

Vortigern in and out of the Closet

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Abstract

The W. H. Ireland forgery *Vortigern* has been explored repeatedly as an infamous and in some ways scandalous theatrical failure. At the same time, studies of Ireland himself have focused on the toxic nature of his childhood. Yet, no one has entwined these performative and biographical threads. This paper reframes *Vortigern* as a closet play designed to expose and humiliate the forger's father, Samuel Ireland. It gathers evidence from the hitherto unexplored first draft of the play, which was read aloud by Samuel Ireland at a family gathering. The earliest draft of *Vortigern* was not a play designed for professional performance; it was, rather, a closet play, a mousetrap in which Samuel Ireland was ensnared, his credulity exposed, and moral hypocrisy uncovered before his counterfeit family.

This essay is dedicated to Diane Long Hoeveler, 1949-2016.

In 1815, an anonymous rhymester, "Anser Pen-Drag-on, Esq," mocked the fashionable playwrights of his era, including an infamous Shakespeare forger and his play, *Vortigern*:

In garb of deception boy *Ireland* now view,
With *Vortigern* dauntlessly brave critic crew,
Thus proving mere childhood can acumen blind,
And veil youthful faults with bright flashes of mind. (W. H. Ireland 1815)

The poet supplemented the passage with a critical gloss explaining: "the fate of *Vortigern* [*sic*] is well known to the public; it was the effusion of a youth of eighteen, and, if not possessed of some beauties when read in the closet, the wisest and most able critics must have been most egregiously deceived" (W. H. Ireland 1815, 121n.). Today, we know that "Anser Pen-Drag-on, Esq," was in fact William-Henry Ireland; as such, Anser Pen-Drag-on's verse is intended as a revisionary puff, an attempt to save *Vortigern* from the scrap heap of history. Ireland's play was staged for all to see at Drury Lane on April 2, 1796. The house was packed; newspaper and journal coverage was extensive, but the result, in part due to machinations among the cast, was disastrous. The play was

booed off stage. That said, the forger is not merely suggesting that *Vortigern's* public premiere was sabotaged; he is also referencing a still earlier private performance — when *Vortigern* was "read in the closet."

Vortigern in Public

Thinking of *Vortigern* as a closet play is a significant relocation, if only because in 1794 through 1796, it was very much a public event. In late 1794, the teenage William-Henry Ireland claimed he had met a mysterious man named "Mr. H.," who (allegedly) owned a trunk brimming with Shakespeare's legal papers, love letters, unpublished poems, portraits, business correspondences, and a series of lost plays, among them, *Vortigern*. The forgeries were open to public viewing; anyone willing to shell out the entry fee (two guineas, or in today's money roughly £220) could look at them.¹ The high ticket price was by design.² The forger's father, Samuel Ireland used the forgeries as a money-making scheme and as a social passport into high society (Bate 1989, 58). Ticketed sirs, earls, and dukes lined up to see (and to be seen seeing) the papers (Schoenbaum 1993, 156; Kahan 1998, 168; Lynch 2004, 94; see also Worrall 2007, 133).

While a variety of experts were invited to inspect the manuscripts and offer their public opinion, almost all of the authorities who entered Samuel Ireland's house on 8 Norfolk Street seemed happy enough to participate in a grand spectacle tinged with religiosity. James Boswell, loyal sidekick and biographer of Samuel Johnson, studied the putative "Shakspeare Papers," then requested a tumbler of warm brandy and water (W. H. Ireland 1874, 96). Having nearly finished his drink, Boswell could no longer contain himself. He fell to his knees and cried out, "how happy I am to have liv'd to the present day of discovery of this glorious treasure — I shall now die in peace"; and then he kissed the papers (Kahan 1998, 83).

Despite the public veneration and general hoopla surrounding the discoveries, the top Shakespeareans of the 1790s (Edmond Malone and George Steevens) refused invitations to visit 8 Norfolk Street. Joseph Ritson, another important Shakespearean of the era, inspected the papers, asked a few quiet, purposeful questions and left without saying good-bye. The forger interpreted Ritson's actions: "In fine, I do as firmly believe that Mr. Ritson went away fully assured that the papers were spurious, as that I have existence at this moment." William Henry Ireland had shrewdly deduced Ritson's opinions. In a letter to a friend in Edinburgh, Ritson stated that the papers were "a parcel of forgeries, studiously & ably calculated to deceive the public" (Kahan 1998, 150).

Given the public referendum over the play and the way it was carefully framed by the other accompanying forgeries, the thought of *Vortigern* having been written as a (presumably stand-alone) closet piece is startling. It is also counter-intuitive. Commonsensically, the documents that

Boswell and other critics inspected were a collective framing device for *Vortigern*: the forgeries carefully lay the groundwork for the play's debut. *Vortigern* was only "discovered" after a variety of legal and personal letters established the existence of the "old" and unknown play. However, we do not know and cannot know the order in which the forged documents were created. It may well be that *Vortigern* was written first, and only then did the forger turn his brain to how he might release the papers, first to his family and then to the public. As James Agate reminds us, "The drama is an aesthetic phenomenon, the theater is an economic proposition" (1926, 9). In short, it is my contention that *Vortigern* was first written for the forger's family and then recalibrated as part of a money-making scheme.

Closeted Meanings

A *closet drama* is broadly defined as any play that is meant to be read or that has been published; it can also include a play performed for intimate friends or relations (the most famous instance is Elizabeth Inchbald's play, *Lover's Vows*, performed among friends in Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park*); it can be a professionally-published souvenir copy (i.e., the title-page might state that the version offered was "performed at" such-and-such a theater by such-and-such a company), or a pseudo-novel meant for armchair readers. While there is some overlap here, Marta Straznicky suggests that closeted performances differed from commercial theatricals insofar as the former belonged exclusively to the "private" sphere and afforded women access to theatrical discourse otherwise unavailable to them (2004, 112; see also Raber 2001, 19, 23-24). In such instances, the playwright might craft a work that spoke specifically to an immediate audience (e.g., family and friends). Straznicky's study centers on female playwrights, and, in terms of eras, ends about a hundred years before Ireland penned *Vortigern*, but the argument nonetheless holds. Plays created for closeted readings often carried within them private discourse. In terms of a private reading for family and friends, I want to expand that definition to include secret or coded messages.

Saying that some works have secret messages does not do us much good if we have no way to decode them. In most cases, the autobiographical inner life of any author is often read as if it were a scrambled alphabet, the life turned into literary riddles and runes, or what Anne Williams has called personalized or "coded" expressions (2009, 29). Reading for the inner-life of the author across multiple drafts of a work only adds to that interpretive challenge, and this is especially true when dealing with mid- to late eighteenth-century authors, who commonly marketed their highly polished works as extemporaneous, hastily conceived, or received in a trance or dream.³ Edward Young, for example, considered writing to be something that "rises spontaneously" (1918, 7). That aesthetic, what Zachary Leader calls "textual primitivism," is all the more important in cases of

forgery, since forgeries must appear to be artless, their authorship and, thus, intent, deliberately concealed (1996, 25).⁴

In the case of *Vortigern*, any critical interpretation or biographical reading must also take into account Ireland's intended misdirection. Since *Vortigern* is supposed to be by Shakespeare, the clues in the public text should point to the inner life of Shakespeare, not to that of the forger. Readers looking for straightforward biographical significance in the Ireland forgeries (or even his printed *Confessions*) would do well to adopt Jack Lynch's jaundiced view: "William-Henry Ireland lied; he lied often; he lied about important matters; he lied about trivia; he lied recklessly. The result is that almost everything we think we know about Ireland may be wrong. Those who presume to write about him must be on their guard" (2004, 87). Nonetheless, looking at the forgeries in context, there is more than enough reason to suppose that at least one member of the Ireland household recognized a coded message in *Vortigern*. We can delay for a paragraph or two what that message was. The point to keep in mind here is that the message was not only recognized, it was also purposefully suppressed before it could be shared with the public.

The proof is in the extant manuscripts. There are seven distinct manuscript versions of *Vortigern* (MSS 1-4, 6-7 are in the Folger Library; MS 5 is at the Huntington Library). The stage-approved version (as found in MS 4 and beyond) tells the story of *Vortigern*, a usurper who discards his wife in favor of Rowena, his mistress. When *Vortigern* crowns her as his new queen, the family fractures. *Vortigern*'s first wife, Edmunda, goes mad; his daughter Flavia flees to the local forest; his sons join the armies of Aurelius, son of the murdered King Constantius.

In the three earliest versions of the play (MSS 1-3), there is another reason for Flavia's flight — her father's incestuous desire. This is from the modern-spelling version, MS 3:

VORTIGERN: Yes, thy mellow'd Voice shall here command me,
 And in my breast fast root the Plant o' Love
 Thy radiant beauty shall serve as Sun,
 To nourish and bring forth its tender blossoms.
 Why start thus, wherefore art thus amaz'd?

FLAVIA: Can it be other Sir, when such words as these
 From Fathers lips find utterance?
 The Angels sure did hide themselves with shame,
 And Man's great Enemy did turn aside,
 Else must this firm Globe ha' been feverous,
 And heavens high canopy in horror,

Have blaz'd this vast immensity of Earth!
 O Sir, are you my Father — shame, Shame, Shame!

VORTIGERN: Ay, one woud needs love, and admire you,
 An you took the right way to preferment.
 But mark me, and set not the burning coal
 To fire revenge within, for if thou dost,
 I'll measure this my quantity o love,
 And thrice treble it, with direst hate.
 My Passions, thou know'st, are hot, and fiery,
 More is than troubl'd Sea; or hungry Tyger
 Therefore beware, and give a speedy answer?
 Thou dos't understand me, for on that, depends
 Thine happiness or misery. — (Kahan 2004, 3:157-58)⁵

Before she can be raped, Flavia flees her father's court. Shame here takes on another resonance, the need to maintain silence. Flavia's impulse to leave the court is explained only by Vortigern himself, who accuses his daughter of perverse loyalties, deserting his side in favor of the enemy. Though Vortigern is captured and arrested for his murderous usurpation and Flavia restored as a titled princess of the realm, she adheres to her father's duplicitous narrative. She never discloses her personal and familial shame.

The scene was apparently so shameful that no one was allowed to read the original manuscript of the play. While the other documents were on display and were actually printed and available for inspection (S. Ireland 1796), *Vortigern* remained unpublished and unseen. There is, for example, no reference to Boswell having read the play; the first person outside the family to read *Vortigern* was Drury Lane manager Richard Brinsley Sheridan. And even then, he read only a redacted transcript in a modern hand — MS 4. The forger recalls that Sheridan "inspect[ed] the fair copy of the play [i.e., the modern, theatrically, or in this case, publicly-ready version], which had been made from the manuscript as produced in the disguised hand" (W. H. Ireland 1874, 138).⁶

True, the Irelands may have kept the play back to maximize public curiosity (and its related market value) in negotiations with Sheridan, but the point remains that the public knew nothing of the incest scene. That was not the case within the Ireland family. When the forger turned over his "discovered" Shakespeare play to his father, he had every reason to suppose it would be read aloud to the family. In his *Confessions*, William-Henry Ireland writes: "I had daily

opportunities of hearing Mr. Samuel Ireland extol the genius of Shakspeare, *as he would very frequently in the evening read one of his plays aloud*, dwelling with enthusiasm on such passages as most peculiarly struck his fancy [. . .] I [. . .] paid the greatest attention to every statement made by Mr. Ireland" (1874, 6; emphasis added). Taking the forger at his word (not always a good idea), William-Henry Ireland wrote *Vortigern* with his father in mind. The subject and the speaker here were designed to be heard as one. In Samuel Ireland's closet performance of the incest scene, the family would have seen a truly repulsive parental figure and predator.

Of course, there might be nothing to this. Samuel Ireland might have read the play to his family and made no connection between himself and *Vortigern*. Maybe he never connected the dots; *maybe there were no dots to connect*. But then why was the scene cut before anyone outside the family could read it? If you are asking who did the cutting, well, as the head of the household, Samuel Ireland himself undertook the crossing out of lines that he presumably felt were inappropriate.⁷

The logic for cutting the incest scene had nothing to do with Shakespeare's supposed respectability. Both *Hamlet* and *Pericles* have incest scenes, and both were staged in the era. *Hamlet* was, far and away, the most popular staged play of the eighteenth century; *Pericles*, while comparatively unpopular — it was only professionally staged twice in London in the entire eighteenth century — was commonly included in complete works of Shakespeare (*Index* 1979, 772; Kahan 2004, 3:7-8). *Vortigern's* incest, however, was never performed on stage and was not included in the later manuscript copies (MS 4-7) and later published quartos. If the theatrical record cannot justify the cut, then obviously, we'll have to explore alternatives. We can begin by looking at the public façade of the Irelands and the forgeries that they presented to the world.

A Forged Family

From the outside looking in, "the Ireland family could have been called respectably Bohemian"; Samuel's household was seemingly irreproachable (Mair 1938, 1). They lived in a fashionable area of London, a few blocks away from the British Library. The middle-aged Ireland seems to have been a widower who devoted himself to the care and comfort of his children. His son, William-Henry, had recently completed his education in France and was clerking for a law firm; his daughters, Anna Maria and Jane, were both accomplished artists. Money did not seem to have been an issue. The elder Ireland lived the life of the haute bourgeoisie, rubbing shoulders with London's literati, traveling throughout Europe or indulging his passion for collecting Shakespeare memorabilia (Mair 1938, 5-6).

What was less-widely known was that Ireland was no gentleman. Until recently, he had been a common Spitalfields weaver. The economic capital necessary for Samuel Ireland's grand lifestyle came from the Earl of Sandwich, who seems to have paid Ireland for taking his mistress — Anna Maria de Burgh Coppinger, sometimes known as Coppengen, later known as Mrs. Freeman *and* as Mrs. Irwyn — off his hands.⁸ The disposing of mistresses was not uncommon nor always scandalous, so it might be useful here to compare Anna Maria de Burgh Coppinger to women in similar circumstances. On the droves of single, unwed or widowed women, often with children in tow, begging, or prostituting themselves in the streets of London during this era, Tim Fulford writes: "London's streets overflowed with poor women pressing their ware — and themselves — on any passing man they thought might give them money" (2006, 313). These women were commonly the widows of soldiers or pregnant serving girls abandoned by their lovers and/or fired by their employers. In an era in which "poverty afflicted more Britons than ever before, due to population growth, bad harvests, capitalist employment practices, and continual war," hooking for £2 or £3 (roughly £200 to £300) a week was not an option but a necessity (Fulford 2006, 321; see also Burford 1986, 210).

So much for women at the low end of the social spectrum. At the higher end of the sex trade, women, Anna Maria de Burgh Coppinger among them, led still more precarious existences, insofar as they had still further to fall. The inevitable fading of physical charms or a simple lover's quarrel might lead to a permanent expulsion from high society. On the other hand, for those who could negotiate their roles successfully, respectability (if not for themselves, then for their children), was a real possibility. For example, the former prostitute Dorothy Clement was initially the mistress of Edmund Walpole. According to Samuel Johnson's friend, the London gossip Mrs. Piozzi, Mrs. Clement was a "lovely Creature" who was found in "rags" sitting on a "Dust Cart." In 1759, she was "in the hands of a Covent Garden Milliner, who transferr'd her to Neddy Walpole" (1996, 4:278, n.3). Assuming here that *Milliner* may be read as *prostitute*, a woman living by the *prick* of her needles, the transfer seems clear enough: Walpole bought her. She later married James Waldegrave, the second Earl Waldegrave, great grandson of James II. The Earl died in 1763; in 1772, Maria married the Duke of Gloucester.

There were, too, lesser degrees of success and some downright tragedies. The acclaimed actress, Dorothea Bland (Mrs. Jordan), was mistress to the Duke of Clarence, the future William IV, and mother to ten of his children. In 1811, the couple separated, and the Duke provided her with a pension, on the condition that she never again perform on stage. Debts forced the resumption of her career, whereupon the Duke cut off her allowance. Jordan then fled creditors and died a year

later, penurious, at St. Cloud, a suburb of Paris.⁹ Anxious about money and unable to secure a new lover, she had but one way to maintain her financial position: theatrical performance. For women without Jordan's theatrical talent, options would have been still more limited. For such women, the dread of a still further fall into outright prostitution must have made them frantic.

Comparatively speaking, it would seem that Sandwich had acted as respectably as his station allowed. He paid Samuel Ireland to take his old mistress (and possibly her bastards — on this, more anon) off his hands. His payment was no mean sum: £12,000 or roughly a million pounds in today's funds.¹⁰ Doug Stewart argues that Samuel Ireland's gobbling up of Sandwich's crumbs was pure "acquisitive lust" (D. Stewart 1991), but this might not have been Ireland's only deadly sin; the highlight of Samuel Ireland's travelogue, *Picturesque Tour through Holland, Brabant and Part of France*, is a visit to a Dutch brothel (S. Stewart 2010, 32; S. Ireland 1790, 1:130).

Whether out of love, lust, or greed, Samuel Ireland pretended that all of Anna Maria de Burgh de Coppinger/ de Coppengen/Freeman/Irwyn's children — William-Henry, Jane, and Anna Maria — were unquestionably his own. But some or all of them were likely fathered by Sandwich.¹¹ Adding to the confusion over paternity, Mrs. Freeman was early on treated as a housekeeper, then as an aunt. It was only as the children reached puberty that Samuel instructed them to address their "aunt" as their "mother." Likewise, Mrs. Freeman/Mrs. Irwyn now gave way to yet another cognomen, "Mrs. Ireland" — though this too was a falsification, since she remained either married to another man or unmarried altogether (Grebanier 1965, 51-54). As for the forger, Samuel Ireland often referred to William-Henry as "Samuel," "Sam," or "Sammy" (ie., a copy of himself — or, more accurately, since there was likely no blood relation, a false copy).¹²

Family Plays

Although Samuel Ireland took Sandwich's mistress for a large sum of money, it does not follow that he treated her well. In his *Confessions*, the forger recalled that every evening the members of the Ireland household would gather to hear Samuel Ireland read aloud passages from Shakespeare. On occasion, however, he diverged from the bard to indulge in a more scandalous narrative: Herbert Croft's *Love and Madness*. Principally, the book is a nonfiction concerning the murder of Martha Ray, a former mistress of Lord Sandwich, and mother to nine of his children (Burford 1986, 112). So, when the family sat around listening to Samuel read from Croft's thinly-disguised novel, *Love and Madness*, Mrs. Ireland (or whatever she called herself) was forced to listen to Mr. Ireland read, in front of her illegitimate children, a story closely connected to her former lover. These constant reminders of her past in front of her bastard children must have made

for perverse and cruel treatment. Reading aloud *Love and Madness* in this context showed "either gross insensitivity to his partner's feelings or a sadistic streak" (D. Stewart 2010, 50).

Croft's book likely played a key role in William-Henry Ireland's decision to retaliate in kind. According to the forger's own confession (again, not always to be trusted), it was only a few months after the live reading of Croft's *Love and Madness* that Ireland himself was "held forth to public view as the supposed discoverer of the Shaksperian manuscripts" (W. H. Ireland 1874, 11). The timing may be entirely coincidental, but, as Nick Groom notes, the Ancient Greek for the word *fakes* comes from the Greek *nothoi*, meaning, *bastards* (2002, 246). Groom goes on to argue that Ireland became a forger because he saw himself as a bastard, a counterfeit, someone of a falsely coined pedigree. In support of this thesis, we may note how the forger himself connected *Love and Madness* to both bastardy and to his own Shakespeare forgeries. Martha Ray's lover, James Hackman, is referred to within Croft's book as "Mr. H."; "Mr. H." is also the name of William-Henry Ireland's mysterious benefactor, the non-existent man who supplies him with a seemingly endless supply of unknown Shakespeare documents.

Mock History

I mean *mock* here not just in terms of falsity but also in terms of comedy. Indeed, as the forgeries grew (William-Henry Ireland seems to have "discovered" more documents in Mr. H's trunk on a daily basis), some found them hard to take seriously. Edmond Malone, for example, ridiculed their seemingly antique logography: any disquisition on "KYNG VORRTYGERNE, and all the KKINGES and all the QQEENES which have been announced from the same quarter . . . is, I conceive, wholly unnecessary" (Malone 1796, 314). Even Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the very man who bought *Vortigern*, suggested that the forgeries were a sophomoric prank: "It is very odd, one would be led to think that Shakspeare must have been very young when he wrote [*Vortigern*]" — a none-too-veiled reference to the play's teenage discoverer (W. H. Ireland 1874, 139).

Certainly, Ireland seems to have gone out of his way to point to himself as the author of the papers. The "Deed of Gift," for example, recounted how "Masterr William henrye Irelande" saved Shakespeare from drowning in the Thames. William-Henry Ireland discovering a document that mentions a "Masterr William henrye Irelande" may have suggested that providence was at work in the provenance, that Ireland was, like Hamlet, born to set things right. As the descendant of the man who saved Shakespeare, he and he alone was tasked with giving new life to Shakespeare's lost works. But less romantically, it really does strain credulity that William-Henry Ireland found centuries-old documents that contained his very name. It seems far more likely that Ireland added this detail because he wanted to get caught.

Public attention (and humiliation) is often cited as a motive for literary forgery, but, as Louise J. Kaplan reminds us, criminal writing, specifically forgery, always has an aspect of "triumphant revenge" (1987, 157).¹³ But what was that revenge? Samuel Ireland, always willing to sacrifice truth for cash, kept saying that all the papers were legitimate. As such, he had to admit the legitimacy of a document that named "William henrye Irelande," and that William-Henry Ireland was legitimately an Ireland.¹⁴ Of course, Samuel Ireland knew that William-Henry Ireland was not his blood relation and thus, could not be a direct descendant of the "William henrye Ireland" who saved Shakespeare from drowning. However, if he revealed that secret, then the discovered papers did not belong to his "son." The irony could not have been lost upon the elder Ireland, who, having accepted Sandwich's mistress (and her children) as his own in exchange for money, now had to re-acknowledge (or at least not deny) William-Henry's paternity in order to collect his "son's" earnings.¹⁵

The incest in *Vortigern*, however, must have presented a more private form of conscience-pricking. In scripting Samuel Ireland's one-man recital, William-Henry Ireland was playing a version of Prince Hamlet, who sets down eight or a dozen lines in the *Murder of Gonzago* in order to catch the conscience of the man who plays at being his "loving father" (4.3.50).¹⁶ In sum, Vortigern's hypocrisies extend to his first player, Samuel Ireland, who publically pretended to have an ordinary and healthy relationship with William-Henry and his siblings. And while within the play itself Flavia never reveals her father's crime, she and her brothers clearly side against their father, just as William-Henry and his sisters unquestionably sided against the man who was shaming their mother.

If I am correct, then William-Henry was enacting a "triumphal revenge." Going one better than Hamlet, who merely had Claudius *listen* to actors recite offensive lines, our forger had Samuel give *voice* to his "son's" special message:

But mark me, and set not the burning coal
To fire revenge within, for if thou dost,
I'll measure this my quantity o love,
And thrice treble it, with direst hate. (Kahan 2004)

To be sure, this reading relies upon free association. I am here transposing *Vortigern's* lines as if they spoke on behalf of their author. That approach may strike some as hopelessly naïve, but as Kaplan points out, forgers commonly create fragments and supposedly lost poems in order to reflect a "fragmented sense of self" (1987, 157). Ireland follows this archetype by fragmenting

himself into a variety of roles. True, the Ireland children were not victims of incest (at least not in the formal sense of bloodlines), but they were still victims — chattel, sold haplessly to Samuel Ireland. And if the later had nothing but "direst hate" for his mistress and her offspring, the feelings were, according to this reading, entirely mutual. Pretending to be only the play's discoverer or surrogate, William-Henry was free to attack Samuel Ireland. If the latter wanted to expose his "son" as the play's true author, then, obviously, such an exposure would lead to further questions and, possibly, still other family revelations. Samuel Ireland was also aware that exposing the true nature of his relationship with his wife and children would invalidate his claim over any money generated from the forgeries. Faced with this choice and mindful of how much this incest scene mirrored the emotional subtext of his *Love and Madness* closet readings, in which he expressed his contempt (or "direst hate") for Mrs. Ireland and her children, Samuel suppressed the ugly truth. The scene had to be cut.

But we need not examine the extant manuscripts of *Vortigern* to come to the conclusion that the play carried within it a message apparent only to the Ireland "family." Every member of the household knew the "family" secret, just as they (almost certainly) knew the secret of *Vortigern's* authorship. All they had to do was look at the print hanging above the mantelpiece. The subject was John Mortimer's painting, *Vortigern and Rowena* (W. H. Ireland 1874, 132-33).¹⁷ The engraving was made by Samuel Ireland. When Samuel Ireland read *Vortigern* "in the closet," he was, in fact, reading a transcript of a forged play (based on a copy of a painting) to a fake family; he then edited and oversaw the revision of the play eventually staged at Drury Lane. The earliest draft of *Vortigern* was not a play designed for professional performance; it was, rather, a closet play, a mousetrap in which Samuel Ireland was ensnared, his rapacious nature exposed before his counterfeit family.¹⁸

Notes

1. This assumes that a guinea is worth £1.05 circa. 1795; the present-day value comes by way of <http://www.measuringworth.com> (2016).
2. For more on ticketing and hours of operation, see W. H. Ireland 1874, 183.
3. On this point, see Tilottama Rajan, "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*: Melancholy and the Political Economy of Romanticism" (1994), especially 47-48.
4. James Boaden, for example, noted that a common defense of Ireland's forgeries was that they must be Shakespeare's because they demonstrated the "spontaneous flow of the soul of the sweet Swan of Avon" (1796, 11).
5. All citations from *Vortigern* are from the same volume (Kahan 2004).
6. For full collations, see Kahan 2004, 3:94-175.

7. There were, however, various hands involved in the additions. See Kahan's collations (2004).
8. Another bit of gossip came by way of Edmond Malone, who reported that Mrs. Irwyn had been married but had separated from her husband. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, 29:32. Robert Miles overlooks Malone but comes to the same basic conclusion: "Although of good family, Mrs Freeman had become déclassé in her liaison with Sandwich . . . in his sexual mores Samuel Ireland was old-fashioned and drew the line at marrying the cast-off mistress of an aristocrat" (2005, 602).
9. Before Mrs. Jordan died, she turned to William-Henry Ireland, now a Grub Street hack, to write her memoirs (Pierce 2014, 225). Jordan had played Flavia in *Vortigern*.
10. Doug Stewart calls the £12,000 from Sandwich a "parting gift" and states that it was, in our money, about £700,000 pounds (2010, 13). On modern calculation of sums, see note 1, above. There is also a connection between Mrs. Ireland and Mrs. Walpole: they were friends. See Kahan 2009, 64.
11. Patricia Pierce raises the possibility that one or more of the children were sired by Sandwich (2014, 20); Doug Stewart writes that Mrs. Freeman was Samuel Ireland's "mistress and the likely mother of all three children" (2010, 12). In any case, whether Samuel fathered one or all three children, legally, they were all illegitimate.
12. As Robert Miles phrases it, the forger "felt himself doubly a bastard: in blood terms, a counterfeit of a counterfeit" (2005, 602). William-Henry Ireland ascribes the nickname to yet another displacement. Apparently, Samuel Ireland's first-born was a son he named "Samuel." The child died, and Samuel then took to calling William-Henry "Samuel" or "Sammy" (W. H. Ireland 1874, 251). Whether this other son was William-Henry's full or half-brother is impossible to determine. For all we know, the other child is a fiction.
13. See also Susan Stewart, who links imposture and forgery to daydreams of masturbation and humiliation (*Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (1991), 144-54).
14. As Paul Baines notes, in a legal sense, the document was the forger's self-created birth certificate of authenticity. Baines calls the Ireland forgeries a familial tragedy in which Ireland "curiously disinherited himself" (1999, 181). It is this author's contention that the original version of *Vortigern* similarly served as a form of self-emancipation.
15. Paternity is also at the forefront in Ireland's forged "Deed of Trust," in which Shakespeare discusses the siring of a bastard ("thatt Chylde of whom wee have spokenn butt who muste note be named here"), and his rationale for writing the play, "Kynge Vorrtygerne" — i.e., to support his love child (S. Ireland 1796, n.p.).

16. Citation from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1997).
17. We have only the forger's word on this; no copy of the engraving has thus far been located. For detailed discussion of Mortimer's, as well as other paintings, of Vortigern and Rowena, see Kahan 1998, 74-81.
18. The author acknowledges the many kindnesses of the *Borrowers and Lenders* editorial team.

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Meeting of Vortigern and Rowena painted by William Hamilton. Wikicommons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meeting_of_Vortigern_and_Rowena.jpg

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