



Notorious Facts: Publicity in Romantic England, 1780-1830

James Mulvihill

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Notorious Facts examines the sensationalistic confounding of persons and principles in the public life of Romantic England (1780–1830). Its purview is limited to five decades straddling the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but its trajectory, moving from a politics rendered in personal terms to a politics of personality, describes a shift still in process today. The study's chapters draw on a motley body of literature (pamphlets, secret histories, and the like) that at first glance seems uncharacteristic of what literary historians call the English Romantic period. Viewed in the context of something called late Georgian England, these texts seem more indigenous, but if the canonical revisionism of the last few decades should teach us anything, it is that a Romanticism encompassing all romanticisms ideally excludes nothing. In its heroic Enlightenment sense, publicity is concerned with exposing the workings of power for all to see. A good deal may be inferred about publicity in Romantic England from primary texts in which this salutary function is at once espoused and subverted. These texts—the mostly nameless or pseudonymous authors of the age's pamphlet literature are the heroes and villains of the piece—almost invariably claim to speak from a disinterested conception of publicity while putting its methods of critical exposure to wholly self-interested purposes. This study examines well-known authors of the period like Jeremy Bentham, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Hazlitt, as well as pamphleteers like John Horne Tooke, Philip Withers, and Nathaniel Jefferys. Other figures include authors of secret history like Thomas Ashe, Mary Anne Clarke, Lewis Goldsmith, and Joseph Haslewood in addition to notorious figures in their own right such as the Prince and Princess of Wales, Mrs. Fitzherbert, and the Reverend Edward Irving. Among the topics treated are treasonous libel, royal scandal, secret history, and celebrity.

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