liber Amoris: Or, The New Pygmalion*, New York: New York UP, 1980, 21-34.

³³ See also Robert Ready, “The Logic of Passion: Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris*,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 14.1 (Winter 1975), 41-57, and Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830*, London: Longman Literature in English Series, 1989 (258-9).

³⁴ *Liber Amoris* sold poorly (Grayling 300). However, as Stanley Jones suggests, the low sales figure for the book may not actually indicate a lack of interest in it. Reviews such as Shackell’s *Register* “pirated the text in eighteen closely printed columns of selections” and “made it hardly necessary to lay down money to read it” (338).

writer within *Liber Amoris* but also provides textual clues so that readers could discover the identity of this author-figure. The work seeks to capitalize on a widespread interest in authorial personality, as well on the popular practice of reading literature for biographical details. Hazlitt had seen firsthand how the career of his fellow magazine writer and confessor Thomas De Quincey had been bolstered by a self-revelatory work and an intriguing persona. Even though Hazlitt had created a name for himself in the *London Magazine* and frequently drew on his life experiences for his *Table Talk* column, he did not stimulate the readerly fascination produced by De Quincey with his confession. Like De Quincey, Hazlitt tries to intrigue the reader, but at the same time, he also uses the confession as a forum to emphasize his literary status. The subject of *Liber Amoris* is not simply that of a romantic entanglement. In publishing private documents, Hazlitt fashions himself as a man of letters through both the professional and personal facets of his life to demonstrate that his identity is intrinsically literary.

An important context for the publication of *Liber Amoris*, as Kurt Koenigsberger and Duncan Wu have suggested, is the history of critical abuse directed at Hazlitt in the periodical press. This criticism, particularly when it came from *Blackwood's*, was largely personal in nature.³⁵ Beginning with the *Blackwood's* August 1818 article "Hazlitt Cross-Questioned," Koenigsberger traces characterizations of Hazlitt that connected his "notions of poetry to the supposed depravity of his moral character" and sought to damage his "integrity as an essayist and critic" (298). In *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt responds to the personal criticism typically used against him by making it personal as well. For Koenigsberger, he thus

³⁵ According to Hazlitt's friend, P.G. Patmore — to whom a number of the letters in *Liber Amoris* are addressed —, Hazlitt was highly sensitive to such attacks. Hazlitt felt the "double seal of public and private infamy" in all of his relationships, fearing that his acquaintances' perceptions of him were imbued with the latest abuse from *Blackwood's* (qtd. in Le Gallienne iv-v).

produces a form of “self-libel” (286), while Wu sees Hazlitt’s “candor” as “an act of open defiance” (24). It is also a form of authorial control. Crucial to *Liber Amoris* is its construction as an authoritative record of the way Hazlitt’s personal and literary lives intersect, allowing him to promote and assert control over his print personality.

Hazlitt attempts to regain control in a manner akin to that of William-Henry Ireland by reproducing evidence of his private life. Instead of simply writing about his life, Hazlitt reproduces actual documents from it. Through such publication, *Liber Amoris* claims authority and authenticity, and a key part of the book’s establishment of itself as an authentic record is the absence of mediation. Whereas Ireland’s *Confessions* encloses its textual evidence within narrative to guide interpretation of his character, Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris* binds together its personal texts without any commentary. The only explicit addition to the book is its prefacing “Advertisement.” Yet aside from indicating that “names and circumstances” have been “disguised,” this paratext neither offers a meaning nor suggests any way in which the textual assemblage should be understood (ii). The only readerly guidance provided by the “Advertisement” is the assertion that the events of the book actually took place “a very short time ago” and that the enclosed texts are the product of the writer’s experiences (i). As in Ireland’s *Confessions*, these documents are presented as a genuine reproduction of the original manuscripts, but the “Advertisement” claims more immediate representation in publishing its confessor’s original writings and spoken words. The implication is that his personality and actions have been neither narrativized nor fictionalized for print.

Claiming to exhibit an unadulterated record of its confessor, *Liber Amoris* directly transforms the erratic life of a man of letters (as well as his personal letters) into book form.

According to the “Advertisement,” the “whole was transcribed very carefully” by the confessor and the documents of his self-expression are reproduced in their original forms (i). Readers are thus to understand the few bits of censorship via asterisk as necessarily enacted by the confessor in order to “prevent any consequences resulting from publication,” particularly cases of libel (ii).³⁶ The use of asterisks and dashes, however, also highlights that the confessor has simply disguised names and words instead of imaginatively revising his original manuscripts.³⁷ Moreover, the “Advertisement” underlines the book’s genuineness through an allusion to the words of John’s prophecy in *Revelation* 22:18. Echoing the apostle’s warning that no “man shall add unto” or “take away from the words of this book,” the “Advertisement” of *Liber Amoris* indicates that “a promise was given [to the confessor] that not a word should be altered, and the pledge was held sacred” (ii). Since the book’s “manuscript was entrusted” with a “promise” to the confessor’s friend (and publisher, John Hunt), not even passages deemed “either childish or redundant” by this friend were “omitted” in the publication process (ii). *Liber Amoris*, in advertising itself with the textual authority of a sacred book, bolsters its presentation as a faithful reproduction and revelation.

As a number of critics have noted, however, *Liber Amoris* is not the complete and unadulterated record that it claims to be. Suspicion was there from the start. *John Bull* first noted textual discrepancy on June 22, 1823, when it published one of Hazlitt’s original love

³⁶ Mark McCutcheon discusses the potential legal ramifications of Hazlitt’s work in “*Liber Amoris* and the Lineaments of Desire.” He argues that *Liber Amoris*’s prefatory advertisement was a “nominal deference to libel and obscenity laws” and a “cagey disclaimer at a time when the Society for the Suppression of Vice enforced the official intolerance of obscene publications” (438). He notes that William Benbow, an associate of radicals like John Hunt was arrested by the Society in 1822, but “got off by claiming literary merit for the materials he sold (247).

³⁷ In “The Quarrel,” for example, Hazlitt uses asterisks to censor a rather bawdy “conversation down-stairs” between Sarah and her mother, which Hazlitt had overheard. Hazlitt’s transcript of the conversation, as well as his analysis of it, is reported in a letter to P.G. Patmore, 18 June 1822 (*Letters* 270).

letters alongside the edited version from *Liber Amoris*. But only since the publication of *The Letters of William Hazlitt* in 1978 have critics have taken more interest in Hazlitt's use of his letters, noting that those contained in *Liber Amoris* have been edited, rearranged, or supplemented with material that Hazlitt wrote at a later date.³⁸ A similar critical interest has been expressed in the conversations between H— and S— presented at the beginning of the book. Although they could not actually have been written out verbatim, Hazlitt's friend Haydon insisted that they were transcribed "without colour, literal as they happened" (*Diary* 2: 382).³⁹ But the conversations were actually written over a year after most of them allegedly took place, a distance which places the accuracy of their words and details into greater question, particularly since Hazlitt reports that he wrote them as an amusing diversion.⁴⁰ No record of Part III, according to Duncan Wu, "has ever been traced, or acknowledged to exist in that form (such lengthy correspondence was in any case untypical of Hazlitt)" (24). Wu observes that this final section of the book, in which H— catches S— with a new lover, was likely created in order to resolve narratively the events that Hazlitt did not personally settle for some time (24). Hazlitt, by giving a unity of action to these years of his life, dramatizes them to make his writerly existence and personality as interesting as the

³⁸ For a table of correlations between letters in *Liber Amoris* and *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, see Gerald Lahey, "Introduction," *Liber Amoris: or, The New Pygmalion*, New York: New York UP, 1980, 43-44.

³⁹ The report comes from a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, dated 8 September 1822. Haydon writes that Hazlitt "talks of nothing else night and day. He has written down all the conversations without colour, literal as they happened [Part I of the *LA*]; he has preserved all the love-letters, many of which are equal to anything of the sort, and really affecting [Part II of the *LA*]; and, I believe in order to ease his soul of this burden, means with certain arrangements, to publish it as a tale of character" (*Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon* 2: 382).

⁴⁰ Hazlitt includes in *Liber Amoris* a letter he wrote to C. P- from Scotland: "I have begun a book of our conversations (I mean mine and the statue's) which I call LIBER AMORIS. I was detained at Stamford and found myself dull, and could hit upon no other way of employing my time so agreeably" (*Liber Amoris* 52-53). In *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, this letter is dated "middle of March 1822," months before Haydon's report (245). Nonetheless, the distance between the conversations and their transcription still poses problems of accuracy. As Wu reports, Hazlitt met Walker in August 1820, and immediately became infatuated with her. In 1821, he began the legal proceedings to obtain a divorce from his wife, Sarah Hazlitt, in order to marry Sarah Walker. The conversations appear to take place during late 1820 and throughout 1821 (Wu 22-24).

narratives his contemporaries often read. Because the book's plot is purportedly drawn from his personal documents, he presents even his private writing as a self-sufficient narrative, as though the outcome of his life is literature.

In inventing, selecting, and editing his documents for *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt was able to create a specific imprint of his authorial persona. Hazlitt's persona, *Liber Amoris* quickly indicates, is not simply that of a romantic lover but that of an artist. The first nod to the confessor's creative dimension is given in the book's subtitle. Hazlitt, this "New Pygmalion" (as he was also styled by several reviewers), can metamorphose a woman into art. But whereas his mythic predecessor turned love into a statue, Hazlitt creates a "book of love," as its Latin title indicates. This transformation of life into print is visually portrayed on the title-page of the book, where an oval vignette drawn from Sarah Walker's image is displayed. As readers moved inside, they encountered apparently off-the-cuff letters and daily conversations imbued with erudition and literary reference. Hazlitt does not view Walker as a mere woman, let alone write to or about her in simple terms; he attempts to understand her within tropes and archetypes passed down in Biblical and literary tradition.⁴¹ In the opening conversation, he shows S— a picture in which he has discovered her resemblance, identifying it as a copy of an old Italian painting, Guido's or Raphael's: "Some say it is a Madona [sic]; others call it a Magdalen [. . .] But it seems to me more like

⁴¹ As Gerald Lahey suggests, *Liber Amoris* invokes a number of tropes of the "love confession" and its Biblical, Classical, and Romantic allusions help present S— as an "idealization," softening the humanness and sexuality of S— (1, 7). Readings of S— disagree sharply, particularly in gender-based approaches to the book. See, for example, Catherine Burroughs, "Acting in the Closet: A Feminist Perspective of Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* and Keat's *Ortho the Great*," *European Romantic Review*, 2 (1992) 125-44; Daniel Robinson, "Taking 'Other Liberties' With *Liber Amoris*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, (Winter 1997): 141-49; Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998): 104-121; Charles Mahoney, "Figuring Out the Coquette," *European Romantic Review*, 10.1 (Winter 1999): 23-52; Wu, Duncan, "Hazlitt's 'Sexual Harassment,'" *Essays in Criticism*, 50.1 (July 2000): 199-214; Mark McCutcheon, "*Liber Amoris* and the Lineaments of Desire," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 46.4 (Winter 2004): 432-451.

Raphael's St. Cecilia" (3). Initially, he feels "as Adam must have done when his Eve was created for him," but by the end of the book he understands her through darker religious metaphors drawn from *Paradise Lost* and *Genesis 3*, noting that while "her form lost none of its original brightness," she is the "Seed of the serpent," a "witch" (*Liber Amoris* 164).⁴² The book is replete with such allusion and quotation. Hazlitt's literary citations also include Shakespeare (who appears most often), Horace, Virgil, the *Arabian Nights*, Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt, among others. Ostentatious in his use of quotation, Hazlitt displays his writing as opulent and resonant in its literariness, establishing a well-read and sophisticated persona. Such literariness was "habitual" for Hazlitt, as Gerald Lahey suggests, and readers would have seen it as a "recognized part of Hazlitt's style—and conspicuous in the story" (52). But by sprinkling the citations in his letters and conversations, Hazlitt reveals his personal life as fundamentally bookish as well, as though literariness was imbued in all facets of his identity.

In case readers did not pick up on Hazlitt's literariness within the letters and conversations, he offers samples of his quasi-poetic prose effusions as well. Employing an expressive register distinct from that of Hazlitt's letters and conversations, these meditative pieces display the breadth of his writing ability and add a sense of interiority. No passage receives any commentary; each is simply inserted within the book in what readers are to assume is chronological order. Although such organization suggests that readers themselves must decide how life, emotion, and art inflect each other in the confessor's life, within each piece connections are made explicit. In a highly autobiographical outburst such as "To Edinburgh," in which Hazlitt apostrophizes the "Stony-hearted" city, he cries out "The dust of thy streets mingles with my tears and blinds me," evoking pathos because he is separated

⁴² Cf. *Paradise Lost* 1: 593-4; *Genesis* 3:14-15

from Walker while obtaining a divorce in Scotland (81). Other effusions like “Perfect Love” connect Hazlitt’s “heart” to the “moulds of imagination” (107). By commenting on the difficulty of expressing the “truth of passion” through “mere language,” he not only links his emotion to art but also demonstrates a familiarity with the poetic process, all of which factor into his bid for the recognition of his literary qualifications. Even more, he connects himself to the poets of his era, as in “Written on a Blank Leaf of Endymion,” a piece that not only recalls images in Coleridge’s *Christabel* and Keat’s *Lamia* (Barnard 186), but one that is explicitly penned on a page from Keats’ 1818 volume.

The visual presentation of these pieces within *Liber Amoris* highlights the book as an artistic product. “Written on a Blank Leaf of Endymion,” for example, receives its own page, even though it consists of only two sentences. As Barnard notes, *Liber Amoris* draws attention to itself as an “aesthetic object” through the “*mise en page* of the first edition”: each conversation, letter, and quasi-poetic passage begins on a new page; each section has a title page; and each entry is given its own title (185-6). The end of each entry is indicated by a short rule, marking the entries as distinct parts within the printed assemblage of the artist’s life. The book as a whole is artfully put forward and fashioned for readerly pleasure. The original publication had pink paper boards with the book’s title labeled along the spine, and its engraved title-page was elegantly designed.⁴³ Handsomely produced, both textually and materially, *Liber Amoris* embodies the meaning of its title; it is a “book of love” in construction as well as content. Even though it was printed as a duodecimo and sold for seven shillings six pence, this inexpensive format did not mean that, as an artistic product, it was cheap.

⁴³ For bibliographic details, see Geoffrey Keynes, *Bibliography of William Hazlitt*. 2nd ed. Godalming, Surrey: St. Paul’s Bibliographies, 1981, (66-69).

In the process of assembling his print personality from his correspondence, Hazlitt literally becomes a man of letters. While little information exists on how much Hazlitt contributed to the print production of *Liber Amoris*, his relationship with its publisher, John Hunt, was well-established. Over a decade earlier, personal connection and political agreement had led Hazlitt to write for *The Examiner*, which was operated by brothers Leigh and John Hunt, and he continued to maintain the connection. A personal relationship also seems to have existed between Hazlitt and *Liber Amoris*'s printer, C.H. Reynell, whose daughter later married Hazlitt's son. Reynell himself risked £100 in buying *Liber Amoris*'s copyright, despite the fact that Hazlitt's print personality and private life was subject to regular critical abuse (Le Gallienne xxxvi). A work like *Liber Amoris* demonstrates that even in the expanding and commercialized literary marketplace of Romantic Britain, print production could still remain personal in business arrangement, literary content, and reading experience. Hazlitt used his book to personalize literature for both author and reader, connecting his confessional self-presentation to his professional literary career. But the navigation of such personalized works was not straightforward. As both *Liber Amoris* and *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* reveal, the process of transforming man into book was a tangled and ambiguous process, disguising the complexity of the confessor's life even while purporting to disclose it. At the same time, the success of both in manipulating documents to authenticate their confessional discourse points to a shrewd sense of how the authority of the printed book could bolster biographical modes of reading.

CHAPTER THREE

Ambiguity and Fiction: Publishing the Confessional Text in Hogg

“I like to write about myself,” James Hogg declared in the opening of his 1832 *Memoir of the Author’s Life*. “[I]n fact,” he continues, “there are few things which I like better” (3). Hogg enjoyed the act of self-writing enough to revise and publish “this *important* Memoir” three times during his lifetime, setting forth his literary existence with a bit of “good-natured egotism” in 1807, 1821, and 1832 (3).¹ The *Memoir*, as Douglas Mack observes in his introduction, recounts Hogg’s “struggles” for literacy then for literary fame (ix), publicizing Hogg’s literary personality in ways similar to the confessions of De Quincey, Lamb, Ireland, and Hazlitt, but in the form of anecdotal memoir instead of intimate self-revelation. When Hogg did turn to the form of literary confession in 1824, however, he opted not to write about himself. Instead, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* offers the fictional confession of Robert Wringhim, a young religious fanatic in early-eighteenth century Scotland, who commits a variety of murders before killing himself. According to the story, Wringhim was unable to complete the printing of “Confessions of a Sinner” before his suicide, but his printed work, along with a handwritten journal, were recovered in the early nineteenth century. In “The Editor’s Narrative,” an editor-figure frames this confession, giving a historical context for Wringhim’s life before reporting the discovery and eventual publication of the confession. Even though the editor is situated in the literary world contemporary with Hogg, the latter did not write himself into

¹ His 1807 *Memoir* was published in the same volume as *The Mountain Bard*; he revised and updated it for *The Mountain Bard*’s republication in 1821. The citations above appear only in the version of the *Memoir* that was published alongside the *Altrive Tales* in 1832.

this editorial role. In fact, Hogg tried to disclaim authorship of the anonymous work altogether.

When Hogg briefly discusses the novel in his 1832 *Memoirs*, he states that because it was “a story replete with horror, after I had written it I durst not venture to put my name to it” (55).² The title-page, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by Himself: With a Detail of Curious Traditional Facts, and Other Evidence, By the Editor*, insists upon the two figures represented within its pages as responsible for its production. The book’s dedication maintains the fiction of the editor as a distinct and actual person: the work is dedicated to “The Hon. William Smith, Lord Provost of Glasgow,” who served as mayor from 1822-24 (2). This reference to Glasgow further muddled the question of authorship (Hogg published out of Edinburgh), and Hogg did so deliberately. Shortly after the printing of *Private Memoirs and Confessions*, he wrote to William Blackwood, anticipating that *Blackwood’s* would be one of the “first efficient reviewers of *The Confessions*,” and requested that the journal “will not notice them at all as mine but as written by a Glasgow man [. . .] and allude to the dedication to the lord provost there” (qtd. in Garside lxvi).³ Hogg’s manoeuverings failed; he was quickly exposed, with six journals

² While Hogg suggests here that he made the decision after drafting the work, in his edition of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Peter Garside thinks it “likely” that Hogg wanted to avoid “a direct attribution from the conception of the project” (n. 104, xci). All page references to the novel are to Peter Garside’s critical edition, set from an actual first edition copy.

³ Hogg took serious interest in the publishing of his work. As Peter Garside reports in “Printing *Confessions*,” Hogg worked with his regular publisher, Longmans of London, but when it came to employing a printer in Edinburgh, author and publisher had different preferences. Hogg wanted James Clarke, while Longmans insisted upon James Ballantyne, writing to both Ballantyne and Hogg on December 12, 1823 with directions for Hogg “to inform Mr Clark [sic] of the change of printer” (qtd. in Garside 21). Ballantyne’s “sense of probity” had gained him a reputation as an interventionist printer, and Hogg overrode the firm’s choice because *Confessions* was an intricate and delicate text to produce (21). He continued to use James Clarke, with whom he could work closely in order to supervise the production of his work. Ultimately, *Confessions* “ended up where Hogg had originally intended. Of this destination there can be little dispute. Both the printer’s marks on the verso of its title-page and the colophon show the first edition of *Confessions* to have been ‘Printed by James Clarke & Co. Edinburgh, 1824’” (21).

naming him specifically.⁴ *Blackwood's* itself honoured the letter of Hogg's request only to violate its spirit. A note to the leading article of the July issue, J.G. Lockhart's "Remarks on Dr. Henderson's History," invokes Hogg to state: "By the way, I find I was quite wrong in supposing "CONFESSIONS OF A SINNER" to be a work of his. It is, as it professes to be, the performance of a Glasgow Literateur, who properly dedicates to the Lord Provost of The West Country" (16: 16n).

Even while disguising his authorship of the novel, however, Hogg placed himself within it. Playfully appearing in the coda as his well-known print personality the "Ettrick Shepherd," he arrives on the scene just long enough to self-advertise. At the same time, "JAMES HOGG" (capitalized and the only contemporary figures whose name appears in full) is prominently displayed, for the novel reproduces a large extract from the letter "A Scot's Mummy," written by Hogg and published in *Blackwood's* in August 1823. This letter points the editor towards the suicide's grave, where the confession — held by a corpse "miraculously preserved frae decay"— is later unearthed (174). In the coda, the editor and his associates seek information from the Hogg character, showing him the letter from *Blackwood's*, but he avoids the issue by claiming "It was a queer fancy for a woo-stapler to tak" (170). They press this reticent "Hogg" for assistance with their project, but he refuses to participate: "I ha ithers matters to mind. I hae a' thae paulies to sell" (170). Sheep, it appears, are more important to "Hogg" than helping the editor in his work. Both Hogg-as-character and Hogg-as-author distance themselves from the project, but neither explicitly states why. What does become clear through the novel, however, is that fiction allows Hogg

⁴ For a discussion of these reviews, see G.H. Hughes, "The Critical Reception of *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," *Newsletter of the James Hogg Society*, 1 (May 1982): 11-14.

a necessary detachment, creating a space of reflection in which he may raise questions about confessional publication and, more generally, his literary sphere.

At the heart of the novel lies the question of the “little book” found with the corpse, protected from dirt and decay for over a century only to be brought to light (and to the presses) in the reader’s own day. “The Editor’s Narrative” encloses and investigates the confession in an attempt to answer the question “What can this work be?” (165). Many of Hogg’s contemporaries were similarly perplexed by Hogg’s work, but the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* rightly identified its interest in the phenomenon of confessional writing: “These ‘Confessions’ are, we presume, intended to bring that exaggerated style of writing which has lately become too prevalent, into the contempt which it so richly merits” (“New Publications” 11: 506). If Hogg used his novel to bring into contempt the “style” of literary confession that had become popular by 1824, he was not simply attacking a manner of writing but disassociating himself from the entire confessional enterprise. Rebecca A. Pope argues in “Hogg, Wordsworth, and Gothic Autobiography” that Hogg’s novel offers a “critique of autobiographical writing,” making central to its critique a “dismantling” of the “tendency to think of autobiography as more ‘real’ than realism” (220, 221). “Fiction” indeed “inhabits what purports to be fact,” as Pope points out, but this fiction is not limited to the text itself (219). Hogg was engaged at various levels of literary production, from writing to editing to printing, and he displays this entire process in *Private Memoirs and Confessions*. Through the novel’s double structure, Hogg teases out the fictions inherent in the assumptions on which literary confession is posited, undercutting its claims to transform the compound and public process of literary publication into a personal and private act.

Reading Robert Wringhim: An Inscription of Authorial Agency

Literary confessions attempt to transform life experience into a distinctive writerly identity, but the identity of Robert Wringhim, the writer of “Confessions of a Sinner,” is questionable from the moment of his birth. Robert claims George Colwan as his “father according to the flesh” and Reverend Wringhim as his adoptive father, but his mother’s refusal to share Colwan’s “embraces” and “apartments” from the “first night after their marriage” places his paternity in doubt (67). The editor attempts to smooth out such details through “traditionary facts,” but only further complicates this and other matters (175). Ambiguous origins do not form the novel’s only crisis of selfhood.⁵ Greater problems arise when Robert attempts to consolidate his identity in writing, a desire he reports within the first pages of his confession: “I will sit down and write” (68). Raised to view the Bible as the Word of God, Robert sacralizes this book and internalizes its writing, so that his own diction overflows with biblical allusions. Imbued with a radical Calvinist belief in predestination, he sees his life as a divine “book” in which his own fate is inscribed. Thus when Reverend Wringhim fears that the boy is “without the pale of the covenant,” Robert can think of little other than whether or not his “name” has been “written in the book of life” for “all eternity” (68-69). This metaphor of writing as salvation consumes him. When Robert comes to believe that his name is indeed “written in the Lamb’s book,” he identifies this inscription as underwriting “the most important period of my existence” (79, 78). But this is also the period when his faith in the Word and words begins to move into a more active phase, to shift from a desire to be “written” to the desire to write himself.

⁵ A number of studies on Hogg’s novel take psychoanalytical approaches, concentrating on Robert’s struggles for self-definition. See for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (97-117) and Susan M. Levin, *The Romantic Art of Confession* (99-117).

“Confessions of a Sinner” places the moment of the confession’s actual inception in the Queen’s printing office in Edinburgh, where Robert realizes that he can harness the powers of print and writing for himself. Robert writes the narrative of his life because of an “inward thirst and longing to distinguish myself”: “I weened that I might thus get me a name even higher than if I had been made a general of the Czar Peter’s troops against the infidels” (152). As he places his name in print, he seeks the distinction that accompanies great religious men, war heroes, and most important, literary authors. His entire narrative is impelled by authorial desire, as the writing of his life becomes tantamount to living it. After the printing of his confession is foiled, he keeps a journal, which he has “fashioned to stick in with the printed work” (162). Shortly before his death, he reports that his existence consists of “spending my time in prayer, and writing out this my journal” (162).

Hogg’s depiction of the confessor moves into focus the question of authorial agency. Although Robert is the writer of his own life, his authorship is not self-determined. By becoming “justified” (both a theological and printing term), Robert is welcomed into a privileged class of writers as one of its “elect.” For the writers of Hogg’s Edinburgh, David Groves observes in *James Hogg: The Growth of a Writer*, Calvinist concepts of election and justification were an “in-joke which could be applied to any author seeking public favour; even Francis Jeffrey could predict, after *The Queen’s Wake*, that Hogg ‘is yet doomed to justify his early election’ as an author” (127). Since Robert’s text is the conduit for his religious views as both a Confession of Faith and a Confession of Sin, religion and writing collide throughout the narrative. Believing himself ordained for success, he decides to “print my own works” in order to “blow up” the idea of “good works,” a sentence that suggestively replaces acts of charity with the individualism of autobiographic writing (152). He takes

pride in his authorship (despite professing orthodox views of divine sanction), emphasizing that he is “possessed of strong and brilliant parts, and a liberal education” (144). It is by “making some use” of his classical education that Robert finds himself in the Queen’s printing office, gaining a position by virtue of his knowledge of “Latin and Greek languages” (152, 152). What he wants to do, however, is to gain access to the printing press in order to “astonish mankind” (152).

Robert “astonishes” in ways he does not intend, but Hogg’s point is not only the self-delusion and self-absorption of confessional authorship. The desire to “astonish,” to define oneself as uncommon, lies at its heart. While all autobiographic writing is a self-writing, not all is motivated in this way. Hogg’s own *Memoir*, for example, is equally self-absorbed, but in his literary autobiography, Hogg tries to align himself with other figures in the literary sphere: writers, printers, and publishers. Much of the *Memoir* in fact focuses on Hogg’s friendship with contemporary authors, sharing his “literary adventures” in anecdotal form (37). Literary confession, however, sets the writer apart. Even more, the representation of Robert Wringhim suggests that it springs from antagonism. Robert’s desire for distinction precludes friendship, and makes him vicious when faced with competition. His behaviour at a tennis match early in the novel (when he meets his brother) is symptomatic. We are told that Robert “knew no other pleasure but what consisted in opposition,” and he quickly moves from the position of “on-looker” to opponent (16). As Robert Kiely observes of this episode between the brothers, Robert “attempts to redefine the ‘game’ in mid-play” to “render ridiculous all rules and regulations but his own” (217). Metaphors of aggression and conquest permeate Robert’s writing. From his school days onward, he seeks “victory” over others, ruthlessly eliminating rivals like the schoolmate M’Gill and those who challenge his

views such as the “eloquent and powerfully-minded” Mr. Blanchard (76, 91). He then turns these acts into a mark of distinctiveness through the writing of his confession.

More important, he stands in alienated relationship to his readers. In the opening of his confession, Robert reports that “in the might of heaven I will sit down and write,” so that others may “read and tremble” (67). His words assert religious assurance in his vocation, but at the same time betray a writerly arrogance. His sense of election brings him to view himself as an “eagle among the children of men, soaring on high, and looking down with pity and contempt on the groveling creatures below,” using the legacy of the Word as permission to condescend to his uninitiated readers (80). As the editor implies when he contemplates changing Robert’s title to “*A Self-Justified Sinner*,” the confession is one of narcissism and unabashed transgression; Robert forgets that an author also needs to be “justified” by a reading audience (174).

Robert’s stance toward his readers does shift, however. In the printed confession, he narrates his life as a record for “the wicked of this world,” but in the handwritten journal, his audience is “Christian readers” (67, 153). Here, Robert reconceptualizes his audience as one with which he may identify. Through this shift, Hogg highlights that the confessor’s initial “hopes and prospects are a wreck” (154). At this point, Robert is not recollecting his life nor can he set it in print, the processes through which he had previously attempted to fix his authorial status. Whereas the transparent self-delusion of Robert’s printed confession highlights the irony that a confession rarely conveys to readers the image that the confessor desires to present, the handwritten portion, in which Robert lives within the narrative he is recording, points toward the fact that this image is constantly in flux. Each entry of Robert’s journal ends with his not knowing whether he will survive to write again. He is thus

“reduced” to the point where he must “let the reflecting reader judge” (164). The act of reading is one of both judgement and interpretation, and more readers than one take part. The editorial frame invites readers to consider the diverse ways in which they may read an author-figure. Mark Schoenfield points out that Hogg knew “the self is a mediated public figuration” (208). As he explains, Wringhim is unsuccessful in his initial project because he “fails to notice institutional constraints such as those Hogg faced”: “authorship arises not merely by the writing of a work but by its deployment, circulation, reviews, and allusions” (219, 207). Reading is a key part of the way in which authorial identity is configured. Even though literary confession purports to be a private, self-directed venture aimed at a specific type of reader, it cannot carve out individual authorship in isolation, because authorial identity is negotiated by numerous readers and at various levels in the public sphere.

(Mis)Handling Documents: The Editor and the “Printer’s Devil”

Robert’s authorial identity is also complicated by the presence of the diabolical Gil-Martin. Often read as Robert’s psychological double,⁶ he can be seen as an authorial double as well. If we think about him in relation to confessional writing, he functions in many ways as Robert’s confessional persona. As he tells Robert when the two meet, “Gil-Martin” is “a name which may serve your turn” (89). Robert reports that Gil-Martin is “the same being as myself”: the two appear identical in age, colour of hair, eyes, clothes, as well as form (80). Robert feels that the two are “incorporated together — identified with one another,”

⁶ See, for example, Barbara Bloede, “James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*: Genesis of the Double,” *Études anglaises*, 26.2 (April/June 1973): 174-186. Most critics discuss Gil-Martin in relation to supernatural and psychological themes. The general consensus seems to be, as Douglas Gifford argues in *James Hogg* (New Assessments Series, Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1976) that he remains fundamentally ambiguous.

individually distinct yet simultaneously the same (126). Robert tellingly reports that “since ever I fell in with this extraordinary person, I have written about him only” (94). The subject of Robert’s confession, then, is this “second self” (106). The key point, however, is that as the narrative progresses, Gil-Martin changes shape, borrowing characteristics from others and transforming into whatever image best suits his project. Robert may try to identify and fix Gil-Martin as the Czar Peter of Russia, who embodies the “illustrious” status at which the confessor grasps, but this persona is actually a constantly-shifting counterfeit, only nebulously grounded in reality (118).

Such a persona poses a significant problem for readers, both inside and outside the fiction. A number of the novel’s characters, including Bell Calvert and George Colwan, have trouble knowing whether they are encountering Robert’s real self or a counterfeit. George falls for the counterfeit, a mistake that leads to his death. Bell compares readings with Mrs. Logan, but the two do so “hysterically” when they realize the existence of the diabolical persona. The editor-figure, the novel’s most explicit reader of the confession, closes the work by reading Robert as a “religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at that height of madness, that he believed himself the very object whom he had been all along describing” (175). In order to arrive at such a conclusion, however, the editor must disregard contradictory evidence, which comes from contemporary witnesses who report an embodied Gil-Martin accompanying Robert Wringhim. David Groves concludes that the editor is “Hogg’s portrait of a poor reader or critic” (123), but the editor has a slippery text to decipher. Robert himself claims that he is not always certain whether he or his “likeness” is responsible for the sins being confessed.

In “Confessions of a Sinner,” print personality runs amok to the point where even its author cannot maintain control.⁷

The confessional text is thus highly unstable. The editor, who appeals to “reason,” “history,” “parish registers,” and “tradition,” is unsuccessful in his quest to understand it (175, 3). He presents himself as an authority on the pamphlet, claiming that “no person, man or woman, will ever peruse it with the same attention that I have done,” but, ultimately, he must “confess that I do not comprehend the writer's drift” (175). His critical authority is further undermined by his admission that he has been “hoaxed” by “ingenious fancies” printed in *Blackwood's* (169). Moreover, he has a clear bias against Robert, as well as several other characters such as Robert's mother, Rabina, so that the editor's account, as most critics have noted, exposes his own religious and political positions. While explicit declarations of “truth” and “falsehood” appear frequently throughout both “Confessions of a Sinner” and “The Editor's Narrative,” the effect is to make both appear dubious as categories.

Print itself heightens the ambiguity. In Robert's case, the sense of order and control a printed text implies rapidly dissipates when he loses access to the printing press. His pamphlet is “consigned to the flames,” save for one copy, so he continues his confession by hand (153). Unlike the poise of Robert's printed pamphlet, his diary is full of “terror” and “grief” (154). Its mania suggests that the printed confession is but a revised and polished version of a handwritten madness. Larger questions arise when the editor seeks to authenticate Robert's account through printed supplements. Along with the “original

⁷ Hogg, as critics like Susan Levin have observed, knew what it was like to have an “uncontrollable second self” (102). While Hogg cultivated his print personality in the form of the “Etrick Shepherd,” which was created from his real life, the crew at *Blackwood's* used the “Noctes Ambrosianae” section of the magazine to transform this personality into an unintelligent, drunken, backwoods buffoon.

document” of Robert’s confession, the editor has “ordered the printer to procure a facsimile” of the handwritten diary entry from September 8, 1712 “to be bound in with the volume” (64, 174). By this point in the novel, however, Robert’s confession has undermined the reliability of such forms of document. Lawyer Linkum, for instance, has three of Robert’s letters with signatures, but Robert vows that he “never signed the document[s]” (123). He unauthorizes this replica of his distinctive autograph. At the same time, Robert is equally engaged in counterfeiting; he seems to have taken part in creating a “supposed, old, false, and forged grant, raked up and new signed, to ruin the young lady’s family” (125). Despite being a fake, this document achieves its destructive purpose, enacting at yet another level the power of doubling and reproduction exemplified by the devious Gil-Martin.

Through Hogg’s own disguise within the novel, print’s air of authentication is more fully undermined. The editor reproduces an “extract” from Hogg’s “authentic letter” in *Blackwood’s*, but even as he claims that it “bears the stamp of authenticity in every line,” his associate Mr. L—t of C—d acknowledges that “Hogg has imposed as ingenious lies on the public ere now” (165, 169). The unreliability of documentation is sharply exposed when the location of the suicide’s grave given by Hogg is revealed to be inaccurate. Hogg reports its existence at “the top of a wild height called Cowanscroft,” but the editor and his associates discover “Faw-Law” to be the true burial site (165, 171). A number of other discrepancies crop up between Hogg’s letter and the editor’s account, including the colour of the corpse’s hair and the clothing it wears. Fact, fiction, and deception become entangled.⁸ Although the editor purports to “describe everything as I saw it before our respectable witnesses, whose

⁸ Douglas Mack and David Groves have corroborated some of the events related to the discovery of the suicide’s grave. See, for example, Douglas Mack, “The Suicide’s Grave in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*,” *Newsletter of the James Hogg Society*, 1 (1982), 8-11, and David Groves, “James Hogg’s *Confessions*: New Information,” *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 40. 158 (May 1989), 240-42.

names I shall publish at large if permitted" (171), what he saw is different from what Hogg reports in his letter and the details of both accounts sometimes vary from those of the confession. As Peter Garside observes of "The Editor's Narrative," at the same time as it "attempts to stabilise evidence, new cracks and instabilities appear" (xix). These instabilities are compounded by the way in which "The Editor's Narrative" often contradicts "Confessions of a Sinner." Conflicting information ranges from larger issues such as the number of accomplices involved in George's murder — or whether George is even dead — to smaller details such as the number of times Robert prays each day: the editor states "twice," while Robert claims "three" (14,69).⁹ With both the confession and extra-textual evidence before him, the editor nonetheless fails to create an authoritative report, and his failure points to the difficulty readers in general face when confronted with genres like the literary confession. The double structure of *Private Memoirs and Confessions* itself both defines the problem, and allows readers to experience it, as they weigh each narrative against the other.

The double structure of the novel offers more than an interpretive problem. It also enacts the process of publishing a confession. The editor participates in a world of print that *Private Memoirs and Confessions* reveals to be not just uncertain but strangely diabolical. When Robert first attempts to publish his confession, the printers tell him of "the devil having appeared twice in the printing house, assisting the workmen at the printing of [Robert's] book" (153). Robert flees the printing house after realizing that the devil wants to "further the progress of my work," but the editor completes the work authored by Robert and authorized by the devil (154). Confession, when exploited for publication, appears as a dark inversion of its sacramental tradition. As a number of critics have observed of this episode,

⁹ Kiely discusses the ambiguity of details about George's murder and the editor's use of witnesses.

Hogg literalizes the term “printer’s devil,” which normally refers to a printer’s apprentice. It is not clear who is the printer’s devil in this case: Gil-Martin or Robert or, more likely, both. Yet the editor is also somewhat of a devil as he assists in its production. Unlike the first printer, Mr. Watson, who lays “stress upon morals” and thus burns the printed “medley of lies and blasphemy,” the nineteenth-century editor is not restrained by a clear moral code. David Groves may exaggerate when he claims that the editor is “as much a liar as Robert Wringhim,” but he certainly lies when he employs the assistance of W—m B—e in finding and digging up the grave (118). Promising “strict secrecy” after having agreed to the old shepherd’s condition “that we should not speak of it,” the editor then returns to London, breaking his promise and readying the manuscript for publication (170).

The editor’s graveside work moves into focus the idea that the work of publishing another’s confession inevitably entails personal violation. The author of “Confessions of a Sinner” is represented as particularly vulnerable when the editor and his companions get their hands on both his body and text. When they open the grave, “all the limbs, from the loins to the toe, seemed perfect and entire,” but when they have finished, “they were all shaken to pieces, except the thighs, which continued to retain a kind of flabby form” (173). Robert’s confessional corpus, a “*printed pamphlet*” and handwritten journal whose form is “damp, rotten, and yellow,” is equally fragile (173). The “yellowish drab colour” of Robert’s clothing echoes the material on which his confession is printed. Moreover, just as the editor and his men mangle the objects from the grave, so too the editor threatens the presentation of the text by contemplating title changes.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hogg’s condemnation of the publisher’s choice in changing the author’s chosen title is particularly appropriate given the publication history of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Priced at 10s. 6d. in boards, few copies of the post-octavo volume seem to have sold. As Peter Garside reports, Longmans sold remaining stock to Thomas Tegg, but in 1828, the novel was reissued under the title *The*

Even so, Robert's body of writing survives the exhumation in a better state than his corpse. The editor stakes a claim in the confession's preservation, but someone has stuck a spade into Robert's cranium. This damage disappoints the editor, who was "very anxious to possess the skull" (172); nonetheless, he continues his quest to own a piece of the author. He takes "possession of the bonnet," as well as some other pieces of clothing, but the "most precious treasure" is Robert's work (173, 174). The confession may be a treasure, but it no longer has value for its author, for Robert has lost not only his life but also his copyright. These acts of treasure hunting and grave robbing underscore the commercial enterprise of publishing the literary confession and offer a sardonic view of literati. Hogg presents the editor and publisher of the confession as eager to steal from the author even when his person is vulnerably exposed.¹¹

But this theft is not simply material or financial. The editor also attempts to seize control of meaning by attaching his own authoritative reading to the confession. Of course, the editor's efforts fail as much as the confessor's, but Hogg's coda offers a warning to authors of literary confession because what may begin as a personal piece of writing is reshaped upon its entrance into the public sphere. Hogg himself knew how an authorial character could be transformed into caricature, and his novel suggests that cultivating authorship from infamy not only poses questions of ethics and legitimacy but also plays into an exploitive literary culture. Even as Hogg creates a damning portrait of the literary confessor himself through Robert Wringhim, the final events of the novel complicate Hogg's

Suicide's Grave; or, Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner, with "Edited by J. Hogg" printed underneath. In 1837, shortly after Hogg's death, a severely altered version appeared as *Confessions of a Fanatic*. See Garside's "Introduction: Early Reviews and Later Editions" for further discussion of these editions.

¹¹ Such a characterization of editors and publishers appears in Hogg's letters as well. On October 20, 1820, for instance, he wrote to William Blackwood that "It is a maxim with the trade to monopolose every authors whole works whom they once befriend or publish a book for [. . .] they ought all to be damned to hell" (qtd. in Garside "Printing *Confessions*" n.3 28).

critique by turning to questions of historical retrieval, dissemination of the past, and publication, which move the critical spotlight away from authors to editors, readers, critics, printers, and publishers. His *Blackwood's* letter is sympathetic to the author who, after failing to publish his confession on his own terms, kills himself out of "utter despair" because of a "very near run of cash" (169). As much as writers may try to assert control over their authorial identity and literary career through publishing their private lives, the process inevitably involves editors, printers, and publishers, engaged in the unpredictable circuit of printed texts, along with equally unpredictable readers. Incorporating this wider context, Hogg's novel offers a compelling reflection on literary confession as a genre in which persons become print.

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