



# Staging Romantic Chameleons and Imposters (Nineteenth-Century Major Lives and Letters)

*William D. Brewer*

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*Staging Romantic Chameleons and Imposters* examines cultural attitudes toward imposture and theatrical and literary representations of chameleonic identities in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England. During this period, chameleonism evoked both anxieties about depersonalization and social instability and fantasies regarding empowerment and self-fashioning. Human chameleons blurred boundaries between human and reptile, upper- and lower-class, master and servant, female and male, domestic and foreign, natural and imitative, and authentic and theatrical. Imposters such as the Social Monster, the Northern Imposter, the pretended Duke of Ormond, John Hatfield, and Princess Caraboo scandalized, mystified, and captivated the British public. Georgian dramatists created self-consciously theatrical characters who used performance to reinvent themselves or manipulate their dupes. This study of chameleonism addresses important and much-debated issues in Romantic scholarship and Cultural Studies: authenticity, sincerity, performance, uniqueness, autonomy, and personal, class, and gender identity.

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