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**PSEUDONYMITY, AUTHORSHIP, SELFHOOD:
THE NAMES AND LIVES OF
CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND GEORGE ELIOT**

SONJA NIKKILA

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ABSTRACT

“Why did George Eliot live and Currer Bell die?” Victorian pseudonymity is seldom treated to any critical scrutiny — the only sustained interest has been in reading masculine pseudonyms as masks for “disreputable femininity,” signs of the woman writer’s “anxiety of authorship.” This thesis proposes that pseudonymity is not a capitulation to gender ideology, but that a *nom de plume* is an exaggerated version of any authorial signature — the abstraction (or Othering) of a self into text which occurs in the production of “real” authors as well as fictional characters.

After an introductory chapter presenting the theoretical issues of selfhood and authorship, I go on to discuss *milieu* — the contexts which produced Brontë and Eliot — including a brief history of pseudonymous novelists and the Victorian publishing and reviewing culture. The third and fourth chapters deal with pseudonymity as *heccéité*, offering “biographies” of the authorial personas “Currer Bell” and “George Eliot” rather than the women who created them, thus demonstrating the problems of biography and the relative, multiple status of identity. The three following chapters explore the concerns of pseudonymity through a reading of the novels: I treat *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and even *Shirley* as “autobiographical” in order to address the construction of self and narrative; I examine how Eliot’s realist fictions (notably *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Romola*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*) trouble the “reality”/“fiction” binary; and finally I read Brontë specifically for her engagement with “dress,” using queer theories of performativity with Victorian theories of clothing and conduct to question “readability” itself. My final chapter is concerned with *agencement* (adjustment) and “mythmaking”: the posthumous biographical and critical practices surrounding these two writers reveal that an author’s “name,” secured through literary reputation, is not static or inevitable, but the result of constant process and revision.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
ABBREVIATIONS

PART I: MILIEU

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. "UNKNOWN" PARENTS: VICTORIAN AUTHORSHIP AND PSEUDONYMITY.....	31

PART II: BECOMING A PSEUDONYM

3. THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF CURRER BELL.....	63
4. THE STRANGE LIFE OF GEORGE ELIOT	91

PART III: THE WORKS

5. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË.....	115
6. CATEGORY CRISIS IN GEORGE ELIOT'S REALIST FICTION.....	151
7. ALL DRESSED UP: CLOTHES AS PERFORMANCE IN BRONTË	183

PART IV: ADJUSTMENT

8. MYTHMAKING: THE AFTERLIFE OF A PSEUDONYM	217
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APPENDIX: ORIGINAL TITLE PAGES	263
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	275

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ABBREVIATIONS

IN FOOTNOTES:

CB	Charlotte Brontë
GE	George Eliot
MEL	Marian Evans Lewes
GHL	George Henry Lewes
ABN	Arthur Bell Nicholls
GS	George Smith
WSW	William Smith Williams
JB	John Blackwood
WB	William Blackwood
EB, AB, BB, PB	Emily, Anne, Branwell, and Patrick Brontë
WH, AG, TWH	<i>Wuthering Heights, Agnes Grey, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i>

PRIMARY TEXTS:

<i>JE</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i> (OUP, 2000)
<i>S</i>	<i>Shirley</i> (Penguin, 1974)
<i>V</i>	<i>Villette</i> (Penguin, 1979)
<i>SCL</i>	<i>Scenes of Clerical Life</i> (Penguin, 1973)
<i>AB</i>	<i>Adam Bede</i> (Penguin, 1980)
<i>MF</i>	<i>The Mill on the Floss</i> (Penguin, 1979)
<i>Rom</i>	<i>Romola</i> (Penguin, 1996)
<i>FH</i>	<i>Felix Holt: The Radical</i> (Penguin, 1995)
<i>Mm</i>	<i>Middlemarch</i> (Penguin, 1994)
<i>DD</i>	<i>Daniel Deronda</i> (OUP, 1984)

SECONDARY TEXTS:

GE Letters	<i>The George Eliot Letters</i> , ed. Gordon Haight: Vols. I-IX (1954-78)
CB Letters	<i>The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence</i> , ed. Thomas James Wise & John Alexander Symington: Vols. I-IV (1932)
Smith Letters	<i>The Letters of Charlotte Brontë</i> , ed. Margaret Smith: Vols. I-III (1995-2004) (<i>n.b.</i> : While Smith's work is an enormous scholarly improvement, Wise & Symington remains my primary source; in cases when the text differs significantly, I use Smith.)
CH-CB	<i>The Brontës: The Critical Heritage</i> , ed. Miriam Allot (1974)
CH-GE	<i>George Eliot: The Critical Heritage</i> , ed. David Carroll (1971)
Bio Notice	Charlotte Brontë's "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell" (1850; text Smith Letters Vol. II, Appendix II: 742-47)
<i>GE Essays</i>	<i>Essays of George Eliot</i> , ed. Thomas Pinney (1963)
<i>Gaskell's Life</i>	<i>The Life of Charlotte Brontë</i> , by Elizabeth Gaskell (1857; Penguin, 1997)
<i>Cross's Life</i>	<i>George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals</i> , ed. John Walter Cross (1885)
Barker	<i>The Brontës</i> , by Juliet Barker (1994)
Gérin	<i>Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius</i> , by Winifred Gérin (1967)
Haight	<i>George Eliot: A Biography</i> , by Gordon Haight (1968)
Bodenheimer	<i>The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction</i> , by Rosemarie Bodenheimer (1994)
Scott Prefaces	<i>The Prefaces to the Waverley Novels</i> , ed. Mark A. Weinstein (1978)
OED	The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (1989)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

HERE LIES THE BODY / OF / 'GEORGE ELIOT' / MARY ANN CROSS¹

ADJOINING LIE THE REMAINS OF / CHARLOTTE, WIFE
OF THE / REV. ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS, A.B.,
AND DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTË, A.B., INCUMBENT.²

This thesis takes as its starting point the question “Why did George Eliot live and Currer Bell die?” It may seem a spurious line of inquiry, which can be answered in terms of propriety and practicality: Mrs. Marian Lewes would not be acknowledged by the Victorians first entrusted with her memory, while she herself would not acknowledge Marian Evans; Charlotte Brontë, on the other hand, was publicly beyond reproach. Nevertheless, this apparently straightforward response throws up more issues than it resolves. For instance, if the key term is respectability, then the gravestones of two decently married women tell an interesting story, beginning, “What happened to ‘Mary Ann Cross’ and ‘Charlotte, Wife’?”³ By the middle of the twentieth century, a searcher through literary monuments such as dictionaries of *anonyma* and *pseudonyma* would have a difficult time locating the legally correct “Cross” and “Nicholls,” which remain only as a trace — “see Evans, Marian”⁴ — or are subsumed, bracketed, under the headings “Brontë” and “Evans,”⁵ or have disappeared entirely.⁶

¹ Highgate Cemetery, London.

² CB’s memorial plaque in Haworth Church followed the six dedicated to her mother and siblings.

³ The 21st-century reader can literally only “read” CB’s original tombstone in Gaskell’s *Life* — several years after her death, a new stone replaced it and ABN instructed the sexton to “take the old tablet-stone, and with a hammer break it into small pieces,” then “bury [it] 4ft. deep in the garden: for fear any one should get hold of a piece as a relic.” (CB Letters IV.241) The current marker in Haworth Church reads: “The / BRONTË FAMILY / VAULT / Is Situated Below / This Pillar, / Near To The Place Where / The Brontës’ Pew Stood / In The Old Church. / The Following Members Of The Family / Were Buried Here / MARIA AND PATRICK, / MARIA, ELIZABETH, / BRANWELL, / EMILY JANE, CHARLOTTE.”

⁴ e.g., the *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature* (Kennedy et al.), originally from the Advocates’ Library: “CROSS, Mrs. Marian” sends the reader to EVANS, while NICHOLLS is entirely absent, clear contraventions of the preface’s statement that “[n]oblemen are entered under their family names, not under titles; married women under their name by marriage, not under their maiden name.”

⁵ e.g., Stonehill, *Anonyma and Pseudonyma*.

⁶ e.g., Carty, *A Dictionary of Literary Pseudonyms in the English Language*.

Even the early, officially accurate use of “Mrs. Charlotte (Brontë) Nicholls” and “Mrs. Marian (Evans Lewes) Cross” is plagued by absence. William Cushing’s 1885 *Initials and Pseudonyms: A Dictionary of Literary Disguises*, to take a notable example, offers information on “Brontë, Anne, 1820-49. *Acton Bell*. An English poet and novelist; b. at Thornton, near Bradford. Her poems are of a deeply religious character, and most beautiful in sentiment.” Likewise: “Brontë, Emily Jane, 1818-48. *Ellis Bell*. An English novelist; b. @ Thornton, near Bradford, Yorkshire. At Haworth she divided her time between homely domestic duties, studies, and rambles.” Between these two lies “Brontë, Charlotte. *Currer Bell*,” for whom we are directed to “See ‘Nicholls, Mrs. C. (B.)’” The dutiful reader, however, will find only empty space between “Nicholas, Samuel Smith” and “Nichols, John,” though if we look to “Bell, Currer,” we will learn about “Jane Eyre, an autobiography,” and how it was published in London 1847. Upon discovering that Mrs. Cross is similarly ghosted,⁷ we may start to suspect that our eyes are playing tricks — perhaps there is something we are not *seeing* about Cushing’s method.

I suggest that the troubled mechanism is not the dictionary, but the mechanism of the author’s name itself. The deaths of the “bodies” of Currer Bell and George Eliot return the pseudonyms to their original condition on the title pages of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* and *Scenes of Clerical Life*: they exist as names associated only with texts, detached from any biographical incidents. What I hope to show, furthermore, is that there was no interval of “presence” between these two detached states (initial title page and posthumous index). In both life and afterlife the pseudonym is a sign of absence and the impossibility of control over a public — published — name.

⁷ In the Second Series “Cross, Mrs. Marian (Evans Lewes), 1819-80” *does* appear, and we are told she was “b. at South Farm, Griff, in Warwickshire; assistant-editor of the ‘Westminster Review’, 1851-57 *et seq.*; d. in London.” However, her only pseudonymous accomplishment is for the brief stint as “*Felix Holt*. An English miscellaneous writer” (202-03), when she adopted her character to write the “Address to Working Men” — the illustrious “George Eliot” remains free-floating.

I am not claiming that the use of “Brontë” rather than “Bell” or “Nicholls,” and “Eliot” rather than “Evans,” “Lewes,” or “Cross,” is a spontaneous occurrence. We might, for instance, read the triumph of “Charlotte Brontë” and “George Eliot” as the result of their first major biographies, and the names chosen for titles: Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) and Cross’s *George Eliot’s Life* (1885). However, the full titles of each work also suggest, inescapably, the names which were *not* chosen: *The Life of Charlotte Brontë, Author of ‘Jane Eyre,’ ‘Shirley,’ ‘Villette,’ &c.* and *George Eliot’s Life as Related in her Letters and Journals: Arranged and Edited by her Husband J.W. Cross*. The title pages of “Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette &c.” unanimously declare their Author to be Currer Bell,⁸ while J.W. Cross is the husband of Mary Ann Cross. The monumental names Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot do not eradicate Currer Bell, Charlotte Nicholls, Mary Ann Evans and Cross, Marian Evans and Lewes, but instead are perpetually haunted by their absence.

The issue of *choice*, then, does not disappear after these first major biographies, but comes into play with each work, biographical or critical, that addresses the authors by name. Recognizing that a name is not necessarily a given, but can be decided upon, undermines the notion that there is a “real” name and a “pseudonym.” What, for example, could be more “real” than the (married) names these women signed on their last letters and their wills, the same names which appear, legally and finally authorized, on their death certificates? The truth of a name, it seems, is in the eye of the beholder — or the biographer-critic. The matter is simpler in Brontë’s case: as Charlotte Nicholls is almost universally ignored, the choice of “real” name behind pseudonym is effectively reduced to one. This, I hasten to add, is only the *appearance* of having no choice. The

⁸ In fact, Currer Bell’s relation to *JE* (Author or Editor?) is uncertain — a point to which we will return in Chapter 5.

ghost of “Charlotte, Wife” remains so long as we acknowledge the existence of Arthur Bell Nicholls and his role in the Brontë story.⁹

In the case of George Eliot, there are more options, and thus the problem of choice is more evident. Even if we remove Mrs. Cross by default, is it Mary Ann or Marian, Evans or Lewes? On the one hand, we have Bodenheimer’s claim for *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, on the other, Rosemary Harris believes her partnership with George Henry Lewes “gave her her true name, ‘Marian Lewes’.”¹⁰ The most common choice is “Marian Evans,” but the decision to use “Marian Lewes” may suggest a feminist critic interested in acknowledging the right of a woman to decide her own name without patriarchal approval by legal and religious institutions. “Marian Evans” might again support a *different* kind of feminist reading; the important point here is that we can read in the choice of “real” name the inescapable issue of choice itself. A name, as a collection of linguistic symbols, both allows and requires interpretation.

Furthermore, as a textual artifact, a name is necessarily a rejection of origin. Thus there is no single person or moment that can be identified as the “reason” why George Eliot lived and Currer Bell died. The name, the authorial identity, is consolidated and legitimized through the interplay of texts — biographical and critical, Victorian and contemporary, the authors’ works, both private and published. Put another way: George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë had no intrinsic claim to the privileged places they occupy today (bindings, title pages, indices), yet their victory was inevitable — they were the only names which could have both produced and survived their literary reputations.

What I am proposing to explore is the paradoxical, unstable condition of authorship itself, during the author’s life — when the personal self is unavoidably

⁹ As addressed in Chapter 8, ABN’s existence is not one with which many practitioners of the Brontë myth are especially comfortable.

¹⁰ Harris, “The Names of George Eliot” 28.

inflected by the published persona — and during her afterlife — when identity is at the mercy of memory, and memorialization. This exploration, however, will be conducted almost entirely under cover: I want to discover the problems that lie behind the “mask” of pseudonymity, but I intend to do so by meditating upon the mask itself rather than attempting to strip it away. This thesis hopes to show that the difference between the obviously pseudonymous “Currer Bell” and “George Eliot,” borderline cases such as “Mrs. Gaskell” and “the Author of *Waverley*,” and even fully anonymous¹¹ authors like “Charles Dickens” is a difference of degree, not kind. The lines dividing these categories of authorship are imaginary; as such, they are continually under threat, and require continual maintenance.

One of the primary difficulties — but also one of the main motivations — for a study of pseudonymity is how rarely “pseudonymity” appears in the index of a biographical or critical work. Such scarcity might be read as an indication that the pen-name is simply not very interesting — at least not as a general phenomenon, since if “pseudonym” is listed at all, it is likely to be under the entry for an individual author. However, I do not consider this absence a sign of deficiency in criticism, but a characteristic of pseudonymity itself: the *nom de plume* tends toward the invisible. Indeed, when we do manage to locate a pseudonym being treated *as* a pseudonym, it is a concern with “hiding” which dominates the discussion. “Generally the motive is some form of timidity,” explain the eminent editors of the Halkett and Laing *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature*, offering a scale of “varying degrees,” from “initials only” to the “complete concealment” of “strictly anonymous.”¹² A brief catalogue of metaphors for the pseudonym, harvested from

¹¹ Genette offers “onymity” as a term for authorship signed with the author’s legal name. As “the most ordinary state is the one that [...] has never received a name,” he wants to “rescue it from this deceptive ordinariness,” noting, crucially, that even onymity is a *choice* to use the real name (*Paratexts* 39-40).

¹² Kennedy et al., “Notes on Anonymity and Pseudonymity” (xi-xxiii).

numerous sources, also suggests that concealing is the most salient characteristic:

“mask” is both the most common and the most provocative, but alternatives include “mantle,” “disguise,” “veil,” “shield,” “subterfuge,” “camouflage,” “forged passport,” even that originary moment of covering-up — “Eve’s fig leaf.”

This last definition, from Elaine Showalter,¹³ brings us to the elephant in the room: pseudonymity as the concealment of a *woman* writing, specifically a nineteenth-century woman. As with any philosophy of reading, the interpretation of pseudonymity as a feminine strategy for gaining access to a masculine literary world has an indefinite origin. Many point to Charlotte Brontë herself, quoting her 1850 “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell”: “we did not like to declare ourselves women, because [...] we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice.”¹⁴ Chapter 8 of this thesis returns to look in detail at Brontë’s Biographical Notice and its fraught relation to origins; for now I only suggest that this statement comes in a text so informed by “vague impressions” that it cannot be credited as a definite indication of motive.¹⁵

Regardless of where we might locate the beginning of this particular theory of pseudonymity, we can find its clearest statement in the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who believe the pseudonym is an expression of the female “anxiety of authorship”: “Certainly, as we all now recognize, by the mid-nineteenth century the male pseudonym was quite specifically a mask behind which the female writer could hide her disreputable femininity.”¹⁶ Although I am suspicious of the redundancies

¹³ On the women writers who began publishing in the 1840s: “One of the many indications that this generation saw the will to write as a vocation in direct conflict with their status as women is the appearance of the male pseudonym. Like Eve’s fig leaf, the male pseudonym signals the loss of innocence.” (*A Literature of Their Own* 19)

¹⁴ Bio Notice 743.

¹⁵ e.g., Caroline Levine’s “Harmless Pleasure”: Gender, Suspense, and *Jane Eyre*” is a convincing demonstration of how CB actually offers contrasting, incompatible reasons for the Bell pseudonyms.

¹⁶ Gilbert & Gubar, “Ceremonies of the Alphabet” 26-27. Similarly, in *Madwoman in the Attic*: the Brontës “concealed their troublesome femaleness behind the masks of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.” (95)

“*certainly*, as we all now recognize” and “*quite specifically*” as expressing an anxiety of their own, this rationale has been extremely pervasive. It reached its zenith between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, with ludicrously oversimplified versions — such as the Victorian woman who was “obliged to assume a male name in order that her book should be widely read, or even that it should be published at all.”¹⁷ We can perhaps mark a turning point at Gaye Tuchman’s *Edging Women Out* (1989), which proposes with no small success that, in fact, “men submitting fiction were more likely to assume a female name than women were to use either a male or neuter name.”¹⁸

Nonetheless, I submit that Gilbert and Gubar’s version remains the dominant model for reading pseudonymity. Therefore, I will at certain points refer to it as “the ‘disreputable femininity’ myth,” aligning it with an overarching interest in the status of myth itself: how a thing can owe its “monumental” status to a foundation in a satisfying version of “reality,” while simultaneously being the product of an (equally satisfying) fictionalization.

This thesis selects elements from an expressly feminist reading of nineteenth-century pseudonyms such as George Eliot and Currer Bell, and applies them to a different set of concerns. I propose that the pseudonym is not one of “the desperate strategies forced upon women in their attempt to circumvent patriarchal prejudice,”¹⁹ but rather an enunciated authorial signature. The masked woman writer is not necessarily an outsider struggling to negotiate phallogocentric territory, and her “desperate strategy” of a pseudonym might in fact indicate that she was *less* deluded about the concerns central to the condition of authorship.²⁰ For instance, two issues

¹⁷ Adrian Room, *Naming Names* 22.

¹⁸ Tuchman 53.

¹⁹ Burke, *Authorship* 146. His reading of the “pseudonymous mask” as a “dramatic illustration” of the way female “authorship had to be denied so as to be attained” was written in 1995 — the myth persists.

²⁰ cf. Eagleton on fiction writing being a “less deluded” form of communication, as “literary language constantly undermines its own meaning.” (*Literary Theory* 145)

which are generally applicable to the condition of authorship, though they are, in a sense, “colonized” by feminist readings: firstly, Patricia Lorimer Lundberg on George Eliot: “Often, when a woman writer became successful under a pseudonym, her pseudonymic identity overshadowed her real identity, blurring the line separating the real person from the persona she created in her works.”²¹ Secondly, Annette Tromly is in direct conversation with the myth when she claims that Charlotte Brontë did *not* use her pseudonym for convenience or psychic escape, but was “formidable, mature, and very much in control of the mask through which she speaks.”²²

While both these claims are specifically applicable to women authors, they are equally — and, I suggest, more productively — applicable to *any* author. The problem illustrated in the first of these quotations can be summarized as “the trouble with ‘second selves’”: the ostensibly distinct identities “private person” and “public persona” are actually interdependent, to the extent that the “creating” self requires the authorization of its created persona. The second problem, “the trouble with control,” highlights the impossibility of regulating interpretation, the inherent “unruliness” of the linguistic sign. In each case, what is revealed is a fundamental instability in both identity and text. Pseudonymity makes these issues, which are endemic to authorship, particularly visible and thus open to exploration. That is, pseudonymity gives them *a name*.

²¹ Lundberg, “George Eliot: Mary Ann Evans’s Subversive Tool in *Middlemarch*” 270. This 1986 essay is one of the most fiercely committed to the “disreputable femininity” myth; its opening lines contain such touchstone terms as “struggling,” “patriarchal,” “disguise,” “shield,” “ridicule,” “dared,” and it concludes on an image of GE as “Pollian, the Angel of Destruction,” out to “wreak havoc” on patriarchy.

²² Tromly, *The Cover of the Mask* 9. Writing in 1982, Tromly is also situated at the zenith of the “disreputable femininity” myth — as indicated by her specific opposition to it.

Theoretical Method: Third Terms, Haecceities, and Ghosts

The understanding of pseudonymity I propose — as a “third term,” a “haecceity,” and a “ghost” — is informed by queer theory, particularly as expressed by Judith Butler via Marjorie Garber; by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*; and by the Freudian “uncanny.” Underlying each of these theoretical issues and underpinning the claims of this thesis is a Derridean concern with the perpetual deferral of meaning and the impossibility of origin — the total absence and endless productivity of language.

Like Monique Wittig, Butler considers a unified version of selfhood to be dangerous, and the (ultimately futile) search for a singularized concept of “sex” to be violently enacted by a heterosexist culture. “Indeed,” she argues, “the ‘unity’ imposed upon the body by the category of sex is a ‘disunity,’ a fragmentation and compartmentalization,” and the harmful myth of “a seemingly seamless identity” is revealed by the “occasional *discontinuity*.”²³ Transvestism, in particular, advertises such discontinuities: the performance manifest in the drag show does not parody the original, she proposes in *Gender Trouble*, but the idea of originality itself.²⁴

Butler’s clarification of her position on drag, offered in *Bodies That Matter*, is especially useful for understanding the slippery “mask” status of a pseudonym. Not all performance is drag, she explains, nor does the drag show propose that gender is like a costume or mask: what it questions is whether there *is* a prior “one” who can wear the mask. Gender is not inner truth or external “surface appearance” — “its undecidability is to be traced as the play *between* psyche and appearance (where the latter domain includes what appears *in words*).”²⁵ I propose that we position authorial

²³ Butler, *Gender Trouble* 114, 141; emphasis original.

²⁴ Ibid. 138.

²⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 230-31, 234; emphasis original.

identity similarly to Butler's version of gender identity — it is neither private self (“psyche”) nor public, published persona (“appearance”), and pseudonymity is a means by which we can trace its play between the two.

As Derrida argues in “Signature Event Context,” “an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of a subordination.”²⁶

Another queer theorist, Marjorie Garber, proposes an alternative to this two-party system: the “third term,” which, in *Vested Interests*, she explores predominantly through the figure of the cross-dresser (Renaissance “boy” player, Joan of Arc, drag queen). However, she is careful to insist,

the ‘third term’ is *not a term*. Much less is it a *sex*, certainly not an instantiated ‘blurred’ sex as signified by a term like ‘androgynous’ or ‘hermaphrodite.’ [...] The ‘third’ is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge.

The third term is what happens when “what once stood as an exclusive dual relation becomes an element in a larger chain.”²⁷

The third term is applicable to any instance in which there is a problem of boundaries or a challenge to priority based on a binary system — in short, wherever there is a “category crisis,” “an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin.”²⁸ Garber notes other third terms besides the transvestite, including the third dimension and the Third World; I add the pseudonym to this list, as it is produced by and disrupts the dual relation of public and private identities. “This emphasis on *reading* and *being read*,” Garber writes, “and on the deconstructive nature of the transvestite performance, always undoing itself as

²⁶ Derrida, *Limited Inc.* 21.

²⁷ Garber 11-12, emphasis original.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 17.

part of its process of self-enactment, is what makes transvestism theoretically as well as politically and erotically interesting.”²⁹ Chapters 5 and 7 of this thesis look at the “selves” constructed by Brontë in her novels (each of which is “interesting,” erotically and otherwise), and at what those selves broadcast in their clothing. In each case the heroine’s availability to “reading” makes her, paradoxically, unreadable. This inscrutability replicates the cipher-like quality of the pseudonym, which I argue, is Garber’s “space of possibility” — where interpretation (reading and being read), enactment, and undoing occur simultaneously.

Deleuze and Guattari offer a set of concepts for understanding this both/and, neither/nor space when they describe a “becoming,” a no-man’s land which is “neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both.”³⁰ Understanding “becoming” requires an understanding of *milieu* (“middle,” environment), *agencement* (“adjustment,” process), and perhaps most importantly, *haecceity* (“thisness”).³¹ A haecceity is entirely heterogeneous and multiply-connected, “a map and not a tracing,”³² a rhizome rather than a root or tree. “The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’, but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and...and...and...’.” Having no beginnings or ends, only middles (milieus) and plateaus, the haecceity has the force to uproot “to be.”³³

We need look only as far as the aptly named *Middlemarch*, which insists that “[e]very limit is a beginning as well as an ending” (*Mm* 832), to recognize that George Eliot was on to a very similar idea. Chapter 6 of this thesis is concerned with Eliot’s

²⁹ Ibid. 149, emphasis original.

³⁰ Deleuze & Guattari 323.

³¹ As glossed by Kropf in *Authorship as Alchemy*, “[a] haecceity [sic] is determined by the multiplicity of adjustments effected within a specific milieu. The entire process is called a ‘becoming’ (*devenir*).” (5) His view of subversive, multiply-identified, “in process” Romantic authors I see applying equally well if not better to Victorian authors such as CB and GE.

³² Deleuze & Guattari 13, emphasis original.

³³ Ibid. 23-24, 27.

realist fictions and their resistance to boundaries — including any certainty about beginnings and endings, to either narrative or “reality.” I find this defiance and disruption of “limit” in the works, lives, and, crucially, in the names of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot; pseudonymity, I submit, denies a solid, “to be” ontology of the self in favor of heterogeneity and, frequently, discontinuity. “In fact,” as Deleuze and Guattari posit, “the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.”³⁴

Authorship, I argue, produces a particularly acute in-between status, which trends from not-wholeness to unwholesomeness, even perversity: “After all, I fear authors must submit to be something of monsters not quite simple, healthy human beings,” Eliot apologizes to her publisher John Blackwood, “but I will keep my monstrosity within bounds if possible.”³⁵ Dickens also offers an unsettling view of the novelist’s profession, claiming to be “the modern embodiment of the old Enchanters, whose Familiars tore them to pieces.”³⁶ Brontë has a similar philosophy of literary creation: “When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master — which will have its own way [...]”³⁷ As discussed in depth in later chapters, this “influence” activates a sense of self-as-divided, while simultaneously playing into a reading of Brontë as an “unmediated” artist, whose work promises evidence of a single, transcendent self.

Such problematic, liminal versions of authorship and selfhood point towards a psychoanalytic approach common among (particularly feminist) critics of Brontë and Eliot in the 1970s and 80s. While I am not offering a particularly psychoanalytic argument, this thesis will be informed by a reading of the uncanny. What Freud discovers is that “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an

³⁴ Ibid. 275.

³⁵ GE to JB (23 July 59) GE Letters III.119.

³⁶ Letter to Mrs. R. Watson, quoted in Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* 454.

³⁷ CB to GH (12 Jan 48) CB Letters II.179.

ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*.”³⁸ As the term “uncanny” itself threatens a clean sense of binary opposition, the uncanny effect is triggered, Freud finds, by situations of “intellectual uncertainty” as to whether something is alive or dead, animate or inanimate, authentic or “doubled.”³⁹ In this work, I use the figure of a ghost — with its characteristically eerie effect and uncertain status (alive or dead, present or absent) — to indicate both/and, neither/nor “spaces of possibility.”

The primary “ghosts” are the pseudonyms themselves. Like Barthes’ “healthy” sign, which both represents and points to its artificiality,⁴⁰ the pseudonym is fundamentally not-real (literally a *false* name) yet it achieves an undeniably real effect — it is evident in title-pages, advertisements, and reviews, and it designates a distinct individual (e.g., “the Author of *Middlemarch*”). A pseudonym’s ghostliness, I argue, is about “his” readers’ desire for visibility and corporeality (to locate, see, even touch the author behind a wildly popular novel) coming into conflict with “his” status as abstraction (a collection of textual symbols indicating the absence, or at least invisibility, of the “real” person). Other, principal ghosts will include the “Editor” in Brontë’s autobiographical fictions and the narrator in Eliot’s realism, as well as the “mythical” or “monumental” Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot created by (and, paradoxically, responsible for) their literary reputations.

Whether pseudonymous or otherwise, authorship is ghostly, situated in a category crisis: writing is the process by which life (the experience of a person) is turned into art (the work of an author). As an effect of writing itself, that process is necessarily defamiliarizing. Brontë complains of a critic who “did not always seize my meaning; he speaks, for instance, of ‘Jane’s inconceivable alarm at Mr. Rochester’s

³⁸ Freud 131.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 139.

⁴⁰ cf. Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 135.

repelling manner.' I do not remember that,"⁴¹ she jokes, but the inherent problem with interpretation is not laughed off so easily. Readers will inevitably locate meanings in the text which its creator finds strange and yet is expected to "own" (we might include here the charges of "coarseness" leveled against the novels of all three Brontë sisters).

In the case of a longer-lived author such as George Eliot, the defamiliarized condition of authorship becomes more apparent after the passage of time. Gérard Genette calls the practice of writing "delayed" prefaces a way of looking back "*after forgetfulness*," when detachment and separation has "transform[ed] the author into an (almost) ordinary and (almost) impartial reader [...]."⁴² Eliot, as I mean to show in readings of her letters and journals, was perfectly aware of such theoretical issues (as was Brontë, for that matter), and she offers numerous expressions of Genette's "after forgetfulness" estrangement: "My books don't seem to belong to me after I have once written them; and I find myself delivering opinions about them as if I had nothing to do with them," she claims, reiterating years later that "I could no more live through one of my books a second time than I can live through last year again"; later still, she finds a collection of quotations from her work "marvellously new to me — since I had forgotten the greater part of what I had written."⁴³

As we shall see throughout this thesis, "the author" is a defamiliarized, multiple entity, constantly negotiating different categories. One of the significant rifts is that explored by Barthes in "Authors and Writers." He suggests that "[t]he author performs a function, the writer an activity" — "for the author, *to write* is an intransitive verb," whereas the writer "is a 'transitive' man", for whom "language

⁴¹ CB to WSW (28 Oct 47) CB Letters II.151.

⁴² Genette 253, emphasis original.

⁴³ GE Letters III.374 (29 Jan 61); IV.396 (9 Nov 67); V.289 (28 Dec 71).

supports a *praxis*, it does not constitute one.”⁴⁴ Again, it is my contention that the writers under consideration here were by no means “naïve” Victorians; a claim borne out by any sustained look at their personal correspondence and professional criticism. A century before Barthes, Brontë voiced her frustration with a similar discrepancy: “as [Thackeray] once said to Currer Bell with some bitterness, ‘I worked ten years before I achieved real success,’ intimating at the same time that the said ‘Currer Bell’ had won his small first-work conquest a great deal too cheaply, which would have been true only that Currer Bell had worked quite as long as Mr. Thackeray, without publishing.”⁴⁵

The defining characteristic of an “author,” it would seem, is a writer who has entered the public, published sphere. However, public and private offer an uneasy sense of definition, since, according to critics like Mark Rose, they are “radically unstable concepts,” having everything to do with stance — “not a part of the world, but a way of organizing the world.”⁴⁶ The public/private binary is crucial for structuring conventions such as copyright (with which Rose concerns himself) and regulating legal responsibility, but it remains a fraught dialectic. David Saunders and Ian Hunter, for instance, maintain that “legal” and “literary” categories are too often conflated when discussing an author’s rights, noting that the liability is in publication, not in writing.⁴⁷ Robert Griffin likewise urges a separation of legal and aesthetic authorial identities, noting further that “aesthetic” is itself a “conflation” — not “a unified entity,” but “split into multiple entities in the course of individual publications [...] and is collected together under the name of the empirical writer only after the

⁴⁴ Barthes, *A Barthes Reader* 186-89. Kropf’s distinction, resonant in a discussion of ghosts and presence/absence, is that the writer is “full” but the author is “frozen,” “posed,” “empty” (75-76).

⁴⁵ CB to GS (28 Nov 51) CB Letters III.294-95.

⁴⁶ Rose, *Authors and Owners* 141.

⁴⁷ Saunders & Hunter, “Lessons from the ‘Literary’: How to Historicize Authorship” 485-88.

fact.”⁴⁸ Rather than spiraling between “author” and “writer” and varying degrees of public and private, this thesis will consider Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot to be “authors,” having acknowledged that the designation is not without its problems.

Sonia Hofkosh states the case plainly: “the self becomes the author when the work that is his own belongs to others, when it is published, bought, read, and reviewed.”⁴⁹ I want to alter this definition in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence that for a man to become a dog the dog must also become something else⁵⁰ — insofar as the self becomes the author, the author must also become a self. Thus, rather than presuppose a single original self who undergoes modifications, I am interested in the ways in which the author, initially designated only by a name printed on a title page evolves — if not independently, then at least beyond the control of the person “wearing” the name.

This introduction will address some of the concerns of names on title pages (including whether any name appears at all), but first I offer a very brief exploration of the general concepts “self” and “name.” The status of each is best characterized as fluid, in-process; self and name are both, ultimately, forms of narrative, and thus are created by and subject to interpretation. The story of selfhood since the Enlightenment can be read as a kind of entropy — the disintegration of Descartes’ unified *cogito* into a sequence of disconnected experiences and impressions held together by consciousness and memory, and liable to interruption.⁵¹ In the standard narrative, the recognition of the self as composed of discrete (and disjointed) experience is born around the middle of the eighteenth century, possibly with Hume. It gathers steam through the nineteenth century to explode at the advent of the twentieth century with

⁴⁸ Griffin, “Anonymity and Authorship” 890.

⁴⁹ Hofkosh, “The Writer’s Ravishment: Women and the Romantic Author,” in Mellor, ed. 95.

⁵⁰ Deleuze & Guattari 285.

⁵¹ As explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis, which addresses autobiographical narrative.

Freudian psychology and Modernist “stream of consciousness” experimentation, driving ultimately towards the postmodernist death of the subject outside of discourse.

However, just as a life — individual selfhood over time — does not *a priori* have a narrative shape or significance, we should be equally suspicious of a story of *general* selfhood over time which endorses uni-directional movement, even teleology. For instance, we can see in a post-Enlightenment narrative how “the disease of Cartesianism keeps breaking out again and again.”⁵² I want to avoid a naïve, unified view of the *story* of the subject, as well as of subjectivity itself. Like the author, as discussed above, the self is plagued by dialectical tensions — Locke’s man (the body in the world) versus person (the moral, accountable social agent),⁵³ Buber’s I versus thou, and the like. To this end, the following chapter will look specifically at tensions in mid-nineteenth century selfhood, proposing that the Victorian age offers a particularly intense expression of the self as created through conflict.

The self is not a stable or static entity, and the attempt to resolve it into unity by giving it a name is likewise doomed to failure. As Deleuze and Guattari have it, “the proper name is in no way the indicator of a subject,” but “fundamentally designates something that is on the border of the event, of becoming or of the haecceity.”⁵⁴ In “Critically Queer,” Butler argues that “the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one’s social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject-

⁵² Rom Harré, “Language Games and Texts of Identity” (in Shotter & Green 23). This “story” of selfhood is only a very cursory sketch — my understanding of the self, particularly as related to narrative and representation, is informed by critical works such as *The Turning Key* by Jerome Buckley, *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al.), *Texts of Identity* (Shotter & Green, eds.), *Subjectivities* (Regenia Gagnier), *The Death and Return of the Author* (Seán Burke), *Storied Lives* (Rosenwald & Ochberg), *Rewriting the Self* (Mark Freeman), and *Self As Narrative* (Kim Worthington).

⁵³ Kropf, again, offers a useful gloss: “society tends to see to it that the same man is held accountable for the deeds of various persons,” and thus forces the shifter “I” to singularize (33-34).

⁵⁴ Deleuze & Guattari 291.

formation.”⁵⁵ In this thesis, a name is understood, first and foremost, as a collection of symbols, and thus subject to the perils of language as expressed by Derrida — its “true meaning” is endlessly deferred.

Nevertheless, there is a devotion to an “Adamic” understanding of a person’s name which needs addressing, as it proves remarkably persistent.⁵⁶ Alan Gardiner offers a *Theory of Proper Names* in which names are “older” than mere words; “when we speak of a ‘name’ we imply that there exists something to which a certain sound-sign corresponds, something that was the *fons et origo* of the name, something that supplies its *raison d’être*.”⁵⁷ Adrian Room insists that “[o]ur names not only identify us, they *are* us: they announce us, advertise us and embody us.”⁵⁸ Philippe Lejeune, who will re-appear in the discussion of autobiography in Chapter 5, is certain that despite the threat of “shifters” turning humanity into an anonymous mass, a person “is still able to declare what he irreducibly is by naming himself.”⁵⁹

Despite these near-mystical overtones, a name must behave as any text does — while an appellation may be unusual, and even (if infrequently) completely unique, it cannot be cleansed of associations. As Butler writes, regarding the attempt to (re)claim an identity such as “queer,”

It may be that the conceit of autonomy implied by self-naming is the paradigmatically presentist conceit, that is, the belief that there is a one who arrives in the world, in discourse, without a history, that this one makes oneself in and through the magic of the name, that language expresses a ‘will’ or a ‘choice’ rather than a complex and constitutive history of discourse and power [...].⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 226.

⁵⁶ Appropriately enough, Dorothea Barrett’s introduction to *Romola* includes the claim: “Marian Evans Lewes was an Eve who took on the Adamic function of the naming of creation (and began by renaming herself ‘George’).” (*Rom* xxii)

⁵⁷ Gardiner 12-13.

⁵⁸ Room 7, emphasis original. He further demonstrates his unfamiliarity with basic Saussurean semiotics by claiming that “the name of each person has an ‘aura’, an associativeness, that mere names of objects [example: chair] lack.” (68)

⁵⁹ Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Contract” 199. Moreover, “the passion for the name” is not just vanity, but “expresses the cry for existence of personal identity itself.” (209)

⁶⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 228.

As we shall see in the final chapter of this thesis, the various names used by “the Author of *Jane Eyre*” and “the Author of *Middlemarch*” fall prey to the “complex and constitutive” discourses of literary reputation. Meanwhile, Chapters 3 and 4 reveal that the names escape the self-namers’ control, even during their lives, giving the lie to any “conceit of autonomy.” Moreover, the (at-times obsessive) search for “originals” of the peculiar “Curren” and the prosaic “Bell,” “George,” and “Eliot” demonstrates that the pseudonyms had histories prior to being “created” by Marian Evans Lewes and Charlotte Brontë. To declare an “inspiration” for the pseudonyms is, in fact, to declare an interpretation of them — “George Eliot,” for instance, reads somewhat differently if the “George” is a tribute to George Sand or to George Henry Lewes. There is nothing “irreducible” about naming oneself — names are nearly as available to (mis)reading as novels are.

In order to be readable, a name like any text must also be iterable, thus exposing it to performativity and inauthenticity. Derrida explains this particular condition of the name in his discussion of signature: since, as Austin notes, “written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are,” the signature “implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer.” However, that signature also guarantees a moment of signing, as it “marks and retains his having-been present in a past *now*.” If it is to function properly, an autograph must be both unique and repeatable — “[i]n order for the tethering to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.” This “pure reproducibility” is possible, but its possibility depends, paradoxically, on the condition of its impossibility: the

“authorizing” event must be iterable, and therefore performable. Thus Derrida can append his signature to his essay, “Which I do, and counterfeit, here.”⁶¹

The Author’s Name: Onymity, Anonymity, Pseudonymity

The empty, iterable signature nonetheless manages to “do” things. As Foucault has it, “an author’s name is not simply an element of speech,” but a “means of classification” — the name appended ties texts together, establishing relations and differentiations.⁶² The rise in mass media and mass readership during the nineteenth century made the author’s name particularly valuable as an advertisement, a recognizable product-name or trademark.⁶³ The author’s name becomes “metonym for writer *and* work,”⁶⁴ a condition which provoked I.A. Richards’ 1929 experiment, described in *Practical Criticism*: having asked his Cambridge students to analyze poems without the benefit of poets’ names, and unsatisfied with the result, he “lamented that reputation had become a shortcut for reading authors in place of texts.”⁶⁵ Susan Lanser, however, suggests that this is “axiom” not “laxity,” as “authorship conventionally underwrites readers’ engagements with literary texts.”⁶⁶

Given that an authorial name has such force, Eliot herself poses a salient point: “A little reflection might, one would think, suggest that when a *name* is precisely the highest priced thing in literature, any one who has a name will not, except when there is some strong motive for mystification, throw away the advantages of that name.”⁶⁷

As this letter was written after “George Eliot” had established “himself” as a

⁶¹ Derrida 19-21.

⁶² Foucault, “What is an Author?” (in Burke ed.) 234-35.

⁶³ See, for example, Sharon Marcus’s excellent “The Profession of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising, and *Jane Eyre*.”

⁶⁴ Kropf 67, emphasis original.

⁶⁵ Lanser, “The Author’s Queer Clothes” 81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 82.

⁶⁷ GE to Sara Hennell (23 April 62) GE Letters IV.25, emphasis original.

successful author, it is clear that “*name*” here does not stand for personal identity (“Marian [Evans] Lewes”) but for public renown. The author “makes a name for herself” with her pseudonym, which is constituted by reputation as well as by her choice of the sound-images /george/ and /eliot/. Nevertheless, the persistently Adamic view of names as “irreducible” declarations of being means that most of the existing critical interest in pseudonymity centers on what “strong motives for mystification” would lead a person to “throw away” that original appellation which supposedly “embodies” her self. Thus dictionaries of pseudonyms and critical studies of authors concern themselves with the question “*Why* would one adopt a pseudonym?”

This thesis seeks to avoid entanglement in such issues of intentionality, asking instead, “What does adopting a pseudonym reveal about *not* adopting a pseudonym?” That is, exploring authorship under a false name forces us to consider what — if anything — can be considered “real” about an author’s identity. The authorial name, onymous or otherwise, is situated in a contradictory, liminal “space of possibility.” According to Foucault, “the name of the author remains at the contours of texts,” it “is not a function of a man’s civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities [...]”⁶⁸ Similarly, Lejeune identifies it as “the only mark in the text of an indubitable ‘outside-of-the-text’, designating a real person,” making the name a “threshold” and the author a figure “with one foot in the text, and one outside.”⁶⁹ That figure inhabits a “borderline area of the printed text which in reality *governs* all of our reading,”⁷⁰ an area which Genette defines as “paratext”: “a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*,” incorporating a “heterogeneous group of practices and discourses of all kinds.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Foucault 235.

⁶⁹ Lejeune 199-200.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 219, emphasis original

⁷¹ Genette 2, emphasis original.

Although Lejeune calls it “indubitably referential” because of its legal, contractual function with both reader and publisher, Genette makes clear that “the name of the author is not a given that is external to and coexistent with this contract,” but “is indeed a constituent element of the contract and has an effect that blends with the effects of other elements” — including, for instance, genre designations.⁷² The information on a title page has illocutionary force: even ostensibly “conventional” claims — “By a Lady,” “Edited by,” “An Autobiography,” “A Tale” — dictate modes of reading. For instance, “*a novel* does not signify ‘This book is a novel,’ [...] but rather ‘Please look on this book as a novel.’”⁷³

The novel as a heterogeneous form (which will be explored in the following chapter) lends a particularly troubled dimension to the singularizing process of naming. Using as example *Les liaisons dangereuses*, which claims to be a series of letters “edited by” C—— de L——, Kropf argues that “[r]ather than designating a multiplicity, the author’s name ‘arrests’ it and thereby fixes and stabilizes a singular sponsoring source,” even when “the text itself is intent precisely on making the identity of this source problematic.”⁷⁴ Where onymity promotes a further singularizing by tying the text to a “real” entity, conventions such as “edited by” (also used in the first edition of *Jane Eyre*) and the quasi-pseudonymous “C—— de L——” preserve a certain problematization of origin which is crucial to the aesthetic of the novel.

It is also important to note that the “contractual function” of the author’s name is not especially clear. While the author communicates through paratext (title page, preface, dedication, etc.), “[t]he sender of a paratextual message (like the sender of all other messages) is not necessarily its *de facto* producer, whose identity is not very important to us [...]. The sender is defined by a putative attribution and an acceptance

⁷² Lejeune 210-11; Genette 41.

⁷³ Genette 11.

⁷⁴ Kropf 56.

of responsibility.”⁷⁵ In fact, as copyright and printing laws in Britain have made clear throughout the past several centuries, legal liability ultimately lies with the publisher or printer, not the author.⁷⁶ It may be the author’s signature on the text, but that signature does not necessarily guarantee responsibility. Genette makes the analogy to cinema, explaining that the author is “presented” by the publisher: “If the author is the guarantor of the text (*auctor*), this guarantor himself has a guarantor — the publisher — who ‘introduces’ and names him.”⁷⁷ As we shall see in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the dyadic authorial identity created by a pseudonym (Currer Bell the textual and Charlotte Brontë the physical presence) cannot be resolved without authentication by the publisher.

The author, far from being an autonomous entity, is constructed by relation and situated in liminal, uncertain spaces. Nevertheless, like the self and like the name, the figure of the author is subject to romanticizing narratives. Robert Griffin, for instance, sets out to debunk the “standard version” of the professional author — “a story of identity emerging out of anonymity,” promoted most notably by Foucault. Griffin begins his work by observing how “[l]iterary studies exhibit a curious reluctance to acknowledge that most of the literature ever published appeared either without the author’s name or under a fictive name.”⁷⁸ He is, however, most interested in anonymous authorship, subsuming pseudonymity into anonymity because it is non-anonymous, not a “real” name. On the other hand, like Lanser I find that “reading abhors an authorial vacuum,”⁷⁹ and thus the blank space of anonymity evolves into a functional name, or pseudonym. As detailed in Chapter 2, the absence on the title page of, for instance, *Roderick Random* or *Waverley* is inevitably filled; subsequent works are by “The Author of *Roderick Random*” or, more famously, “The Author of *Waverley*.”

⁷⁵ Genette 8.

⁷⁶ cf. Saunders & Hunter 487; Griffin, *Faces of Anonymity* 5;

⁷⁷ Genette 46.

⁷⁸ Griffin, “Anonymity and Authorship” 877-78; *Faces of Anonymity* 1.

⁷⁹ Lanser 95.

Whether anonymity is a subset of pseudonymity or vice-versa, I do agree with Griffin that as “an artifact, at a distance from the empirical writer and part of the semiotics of the text,” even an author’s legal name is “a figurative version of anonymity”⁸⁰ — its implication in linguistic and fiction-making structures means it cannot perfectly designate the “real,” extra-textual entity. Griffin suggests elsewhere that anonymity should not be read “as a lack or absence, but positively, as another mask,” as “even unnamed texts project a ‘presence’.”⁸¹ I suggest flipping the statement to read: “even named texts are characterized by absence.”

I will be focusing on the pseudonym as exactly, irresolvably poised between presence and absence, a situation which can be illustrated by two contradictory, complementary readings of the most common pseudonym metaphors: the veil and the mask. According to Caroline Levine, “it is worth pointing out that to veil is not to conceal entirely: it is to screen, to obscure.” A veil is a guarantee of something behind, “an invitation to speculation.”⁸² On the other hand, Severo Sarduy notes, “the mask makes us believe that there is a depth, but what the mask covers is itself: the mask feigns dissimulation to dissimulate that it is nothing more than a simulation.”⁸³ This thesis is driven by the tension between pseudonymity as a veil, suggesting presence somewhere “behind,” and pseudonymity as a mask, revealing only the inescapably deferred, absent nature of language and performance.

Previously in this introduction I noted (in order to dismiss) the frequently cited “disreputable femininity” explanation for pseudonymity. I close by acknowledging several alternative versions which I find more productive. For instance, Carol Bock and Sharon Marcus both offer readings of “Currer Bell” as canny professional move

⁸⁰ Griffin “Anonymity and Authorship” 890.

⁸¹ Griffin, *The Faces of Anonymity* 10.

⁸² C. Levine 276.

⁸³ Sarduy, “Writing/Transvestism” 439.

rather than feminine capitulation. Bock claims “the pseudonym was less a mask for disguising a ‘true self’ than a denominative sign of her professional self, an identity that she brought forward for circulation in the literary economy,” while Marcus calls it “a form of veiled self-advertisement [...], a strategy for disowning the difficulties of female embodiment by exploiting the powers of abstraction.”⁸⁴ Patricia Wheat proposes, somewhat unusually, that “Charlotte Brontë” is the outward persona and her alias “Currer Bell” is the “invisible, often unknown part of the self that exists beyond the social self and comprises the spirit of the person, the character.”⁸⁵ Despite implying a transcendental self (“the spirit of the person”), Wheat’s repositioning forces us to re-examine the standard pairing of Private Charlotte and Public Currer, making us question what we expect a “true” self to be.

This project’s investigation not only of the author’s public and private writings, but of contemporary reviews will demonstrate that Victorian critical assessments were, in many ways, prescient versions of twentieth-century theoretical concerns. For instance, in 1894 Leslie Stephen questions whether public/private is a legitimate binary opposition at all: “Miss Brontë,” he suggests, was one of those “many people who can confide in the public more freely than in the most intimate friends. The mask of anonymous authorship and fictitious personages has a delusive appearance of security. The most sacred emotions are for ourselves or for the invisible public rather than for the intermediate sphere of concrete spectators.”⁸⁶ Earlier still, in an 1872 review, Edward Dowden toggles the visible/invisible, public/private alignment, suggesting that the enduring figure in “George Eliot’s” works is

one who, if not the real George Eliot, is that “second self” who writes her books, and lives and speaks through them. Such a second self of an author is perhaps more substantial than any mere human personality encumbered with the accidents of flesh

⁸⁴ Bock, “Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser’s Magazine*” 255; Marcus 207.

⁸⁵ Wheat, *The Adytum of the Heart* 30-31.

⁸⁶ Stephen, *Hours in a Library* 12.

and blood and daily living. It stands at some distance from the primary self, and differs considerably from its fellow.

Correspondingly, he finds that the work produced by such a self is not a static object but a process: “There is not a hard kernel of dogma at the centre of her art, and around it a sheath of envelope which we break and throw away; the moral significance coalesces with the narrative, and lives through the characters.”⁸⁷

To return to a more modern perspective, Barbara Hardy also uses the second-self condition of pseudonymity to explore an intrinsic connection between fictional character and “real” author: “[Eliot’s] own vulnerability, privacy and silence, lie behind the reticence in her novels. There are links between characters who tell their stories, the narrator who does everything but tell his or her story, and the reticent author whose name never appeared on the cover or title-page.”⁸⁸ In his *George Eliot and Blackmail*, Alexander Welsh offers the reading perhaps most closely related to my own. Anyone whose “primary relations” with the world are conducted through print, he argues, and who depends (in a mental or emotional sense) on words for that relation is already pseudonymous, “in that their names appear in print rather than on the lips of persons meeting face to face.” Thus, “[t]he true secret of George Eliot is the ordinary concealment of writer from reader, and it would be an unusual person whose feelings were not affected by this relation.”⁸⁹

A pseudonym, as I mean to show, is a third term, a haecceity, a ghost — an act of transmission, a site of interaction between categories such as “public” and “private,” “name” and “body,” “author” and “self.” Creating a pseudonym does not in itself create a public, professional Author: the publication of any name, “real” or otherwise, on the title page of a novel signifies the existence of a new identity distinct

⁸⁷ *Contemporary Review* (Aug 72): CH-GE 320-22.

⁸⁸ Hardy, *Particularities* 145.

⁸⁹ Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* 113, 116.

from the private, personal self. What pseudonymity does is call attention to this intrinsic division and heighten the sense of disjointedness. It is a performance which on the one hand claims to draw a line between two categories of identity — “This is Currer Bell/George Eliot the author not Charlotte Brontë/Marian Evans Lewes the person” — and yet at the same time threatens and collapses those categories.

*

This thesis traces in its own progression the stages in the “life” of a pseudonym, beginning with its invention and first appearance on a title page, moving through the works themselves, ultimately attaining death and entering “afterlife” (memorialization and reputation). Before addressing the “births” of Currer Bell and George Eliot, we need to examine the milieu which produced them — namely, the Victorian publishing world and its “Unknown Parents.” The particular concerns of female authorship and re/production anxieties find a “monstrous” mother in Mary Shelley as “the Author of *Frankenstein*,” while Sir Walter Scott, “the Author of *Waverley*” and the first “Great Unknown” in English literature, is an equally problematic father-figure to the newly “professional,” frequently pseudonymous Victorian author. This chapter also hopes to recuperate the period generally: far from being the staid, well-regulated pause dividing the exciting Romantic author (with his divinely given “I”) and the exciting Modernist author (with his fractured “I”), the Victorian author is a complex, productive site of transmission between his predecessor and his successor.

The second part of this thesis is concerned with “becoming a pseudonym”: how Currer Bell and George Eliot came into being, and how their beings were dismantled and re-constructed throughout the authors’ lives. The chapter “The Birth and Death of Currer Bell” sets out the problems of cipher and interpretation through an interest in abstraction, or disembodiment. Following that, “The Strange Life of

George Eliot” proposes the life of a pseudonym as a three-step process — from “anonymous” through “imaginary” to “real” — and examines the “biography” of George Eliot as the name negotiates these three stages.

The third part moves from “life” to “art,” turning to the authors’ works and offering a discussion of each, informed by the supposition that Brontë and Eliot are practitioners at variance with each other. By reducing Brontë’s art to “autobiographical fiction” and Eliot’s to “realist fiction,” I am attempting to show how even the most polarized versions of their different aesthetic strategies reveal a joint interest in the underlying concerns of authorship. Both chapters take as their main concern the ghostly quality of the novels: “The Autobiographies of Charlotte Brontë” is concerned primarily with the question of absence and lack of origin, while “Category Crisis in George Eliot’s Realist Fiction” explores the always-already disrupted boundaries of her supposedly well-regulated genre.

“All Dressed Up: Clothes as Performance in Brontë” is a kind of case study — while I do not want to propose a particular methodology, this chapter offers an example of what a reading expressly informed by the problems of pseudonymity (especially performativity and third-termness) might look like. Moreover, including this case study accomplishes what I feel is otherwise somewhat lacking — namely, a focused examination of the novels themselves, historicized by being read alongside contemporary non-fictional texts such as clothing and conduct manuals.

The fourth and final progression is to “adjustment,” and what happens in the total absence of the author-as-self. The chapter “Mythmaking: The Afterlife of a Pseudonym” is a combined look at the posthumous literary reputations of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, and attempts, once again, to puzzle out the disappearance of Currer Bell, Charlotte Nicholls, Marian Evans, Marian Lewes, and Mary Ann Cross.

A Note On Names

A work that is predominantly concerned with names cannot begin properly without discussing the choices made in referring to these authors. To avoid (as much as possible) enacting the naming-confusion I describe, my general rule is simplicity:

[Charlotte] Brontë and *[George] Eliot*. However, a few items which merit a mention:

The only significant issue with Brontë is the excessively “familial” surname — typically, a work which addresses all three sisters will use “Charlotte,” “Emily,”⁹⁰ and “Anne,” and “Brontë” will effectively drop out. As Charlotte Brontë is my focus here, she will have privileged access to the surname: *Brontë* will always and only refer to her, though it means her family members are relegated to given-name-only status.

There is no simple way to deal with the multiply named person opposing the persona George Eliot. “Marian Evans” is the most common critical practice but *Marian Lewes* is, I firmly believe, more accurate (in the sense that the private self under discussion sent and received letters under that name). “Marian” is tempting (as, in fits of pique, is “Polly”) but ultimately not acceptable. Therefore, I use *George Eliot* and *Eliot*⁹¹ to signify the “overall” author-person whenever possible, the major exception being Chapter 4, where each choice of name will be determined by immediate context.

When referring to “George Eliot” explicitly *as a pseudonym* (and “Carrer Bell,” for that matter), I will put the names in quotation marks — this will be most frequently in reference to a letter or preface signed with the alias.

In cases when the choice of name *is* the issue, and in any other problematic case, I will use “the Author of *Jane Eyre*” and “the Author of *Middlemarch*.”

⁹⁰ If the critic is Harold Bloom, he will use “Emily Jane,” and he will inevitably sound patronizing.

⁹¹ There is a silent debate in criticism as to whether GE can legitimately be referred to as “Eliot,” since there is technically no distinction between given name and patronymic. While I find this interesting, the nature of indexing (“Eliot, George”) reveals that it is not a sustainable convention — whether it is a “real” patronymic or not, “Eliot” is treated as such.

CHAPTER 2

“UNKNOWN” PARENTS: VICTORIAN AUTHORSHIP AND PSEUDONYMITY

The Victorian period has a particularly “betwixt” status, falling as it does between two periods with claims to equally exciting, yet conflicting, versions of selfhood and authorship: the Romantic “celebration of inwardness” and the alienation of Modernism.¹ While I do not want to discard a healthy skepticism about periodicity, this chapter does not directly question the designations “Romantic,” “Victorian,” and “Modernist.”² Reading these periods as distinct episodes in a narrative — juxtaposed, sequential, related, significant — reveals not only the instability of categorization but also the problem of interpretation, which is not merely the decoding of a pre-existent “real” set of data but an act of creation, even fabrication.

The idea that the Victorians used remnants of an “inherited” Romantic myth³ while yet only “gradually” beginning to touch on the Modernist myth means that the period is too often read not as “mediating” but as “middling” — a relatively unexciting plateau between two spikes of interest in the story of selfhood and authorship. Thus we have critical appraisals from the mid-twentieth century, which, catching hold of Henry James’s description of long nineteenth-century novels as “loose, baggy monsters,”⁴ point to that “school of solid novels” and their “voluminousness,” or “bulbousness,” their tendency to be “not a slice of life, but the whole pudding,” doughy but “easily swallowed.” In the words of Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée: “it is not, to put it

¹ Worthington, *Self as Narrative* 4. Holly Laird proposes the Postmodern rather than the Modern as the opposing pole to Romanticism. She offers problematic Victorian pseudonymity (particularly multiple authorship, in the case of “Michael Field,” Edith Cooper/Katherine Bradley) as a mechanism “giving the lie to both the Romantic myth of solitary genius and to the postmodern myth of the author’s death.” (193)

² For simplicity’s sake I define the Victorian period by the dates of Queen Victoria’s reign, 1837-1901; “Romantic” designates the period of English literary history between about 1780 and 1837; “Modern” means the first decades of the 20th century, through the start of WWII.

³ cf. Bock, who considers the special significance of an author’s “coming forward” to be a concept inherited from the Romantic notion of genius residing in an unique, individual consciousness: coming forward was “publicizing one’s inner being” (“Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser’s*” 246).

⁴ James, *The Tragic Muse* 4.

bluntly, that they wrote much, but that they wrote too much. They did not stop when they had made their effect, they went on making it, and so weakened it.”⁵ Of particular interest is how the years in which Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot were active are read as especially (and thus suspiciously) stolid. For instance, Nigel Cross divides his Victorian age into three periods, noting the confusion and boundary-testing of the first and third segments — “advances in technology,” “commercial confusion,” and “literary insecurity” is noteworthy pre-1840, while post-1880 is marked by writers “beg[inning] to look beyond the middle class.” The period 1840-80, however, acts as an interlude of sobriety, with “the book and newspaper trade settling down into general profitability,” to the satisfaction of the middle-class reader.⁶

These myths of Victorian staidness and solidity — it was a time of incomplete Romanticism and incomplete Modernism — have enjoyed critical and cultural longevity. Rather than argue that the period was a spike of its own, however, I am more interested in exploring it *as* a plateau, a no-man’s land, complete with the third-term anxieties produced by being “both” and “neither.” Charles Taylor, looking at “Our Victorian Contemporaries,” proposes that one of their concerns which resonates into the twentieth century is the possibility of a “third path, neither faith in God of a normally recognized kind nor scientific agnosticism. It is an aspiration towards wholeness, towards a fulness of joy where desire is fused with our sense of the deepest significance. Its source is the Romantic ideal of self-completion through art.”⁷ This positioning between categories (religious orthodoxy and scientific atheism; the modern world of “our sense” and the bygone “Romantic ideal”) paradoxically

⁵ Batho & Dobrée, *The Victorians and After* 77, 36.

⁶ N. Cross, *The Common Writer* 5. Opposing this is Altick’s data in “The Sociology of Authorship: The Social Origins, Educations, and Occupations of 1,100 British Writers, 1800-1935,” in which the second of his four periods, 1837-1870, is almost always the “odd one out” of statistical trends (*Writers, Readers, and Occasions* 95-109). Allott also claims in CH-CB that *JE* was published during “the most eventful period in the novel’s history” (22-23).

⁷ Taylor 409.

endeavors to connect “wholeness,” “fullness,” and “completion” with something as emptying and fragmenting as “art,” which functions through signification and interpretation. I want to suggest that the third-term crises of a “betwixt” period and the prominence of pseudonymity in that period are related phenomena: each demonstrates a concern with mediation, and each functions as a site of conflicting identities. A pseudonym negotiates public and private versions of self (and, as an authorial signature, it signifies and complicates the translation of lived experience into fictional text), while the Victorian period stands as both barrier and transmission between Romantic and Modernist myths of consciousness.

Pseudonymity is by no means an invention of the writers of Victoria’s reign, though the convention naturally reflects the culture in specific ways. I propose a way of understanding the *milieu* of the Victorian pseudonym by, perversely, finding its “parents” — an apparently anti-Deleuzian vision of a family tree that will, in the end, only affirm the perpetually orphaned, eternally “now” status of the pseudonym. Sir Walter Scott, “the Author of *Waverley*,” plays the father-figure in the story of the English novel, yet his status as the “Great Unknown” casts appropriate aspersions on the paternity of the alienated, abstracted Victorian author. Likewise, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, “the Author of *Frankenstein*,” gives to Victorian women writers a legacy of gender-consciousness and “monstrous” motherhood. While Scott and Shelley do not tend to be considered pseudonymous writers in the traditional sense, they both have problematic (non-anonymous) “names” through which we can explore the primary concerns facing Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot: the uncertain status of an authorial identity, and the complications of Victorian gender ideology.

The “Unknown” Father: Walter Scott and a History of Pseudonymity

Scott is frequently considered the esteemed *paterfamilias* of nineteenth-century fiction. His literary reputation ensured by poetry, he was the first, best example of how fiction could “earn profit and popular glory” for its writer⁸ — he was a respectable, professional success in a field presumed to be on the seedier side of artistic production, and he “inaugurated the new era of huge readership.”⁹ Novel prices rose and fell with his career: his popularity brought them up, and the after-effects of his bankruptcy brought them down again.¹⁰ We need also to remember Scott’s role as the archetypal *novelist* of the nineteenth century, understanding the novel to be a heterogeneous, multi-vocal, disrupted form. According to David Glenn Kropf, “his identity as a writer is analogous to the novel itself,” and thus “the Author of *Waverley*” is ultimately a collective presence, a Bakhtinian “heteroindividuality.”¹¹ Gérard Genette sees Scott’s canny use of his anonymity as proof of his belief “that a true novelistic vocation is inseparable from a certain proclivity for suddenly disappearing, that is, in short, for clandestineness.”¹² As an author and particularly as a novelist, Scott is multiply defined and intrinsically elusive — two of the key qualities of a pseudonym, which both suggests and resists identity just the linguistic sign always promotes and endlessly defers meaning.

The case of Scott also demonstrates the inevitability of an author’s name — as “reading abhors an authorial vacuum,”¹³ the blank space on the title page of *Waverley*

⁸ Tuchman 7.

⁹ Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* 10.

¹⁰ Altick, *English Common Reader* 274.

¹¹ Kropf 3, 149. His chapter on Scott is entitled “The Novelist: ‘To One Thing Constant Never’.”

¹² Genette, *Paratexts* 43. Kropf also portrays authorship as resonant with a certain element of deception and criminality.

¹³ Lanser, “The Author’s Queer Clothes” 95.

evolves into a functional pseudonym, “the Author of *Waverley*.”¹⁴ Scott did not invent “the Author of —” as a name; that convention had been in play since the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁵ Fellow Scot Tobias Smollett was consistently advertised on title pages as “the Author of *Roderick Random*,” as late as *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), over twenty years after the first, anonymous appearance of *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748). Charlotte Ramsay Lennox was “the Author of *The Female Quixote*” when she published *Henrietta* and *Philander* (both 1758). Although Ann Radcliffe would eventually put her name to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), she began her career as “the authoress of ‘The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne’” (*A Sicilian Romance*; 1790). Jane Austen’s “name” is built of layers of novel titles: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), famously, was “By a Lady,” but *Pride and Prejudice*, two years later, officially christened “the author of *Sense and Sensibility*.”¹⁶ *Emma* (1816), the last novel published in her lifetime, awarded Austen the authorial “etcetera”: “by the Author of *Pride and Prejudice* &c. &c.”¹⁷

Though only one of many “Authors of,” Scott distinguished himself by securing the popular moniker “the Great Unknown,” due to the remarkable interest his anonymity generated, and due also to a burgeoning reviewing culture that could appreciate such a mystery.¹⁸ (The title is itself a “shifter,” and will be handed down to “the Author of *Jane Eyre*” in 1847, who in turn passes the mantle to “the Author of the *Scenes of Clerical Life*” in 1858.) The speculation surrounding the *Waverley*

¹⁴ See Appendix, Figures 1 and 2.

¹⁵ In the 18th century, up to 80% of all novels were published anonymously (cf. Griffin, “Anonymity and Authorship” 880; Raven “The Anonymous Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1830” 143).

¹⁶ As an interesting aside, Austen’s first two authorships reinforce each other, as the second edition of *Sense and Sensibility* was “by the Author of ‘Pride and Prejudice’.”

¹⁷ See Appendix, Figures 3 and 4. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* appeared posthumously with Henry Austen’s “Biographical Notice of the Author” — the 1818 Nelson Classic edition was published anonymously.

¹⁸ By the time *Waverley* hit the shelves, reviewing contemporary literature was an established practice rather than a relative novelty — which, according to Lionel Kelly, only began with the *Monthly Review*, founded May 1749 (*Tobias Smollett: The Critical Heritage*, 4).

Novels allowed Scott to stage his authorship as a performance, and it is to this performance — specifically in his preface-writing — that I want to turn now. Scott's *Waverley* Novel prefaces are playful but vital documents, exposing the multiplicity (even duplicity) of the authorial role and the problem of single origin in a heteroglossic novel form. Most importantly, they engage with the author's status as a kind of character rather than an empirically "real" entity.

The Monastery (1820) is prefaced by an "Introductory Epistle" from Captain Cuthbert Clutterbuck to "the Author of *Waverley*," and the Author's reply. Of the many interesting things happening in this correspondence, I want to latch onto its concern with source and authenticity, the proper function of an author, and the impossibility of controlling a name. Firstly, Clutterbuck's letter, accounting for the origin of the following novel, denies "the Author of *Waverley*" any creative sovereignty over the tale. *The Monastery*, to hear Clutterbuck tell it, was a bundle of papers given to him by a mysterious monk, claiming they were "genuine Memoirs of the sixteenth century." When Clutterbuck observes that the "hand seemed too modern for the date assigned to the manuscript," the monk is forced to qualify: "I did not mean to say the Memoirs were written in the sixteenth century, but only, that they were compiled from authentic materials of that period, but written in the taste and language of the present day."¹⁹ The tale's "genuineness" recedes, as does its unity, since it is split (distinctly) between the monk's narrative and his uncle's. It also lacks a certain faithfulness, as the monk gives the Protestant Clutterbuck license to correct any offending popery — in regards to which "the Author of *Waverley*" admits, "I have made very liberal use of his permission."²⁰ Indeed, Clutterbuck's letter suggests that the Author is only an "editor," a "corrector at once of the press and of the

¹⁹ Scott, *Monastery* 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 30.

language, which [...] was absolutely necessary.” As the manuscript’s authenticity is given with one hand and taken with the other, the role of the editor as corrector rather than creator is likewise undermined. Clutterbuck allows the Author even greater license than the monk gave him, requesting “that you will review, or rather revise and correct the enclosed packet, and prepare it for the press, by such alterations, additions, and curtailments, as you think necessary.”²¹

While ostensibly only a last link in the pre-publication chain, the freedom to change, embellish, and omit howsoever he sees fit allows “the Author of *Waverley*” to transcend the “secondary” status of editor. He is so fully “authorized” in terms of the manuscript, in fact, that he refuses any collaborative credit. Clutterbuck’s suggestion — “I should be well contented to march in the front with you — that is, to put my name with your’s on the title-page”²² — provokes a stern response, the Author flatly refusing to “gratify [his] literary ambition”:

As I give you no title to employ or use the firm of the copartnery we are about to form, I will announce my property in my title-page, and put my own buist on my own cattle, which the attorney tells me will be a crime to counterfeit, as much as it would to imitate the autograph of any other empiric — amounting, as advertisements upon little vials assure us, to nothing short of felony.²³

It is notable that in this exchange, “the Author of *Waverley*,” originally used in *absence* of a name, is a name *de facto* for Clutterbuck (“to put my name with your’s”) and *de jure* for the Author — a “buist” or symbol with all the legal rights of “the autograph of any other empiric.” To insist on legality is to strive for control, when, in fact, the misuse of names has been embedded in the novel from its modern beginnings in the early seventeenth century. The Author himself cites Juan Avellaneda’s appropriation of Cervantes’ “Cid Hamet Benengeli” for an unauthorized second part

²¹ Ibid. 22-23.

²² Ibid. 23.

²³ Ibid. 29.

of *Don Quixote* — “if you have Jackoo in your hand, you can make him bite me,” he summarizes, “if I have Jackoo in my hand, I can make him bite you.”²⁴

Keeping an unruly “Jackoo” in hand, however, was no easy task — as was amply demonstrated by the English novel in the century leading up to Scott. Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), for instance, spawned two works by Fielding — “An Apology for the life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews: In which, the many notorious falsehoods and misrepresentations of a book called *Pamela*, are exposed and refuted”²⁵ and “The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams”²⁶ — as well as other borrowings such as “Pamela’s conduct in high life. Published from her original papers. To which are prefix’d, several curious letters written to the Editor on the subject” and “Anti-Pamela: or, Feign’d Innocence detected; in a series of Syrena’s adventures, etc.” A decade after *Pamela*, Fielding finds himself in his own war of names: satirized as “Mr. Spondy” in Smollett’s *Peregrine Pickle*, he responds under the pseudonym “Alexander Drawcansir” in the *Covent Garden Journal* of January 1752; a week later Smollett appropriates Drawcansir to author a pamphlet of his own, using a character called “Habbakkuk Hilding” as a stand-in for Fielding.²⁷

In his refusal to share space on the title page of *The Monastery*, “the Author of *Waverley*” suggests that it is the fictionality of a Jackoo that makes him so unruly. Despite the “careful concealment of [his] origin,” the Author knows Clutterbuck to be a citizen of “*terra incognita*,” “the fairy-land of delusive fiction”: “You belong, sir, to

²⁴ Ibid. 28-29.

²⁵ Fielding plays on “authenticity” in several ways before we are through reading the full title of *Shamela*: “The whole being exact copies of authentick papers delivered to the editor,” with the declared author a “Mr. Conny Keyber,” is itself a play on a “real” contemporary autobiography, *An Apology for the life of Mr. Colley Cibber* (cf. R.F. Brissenden, introduction to the 1977 Penguin edition of *Joseph Andrews*).

²⁶ *Joseph Andrews*, notably, claims to be “Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of *Don Quixote*.”

²⁷ See Tobias Smollett: *The Critical Heritage* 10ff., 80-84.

the Editors of the land of Utopia,” he writes, classing him with “Ossian” and others who “are inclined to pass themselves as denizens of the land of reality.”²⁸

Nonetheless, the *Waverley* Novel prefaces ultimately collapse rather than uphold a distinction between a “fictional” Clutterbuck and a “real” Author. In the “Introductory Epistles” to *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *Pevekil of the Peak* (both 1822), the Author becomes an individual sought by the hapless Cpt. Clutterbuck and Rev. Dr.

Dryasdust. The narrative constructed in these letters demonstrates the novelist’s particular recognition that an author *is* a character, a kind of fictional being allied with rather than juxtaposed to the inhabitants of his narrative.²⁹

The *Nigel* and *Pevekil* prefaces suggest that the search for the man behind the pseudonymous mask will reveal only an unsubstantial “eidolon,” as Clutterbuck discovers “the person, or perhaps I should rather say the eidolon, or representative vision, of the AUTHOR OF *WAVERLEY!*”³⁰ The Captain and the good Doctor meet their “great progenitor” in sites of obscurity (a “labyrinth of small dark rooms or crypts”) and ambiguity (in a “state betwixt sleeping and waking”).³¹ While the prefaces are playful in the framing of these encounters, in actuality the reader *does* meet the author in such uncertain situations. He inhabits title pages, dedications, prefaces, and other paratexts — “zone[s] not only of transition but also of *transaction*,” a “heterogeneous group of practices and discourses of all kinds.”³²

It is also worth noting that upon Clutterbuck’s first sighting (which is the *Waverley* Novel reader’s as well), the Author is engaged in an iterative moment: he is

²⁸ Scott *Prefaces* 25-27.

²⁹ cf. Kropf on novelist-as-character (131-32). He also argues that Scott was acutely aware of the split between “the Writer of *Waverley*” (the present, embodied person who writes) and “the Author of *Waverley*,” “the ghostly father of what came to be a whole series of novels: a floating, empty space” which signified slightly differently for each work: “In other words, he was a writer and several authors.” (131-33)

³⁰ Scott *Prefaces* 42.

³¹ *Ibid.* 42, 60.

³² Genette 2, emphasis original.

reading “a blotted *revise*,” which Scott’s footnote hastens to add is a “second proof-sheet.”³³ Authorship is deeply tied to replication — a novel goes through at least two round of “revision” before it ever reaches the public — and yet nineteenth-century fiction relies on the opposing notion, that the text arrives from its source essentially unadulterated. Thus we have the Author’s protestation that he is only a “postman who leaves a packet at the door of an individual.”³⁴ Moreover, the Romantic tradition had a particular interest in “inspiration” as a supernatural or quasi-divine effect; consider the Author’s description of “a demon who seats himself on the feather of my pen when I begin to write,” and how “on such occasions I think I am bewitched.”³⁵ This thesis intends to address how such problems of mediation are rehearsed in the novels of our Victorian “Great Unknowns.” Charlotte Brontë’s autobiographical fiction displays the tension between writing under an “influence,” and the practicalities of editing a life in order to create narrative. Likewise, the mediating figure in George Eliot’s realism, a supposedly objective third-person narrator, is revealed to be an irregular, ghostly figure.³⁶

Another concern surrounding “the Author of *Waverley*” which will resonate in his Victorian progeny is the question of gender. Though the figure he meets is “veiled and wimpled,” Clutterbuck swears that his “*magne parens*” is in fact a father and not a mother — in contravention of “very ingenious reasons, and indeed something like

³³ Scott *Prefaces* 42. Iterability is the key component of performativity, and Scott was indeed concerned with the author’s name as a performance and “mask.” For instance, in his first preface as an “outed” author (*Chronicles of the Canongate*, 1827) he opens with a discussion of the early Italian stage clown *arlecchino*, who once took off his mask and was never again able to play his part: “it seems the mask was essential to the performance of the character,” he writes, and “[p]erhaps the Author of *Waverley* is now about to incur a risk of the same kind” (70-71).

³⁴ *Ibid.* 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 49.

³⁶ In the *Pevevil* preface, Dryasdust remarks how the following novel is full of anachronism and other disruptions: “The old gentleman hath broken all bounds: abiit, evasit, erupit [he went off, he went forth, he broke out].” (59-60) Chapter 6 of this thesis explores GE’s realist fiction as a project of innovation and boundary-crossing (going forth and breaking out).

positive evidence” offered elsewhere.³⁷ The practices by which reviewers found textual “evidence” for an unknown author’s gender is a joke in Scott; when married to Victorian ideology and its infamous critical double-standard, however, it produces crisis for “Curren Bell” and “George Eliot.” Nonetheless, the fundamental problem is the same: readers desire to “know” an author, but their very attempts to interpret his identity expose his ultimate unknowability.

Although the title page of *Ivanhoe* advertises “By the Author of *Waverley*, Etc.,” the book begins with a “Dedicatory Epistle to the Rev. Dr. Dryasdust, F.A.S.,” bearing the exaggerated signature “LAURENCE TEMPLETON. / Toppingwold, near Egremont, / Cumberland, Nov. 17, 1817.”³⁸ The devil is in the details — specifics of place and time authenticate the signature, supposedly grounding it in a verifiable “real” moment. While it is typically the privilege of the author to dedicate his work,³⁹ the link between “the Author of *Waverley*” and the name “Laurence Templeton” remains tenuous. The subject of the dedication itself threatens rather than strengthens its writer’s claim to the authorship of the novel which follows — “Templeton” attributes the origins of *Ivanhoe* to a “singular Anglo-Norman MS.,” currently in the possession of “Sir Arthur Wardour,” himself a character in *The Antiquary*, an earlier *Waverley* Novel.⁴⁰ He also apologizes for his “presumption in placing the venerable name of Dr. Jonas Dryasdust at the head of a publication which the more grave antiquary will perhaps class with the idle novels and romances of the day.”⁴¹ Thus we have at least three possible names with a claim to a degree of authorship: “Laurence Templeton” offers his signature; “Arthur Wardour” gives his name to the “original”

³⁷ Scott *Prefaces* 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 39.

³⁹ Consider the 1st ed. of *Frankenstein*, “TO WILLIAM GODWIN, / Author of *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams*, &c. / These Volumes are respectfully inscribed by / THE AUTHOR,” or the 2nd ed. of *JE*: “To / W.M. THACKERAY, Esq., / This Work / is respectfully inscribed / by / THE AUTHOR.”

⁴⁰ Scott *Prefaces* 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 29.

manuscript, which Templeton has promised to “designate [...] by some emphatic mode of printing, as *The Wardour Manuscript*”;⁴² “Jonas Dryasdust” has the privileged position “at the head of the publication.” The *Ivanhoe* preface demonstrates that an authorial signature, regardless of its specificity of name, place, and time, is no guarantee of authorial identity. We might recall such a lesson when faced with another signature, on *Chronicles of the Canongate* — the first appearance in the text of “WALTER SCOTT. / ABBOTSFORD, October 1, 1827.”⁴³

This signature ended a thirteen-year deferral, which began with a blank space on the title page of *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*. Like the promiscuity of a name such as Cid Hamet Benengeli, Pamela Andrews, or Alexander Drawcansir, the deferral of an author’s name is not without precedent in the history of the novel.⁴⁴ For instance, Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) seems to be deliberately toying with the reader, repeatedly promising but withholding the author’s name. The prefatory material includes an inscription “To — —” (latterly identified as Burney’s father), invoking “Oh, Author of my being!”; an address “To the Authors of the Monthly and Critical Reviews,” with the drawn-out signature “I have the honour to be, / gentlemen, / Your most obedient / Humble servant, / *** *****”; and finally an unsigned preface.⁴⁵ The absence of a specific authorial identity in *Evelina* plays into the epistolary convention, reserving pride of place for the primary letter-writer, *Evelina* herself.

Throughout the eighteenth century, novels encouraged this conflation of author and character with the claim “Written by Him/Herself.” Daniel Defoe, often

⁴² Ibid. 38, emphasis and boldface original.

⁴³ Ibid. 80.

⁴⁴ The following information on 18th-century title pages comes from COPAC bibliographic records as well as the facsimiles in Penguin Classics (and sometimes Oxford World Classics) editions of the novels.

⁴⁵ According to Samuel Choi, “[e]ach of the book’s abundant introductory apparatuses [...] seems designed to play with the reader’s expectation of finding an author—each acting like a drumroll, each calling out ‘Oh author of my being!’ But in each case Burney refuses to reveal her name.” He connects the Author’s refusal to sign her “real” name to *Evelina*’s signatures (or lack thereof) — they “are not simply perfunctory acts randomly distributed throughout the series of letters, but are inflection points at which *Evelina* attempts to deflect deleterious opinions, positions, or conditions.” (“Signing *Evelina*” 259)

considered the first practitioner of the modern English novel, offers *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*, which are “Written by Himself” (1719) and *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c.*, likewise “Written from her own Memorandums” (1722). Jonathan Swift, typically, exaggerates the supposed reality of the author-character: the *Travels into several Remote Nations of the World in Four Parts by Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships* (1726) offers a portrait of Gulliver as a plate facing the title page, and is prefixed by letters between Gulliver and his publisher Richard Sympson.⁴⁶ Laurence Sterne, having given the world *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* in the 1760s, borrows his own character “Mr. Yorick” to serve as author for *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The fictional status of the claim “Written by Him/Herself” is never far from the surface, as, for instance, we see in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) — “Supposed to be written by himself” but including an “Advertisement” signed by Oliver Goldsmith. Similarly, *Camilla* proposes to be merely “by the Author of *Evelina, Cecilia, etc.*,” but the dedication offers the signature “F. d’Arbly, Brookham, June 28, 1796.”

It would seem that Scott’s forerunners have little investment in the “reality” or stability of the name advertised on a title page, which was frequently a kind of pseudonym (“Author of”) or a continuation of fiction by other means (“by Mr. Yorick,” “Written by Himself”). In fact, even the apparently innocuous claim “By” is problematized, as the eighteenth-century novel stages a debate between the functions of author and editor or translator. The novel’s attempt to convey authenticity (“what you are about to read is not invention, but a ‘real’ story”) paradoxically requires

⁴⁶ See Appendix, Figure 5. Swift’s other works include examples of the author’s name as a deliberately playful element: his 1720 “Miscellaneous Works, Comical and Diverting” has a second part, advertised as “by the supposed author of the first part”, i.e. “T.R.D.J.S.D.O.P.I.I.” — The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick’s in Ireland; in 1722 “The benefit of farting explain’d” is “Wrote in Spanish, by Don Fartinando Puff-indorst” and “Translated into English by Obadiah Fizzle, etc.”

removal — layers of mediation — in order to accomplish its reality-effect. Thus Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) is "Translated by William Marshal, Gent. from the original Italian of Onuphrio Murolo, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto." Richardson's *Pamela* claims to be a "Series of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel, to her Parents," and includes a preface signed by "the Editor." This Editor evolves into a pseudonym in exactly the same way as Austen's "By a Lady" becomes "the Author of *Pride and Prejudice*, etc.": *Clarissa* (1747) is "Published by the Editor of *Pamela*," and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) is attributed to "the Editor of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*."⁴⁷

Novelists leading up to the nineteenth century did not merely pay lip service to the claim of "editor," as their works were often composed by various hands and in various styles. The novel is a voracious art form, incorporating multiple authors and multiple genres between its covers. The first edition of *Pamela*, for instance, begins with two "real" letters to the Editor, from "J.B.D.F." (Jean Baptiste de Freval, a French translator) and "Your affectionate Friend, &c." (probably Rev. William Webster); the second edition adds more letters and a poem, "VERSES, sent to the Bookseller, for the Unknown Author of the beautiful new Piece call'd *PAMELA*," likely the work of Aaron Hill. Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* includes the "Memoirs of a lady of quality," a full chapter written by Lady Frances Anne Vane. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* and *Mysteries of Udolpho* wear their heterogeneity on their sleeves, as the full title of each includes "Interspersed with some pieces of poetry." In 1753 Charlotte Lennox publishes "Shakespear illustrated: or the novels and histories, on which the plays of Shakespear are founded: collected and translated from the original authors. With critical remarks." The title page of this work implicitly

⁴⁷ The coincidence of female character with book title offers an intriguing nuance — Richardson seems to be "editing" not merely texts, but the young women themselves. We will return to an editor's control of text, reputation, and *person* in the final chapter of this thesis.

connects Editor (a collector, translator, and critic) with Author, announcing that it is “by the Author of *The Female Quixote*.”

What I hope to have suggested in touring through the productions of the preceding generation is that Walter Scott’s performance of authorship in his prefaces — the letters from Clutterbuck, Dryasdust, and Templeton, their narratives of manuscripts existing independently of “the Author of *Waverley*” — are informed by a long-standing tradition of heterogeneity. They continue, furthermore, an ongoing debate about the uncertain nature of a novelist: creator, editor, and character, but ultimately “eidolon” and “Great Unknown.”

The Victorians: Selfhood, Society, and Publication

Turning, then, to the generation of novelists who followed Scott — with such a pedigree, it is unsurprising that pseudonymity proliferated. Even major Victorian authors who have survived for posterity under their legal names played with their authorial signatures: consider Dickens’ “Boz,” or Thackeray’s “George Fitzboodle” and “Michael Angelo Titmarsh” (as well as his anonymous *Henry Esmond*), or Trollope’s (failed) experiment in anonymous publication in *Blackwood’s*, when he sought to assure himself that his success was not due to a famous name alone.⁴⁸

Elizabeth Gaskell is especially interesting, perhaps because her varied pseudonymous history generally goes unremarked. Initially she wrote as “Cotton Mather Mills”; she left a blank in place of the author’s name on the title pages of *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*; *North and South* was proclaimed to be by the multi-layered “Author of ‘Mary Barton’, ‘Ruth,’ ‘Cranford’, &c.”; and her eventual onymity was divided between “Mrs. Gaskell” (*Wives and Daughters*, *Sylvia’s Lovers*) and “E.C. Gaskell” (*The Life*

⁴⁸ Griffin, “Anonymity and Authorship” 870.

of *Charlotte Brontë*) — a distinction to which we will return at the end of this chapter.⁴⁹

While I do not want to lose sight of the uncertainty that has always been generated by the novel as an art form, it would be naïve not to consider how circumstances of the Victorian period inflect the Victorian practice of pseudonymity. The mid- and later nineteenth century in Britain was hardly lacking in the kind of conditions which would produce complicated attitudes towards identity and authorship. To select only a few items from a familiar list — the changes wrought upon the cultural and geographical landscapes by industrialization, urbanization, and Empire; social concerns raised by Chartist and women's suffrage movements; perhaps most importantly the explosion in communication (particularly the advent of mass literacy and mass media)⁵⁰ — out of such a *milieu* emerges a certain kind of selfhood and a certain kind of publishing climate conducive to pseudonymity.

To begin with selfhood: the problem with the myth of a pseudonym as a kind of *thing*, a tool or a shield disguising and protecting the private self from the public market, is that it presupposes a unified private self which is being protected. The Victorian notion of that self,⁵¹ however, is neither static nor unified. “As the age understood it,” writes Nina Auerbach, using the example of Samuel Smiles and the self-made man, “character is not the given self but the self as it makes itself.”⁵² The recognition of selfhood as process — an activity (“making”) and not a completed action (“made”) — is evident within the first year of Victoria's reign. In 1838-39, J.F.

⁴⁹ See Appendix, Figures 6-8.

⁵⁰ cf. Altick on how the number of books and periodicals went from the ten-thousands to the millions during the 1800s (*Writers, Readers, and Occasions* 95), and Nigel Cross on the fifteen-fold rise in writers (2-3).

⁵¹ By “self” here I mean, as throughout this thesis, the identity of a subject, dictated and recognized by an individual consciousness. In Victorian discourse (and in discourse *on* Victorian selfhood) it may also be referred to as “character,” “personality,” or “ego.”

⁵² Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 193.

Ferrier published the seven-part *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Consciousness* in *Blackwood's Magazine*, in which he makes claims such as: “no man is born ‘I,’” but “*after a time and after a certain process*, becomes ‘I’”; “the *ego* is never passive. Its being is pure act. To hold I passive is to hold it annihilated”; and “[t]he perfect truth is, that man *acts I* before he *is I*, that is to say, he acts before he truly is — his act precedes and realizes his being.”⁵³

The process that is Victorian selfhood is not passively plastic⁵⁴ but is in fact an active performance — identity is produced out of dissimulation. Masks thus play an important role not only in the pseudonymous disguise for a self, but in the very construction of that self. The nature of acting and the anxiety of a life lived in the *theatrum mundi* — “tear away the mask and what was there? — another mask, or nothing at all?” — came to the forefront with Hume’s suggestion of the individual as an “unstable heap of impressions,”⁵⁵ an uncomfortable recognition of identity as essentially theatrical which continued into the Victorian period. “[T]he passions are real madmen,” writes Ferrier, “and consciousness is their only keeper; but man’s born amiabilities are but painted masks, which (if consciousness has never occupied its post) are liable to be torn away from the face of his natural corruption [...]”⁵⁶ Indeed, Sally Shuttleworth’s reading of Victorian psychology relies on masking and disguise:

True selfhood is not the naked display of the insane, but rather the artful concealment and dissimulation of the social creature. Although the insane reveal in more vivid outline the real characteristics of man, to become a social being the individual must learn to overlay and disguise these impulses. Indeed, the condition of selfhood is

⁵³ Part IV, 1838:238; *ibid.* 240; Part V, 1838:549-50; all emphases original. I have selected Ferrier particularly because of *Blackwood's* importance to CB and GE — GE chose *Blackwood's* as her publisher for all but *Romola*, while in 1838 the young CB was an avid reader of *Maga*, “the most able periodical there is” (quoted in Barker 149).

⁵⁴ cf. Mrs. Sandford (1839) on the character of woman: “She must, in a certain degree, be plastic herself, if she would mould others” (7). Sandford and other conduct writers will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁵⁵ Porter, *Rewriting the Self* 9.

⁵⁶ Ferrier VII, 1839:423.

dependent on having something to conceal: it is the very *disjunction* between inner and outer form which creates the self.⁵⁷

Note that Ferrier and Shuttleworth both identify in selfhood-as-mask the desire for *control*. We will return to the same myth of control at work in the image of pseudonym-as-mask — the attempt to neutralize the conflicts inherent in both selfhood and authorship forces an acknowledgement of those fractures as much as it contains them. “Doubleness and discontinuity enable greater consciousness,” Alexander Welsh observes, adding, crucially, “once the connections have been made.”⁵⁸ Disunity is productive rather than disruptive, but only as part of a *process* of acknowledgement and (attempted) reconciliation. In this sense, Welsh sees Victorian literature as a kind of forerunner to psychoanalysis, in its interest in consciousness as a site of tension and concealment: “Modern consciousness [...] assumes a fairly constant reference to a present and a past identity, a kind of duplicity even [...]”⁵⁹

Other critics recognize Victorian selfhood as fraught with duplicity and contradiction, particularly in the navigation of opposing public (social) and private (personal) concerns. For instance, John Kucich believes that the infamous “Victorian repression produced a self that was actually more responsive libidinally, more self-sufficient, and — oddly enough — more antisocial than we have yet understood.”⁶⁰ Regenia Gagnier finds that “the mind or personality that was traditionally so unique and individual — what the middle classes called ‘genius’ — was dependent upon communication with others, was in fact the most shared aspect of ‘individual’ identity.”⁶¹ If, as Kevin Murray suggests, “full” identity requires both social and

⁵⁷ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* 38, emphasis original. She goes on to discuss phrenology as a project fueled by “the idea of fiercely competing energies,” which “grounded man’s sense of identity in the experience of internal division” (62).

⁵⁸ Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* 257.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 151.

⁶⁰ Kucich, *Repression in Victorian Fiction* 3.

⁶¹ Gagnier, *Subjectivities* 83.

personal identities,⁶² then, paradoxically, fullness is not a function of wholeness or unity but of division and conflict.

The negotiation of these contradicting identities had particular resonance for the Victorian author, as he found himself expected to be not only a writer, but a public persona. Nina Auerbach notes a growing interest in character, evidenced by the opening of institutions such as Madame Tussaud's (1834) and the National Portrait Gallery (1856), which I read alongside a rise in celebrity.⁶³ One effect of the advent of literary celebrity is a highly visible male author at odds with his "invisible" female counterpart. Thus, while William Thackeray might keep busy on lecture tours and Charles Dickens give hugely popular readings and be "mobbed by adoring fans as he walked the streets of London,"⁶⁴ the problematic "Mrs. Lewes" typically held court at the Priory rather than venturing into the public sphere. Meanwhile, of the reclusive Yorkshire parson's daughters, we have an "official portrait" of Charlotte Brontë because she alone of the three was willing to come forward and be a "personage."⁶⁵

Perhaps counterintuitively, the relative invisibility of a woman writer meant that she was more frequently "read into" her writing — that is, her selfhood was understood to be completed by, and located in, the piece of art produced. Joanne Shattock, for instance, cites Poe's comment on Elizabeth Barrett Browning — "a woman and her book are identical" — in order to discuss the "easy association of the life and the work, or more accurately, a refusal to separate them," which characterized how nineteenth-century women authors read each other. In lieu of a face-to-face

⁶² Murray, "The Construction of Identity in the Narratives of Romance and Comedy" 176-205.

⁶³ Auerbach 195-96. She proposes that "celebrity" in the 19th century was centered on the creation (e.g., Dickens' cast of memorable characters) whereas the 20th-century star is the creator (e.g., Marilyn Monroe) (226). I am suspicious of this distinction, and find the pseudonymous "Marilyn Monroe" a particularly (in)felicitous example.

⁶⁴ Tuchman 106.

⁶⁵ Bock, "Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser's Magazine*" 262. I am actually wary of this distinction, since CB's portrait was only commissioned after EB and AB were dead.

community, “reading one another’s books made them feel that they knew the authors. It was an alternative to a female literary society.”⁶⁶ Certainly, Brontë’s “knowing” of George Henry Lewes seems to be based on his novel rather than his correspondence with “Currer Bell”: “You were a stranger to me. I did not particularly respect you,” she writes in November 1847, concluding that after reading *Ranthorpe*, “Now I am informed on these points.”⁶⁷ While the tendency to identify an author’s self with her book may be a strategy more often applied by female readers, the examples of Poe reading/knowing Barrett Browning and Brontë reading/knowing Lewes demonstrate that the procedure can be used by a man, and used on a man’s writing. The *possibility* of interpreting personality through text is always present, and thus its concerns and complications are likewise always present. As argued at various points throughout this thesis, the Victorian authorial identity — masculine or feminine — is subject to the process of textual interpretation. We might perhaps consider it a haecceity squared, an in-progress self expressed through the in-progress mechanism of (explicitly fictional) language, constantly and variously read and re-read.

There is another narrative episode in nineteenth-century literature that I would like to rescue from an exclusively gendered interpretation. One of the hallmarks of the Victorian period is the birth — or perhaps the coming-of-age — of the professional author, whose vocation rose from “disreputable” and “degradingly female”⁶⁸ to “respectable as the law, medicine, or the civil service” by the time of Dickens’ death in 1870.⁶⁹ Typically this shift is read as a battle between genders: after the Enlightenment and its “Age of Reason,” the Romantic “Men of Feeling,” finding themselves to be

⁶⁶ Shattock, “Jane Austen and George Eliot: Afterlives and Letters” 7.

⁶⁷ CB Letters II.156 (22 Nov 47), emphasis original.

⁶⁸ cf. Tuchman 46; Sonia Hofkosh notes that novel-writing was “degradingly female” to both men *and* women (“The Writers’ Ravishment: Women and the Romantic Author,” Mellor, ed. 98).

⁶⁹ Sutherland 23. He points to Dickens rather than Scott as the key figure in the novelist’s professional respectability because, unlike Scott, Dickens died a rich man with an estate worth £93,000, proving definitively that authorship was not a “beggarly profession.” (22-23)

contradictions in terms, sought to (re)colonize literature as a masculine domain.⁷⁰ As Gaye Tuchman shows, by about 1840 they began to “edge women out”: “when men recognized novel writing as an important activity, they began to invade the field and to identify the high-culture novel as their own preserve.”⁷¹

While I agree that gender ideology is a crucial element in the evolution of fiction-writing as a respectable career, I do not want to neglect the problem of “profession” itself. Professionalism is not a static condition — not merely a vocation or occupation, which can be fulfilled, but a constant process of organization and control.⁷² A writer does not achieve the rank of professional author, but must always enact his professionalism. As N. N. Feltes notes in *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*, Victorian fiction-writing was subject to capitalist drives, moving from petty-commodity production (a “commodity-*book*”) to “a capitalist literary mode of production, the ‘commodity-*text*’.” As a consequence of this entrenchment of capitalism, even an author needed to present himself to a publisher as any other capitalist worker (in Marx’s words, “the owner of nothing but his labour-power”); he could not rest on his laurels but must be “skilled and militant” in performing his profession.⁷³ The literary practitioner, by his Romantic inheritance, should be “superior to the capitalist economy,” but is “hopelessly embroiled within it.”⁷⁴

Authorial identity is, therefore, subject to the alienation of capitalist production — a condition exacerbated by the “alienation of the self that Plato associated with writing,” which “widened in the nineteenth century, as literacy and

⁷⁰ Alan Richardson, “Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine,” in Mellor, ed. 13-15.

⁷¹ Tuchman 181. The male writers “edged women out” in three stages: by “invading,” “redefining,” then “institutionalizing” fiction-writing. See also Gagnier on Dickens’ position on the frontlines, esp. *David Copperfield* and the conflation of domesticity and authorship in “Household”/“Words” (33).

⁷² Feltes 42-44.

⁷³ Ibid. xi, 6; emphasis original.

⁷⁴ Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 106.

publication spread rapidly in a culture still deeply committed to individual being.”⁷⁵

To the estrangement of writing itself we can add the requisite abstraction of published authorship, the turning of oneself into one’s signature, in the form of trademark and advertisement. This was of particular note during the early years of Victoria’s reign; as Victor Bonham-Carter notes in his *Authors by Profession*, the class of newly respectable, newly influential authors sought to make their work “a recognised form of employment,” agitating (successfully) to have the landmark 1710 “Act of Anne” replaced by the more detailed 1842 Copyright Act.⁷⁶ We can of course read in these efforts to control an admission that control was under serious threat: the literary trade was plagued by piracy (especially in international “gaps,” such as with America) and Victorian authors were not particularly effective as a group, without a successful unionizing effort until the Society of Authors, in 1884.⁷⁷

While copyright laws made a name into a form of (economic) protection for authors, the choice *not* to offer a name was a form of (legal) protection: by holding the printer or publisher, rather than the author, liable in the courts, British law made anonymity “an officially tolerated form of sanctuary.”⁷⁸ I suggest that the withholding of an author’s real name, either through anonymity or pseudonymity, was not only a ploy for legal sanctuary, but offered protection from a Victorian critical field that was diverse, extensive, and predominantly faceless. By mid-century, periodicals had proliferated to perhaps as many as 50,000⁷⁹ — and the great majority of literary reviews

⁷⁵ Welsh 44. Perhaps this doubly-estranged condition explains a paradox in the very form of most novelists’ productions: the “triple-decker” format, which Sutherland calls “[o]verlong, overpriced and almost from the first overdue for extinction.” Though “[m]uch exaggerated reports of its death were recurrent throughout the period,” it was nonetheless one of the “imperial pillars,” “not only stable in itself but a source of general stability.” (12-13)

⁷⁶ Bonham-Carter 45.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 75ff., 119ff.

⁷⁸ Griffin, *The Faces of Anonymity* 5. The 1637 Star Chamber Decree required the author’s name on title page, but this was lifted with the 1662 Licensing Act; after 1695 the printer/publisher was liable for any legal action. See also “Anonymity and Authorship” 887-88.

⁷⁹ Garrigan, Foreword: “Decorum, Scandal, and the Press” 5.

were unsigned, or signed with false names. To give only a few noteworthy examples of the latter: “Christopher North” and his merry men of the *Noctes Ambrosianae* had left *Blackwoods Magazine* a considerable pseudonymous legacy; William Maginn and then Francis Mahony edited *Fraser’s* under cover of “Oliver Yorke”; while at the *Westminster Review*, when George Henry Lewes was indisposed, his stand-in Marian Evans continued using his “Vivian.” Unsigned reviewing, on the other hand, allowed for a slightly different kind of disguise. It allowed (even encouraged) the individual critic to speak out from behind the mask of an authoritative “we,” the lack of a specific signature effectively making him the voice of a general editorial body called *The Critic*, *The Leader*, *The Athenaeum*, or some other similarly august name.

Critical anonymity may have been customary, but it was by no means without its own anxieties. According to John Galt, in a diatribe published (onymously) in *Fraser’s* in 1835, “as the law stands at present, the ruffian that attempts to stab character in the dark, is permitted to skulk off from his crime.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, critics who in a “mean and cowardly spirit” attack from under cover, “furnish their victims with a motive to sequester themselves from the eye of the public, by the very nature of the castigations they inflict.”⁸¹ Victorian authors and Victorian critics are trapped in a vicious cycle of facelessness: masked reviewing promotes masked publication, an unknown authorial identity allows critics greater license in their assaults (attacks cannot be “personal” if there is no person to receive them), which in turn encourages writers to protect themselves with *noms de guerre*.⁸²

⁸⁰ Galt, “Anonymous Publication” 549.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 550.

⁸² Galt’s article was almost surely seen by the Brontë children, avid readers of *Fraser’s*, three of whom would indeed come to “sequester themselves from the eye of the public,” using pseudonyms to protect themselves from “castigations” (CB in the Bio Notice: “we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality”).

On the subject of a novel's faceless reception, it is also worth noting the diverse, extensive, and invisible quality of a Victorian readership-at-large. Although Altick argues in *The English Common Reader* that the notion of reading as a "universal" activity (available to anyone at nearly any time) is a myth, he maintains elsewhere that "it is inaccurate to refer to the 'reading public' — singular — in any century after the fifteenth."⁸³ That is, while we cannot presume that everyone was a reader, it is nearly impossible to grasp precisely *who* the readers were; we must recognize, at the very least, that the majority of the reading public (a population of five or six million by the 1850s) was not the buying public (one million at the most).⁸⁴ The varied, shifting Victorian reading market is reflected in the publishing industry's scramble to modify its products — acquiescing to demands of lending libraries (Mudie's perhaps most famously) and experimenting with serial formats and cheap editions.

Sharon Marcus, considering advertising and abstraction in "The Profession of the Author," suggests that imperialism, advances in transport, communication, and mass media, all conspired to "create an abstract space, based on imagined proximity rather than face-to-face contact,"⁸⁵ to which I would add the namelessness of critical practice and the facelessness of the reading audience. At odds with this alienation and distancing, however, is what John Sutherland calls "the claustrophobic literary 'world' of London," an excessively face-to-face situation "where critics, authors, publishers and readers were thrown promiscuously together."⁸⁶ It is the paradoxical connection between authorship as abstracted textual production and authorship as an intimate, even embodied relationship — a kind of parental *re*-production — that is explored in the remainder of this chapter.

⁸³ Altick, *English Common Reader* 90-94; *Writers, Readers, and Occasions* 152.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 143-45.

⁸⁵ Marcus 207.

⁸⁶ Sutherland 69.

Mothers and Monsters: Women and Authorship

Throughout *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, Sutherland expresses an interest in the London publishing world as a site of parental and even marital concerns — the “promiscuous” situation could actually result in a happy, faithful marriage, as in the case of Brontë, who “[o]f all the women novelists [...] was the most loyal, never taking her novels elsewhere than to Smith, Elder.”⁸⁷ From this union of author and publisher comes literary offspring: “Some of fiction’s triumphs were actually begotten by publishers rather than authors.”⁸⁸ It might be more accurate to say “begotten upon authors by their publishers,” and certainly Sutherland’s metaphor of women authors defending their (pro)creative virtue trends in such directions: “These ladies prohibited publishers from entering the privacy of their writing processes as they might have banned a man from their boudoir. Indeed their imagery when describing literary creation often suggests sexual mysteries.”⁸⁹

Textual production, however, resists being mapped onto the comparatively straightforward process of biological *re*-production. This portrait of the Victorian publishing world as a happy family begins to fracture when we consider a slightly different version of parenthood: “I cackle over my hatched chick,” Lewes writes to John Blackwood, “and so may you.” Here the offspring of agent and publisher is not the author’s *Scenes of Clerical Life*, but the author herself, “that sensitive doubting fellow” George Eliot.⁹⁰ Our literary family tree has taken a turn for the incestuous — the

⁸⁷ Ibid. 84.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 1. He notes also that a bad father such as Newby “could bring a novel as great as *Wuthering Heights* to stillbirth.”

⁸⁹ Ibid. 84.

⁹⁰ GE Letters II.295 (11 Feb 57). JB agrees, but, ever decorous, he keeps it a non-biological relationship: “You have much reason to be proud of your Literary Godchild George Eliot” (II.299). GHL is (in)famous for nurturing GE in a protective “greenhouse” — see, for instance, Bodenheimer on his roles as both mother/nurse and sexual/creative liberator (86).

publisher begets both the author and the works of her “body” (the novels produced by her hand). The originator (“parent”) of a text is not only a confused role, but a somewhat deviant one. While “the Author of *Waverley*” admonishes the uppity Clutterbuck in the traditional tone of a *paterfamilias* — “your very all is at my disposal. I can at pleasure cut off your annuity, strike your name from the half-pay establishment, nay actually put you to death, without being answerable to any one” — he also proposes a very *non*-traditional form of parentage: “I know you as well as the mother who did *not* bear you [...]. You are not born of woman, unless, indeed, in that figurative sense, in which the celebrated Maria Edgeworth may be termed mother of the finest family in England.”⁹¹ Neither version of the family relations that produced Clutterbuck is conventionally acceptable — either he is subject to a gender-reversed Virgin Birth, or his mother was a rather promiscuous Maria Edgeworth, responsible for a diverse (if “fine”) collection of children spanning across England (or, perhaps, “English”).

It is such indications of aberrant behavior in the maternal role of the author that I want to explore. For instance, after *The Professor* has been rejected for publication a ninth time, Brontë writes to Smith, Elder of her “martyrised MS.”: “Few, I flatter myself, have earned an equal distinction, and of course my feelings towards it can only be paralleled by those of a doting parent towards an idiot child.” She declares, furthermore, to have “put him by and locked him up, not indeed in my desk, where I could not tolerate the monotony of his demure Quaker countenance, but in a cupboard by himself.”⁹² This unsettling view of the author/parent — doting on the child one moment, locking that child in a cupboard the next — is at odds with what Victorian

⁹¹ Scott Prefaces 27, 29; emphasis original.

⁹² CB to GS (5 Feb 51) CB Letters III.206-07.

ideology expected of a woman's "natural" maternal inclinations: as is often discussed, the "anxiety of authorship" expresses itself in an anxiety of motherhood.⁹³

At various points this thesis will deal with some of the many (well rehearsed) issues of female authorship and abnormality. Like the condition of Victorian selfhood generally, the woman writer's relation to gender ideologies is riddled with paradox and contradiction, and is subject to frequent critical revision. Françoise Basch, in *Relative Creatures*, takes as her starting point the supposition that the Victorian woman "can only justify her presence on earth by dedicating herself to others."⁹⁴ A comparable view of the situation leads Sidonie Smith to posit that woman has a different kind of "essential" selfhood from the universal human (male) version: "There are no masks to uncover because paradoxically there are only masks, only roles and communal expectations."⁹⁵ Ostensibly "scientific" claims "that women 'identified with' the feelings of others far more readily than did men" led to women's writing being a "ventriloquization of identity"⁹⁶ — to have too many identities was actually to have none, to be only voice.

Margaret Homans' *Bearing the Word* offers a similarly complicated, even contradictory reading of women and writing. On the one hand, she suggests that "[t]o be healthy is not to be introspective, and not to be introspective is to be a good novelist. The training in feminine selflessness is thus the same as the training of the novelist." On the other, she considers both authorship and motherhood to be fundamentally egotistical

⁹³ cf. Gilbert & Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*; Showalter (61) and Keefe (xi) on the impact of the mother's early death on women authors; Homans on the different results of motherhood for Cathy Earnshaw and Jane Eyre (98); Moglen on CB: "A year and a half after her marriage [sic!], Charlotte Brontë conceived a child and fell ill of the conception: sickened, apparently, by fear. [...] She could not bring to birth the self she had conceived." (241)

⁹⁴ Basch 5. Her title comes from Mrs. Ellis' 1839 assertion that women "are, in fact, from their own constitution, and from the station they occupy in the world, strictly speaking, relative creatures." (*Women of England* 149)

⁹⁵ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* 11, 15.

⁹⁶ Kate Flint, "...As a rule, I does not mean I" 159. cf. Sidonie Smith on the female autobiography as "cultural ventriloquism, an act of impersonation" (57).

operations, which simultaneously threaten a sense of “whole” selfhood.⁹⁷ Auerbach argues in *Woman and the Demon* that the woman at the center of Victorian cultural mythology is no selfless, submissive figure but, conversely, “seems a monster of ego.”⁹⁸ Similarly, although authorities may have “assumed and reinforced [a] binary model of difference articulated upon sex,” Mary Poovey’s *Uneven Developments* brings to prominence the border cases which “had the potential to expose the artificiality of the binary logic that governed the Victorian symbolic economy.”⁹⁹

Of particular interest to this thesis is the supposed “double standard” of Victorian reviewing, an example of how women authors may have been “prevalent” but did not “prevail.”¹⁰⁰ The double standard is explored at length in Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own*, and also refuted by critics such as James Raven.¹⁰¹ Whether a “real” phenomenon or not, the assumption of unequal treatment based on sex has an effect on the practice of pseudonymity. The abstraction of authorial signature requires an emptying of identity, including, perhaps most crucially, gender. This “empty” condition was exacerbated in cases of uncertainty, such as that provoked by a pseudonymous writer. The two following chapters, which address the “lives” (publishing careers) of the pseudonyms Currer Bell and George Eliot, examine the critical practices used to assess an unknown writer and the problems posed when that writer refuses to be clearly gendered.

For the moment, however, I want to address issues of motherhood and re/production in nineteenth-century women’s writing. Decades after Gilbert and Gubar’s influential *Madwoman in the Attic*, feminist critics question the extent to

⁹⁷ Homans 172, 185-86.

⁹⁸ Auerbach 185. Her “woman” is actually a collection of figures, including militant, god-displacing angels, demons which are the “source of all shaping and creative power,” and old maids who pretend “meekness” but are effectively rulers of all they survey.

⁹⁹ Poovey 6, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Tuchman 181.

¹⁰¹ He is skeptical about whether the practice of reviewing actually bears out the theory (146-47).

which there was an “anxiety of authorship.” Kate Flint, for example, calls on Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s famous “I look everywhere for grandmothers, and see none” as “a performative act,” an “assertion of individuality, of pioneering identity” because it may not be true — women did in fact look to a maternal lineage, stretching back as far as Sappho.¹⁰² I propose to turn back only a generation, and locate a mother figure in Mary Shelley and her “hideous progeny.”¹⁰³

In “My Monster/Myself,” Barbara Johnson argues that *Frankenstein* expresses a fundamental incompatibility between femininity and literary creation — Shelley’s attempt at textual production is, in a word, “monstrous.” Victor Frankenstein’s attempt at physical birth is likewise condemned; he “usurps” the natural female role of biological reproduction.¹⁰⁴ This reading provides a Romantic precursor to the acute “separate sphere” conflict facing Victorian women who would produce books rather than re-produce babies. “The social imperative to measure all women’s activities by their suitability to motherhood,” writes Homans, “results in a taboo against women’s writing for being in conflict with women’s ‘proper duties’ [...]”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the attitude of mid-Victorian England on this score might be best encapsulated in the *Edinburgh Review*’s insistence that “[t]he grand function of woman, it must always be recollected, is, and ever must be, Maternity.” The critic goes on to chastise the novel under review (Brontë’s *Shirley*) for its deeply “unnatural” mother, Mrs. Pryor, who abandoned her daughter as an infant:

Currer Bell! if under your heart had ever stirred a child, if to your bosom a babe had ever been pressed, — that mysterious part of your being, towards which all the rest of

¹⁰² Flint 156.

¹⁰³ cf. Shelley’s introduction to *Frankenstein*: “And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart.” (10)

¹⁰⁴ Johnson 151.

¹⁰⁵ Homans 27. She goes on to suggest that the strategy of masculine pseudonymity is a direct result of these tensions, a move towards the myth of “disreputable femininity” that I continue to treat with respectful skepticism.

it was drawn, in which your whole soul was transported and absorbed, — never could you have imagined such a falsehood as that!¹⁰⁶

The plot, however, thickens: with the advantage of hindsight, we can read forward nearly ten years and find this very reviewer in a de facto marriage with a successful novelist but a childless woman. During the writing of *Mill on the Floss*, Lewes repeatedly characterizes George Eliot as a mother, “rock[ing] the cradle of the new ‘little stranger’ with fresh maternal vigour.”¹⁰⁷ In his reiterations of Eliot’s extravagantly tender, demonstrative authorship — “getting her eyes redder and *swollener* every morning as she lives through her tragic story,” “reddening her eyes, and blackening her paper, over the foolish sorrows of two foolish young persons of her imaginary acquaintance”¹⁰⁸ — we might perhaps read not only the anxiety in trying to reconcile authorship with motherhood, but also in trying to reconcile the position of the *Edinburgh Review* critic of 1850 with the domestic partner and literary agent of George Eliot, circa 1859. That is, it was not only the women writers who had to negotiate the re/production fracas, but rather a whole society had constantly to battle to maintain its supposedly rigid, pervasive gender ideology.¹⁰⁹

I have suggested Mary Shelley as a mother figure for the re/productive concerns plaguing Victorian women writers, but it is important to note that she is another kind of forerunner as well: her fraught authorial signature presages pseudonymous “daughters” such as Currer Bell and George Eliot. *Frankenstein* was first published anonymously, the 1821 French edition gave the author as “Madame Shelley” (suggesting the “wifely-ness” we see in “Mrs. Trollope” or “Mrs. Gaskell”), the 1823 English reprint offered “Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,” and later editions

¹⁰⁶ [GHL], *Edinburgh Review* (Jan 1850): CH-CB 161, 167.

¹⁰⁷ GHL to JB (22 July 59) GE Letters III.117.

¹⁰⁸ GHL to JB (March 60) III.269 and to Bodichon (6 March 60) III.269-70; emphasis original. cf.

Herbert Spencer on the same theme, GE “crying her eyes out over the death of her children” (270fn.).

¹⁰⁹ cf. Poovey: “the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction” (3).

“reverted to quasi-official anonymity.” This obscurity was demanded by Percy Shelley’s father, who threatened to withhold his financial support of the widow otherwise. Indeed, as we see in Timothy Shelley’s concern, even the author’s “real” signature carries its own set of interpretational difficulties: “her name names notable others,”¹¹⁰ her mother and her husband, as well as her husband’s family. “The Author of *Frankenstein*” describes a more singular identity than the onymous “Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley” — the pseudonym is more particular than her collection of overly “relative” surnames.

The final chapter of this thesis returns to the problems incurred by a “real” name that is nonetheless exceptionally “relative” ([Charlotte] Brontë), but for now I conclude with the mention of another Victorian woman writer: Elizabeth Gaskell. Until quite recently, she has been known predominantly (and onymously) as “Mrs. Gaskell,” and I want to promote a skepticism about the “reality” of this name. According to Showalter, thanks to the “normalcy” of a married or motherly woman, “those mothers who did appear [as authors] got preferential treatment, at least in the short run.” Therefore Gaskell used her married title to suggest her propriety, as its “unassailable respectability and normality helped win over readers.”¹¹¹ Although the name was legally hers, the equally legal, equally “real,” but distinctly different “E.C. Gaskell” was also in circulation — revealing that there is no one true name, suggestive of one true identity, “behind” pseudonymity. “Mrs. Gaskell” was not a default but a choice — a publishing ploy no less manipulative than a “puff mysterious” such as Currer Bell, an overtly fantastic name which stimulates curiosity by “advertis[ing] its own fictiveness.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Eilenberg, “Nothing’s Nameless” 172-77. She notes that William Godwin is named as well, in the novel’s dedication (178). See Appendix, Figure 9.

¹¹¹ Showalter 70-71. *Ruth* was of particular concern, dealing as it does with unmarried motherhood.

¹¹² Marcus 215.

If “*a novel* does not signify ‘This book is a novel,’ [...] but rather ‘Please look on this book as a novel,’” and if “By a Lady” is not so much a proprietary disguise as “a means to signify to the reader that a certain type of role was being performed, a type of personality was being staged,”¹¹³ then I suggest that “Mrs.,” the “puff mysterious,” and “the Author of *Waverley*” each indicates a way of reading the novelist. That novelist is by no means a stable entity, and cannot be considered independently of her sometimes bizarre pedigree (stretching back as far as Cervantes and including inveterate tricksters Swift, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne), or of the culture which produced her, or of the text she produces. The motivations for Victorian pseudonymity are as murky and absence-haunted as the motivations for an individual pseudonym. A singular explanation for (or origin of) the convention remains always at a distance — the history of the novel as a heterogeneous art form, a desire for “sanctuary,” a pervasive sense of alienation from self and society, the concerns of gender ideologies — ultimately we can only catalogue elements in a massively complicated, endlessly dynamic *milieu*.

¹¹³ Genette 11, emphasis original; Ezell, “‘By a Lady’: The Mask of the Feminine” 64.

CHAPTER 3

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF CURRER BELL

This and the following chapter look at the lives of “Currer Bell” and “George Eliot,” as opposed to the more common biographical subjects Charlotte Brontë and Marian [Evans] Lewes. These professional, authorial personae have, thus far, escaped any sustained independent scrutiny, but are instead subsumed into the biographies of the women who used them. Each “biography” offered here is organized on similar principles but with a slightly different focus: the current chapter pays more attention to Currer Bell’s pre-history (leading up to his “birth” on a title page), his “death” (when he is “outed”), and his ability to “haunt” his creator. The next chapter, on George Eliot, centers on what I see as the three stages of a pseudonym’s “life,” and begins to address the difficulty of biography as a practice — a topic to be continued in the final chapter of this thesis.

Both the biographies that follow depend on an understanding of “cipher,” and thus we begin with a set of definitions. Originally from the Arabic *ṣifr*, “zero,” the primary definition of cipher is “[a]n arithmetical symbol or character (Ø) of no value by itself, but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position.”¹ We have, therefore, not a thing but a haecceity, a relation between things. A further definition — “[a] person who fills a place, but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity, a ‘mere nothing’”² — activates the abstraction and disembodiment of authorship, accomplished by the severing of voice/origin from text. Cipher also denotes a symbol, a code, *and* its key — hence “to cipher” is both to write and to

¹ *OED* “cipher, cypher, n.”; “cipher, v.”

² CB, as we shall see later in this thesis, describes both of her sisters as “nothing,” while her character Lucy Snowe describes herself as a “cypher.” cf. Tuchman on novel-writing as an “empty field” — assumed to be so because populated by nonentities such as women writers (4-5; also her Chp. 3).

read, or decipher. The danger of the cipher is the danger of zero, nothingness: it excludes everything while including every possibility in a dizzying spiral.

To anchor this dizziness in the example of pseudonymity, the pseudonym-as-cipher empties the authorial name of identity (including, crucially for Victorian discourse, gender), and allows the reader to interpret freely (that is, supposedly without prejudice, though I intend to discredit this notion). On the other hand, a pseudonym-as-cipher does not merely allow free interpretation; it forbids limitation on that interpretation. So as long as the pseudonym is a cipher — unclaimed by its creator — it is available to opportunistic manipulation. In the cases of both Currer Bell and George Eliot, as we shall see, there were opportunists happy to oblige. Charlotte Brontë and Marian Lewes never truly had control of their *noms de plume* — in order to prevent misuse, the writer has to attach herself to her pseudonym; once attached, the name can no longer function as the shield between public and private that it was created to be. Furthermore, the attachment to both work (via title page) and life (via “outing” and acknowledgment) allows for the separation or conflation of biography and art as the reader, not the author, sees fit.

Although I have limited myself to two very specific examples, examining the pseudonym as a site of radical insecurity and instability gives us a way in which we can view all authorship, particularly as it was evolving during the Victorian period: pseudonymity is an extreme, but not *exceptional*, condition of professional authorship. No published author has complete control of his name, that is, of the identity in public circulation.

Brontë's "Habit" of Pseudonymity

In 1846, the "Great Unknown" returned to London after an absence of over twenty years. His arrival was inauspicious and went almost entirely unnoticed — he was camouflaged in a trio of names on the title page of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, a slight volume which sold only two copies. Nonetheless, the pseudonym's ability to generate speculation and interpretation is present in the first meager reviews of Currer Bell's least accomplished work, over a year before *Jane Eyre* revealed him to be the new Great Unknown. *The Critic*, for example, is full of questions:

Who are Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, we are nowhere informed. Whether the triumvirate have published in concert, or if their association be the work of an editor, viewing them as kindred spirits, is not recorded. If the poets be of a past or of the present age, if living or dead, whether English or American, where born, or where dwelling, what their ages or station — nay, what their Christian names, the publishers have not thought fit to reveal to the curious reader. Perhaps they desired that the poems should be tried and judged upon their own merits alone, apart from all extraneous circumstances [...].³

While the reviewer alludes to the detachment of personal identity ("extraneous circumstances") from artistic endeavor, his interest in what is hidden indicates that the person behind the work will always be sought. An "empty" name is not sterile, but productive. The *Dublin University Magazine* adds another dimension to the debate, wondering if the three names are indeed three separate blanks:

Whether ... there be indeed 'a man behind' each of these representative titles; or whether it be in truth but one master spirit — for the book is, after all, not beyond the utmost powers of a single human intelligence — that has been pleased to project itself into three imaginary poets, — we are wholly unable to conjecture....⁴

The *Athenaeum*, having assessed poems by "S. and E. Hersee", turns to the Bell volume, and finds that it

furnishes another example of a family in whom appears to run the instinct of song. It is shared, however, by three brothers — as we suppose them to be — in very unequal

³ *The Critic* (4 July 1846) CH-CB 59.

⁴ [W.A. Butler], *Dublin University Magazine* (Oct 1846) CH-CB 63.

proportions [...]. The Muse of Currer Bell walks halfway betwixt the level of Acton's and the elevation attained by Ellis.⁵

The passing interest in gender, which would become Gaskell's "much vexed question of sex,"⁶ is accompanied by another crucial component of the Bells' grip on literary interest: assuming there are indeed three authors, what is the relation of each to each? How do they fit together, how might they be ranked and compared? Initially it was this qualitative relation of the three *as artists* that provided fodder for the reviewers, though juxtaposition became (arguably) more important after their deaths, as their *personal* relations came to prominence in Brontë criticism.

Juliet Barker, trawling these reviews, also finds the seeds of future critical interest, but reaches a very different conclusion: "Irritatingly," she writes, these critics "seemed almost as much exercised by the identity of the mysterious Bells as by the quality of their verse [...]. In attempting to conceal their identity and sex, therefore, the Brontës had unwittingly stimulated the curiosity of the reviewers and created a mystery where none was intended."⁷ I will not be tempted into making claims about what Brontë, let alone *the* Brontës, intended in their use and choice of pen names, but I do mean to argue that a pseudonym necessarily provokes uncertainty and intrigue — valuable strategies for selling books. As Charlotte Brontë did not have the leisure of a masculine intermediary to manage her career (such as a Henry Austen, William Gaskell, or George Henry Lewes), she had to engage directly with the "business" of being an author. While it is a matter of some debate exactly what kind of businesswoman she was — opinion ranges between the quaintly naïve and the

⁵ *The Athenaeum* (4 July 1846) CH-CB 61-62.

⁶ Gaskell 251.

⁷ Barker 496-97. Barker is not alone in claiming that the pseudonyms were "forced upon" an unwilling CB by EB (and AB), and that she only came to see the "advantages of their assumed names" afterwards (479). While we can never know what discussions actually happened between the sisters, I do not find this reading consistent with CB's use of pseudonymity both before and after the advent of the Bell brothers.

stubbornly ambitious⁸ — I intend to show that Brontë was certainly not unaware (“unwitting”) of the pseudonym’s potential to create (profitable) speculation.

Furthermore, her adventures in naming prior to the “birth” of Currer Bell reveal that the habit of authorship — experimenting with an Othered perspective — and the habit of pseudonymity — experimenting with an Othered name — are intrinsically related.⁹

We begin with Brontë’s “real” surname, the spelling of which had only stabilized just before her birth, and the origin of which remained a source of debate after her death. The names used by her father Patrick include Branty, Brunty, Bruntee, Bronty, Bronte, Brontée, and finally, by the time the family was settled at Haworth, Brontë. Insignificant though the differences may seem, there is enough recorded speculation on the whys and wherefores to suggest how easily meaning can be attached to any slight variation. In one reading, the name began as “O’Prunty,” in “primitive” Ireland, but the association with Lord Nelson’s recent dukedom of “Brontë” made for a “more ornamental,” “more attractive” surname.¹⁰ Alternatively, “[t]he name Brontë (an abbreviation of Bronterre) is Irish and very ancient.”¹¹ And different still, “Mr. Patrick Prunty’s” patron, who arranged his Cambridge education, “disliked” the name and “requested him to take that of Bronte [sic], from the fanciful idea that the Greek word *Bronte* would appositely signify the singular quickness and intelligence of his

⁸ Gaskell is the main perpetrator of the quaint, offering anecdotes of CB’s “inexperience of the ways of the [publishing] world” (243). A more recent trend gives us a fame-obsessed CB, bullying her sisters into joining her scheme then badgering them to abandon Newby for Smith, Elder. Bock offers a compelling middle way: the Brontës were inexperienced but enthusiastic disciples of the advice for “coming forward” given in magazines such as *Fraser’s*, and owed their success to blending masculine determination and vanity with feminine restraint and compliance (263). Bock suspects that the recent “harsh” judgments of CB’s ambition and concern for “market-place considerations” is, in fact, a consequence of “our persistent discomfort with forwardness in women.” Thus Gaskell’s charmingly green CB all but stumbling into literary success (a rather obvious ploy to feminize and domesticate) has the same ideological roots as the modern, “bullying” CB.

⁹ As explored in Chapter 7 of this thesis, understanding authorship and pseudonymity as “habits” (*OED*: “Fashion or mode of apparel, dress”) is crucial in another sense as well.

¹⁰ CB Letters I.3-4; Shorter 32-33.

¹¹ Harriet Martineau, “The Death of Currer Bell,” *Daily News* (April 1855) CB Letters IV.181-82.

intellect.”¹² I am not suggesting that the varied nature of “Brontë” directly caused the Bell pseudonyms. Rather, by addressing the multiple interpretations available in an unstable “real” name, I am attempting to construct the milieu in which we can understand Currer Bell — a web rather than a chain of circumstances.

Brontë demonstrated an active interest in name and authorial identity long before Currer Bell graced a title page,¹³ and I propose that her play with pseudonymity is one of the most tangible elements of a lifelong addiction to authorship as “standing aside.” In his essay on “Makers and Persons,” Patrick Cruttwell notes that even the “amateur” writer cannot help but notice the difficulty in preserving identity between “the person-in-the-journal and the person-who-makes-the-journal”; in the serious writer, meanwhile, the “habit of making, the practice of standing aside a little and looking at the subject, has become *incurable*.”¹⁴ The language of disease is important here. Recent claims about the young Brontës’ extensive juvenile writing, or “scribblemania,” suggest an “addiction to words [that] borders on the pathological.”¹⁵ The implication seems to be that the Brontë children were not merely prodigious, but unhealthily obsessed with writing. While the association with illness and pathological behavior may come more readily to hand in a family with such a legacy of affliction,¹⁶ the behavior of “addiction” in their literary production is perhaps more usefully understood to be a condition of authorship, not

¹² *Belfast Mercury* (April 1855) CB Letters IV.184-85, emphasis original.

¹³ Nor was he the last false name CB would adopt, becoming “Miss Brown” and then “Miss Fraser” on her trips to London in 1848 and 1851. (Gaskell 273; CB Letters II.253 and III.256-58)

¹⁴ Cruttwell 488, emphasis original.

¹⁵ Martin, “Writing Lives” 252

¹⁶ e.g., Maria Branwell Brontë’s early death from (probably) uterine cancer, the fever at Cowan Bridge which killed Maria and Elizabeth Brontë, PB’s blindness, BB’s addictions to alcohol and opium, EB and AB’s tubercular demise; also the psychosomatic dimension added by Gilbert & Gubar, notably EB’s “anxiety of authorship” expressing itself in anorexia. CB’s own undetermined cause of death is crucial — “phthisis,” or TB, is indicated on her death certificate, though latterly the most popular diagnosis is hyperemesis grvida, excessive morning sickness. According to Margaret Smith, however, “[w]e shall never know for certain” (III.xxvi). This resolute *uncertainty* allows extravagant re-interpretations, such as James Tully’s in *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë* (1999), that CB was poisoned by ABN, having previously helped him poison BB, EB, and AB.

the special burden of one sickly quartet of child-prodigies. If the following account of the many names employed by Charlotte Brontë seems extravagant, I would offer for consideration not only the “galaxy of names” spawned by Mary Anne Evans,¹⁷ but also Genette’s comment on the pseudonymous condition generally: a single pseudonym “naturally inclines toward” the state of multiple, and furthermore, “the pseudonym habit is very much like the drug habit, quickly leading to increased use, abuse, even overdose.”¹⁸

While it is worth noting that Charlotte Brontë did use aliases in contexts not explicitly authorial,¹⁹ her interaction with literary pseudonymity is significant for its early advent and its persistence. By the time she was twelve, her professed heroes included not only the Duke of Wellington, but “Mr. Christopher North, an old man seventy-four years of age; the first of April is his birth-day,” and his cohorts, including “Timothy Tickler, Morgan O’Doherty, Macrabin Mordecai, Mullion, Warnell, and James Hogg, a man of most extraordinary genius, a Scottish Shepherd.”²⁰ Brontë’s early and overt admiration for the exploits of John Wilson (North), James Hogg (the Ettrick Shepherd) and *Blackwood’s* “Noctes Ambrosianae,” pseudonymous activity that was both successful and playful, should not be discounted when we consider the life of Currer Bell. In her own writings with Branwell (heavily influenced by *Blackwood’s*, as their title “Branwell’s Blackwood’s Magazine,” est. 1829, suggests), Charlotte Brontë took on a number of pseudonyms — the most prominent of which were Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley (Charles Townshend, or CT); Arthur Wellesley (Marquis of

¹⁷ Beer, *George Eliot* 110.

¹⁸ Genette 51-52.

¹⁹ e.g., at points in her correspondence with Ellen Nussey she signs herself “Charivari” and “Caliban,” and for a period refers regularly to one of her father’s curates by the moniker “Celia Amelia” (CB Letters I.200ff., I.215; Barker 344).

²⁰ Gaskell 65-67, Barker 149-52. CB had selected these admired men to populate her chosen island (Wight); in the same exercise, EB named the first Great Unknown, Sir Walter Scott.

Douro, Duke of Zamorna); Captain Andrew Tree; and Charles Thunder.²¹ There is a definite element of play evident within this selection of names — a tendency for slippage within a single identity (Zamorna and Townshend, technically the same individuals as Arthur and Charles Wellesley, sons of the Duke of Wellington, are both significantly evolved from the original characters), between identities (note the recurrence of the initials “CT”), and between fictional and “real” names (Charlotte being the feminine form of Charles; *bronte* being Greek for “thunder”).

The direct relation of at least one pseudonym to Charlotte Brontë’s own name is especially noteworthy when we consider that she wrote to Robert Southey in 1836 and signed her real name, to which he responded: “What you are I can only infer from your letter, which appears to be written in sincerity, though I may suspect that you have used a fictitious signature. Be that as it may, the letter and the verses bear the same stamp; and I can well understand the state of mind they indicate.”²² She replied with a general biographical sketch and the closing: “The signature which you suspected of being fictitious is my real name. Again, therefore, I must sign myself / C. BRONTË.”²³ The Southey correspondence has become (in)famous for his patronizing suggestion that while she may continue to write poetry for its own sake, “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be.”²⁴ However, this letter merits a special place in the evolution of Charlotte Brontë’s authorial identity not only because it is a formative example of Victorian gender discrepancies, but because it is the first time she engages with the problem of name and identity

²¹ Gérin 88; Alexander & Smith, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, entry “Pseudonyms used by the Brontës” (407).

²² CB Letters I.154-55.

²³ CB Letters I.158 (16 March 37).

²⁴ Famous as well as for CB’s inscription on the letter itself, “Southey’s Advice To be kept for ever.” CB Letters I.155-56; Barker 262-63.

(including the “stamp” or connection between signature, art, and “state of mind”) — and it is her “real” name that is under fire.

The issue of ambiguous gender, not yet in play between her thoroughly feminine “Charlotte” and the unanimously masculine personae of her juvenilia, arose when Brontë again took her literary attempts into a more public space than the collaborations with her siblings. In 1840 she wrote to Hartley Coleridge, requesting his comments on the opening of one of her stories, and signing herself with her favorite pseudonymous initials, “CT”. The closing of her response to Coleridge’s reply (which queried issues of identity such as her political stance and her gender), is worth quoting at length:

I am pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I belong to the soft or the hard sex — and though at first I had no intention of being enigmatical on the subject — yet as I accidentally omitted to give the clue at first, I will venture purposely to withhold it now — as to my handwriting, or the ladylike tricks you mention in my style and imagery — you must not draw any conclusions from those — Several young gentlemen curl their hair and wear corsets — Richardson and Rousseau — often write exactly like old women — and Bulwer and Cooper and Dickens and Warren like boarding-school misses. Seriously Sir, I am very much obliged to you for your kind and candid letter — and on the whole I wonder you took the trouble to read and notice the demi-semi novelette of an anonymous Scribe who had not even the manners to tell you whether he was a man or woman or whether his common-place “CT” meant Charles Timms or Charlotte Tomkins.²⁵

While this is a foretaste of the censure both Currer and Acton Brontë would level at the critical double standard,²⁶ more intriguing here is the insistence upon enigma: Brontë finds the element of “cannot quite decide” pleasurable, and decides “purposely” to maintain the uncertainty. It seems untenable that this pleasure and purposefulness — or at the very least an *awareness* of it — would not be in play several years later when the Bell brothers “unwittingly” stimulated a mystery as to their identity and sex.

“As if to prove that her manners now bordered on the idiotic,” Barker says of Brontë’s refusal to illuminate her “CT”, “Charlotte continued the letter in a flippant

²⁵ Smith Letters I.240-41 (10 Dec 40).

²⁶ CB in numerous letters to her literary correspondents, as well as in a (rejected) preface to *Shirley*; AB in her preface to the 2nd ed. of *TWH*. Unsurprisingly, EB’s feelings on the matter are not recorded.

and frivolous tone which verged on disrespect.”²⁷ I agree that this is a case of “bordering” and “verging”, but not simply between good and bad epistolary etiquette, or between insolence and reverence. The third term of pseudonymity is in effect, and so a certain amount of disruption will necessarily be in play. The transvestite figures of “young gentlemen who curl their hair and wear corsets” most obviously attach to the discrepancy between the “soft” and “hard” sexes, but Garber would have us view cross-dressing as the symptom of a “category crisis elsewhere.” The tension that interests me is between “Charlotte Brontë,” a flesh-and-blood person who (supposedly) did not intend to be “enigmatical,” and “C.T.,” the abstracted sign of an “anonymous Scribe” who cannot help but be a cipher.

The “Birth” of Currer Bell: Disembodiment, Androgyny, and Multiple Identity

Perhaps in response to Southey’s reading of the author’s “state of mind” through the “stamp” of writing, Brontë’s draft of her letter to Coleridge points out that handwriting is no sure indicator of identity. “I may employ an amanuensis,” she writes,²⁸ intimating that a text can easily be detached from the hand of its producer, thus dissolving any material, verifiable connection between creator and creation. Likewise, the pseudonym explicitly severs a text from a corporeal body, giving us a name, as it were, by which to understand the abstraction of all published authorship.²⁹ The “birth” of an author — the appearance of a name on a title page — is a site of vacancy; personal identity becomes a collection of textual symbols, absence rather

²⁷ Barker 338.

²⁸ Smith Letters I.237. Leah Price’s “From Ghostwriter to Typewriter: Relegating Authority at Fin de Siècle” offers a fascinating look at the debate surrounding spectrality, embodiment, and originality, albeit several decades after CB’s lifetime.

²⁹ Marcus puts a gendered spin on pseudonymity’s advantages for authorship: publishing “under cover” of a pen-name “exploits print’s erasure of the author’s body to authorize women’s professional participation in a market” (217).

than presence. While similar claims might be made for Charles Dickens (born 1812 in Portsmouth) and “Charles Dickens” (born 1837 in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*), Currer Bell offers us a particularly illustrative example of the author’s name as cipher. His “invisible,” unknown existence activates questions of androgyny (a threat to gender ideologies) and multiple identities (a threat to the myth of single authorship). His ability to instigate this questioning, however, would eventually make Currer Bell a threat to Charlotte Brontë — the disembodied pseudonym-as-cipher is as insubstantial to its creator as it is to its readers, and will both encourage and elude attempts to control it.

On 4 January 1848, “Currer Bell” writes to William Smith Williams, his first reader and champion at Smith, Elder:

“Jane Eyre” has got down into Yorkshire; a copy has even penetrated into this neighbourhood: I saw an elderly clergyman reading it the other day, and had the satisfaction of hearing him exclaim “Why — they have got —— school, and Mr. — — here, I declare! and Miss ——” (naming the original of Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst and Miss Temple). He had known them all: I wondered whether he would recognize the portraits, and was gratified to find that he did and that moreover he pronounced them faithful and just — he said too that Mr. —— (Brocklehurst) “deserved the chastisement he had got.”

He did not recognize “Currer Bell” — What author would be without the advantage of being able to walk invisible?³⁰

Brontë’s ability to feel “satisfaction” and “gratification” from her readers — “directly,” as it were — without herself being seen (or heard) replicates what, according to Ivan Kreilkamp, her work “implicitly argues”: that despite the heroines’ urge to vocalization, “disembodiment might best serve their interests.”³¹ Chapter 5 of this thesis explores the disembodiments of these heroines, but it is appropriate here to address the impulse in their creator, who was able to walk invisible as the phantasmic Currer Bell.³²

³⁰ CB Letters II.174.

³¹ Kreilkamp, “Unuttered: Withheld Speech and Female Authorship in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*” 331.

³² cf. Marcus on how Currer Bell “takes on an invisible, phantom existence” (217).

Brontë's desire for, or at least, the pleasure she took in invisibility plays well with her particular concerns about the body — including her family's history with illness, her own hypochondria,³³ and her consciousness that she lacked physical beauty.³⁴ Invisibility allowed her not only to eavesdrop on her readers, but gave her a cushion between a viewer's opinion of her body and opinion of her work. For instance, a fan signed only "K.T." wrote to "Currer Bell" during 1850, addressing him as "MADAM, — for the 'Edinburgh Review' says it is 'Madam'," and declaring that "I do not think you tall. I do not think you young. I will not swear that I think you pretty [...]. I will swear that your face is full of thought and expression: I will swear that were you short, old, and plain, I should esteem and love you as much as I do at this moment [...]."³⁵ The string of negative phrases (do not – do not – will not) followed by a series of affirmatives ("I will swear") enacts the cipher's inclusion of both positive and negative, its ability to be anything to anyone, and it demonstrates that by virtue of *possibility*, not certainty ("I do not think"), it can reconcile a disappointing body with admiration.

A pseudonym's disembodied, negative space is a free space — as Brontë claims, constraint would come from the removal of the incognito. "It is very kind and right in you to answer 'Currer Bell' to all queries respecting the authorship of 'Jane Eyre'," "he" tells Williams in April 1848; "That is the only name I wish to have mentioned in connection with my writings. [...] If I were known, I should ever be

³³ Barker 288-89, 441; Gérin 114; see also Lucy Snowe's battles with "that strangest spectre, hypochondria."

³⁴ Mary Taylor, on meeting CB at Roe Head school: "It was about this time I told her that she was very ugly. Some years afterwards I told her I thought I had been very impertinent. She replied, 'You did me a great deal of good, Polly, so don't repent of it.'" (CB Letters I.90); Thackeray: "[R]ather than have fame, rather than any other earthly good or mayhap heavenly one she wants some Tomkins or another to love her and be in love with. But you see she is a little bit of a creature without a penny worth of good looks, thirty years old I should think, buried in the country, and eating up her own heart there, and no Tomkins will come." (CH-CB 197-98); GS: "There was but little feminine charm about her; and of this fact she herself was uneasily and perpetually conscious. [...] I believe she would have given all her genius and her fame to have been beautiful." ("Charlotte Brontë" 784-85)

³⁵ CB Letters III.180, 182.

conscious in writing that my book must be read by ordinary acquaintances, and that idea would *fetter me intolerably*.”³⁶ From the personal “fetters” of Charlotte Brontë (those of an unattractive person, living in a provincial, gossipy community³⁷), we can move to a more general idea of a restriction and the body: the female body, restrictive in its readability and restricted by Victorian gender proscriptions.

The Bells’ novels and their troubling of reviewers’ gender expectations is one of the most well-rehearsed elements of Brontë criticism — for every claim that “no woman *could have* penned the ‘Autobiography of Jane Eyre’,”³⁸ another protested “we, for our part, cannot doubt that the book is written by a female.”³⁹ Intriguingly, the *North British Review* insisted that if Currer Bell is a woman, “she must be a woman pretty nearly unsexed.”⁴⁰ Brontë responds to this negativity (in both its senses) with her own assertion of identity through negation: “To such critics I would say — ‘To you I am neither Man nor Woman — I come before you as an Author only — it is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me — the sole ground on which I accept your judgment.’”⁴¹ Having “unsexed” herself, what remains is “an author only,” a disembodied presence associated with an abstracted text, not a gendered body. Unlike a Victorian body (particularly a *clothed* Victorian body, a point to which we will return in a later chapter), which tended to advertise one gender or the other definitively, a text is androgynous — it permits both verdicts.

Although “androgyny” suggests fullness or wholeness in its etymology (both andro *and* gyne) and denotation (“the union of sexes in one individual”⁴²), in Victorian

³⁶ CB Letters II.204, emphasis added.

³⁷ CB writes to WSW that Haworth folk “have long since set me down as bookish and quiet, and trouble themselves no farther [sic] about me. But the gossiping inquisitiveness of small towns is rife at Keighley [...]” (CB Letters III.26)

³⁸ *Era* (14 Nov 1847) CH-CB 79.

³⁹ *Christian Remembrancer* (April 1848) CH-CB 89

⁴⁰ [James Lorimer], *North British Review* (Aug 1849) CH-CB 116.

⁴¹ CB to WSW (16 Aug 49) Smith Letters II.235.

⁴² OED, “androgyny.”

critical practice the addition of masculine plus feminine does not offer a positive result but an empty term: “unsexed.” Incorporating both genders reduces the gender value to zero, a nothingness or invisibility that confounds reviewing standards based on an alphabet of the body — or, appropriately here, a mathematics of the body. Showalter describes the typical (and typically unreliable) gender arithmetic: “Approaching an anonymous or pseudonymous novel, reviewers would break it down into its elements, label these masculine or feminine, and add up the total. The predominance of masculine or feminine elements determined the sex of the author.”⁴³ A kind of empiricism seems to inform the critics’ insistence on “internal evidence”⁴⁴ in their detective work, and yet it is just this kind of certainty that a pseudonym disrupts.

Thus it was the most specifically detailed “proofs” that were revealed to be the most ludicrous once the cipher was deciphered. Perhaps the most famous example is Elizabeth Rigby’s “incontrovertible” data offered in the *Quarterly Review*: a woman never “trusses game and garnishes dessert-dishes with the same hands,” nor attires another woman (i.e., Blanche Ingram) “in a morning robe of sky-blue crape, a gauze azure scarf twisted in her hair.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, “[n]o lady, we understand, when suddenly roused in the night, would think of hurrying on ‘a frock.’ They have garments more convenient for such occasions, and more becoming too.” Rigby does not define *Jane Eyre* as a man’s work by declaring what masculine writing *is*, but rather what feminine writing is *not*. Such negative interpretation is bound up, I suggest, in Rigby’s own attempts to negotiate an androgynous space. Her (unsigned) review goes to some length to intimate a male voice: she calls upon “a lady friend, whom we are always happy to consult” for her facts and distances herself from

⁴³ Showalter 91.

⁴⁴ Eugène Forçade, *Revue des deux Mondes* (31 Oct 1848) CH-CB 101.

⁴⁵ *Quarterly Review* (Dec 1848) CH-CB 111. GHL, reviewing *Shirley* once in possession of CB’s secret identity, lambasts Rigby’s “irresistible evidence,” revealing how it is undone completely “by the simple fact that Currer Bell is a woman.” *Edinburgh Review* (Jan 1850) CH-CB 162.

women (“no lady, *we understand*”; “*They have garments*”). On the other hand, her editor, J.G. Lockhart, may be skeptical that the Lowood scenes were written by a man (they “have a striking air of truthfulness”), but admits that he is “an ignoramus” on such points and ultimately defers to her feminine authority: “your skill in ‘dress’ settles the question of sex.”⁴⁶

As Rigby plays for the different kind of authority wielded by each gender, Brontë claims that the Bell brothers’ androgyny was intentional: “the ambiguous choice” of names, she says, were not “positively masculine” yet allowed the sisters to avoid “declar[ing] [them]selves women.”⁴⁷ While the 1850 Biographical Notice as a rigorous document of “truth” is to be treated with healthy skepticism — as is any piece of writing whose ostensible object is to transmit a life into text — I do not agree with Gilbert and Gubar when they call the claim for androgyny “disingenuous.”⁴⁸ I prefer an interpretation of the “overtly artificial” names as part of an advertising strategy known as “puffs mysterious”⁴⁹ — part of the invisible, androgynous pseudonym’s success is its refusal to play by the rules of gender.

As the member of a trio of novelists, Currer Bell also refused to adhere to strict notions of single authorship: the question “And who *is* Currer Bell?” runs parallel to the question “*What is* Currer Bell?”⁵⁰ Not only was he of mysterious gender, but he was of mysterious number and relation to his cohorts Ellis and Acton Bell. The notion of three Bells was (and still is) valuable to critical assessments of the novels, giving reviewers a ready-made structure of comparison and contrast — a structure which works whether Currer, Ellis, and Acton are three distinct individuals or three distinct components of a single individual. *The Examiner*, for instance, suspected that the Bell novels “might

⁴⁶ Shorter 321.

⁴⁷ Bio Notice 743.

⁴⁸ Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* 65.

⁴⁹ cf. Marcus 215.

⁵⁰ *The Critic* (15 Nov 1849) CH-CB 140-41, emphasis original.

have issued from the same source; sent forth at different seasons, in different states of mind or humor, or at different periods or elevations of the intellect.”⁵¹ We previously saw such a charge made by the *Dublin University Magazine* in reference to the book of poems; Brontë found it “an ingenious thought in the Reviewer — very original and striking, but not accurate. We are three.”⁵²

Similarly, when a reviewer declares that *Jane Eyre* “bears the marks of more than one mind and one sex,”⁵³ Brontë responds with amusement:

If they like, I am not unwilling they should think a dozen ladies and gentlemen aided at the compilation of the book. Strange patchwork it must seem to them — this chapter being penned by Mr., and that by Miss or Mrs. Bell; that character or scene being delineated by the husband, that other by the wife! The gentleman, of course, doing the rough work, the lady getting up the finer parts. I admire the idea vastly.⁵⁴

It is in the problem of heterogeneous, compound identities that the cipher’s double-edged nature becomes clear. On the one hand, Brontë and Smith, Elder could wield the mysterious, multi-purpose Currer Bell and all his attendant speculation to achieve commercial success. On the other hand, so too could Thomas Newby, Ellis and Acton Bell’s publisher.⁵⁵ The Bell names were available to manipulation so long as the pseudonyms were complete ciphers, unknown even to their publishers. In January 1848, Charlotte Brontë is fairly sanguine about her pseudonym’s susceptibility to promiscuous behavior, and “Currer Bell” writes to Williams:

⁵¹ CH-CB 254 (29 July 48).

⁵² CB to WSW (10 Nov 47) CB Letters II.154.

⁵³ E.P. [Whipple] CH-CB 98. “The family mind is strikingly peculiar, giving a strong impression of unity, but it is still male and female.” Interestingly, this assessment of the androgynous condition gives a positive (“more than,” “and”) rather than negative value, but this particular result relies, I believe, on another term besides gender being in play; the variable of “family,” or number, changes the equation.

⁵⁴ CB to WSW (22 Nov 48) CB Letters II.287.

⁵⁵ This was not Newby’s first (or last) manipulation of an author’s name. In 1845 he advertised Anthony Trollope’s first novel as a work by the already-famous “Mrs. Trollope” (Sutherland 47). In 1859 he attempted to cash in on the success of GE, advertising “Adam Bede, Junior. A Sequel” (“GE” replied in *The Times*, “outing” him as the baddie from Gaskell’s *Life* [GE Letters III.220]). Sutherland says Gaskell gave Newby “a kind of shabby immortality” (45); I suggest that a certain “immortality” — ghostliness — was always in play with such a slippery, opportunistic character. Consider CB’s descriptions — “will o’ the wisp,” “a very pleasant and witty sprite,” “this ethereal and evanescent ornament of ‘the trade’” (CB Letters III.185-86) — which suggest a third-term quality appropriate to his engagement with the disruptive possibilities of the pseudonym.

“Jane Eyre” is given to Ellis Bell, and Mr. Newby, it appears, thinks it expedient so to frame his advertisements as to favour the misapprehension — If Mr. Newby had much sagacity he would see that Ellis Bell is strong enough to stand without being propped by Currer Bell — and would have disdained what Ellis himself of all things disdains — recourse to trickery. However, Ellis, Acton and Currer care nothing for the matter personally — the Public and the Critics are welcome to confuse our identities as much as they choose; my only fear is lest Messrs Smith and Elder should in some way be annoyed by it.⁵⁶

Expressing a thoughtful concern for any “annoyance” to her publishers, Brontë is still confident that the detachment of private person and public name is both possible and desirable. However, as the texts “Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell” are read alongside the texts *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey*, the names evolve into authors, and these authorial identities (or identity) are not their identities as persons. As long as the pseudonym is separate from the writing self, it is free — as open (and as locked) to any interpreter as it is to its creator.

Newby’s next move was to advertise Acton Bell’s forthcoming *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* with an “Opinions of the Press On Mr. Bell’s First Novel” that included excerpts from reviews of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* as well as *Agnes Grey*.⁵⁷ Newby is walking a fine grammatical line between truth and lie, as the shifter “Mr. Bell” can designate each of the three novelists, and Brontë’s sanguine attitude begins to slip. “You will perhaps have observed that Mr. Newby has announced a new work by Acton Bell,” “Currer Bell” writes to Williams. “The advertisement has, as usual, a certain tricky turn in its wording which I do not admire.”⁵⁸ However, Charlotte Brontë remains detached, leaving “Currer Bell” to fight back in his preface to the third edition of *Jane Eyre*:

I avail myself of the opportunity which a third edition of “Jane Eyre” affords me, of again addressing a word to the public, to explain that my claim to the title of novelist rests on this one work alone. If, therefore, the authorship of other works of fiction has been attributed to me, an honour is awarded where it is not merited; and

⁵⁶ CB Letters II.181-82 (22 Jan 48).

⁵⁷ Gérin 357.

⁵⁸ CB Letters II.226 (22 June 48).

consequently, denied where it is justly due. This explanation will serve to rectify mistakes which may already have been made, and to prevent future errors. (*JE* 6)

“Prevent future errors” it did not — although he would remain on future title pages as an attached, authorized pseudonym, this was the last piece of text published by Currer Bell during his life as an unknown pseudonym. The death knell came when Newby offered *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to the American publishing house Harper Brothers as “by the author of *Jane Eyre*.” Harper, already engaged with Smith, Elder for Currer Bell’s works, rang the alarm, and Smith, Elder wrote to Haworth in inquiry.⁵⁹ Their gambit for detached, unknown authorship had been played out: Charlotte and Anne Brontë (and Emily, by proxy) were on the next train to London to authorize, and in a certain sense “kill,” the Bells.

The “Death” of Currer Bell: Authorization, Embodiment, and Spectrality

The only way the Brontës could turn the “nothings” Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell into “somethings” was to offer embodiment in place of invisibility. Writing and signature alone could not prove identity (as, we shall see, George Eliot would discover during “the Liggins affair”) — text cannot guarantee presence. The Brontës’ hasty journey up to the city and their unannounced arrival at the houses of Smith, Elder in Cornhill has been told and re-told, first in a letter from Charlotte Brontë to Mary Taylor, then by Gaskell,⁶⁰ and again by George Smith in his memoir of 1900. For our purposes here it is enough to offer Brontë as quoted by Smith: “We have both come that you might have *ocular proof* that there are at least two of us.”⁶¹ The invisibility that Brontë valued on the streets of Haworth has been recast in its opposite definition: what is crucial now is spectrality as a quality of something “produced merely by the

⁵⁹ see CB Letters II.229, 250-54; Barker 557-58; Gérin 357-58.

⁶⁰ CB Letters II.250-54 (4 Sep 48), Gaskell 268-70,

⁶¹ GS, “Currer Bell” 784; emphasis added.

action of light on the eye or on a sensitive medium” — spectrality becomes specularity.⁶² “Spectral” is a boundary term that both incorporates and refuses “visibility” and its opposite, “invisibility.”

Likewise, the moment in which the Brontës authorize their pseudonyms entails both physicality (the ocular proof of a body) and abstraction (a name or text). Let us turn to Brontë’s own account of George Smith meeting “Charlotte” and “Currer” simultaneously. Arriving at Cornhill, she asks one of the “great many young men and lads” at the counter “May I see Mr. Smith?” She continues:

He hesitated, *looked* a little surprised — but went to fetch him — We sat down and waited a while — *looking* at some books on the counter — publications of theirs well known to us — of many of which they had sent us copies as presents. At last somebody came up and said dubiously “Did you wish to *see* me, Ma’am?”

“Is it Mr. Smith?” I said, *looking* up through my *spectacles* at a young, tall, gentlemanly man.

“It is.”

I then put *his own letter* into his hand directed to “Currer Bell.” He *looked* at it — then at me — again — yet again — I laughed at his perplexity — A recognition took place — I gave my real name — “Miss Brontë” —.⁶³

While it may be somewhat facetious to diagram all the “looks” in Brontë’s letter, it is important to note the collision of a visual, physical reality with the previously invisible, abstracted Currer Bell. Smith is introduced both to the woman, a bespectacled body, and to her pseudonym, a name on a letter. This moment of heightened specularity is the beginning of Currer Bell’s “death” from anonymous cipher into full authorial self: the project is completed, appropriately enough, by the actual deaths of Emily and Anne, after which Charlotte Brontë was free to kill off Ellis and Acton Bell (“I feel myself that it is time the obscurity attending those two names [...] was done away”), yet bound by “duty” to explain the “origin and authorship” of their novels.⁶⁴

⁶² *OED* “specular”: “of or pertaining to sight or vision.” The term, of course, also has a rich history of association with problematic ways of seeing, mirrors, and Lacanian psychology.

⁶³ CB to Mary Taylor (4 Sep 48) Smith Letters II.111-12, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ Bio Notice 742.

Once outed — made a “real” personage for consumption by the literary world, who previously had only his abstracted texts (the name and the novels) — the visibility of Currer Bell (meaning the body of Charlotte Brontë) becomes a privileged artifact.⁶⁵ At first the contact was tenuous, transmitted mostly through gossip. Typically requiring a face-to-face situation, gossip is a step closer to “full presence,” but still stands at a distance. Luckily we do have some of this chatter in recorded form, including Gaskell’s second-hand account of Harriet Martineau’s meeting with the Brontë/Bell body. Her letter to Ann Shaen in December 1849 demonstrates both the desire for presence (visual confirmation) and the difficulty in attempting to lay eyes on a Great Unknown: “There!” she closes, “that’s all I know, but I think it’s a pretty good deal, it’s something to have seen somebody who has seen *nominis umbra*.”⁶⁶ Due to Charlotte Brontë’s geographical distance from the London literati and her abbreviated life, for the most part she remained *nominis umbra* — “the shadow of a name” — a mediated presence available only through the eyes of another.⁶⁷

Because the sight of Brontë/Bell was so rare, it was also valuable. After her death, Thackeray would claim, “I can only say of this lady, *vidi tantum*”⁶⁸ — and we would be wise to question his “only.” Even the Latin *tantum* casts a certain shade, as the original phrase (*Virgilium vidi tantum*) refers to Virgil and was spoken by Ovid: the “humble” Thackeray nonetheless puts himself in very good company. A vision of the Brontë/Bell body was prized, from the heights of Classical quotation to the depths

⁶⁵ The Brontë/Bell body, “neither beautiful, striking, nor masculine in appearance and charm,” was a challenge to the literary world, where women often needed more than skill with a pen. “Had she been even ordinarily good-looking and at her ease in society, the interest she aroused would not have been nearly so unbridled” — her homeliness meant “there *was* something to explain.” (Gérin 414)

⁶⁶ CB Letters III.57, text incomplete; see Peters, *Unquiet Soul* 268.

⁶⁷ GE never met her predeceasing Great Unknown: “Lewes was describing Currer Bell to me yesterday as a little, plain, provincial, sickly-looking old maid.” GE to the Brays (5 March 53) GE Letters II.91.

⁶⁸ Thackeray, “The Last Sketch” 486.

of female gossip. Consider, for instance, the warts-and-all physical descriptions offered by Gaskell once she had a first-hand account to offer:

I had time for a good look at her. She is (as she calls herself) *undeveloped*; thin and more than half a head shorter than I, soft brown hair, not so dark as mine; eyes (very good and expressive, looking straight and open at you) of the same colour, a reddish face; large mouth and many teeth gone; altogether *plain*; the forehead square, broad, and *rather* overhanging.⁶⁹

This letter also includes a biographical sketch, and I think there is justification for identifying in Gaskell's gossiping to the Winkworth sisters the first recorded telling of the Brontë myth (the Biographical Notice would not appear until some months later).

"Poor Miss Brontë," came the reply to Gaskell's effective, affecting narrative, "I cannot get the look of the grey, square, cold, dead-coloured house out of my head."⁷⁰

As Emily Winkworth had never seen Haworth Parsonage and yet found herself fixated by the "look" of it, we appear to be back in the territory of that *other* kind of spectrality: ghostliness. I propose that alongside the visibility activated by the demise of Currer Bell-the-cipher (his authorization by the Brontë body), there is, simultaneously, a move back into the abstracted, or ghostly. It is upon his "death" that the pseudonym's uncanny qualities — that is, the condition of uncertainty that attends any act of published authorship — come to the fore. He begins truly to "haunt" his creator; his third-termness disrupts the boundaries between "Charlotte Brontë, private self" and "Currer Bell, public author." Furthermore, he destabilizes the identity of "real" woman, in a movement I call "double-ghosting."

To return to the introduction of Charlotte Brontë/Currer Bell to George Smith, we should note that although Brontë's body is readable (her gender, her physical condition, her class and even regional identity through "the plain, high-made country

⁶⁹ CB Letters III.142 (25 Aug 50), emphasis original. The version of this letter included in the *Life* tactfully omits CB's missing teeth and "reddish" face. The description continues with her voice, which is "very sweet" — while not a visible component, voice is nonetheless another guarantor of presence.

⁷⁰ To emphasize the virulence of gossip, this letter is from Emily to Catherine Winkworth, Gaskell's original correspondent — the biography, the life-in-text, was already in circulation (Shaen ed. 60).

garments”⁷¹), it is not significant as “the author of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, etc.” until it is combined with the name “Currer Bell.”⁷² Until the connection is made, Smith remains “perplexed” — the body is cipher (code) and the text is cipher (decoder), but without the body’s cipher (decoder), the text remains a cipher (code). That is, while Charlotte Brontë alone can authorize Currer Bell, only the production of Currer Bell (a name) can authorize the body of Charlotte Brontë, standing uninvited in the Cornhill offices. It is also worth noting that the text which guaranteed Currer Bell’s identity was Smith’s “own letter.” The Brontë/Bell interdependence cannot resolve itself, but requires a third party — the publisher — as part of the authorization process.⁷³

Pseudonymity as it is commonly understood is based on a notion of the pen-name as a tool wielded by an author in order to achieve some degree of separation or protection. However, the question of which term ultimately controls which, at stake in the meeting at Cornhill, reveals such a conception of pseudonymity as untenable. Nevertheless, even (perhaps especially) the creators of pseudonyms are guilty of promoting a mythic version of pseudonymous control. As Charlotte Brontë writes to George Smith regarding the Wheelwright family, “these friends only know me as Miss Brontë, and they are of the class, perfectly worthy but in no sort remarkable, to whom I should feel it quiet superfluous to introduce Currer Bell; I know they would not understand the author.”⁷⁴ And to Williams, about the *Quarterly Review*’s attack on her novel: “Believe me, my dear sir, ‘C. Brontë’ must not here appear; what she feels or has felt is not the question — it is ‘Currer Bell’ who was insulted — he must

⁷¹ CB Letters II.252.

⁷² cf. Lejeune on *présentation* (Fr. “introduction”): “there is not full presence without naming” (199). CB’s body, though undeniably present, required the name “Currer Bell” in order for the *présentation* to be complete.

⁷³ cf. Genette: “If the author is the guarantor of the text (*auctor*), this guarantor himself has a guarantor — the publisher — who ‘introduces’ and names him.” (46)

⁷⁴ CB Letters III.37-38 (19 Nov 49).

reply.”⁷⁵ Again, upon being addressed by Thackeray as her pseudonym: “She tossed her head and said ‘she believed there were books being published by a person named Currer Bell... but the person he was talking to was Miss Brontë — and she saw no connection between the two’.”⁷⁶

This belief in the myth of control and separate identities shows signs of faltering when death invades the worlds of both self and pseudonym: “The lash of the ‘Quarterly’,” she writes to Williams in January 1849, Branwell and Emily having died and Anne now sickening, “however severely applied, cannot sting — as its praise probably would not elate me. Currer Bell feels a sorrowful independence of reviews and reviewers; their approbation might indeed fall like an additional weight on his heart, but their censure has no bitterness for him.”⁷⁷ The division provided by a pseudonym is supposed to be between private identity and professional persona, but shared grief gives Currer Bell “independence” from the concerns his own sphere, locating him instead within Charlotte Brontë’s domestic, non-authorial tragedy.⁷⁸

According to the bulk of critical verdicts over the past century, a Victorian *nom de plume* was created in deference to the ideology of separate spheres, allowing a woman to cross into the public, masculine arena of authorship. However, pseudonymity reveals that the boundaries between any number of different spheres (masculine/feminine, public/private, life/art, embodiment/abstraction) are permeable and constantly under threat. What is more, that threat is not uni-directional — Currer Bell’s slipping from “his proper sphere” is as problematic as Charlotte Brontë’s dallying outside of hers. He offers a challenge to her independent identity; he is

⁷⁵ CB Letters III.15 (31 Aug 49).

⁷⁶ Mrs. Brookfield, quoted CB Letters III.50.

⁷⁷ CB Letters II.298 (22 Jan 49).

⁷⁸ Some practitioners of Brontë bio-criticism claim the converse, that during the personal tragedy CB capitalized on the permeability of the border between herself and Currer Bell’s world. For instance: “Although her identity was no longer a secret, she clung to the masculine name and pronoun as to a rock, submerged as she was in a rough sea of domestic distress” (Peters 233).

required in order to guarantee her authorial existence; even his character could trump hers on occasion. As Brontë wrote regarding an experience in London society, in which literary opinions were required, “[s]ome pieces were referred to about which Currer Bell was expected to be very rapturous — and failing in this — he disappointed.”⁷⁹ Rather than remaining in the confines of the imaginary, Currer Bell invades the “real” and acts as a second, Othered self.

After her introduction to George Smith, the crux of her joint Brontë/Bell existence, Brontë describes herself thus: “A more jaded wretch than I looked when I returned, it would be difficult to conceive — I was thin when I went but was meagre indeed when I returned, my face looked grey and very old — with strange, deep lines ploughed in it — my eyes stared unnaturally — I was weak and yet restless.”⁸⁰ The inability to recognize oneself is the epitome of “uncanny” — the self, supposedly most familiar and *heimlich*, is defamiliarized into the *unheimlich*. Freud sees this particularly in the double, or *doppelgänger*, which is initially created to be “an assurance of immortality” but which “becomes the ghastly harbinger of death.”⁸¹ The uncanniness of the *doppelgänger* stems from its refusal to remain true to its original purpose — much like the ghostly threat of a pseudonym who oversteps his boundary from fiction to life.

Melchisedec and Pygmalion: Charlotte, Currer, and Jane

To conclude our discussion of the tension between the “real” Charlotte Brontë and the “fictional” Currer Bell, we need to turn to a more obvious example of fictionality:

Jane Eyre, and by extension, Jane Eyre. While the pseudonym and the embodied self

⁷⁹ CB to Margaret Wooler (14 Feb 50) CB Letters III.76.

⁸⁰ CB to Mary Taylor; Smith Letters II.115. cf. JE’s defamiliarized moment when she sees herself in the Red Room mirror: “the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit” (*JE* 14).

⁸¹ Freud 141.

are required to authorize each other, the perception of both is informed by readers' responses to "their" novel.⁸² For instance, let us examine another gossipy description of a face-to-face meeting with the Brontë/Bell body. Upon seeing Charlotte Brontë, Anne Thackeray Ritchie finds that her and her sister's childhood response to Currer Bell's first novel (that "undreamed-of and hitherto unimagined whirlwind") would "accurately describe our state of mind on that summer's evening as we look at Jane Eyre — the great Jane Eyre — the tiny little lady."⁸³

Brontë's pseudonymity made it such that when *Jane Eyre* arrived in the world, "Jane Eyre" was the only figure whose name and identity referred definitely to each other — she filled the public's "need" for an author,⁸⁴ and that original connection was not easily displaced. Thus the body of Charlotte Brontë (which Ritchie goes on to describe in typically minute detail) is read through her novel — even the supposedly "full presence" of the author is mediated by another text, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. The association persists even (perhaps particularly) when the intent is to sever. In his retrospective piece in *Cornhill Magazine* at the turn of the century, George Smith seems to relish telling how Thackeray was famously cut when he made the grievous mistake of introducing his mother to "Jane Eyre" rather than to "Charlotte Brontë." However, his commentary on her counterattack is written in such a way as to side with Thackeray, implicitly associating Brontë with her small, outspoken heroine: "The spectacle of this little woman, hardly reaching to Thackeray's elbow, but, somehow, looking stronger and fiercer than himself, and casting her incisive words at his head, resembled the dropping of shells into a fortress."⁸⁵

⁸² While the perception of that novel, conversely, is mediated through knowledge of the author.

⁸³ Quoted CB Letters III.48.

⁸⁴ As "nobody is satisfied with anonymous authorship," nameless authors acquire "specific individual identities in our minds and our literary histories; lacking their names, we designate them by the works they wrote." (Stillinger 187).

⁸⁵ GS, "Currer Bell" 790-91

All three identities — Charlotte, Currer, and Jane — are in fact “characters” in overlapping but intrinsically related narratives. Each relies on an imaginary, rather than biological, creation. While Charlotte Brontë may have “thought up” Currer Bell and Jane Eyre, as an author in public circulation she herself is the product of reader interpretation. Origin is deferred, circular, and ultimately unavailable. Textual communication turns everything it touches to a kind of fiction, emptying it of presence and severing it from its source in “reality.” In her letter to Hartley Coleridge, the pre-Bell Brontë speaks of her writing process as “creat[ing] a world out of one’s own brain and peopl[ing] it with inhabitants who are like so many Melchisedecs — ‘Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life’.” Holding conversation with these brain-children calls up the figure of Pygmalion, she continues, startled by his statue “when life began to animate its chiselled features and kindle up its blind, marble eyes.”⁸⁶

We find an echo of this in November 1849, when Brontë describes to Williams a letter that had “almost startled” her. A reader has written to “Currer Bell,” and “runs on in a strain of wild enthusiasm about ‘Shirley’.” No stranger to fan mail, she continues:

This letter would have struck me no more than the others rather like it have done, but for its rash power, and the disagreeable resolves it announces to seek and find “Currer Bell.” It almost makes me like a Wizard who has raised a spirit he may find it difficult to lay.⁸⁷

Brontë’s syntax is wily here: she is the wizard, but who exactly is the spirit? Is it Currer Bell, unruly pseudonym and second self? Is it *Shirley*, for provoking such extraordinary devotion? Perhaps the culprit is not the novel, but the attractive titular

⁸⁶ Smith Letters I.239-40. Melchisedec comes to Abraham in Genesis 14 as the King of Salem and priest of God. CB’s quotation comes from the commentary on this episode in Hebrews 7, which continues “like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.” His status as priest (in some commentaries, as a kind of angel) makes him a messenger-without-origin, much like language itself. On the “startled” response of a Pygmalion, cf. Freud: “a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny sensations is created [...] when the inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one.” (139)

⁸⁷ CB Letters III.41 (22 Nov 49).

character, Shirley Keeldar. Could it even be that the “spirit” raised is the letter-writer himself? Brontë admitted in her first preface that “[t]he Press and Public are but vague personifications for me” (*JE* 3) — could their vagueness be so extreme that they are, in effect, no different from the originless Melchisedecs of her own brain? Regardless of who Brontë intended to play the role of ghost in this particular moment, the existence of Currer Bell and the third-term condition of pseudonymity alert us to disruption and uncertainty, and to the possibilities allowed. What is resonant in fiction-making is possibility itself. I tend to cast “Currer Bell” as the spirit to Brontë’s wizard, but, to give a previous phrase in full: *Stat magni nominis umbra*; “There stands the shadow of a glorious name.” Or, “He stands the shadow of a great name.” Is the name substantial enough to cast a shadow? If so, why is it the shadow we see, why isn’t the name in evidence? Is a self reducible to a name? To a *shadow* of a name? If there is a single answer, it is obscured by the possibilities.

Upon her death in March 1855, Charlotte Brontë attained the ultimate incorporeality, removing the body who could authorize or be authorized by Currer Bell. Reduced to names alone, untethered from all embodiment except within their texts, the woman and her pseudonym become slaves to de/ciphering: readers will interpret and biographers will write their lives. “‘Currer Bell’ is dead!” begins Harriet Martineau’s obituary. With no small part awarded to the role of the visual, she goes on to “create” her own Pygmalion’s statue out of the newly departed Brontë. The result is neither wholly faithful nor wholly original, but relies on a combination of personal knowledge and fictional text. “‘Jane Eyre’ was naturally and universally supposed to be Charlotte herself,” she writes, “but she always denied it, calmly, cheerfully, and with the obvious sincerity which characterised all she said.” If

Martineau meant to honor the “obviously sincere” denial, however, she singularly fails by offering a profoundly Jane-esque Brontë:

There was something inexpressibly affecting in the aspect of the frail little creature who had done such wonderful things, and who was able to bear up, with so bright an eye and so composed a countenance, under such a weight of sorrow, and such a prospect of solitude. In her deep mourning dress (neat as a quaker’s), with her beautiful hair, smooth and brown, her fine eyes blazing with meaning, and her sensible face indicating a habit of self-control, if not of silence, she seemed a perfect household image — irresistibly recalling Wordsworth’s description of that domestic treasure. And she was this. She was as able at the needle as the pen. The household knew the excellence of her cookery before they heard of that of her books.

In closing, Martineau drives a wedge between the private woman, goddess of the hearth, being mourned “in a domestic sense,” and the androgynous professional persona: “for the public, there can be no doubt that a pang will be felt in the midst of the strongest interests of the day, through the length and breadth of the land, [...] that the ‘Curren Bell,’ who so lately stole a shadow into the field of contemporary literature had already become a shadow again — vanishing from our view, and henceforth haunting only the memory of the multitude whose expectation was fixed upon her.”⁸⁸ As my final chapter’s foray into the biographical practices surrounding Charlotte Brontë/Curren Bell (and Marian Evans/George Eliot) will demonstrate, this shadowy, elusive pseudonym is finally indistinguishable from the “real” self when it comes to transmitting a life into text: neither can be guaranteed past its name.

⁸⁸ *Daily News* (April 1855) CB Letters IV.183-84.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRANGE LIFE OF GEORGE ELIOT

My choice of title for this chapter is both a tribute to and a problematizing of Rosemarie Bodenheimer's 1994 biography *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*. I believe that the juxtaposition of a "Real Life of Mary Ann Evans" with a "Strange Life of George Eliot" will deepen and complicate our understanding of authorship, of biography as a practice, and of selfhood and its construction. Prior to Bodenheimer, the three major biographical studies were John Cross's *George Eliot's Life* (1885), Gordon Haight's *George Eliot: A Biography* (1968), and Ruby Redinger's *George Eliot: The Emergent Self* (1976).¹ Bodenheimer was not the first to break from the tradition of using the writer's pseudonym as a title for the writer's life: in 1952, Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson published *Marian Evans and George Eliot: A Biography*, a work less interesting as a biography than as an example of the confusion engendered by its subject's many names. The title promises a focus on the tension between "Marian Evans" and "George Eliot," the text refers exclusively to "Marian" (without surname),² while the index directs all inquiries to "Cross, Mary Ann."

It is, however, Bodenheimer who most explicitly addresses the provocative question of why we tend to use the name "George Eliot" for the historical subject who was born Mary Anne Evans, wrote *Middlemarch*, and died Mary Ann Cross:

In the long run, the pseudonym "George Eliot" worked brilliantly to achieve precisely that triumphant vindication that Marian Lewes desired. Backed by the power of her books, it acquired a kind of independent existence that has, more than a century later, lost none of its effect. Partly because of that autonomous power and partly because it

¹ Other of the many biographies of GE include: *George Eliot's Family Life and Letters* (Paterson, 1928); *George Eliot: A Biography* (Williams, 1936); *George Eliot and Her World* (Laski, 1973); *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (Hughes, 1998). There are also several joint studies, such as *George Eliot and John Chapman* (Haight, 1940) and *Edith Simcox and George Eliot* (McKenzie, 1961).

² "George Eliot was christened Mary Ann [sic] Evans. She was generally known as Mary Ann by her friends and relatives for many years. But she eventually preferred and adopted the name of Marian, and she is referred to throughout this book by that name" (x). GE was christened Mary Anne Evans.

is the only stable name in her large repertoire, “George Eliot” has become the subject of biography as “Currer Bell” could not.³

While I am grateful for this passage, I intend to trouble these assumptions on several counts. By focusing on the lives of the pseudonyms, and not the women who created them, I am attempting to give “Currer Bell” and “George Eliot” equal status as biographical subjects — which, ultimately, is not a claim for the “reality” of either pseudonymous identity as much as for the unavoidable “unreality” of biography. I also want to undercut the sense of confidence in Marian Lewes’s “triumphant vindication.” There is nothing “precise” about the functioning of a pseudonym, which is an unruly entity that initiates crises of all sorts both during and after the life of its creator. Finally, and most importantly, I intend to show how “George Eliot”⁴ is anything but a “stable” name, and how it is exactly that “independent existence” and “autonomous power” that makes him so unstable.

The previous chapter dealt with the characteristics of a pen-name — Currer Bell’s abstraction and invisibility, his androgyny, and his ability to “haunt” his creator. This chapter pays closer attention to pseudonymity as a process: I suggest that the pseudonym actually has three different kinds of existence: as “anonymous,” as “imaginary,” and as “real.”⁵ The anonymous pseudonym lasts while the name is completely “unknown,” unattached to a person (that is, between its first appearance on a title page and its acknowledgment by the creating self). Marian Lewes called this initial kind of pseudonymity an “iron chest,” which should remain locked and guarded

³ Bodenheimer 144.

⁴ The preservation of “Charlotte Brontë” as an authorial name means that Currer Bell can be referred to as a *pseudonym* without quotation marks; here the pseudonym has to be distinguished from the general name for “the Author of *Middlemarch*.” Thus, in this chapter alone I use “George Eliot” to mean the pseudonymous persona specifically.

⁵ This tripartite distinction is my own invention, though it is perhaps of interest that Cross subtitled each of the three volumes of *The Life of George Eliot*: “Unknown” (1819-57), “Famous” (1858-66), and “Sunset” (1867-80). The second, problematic stage of pseudonymity is troublesome in its naming — what do we call a thing that doesn’t exist? I have selected “imaginary,” by which I mean no relation to the Lacanian Imaginary.

against all inquiries — both the simplest and least stable form of pseudonymity.

Jumping ahead for the moment, the third, or “real,” stage begins when the pseudonym is “outed”: when it is authorized and attached to a “real” person. The cipher becomes an authorial self, a public figure established through both textual and contextual readings.

The middle stage is where the third-term crisis occurs, and reveals the instability underpinning the other two categories. The “imaginary” pseudonym is pseudonymity as it is most commonly understood: a useful tool, wielded to the advantage of a person seeking the separation of private and public. It is figured as a mask worn for public consumption “while, behind it, lurks well pleased the veritable historical self secure from impertinent observation and criticism.”⁶ The “imaginary” condition positions the pseudonym between cipher and self, and hinges on a myth of control. What I mean to show in these biographies of “Curren Bell” and “George Eliot” is that this second stage is indeed imaginary — the ideal of protective, separative pseudonymity cannot exist. The perfect pseudonym is a phantom.

The Anonymous Pseudonym

Whatever may be the success of my stories, I shall be resolute in preserving my incognito, having observed that a *nom de plume* secures all the advantages without the disagreeables of reputation. Perhaps, therefore, it will be well to give you my prospective name, as a tub to throw to the whale in case of curious inquiries, and accordingly I subscribe myself, [...] / Yours very truly, / George Eliot.⁷

This letter, written to William Blackwood on 4 February 1857, is the earliest existing record of the pen-name “George Eliot.” In his very first moments, we can read the problems inherent in pseudonymity: the desire for “security” and the dangers coded into the language of security itself. The “Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton” being published serially in *Blackwood's Magazine*, John Blackwood addresses its

⁶ Edward Dowden, *Contemporary Review* (Aug 1872) CH-GE 321.

⁷ GE Letters II.292.

anonymous author as “My Dear Amos,”⁸ and Marian Lewes counters with her “tub to throw the whale.” This phrase, defined as “to create a diversion, esp. in order to escape a threatened danger,” comes from Swift’s preface to *A Tale of a Tub*: “seamen have a custom when they meet a Whale, to fling him out an empty Tub, by way of amusement, to divert him from laying violent hands upon the ship.”⁹ We shall see, as we watch the life of “George Eliot” unfold, how the “amusement” of pseudonymity turns to crisis. The “dangerous” insecurity of the pseudonym is, in fact, inextricably linked to its capacity to divert — both in the sense of “to deflect, avert, or distract,” and “pleasurably to excite the mind or attract the attention; to entertain, amuse.”¹⁰

Although the above letter may be the most obvious opening for this biography, it is not the only appropriate beginning. Locating the moment of “George Eliot’s” birth is as elusive as locating his status as an entity — cipher or self? Depending on our understanding of the pseudonym, we might place his birth as early as June 1848 (when Marian Evans read *Jane Eyre*, whose heroine takes the alias “Jane Elliott”)¹¹ or as late as February 1859 (when he appeared on the title page of *Adam Bede*). If we read the name as the collection of linguistic sound-images that signify “The Author of...”, we get a set of specific dates at the later end of this spectrum. If, however, we consider “George Eliot” to be an expression of selfhood, a complex set of ideas and associations linked by a particular narrative perspective, we must look ever earlier for its origins in Marian Evans Lewes’s mind.

For instance, as contributions to *Blackwood’s Magazine* were anonymous by rule, the first official appearance of “George Eliot” was the republication of the three

⁸ GE Letters II.290 (30 Jan 57).

⁹ OED: Tub, n., quotation: “(to throw out) a tub to the whale.” Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* (1704) is not an “original” source, however, as Ben Jonson wrote a pastoral comedy of the same name in 1633.

¹⁰ OED: divert, v. Also of interest is the version of *nom de plume* preferred in France: *nom de guerre*, or war-name.

¹¹ cf. Haight 220.

Scenes of Clerical Life as a two-volume work in January 1858, when the imprint of his name on the title page conferred author-hood.¹² Prior to that, the “incognito” functioned only in the private correspondence between the Leweses and their publisher, and as Blackwood’s informal answer to personal inquiries. Furthermore, the cheques for installments of the *Scenes* were made to George Henry Lewes, leaving “George Eliot” without any legal or financial status as well as without public acknowledgement for nearly a year after the letter ostensibly announcing his existence. Under a slightly different understanding of authorship, the date of the pseudonym’s true birth might be pushed forward to February 1, 1859, when the title page of *Adam Bede* declared itself a work “by George Eliot, Author of ‘Scenes of Clerical Life’.”¹³ Where “George Eliot” had been merely the name affixed to a book by a previously unknown writer, he was now properly and publicly made “Author” for the first time.

On the other hand, there are few biographers who are satisfied with a purely textual birth of “George Eliot” (either in letter or title page) — most cannot resist the temptation to speculate on an earlier, more abstract conception. John Walter Cross appends to the 4 February letter: “I may mention here that my wife told me the reason she fixed on this name was that George was Mr. Lewes’s Christian name, and Eliot was a good mouth-filling, easily-pronounced word.”¹⁴ Redinger proposes that the surname could be decoded as “To L — I owe it.”¹⁵ Haight mentions a parish clerk called “George Elliot” in the village where Fanny Houghton (Marian Evans’s half-sister) lived.¹⁶ These speculations suggest an interest in the pseudonym as something closer to self than text: “George Eliot” has an extra-textual significance even from his

¹² See Appendix, Figure 10.

¹³ See Appendix, Figure 11.

¹⁴ Cross I.349.

¹⁵ Redinger 331. Redinger claims that her source for this is Cross.

¹⁶ Haight 220.

earliest days. “Symbolic birth though this was,” Redinger writes, “more than a mere name was born.”¹⁷ If “George Eliot” could legitimately be considered more flesh-and-blood than brainchild, however, no scholar would be indelicate enough to wonder about “the deeply personal origin of the pseudonym” — that moment when the Leweses “conjured up the name.”¹⁸ As discovered in the second chapter of this thesis, the impetus to identify “family relations” in the Victorian publishing world reveals how literary production ultimately resists being mapped onto biological reproduction.¹⁹ We see, then, how the tangled nature of a pseudonym — its undecided, undecidable third-term status on the boundaries of both self and cipher — threatens to undermine the biographical project by defying us to locate its boundaries. However, in the interests of maintaining forward momentum, let us allow that on or about 4 February 1857, the pseudonym “George Eliot” was born.

“George Eliot’s” cipher-like qualities were, initially, encouraged by his creator. “I wish the book to be judged quite apart from its authorship,” Marian Lewes says of *Adam Bede*,²⁰ perfectly expressing the fantasy of the unattached pseudonym we saw in *The Critic*’s review of the Bells’ poems — withholding the “real” name might be an attempt to let the poems “be tried and judged upon their own merits alone, apart from all extraneous circumstances.”²¹ As “George Eliot” had explained earlier to John Blackwood:

For several reasons I am very anxious to retain my incognito for some time to come, and to an author not already famous, anonymity is the highest *prestige*. Besides, if George Eliot turns out to be a dull dog and an ineffective writer — a mere flash in the pan — I, for one, am determined to cut him on the first intimation of that disagreeable fact.²²

¹⁷ Redinger 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 331.

¹⁹ cf. Bodenheimer, on “GE” as the “collaborative invention” of GHL, MEL, and JB (122).

²⁰ GE Letters II.505 (1 Dec 58).

²¹ CH-CB 59.

²² GE Letters II.309-10 (14 Mar 57).

The most practical and immediate of the “several reasons” — one which was likely to trouble her upright Scottish publisher,²³ and one to which we will return — was the author’s scandalous cohabitation with a married man. But the motivation for incognito offered here, and one which Blackwood almost certainly did appreciate, is a business-headed savvy about the marketability of mystery. George Henry Lewes later sums up this position as: “Let the public know that Smith and not Brown wrote a certain book, and although both Smith and Brown are entirely unknown to the said public a certain charm is lost. When *Jane Eyre* was finally known to be a woman’s book,” Lewes continues, “the tone noticeably changed.”²⁴

The unavoidable comparisons between the “Great Unknowns” Currer Bell and George Eliot began with the Leweses themselves, who used Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* to track the sales of *Scenes of Clerical Life* against those of *Jane Eyre*,²⁵ and have persisted through to Bodenheimer, who opens the second chapter of *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans* with “On October 20, 1854, the recently married Charlotte Brontë Nicholls wrote a newsy note to her school friend Ellen Nussey [...].”²⁶ Indeed, the early lives of these two incognitos have undeniable — and theoretically cogent — resonances with each other. There are three particular ways in which “George Eliot’s” first experiences in the literary world replicate those of the Bells: the immediate critical assumption that unfamiliarity is pseudonymity; the “much vexed question of sex” in

²³ It is not clear exactly when the Blackwoods knew “GE” to be MEL. JB first met “GE”/MEL on 28 Feb 1858 (GE Letters II.435), yet in Dec 1857, WB wrote to his brother: “I have just returned from Richmond. G.E. did not show: he is such a timid fellow, Lewes said.” His addition — “I saw a Mrs. Lewes” — as well as GE’s journal entry — “It was evident to us when he had only been in the room a few minutes that he knew I was George Eliot” — both suggest that it was an open, but tacit, secret between the Blackwoods and Leweses (GE Letters II.410fn.). The (albeit gentlemanly) disapproval of the Evans/Lewes situation is evident in JB’s letter to his wife: “I drove to Richmond to see Lewes, and was introduced to George Eliot — a woman (the Mrs. Lewes whom we suspected). This is to be kept a profound secret, and on all accounts it is desirable, as you will readily imagine.” (GE Letters II.436)

²⁴ GE Letters II.506 (2 Dec 58).

²⁵ cf. GE Letters II.429.

²⁶ Bodenheimer 23. The name “Mary Ann Evans” only occurs after a full two pages are devoted to CB.

reviews; and, most importantly, how the benefits of anonymity contain the means by which that anonymity is ultimately exploited and, consequently, aborted.

On 2 January 1858, the *Times* declared “Mr. George Eliot,” who had “now claimed” the authorship of the reprinted *Scenes*, to be “a name unknown to us. It is quite possible that this may be a mere *nom de plume*, and we are not curious to inquire at all upon this point.”²⁷ Soon after the publication of *Adam Bede* the following year, Elizabeth Gaskell wrote to John Blackwood to thank him for her copy: “I thoroughly admire this writer’s works,” she says, adding in parentheses, “(I do not call him Mr. Elliott [sic] because I know that such is not his real name.)”²⁸ There seems to be no solid evidence for the pervasive suspicion that the name “George Eliot” — despite being conscientiously chosen to sound unremarkable to English ears (“good mouth-filling, easily pronounced”) — was as much a fabrication as the bizarre “Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.” The nature and dissemination of the London gossip about exactly what George Henry Lewes’s mistress might be getting up to is a slice of crucial but unrecorded oral history, and must remain one of the many indistinct patches in the biography of the pseudonym.

Hard on the heels of speculation about “George Eliot’s” reality comes the inevitable battle of the sexes: is it a man or a woman? As with the reviews of Currer Bell’s work, each camp is as adamant, and as entertaining to the hindsighted, as the other. On the side of masculinity, the *Saturday Review* claimed that “George Eliot” was “some studious clergyman, a Cantab, [...] the father of a family, of High Church tendencies, and exceedingly fond of children, Greek dramatists, and dogs,”²⁹ and Jane

²⁷ CH-GE 61. This professed indifference is naïve, if not downright facetious. During the Liggins authorship debate, which finally drove “GE” out of anonymity, *The Times* hosted the most virulent and prominent debate on its own Letters page.

²⁸ GE Letters VIII.224 (9 March 59).

²⁹ CH-GE 67 (29 May 1858). “Thus much internal evidence suggests,” the reviewer adds, echoing Forçade on *JE* (cf. Chapter 3 of this thesis).

Welsh Carlyle guessed he was “a man of middle age, with a wife from whom he has got those beautiful *feminine* touches in his book, a good many children, and a dog that he has as much fondness for as I have for my little Nero! for the rest, not just a clergyman, but a Brother or first cousin to a clergyman!”³⁰

Charles Dickens heads up the opposition, claiming proudly to have “nailed my colors to the Mast with ‘Eve’ upon them.”³¹ He writes via Blackwood:

In addressing these few words of thankfulness to the creator of the sad fortunes of Mr. Amos Barton, and the sad love-story of Mr. Gilfil, I am (I presume) bound to adopt the name that it pleases that excellent writer to assume. I can suggest no better one; but I should have been strongly disposed, if I had been left to my own devices, to address the said writer as a woman. I have observed what seem to me to be such womanly touches, in those moving fictions, that the assurance on the title-page is insufficient to satisfy me, even now. If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself, mentally, so like a woman, since the world began.³²

Marian Lewes’s reply to Blackwood, expressing regret that her anonymity requires her silence, directs us to the problem that underpins and finally undermines this first stage of pseudonymity: “I am so deeply moved by the finely-felt and finely expressed sympathy of the letter, that the iron mask of my incognito seems quite painful in forbidding me to tell Dickens how thoroughly his generous impulse has been appreciated.”³³ The incognito as an “iron mask,” which will later become an “iron chest,” is the key image for understanding the cipher and why it is doomed to fail. As with both the predeceasing Great Unknowns, there could be nothing more conducive to

³⁰ GE Letters II.426 (21 Jan 58). Jane Carlyle’s guesses demonstrate a good deal of self-awareness: “I hope to know someday if the person I am addressing bears any resemblance, in external things to the Idea I have conceived of him in my mind,” she writes, and adds at the end of her Idea, “How ridiculous all this *may* read, beside the reality!”

³¹ GE Letters III.115 (10 July 59). At this point Dickens knows who “GE” is — and is in fact attempting to woo GE from Blackwood with his displays of the “absolute and never-doubting confidence” he had in her sex from the beginning.

³² GE Letters II.423-24 (18 Jan 58). In his covering letter to JB he insists, “if those two volumes, or a part of them, were not written by a woman, then should I begin to believe that I am a woman myself!” On 27 Jan he writes again: “If I be wrong in this, then I protest that a woman’s mind has got into some man’s body by a mistake that ought immediately to be corrected.” (428) Such insistence on distinctly gendered writing seems ironic when we recall that CB named him in her letter to Hartley Coleridge as one of the male authors likely to write in the style of “boarding-school misses.”

³³ GE Letters II.424.

speculation than the impenetrability of the incognito. From speculation it was an easy next step to capitalization — and there was an opportunist prepared to make the jump.

Pseudonymity in Crisis: The Liggins Affair

As their correspondence progresses, it becomes clear that Blackwood appreciated the sense of fun that drove his new writer to maintain her “dull dog” pseudonym. In those early letters between Edinburgh and Richmond, “all the participants took pleasure in playing on the boundaries of the fiction. For a while, Marian enjoyed the ‘prestige’ of anonymity and the secret thrill of hearing both Blackwood and Lewes repeat others’ opinions and gossip about the stories and their unknown writer.”³⁴ The Author of *Scenes* and *Adam Bede* enjoyed hearing about the guesses of the unprivileged — both the incorrect (Jane Carlyle, as well as Thackeray and Margaret Oliphant) and the correct (Dickens) — and her publisher and husband enjoyed relating them.³⁵

The opportunities for amusement provided by “George Eliot” were not limited to the correspondence with her publisher — Marian Lewes also enjoyed toying with family and friends who lived outside the literary pale of London. In reply to her sister Fanny’s mention of the *Scenes of Clerical Life* (still appearing anonymously in *Blackwood’s*) and their possible Warwickshire origin, she writes:

You are wrong about Mr. Liggins or rather your informants are wrong. We too have been struck with the “Clerical Sketches,” and I have recognized some figures and traditions connected with our old neighbourhood. But Blackwood informs Mr. Lewes that the author is a Mr. Eliot, a clergyman, I presume. *Au reste*, he may be a relation of Mr. Liggins’s or some other “Mr.” who knows Coton stories.³⁶

³⁴ Bodenheimer 122-23. In fact, after meeting “GE,” JB’s first act of face-to-face business was to discuss which literati thought him man and which thought her a woman (GE Letters II.435).

³⁵ Haight 252. It could be that the “thrill” palpable among the three privileged secret-keepers is closely related to the anxiety regarding GE’s “morbid sensitivity” to criticism and the ensuing self-censorship practiced by GHL and JB.

³⁶ GE Letters II.337 (2 June 57).

A biographer reading this letter would be forgiven for detecting a palpable grin in the apparently non-sequitur addition of “Have you read *Currer Bell’s Life* by Mrs. Gaskell? Do — it will deeply interest you,” and the signature “Marian Lewes *alias* Polly.” However, the instability of an anonymous pseudonym, which allowed such “playing on the boundaries,” soon turns pleasure to desperation. It is this “Mr. Liggins” — initially harmless, even “a useful ‘beard’ for Marian Lewes”³⁷ — blithely dismissed in the summer of 1857, who will provoke a year of crisis, resulting in the incognito being abandoned in the fall of 1859.

Much remains unclear about Joseph Liggins and his claim to be the author of “George Eliot’s” works — for instance, it is uncertain whether he masterminded the scheme or was merely the pawn of manipulative friends.³⁸ Nevertheless, what began as provincial gossip reached the ears of John Blackwood in April 1858, blossomed into printed debate by the following spring, and reached a head when a rumor that the author had received no money for the *Scenes* led to a charitable collection being taken up for Mr. Liggins. In the face of the impostor’s assertions, the “real” George Eliot wrote to his publisher in despair: “I think I should soon begin to believe that ‘Liggins’ wrote my books — it is so difficult to believe what the world does *not* believe, so easy to believe what the world keeps repeating.”³⁹

There is a certain amount of bemusement on the part of Eliot scholars when it comes to “the Liggins Affair”; David Carroll, for one, sums up the man and his claims

³⁷ Hirsch, “Ligginitis, Three Georges, Perie-zadeth and Spitting Critics” 81.

³⁸ Hirsch considers Liggins his own agent, and an especially clever one at that — his ability to exploit “borders on a kind of genius,” though not the genius of “the real ‘George Eliot’” (81). Welsh, on the other hand, argues for Liggins-as-puppet — he was such a buffoon that his existence in the GE story “exemplifies the strange possibilities of the divorce between public and private life.” (129)

³⁹ GE Letters III.44 (10 April 59), emphasis original. The extent of the Liggins affair as “crisis” is a matter of debate: from “amusing, exasperating, and intrusive” but ultimately “useful” — with the resulting revelation “embarrassing but triumphant” (Welsh 123, 128-29) — to a full psychological crisis, provoking the acidly disillusioned tone of “The Lifted Veil” (cf. Redinger, Bodenheimer).

as “bizarre.”⁴⁰ However, I argue that Joseph Liggins the logical if not necessary result of anonymous pseudonymity — at least, that is, of commercially successful anonymous pseudonymity. Authorship loves, and demands, acknowledgement. If “George Eliot’s” creator would not claim him, he would seek someone who would. Faced with a storm of speculation and accusation, the Leweses had taken their cue from Sir Walter Scott, who believed that when faced with direct questions regarding his authorship, “only one of three courses could be followed. Either I must have surrendered my secret, or have returned an equivocating answer, or finally, must have stoutly and boldly denied the fact.”⁴¹ Marian Lewes believed firmly in the last of these: “An incognito can be maintained on no other condition, and in such a case one ought to say ‘No’ to an impertinent querist as one would decline to open one’s iron chest to a burglar.”⁴² As an example of this philosophy, Lewes wrote to the rumor-mongering John Chapman: “As you seem so very slow in appreciating [Mrs. Lewes’] feelings on this point, she authorizes me to state, as distinctly as language can do so, that she is not the author of ‘Adam Bede.’”⁴³

The hitch in the “iron chest” plan is that by denying any attachment to the pseudonym, Marian Lewes relinquished her ownership over it, and “George Eliot” was available to anyone who could make a case for himself. Pam Hirsch calls the pseudonym a “vacuum,”⁴⁴ giving its emptiness a drawing power. Thus we have Reverend Anders, announcing to the readers of *The Times* that the author of both *Scenes* and the hugely popular *Adam Bede* is “Mr. Joseph Liggins of Nuneaton,” and promises tangible proofs: “You may easily satisfy yourself of my correctness by

⁴⁰ CH-GE 9.

⁴¹ He claims to have “considered [him]self entitled, like an accused person put upon trial,” *not* to give evidence against himself (“General Preface to the *Magnum Opus*”, *Scott Prefaces* 96-97).

⁴² GE Letters II.505 (1 Dec 58).

⁴³ GE Letters III.13 (12 Feb 59).

⁴⁴ Hirsch 79.

inquiring of any one in that neighbourhood. Mr. Liggins himself and the characters whom he paints in *Scenes of Clerical Life* are as familiar there as the twin spires of Coventry.”⁴⁵ The Leweses, having elected the route of denial, were in no stronger a position than Anders. Nonetheless, a reply signed “George Eliot” ran the next day, “distinctly deny[ing]” his claim:

I declare on my honour that the gentleman never saw a line of those works until they were printed, nor had he any knowledge of them whatever.

Allow me to ask whether the act of publishing a book deprives a man of all claim to the courtesies usual among gentlemen? If not, the attempt to pry into what is obviously meant to be withheld — my name — and to publish the rumours which prying may give rise to, seems to me quite indefensible, still more so to state these rumours as ascertained truths.⁴⁶

As long as he remained a cipher, “George Eliot” could not be controlled, nor could he be held to the “honourable” standards of a gentleman — a problem rather nicely illustrated by the fact that his letter to *The Times* bore a counterfeit signature: it was penned by George Henry Lewes. It was the strength of his anonymity — the iron of the chest — that made him so unstable and so pliable an element. *The Athenaeum*, for instance, picked up on this quality and spun the name-claim-game to absurd new heights, proposing that Liggins was actually an invention of “George Eliot’s,” rather than the other way around:

Mr. Nicholas, it is true, answers for Mr. Liggins; but who answers for Mr. Nicholas? Liggins, Eliot, and Nicholas are like Sairy Gamp, Betsy Prig, and Mrs. Harris. Roll all three into one and you turn up a rather strong-minded lady, blessed with abundance of showy sentiment and a profusion of pious words, but kept for sale rather than for use. Vanish Eliot, Nicholas, Liggins, — enter, (let us say, at a guess,) Miss Biggins!⁴⁷

When Gaskell uses the opportunity to joke with the cipher, she is condoned. Accused of being the author of *Adam Bede*, she writes to the still-anonymous “George Eliot” in June 1859: “I have hitherto denied it; but I really think, that as you want to keep your real name a secret, it would be very pleasant for me to blush acquiescence. Will you

⁴⁵ GE Letters III.48 (printed 15 April 59).

⁴⁶ GE Letters III.50 (printed 16 April 59).

⁴⁷ GE Letters III.109fn. (2 July 59).

give me leave?" She closes that, "although to my friends I am known under the name of Mrs. Gaskell, to you I will confess that I *am* the author of Adam Bede, and remain very respectfully and gratefully yours, / Gilbert Elliot [sic]."⁴⁸ The same joke delivered with a straight face by Liggins, or in a mocking tone by *The Athenaeum*, becomes a threat. By this point, Marian Lewes was no doubt disillusioned with the "play" offered by her pseudonym, who had fulfilled his unruly third-term potential in spades.

The final move in the game came with the rumor that Liggins had a manuscript for the *Scenes of Clerical Life*. "We can no longer consider the matter a joke or believe that only fools will be taken in," Marian Lewes writes to Blackwood in June 1859.⁴⁹ He made a desperate attempt to rekindle the frivolous spirit and keep the wildly successful unknown author from attaching himself to the all-too-known woman — he proposed an anonymous publication of the forthcoming *Mill on the Floss*, suggesting that "it would be great fun to watch the speculations as to the author's life."⁵⁰ But by the end of the year the iron-clad cipher was in his death throes. In early 1860, *The Mill on the Floss* appeared on the shelves, and its authorship was attributed to a compound of "George Eliot, 'Author of Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede'" (via title page) and Marian Evans Lewes (via common knowledge). In April 1862, Marian Lewes wrote to Sara Hennell, re-telling how her incognito met its end. She closes with "[b]ut Requiescat in pace. You know I do not willingly encourage the ghosts of the past to haunt me — that I do not willingly write or speak about my books," she says, throwing a suggestion of third-term ghostliness on Liggins, her own previous life as an anonymous pseudonym, and the novels themselves.⁵¹

⁴⁸ GE Letters III.74 (3 June 59), emphasis original. In an excellent touch of self-reflexiveness, Gaskell addresses the letter as she signs it — "Dear Mr. 'Gilbert Elliott'."

⁴⁹ GE Letters III.102.

⁵⁰ GE Letters III.161 (21 Sept 59).

⁵¹ GE Letters IV.26. Hirsch claims that by the publication of *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, GE had finally been vindicated, and "the shade of the persistent Liggins had been put to rest." (95)

Imaginary Pseudonym, Imaginary Self: “George Eliot” is “Mrs. Lewes”⁵²

At the moment that the anonymous “George Eliot” dies and the real “George Eliot” is born — and only in this moment, on the boundary between known and unknown — the middle stage of pseudonymity comes into play. The “imaginary pseudonym” appears in the space of possibility that connects public persona with private person. This space is opened when the author-as-anonymous cipher transforms into the author-as-real self, and it exposes Garber’s category crisis: the binaries of “George Eliot” and “Marian Lewes” are disrupted; both are revealed to be always-already cipher *and* self. We can read this crisis in the life of any pseudonym, but the disruption is especially striking in this case. Between “Currer Bell” and Charlotte Brontë there was the difference of a legalized existence (birth certificate); between “George Eliot” and Marian Lewes, there is none.⁵³ As observed rather nastily by the *Saturday Review*, in its assessment of Cross’s *Life*: “It is no more true that the author of *Adam Bede* was Mrs. Lewes than it is true that the author of *Adam Bede* was Mr. Liggins,” and to refer to the Evans/Lewes union in terms of “husband” and “wife” is to “debase the moral currency” and “endorse a deliberate literary and historical falsification.”⁵⁴

To pause and expand this moment of imaginary pseudonymity — the non/existence that occurs when the known person behind the unknown Author first publicly attaches herself to her pen-name — let us return to the confused origins of the pseudonym and its cipher/self tensions. “George Eliot’s” birth is tied to the death of “Marian Evans” in favor of “Marian Lewes” — “a change that followed close upon

⁵² GHJ to Émile Montégut (1 Dec 59), seeking a competent translator for *AB*: “George Eliot is Mrs. Lewes — so you see I have an interest in the matter.” (GE Letters VIII.253)

⁵³ There would, eventually, be a legal entity known as “Mary Ann Evans Lewes,” but not until GHJ dies in 1879. For a discussion of the legal and financial problems facing “Mary Ann Evans, Spinster,” the “nonwidow” of GHJ, see Bodenheimer (114) and Haight (523).

⁵⁴ “A Too Serious Life” (7 Feb 1885) CH-GE 486.

the adoption of the pseudonym George Eliot,” Bodenheimer writes, admitting that “the connection between the fictional married name and the pseudonym is a tantalizing one. If she could be George Eliot, why not Marian Lewes?”⁵⁵ The trauma involved in creating and maintaining the authorial persona, indeed, neatly mirrors the trauma involved in creating and maintaining the “wife and mother” Marian Lewes. On 26 May 1857, the creator of “George Eliot” writes to Isaac Evans: “You will be surprized, I dare say, but I hope not sorry, to learn that I have changed my name, and have someone to take care of me in the world.” The letter is signed “Your affectionate Sister / Marian Lewes.” Isaac’s solicitor replies, asking for the specific where and when of what she suggests was her “marriage.” When “Mrs. Lewes” is unable to provide sufficient evidence of the legal reality behind her “altered state,” her brother initiates a 23-year silence that is, effectively, a near-complete break from the Evans family.⁵⁶ Biographers are quick to hit on the violence of this rupture as a crucial — if not the crucial — moment in the creation of Marian Lewes, and read it as influencing and influenced by the creation of “George Eliot.”⁵⁷

Although both of these new names were “fictional,” only one of them required the death of another name. Marian Lewes could not exist without the squelching of Marian Evans — an awkward and lengthy process for the Leweses, who did not have the weight of the law behind them. We can follow their crusade to kill Marian Evans across the course of several years, beginning in 1857 with an earnest request to Bessie Rayner Parkes: “you must please not call me *Miss Evans* again,” she writes,

⁵⁵ Bodenheimer 120.

⁵⁶ GE Letters II.331-32, 346.

⁵⁷ Redinger: “The pseudonym could have given her no direct help in her troubled relationship with Isaac, yet she may have drawn courage from the mere awareness of its existence” (336); Beer: “But George Eliot survived after Marian Evans’ alienation from her brother — was even born out of that alienation” (*George Eliot* 95); Bodenheimer: “The possession of a new secret power may be indirectly connected with Marian’s decision to end the silence that had kept her marriage hidden from her family” (127).

summoning what official support she can: “I have renounced that name, and do not mean to be known by it in any way. It is Mr. Lewes’s wish that the few friends who care about me should recognize me as Mrs. Lewes, and my Father’s Trustee sends me receipts to sign as Marian Lewes, so that my adoption of the name has been made a matter of business.”⁵⁸ By 1859, a strain is showing in the hearty good-nature of George Henry Lewes’s postscript to Barbara Bodichon: “But, dear Barbara, you must not call her Marian Evans again: that individual is extinct, rolled up, mashed, absorbed in the Lewesian magnificence!”⁵⁹ In July of that year, after rumors that her Coventry friends are referring to her as “Miss Evans,” the author and the wife join forces and sign a letter to Charles Bray: “Yours ever / G.E. / My *name* is Marian Evans *Lewes*.”⁶⁰

A similar desperation for recognition of both professional and personal aliases occurs again in 1861, when Lewes replies to the editor of *Men of the Time* (which has named “Mary A. Evans” the “authoress” behind the “*nom de plume* of George Eliot”):

Mrs. Lewes (who for the last seven years has ceased to be Miss Evans) has done her utmost to keep from every other publicity than that of her books, with which alone the outside world has any right to concern itself. A portion of the English Press has however, with questionable delicacy, refused the author’s right to remain unknown, and refused to accept the name which each successive title page, from the Clerical Scenes to Silas Marner has shown to be the name she has chosen for her public appearances.⁶¹

With his charge of “questionable delicacy,” Lewes situates this letter in an ongoing debate about the rights of a published author in relation to the public marketplace — a debate which often calls upon notions of “honour,” perhaps because the novelist’s profession had only recently been made respectable, colonized from a vocation unbecoming to “gentlemen.” Both the Leweses used the vocabulary of gentlemanly conduct in “George Eliot’s” responses to *The Times* during the Liggins crisis — her

⁵⁸ GE Letters II.384 (24 Sep 57), emphasis original.

⁵⁹ GE Letters III.65 (5 May 59).

⁶⁰ GE Letters III.111 (5 July 59). Bray gets the point, writing to GHL on 8 July: “She has been long ‘Marian Evans Lewes’ to us in spirit and in fact, and if any one says, as is often now the case, did Miss Evans write Adam Bede, I say no, but Mrs. Lewes did, who was Miss Evans.” (121 fn., emphasis original)

⁶¹ GE Letters III.429 (22 June 61). From Haight’s footnote, it seems *Men of the Time* did not listen.

stringently worded attempts (“*he is an impostor*,” “*he is a swindler*”), went unpublished,⁶² while, as quoted previously, his more delicately pointed “[a]llow me to ask whether the act of publishing a book deprives a man of all claim to the courtesies usual among gentlemen?” made it into print. Blackwood reassured the Leweses that their faith in the honor of the profession was well-founded: “George Eliot’s contradiction in the Times is exceedingly well put and made me laugh considerably. It will stop all the better class papers from publishing rumours as to the authorship.”⁶³

The gendered notions underlying the implicit and explicit demands for proper gentlemanly conduct highlight the problems of cross-gendered pseudonymity generally, but also engage specifically with the “questionable delicacy” of Marian Lewes’s social situation. As Alexander Welsh demonstrates in his *George Eliot and Blackmail*, managing the secrets of the two fictitious names required different strategies: while George Eliot was (initially) a “closed” secret, and thus vulnerable to Liggins’s “strange form of blackmail,” the “open” secret of Marian Lewes (that Marian Evans had no legal right to the name) was immune to blackmailing.⁶⁴ Even friends sympathetic to the Leweses’ decision to defy Victorian mores could not deny the gravity of the “Mrs. Lewes” problem and its consequences both personally and publicly.⁶⁵ The relatively conservative Blackwoods establishment, whatever their personal reservations, took their cue from the extreme tact of John Blackwood and

⁶² GE Letters III.93, emphasis original.

⁶³ GE Letters III.51 (18 April 59). Interestingly, in Dec 1859 Newby turned the charge of indelicacy against the Leweses. After “GE” condemned him for attempting to publish “Adam Bede, Junior. A Sequel” and named him as the villainous publisher in Gaskell’s *Life*, Newby’s reply objected to the “most palpable misrepresentation levelled at a publisher whose name the author of Miss Bronte’s life declined to give, but whom ‘George Eliot’ for the first time identifies with me.” (GE Letters III.220)

⁶⁴ Welsh 123.

⁶⁵ Bodichon, one of the freest thinkers of GE’s acquaintance, writes from Algeria on the gossip surrounding *AB* and “GE”: “From their way of talking it was evident they thought you [as Mrs. Lewes] would do the book more harm than the book do you good in public opinion” (GE Letters III.103; 28 June 59). Gaskell breaks the hard news gently: “I should not be quite true in my ending, if I did not say before I concluded that I wish you *were Mrs. Lewes*. However that can’t be helped, as far as I can see, and one must not judge others” (GE Letters III.197; 10 Nov 59; emphasis original).

were conscientiously silent on the issue. During the period of confusion and ill-humor provoked by the death of the anonymous incognito,⁶⁶ William Blackwood wrote to his brother with typical restraint and understatement, his writing nicely demonstrating that “[a]ltogether it is a tangled kind of business.” He refers to “G.E.” with alternating pronouns (“he wishes,” “give him,” “his feelings,” “publisher for her,” “her other writings”), and at one point seems to throw up his hands with an “I really think we should have some understanding with Lewes about this.”⁶⁷

If we turn from these two most courteous gentlemen to their less refined underlings, we see how even a minor tremor between authorial household and publishing house exposes the anxiety caused by unstable gender and unsuitable sexual impropriety. Amongst rumors that Marian Lewes would be offering her new novel (*Mill on the Floss*) to Dickens for publication in *All the Year Round*, Blackwood’s Edinburgh manager, George Simpson, wrote to Joseph Langford, London manager:

G.E. has sold herself to the highest bidder. I said very early that he was an avaricious soul, but even with this failing if he had known what dealing with Gentlemen was I think he would have explained the matter to the Messrs. B before accepting the offer of another party. I have no doubt the tempter is that fallen angel C.D.⁶⁸

While Simpson’s assumptions were, in the end, entirely unfounded, his peevish response is illustrative of the paradoxical position a third-term “George Eliot” occupied in the mind of at least one Victorian reader. The pronouns are muddled and inconsistent (“herself,” “he”), and “G.E.” is cast as Eve to Dickens’s serpent while simultaneously chastised for her failure to behave according to the standards of “Gentlemen.” The pseudonymous author finds him/herself occupying space on both sides of the gender divide, and, at the mercy of a rigid “separate spheres” mentality, doomed not to satisfy

⁶⁶ The Blackwoods and Leweses were on frosty terms Oct-Dec 1859 (see GE Letters III, esp. 194). There are several reasons for this spat, including money issues and garden-variety misunderstandings. Haight treats this uncomfortable period and the reconciliation thoroughly (297, 306-312).

⁶⁷ GE Letters III.221 (1 Dec 59).

⁶⁸ GE Letters III.204-05 (16 Nov 59).

the expectations of either. On the other hand, the problems raised by the both/and, neither/nor status of “George Eliot’s” gender, as with any third term, challenge the very rigidity of those categories. We previously saw how Elizabeth Rigby’s ability to perform a masculine voice (in her review of *Jane Eyre*) and her concomitant use of feminine authority on matters of “dress” reflected the resistant androgyny of the novel she was “proving” to be by a man. Similarly, Marian Lewes’s initial performance as “George Eliot, Esq.” upsets the clean masculine/feminine binary, which remains destabilized even after her “true” gender is revealed.

“Real” Pseudonymity: Physicality and Selfhood

Leaving the uncertain space of possibility, in which the direct interaction of “George Eliot” with Marian Lewes creates a single slippery moment of “imaginary” pseudonymity, we begin an examination of the third stage of pseudonymity with two quotations from John Blackwood:

I have just returned from a long day with George Eliot and Lewes. It is impossible not to like her excessively. She gives irresistibly the impression of a real good woman.⁶⁹

She is a fine character — all my former good opinion of her is restored. I am sure I cannot be mistaken both in her language and the expression of her face.⁷⁰

These two observations bookend the most troubled time of the long and successful relationship between the Blackwoods and the Leweses. The first is from June 1859, the height of the Liggins fiasco. The anonymous pseudonym was failing fast — a month previously Blackwood had admonished the excitable “George Eliot” with the postscript “KEEP YOUR SECRET.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, on 18 October Blackwood received a

⁶⁹ JB to his wife, GE Letters III.94 (25 June 59). He follows this observation with one of his few recorded comments on the “Mrs. Lewes” problem: “It is impossible not to like him too. It is most melancholy that their relations cannot be put straight.”

⁷⁰ JB to WB (15 Dec 59) GE Letters III.236.

⁷¹ GE Letters III.68 (18 May 59).

letter signed “Ever, my dear Sir, / Yours very truly / Marian Evans Lewes.”⁷² From June through December 1859, “George Eliot” was abandoning anonymity for the realm of the “real” — characterized so aptly by William Blackwood as “altogether a tangled kind of business.”

Appropriately, this period of change is bound by observations on the physical reality of “George Eliot”/Marian Lewes. In each quotation, John Blackwood finds reassurance in what flesh-and-blood *presence* can offer him — a “long day’s” visit, her “language” (her voice, as opposed to her letters), and her “face.” The aggravations of the anonymous “George Eliot” — an abstract, textual cipher that is readily interpretable and thus frustratingly insecure — are juxtaposed with the comfort of a tangible, concrete self called Marian Lewes, whose extra-textual existence can act as guarantee of her sincerity and reality. However, as Blackwood’s inadvertently problematic choice of words suggests, this “*impression of a real good woman*” carries the seeds of its own destruction. Even the “real” Marian Lewes can convey an “impression,” which contains the very opposite of tangible, concrete reality: “A notion, remembrance, or belief, impressed upon the mind; hence esp., a somewhat vague or indistinct notion remaining in the mind as a survival from more distinct knowledge.”⁷³ The self resists claims of certainty as easily as the cipher did. We must be skeptical of ideas of security or control — we cannot assume that because Marian Lewes extended her hand and reined in the freewheeling “George Eliot,” she could use him at her leisure.

Within days of the pseudonym’s birth in February 1857, George Henry Lewes had promised Blackwood that his mysterious friend would eventually “break through

⁷² GE Letters III.185. WB, passing the letter to JB, bemoans the change: “I am rather sorry to see the change of signature” (188). JB replies to GE on 27 Oct with his first “My Dear Madam” (190).

⁷³ *OED*: impression, n. A man so steeped in publishing as JB could not have had another sense of the word far from mind: “The printing of that number of copies (of a book, etc.) which forms one issue of it.” MEL is, once again, a textual entity.

the anonymous with you” and “become his own literary Agent.”⁷⁴ Indeed, when the incognito is broken and persona attaches to person, “George Eliot” gains new agency: he becomes a “real” pseudonym. The public not only could recognize him on title pages, but could be reassured by a physical presence — they might write letters to him, collect his autograph, spot him at a literary event, even visit him at the Priory on a Sunday afternoon. Lewes records an example of such physically focused author-worship in his diary for 28 February 1878:

as we all came out of [Westminster] Abbey I saw a lady gazing very devoutly at Polly and then quietly as if unobserved stroke the back of her cloak and person. Du Maurier afterwards told us that Mrs. Kendall was in high spirits at having ‘touched George Eliot.’ Now the lady I saw was *not* Mrs. Kendall — so that there were two who had the same inspiration.⁷⁵

“A shadow holds out a hand to me,” J.A. Froude wrote to a still-anonymous “George Eliot” in 1858; “I try to take it and it fades away. Who are you?”⁷⁶ By answering this question, Marian Lewes made her pseudonym *knowable* — a promise to readers that there was a tangible, embodied author they could discover. Froude’s desire to learn the secret of the anonymous pseudonym is echoed in the life of the “real” pseudonym by Louisa Estes, who expresses “the intense desire to know you, to actually look at, talk and clasp hands with you.”⁷⁷ The answer she receives — “I value very highly, and I shall bear in mind very gratefully what your letter tells me of the feeling with which you regard my books and, in consequence, the unknown remainder of myself. [...] But pray remember that the best of an author is, or ought to be, in his books”⁷⁸ — only reinforces the idea that “George Eliot” has existence both within and without his

⁷⁴ GE Letters II.295 (11 Feb 57).

⁷⁵ GE Letters VII.14, emphasis original. The event “at the Abbey” was Lionel Tennyson’s wedding.

⁷⁶ GE Letters II.481 (26 Sept 58).

⁷⁷ GE Letters VI.51fn.

⁷⁸ GE Letters VI.51-52 (28 May 74).

novels. Such an idea provokes any number of interpretations, gleaned from the textual and verified by the contextual, and vice versa.

The physically descriptive gossip, which (as we saw in the previous chapter) indicated that the outed Brontë/Bell body was a privileged sight, has resonances here as well. But there is an almost exaggerated warts-and-all quality to portraits of the Lewes/Eliot body — consider Eliza Lynn Linton’s description: “[she] held her hands and arms kangaroo fashion; was badly dressed; had an unwashed, unbrushed, unkempt look altogether.”⁷⁹ Charles Eliot Norton connects George Eliot to George Sand by likening their faces, though the former does not benefit by the comparison:

the lines are almost as strong and masculine, the cheeks are almost as heavy [...], but the eyes are not so deep, and there is less suggestion of possible beauty and possible sensuality in the general contour of the expression. Indeed one rarely sees a plainer woman; dull complexion, dull eye, heavy features.⁸⁰

Later in this thesis I will be proposing that there is a critical coherence to the insistence on an ugly, specifically *masculine* George Eliot, but for the moment it is important to note that the (implied) reading of George Sand’s face comes from a portrait, not from life. Swinburne is perhaps more to the point: “Charlotte's bad eyesight must have misled her when she fancied a likeness between her sister and G.H. Lewes. I only met him once, but I remember [...] that he was the ugliest of human beings I ever saw except perhaps his consort George Eliot [...]”⁸¹ Emily Brontë never made a single appearance in literary society, yet Swinburne is prepared to defend the invisible body of “Ellis Bell” in the same breath that he behaves in such an ungentlemanly manner towards Eliot.

I suggest that these readings are not evidence that Marian Lewes was empirically less comely than the Brontë sisters, but rather that “George Eliot” suffers

⁷⁹ Quoted in Showalter 107.

⁸⁰ GE Letters V.9 (29 Jan 69).

⁸¹ Letter to Clement Shorter (19 Oct 96) CB Letters II.286.

from a lack of the Romanticizing mediation provided by *Jane Eyre* or, perhaps more significantly, the poignant tragedies of the 1850 Biographical Notice and *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. In what I consider to be a related phenomenon, each Charlotte Brontë novel is considered a kind of autobiography — each heroine is an embodiment of her creator — whereas George Eliot’s autobiography is located in a different kind of “body”: her *corpus*, or collected works. The final chapter of this thesis will return to the different ways in which the texts “Charlotte Brontë” and “George Eliot” are read; the next three chapters, however, offer readings of the literary texts produced by “the Author of *Jane Eyre*” and “the Author of *Middlemarch*.”

CHAPTER 5

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Karen Chase, reflecting on how the great Victorians “seem to reflect the age but not to reflect one another,” poses a question to illustrate her point: “Who could be more dissimilar than [Charlotte] Brontë and George Eliot?”¹ While literalness might tempt us to answer “*Emily* Brontë and George Eliot,” the following two chapters take as their premise the fact that the authors of *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch* do indeed seem to be going about their business in very different ways. I propose that if we allow our understanding of pseudonymity to inform our view of these writers and their distinct artistic visions, we will recognize that the disrupted status of each constitutes a bridge across the gap, a breach in the wall between genres.

This chapter looks at the autobiographical conceit in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, which enacts the split self inherent to pseudonymity and to authorship generally, as well as at the unlikely autobiography in *Shirley*, a third-person narrative supposedly interested in more “social concerns.”² The following chapter turns to George Eliot, intending to show that her realist fiction is not, after all, a steady art in opposition to Brontë’s self-confessed “irregular” and “heretic” narratives. As the hard-working third term has already dismantled categories surrounding authorship, we will now put it to work on generic categories, the problematic productions of authorship.

The radical term here is, I suggest, the editor. Often regarded as one step up

¹ Chase, *Eros and Psyche* 4.

² *The Professor* has a long history of exception in CB criticism, and receives no better from me. What I would note has already been said, succinctly, by Heilman in “Charlotte Brontë’s ‘New’ Gothic”: CB dresses her perspective up as Crimsworth’s, “making love to herself as Frances Henri: in this there is a kind of ravenousness, inturning, splitting, and doubling back of feeling.” (118)

the publishing ladder from “lackey,”³ an editor is in fact so unruly that he destabilizes everything he touches. What we see emerging from Brontë’s narratives is the effort required to shape an identity and to translate a life into text — the attempt to control self and story. Like the pseudonym, the editor is both the means of controlling and the means by which control is undermined: the figure which is most concerned with the presentation of text — the corrector of misspellings and refiner of punctuation — is simultaneously the most ephemeral. George Landow suggests that in the Victorian period, when “choice” was becoming more and more salient in an individual’s life, “autobiography, the justification of one’s choices, becomes increasingly important as a literary mode.”⁴ While the choices of the narrated subject are made evident in the text, the justification for an editor’s “STET” or “OMIT” remains, as it were, on the cutting room floor: on proof-sheets, unpublished, essentially non-existent. The editor is rarely ever “seen” in Brontë (a notable exception being the original title page of *Jane Eyre*, a point to which we will return), but nonetheless exerts a palpable force over her autobiographical narratives. I argue that the crisis signified by the third-term editor is the unsustainability of an “immediate,” “influence”-driven narrative.

Of the many myths surrounding Charlotte Brontë, one of the most pervasive is the myth of the unmediated writer, in thrall to her muse, channeling her art from some Romantic wellspring and transmitting it to the page with minimal interference from “the world.” As the *Quarterly Review* said of *Jane Eyre*, “[i]t bears no impress of being written at all, but is poured out rather in the heat and flurry of an instinct, which flows ungovernably on to its object, indifferent by what means it reaches it, and unconscious

³ cf. Stillinger’s chapter on editors, who he wants to recuperate against the myth of single authorship (e.g., he suggests Ezra Pound has a legitimate claim on *The Waste Land*), as well as Bodenheimer’s claim for hierarchy: the translator comes second to the “original creator,” as “Marian Evans the editor must surely come second to George Eliot the artist” (“A Woman of Many Names” 27).

⁴ Landow, *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography* xxxvii.

too.”⁵ The two novels that followed would do little to change this verdict — “[w]e feel no art in these remarkable books,” was Margaret Oliphant’s posthumous assessment. “What we feel is a force which makes everything real — a motion which is irresistible. We are swept on in the current, and never draw breath till the tale is ended.”⁶

As is often the case, the mythologized subject is equally culpable for perpetuating such ideas. Corresponding with George Henry Lewes regarding her next novel (which would be *Shirley*), Brontë assured him that she would *try* to write with less “melodrama,” with more of the Austen he had prescribed for her, but success was by no means certain:

When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master — which will have its own way — putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new-moulding characters, giving unthought-of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones. Is it not so? And should we try to counteract this influence? Can we indeed counteract it?⁷

While such an Othered “influence” at work in an author is hardly unique,⁸ the promise of unmediated expression seems to have particular resonance in the case of Charlotte Brontë. Her novels appear to offer a direct line to life experience, which, according to Leslie Stephen, “has been scarcely transformed in passing through her mind.” Her very self is transmitted to the page — “[i]n no books is the author more completely incarnated.” Thus *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe* are not only vivid characters in their

⁵ [Elizabeth Rigby] (Dec 1848) CH-CB 110.

⁶ *Blackwood's* (May 1855) CH-CB 313.

⁷ CB Letters II.179 (12 Jan 48). This appears to be a consistent position from her earlier life, according to Mary Taylor: as a 20-year-old teacher at Roe Head (with a tendency towards the “gloomy or frightful”), she recited lines of verse that had, quite literally, “come to her” via a voice in the night. “She insisted that she had not made them,” Taylor writes, though skeptical. “Whether the lines were recollected or invented, the tale proves such habits of sedentary, monotonous solitude of thought as would have shaken a feebler mind.” (CB Letters I.137; Gaskell 106-07)

⁸ cf. Scott: “But I think that there is a demon who seats himself on the feather of my pen when I begin to write, and leads it astray from the purpose. [...] In short, sir, on such occasions I think I am bewitched.” (Scott *Prefaces* 49)

own right, but their creator's personality "directly manifested in various avatars of her own spirit."⁹

Indeed, readers past and present have had a notably difficult time keeping Brontë separate from her "wonderful governess."¹⁰ As discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, the authorization of Currer Bell, the appearance of the Brontë/Bell body, and the circulation of Brontë biographical information cannot displace this original association of Jane Eyre not only with her story but with her *authorship*. The result is a heterogeneous figure whose origin is found both in "real" biographical data and in the mystical, mythologized "influence" promising a direct link between life and text. I suggest that this heterogeneity is a product of the novel — whose form incorporates heterodiegetic, heteroglossic elements even when its narrative is auto- and homodiegetic¹¹ — but also a product of self-writing, which is ultimately more about splitting and dividing than about unifying.

Crucially, the definition of autobiography is in the eye of the beholder: it "is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts."¹² The answer as to whether Brontë's works are her autobiography "cast in fictional form" or "fictions cast in [...] 'the autobiographic form',"¹³ is, I propose, "Yes." In order to arrive at this understanding of a problematic genre, however, we need to explore some of the more traditional attempts to define it.

In his seminal work on *le pacte autobiographique* (the autobiographical contract), Philippe Lejeune offers a rigid way to determine the genre's boundaries. The key element is identity between author, narrator, and protagonist: "there is no transition or latitude. Either there is identity or there is not. There is no possibility of

⁹ Stephen, *Hours in a Library* 7, 22.

¹⁰ T.W. Reid, *Charlotte Brontë* 12.

¹¹ cf. Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" or Genette's *Narrative Discourse*.

¹² De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement" 921.

¹³ Tromly, *The Cover of the Mask* 14.

degrees, and any doubt imposes a negative conclusion.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the “final term” in the autobiographical contract — the most important element in determining identity between author, narrator, and protagonist — is the name, which allows a person “irreducibly” to declare what he *is*.¹⁵ Paul De Man admits that Lejeune’s work on autobiography is “exemplary,” but dismisses this insistence on name as guarantor of identity as “stubborn.”¹⁶ While I am inclined to agree with De Man (declaring what one “irreducibly is” flies in the face of pseudonym and self as haecceity), Lejeune’s stubbornness is important: his efforts at an unequivocal delineation of the genre, to the extent of including of charts and checklists, achieves not so much a preservation of autobiography’s boundaries as it reveals just how vulnerable those boundaries are.¹⁷ The boundary particularly under threat is the one separating autobiography proper (a “referential” text that “claim[s] to convey information about a ‘reality’ which is external to the text and hence subject to the test of *verification*”) and the fiction which calls itself an “autobiographical novel.”¹⁸ As this opposition is the site of the most anxiety, it stands to reason that it is also the site of least stability.

Returning to the genre difficulty in Brontë’s writing, positioned on the fissure between autobiography and autobiographical novel: it is true, as Avrom Fleishman points out, that it would take “strenuous argumentation” to link the incidents of Jane Eyre’s life with her creator’s.¹⁹ However, in the critical milieu that surrounded (and determined) Brontë’s work, the parameters of autobiography were both more and less

¹⁴ Lejeune 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 199.

¹⁶ Stubborn “because it does not seem to be founded in argument or evidence” (922).

¹⁷ The borders of autobiography are under attack on multiple fronts; so much so that the genre seems composed more of boundary than of bounded terrain. Autobiography is located on the “borderlands of literary study” (Spengemann xi); characterized by “questions rather than conclusions, quests rather than conquests,” wherein “the possibilities and the meaning of being human must seem like a steadily growing Everest to the climber in search of a final encompassing perspective. Or like a labyrinth” (Shapiro 431); its shape is “Protean,” of “limitless variety,” with “boundaries [that] are more fluid and less definable” than other literary genres (Misch 4-5).

¹⁸ Lejeune 211, emphasis original.

¹⁹ Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography* 199.

strict: the cohesion of “incidents” (including names) was not demanded, though the reader’s perception of adherence to an artistic or moral “truth” was. The earliest reviews of *Jane Eyre* prove that critics found strong claims for the “deep, significant reality” of the life being told. “It is an autobiography,” Lewes wrote in *Fraser’s*, December 1847, “not, perhaps, in the naked facts and circumstances, but in the actual suffering and experience.”²⁰ To quote Professor Teufelsdröckh of *Sartor Resartus*, a text which will be important throughout this chapter: “Wilt thou know a Man, above all, a Mankind, by stringing together breadrolls of what thou namest Facts? The Man is the spirit he worked in; not what he did, but what he became. Facts are engraved Hierograms, for which the fewest have the key.”²¹ As we saw with the pseudonym-as-cipher, however, a code (“Hierograms”) without a key rather encourages than forbids interpretation. Thus, having read Gaskell’s *Life* and found it compatible with (that is, adaptable to) a reading of *Jane Eyre*, Margaret Sweat proclaims: “We now know it to have been autobiographic chiefly in that sense in which true genius throws its very self into its work, pours its lifeblood through its creation, making it throb with vitality, and then, by right of kingship, calls its conquered territory by its own name.”²²

The battle for autobiography — the battle *of* autobiography — is between “fact” and “truth,” and the freedom (and burden) of interpreting the genre’s boundaries rests with the reader. To call again upon De Man: “It appears, then, that the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but that it is undecidable. But is it possible to remain [...] *within* an undecidable situation?” He

²⁰ CH-CB 84. cf. GE’s famous declaration of independence from “the small bundle of facts that make our own personality” (GE Letters V.107), which is discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

²¹ Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* 153.

²² *North American Review* (Oct 1857) CH-CB 380. Also responding to Gaskell’s *Life*, Émile Montégut believed that “Jane Eyre is the ideal and poetic Charlotte; Lucy Snowe is the prosaic, living Charlotte; they are sisters but there lies between them all the distance that separates reality from illusion.” The two novels are an autobiography in two volumes: “*Jane Eyre* would be entitled *The Poetic Life*; and *Villette*, the *True Life of Charlotte Brontë*.” *Revue de deux Mondes* (1 July 57) CH-CB 372-73.

likens the situation to being caught in a revolving door, which is “certainly most uncomfortable.”²³ However, it is a useful metaphor for haecceity — perpetually in motion, perpetually at the point of transition, perpetually becoming. Autobiography, like authorship itself, is productive because it is difficult.

One of the most prominent of these “difficulties” in recent debate has been the problem of women’s autobiographies, where the concerns about female authority and representation and those about female self-presentation come to a head.²⁴ By “[c]hoosing to write autobiography,” Sidonie Smith says, the woman self-writer “unmasks her transgressive desire for cultural and literary authority.” She is excluded from the autobiographical contract because that contract “requires her unrepresentability.”²⁵ The patriarchal, phallogocentric structure of both society and literature requires that women are, in Shoshana Felman’s words, “[t]rained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves,” and thus “I cannot write my own story (I am not in possession of my own autobiography) but I can read it in the Other.”²⁶ Necessarily Othered, women cannot participate in a genre which celebrates, and insists upon, individual (masculine) subjectivity.

Among the many feminist readings of self-writing, I find most interesting Barbara Johnson’s claim that “the autobiographical reflex is triggered by the

²³ De Man 921, emphasis original.

²⁴ A sampling: Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography*; Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self*; Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I*; Felman, *What Does a Woman Want*; Gilmore, *Autobiographics*; Flint, “...As a rule, I does not mean I’: Personal Identity and the Victorian Woman Poet”; also the collection *The Female Autograph* (ed. Domna Stanton).

²⁵ Sidonie Smith 50, 56. Lejeune’s contract (and its emphasis on “name” as the crucial element) has a particular blind spot for women: “Everyone knows only too well how much each of us values his own name” (202); “there are very few authors who are capable of giving up *their own name*” (204 emphasis original); the given name matters particularly as it “distinguishes you from your father” (210). Women, of course, routinely give up their names in marriage. And, as Gilbert & Gubar note, even a woman’s original proper name is not *propre*, not her own, but her father’s (“Ceremonies of the Alphabet,” 23-24).

²⁶ Felman 16-17. The CB-specific criticism that deals with selfhood and its relation to “telling one’s own story” is extensive. cf. Freeman, “Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*”; Bodenheimer, “Jane Eyre in Search of Her Story” (in Bloom ed., 155-68); Joan Peters, “Finding a Voice: Towards a Woman’s Discourse of Dialogue in the Narration of *Jane Eyre*”; Kaplan, “Girl Talk: *Jane Eyre* and the Romance of Women’s Narration”; Bock, *Charlotte Brontë and the Storyteller’s Audience*.

resistance and ambivalence involved in the act of writing the book.”²⁷ Autobiography is not an edifice or a territory that precedes attacks upon it, but is the product of those disruptions. Therefore, a view of autobiography that presupposes a unified, bounded selfhood for any subject — regardless of gender — removes the discomfort, the difficulty, that makes the act of self-writing so productive. An autobiographical project must overcome the problem of heterogeneous, fractured selfhood and the problem of self-representation, the faithfulness of which is essentially unverifiable. According to Georg Misch, “the man who sets out to write the story of his own life has it in view as a whole, with unity and direction and a significance of its own.”²⁸ However, if both selfhood and authorship are processes, becomings and not stable entities, then the problems of self-writing are continually posed and solved — the autobiographer may sit down to write with a vision of “unity” and “significance,” but the act of writing itself will necessarily undermine these intentions.²⁹

The first problem, that of unity, requires an autobiographer who can understand her self as singular and whole — an understanding which is by no means assured in a post-Enlightenment view of selfhood as a sequence of discrete experiences, held together by consciousness and therefore prone to disruption.³⁰ The self-writer in particular among subjects is forced to acknowledge how separable and even disposable those individual experiences are. The writing subject is required not merely to remember her past experiences, but to *examine* those experiences — individually and as components of the whole — and then decide which of them are

²⁷ Johnson, *A World of Difference* 145.

²⁸ Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* 7.

²⁹ cf. Jay, *Being in the Text*: “The personal and psychological resolutions that these texts seek to mediate are often disrupted, or even displaced, by the aesthetic problems of translating a psychological subject into a literary one” (27).

³⁰ Forgetfulness, seizure, coma, even sleep pose a threat to unified experience, as do the eminently feminine “fainting fits.” Notably, Jane Eyre suffers lapses of consciousness at formative moments — locked in the Red Room at Gateshead, visited by Bertha at Thornfield before the aborted wedding — as does Lucy Snowe, who collapses after her desperate attempt at confession, and is (belatedly) “conquered” by opium after unveiling the Nun (*V* 570).

essential to the story of her life. Perhaps most crucially, as death is the only “natural” end to a life, a self-writer must give her story an “unnatural” teleology; from a life still in progress she must select only a portion.³¹ In order to ensure the *significance* of her life story, the autobiographer must select from an unfinished series of random experiences those which demonstrate a sense of self, and a sense of narrative. The issue here is how to distinguish between simply assembling a story out of a “real” life, and literally constructing — in a sense, *fabricating* — that story.³²

Nevertheless, Misch assures us we can distinguish truth from lies. Character, he claims, will out — even “the cleverest liar, in his fabricated or embroidered stories of himself [...] will reveal it through the spirit of his lies. Thus, in general, the spirit brooding over the recollected material is the truest and most real element in an autobiography.” Furthermore, “[t]his spirit is visibly written on the face of the incidents and persons of whom the autobiographer writes; it is palpable in the way he conceives of his life as a whole.”³³ The image of an insubstantial “spirit brooding,” one which is nonetheless “visible” and “palpable,” offering a “face” in spite of the effacement of text, brings us back to our spectral pseudonyms ghosting and being ghosted by their embodied selves. “Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life,” Lucy Snowe writes, having (mis)recognized herself in a mirror, “I enjoyed the ‘giftie’ of seeing myself as others see me.” (V 286)

It is only through splitting itself that an autobiographical subject can identify itself, but, as Lucy demonstrates, the mirroring glance is simultaneously familiarizing and defamiliarizing. As Charlotte Brontë and Currer Bell each depended on the other

³¹ Only biography can access the very end of the tale, unavailable to an autobiographer: “‘my’ death will never belong to me, only to those who live after and remember.” (Stanley 47)

³² “Like the poet,” argues Shapiro, “the autobiographer is a maker.” (422) Misch himself concedes: “It is an admitted psychological fact that remembrance does not proceed as mechanical reproduction but tends to creation.” (11)

³³ Misch 11.

for authorization, each autobiographical “I” both creates and is created by the other; they are double-ghosted. In practical terms, the autobiographer must split herself into a protagonist and a narrator, who I will refer to as “N-Jane/Lucy” (Narrating Jane or Lucy) and “P-Jane/Lucy” (Protagonist Jane or Lucy).³⁴ While this splitting is practical to the narrative form,³⁵ it is as problematic as an ostensibly “practical” pseudonym and produces much the same result — the split selves constitute a threat to the notion of control and to the “comfortable” binary of fiction and reality.

Misch’s “brooding” also gives us an image such as Carlyle’s Editor perusing Teufelsdröckh’s “[s]ix considerable PAPER-BAGS” full of “miscellaneous masses of Sheets, and oftener Shreds and Ships”: “Daily and nightly does the Editor sit (with green spectacles) deciphering these unimaginable Documents [...]”³⁶ While the Editor is ostensibly a biographer (telling the story of someone else’s life), his continual references to Teufelsdröckh as “our Autobiographer” suggests that the projects are intimately related — the activity of sorting, selecting, and deciphering is necessary, whether accomplished by another person or an Othered self. It is worth noting the parenthetical mention of “green spectacles,” a conspicuous bit of fun, superfluous detail which only throws into relief the unknowability of the character.

“Who or what such Editor may be, must remain conjectural, and even insignificant: it is a Voice publishing tidings of the Philosophy of Clothes; undoubtedly a Spirit addressing Spirits: whoso hath ears let him hear,” we are admonished at the

³⁴ Other divisions include: “I-past and I-present” (Fleishman 192); the “narrating I” and the “narrated I” (Sidonie Smith 47), or the character that “sees” and the character that “speaks” (Warhol 859).

³⁵ “It may be that the nearest one can come to definition is to look not straight to the self, which is invisible anyway, but sidewise to an experience of the self, and try to discover or create some similitude for the experience that can reflect or evoke it” (Olney 29). According to Gilmore, the inherently divided nature of the “I” provides the autobiographical impetus: “the violence of that splitting makes possible both alienation and nostalgia for the fictional unity of an I” — unity which is described and created through a narrative of self (67). See also Stewart, *On Longing*, for the work of memory and nostalgia in creation of self; and Jay on the “talking cure” of Freudian psychology that requires narrative — fictional or otherwise — to heal the subject (22-26).

³⁶ Carlyle 60-61.

outset of *Sartor Resartus*. The reader is given a footnote confirming the Editor's mysteriousness: "With us even he still communicates in some sort of mask, or muffler; and, we have reason to think, under a feigned name! — O.Y."³⁷ While "Oliver Yorke" is the pseudonym of William Maginn, editor of *Fraser's* (where *Sartor Resartus* originally, anonymously appeared), the author of this footnote is Carlyle.³⁸ Just over a decade after *Sartor Resartus*, another unstable, multiply identified pseudonym produces another "Spirit addressing Spirits" in *Jane Eyre*, who declares: "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: — it is my spirit that addresses your spirit [...]"³⁹ Let us turn then to *Jane Eyre* and examine its difficulties with second selves and editors.

Jane Eyre, Mrs. Rochester, and their Editor

While criticism — particularly of Charlotte Brontë — is shot through with references to the spectrality of the narrating self,⁴⁰ a single, famous example from *Jane Eyre* will illustrate the nature and problems of double-ghosting. On the evening before her disrupted wedding, Jane Eyre looks at her already-packed trunks: "tomorrow, at this time, they would be far on their road to London: and so should I (D.V.), — or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not." Examining the

³⁷ Ibid. 10.

³⁸ A later footnote is signed merely "—ED." (170). The uncertainty between "Oliver Yorke" and "the Editor of these sheets" (not to mention "Thomas Carlyle" or the modern editor) activates "Editor" as a shifter and not a guaranteed identity.

³⁹ In keeping with the embodied/disembodied, mediated/unmediated tension running throughout CB's works, Rochester's response ("enclosing me in his arms, gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips") is *not* spiritual, but fleshly (*JE* 253).

⁴⁰ JE's "I" is "self as boundless whole," "evanescent, immaterial, a fragrance, an essence, a soul that remains always apart from its incarnations" (K. Chase 75); her narration "hovers precariously in a strange land" (Tromly 48). More generally: "the narrator is always present as a disembodied voice, hinting at a satisfactory conclusion" (Spengemann 125); "consciousness [...] has the capacity both to remember and to anticipate, to create a mental phantasm of itself earlier and elsewhere, later and elsewhere" (Olney 27); "the full consciousness [first-person narrators] assume as tellers tends to dissolve their corporeality and to make them, as tellers, weightless and disembodied like third-person tellers. They share the ontological uncertainty of the tellers of *Middlemarch* and *Our Mutual Friend*" (Ermarrh 88-89) — this last provides a link to the following chapter on GE's realism.

address cards on which “Mr. Rochester had himself written” the name of his wife-to-be (and, of course, of his current wife), Jane loses her nerve: “I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o’clock A.M.; and I would wait to be assured that she had come into the world alive, before I assigned to her all that property.” (*JE* 275). The ghostly “Mrs. Rochester” does exist (Bertha Mason Rochester), and does not yet exist (P-Jane Eyre who is meant to be married in the morning), and does exist yet again (N-Jane Rochester who is writing the story).⁴¹ While the younger P-Jane figures herself as a mother to the immanent new self,⁴² P-Jane and all her exploits are creations of the supposedly unborn Mrs. Rochester, N-Jane. The act of autobiography fixes N-Jane and P-Jane in an unresolvable circle of creating and being created.⁴³

Intriguingly, the exact moment of crisis in the eerie scene of Miss Eyre among Mrs. Rochester’s effects presages Brontë’s introduction to her publisher, examined in the third chapter of this thesis. P-Jane’s confrontation with the possibility of an imaginary and yet real self is activated by a textual artifact — specifically, the *name* of the Other self. Furthermore, “Mrs. Rochester’s” address cards were written by Rochester, just as the letter that authorized Charlotte Brontë was written by George

⁴¹ As with pseudonymity and authorship, the confused Bertha/P-Jane/N-Jane situation differs only in degree, not kind, from the availability of any given “Mrs. ———”. Consider, for instance, *JE*’s literary inheritor, Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, whose first-person narrator is known only as “the second Mrs. de Winter.” Consider also Eilenberg referring to “Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin — she would not be Mary Shelley until Harriet Shelley’s suicide, fast approaching, vacated the surname for her” (167).

⁴² Or at least a midwife (“I would wait to be assured that she had come into the world alive”), though feminist and liminalist readings have a stake in motherhood specifically; e.g., Hennelly, “‘In a State Between’: A Reading of Liminality in *Jane Eyre*”: “Bertha, the big woman, is really pregnant with Jane and then dies so that Jane can be pregnant herself and continual the matrilineal cycle” (118-19).

⁴³ *JE*’s moments of creation escape textualization — the (successful) wedding to Rochester is not narrated, nor is the moment she begins writing. Compare the first lines of *David Copperfield*: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born...”; compare also Dickens’s preface, in which he acknowledges his engagement with the text: “I do not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from this Book.” N-Jane and CB/Currer Bell, in contrast, maintain distance from their involvement with the writing — an intriguingly ironic distinction considering the association of Brontë/Bell/Eyre/*Eyre* discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

Smith. The Brontë/Bell and N-Jane/P-Jane circles are so vicious that the pair ultimately cannot resolve (or even fully acknowledge) themselves — they require the participation of someone not just Othered, but other.

This moment is also notable because, as the reader will realize in a few pages, N-Jane has disrupted the chronological flow of her narrative. This allows her to set a ghostly scene first, and offer an explanation for that ghostliness afterwards — an indication of the outright manipulation required in order to make a life into narrative.⁴⁴ The work of an autobiographer, after all, is more omission than inclusion: it would be entirely outside the realm of possibility to include a “whole life” in print. So impossible, in fact, that autobiographers typically feel no need to explain their editorial policy. When they do justify any omissions or transpositions, the effect is rather more startling than reassuring, drawing attention to the composition of the story and disrupting the illusion of recounted — but unmediated — reality. For instance, a chapter begins:

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life, I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography: I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection. (*JE* 83)

N-Jane alludes to the fact that this is a tenth chapter, and the space directly above these words clearly advertises “CHAPTER X.” Jane Rochester has at the very least broken her story into chapters and volumes. If we push our consideration of this “harmless” act of arrangement, we find that the next time “CHAPTER X” appears at the top of a page, we are in Miss Eyre’s bedroom with the shades of Mrs. Rochesters, and we are again on the edge of an omission: what came prior to this moment, Bertha Mason’s midnight visit, is left blank, delayed to a later moment. Two CHAPTER XS,

⁴⁴ This technique is also noted as a strategy for prolonging suspense, appropriate to the Gothic-ness of the novel. Warhol claims that the Gothic tendencies in *JE* are, themselves, part of “the gap of dissonant self-narration”: P-Jane’s story is from “the perspective of a Gothic heroine, although the tale is being told by a resolutely realistic narrator” (861-63).

two instances of narrative manhandling, both involving the relation of a self to its presentation in text — can the reader be forgiven a *frisson*? After all, when listing “those themes of Uncanniness which are most prominent,” Freud gives pride of place to déjà vu: “And finally there is the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations.”⁴⁵

Arguing for pattern rather than coincidence, I offer a reading of the third and final CHAPTER X in which unsettling moments are tied to active narratorial composition. P-Jane makes her decision to leave Moor House; she considers the voice which called to her the night before, which she can “recall [...] with all its unspeakable strangeness”; she returns to Thornfield via “the same vehicle whence, a year ago, I had alighted one summer evening on this very spot” (*JE* 420-21). Finding the manor a burnt shell — the description of which N-Jane delays, offering instead a detailed picture of a tragic lover who “thought his love slept sweetly: he finds she is stone-dead”⁴⁶ — she turns to the innkeeper at the Rochester Arms to hear the story of which Thornfield could give “not even dumb sign, mute token.” After a brief but unsettling confusion between two different “Mr. Rochesters”, one living (“my Mr. Rochester”) and one dead (his father), the innkeeper Others Jane by telling her her own story (*JE* 425).

Jane does not reveal to him that the governess-heroine of the Thornfield tragedy — “a little small thing, they say, almost like a child,” who he “often wished [...] had

⁴⁵ Freud 140-41. EB begs a nod here, for the pathologically recurring names of *WH* — see esp. Hillis-Miller, “*Wuthering Heights*: Repetition and the ‘Uncanny’.” Also, as Carol Jacobs notes, *WH* has an “uncanny dearth of names” (357) — the sense of surplus (too many of the same name) is intimately connected to its opposite (a lack of enough names).

⁴⁶ *JE* 424. Compare N-Jane’s “now his eyes anticipate the vision of beauty — warm and blooming and lovely in rest. How hurried was their first glance! But how they fix! How he starts!” to CB’s likening herself to a Pygmalion “startled” when her statues (poetic brain-children) open their eyes (cf. Chapter 3 of this thesis), and to Freud’s concern with “intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not” (139).

been sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall” — is the listener herself.⁴⁷ Thus she is able to include in her narrative of self what is invisible to the self: what Lucy Snowe calls “the ‘giftie’ of seeing myself as others see me.” The “true” self emerges through composite glances of both subject and other, making autobiography, again, not a thing but a process — “at most some sketchy, shadowy, fugitive likeness of [the subject] may, by unheard-of efforts, partly of intellect and partly of imagination, on the side of the Editor and of Reader, rise up between them.”⁴⁸

Taking this inquiry into the strange case of CHAPTER X one step further offers the glimpse of a ghostly culprit: was it in fact Jane who organized her story into neatly, nearly mirroring chapters, or was it her editor? In order to stitch the images and chapters of autobiography (and, by extension, of self) together, the writer must use “argumentation by juxtaposition, a subtle form of persuasion that negates or reinforces episodes by carefully arranging what goes before and after.”⁴⁹ Self-writing is “both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place, by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary, omission.”⁵⁰ What is needed is a way to stress key points (“emphasis added”), to note comparisons and contrasts (“cf.”), to offer explanation (footnotes, endnotes, marginalia), and to eliminate unnecessary items (“OMIT”). Carlyle’s Editor admits it is “[a] laborious, perhaps a thankless enterprise” to take the “enormous, amorphous

⁴⁷ *JE* 427-28. P-Jane’s careful negotiation of truth — she offers no direct lie but only an evasive “I have heard something of it” — rather echoes CB to Ellen Nussey in May 1848, “denying” her authorship of *JE*: “I have given *no one* a right either to affirm, or hint, in the most distant manner, that I am ‘publishing’— (humbug!),” she writes. “Though twenty books were ascribed to me, I should own none” (CB Letters II.211, emphasis original). Barker calls this cleverly worded (non)denial “imperious and hostile,” even “an undeniable cruelty” (552-53); I say it is an example of the kind of “play” that is inherent in both pseudonymity and authorship.

⁴⁸ Carlyle 61.

⁴⁹ Shapiro 441. Juxtaposition also requires changes in viewing stance: “The lens we see through is continually narrowing and expanding during the narrative” (439). This particular image demonstrates how easy it is to bridge the gap between the first-person intensity of CB’s autobiographical fiction (famous for its seeming rejection of mediation) and GE’s measured, moderated realist fiction summed up in her famous telescope/microscope metaphor of juxtaposition (*Mm* 59).

⁵⁰ Sidonie Smith 45.

Plum pudding” of a life and “pick out the choicest Plums, and present them separately on a cover of our own.”⁵¹ Nonetheless, autobiography does require an editor.

In April of 1848, the *Christian Remembrancer* speculates that “Currer Bell (which by a curious Hibernicism appears in the title-page as the name of a female autobiographer) is a mere *nom de guerre* — perhaps an anagram.”⁵² The “curious Hibernicism” — “JANE EYRE. / *An Autobiography*. / EDITED BY / CURRER BELL.”⁵³ — has been of some critical interest, but not, I believe, of quite the right kind. Sharon Marcus and Caroline Levine, for instance, both offer persuasive readings of the “editor” convention as another level of gender complication. Marcus observes that Currer Bell, by not appearing in the novel itself, “takes on an invisible, phantom existence as an abstract convention that saves Jane from being the author of the text.” She proposes a sort of double-ghosting between the heroine and the pseudonym, who “cover for each other”: “Jane’s story can be published only under the protection of a nonfeminine name, while Currer Bell attains the invisibility that Brontë sought for the name by disappearing within the text that *Jane Eyre* writes.”⁵⁴ Caroline Levine is interested in the relation between N-Jane’s creation of suspense in narrative and Brontë’s creation of suspense in pseudonymity (the “harmless pleasure” of the 1850 Biographical Notice) — specifically through gender confusion. She links the claim on the title page to an extreme version of cross-dressing: the author must be “*a woman posing as a man posing as a woman*. Which is, of course, the oddly circuitous truth.” This “entanglement of possibilities” caused reviewers to “speculate wildly,” though the only certainty “was that something peculiar was going on.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Carlyle 221.

⁵² CH-CB 89.

⁵³ See Appendix, Figure 12.

⁵⁴ Marcus 217.

⁵⁵ C. Levine, “‘Harmless Pleasure’: Gender, Suspense, and *Jane Eyre*” 278; emphasis original.

While I have previously argued for the productiveness of an androgynous pseudonym, which opens a space of possibility simultaneously over-full and empty, there is a “something peculiar” about *Jane Eyre*’s title page potentially more disruptive than indeterminate gender. What is the difference between “By Currer Bell” and “*Edited By Currer Bell*”? This is not an idle question; nor can it be dismissed as mere convention, which a savvy 1840s audience, “thoroughly familiar with the literary device of the fictional editor,” would not be “gullible enough to fall for.”⁵⁶ Indeed, “editors” claimed responsibility for some of the most successful novels of the previous century — Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, “Published by the Editor of *Pamela*” — as well as of Brontë’s contemporary moment — *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, “Edited by ‘Boz.’” It is this very familiarity that poses the problem: so used were readers to interpreting “editor” for “author” that the categories could very well be in crisis and no one would raise the alarm.

The early editions of *Jane Eyre* offered a tangled claim: the first edition was advertised as “By”⁵⁷ while the title page said “Edited”; the second edition title page offered “By,” but thanks to “a curious oversight the fiction of Charlotte’s [sic] editorship was preserved upon the binding.”⁵⁸ This tangling permits, even forces the novel’s readers to collapse the supposedly separate roles of editing and authoring. Once we acknowledge the collapse and try to pull the pieces apart, we realize just how insidious the entanglement is. Regarding this blending of Authorial and Editorial selves, *Sartor Resartus*, again, bears comparison — in translating the “piebald, entangled, hyper-metaphorical style of writing,” “has not the Editor himself, working over Teufelsdröckh’s German, lost much of his own English purity?”⁵⁹ It is also of

⁵⁶ Ibid. 277.

⁵⁷ Marcus 217.

⁵⁸ CB Letters II.170fn.

⁵⁹ Carlyle 221.

note that the Editor's initial references to "the/our Author" fade out completely by Chapter 10, becoming instead "the/our Professor" and "the/our Autobiographer."

The status of "the Author" as opposed to "the Editor" becomes less and less clear. "The editorial device came from earlier forms of the novel in which authors *posed* as editors to lend veracity to their tales and to *authorize* the public circulation of autobiographical confessions." Here Marcus's explanation of the convention is telling in its language, activating concerns of performativity and the troubled etymology of "author."⁶⁰ I argue that the collapse of these roles is not innocently conventional, but threatening to notions of origin and creativity, demonstrating how all forms of writing — autobiographical, biographical, fictional — are inherently mediated. Let us turn now from *Jane Eyre* to the even more spectral Lucy Snowe, whose autobiographical practices depend on the absence — deferral and originlessness — at the heart of editing.

Lucy Snowe: The Melchisedec of *Villette*

"'Villette' makes one feel an extreme reverence for any one capable of so much deep feeling and brave endurance and truth," writes Catherine Winkworth to her sister-in-law Emma Shaen in March 1853, "but it makes one feel 'eerie', too, to be brought face to face with a life so wanting in *Versöhnung*, as Germans would say. I wonder whether Miss B. is so, and I wonder, too, whether she ever was in love; surely she could never herself have made love to any one, as all her heroines, even Lucy Snowe, do."⁶¹ Though more prominent in the case of *Jane Eyre*, the ghost of "poor Miss

⁶⁰ Marcus 217, emphasis added. cf. Foucault's "What is an Author?" — while the authenticity of his version of the word's lineage is contested, the salient point is that "authorship" is entrenched in concerns of authority and authorization.

⁶¹ Shaen ed., *Memorials of Two Sisters* 102-03.

Brontë”⁶² also inflects the reading of *Villette*, which in turn haunts Charlotte Brontë in the form of biographical speculation. However, the carefully set-off clause “even Lucy Snowe” is important: Lucy was recognized immediately — even before her story was in print — as a problematic, exceptional individual. Brontë writes to her publishers in November 1852, justify a heroine they took exception to:

You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she *is* both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance; it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness. If, however, the book does not express all this, there must be a great fault somewhere. I might explain away a few other points, but it would be too much like drawing a picture and then writing underneath the name of the object intended to be represented.⁶³

As her creator explicitly refused to label her, it is no surprise that Lucy Snowe has come to be read as a figure of resistance, defying categorization. Anne Winestone reads her as a paradigmatically “queer” figure; part of a “politic of destabilization” and “critique of categorization,” she uses her “narrative feints to maintain herself as cypher: unreadable, unclassifiable, sexually queer.”⁶⁴ These feints have led to Lucy’s infamy as an unreliable narrator, who we feel “is deliberately attempting to dupe us,”⁶⁵ famously withholding from the reader her own recognition of “Dr. John” as Graham Bretton.

Lucy’s self-description as “cypher” has been duly noted by critics interested in textuality, and aligned with her predilection for reading, interpreting, and decoding.⁶⁶

⁶² Emily to Catherine Winkworth (30 Aug 1850) Shaen 60.

⁶³ CB Letters IV.18. Intriguingly, in the preceding paragraph CB explains the choice of Lucy’s “cold” name (originally Snowe, then Frost, then Snowe again) by referring to “*lucus a non lucendo*,” a proto-Derridean (if incorrect) etymological pun: “it is a dark grove [*lucus*] because it is not light [*lucendo*].”

⁶⁴ Winestone, “The Queerness of Lucy Snowe” 368.

⁶⁵ Tromly 49. Tromly clearly engages with autobiography as a Lejeunian contractual genre: “Lucy violates the one essential convention of autobiographical form — if the reader does not demand to share the narrator’s sense of later events, he does have the right to know what the character realizes at the time of any given event” (275).

⁶⁶ e.g., Lawrence: the “enigma of Lucy Snowe” is “a complex, shifting nexus of meaning and deferral of meaning that, like the sign itself, never refers to an ultimate and stable identity.” (“The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*” 455) Lawrence notes that the plot begins with a letter announcing Polly’s arrival, which provokes Lucy to wonder “‘*Of what are these things the signs and tokens?*’ [...] And thus begins Lucy’s engagement in the semiotic system.” (460, emphasis original) Other noteworthy

However, these critics have overlooked the nature of Lucy's "cypher" declaration itself: "I, to whom nature had denied the impromptu faculty; who, in public, was by nature a cypher; whose time of mental activity, even when alone, was not under the meridian sun; who needed the fresh silence of morning, or the recluse peace of evening, to win from the Creative Impulse one evidence of his presence, one proof of his force..." — she goes on for nearly a page before coming to a full stop (V 445). Although Brontëan sentences are not famous for their brevity, I read this particular bit of long-windedness as a further piece of trickery and self-contradiction in Lucy Snowe: her very expression of the difficulty she has tapping into Impulse is overflowing, uncontrolled, unchecked.

Such trickiness makes Lucy one of the most "doubled" characters in literature, so "advanced in complexity," claims Janet Carlisle, that she "deserves and indeed requires a *doppelgänger*."⁶⁷ Crowded with Lucy's numerous Othered selves (Paulina Home, *heimlich* to Lucy's *unheimlich* homelessness;⁶⁸ Ginevra Fanshawe and her lover Alfred de Hamal; the demon-actress Vashti; the clever spying Madame Beck), the novel is so overstuffed with liminal figures that Sarah Gilead claims it effectively becomes "an antiliminal — or postliminal — novel."⁶⁹ The most frequently discussed double in the *mise en abyme* of *Villette* is the intensely uninterpretable Nun, a figure both for absence ("none") and for the novel's crisis in genres.⁷⁰ Christina Crosby locates in the Nun the same strange mathematics of androgyny discussed earlier in

studies of Lucy as a "reader" include Dames, "The Clinical Novel: Phrenology and *Villette*," and Kreilkamp, "Unuttered: Withheld Speech and Female Authorship in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*."

⁶⁷ Carlisle 283. The novel is "a hall of mirrors in which [the other characters] are allowed to appear because they serve as facets reflecting the affective truth of Lucy's life." (279)

⁶⁸ Jacobus 46-48.

⁶⁹ Gilead 321 (n. 13).

⁷⁰ In the realist vision, the Nun is Ginevra's fop-suitor de Hamal; in the Gothic vision she is the ghost of a nun buried on the property when it was a Medieval convent; in the psychoanalytical vision she is the manifestation of the two Justine-Maries (M. Paul's forbidden/lost love, and his young ward); within the narrative Dr. John proposes that the Nun is a manifestation of Lucy's hypochondria. cf. Crosby, Warhol, Heilman, and Carlisle for readings of the Nun in regard to generic concerns.

this thesis: “Both male and female are present in their quintessentially sexualized forms in the specter, but neither can take precedence. Thus the nun ‘is’ nothing. It cannot be adequately defined.”⁷¹

The Nun as “none” is also important in relation to abstraction and textuality. When Lucy finally “unveils” her, the revelation is not a body but a piece of text, specifically an (unsigned) note: “To the head-bandage was pinned a slip of paper: it bore in pencil these mocking words: — ‘The nun of the attic bequeaths to Lucy Snowe her wardrobe. She will be seen in the Rue Fossette no more.’ And what and who was she that had haunted me?” Though Lucy is “[s]till mystified beyond expression,” rather than “wear out [her] brain with the fret of a trivial though insoluble riddle,” she bundles the lot out of sight under her pillow and succumbs to the opium-laden drink she was given earlier in the evening.⁷² The answer to the riddle is delayed until Lucy receives yet another piece of text, a letter from the newly eloped “GINEVRA LAURA DE HAMAL, née FANSHAWE,” explaining how de Hamal dressed up as the Nun in order to access the girls’ pensionnat. Nonetheless, origin recedes yet further — Ginevra had “chanced to tell him our legend of the nun, that suggested his romantic idea of the spectral disguise” (*V* 574).

Lucy’s devotion to deferral and absence is one of her defining characteristics, but is also entirely at odds with traditional autobiography. Jane Eyre admits that her story is not a “regular autobiography”; Lucy trumps her with a “heretic narrative” (*V* 235). She not only omits but resists telling the originating circumstances with which autobiography almost always begins — “Lucy Snowe enters *Villette* as a character without definition, a name without identity, and a voice without origins.”⁷³ Indeed, as

⁷¹ Crosby 709. Boumelha suggests that the nun “over-signifies” and that “[w]hat emerges from this plethora of interpretations is the inadequacy of interpretation itself.” (102-03)

⁷² *V* 569-70; cf. Crosby on the “ambiguous” unveiling (703).

⁷³ K. Chase 67.

a fictional character she is, to quote Charlotte Brontë quoting the Bible to Hartley Coleridge, “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.”⁷⁴ Melchisedec can be called upon to suggest a figment of the young Brontë’s character-making day-dreams, but he can also suggest Lucy as she portrays herself in the novel: lacking parents and thus descent from those parents, and also lacking descendants of her own. She *cannot* offer us an account of how she will leave the world, but nor does she offer us an account of how she came into the world — or even how she arrived at Bretton, at the beginning of the narrative. This idiosyncrasy of Lucy’s reticence can in fact apply to any textual, autobiographical subject: the necessary deferral of language removes the possibility of origin. We have already seen how the double-ghosted protagonist and narrator selves are parents to each other; we have admitted the impossibility of a subject possessing his own “end of life”; and, as Tristram Shandy spends many hundreds of pages proving, it is equally impossible for an “I” to access its true “beginning of days.”⁷⁵

Rather than strictly “heretic,” Lucy Snowe’s side-stepping of autobiographical convention is less a resistance to the self-writing project than an expression of that project’s inherent problems (similar to pseudonymity being an *understanding* rather than an anxiety of authorship). Particularly in the case of *Villette*, resistance to the foreign often functions as an acknowledgement of the familiar — consider the driving force of the novel, the love between staunchly Protestant Lucy and the Catholic Paul Emmanuel. Indeed, our narrator offers a view of the narrative act, her *raison d’être*, as profoundly Othered, a Jesuitical manipulation, a mystical, arcane facility with the arrangement of circumstance — to construct a story is, literally, to be plotting.

⁷⁴ Smith Letters I.239-40; see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁷⁵ cf. the Editor of *Sartor Resartus*, who in constructing Teufelsdröckh’s “Genesis” comes to wonder “whether from birth and genealogy, how closely scrutinised soever, much insight is to be gained.” (63)

“These Romanists are strange beings,” she remarks, appalled by Mme. Beck, Mme. Walravens, and Père Silas — “the whole conjuration, the secret junta” (V 558) — and their stealthy coordination of events to communicate the history of M. Paul most beneficial to their purposes:

all these little incidents, taken as they fell out, seemed each independent of its successor; a handful of loose beads; but threaded through by that quick-shot and crafty glance of a Jesuit-eye, they dropped pendant in a long string, like that rosary on the prie-dieu. Where lay the link of junction, where the little clasp of this monastic necklace? I saw or felt union, but could not yet find the spot, or detect the means of connection. (V 486)

What Lucy describes is the ability of the autobiographer — of the *self*, moreover — to hold together life’s disconnected stream of “incidents” in a coherent, significant narrative, joined by the eminently intangible “consciousness,” a ghost which can be sensed but not actually proven — she is not even sure which sense to trust, whether she “saw *or* felt the union.” The most familiar part of Lucy (her self, and her existence as teller of the story) is identified in that which she finds most Other. She describes such narrative constructedness as she does essentially all aspects of Catholicism — inimical to her own Protestant aversion to “the evil and baseness of a lie” (V 147) and devotion to “homely truth” (V 442).

“Homely” is an appropriately inappropriate term to be used by so unpretty and *unheimlich* a narrator, and Lucy re-uses it: “Let us be honest, and cut, as heretofore, from the homely web of truth. *Homely*, though, is an ill-chosen word,” she admits, correcting herself (V 563). Like Jane Eyre’s admission of skipping over uneventful years, it is startling to see the narrator working *as* an editor. “Cancel the whole of that, if you please, reader — or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral,” she adds after a poetic description of her first sight of the Continent, introducing the editor’s “OMIT” and “STET” simultaneously (V 117-18). Part of the job of the editor is not only to correct, but to enforce silence, to control through censorship. As we see in one of her

descriptions of life as text — “seven weeks bare as seven sheets of blank paper: no word was written on one of them; not a visit, not a token” (*V* 349) — life is as much about absence (blank paper) as it is about presence (visits, tokens).

One of the novel’s earliest scenes offers us a taste of Lucy as a controlling force, achieved explicitly through “canceling”: when the homesick Polly threatens to make a spectacle in their shared nursery at Bretton, “I roused myself and started up, to check this scene while it was yet within bounds” (*V* 67). She means to direct the performances in this text (including the performance of the text-as-self), and she does so by “checking” or ending a scene.⁷⁶ M. Paul offers a more obviously textual example of Lucy’s negating editorship — a particularly Othered version which she disapproves, like the “Jesuit rosary” method of storytelling. He quite literally offers her stories:

After looking over the two volumes he had brought, and cutting away some pages with his penknife (he generally pruned before lending his books, especially if they were novels, and sometimes I was a little provoked at the severity of his censorship, the retrenchments interrupting the narrative), he rose, politely touched his bonnet-grec, and bade me a civil good day. (*V* 434-35)

Well might Lucy complain about being “provoked” by such censorship, when she offers an autobiography severely “pruned” at the beginning to excise her origin, and pruned again at the end, as she excises M. Paul himself, refusing to disclose his fate to her readers but bidding them “a civil good day” in her simple closing: “Farewell.” Provoked indeed were those readers — at least one of whom wrote in demand of an answer to the mystery — but Charlotte Brontë was as stubbornly reticent as her heroine-narrator. “With regard to that momentous point — M. Paul’s fate,” she writes to George Smith in March 1853, “in case any one in future should request to be enlightened thereon they may be told that it was designed that every reader should

⁷⁶ Kreilkamp and Lawrence explore the power of negation/silence in their works on Lucy Snowe’s “withheld speech” and “reticence”, while Hennelly offers an analysis of *Villette* as enactment of Foucauldian surveillance and suppression (“The ‘Surveillance of Désirée’” 421-40).

settle the catastrophe for himself, according to the quality of his disposition, the tender or remorseless impulse of his nature.” Between the “fearful alternatives” of Drowning and Matrimony, Brontë suggests that it is only the truly cruel that will opt for the latter, “marrying him without ruth or compunction to that — person — that — that — individual — ‘Lucy Snowe’.”⁷⁷ In this capricious description of her enigmatic heroine, Brontë offers us a way to understand the omission and absence at the heart of autobiographical writing: the attempt to describe a self will, in the end, be communicated through the blanks and gaps. Whether the dashes signify the space between words or the space of unprinted, unprintable words, whether such words were censored or never existed in the first place, are secrets only the editor knows.

The only way, in fact, to describe a self is by naming that self, an interval of presence amid absence: “— ‘Lucy Snowe’.”⁷⁸ I do not mean to stop the revolving door’s spin here, facing the camp of Adrian Room — “[o]ur names not only identify us, they *are* us: they announce us, advertise us and embody us.”⁷⁹ What I find is that the narrative of *Villette* defines a “name” as paradoxically invisible (a voice, announcing), corporeal (embodying), and abstracted (a text, or advertisement) all at the same time. Karen Chase argues that Lucy develops from her entrance as a total blank — “Lucy does not merely change, she comes into being”⁸⁰ — but I suggest that ultimate “being,” her name, is only text and relation, more empty space.⁸¹

We might note that Paulina Home, for whom we are offered four names (Missy, Polly, Paulina, and Paulina Mary) before our narrator has one, claims that “I

⁷⁷ Smith Letters III.142.

⁷⁸ cf. Boumelha: Lucy “cannot be characterised except by her name [...]. Our narrator-heroine functions more as a series, a dispersal, than as a fixed centre” (115).

⁷⁹ Room 7, emphasis original.

⁸⁰ Chase 70.

⁸¹ De Man: “Prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one’s name [...] is made as intelligible and memorable as a face” (926). Yet language, the “always privative” medium by which this prosopopeia is constituted, “deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause” (930).

never knew what you were, nor ever thought of asking; for me, you were always Lucy Snowe" (V 368). Lucy admits: "I liked her. It is not a declaration I have often made concerning my acquaintance" (V 461). Conversely, M. Paul offers the abstracting rather than embodying view of name in one of his gift books: "From P.C.D.E. to L—y." He inscribes her as a blank, and she is pleased: "And when I saw this I laughed [...]. I was revived" (V 508). Both versions of Lucy's "cypher" — a code or an empty, place-holding symbol ("merely nothing") — are acceptable.

The pseudonymous Currer Bell wanted "to come before you as an author only," an author severed from the identity of a body and all its biographical (not to mention biological) "incidents" — an author, that is, reduced to a name on a title page. Of course, as Charlotte Brontë could not maintain control over her cipher pseudonym, Lucy-as-cipher similarly forfeits ultimate control to her reader, who will either save M. Paul for her to marry or not, who will associate her life with "Poor Miss Brontë's" or not. Absence and presence, in the case of autobiographical fiction and in the case of pseudonymity, cannot be separated. Readers fill the blanks surrounding and constituting "Lucy Snowe" (readers both within and without *Villette*) — as they did "Currer Bell," as they do "Charlotte Brontë" — and yet those ciphers will thereby reassert their emptiness as the *possibility* of fullness.

***Shirley*: The Ghostliest Autobiography**

In conclusion, we turn to *Shirley* — the odd one out in the trio of novels published in Charlotte Brontë's lifetime, but which Helene Moglen is not alone in considering "the most autobiographical of all."⁸² Whether there is something inherently autobiographical about Brontë's second novel, or whether it is merely read "autobiographically" because

⁸² Moglen 195.

it falls between, and thus is inflected by, the first-person narratives of *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe* is impossible to answer. I want to argue for *Shirley* as one of Brontë's autobiographies not because it conforms to the incidents of her life,⁸³ but because it is about the construction of narrative and self. That is, narrative stance is revealed to be unstable, interpretation of character (self) is a process of ciphering, "true" identity is endlessly deferred, and the work of an editor is pervasive throughout. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in the telling of two other life stories — *Shirley Keeldar/Emily Brontë* and *Caroline Helstone/Anne Brontë* — the narrator/Charlotte Brontë effectively defines and positions her own identity.

In his review of *Shirley*, George Henry Lewes condemns the tendency for "gentle, shy, not highly cultivated Caroline [to] talk from time to time in the strain of Currer Bell herself rather than in the strain of Helstone's little niece."⁸⁴ This autobiographical reading may be due in no small part to Lewes's glee at having discovered the identity of the Great Unknown — "it is now scarcely a secret that Currer Bell is the pseudonym of a woman," he trumpets, though "[w]e never, for our own parts, had a moment's doubt on the subject"⁸⁵ — but nevertheless it is intriguing to read *Shirley* as an especially "wobbly" narration. Rather than attribute this solely to Brontë's lack of facility with the third-person voice, I suggest (here, and in more detail in the following chapter) that a fiction hoping to achieve a reality effect *must* oscillate on the narrative axis between broad third-person objectivity and intimate

⁸³ Fleishman's "strenuous argumentation" is required even more here than in *JE*, though that has not stopped people trying: Keefe proposes that Caroline's re-discovery of a lost mother and her miraculous recovery from illness are CB's own wish-fulfillment, stemming from the loss of her mother and siblings (143-44); Langland suggests that the "patriarchal bull" Shirley talks of being "capsized by" (*S* 249) is CB's own hero/foil Thackeray (265).

⁸⁴ [GHL] *Edinburgh Review* (Jan 1850) CH-CB 167.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 162-63. CB was intensely displeased with GHL's backstabbing: "I can be on guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends!" (CB Letters III.67)

first-person subjectivity. The variation in stance does not only strive to represent omniscience, but also its opposite — the impossibility of ever truly “knowing” a self.

While Terry Eagleton notes that the novel “secretes a tacitly first-person narration — that of Caroline Helstone — within it,”⁸⁶ Caroline is not the only “I” straining against the narrator’s third-person monopoly on telling. Louis Moore also gets near-entire chapters delivered in his voice. Both sets of mini-narrative are enclosed in quotation marks; a key difference, however, is that Caroline’s signify overheard thought while Louis’s are textual: “Come near, by all means, reader: do not be shy: stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles.” (S 487) Thus we have implicit levels of privacy and mediation within the realm of first-person narration — one is the text of a text, the other is the text of a thought. Louis’s narration also occurs in a (more) public space — the Fieldhead schoolroom — while Caroline’s is intensely intimate: “in her small bed-room; the door bolted, her white dressing-gown assumed, her long hair loosened and falling thick, soft, and wavy to her waist,” we find her meditating, and “[h]er thoughts were speaking with her [...]”⁸⁷

What these first-person “lapses” achieve is not only the drawing closer of Caroline and Louis, but in both cases *their* narrative accessibility pushes another character — Shirley — further beyond the reader’s ken. For instance, Shirley’s only declarations of love come in Louis’s writing (the account of his proposal to the heiress, inscribed in “his little blank book,” fills the bulk of the chapter “Written in the Schoolroom”)⁸⁸ and via Caroline’s whispering to Robert Moore of a secret night-time

⁸⁶ Eagleton, *Myths of Power* 80.

⁸⁷ S 122. The similarity between this and the intimacy of “Hetty’s World” and “The Two Bed-Chambers” in *AB* is worth a mention, especially as the previous chapter ends with Robert Moore’s Donnithorne-like resolution not to get carried away with his pretty neighbor: “This won’t do! There’s weakness — there’s downright ruin in all this. However,” he added, dropping his voice, “the frenzy is quite temporary. I know it very well: I have had it before. It will be gone tomorrow.” (S 120)

⁸⁸ cf. Langer on how “Louis increasingly speaks for Shirley, first by appropriating and translating her written compositions and then by (re)writing her in his own private journal,” and on Shirley’s persistence on the “margins” of texts — Louis’s school-books and the novel’s narrative (289).

conversation shared between the two women. Even this, however, is only inferred: “She whispered: Robert gave a start, a flash of the eye, a brief laugh” (*S* 564). One of Caroline’s longest first-person monologues immediately follows an account of Shirley in the chapter “Two Lives”: three solid pages of Miss Helstone’s quoted thoughts only throw into relief the preceding description of Miss Keeldar, which is, indeed, just that — a purely visual depiction. “Let us first visit the heiress,” the narrator suggests, “How does she look?” We are treated to a good deal of dramatic business:

[She] sweeps across from room to room, now carrying flowers to the barbarous peach-bloom salon, now entering the dining-room to open its casements [...]. She takes her sewing occasionally: but, by some fatality, she is doomed never to sit steadily at it for above five minutes at a time: her thimble is scarcely fitted on, her needle scarce threaded, when a sudden thought calls her up-stairs: perhaps she goes to seek some just-then-remembered old ivory-backed needle-book, or older china-topped workbox, quite unneeded, but which seems at the moment indispensable; perhaps to arrange her hair [...]. (*S* 371-73)

Although this first of the “Two Lives” is described in minute detail, full of specific incident (she goes on to play with her dog Tartar, to feed the birds, to talk with her estate manager), Shirley remains an external creature.⁸⁹ Where we have an overabundance of Caroline’s emotions and desires, Shirley’s interior world remains in a state of “perhaps” — it is up to the reader to interpret her actions and determine her state of mind. She remains essentially a cipher until the very end of the narrative, and even then we find her “in a somewhat impracticable mood” — silent, passive, leaving Caroline to choose her wedding garments for her (*S* 591).

I suggest that this removed, deferred Shirley serves two purposes: she teaches us how difficult it is to read, and she summons the “real” person Emily Brontë, newly removed by death and perpetually deferred by her strangeness. As a figure for the difficulty of reading, we can begin with Shirley’s name, which does not properly

⁸⁹ The non-visual descriptions of Shirley in this section are not legitimately “interior,” but rather the mystical, eulogizing rhetoric CB uses to describe EB in the Bio Notice — “A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins”; “Buoyant, by green steps, by glad hills, all verdure and light, she reaches a station scarcely lower than that whence the angels looked down on the dreamer of Beth-el”; etc. (*S* 374)

signify (she is a woman, “Shirley” is a man’s name) and which is a constant reminder of the absence of a brother. We are told that “her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of marriage, providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy, if with a boy they had been blessed.”⁹⁰

Shirley’s cryptic behavior throughout the story, moreover, hinges on the problem of an over-signifying name. It appears that the heiress of Fieldhead is courting her tenant, the mill owner Robert Moore, who is quite obviously the “proper” lover for Caroline Helstone. Mr. Yorke (mis)reads Shirley’s feelings for Robert, offering up “tokens” such as “the light of her eyes, the red of her cheeks: red they grew when your name was mentioned, though of custom they are pale.” (S 495) Robert agrees: “My name had a magical influence over her: when others uttered it, she changed countenance, — I know she did.” (S 497) This misinterpretation leads to Robert’s poorly judged offer of marriage, the telling of which is itself delayed for nearly a hundred pages, embedding another layer of mystery into the narrative. Shirley’s defense of her misinterpreted behavior is cipher-like: “[t]ime may give you the right key to all: then, perhaps, you will comprehend me; and then we shall be reconciled.” (S 501)

Indeed, it is only after *much* time that it is made clear to Robert and Yorke, and the reader (not to mention the much-abused Caroline), that the “Mr. Moore” whose name made Shirley blush is not Robert but his late-arriving brother. Louis is named when we first meet the Moores — “for there was another Gérard Moore besides Robert,” we are informed parenthetically — “of Louis, however, [Caroline] knew less than of Robert” (S 92). He only appears in the narrative well past midway,

⁹⁰ S 211. Interestingly, Shirley has the power to bestow this “empty” name — “if I lived to inherit my father’s estate, and her house,” her young cousin Henry Sympson explains, “I was to take the name of Keeldar, and to make Fieldhead my residence. Henry Shirley Keeldar I said I would be called: and I will.” (S 471) The female body is a holding place for the name “Shirley Keeldar, Esq.” until it can be more properly affixed.

when Caroline meets an Uncanny double: “the enigma of the dream (a dream it seemed) was at its height: she saw a visage like and unlike, — Robert, and no Robert.” Only when “a new Robert, — the real Robert” enters the room does she realize the other “*can* only be one person: your brother, since [his face] is so like you: my other cousin, Louis.” (S 395-96, emphasis original) The “key” to Shirley and “Mr. Moore” is literally absent throughout most of the story, and even after Louis arrives it is a matter of learning little by little that Shirley’s former tutor is Shirley’s current love.⁹¹ “When I sat beside you at the school-feast, did you think I loved you then?” an indignant Shirley demands of Robert upon his proposal. “When I stopped you in Maythorn-lane, did you think I loved you then? When I called on you in the counting-house — when I walked with you on the pavement — did you think I loved you then?” (S 500) Her litany of misread moments forces the reader’s acknowledgement that we, like Robert, answered “yes” to each as it was presented in the narrative.

In a first-person story such as Jane Eyre’s, our intimacy with the protagonist allows us to assume we are misreading *with* her (one of the many conventions strained by Lucy Snowe). Our third-person narrator, however, seems to have failed us; she⁹² left Shirley’s “tokens” untranslated. Even worse, she let Yorke’s and Robert’s mis-translations stand (STET). The silent unreliability in this case is, I argue, highlighted by the narrator’s noisy reliability in other cases of translation: she reminds us throughout that (thanks to the half-Belgian Moore family) there are two languages at play. Under similar circumstances, Lucy Snowe needs a parenthetical disclaimer, disrupting our sense of immediacy as the heroine stands on an unfamiliar doorstep in the middle of the night, awaiting her fate at the hands of Mme. Beck and M. Paul: “(I

⁹¹ Though, again, a reading of *Shirley* is unavoidably inflected by other CB texts (*The Professor*, *Villette*, *Gaskell’s Life*), and thus the informed reader might suspect immediately the word “tutor” appears that Louis will be a romantic lead.

⁹² I use CB’s pronoun for the narrator, though I am not arguing for any particularly feminine traits.

shall go on with this part of my tale as if I had understood all that passed; for though it was then scarce intelligible to me, I heard it translated afterwards.)” (V 128) The *Shirley* narrator, on the other hand, is proud to be her own translator: “Eh, bien! Tu ne déjeûnes pas ce matin?” Hortense Moore asks upon entering. “The answer and the rest of the conversation was in French,” the narrator notes, “but as this is an English book, I shall translate it into English.”⁹³

Nonetheless, as Jane and Lucy’s editorial manipulation was not innocent or incidental to their self-writing, the narrator’s function as translator is related to the misreading encouraged by her silence elsewhere. As even the “not highly cultivated” Caroline notes of St. Paul and his views on women:

he wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians, under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps mis-apprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn [...]. (S 323)

Interpretation of a text is not reliable if we do not have access to “the original.”

Interpretation of a self is similarly unstable in *Shirley*, and not merely in the case of the “Shirley Keeldar, Esquire,” that “gallant little cavalier” (S 212-13). The narrator spends a comparatively great deal of time introducing the character of Mr. Yorke, and his “inelegant, unclassic, unaristocratic mould of visage.” The verdict is for indecision: “Fine people would perhaps have called it vulgar; sensible people would have termed it characteristic; shrewd people would have delighted in it for the pith, sagacity, intelligence [...]. I did not find it easy to sketch Mr. Yorke’s person, but it is more difficult to indicate his mind,” she continues, and her phrenological

“indications” are that he “was without the organ of Veneration,” “without the organ of

⁹³ S 91. Other instances in which the narrator acts *explicitly* as translator: on Hortense’s “natural *bonté* (I use this French word, because it expresses just what I mean; neither goodness nor good nature, but something between the two)” (S 307); describing a “crystalline evening” and its “reflets” of light, she offers the footnote: “Find me an English word as good, reader, and I will gladly dispense with the French word. Reflections won’t do” (S 527); of Caroline’s love-scene with Robert: “she bent her head ‘et les effleura de ses lèvres’ (I put that in French, because the word ‘effleurer’ is an exquisite word).” (S 543)

Comparison,” and “he had too little of the organs of Benevolence and Ideality” (S 76). The self is, indeed, a cipher — it can be read in a collection of symbols (phrenology, or Shirley’s “token” blushes), but it is also saturated with absence: *inelegant*, *unclassic*, *unaristocratic*, *without*.

Caroline, too, is depicted in negative: “To her had not been denied the gift of beauty”; “there was not the grievous defect of plainness to pardon in her case.” (S 102, 119) While numerous other characters (both Moore brothers, Shirley, Martin and Rose Yorke, Mrs. Pryor) describe her beauty in glowingly positive terms, the narrator seems to have a particular blind spot for Miss Helstone, or an attachment to her “blankness.” The closest she comes to outright approbation is when Caroline looks in the mirror and sees “a shape, a head, that, daguerreotyped in that attitude and with that expression, *would have been lovely*” (S 123, emphasis added).

The narrator’s reticence towards Caroline and her hero-worshipping mystification of Shirley⁹⁴ returns us to a more directly “auto/biographical” reading of the novel. These two heroines — “a snow-white dove and gem-tinted bird of paradise joined in social flight” (S 293) — are frequently if not universally recognized as posthumous portraits of Anne and Emily, who both died during the writing of *Shirley*.⁹⁵ The former, who Charlotte Brontë describes as “self-denying,” even “nothing, absolutely nothing,” finds a likeness in the long-suffering Miss Helstone; the latter (“I have never seen her parallel in anything”) is even more obviously Miss Keeldar (“there is no such ladies now-a-days”).⁹⁶ The narrator’s attitude towards these characters,

⁹⁴ e.g., “[S]he does not know her dreams are rare — her feelings peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green.” (S 374)

⁹⁵ cf. Gérin 389-90; Holgate attempts to trace the evolution of the novel alongside CB’s biographical development, exploring how EB was a (somewhat unsuccessful) “graft *post mortem*” onto the character of Shirley (31-32); Gilbert & Gubar argue that Mrs. Pryor (who had been Miss Grey before she became Mrs. Helstone then Mrs. Pryor), is a revision of AB’s “Miss Grey” — “as if Charlotte needed to deflate the romantic happy ending envisioned [in *AG*].” (*Madwoman* 389)

⁹⁶ Barker 208; Bio Notice 746; S 599.

juxtaposed with Brontë's attitude expressed in her biographical and literary criticism, might suggest we read the third-person teller of *Shirley* as another of Charlotte Brontë's autobiographical mouthpieces. I argue that this sort of portraiture does indeed end up being self-portraiture, and again it is the figure of the editor that is important.

The years 1849-50 can be read as something of an anomaly in Brontë's career — in the space between “obviously” autobiographical novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* (“Lucy Snowe is avowedly her own likeness, and Lucy Snowe differs only by accidents from *Jane Eyre*”⁹⁷), she not only published the third-person, dual-heroine'd *Shirley* but also the “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell.” This brief, influential biography is part of a cluster of texts that Brontë produced not as an author, but as an editor: the Biographical Notice and two Prefaces (to *Wuthering Heights* and to *Poems by Ellis Bell*) were affixed to her 1850 edition of her sisters' works. I propose that we read *Shirley* as part of this project, in which Charlotte acts as “curator” to Emily and Anne. She commemorates them in her fiction, in their own fictions, and in the uncertain editorial space of prefatory material — *within* their works but *by* someone else. It is as though Brontë has taken “time out” from being a first-person self, exchanging her authorial “I” for the explicitly mediated, mediating roles of editor, omniscient narrator, and translator (“[a]n interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world,” she says of Emily⁹⁸).

However, like Carlyle's Editor in his green spectacles, like Misch's “spirit brooding,” who is “the truest and most real element in an autobiography,” I suggest

⁹⁷ Stephen 7.

⁹⁸ Bio Notice 746. She offers a key (deferred) in the “Prefatory Note” to EB's *Poems*, when she claims that “[n]obody knew what ailed her but me — I knew only too well.” (Smith Letters II.753) Many critics have latched on to CB's self-casting as interpreter and martyr to duty. Bodenheimer: “it seemed that she [CB] was to be the single Brontë sibling who knew that she must practice the arts of communication and negotiation with the more ordinary world.” (33) Hillis Miller suggests that the Bio Notice's reference to he “who can accurately read the ‘Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin’ of an original mind,” ostensibly a coded reference to sympathetic reviewer Sydney Dobell, also points to CB's *own* role as primary translator of EB's essentially “private language” (382).

that Charlotte Brontë-as-editor is still “I”, still author, and still as ostensibly “influence”-driven. Having failed to justify Heathcliff in the *Wuthering Heights* preface, she falls back on the vision of literary invention which she had offered Lewes, rephrasing only slightly: “the writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master — something that at times strangely will and works for itself.”⁹⁹ As we see in the *Poems* preface, moreover, the editor/arranger goes about her work subject to the very same forces as the author/creator: “an influence, stronger than could be exercised by any motive of expediency, necessarily regulated the selection.”¹⁰⁰ The final chapter of this thesis returns to Brontë’s curatorship of her sisters’ literary and biographical reputations, and how her role as editor (of their lives and texts) is synonymous with her role as author (of the “Brontë Myth”). For now, I conclude by suggesting that — like pseudonym and self, like N-Jane and P-Jane — the author and the editor, autobiographer and biographer are perpetually ghosted by each other throughout Charlotte Brontë’s works.

⁹⁹ Preface to *WH*, Smith Letters II.750.

¹⁰⁰ “Prefatory Note” to EB’s *Poems*, Smith Letters II.752.

CHAPTER 6

CATEGORY CRISIS IN GEORGE ELIOT'S REALIST FICTION

The conventional view of nineteenth-century realism is of a genre which presupposes a uniform and empirically knowable world,¹ and presumes consciousness to be comparable — even continuous — between characters, and between character and reader.² I argue, however, that as with the condition of pseudonymity, the condition of realist fiction is neither “simple” nor “naïve,” but intensely self-aware, saturated with anxiety — it “implies a fundamental uneasiness about self, society, and art,” and insists always on testing its own boundaries.³ Its status as a unified genre is likewise suspect: consider Karen Chase’s claim that Dickens, Brontë, and Eliot “all saw themselves as realists, though their ‘realisms’ display little in common.”⁴ Victorian realism is a “rebellious mode,” developing against what was seen as “misrepresentation” in art,⁵ and actively disruptive not only in the intentions of its architects but in the manner of reading it promotes.

What realism proposes is not only a new version of artistic representation, but also a new way of understanding artistic representation. David Lodge, following Jakobson’s assignment of realism to the “metonymic pole” of language, contends that it is valuable as an art form because it resists any generalized critical mode: metonymic interpretation instructs us to view an element “not as a model of reality,

¹ e.g., Alison Byerly admits that at some level the genre does depend on a stable world, and a stable world depends on being able to point out real and not-real (*Realism, Representation, and the Arts in 19th-Century Literature* 5, 108-09).

² e.g., Brian Swann, working from Hillis Miller’s conception of the realist narrator as a “collective mind,” claims that the separate egos of the *Mm* characters are all elements of the narrator’s “overarching consciousness” (302). See also Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*.

³ G. Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (in O’Gorman ed.) 108. Also: “[t]he truest realism [...] is one that truthfully confronts its own limitations.” (*The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, 18)

⁴ Chase, *Eros and Psyche* 5.

⁵ G. Levine, *Cambridge Companion* 7. GHL termed this penchant for misrepresentation “falsism.” See his 1858 essay “Realism in Art” (quoted in Williams, *The Realist Novel in England* 136).

but as a representative *bit* of reality.”⁶ Brian Swann, meanwhile, suggests that “realistic” symbols differ from Modernist (and traditional) symbols in that they “are not compact images that make a single sensual impact, but are often extensive and not easily delimitable segments of reality.”⁷

I want to latch onto this notion of “not easily delimitable.” Realist fiction has endlessly recurrent problems with “limits,” both in the sense of how something is defined and in the sense of its own boundaries as a genre. The former problem might be distilled to a question of language: in *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator wonders whether Aristotle himself (who in the *Poetics* is a great fan of metaphor) would not lament “that intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor, — that we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else?” (*MF* 209) The recognition of language as endlessly referential rather than a transparent vehicle for stable meaning is deeply troubling to the “empirical” version of realism. A third-term understanding of realist fiction, however, does not depend on perfect transparency of language, and does not promote a clear “truth.”⁸ It is not an art form based on confidence in an empirical, definable “reality,” but an unruly genre which displays a skeptical attitude towards the possibility of definition itself. Pseudonymity reveals that naming is not an Adamic, “irreducible” activity; autobiography produces an elusive

⁶ Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* 109-11. cf. Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances,” *Fundamentals of Language*. Hillis Miller distinguishes GE’s form of synecdoche (the result of metonymy compressing reality enough to achieve the “totalization” required by realism) as separate from, for instance, Dickens’s — where Dickensian characters and plots are *symbols* of the “real world,” GE’s are *samples* of it. (“Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*” 125-26)

⁷ Swann 282-83. Although it is a genre born through the destruction of myth, that destruction is essential as a starting point: to write *against* something is to incorporate that something, and thus “[t]he life of true realism is myth.” (284) The frequency with which critics use the phrase “true realism” is fascinating in its own right — the attempt to identify and unpack a “real” realism is itself a kind of conventional realism, suggesting a verifiable “truth.”

⁸ Shaw, for instance, is skeptical: “realism doesn’t trade in ‘transparent’ representation, because it doesn’t need to and doesn’t want to.” (*Narrating Reality* 39) He continues: “[e]ven if the realists of the nineteenth century all subscribed in an utterly naïve fashion to a theory of transparent language, the question of how language actually behaves in their novels would remain open” (41).

rather than definite self; realism threatens the certainty of “real” — in each case, the attempt to declare what something *is* undermines rather than accomplishes its goal.

Limits, Border-Crossing, and Performativity

Victorian critics sought constantly for the means by which to characterize “good” or “true” artistic representation and, beyond that, “good” or “true” realism. Eliot’s *Westminster Review* essays of 1856 (the year she began writing *Scenes of Clerical Life*) — “The Natural History of German Life,” “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” and the untitled review commonly called “Three Novels” — all deal with the identification of right and wrong kinds of fiction. These essays propose to trace the boundaries of the category she terms “realism,” typically by attacking that which falls into the opposing category of not-realism (Lewes’s “falsism”). Such is Eliot’s method of determining what a thing *is* by discovering where it butts up against what it is *not*. “Fundamentally,” she explains in “Notes on Form in Art,” two years later, “form is unlikeness [...] and in consistency with this fundamental meaning, every difference is form.”⁹ Eliot recognizes that a definition includes its own antithesis; yet her theory of art does ultimately insist that there *are* boundaries between the distinct categories (or forms) of real and not-real. I do not mean to hold George Eliot to a black-and-white ontology of the “real” — I believe she was perfectly aware of the inherent problems of such a position.¹⁰ While her critical essays do indeed campaign for realism as a delimited space in which she will locate her own fiction, that fiction itself refuses

⁹ “Notes on Form in Art,” *GE Essays* 432-33. “Even taken in its derivative meaning of outline, what is form but the limit of that difference by which we discriminate one object from another?” (434) She is also presaging the “ground-breaking” work of Ferdinand de Saussure by at least 50 years.

¹⁰ Contrary to Ioan Williams’ contention that “[h]er point of view is that of the biologist or sociologist. She writes of human life as if it were capable of being objectively and scientifically analysed.” (178)

delimitation: she was never *not* working with a disrupted, disruptive art form.¹¹ Her novels, even when they are not explicitly suspicious of boundaries, time and again demonstrate the elasticity and permeability of the genre's borders.

The first limits I am interested in are the start and finish lines — “origin” and “ending” — though discovering them will be as difficult as pinning down a single moment of “birth” or “death” for a pseudonym. Nineteenth-century fiction, according to Leo Bersani, works from a conception of time “shaped by a prior imagination of beginnings and ends”; the realist novel’s fascination with unified chronologies, specific dates, and historical authenticity “allows us the luxury of assigning precise beginnings to experience, [...] making experience more accessible to our appetite for sense-making distinctions and categories.”¹² Realism offers a vision of a controlled, significant world, giving society “a reassuring myth about itself.”¹³

The basic machinery of the realist plot is driven by narrative contrivances: those which make believable, ordinary events into strategic coincidences, but also those which offer near-fantastic situations (such as the link between Ladislav and Bulstrode) as likely, “realistic.” Both kinds of coincidence are unsettling — Bersani reads narrative contrivance as “seem[ing] almost to signify an awesome complicity of the most distant or unrelated corners of reality with the requirements of the novel’s main psychological and moral structures.”¹⁴ The plot’s victims (its readers) are left

¹¹ It is important to note that the association of GE with the status quo of realist fiction is an effect of hindsight. As the version of realism she helped to shape is the dominant one, we tend to lose sight of how radical she was — retrospection frees us from “the confused, disordered situation which is the literary period as it happens.” (Carroll, CH-GE 2) G. Levine is similarly keen to remind us “how far outside the conventions of Victorian narrative Eliot’s art had developed.” Her novels “subversively undermine traditions of narrative, history, and meaning that her culture had apparently learned to take for granted.” (“GE’s Hypothesis of Reality” 5)

¹² Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax* 54.

¹³ Ibid. 60.

¹⁴ Ibid. 55. The design underlying the 19th-century novel, he claims, trains us to read for significance (52). cf. Freud’s identification of coincidence as one of the hallmarks of the Uncanny.

feeling helpless, yet are simultaneously tempted to assume there is a hidden significance to discover. In the world of the “self-verifying” realist novel, things not only “mean” — if we just keep reading, that meaning will be revealed and resolved.¹⁵

Conversely, Gillian Beer sees in Victorian narrative a re-working of problems revealed by evolutionary theory: origin, teleology, and overarching meaning are called into question — the “real” start-point of life remains ultimately unavailable and individual extinction is our only vision of culmination.¹⁶ While the Victorian novel feeds a desire for closure — we read to discover “how it turns out” — and relies on our trusting that what we are being told “is all part of the story,” contemporary developments in Victorian science left no room for a divine plan. A Darwinian world-view offered no guarantee of an originary moment nor any assurance that there was, finally, significance in life.

This evolutionist paradigm was predicted by the eighteenth-century geologist James Hutton, who declared that for all its searching, science would find “[n]o vestige of beginning, — no prospect of an end.”¹⁷ Sarah Gates points out that Eliot’s last two novels take up this theme between them — the Finale of *Middlemarch* starts with the statement “Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending” (*Mm* 832), and *Daniel Deronda* opens with a similar epigraph (worth quoting in full for its echo of Hutton):

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars’ unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into billions,

¹⁵ The “self-verifying” plot “assumes that what is hidden may be uncovered, and that what lies beyond the peripheries of present knowledge may be encompassed and brought within the account by its completion.” (Beer, *Darwin’s Plots* 162) Cynthia Chase, on the other hand, uses a single instance of disruption (Hans Meyrick’s letter near the end of *DD*, apparently useless, and thus rebellious against the dominant reading offered by the narrative) to show how “the passive trustfulness of protagonist and reader — their trust in the revelatory power of sheer sequence — is fundamentally misplaced” (217).

¹⁶ Beer, *Darwin’s Plots* 11; 88.

¹⁷ Quoted *ibid.* 156.

and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets of *in medias res*. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out. (DD 3)

Gates's argument is that these quotations, which themselves act as borders (epilogue and epigraph) between the two novels, function as a dialogue that disturbs and then entirely disrupts the notion of "limit." Where *Middlemarch* suggests that as "the borders of narration are interchangeable, that since the points of exit can so easily become points of entry, all limits are necessarily arbitrary," the position of *Daniel Deronda* "exposes an even deeper instability: [...] what is 'make-believe' about the beginning is that these single points of exit or entry are capable of becoming landscapes in themselves."¹⁸ The lie of origin, then, is exposed — any point can be origin as well as any other point, depending only on the story (or "landscape") that is constructed from it. According to Eliot, limits are not merely relative and arbitrary, but (as the weight of two "make-believes" and one "pretend" makes clear) inescapably fictional.

This self-conscious evaluation of limits demonstrates an awareness of teleological desire and its antagonistic relationship to the way life "really" works. The epigraph's distinction between Science and "grandmother Poetry" is that the latter is self-aware; the admission of "in medias res" is the poet's acknowledgment of the way narrative time (Genette's *récit*, the Formalist *sjuzet*) can be shaped independently of the actual chronology of events (*histoire*, or *fabula*). Using a problematizing of boundaries as boundary itself (between Eliot's last two novels) replicates the way realism as a genre is driven both to disrupt and to contain that disruption. Thus we have "the realistic novelist desperately tr[ying] to hold together what he recognizes quite well is falling apart. The looseness or elasticity of novelistic form is a sign of

¹⁸ Gates, "'A difference of native language': Gender, Genre, and Realism in *Daniel Deronda*" 700.

that recognition.”¹⁹ What Henry James called “baggy monsters,” then, are only so because they are actively attempting to control their inclination towards bagginess.²⁰ George Eliot’s realist fiction, setting out with a self-awareness of its own fictionalized boundaries, defines itself by defeating itself.

The problem of self-aware, self-defeating realism leads many critics to study it as an epistemological rather than ontological art;²¹ likewise, the third term can only be properly understood as epistemological relation, not ontological thing. One of the traits of a third term is to appear very thing-like while actually behaving as an action or relation, which cannot exist in isolation. As with the pseudonym, the mask is a key image for us here: it suggests both a thing (a covering, or veil) and an action (performance). The notion of realism as a “veil of the familiar,” tempting us to “pierce beyond,”²² informs Carroll’s suggestion that most Victorian reviewers “were more concerned with the truth of George Eliot’s surface realism,” and thus missed the deeper implications of her art.²³ Eliot herself claims that the normal means of human perception dulls what would otherwise be “a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life” and keeps us “well wadded with stupidity.” Her narrative, then, enacts the workings of perception, and provides a filter (or wadding) for reality that protects us from the “roar which lies on the other side of silence” (*Mm* 194). Realist fiction as

¹⁹ Bersani 61.

²⁰ *DD* is a particularly fruitful example of splitting and disruption: many critics have read it as divided between a “Gwendolen half” and “Deronda half” — cf. Beaty, “*Daniel Deronda* and the Question of Unity in Fiction,” and its many responses, including Dale, “Symbolic Representation and the Meaning of Revolution in *Daniel Deronda*”; Carroll, “The Unity of *Daniel Deronda*”; Caron, “The Rhetoric of Magic in *Daniel Deronda*.” Gates sees its realist intention struggling against the epic and tragic endings that “overpower and contain the realistic details that are supposed to contain them.” (704)

²¹ Shaw claims that the movement of modernity itself has been a progression from ontology to epistemology (65), Ermarth sees the post-Renaissance, post-perspective realist movement as a transition from “knowing” man to “thinking” man (36). See also Dale’s discussion of the way *Mm* and *DD* privilege phenomenologist (e.g., Ladislav the artistic, symbolic, relation-oriented thinker succeeds) rather than positivist (Lydgate the scientist/empiricist fails) readings of the world (26).

²² Shaw 51.

²³ Carroll, CH-GE 23.

a veil suggests that, if we could only see past, puncture, or remove it, we would encounter an underlying “real.”

However, the “veil” model of realism, proposing a distinction between surface and depth, does not bear out its metaphor: beneath the veil we find only more layers.²⁴ As Eliot writes in her 1857 essay on “The Poet Young,” “the art that conceals art is an absolute requisite.”²⁵ Artifice is indeed a means of hiding, but what it hides is not truth, only more artifice. The recurring coincidences in plot and symbols, as discussed above, spring from an intention to convey significance, but then disguise themselves as incidents of “reality.” If the “thingness” of a mask indicates a true identity behind a false front, its capacity for performativity short-circuits the notion of priority. Coincidence may make us suspect hidden significance, but the performance of hiding only reveals that there is ultimately no way to discover that significance. No matter which view of realism we take — as an attempt to convey empirical “reality” through a transparent medium, or as an epistemological, self-reflexive project — it is always an art of imitation, mimicking either “real” life or the non-literary ways of representing life.²⁶ If we identify realist fiction as a mask and then attempt to strip it away, we realize that, like a pseudonym, it is actually *relation*, an activity of interaction and transmission rather than a passive mechanism.

Thus far we have discussed realism’s precarious position on the boundaries of its own definition. In order to recognize how this third term destabilizes the categories it hovers between, we need to examine realism as the mediating link between life

²⁴ cf. Sarduy, quoted in the first chapter of this thesis, who is writing on realism and “surface”: “the mask makes us believe that there is a depth, but what the mask covers is itself: the mask feigns dissimulation to dissimulate that it is nothing more than a simulation.” (439)

²⁵ *GE Essays* 361. See also Shaw on the keyhole-peering effect of realism — a conceit that aims to make the reader think he is “there” but prevent him wondering how or why he got there (42).

²⁶ cf. Lodge 25.

(“reality”) and art. Shaw proposes that the realist novel “create[s] a metaphorical and rhetorical chain that runs from novel to reader to the world,”²⁷ an image I would modify from a “thing-like” chain to a conduit, a transmissive flow describing the interaction of supposedly separate spheres. In the argument offered by Elizabeth Ermarth, literary realism first developed alongside the Renaissance invention of perspective drawing, and thus in both cases “[t]he identity of anything — that is, its rational, structured, formal quality — can only be discovered in relationship.” As perspective introduces a single vanishing point and a single (therefore arbitrary) vantage point, previously static, discrete forms are replaced by motion and continuity.²⁸

Part of this motion and continuity is a porous quality to the border between life and art,²⁹ revealed in the tendency of characters from realist fiction to slip the bonds of their original narratives. Felix Holt, for instance, appears in *Blackwood's Magazine* two years after his novel was published to give an “Address to Working Men,”³⁰ while a description of Mary Garth in *Middlemarch* offers not a portrait of a girl who may inhabit the “real world,” but rather suggests that if the reader sees a person who “has a broad face and square brow, well-marked eyebrows and dark curly hair, a certain expression of amusement in her glance which her mouth keeps the secret of, and for the rest of the features entirely insignificant — take that ordinary but not disagreeable person for a portrait of Mary Garth.” (*Mm* 407-08) In Alison Byerly’s words, “Mary Garth steps out of the world of the novel onto our own crowded streets.”³¹

Realism, rather than a one-way channel permitting the reader alone to cross into

²⁷ Shaw 238.

²⁸ Ermarth 16.

²⁹ cf. Logan, “George Eliot and the Fetish of Realism”: “the border between moral influence and supernatural transformation was a porous one in Victorian culture, one that was crossed and re-crossed with regularity.” (43-44)

³⁰ “Address to Working Men, By Felix Holt,” *GE Essays* 415-30.

³¹ Byerly 123.

the novel, is a conduit for interaction between both sides of the text. As we saw with Brontë's "Wizard" and the "spirit" he conjures, or Dickens' "Enchanter" threatened by his "Familiars," authorial invention — pseudonymous or otherwise — indicates a permeable boundary between creator (the "real") and creation (fiction). It is this pervasive border-crossing that informs the following readings of Eliot's novels. The figure which will dominate our discussion is the narrator, who stands between the character's world and the reader's. However, as we shall see, this figure is less a warden than an interloper herself³² — the Eliotian narrator does not patrol but haunts the boundaries of the novel, making them sites of uncertainty rather than distinctness.³³

Ghost in the Machine: The Eliotian Narrator

While Charlotte Brontë's autobiographical fiction is distilled in the figure of the "morbid," hypochondria-haunted Lucy Snowe, George Eliot's realism may be best expressed in the character Romola de' Bardi, whose "mind was not apt to be assailed by sickly fancies; she had the vivid intellect and the healthy human passion, which are too keenly alive to the constant relations of things to have any morbid craving after the exceptional." Romola rejects her brother's dying prophecy, considering it "a sudden awful apparition from an invisible world." (*Rom* 158) Even after the message is

³² I use the author's own pronoun to refer to all of GE's narrators, though I do not mean to imply that the narrator and the author are equivalent. His/her "true" gender remains a topic of debate: cf. Stange, "The Voices of the Essayist," on the progressive dispersal of narrative identity across GE's canon; B. Hardy on the "disembodied voices" which gradually go from masculine to androgynous as autobiographical references drop out (*Particularities* 126-28ff.); Greenstein on how GE "kept her male pseudonym even when it had ceased to offer protection from biased critics (with the result that her narrator is still referred to as 'he', despite little support for this critical convention in the later novels) [...]" ("The Question of Vocation" 494).

³³ "The [narrator's] commentary is essentially a bridge between the fictional and real worlds, insisting that the two are adjacent, continuous, overlapping, and that their problems are common." (Carroll, "The Sybil of Mercia" 19) The choice of three incompatible adjectives — adjacent, continuous, and overlapping — is an example of how problematic the categories are in the first place. Where and what are their boundaries if they can relate spatially to each other in three entirely separate ways?

revealed to have been true, she privileges lived experience and “would have chosen over again to have acted on it rather than be a creature led by phantoms and disjointed whispers in a world where there was the large music of reasonable speech, and the warm grasp of living hands.”³⁴ Romola’s sensible mind refuses connection with “the mind of [her] unearthly brother,” dismissing even the attempt “as useless as for her hand to try and grasp a shadow.” (*Rom* 155) In a similar fashion, Eliot’s measured third-person realism should reject Brontë’s “influence”-driven autobiographical mode.

Nonetheless, where prophecy and realism seem most fundamentally opposed is where they are most fundamentally similar. If realism is based on an empirical worldview and a “massive confidence as to what the nature of Reality actually was,”³⁵ then its message should be both straightforward and verifiable. Prophecy, on the other hand, can never be proved either true or false (as it reserves always the possibility of future signification) and it can be “tailored” to the occasion.³⁶ *Romola* the realist novel opens in just this way, with the denizens of Florence debating their various interpretations of the portents that accompanied Lorenzo de’ Medici’s death. The conclusion offered by Nello the barber is for limitless meaning: “Why, when we poor mortals can pack two or three meanings into one sentence, it were mere blasphemy not to believe that your miraculous bull means everything that any man in Florence likes it to mean.” (*Rom* 19-20) Behind Nello’s satirical view of the debate in the piazza is a recognition that the boundaries of meaning can always be stretched — and not only in the case of prophecy or miraculous portents, but in any “one sentence.” This is, in fact, the way narrative works. The narrator is our prophet, more ghostly

³⁴ *Rom* 323. For an excellent discussion of Dino’s prophecy and its relation to narrative, see C. Levine, “The Prophetic Fallacy: Realism, Foreshadowing and Narrative Knowledge in *Romola*” (in Levine & Turner ed.).

³⁵ Ioan Williams x.

³⁶ cf. C. Levine, “The Prophetic Fallacy” 146-47.

Lucy than practical Romola: we interpret her “whispers” when we can and wait for them to be made clear when we cannot.

In Eliot’s novels, everything hinges on the storyteller as mediator of novel-reality and reader-reality.³⁷ Far from being passive in her mediation, she exerts control over the story in the same kind of editing process used by autobiographers Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. Active manipulation should not be permissible in a transparent, objective realism, and yet in Eliot’s work the recognition of such manipulation is constantly, subversively present. As an illustration, we have the narrative philosophy of *Adam Bede*, which offers a quasi-legal contract with the reader. At the start of the chapter where the story “Pauses a Little,” the narrator claims the events of that story have “mirrored themselves in [her] mind.” She continues:

The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath. (*AB* 177)

To this testimony we can add evidence from *Scenes of Clerical Life* — Eliot’s earliest narrator offers many apparently innocuous nods towards the storyteller’s art, excusing a scene-change because the characters’ conversation is “probably relating to women’s matters that it would be impertinent for us to listen to” (*SCL* 74), or a removal “lest we should happen to overhear remarks unsuited to the lay understanding, and perhaps dangerous to our repose of mind” (*SCL* 97).

On the one hand, these curtailings and movements are intrinsic to narrative, and the reader tends not to demand rationalization, content not to pierce beyond the “art that conceals art.” Yet while we are given explanation in cases when it is not

³⁷ One of the narrator’s primary functions is to translate the thoughts and lives of “ordinary” folk into a language compatible with the sensibilities of the (presumably educated bourgeois) novel-reading public — cf. A.S. Byatt’s introduction to *MF*: GE, “in full consciousness, can [...] compare Tom with Homer’s Hector, Tamer of Horses, and Maggie with a heroine of classical tragedy, but these comparisons are not available to Tom and Maggie.” (*MF* 19)

strictly necessary (retiring from a boring fireside chat), more noteworthy choices are left unjustified. For instance, in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love Story” the narrative cuts away from Anthony Wybrow just before he mysteriously expires on the garden path, leaving us to discover him when Caterina does:

But what is that lying among the dank leaves on the path three yards before her?
Good God! it is he — lying motionless — his hat fallen off. He is ill, then — he has fainted. Her hand lets go the dagger, and she rushes towards him. His eyes are fixed; he does not see her. She sinks down on her knees, takes the dear head in her arms, and kisses the cold forehead.
‘Anthony, Anthony! speak to me — it is Tina — speak to me! O God, he is dead!’
(*SCL* 212)

The achieved effect, of course, is that the reader can share in the heightened emotion of Caterina’s first-person perspective. This wobbling on the narrative axis between first- and third-person viewpoints is an essential component of the realist art, Lydgate’s “systole and diastole” of inquiry promoted by the *Middlemarch* narrator.³⁸

In “Janet’s Repentance,” the final story from *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the narrator contrasts the “bird’s-eye glance of a critic” with her own position alongside the Dissenter preacher Mr. Tryan: “But I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road, through the crowd of unloving fellow-men” (*SCL* 322). George Eliot’s third-person tellers do not merely call attention to themselves via “dear reader” addresses, but unexpectedly insert themselves as “I”s in the narrative.³⁹ “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton” begins with the narrator recalling Shepperton Church’s “dear old quaintness! which I began to look at with delight, even when I was so crude a member of the congregation, that my nurse found it necessary to provide for the

³⁸ *Mm* 640. Perhaps the most famous treatment of the “systole and diastole” effect is J. Hillis Miller’s in “Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*.”

³⁹ The narrator is “just another means of hiding the facts,” as any third-person narrative has a “latent ‘I’” behind the objective façade, which “threatens it, undermines it, cracks it.” (Sarduy 437)

reinforcement of my devotional patience by smuggling bread-and-butter into the sacred edifice.”⁴⁰ *The Mill on the Floss* opens with a daydreaming narrator who, though she does not display any particular character traits, is so corporealized as to have arms numbed from dozing off while pressing her elbows too hard on the arms of her chair (*MF* 55). Perhaps most famously there is the teller of *Adam Bede*; who “Pauses” her story in Chapter 17 to converse with a hale old Adam. The result of this flexible use of “I” is a both/and condition — the Eliotian narrator manages to encompass both omniscience and subjectivity. In fact, to return to her legalized oath of faithful representation, we realize that while she may be guaranteeing the passive objectivity of a mirror, by presenting herself as an “I” swearing an oath, she is simultaneously valuing the individual, personal aspect of a testimonial.

Contrasting, disrupting, and balancing our understanding of the storyteller as an “I” is the sense that a narrator “shuttles between extremes of personalization and abstraction.”⁴¹ Ultimately, the teller is “nobody”: a collective, dissociated, distanced presence “that cannot be satisfactorily explained either as a character in its own right or as a persona for the author.”⁴² We can read here the same tensions that were at play in the pseudonym: the vexed relation of self, persona, and character. The narrator, like the mediating authorial signature, is an empty space — but it is a productive absence. In “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” George Eliot draws a picture of the ideal realist writer (“a really cultured woman”) as the antithesis of a silly lady novelist, and the result is a surprisingly nebulous portrait, characterized by nothingness:

A really cultured woman, like a really cultured man, is all the *simpler* and *less*

⁴⁰ *SCL* 42. Incidentally, we meet “Mr. Gilfil” in this introduction as well, “an excellent old gentleman, [though] I must not speak of him, or I might be tempted to tell the story of his life, which had its little romance [...]” (43). “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story” does indeed follow, though due to its original serial publication in *Blackwood’s*, this reference is like a “prophecy,” only significant in retrospect.

⁴¹ Ermarth 237.

⁴² *Ibid.* 39.

obtrusive for her knowledge; it has made her see herself and her opinions in *something like* just proportions; she *does not* make it a pedestal from which she flatters herself that she commands a complete view of men and things, but makes it a point of observation from which to form a right *estimate* of herself. She *neither* spouts poetry *nor* quotes Cicero on slight provocation [...]. She *does not* write books to confound philosophers, *perhaps* because she is able to write books that delight them. In conversation she is the *least formidable* of women, because she understands you, *without* wanting to make you aware that you *can't* [emphasis original] understand her. She *does not* give you information, which is the raw material of culture, — she gives you sympathy, which is its *subtlest essence*.⁴³

The language here is full of negation and vagueness, leaving us sure as to what the ideal novelist is *not*, but grasping at insubstantialities when it comes to what she *is*.

The realist narrator is a similarly disembodied figure, without face, identity, or definite gender (compare Brontë's declaration: "To you I am *neither* man *nor* woman — I come before you as an author only"), floating like a free and disruptive radical across our notions of both objective realism and subjective perspective.

Let us return to our initial introduction to George Eliot's narrator, in "Amos Barton": "Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors." (SCL 41-42) Having an unregulated mind's penchant for recollection and nostalgia makes her the ideal candidate for a realist narrator, as it is the kind of mind which notices and remembers details like the quality of a voice or style of footwear worn by ordinary, unremarkable country parsons. The narrator's lack of "regulation"⁴⁴ co-exists with the control she exerts over reader and text: this paradoxical figure provides the work with a "heterogeneous texture,"⁴⁵ a bundle of tensions which, as we saw in our discussion

⁴³ "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," *GE Essays* 317. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Compare, perhaps, JE's narrative, which is not a "regular autobiography."

⁴⁵ Arac, "Rhetoric and Realism" 675. Arac proposes that the narrator's attempt to translate (and thus connect) the consciousnesses of the characters with the consciousness of the reader as a kind of rhetorical hyperbole (the word itself an oxymoron meaning "throwing beyond" in the sense of both undershooting and overshooting) that creates "splits" and "fractures" (678-79).

of Brontë's autobiographers, creates a phantom.

The realist narrator, in its capacity as a "nobody," does not broadcast itself as a self in the way a Jane Eyre or a David Copperfield does. The potential for "double-ghosting" as we have thus far defined it does not exist in realism. And yet George Eliot's narrator is inescapably ghostly, more akin to the "phantoms and disjointed whispers" of a prophet than sits comfortably with a traditional view of realist fiction. Ermarth sees the narrator as the realization of "collective and even continuous consciousness," which "exists apart from, between particulars; it is everywhere and nowhere, brooding over the realistic work like an energy source [...]." She denies that there is anything "supernatural" about the narrator, and yet this potential for "collective consciousness" cannot help but produce haunted language.⁴⁶

Suggestive terminology aside, realist narrative creates an unmistakably phantasmic set of structures: "ghost plots," possible but unrealized alternative realities encoded into the novel. Barbara Hardy believes that Eliot wrote with any number of these ghost plots in mind, and each finished product contains a residue thereof:

There is something very like the actual appearance of alternative destiny within the 'irrevocable' and finished book. There is a suggestion of the possible lives her characters might have lived. [...] Her characters are sometimes haunted — or their author is haunted on their behalf — by the vision of possibilities from which they are redeemed, seduced, or diverted [...].⁴⁷

Realist fiction, in order to hide its ultimately artful narrative construction, has to incorporate the suggestion that there are always other directions the story could have taken — a "realistic" universe is one which is not determined by the demands of an artist. Thus the genre is punctuated by gaps, through which we can see "visions of

⁴⁶ Ermarth 66-67. cf. Misch: "the *spirit brooding* over the recollected material is the truest and most real element in an autobiography." (11) Likewise, Beer discusses the effect of pseudonymity: "George Eliot became a brooding presence, 'man-womanly and woman-manly' as Virginia Woolf's persona in *A Room of One's Own* said true writers must be." (*George Eliot* 26)

⁴⁷ Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot* 136.

possibilities,” or those shadowy existences the author did not quite excise from her work. *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, finishes “on an uncertain edge of possibility,”⁴⁸ with a reunion between Gwendolen and her cousin Rex suggested yet cut off by the conclusion.⁴⁹ Near the beginning of *Middlemarch* we find Lydgate’s reaction to Dorothea broken with a sense of what-could-have-been:

“She is a good creature — that fine girl — but a little too earnest,” he thought. [...] Evidently Miss Brooke was not Mr. Lydgate’s style of woman any more than Mr. Chichely’s. [...] But Lydgate was less ripe, and might possibly have experience before him which would modify his opinion as to the most excellent things in woman. Miss Brooke, however, was not again seen by either of these gentlemen under her maiden name. (*Mm* 93)

Here we have the potential union between the novel’s two main protagonists discussed and dismissed in a few breaths. The dismissal is not a smooth one, but rather alternates positions several times before reaching the last “however,” and sending Dorothea off to Rome and her marriage. For instance, between “But Lydgate was less ripe,” and “Miss Brooke, however,” is opened a space wherein we can imagine things happening differently. In this sentence the narrator hints both at what Lydgate *does* experience to change his mind about women (i.e., the disastrous truth about Rosamond, who was “his style of woman”) and what he *could* experience (falling in love with Dorothea). At this point in the narrative, we cannot know which is the real and which the “ghost” plot, and thus the narrator’s prediction is only a “disjointed whisper.” There is even a sort of typographical perforation in this passage: Lydgate’s thought is punctuated by dashes, which seem almost to acknowledge the gaps, “spaces of possibility” that are opened and left to haunt the text. Eliot’s realism

⁴⁸ Beer, *George Eliot* 227.

⁴⁹ Hardy, *The Novels of GE* 153-54.

demands that we interrogate these disruptions and alternatives, and ask “what if?”⁵⁰

In order to work, realist fiction has to suggest that its world is not sealed — even traditional, empirical realism must be available to extra-textual verification. Closure is therefore impossible, which would perhaps explain the frequent sense of dissatisfaction in Eliot’s endings: Hetty dies anticlimactically offstage while the suggestion “There’s a sort of wrong that can never be made up for” is nearly the novel’s last line (*AB* 539); Maggie dies having been unjustly ostracized; Romola decides to return to Tito and ultimately to raise his children; Dorothea potentially rests in an “unvisited tomb”; Lydgate’s “hair never became white,” as he dies young, “regard[ing] himself as a failure,” while Rosamond the basil-plant flourishes on another man’s brains (*Mm* 834-35). Suggestions such as at those at the end of *Felix Holt* — the main character is alive at the moment of writing (“[a]s to the town in which Felix now resides, I will keep that a secret, lest he should be troubled by any visitor having the insufferable motive of curiosity”) and “[t]here is a young Felix” as well (*FH* 477-78) — freeze the story in a perpetual present moment. Like Hutton’s scientific view of life, the realist narrative suggests that there is “no prospect of an end.” Each of its gaps, throughout the storytelling and at the end, reveals a “hinted possible world” that Hardy believes “[a]t all times [...] results in a tremendous increase in realism.”⁵¹ Realism is most “realistic” precisely when it calls attention to its own artifice.

Coeval with these ghostly gaps is a link between the imaginary and the “real,” which allows the author to be “haunted,” according to Hardy, on the “behalf” of her characters and allows Mary Garth to step off the page and onto our streets. We will

⁵⁰ “*Middlemarch* is not, like *Pride and Prejudice*, a masterpiece of dialogue; it is a masterpiece of interrupted dialectics, of dialogues broken off” (Kiely, “The Limits of Dialogue in *Middlemarch*” 108). Such “interrupted dialectics” are indicative of the permeable boundaries of realism.

⁵¹ Hardy, *The Novels of GE* 136.

return to this kind of exchange between the world of the novel and the world of authors and readers, but first we need to look at a related phenomenon: the boundary-crossing that occurs within the text. In its negotiation of both *fabula* and *sjuzet*, a novel is divided into what Shaw terms “story space” and “discourse space.” The proper domain of the narrator is in the discourse space, while the characters inhabit the story space, and comings and goings between these spheres is a paradox, or “category mistake.”⁵² Shaw’s term is a near paraphrase of Garber’s “category crisis”: an irresolvable tension between binaries, and a transgression resulting in destabilization. In this case, Eliot’s narrator is the transgressor, passing through the walls dividing action from narration.⁵³

Third-person narrators ostensibly should not “unsettle” us when they cross space because their disembodied nature is a given — we accept their ghostliness.⁵⁴ I am not convinced this is the case, however, and I hope to show that the boundary-crossing of a third-person narrator has a disruptive effect, as does any activation of the third term. I have already addressed the points in Eliot’s earlier novels where the narrator acquires, at least briefly, an “I.” This kind of switch is typically immediate and distinct, and while it may surprise us, we are not exactly unnerved by the change. What I want to look at now, however, are the more subtly disconcerting moments, in which we cannot tell exactly where the narrator is situated. These occasions, in which the narrator resists her “proper place” and yet attempts to disguise the resistance, are more fruitful for observing realism’s unsettling quality.

⁵² Shaw 239ff.

⁵³ Ermarth draws an excellent interdisciplinary connection to Velazquez’s positioning of himself in the “realist” masterpiece *Las Meninas* — the mirror does not, as it should, reflect the artist, but the king and queen. “The artist, in short, is not in his proper place; he is inside and outside his picture at once.” (68).

⁵⁴ cf. Ermarth on “the ontological uncertainty” of the *Mm* narrator, who is “weightless and disembodied.” (88)

Uncertainty and the Threat to Reader-Reality

Romola offers an episode in some ways similar to Tina's discovery of the dead Anthony in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," in which the narrator deliberately drops a character or plotline in order to return to it later with a fresh, quasi-first-person immediacy. In Chapter 66, "Drifting Away," we see Romola purchase a boat and set herself adrift in the Mediterranean. By the end of the chapter, the narrator's language has turned lyrical and melodramatic, and the scope has contracted to one woman in a small boat, then further into a tomb-like (or womb-like) interior non-space:

Had she found anything like the dream of her girlhood? No. Memories hung upon her like the weight of broken wings that could never be lifted — memories of human sympathy which even in its pains leaves a thirst that the Great Mother has no milk to still. Romola felt orphaned in those wide spaces of sea and sky. She read no message of love for her in that far-off symbolic writing of the heavens, and with a great sob she wished that she might be gliding into death.

She drew the cowl over her head again and covered her face, choosing darkness rather than the light of the stars, which seemed to her like the hard light of eyes that looked at her without seeing her. Presently she felt that she was in the grave, but not resting there: she was touching the hands of the beloved dead beside her, and trying to wake them. (*Rom* 504)

After this passage, the title character of the novel leaves our view for six full chapters. In the interim we see much of "events": Savonarola has his first, aborted "Trial by Fire"; the city of Florence turns to riot; Tito is attacked by a mob, falls into the river, and is strangled by his vengeful stepfather Baldassare, who dies clutching him. Then, at last, we come to "Romola's Waking," returning seemingly without a break to the first-person immediacy of the boat and Romola's emotions:

Romola in her boat passed from dreaming into long deep sleep, and then again from deep sleep into busy dreaming [...]. Her eyes opened and she saw it was the light of morning. Her boat was lying still in a little creek; on her right hand lay the speckless sapphire-blue of the Mediterranean; on her left one of those scenes which were and still are repeated again and again like a sweet rhythm, on the shores of that loveliest sea. (*Rom* 550)

There is a strangeness to the novel's treatment of its heroine in these chapters.

Juxtaposed with the ponderous weight of historical detail in the political and religious

goings-on of fifteenth-century Florence, the sentimentalized, intensely personal descriptions of a woman alone on the sea jar the reader. We could argue that it gets even stranger still — leaving behind Florence entirely, which until now has been the novel's only setting, Romola stumbles across a plague-stricken backwater village and becomes a Madonna, the “Blessed Lady” of her anonymous valley (*Rom* 558). Susan Bernardo picks up on this peculiarity and suggests that Romola the heroine is “swallowed up” by *Romola* the book, until she “floats off into another story.” The mingling with the ocean is (re)entry into a Lacanian pre-linguistic state, and the character “almost moves beyond the limits of the novel's events when she and the narrator all but blend.”⁵⁵ Here we have both story and discourse space disrupted, as the teller merges into the character and the character, simultaneously, “moves beyond the limits” of her story.⁵⁶

There is an eerie quality to this possibility of Romola and the narrator “merging,” each escaping her proscribed zone and dragging the narrative into a kind of nowhere — perhaps for that short time on the boat we are actually in Garber's “space of possibility,” or the Deleuzian haecceity as the no-man's land between one “thing” and another.⁵⁷ As a result, the control guaranteed by the narrator's “distanced consciousness” is undermined.⁵⁸ The power of the third-person teller is similarly challenged by Hillis Miller in his analysis of sign and symbol in *Middlemarch*: “The web of interpretive figures cast by the narrator over the characters of the story becomes a net in which the narrator himself is entangled and trapped, his sovereign

⁵⁵ Bernardo, “From Romola to *Romola*” 96, 100.

⁵⁶ Somewhat similarly, McGowan claims that as her consciousness develops, Dorothea Brooke works towards the knowledge (if not the status) of a narrator (“The Turn of George Eliot's Realism” 186).

⁵⁷ The narrator's dialogue with Adam Bede, which takes place in an undescribed location, might be said to inhabit the same kind of space, although the sense of blurred identities is not between teller and character — the reader's young Adam is threatened by a picture of a different, much older Adam.

⁵⁸ cf. Ermarth 89.

vision blinded.”⁵⁹ The realist narrator’s “bird’s eye view” has to reassert itself in the end, but Eliot’s tellers are always at least attempting — even if involuntarily — to cross spaces, and unsettling us when they do manage to slip their bonds.⁶⁰

This narratorial ambiguity leads us into a discussion of realism’s most transgressive accomplishment: a destabilization of the reader’s own sense of the “real world.” As already discussed, the epigraph of *Daniel Deronda* de-bunks the “make-believe of a beginning,” and the opening lines of the novel continue the disruption. Rather than *telling*, the text sets forth a series of questions:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents?

She who raised these questions in *Daniel Deronda*’s mind was occupied in gambling [...]. (*DD* 3)

We are, for the first paragraph, in another amorphous, uncertain space — our only reference is the fascinating quality of a woman’s gaze, and that, in its utter inscrutability, is no real reference at all. While we may read the impenetrability of the viewed and the ambivalence of the viewer in terms of gender roles and a reversal of the male gaze,⁶¹ I believe there is another, and perhaps more unsettling, reason that this opening is so remarkable. Not yet a full page into the novel, the reader has been made suspicious of beginnings, suspicious of Gwendolen, Deronda, and their gender roles, but most crucially, and least noticeably, suspicious of the narrator. She disguises herself, initially posing as Deronda’s questioning mind (a first-person view) before we even know who he is. It is like being introduced to someone under a false

⁵⁹ Hillis Miller, “Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*” 144.

⁶⁰ cf. Shaw 245–46. Shaw claims that the narrator’s desire for and attempts at inhabiting the story space are most prevalent in GE’s early works, and lessen (if not quite disappear) in the later novels: in *SCL* the narrator claims to be “down there,” whereas in *DD* she only *wants* to be (251).

⁶¹ According to Gates, Gwendolen and Deronda have “internalized the ‘wrong’ gender roles” (699), hence Deronda’s “ambivalence” in his masculine viewing position (705).

name — like an author presenting herself as a pseudonym, in fact.

Moreover, because of the power (“authority,” even) of the realist narrator, we are left in doubt not merely of her identity and position, but also of our own position in relation to the story before us. We are denied any firm footing, and I think it is no accident that the novel’s first questions suggest not merely doubt but a literally *unnerved* reaction. Aside from the dominant sense of “unrest,” the fixation on the “secret” of Gwendolen’s gaze and on eyes themselves calls to mind the *unheimlich* condition as “*the name for everything that ought to have remained ... hidden and secret and has become visible.*”⁶²

Let us frame Gwendolen’s provocative mystery as part of an uncertainty about what is “real” and “unreal” throughout George Eliot’s work. For instance, Edith Simcox’s 1873 review of *Middlemarch* finds that while the novel portrays a “true” picture of England, with “crowds of men and women whom we have all known in real life,” the people do not quite match up:

to our dimmer vision, they seemed less real and life-like than in the book [...]. The world as we know it has its wise and good, its fools and hypocrites scattered up and down a neutral-tinted mass in much the same proportion as at Middlemarch. The only difference is that they are not so plainly recognisable, and this is perhaps the reason that a first perusal of the book seems to have an almost oppressive effect on ordinary readers, somewhat as little children are frightened at a live automaton toy. It is not natural to most men to know so much of their fellow-creatures as George Eliot shows them, to penetrate behind the scenes in so many homes, to understand the motives of ambiguous conduct, to watch ‘like gods knowing good and evil’ the tangled course of intermingled lives, the remote mainsprings of impulse and the wide-eddy effects of action. [...] [S]ince the intricacy of the subject is real, a feeling of even painful bewilderment in its contemplation is not entirely unbecoming.⁶³

Had Simcox not written this assessment just under half a century before Freud penned “The Uncanny,” I would suggest that she had taken his teachings to heart. (I wonder instead whether it might not be the other way around.) Compare Freud’s discussion of

⁶² Freud 129, quoting Schelling; emphasis original.

⁶³ “H. Lawrenny,” *Academy* (1 Jan 1873) CH-GE 324.

“the impression made by wax-work figures, artificial dolls and automatons,” as they “excite in the spectator the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation,”⁶⁴ with Simcox’s “remote mainsprings of impulse” that are available to Eliot’s godlike power of perception, “not natural” in “ordinary” people. Again, perhaps no more than a minor coincidence of terminology,⁶⁵ but I believe the sympathies between Freud’s *unheimlich*, which depends on its antithesis for definition, and Eliot’s *Middlemarch* demonstrate the inherently conflicted, uncertain status of the “real” in realist fiction. It is the promise of “reality” that haunts realism — continually present but continually unavailable.⁶⁶

Thus far we have looked at how the gaps and punctures in realism’s fabric destabilize the ostensibly separate spheres of “story space” and “discourse space,” allowing characters and narrators to make ghostly crossings. We now return to the troublesome cases of Mary Garth — who precedes the portraits one may meet in the “real world” — and George Eliot, who is haunted on behalf of her characters. If, according to Butler, the drag act effectively puts the terms “masculine” and “feminine” into quotation marks, removing their ontological certainty, then the realist performance puts its prior categories into quotation marks as well: “art” and “life,” the reality of the novel and the reality of the reader, are both disrupted.

To re-work Shaw’s separate spheres, I propose an “art space” (the world of the novel) and a “life space” (the world of the reader). We find that the third-person

⁶⁴ Freud 132

⁶⁵ Freud, of course, would disagree — coincidence in itself produces a significant response.

⁶⁶ Impressions of GE’s work are rife with supernatural elements, even if the works are not (“The Lifted Veil” is an exception, and, perhaps significantly, a first-person narrative exception as well). Henry James on *DD*: “it gives us the feeling that the threads of the narrative, as we gather them into our hands, are not of the usual commercial measurement, but long electric wires capable of transmitting messages from mysterious regions.” (CH-GE 363) Compare CB’s “influence”; again, the modes of “unmediated” self-writing and “mediated” realism are not so opposed as a cursory appraisal might suggest.

narrator more often crosses into story space than the characters do into discourse space; similarly, it is easier to identify instances where characters leave the art space and make at least a little headway into life space. There are the characters who are literally commandeered for use outside their original context — Scott’s Sir Arthur Wardour leaves *The Antiquary* to appear in the preface to *Ivanhoe* as the possessor of that novel’s manuscript; Felix Holt, capitalizing on the present-tense loophole at the end of his novel, gives an “Address to Working Men” in *Blackwood’s*.

More frequently, and more subtly, readers are so convinced by (as Eliot would rather we described it, so sympathetic to) a character that they come to feel that character is “real,” and thus that character produces a “real,” often in the sense of “physical,” reaction in the reader. Consider Eliot “reddening her eyes, and blackening her paper, over the foolish sorrows of two foolish young persons of her imaginary acquaintance,” and eventually “crying her eyes out” when Maggie and Tom die.⁶⁷ John Blackwood, who over the course of their long relationship had learned to say the right things to his sensitive author, responds similarly to the characters of *Middlemarch*. Having read the first volume, he claims to “have met old Brookes,” and protests that “[t]he excellent baronet could not be more angry with Mr. Casaubon or sorry for Dorothea than I am. How she will fare when she wakens to real life is a source of great anxiety to me.”⁶⁸ He later reports on the second volume that he was “disappoint[ed] at first not to find any of my old friends of the former part,” and although “I had quite forgotten Mr. Brooke, [...] I *knew his voice* the moment he came into the room at the meeting for the election of Chaplain.”⁶⁹

Blackwood’s response is calculated to flatter — it is, after all, the goal of a

⁶⁷ GE Letters III.269-70.

⁶⁸ JB to GE (2 June 71) GE Letters V.148-49.

⁶⁹ JB to GE (20 July 71) GE Letters V.167, emphasis original.

realist writer to produce characters who can produce “real” reactions. Brooke’s foray into life space is revealed in his status as one of Blackwood’s “friends” and his possession of a recognizable “voice.” However, the description of Brooke’s re-entry into the story in Volume Two is an ambiguous moment — perhaps Brooke has pushed far enough into life space that Blackwood can identify him by his voice, but Blackwood may have instead entered into art space and become one of the people in the hospital’s boardroom during the chaplaincy debate. *Middlemarch* may have made Brooke at least slightly “real,” but reading it has also made Blackwood slightly unreal. In her book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart claims that the reader is always situated within the text, and the inability to see the whole “gives the reader the status of a character.”⁷⁰ Realism’s effect is such that the reader is not merely positioned similarly to the characters in relation to the narrative (that is, in contrast to the omniscient narrator), but is in fact allowed to enter the world of the novel, which has been made realistic enough to permit a crossing between art space and life space.

Although George Eliot was intending to create a world permeable to sympathy, this permeability is double-edged. A space of possibility is not a controllable breach, and will inevitably produce instability. In this case, Eliot’s attempt to shore up the unwelcome breaches between her life and her art is one of the more fraught episodes of her publishing career. In the late summer and autumn of 1859, during the extreme popularity of *Adam Bede*, Eliot was forced to defend herself against accusations of portraiture in her fiction.⁷¹ A troublemaker named Charles Bracebridge had, according to Gordon Haight, “instituted a Pickwickian investigation

⁷⁰ Stewart 4.

⁷¹ This is immediately after the Liggins rumor was uncomfortably laid to rest — “GE” had proved that he was definitely GE and definitely not Joseph Liggins, but not yet MEL or any “real” person; see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

into the ‘origins’ of *Adam Bede*,” combing Derbyshire for Poysers or anyone else who could claim a connection to the novel — and it was these investigations that ended up flushing out Marian Lewes.⁷² Eliot was eager to short-circuit this particular course of inquiry to protect the Evans family⁷³ and her current personal identity (the “Marian Evans Lewes space,” if you will) from intruding into or being intruded by her authorial persona and its public concerns (the “George Eliot space”).

However, it is the notion that she would make “portraits” in her novels that she defends most violently against. “*There is not a single portrait in Adam Bede*, as I have said before,” she writes to her friend Charles Bray (as she did to many others during these months), going on to detail the ways in which characters and incidents are *not* real.⁷⁴ Her fiction, it seems, must in certain cases be “realistic” without actually producing anything that is, or ever was, “real” — certain boundaries must not be crossed. Observing a young woman on the street and thinking “That is Mary Garth” is acceptable, and proof of a job well done. Opening the pages of *Adam Bede* and thinking “That is Elizabeth Evans” (aunt of Marian Evans and the supposed original for Dinah Morris) is not acceptable.

Even worse is a reader who could open *Scenes of Clerical Life*, read “The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton,” and recognize himself in its pages — which is precisely what happened to the Rev. John Gwyther in June of 1859, just prior to the Bracebridge affair. Reading the first installment of “Amos Barton,” he claims to have been “much perplexed” to find his own story told: “on shewing it to my Eldest Daughter she said ‘Who in the world could have written this — have you Papa?’” His

⁷² Haight 291.

⁷³ The Bedes, Adam and Seth, are now generally recognized as Robert Evans and his brother Samuel: Cushing’s 1885 *Dictionary of Literary Disguises* and Amos’s 1985 *Who’s Really Who* both index the Evanses as the Bede originals.

⁷⁴ GE Letters III.155-56 (19 Sep 59), emphasis original.

letter to *Blackwood's* gives an account of his (futile) efforts to determine who had written him, but nonetheless he is “as assured that I am intended by Amos Barton as I am of the Truth of any Fact soever.”⁷⁵ It is, in a sense, the life space that perplexes him — he cannot determine who knew him and wrote him, and his daughter’s suggestion that *he* might have written it seems even to threaten his own status in that life space — it is a kind of Othering. In the art space, however, things are more certain — his existence as Amos Barton is a Truth — surely a reversal of the normal precedence of “Truth” as it occurs in these two worlds.

George Eliot’s own discomfort is apparent in her reply to Gwyther, which is a mess of convoluted syntax:

The author of the “Scenes of Clerical Life” and “Adam Bede” begs me [Blackwood, who transcribed] to inform you that he is not the Rev. W.H. King [one of Gwyther’s “suspicions”], but a much younger person, who wrote “Amos Barton” under the impression that the clergyman whose long past trial suggested the groundwork of the story was no longer living, and that the incidents, not only through the license and necessities of artistic writing, but in consequence of the writer’s imperfect knowledge, must have been so varied from the actual facts, that any one who discerned the core of truth must also recognize the large amount of arbitrary, imaginative addition.⁷⁶

Rather than her usual denial of portraiture, Eliot confesses (and in the following, more plainly worded paragraph, apologizes). What she claims, essentially, is that Amos Barton was an unintentional portrait — he ended up being more “real” than she had intended him to be. The *links* she creates between life and art are actually *ruptures* that allow transmission — in *both* directions — between the world of the novel and the world of the reader. Such sites of instability and disruption will not be controlled, even by their creator. They permit readers like Gwyther to find himself in a space where he should not be (and, moreover, does not *want* to be, hence his writing to *Blackwood's*). Alternatively, as Bodenheimer suggests, there are instances where

⁷⁵ GE Letters III.83-84 (13 June 59).

⁷⁶ GE Letters III.85-86 (15 June 59).

characters intrude unwelcome into life space: she describes the Bracebridge affair as “a ludicrous nightmare in which the gossiping characters in [Eliot’s] books rose up and began to circulate rumors about their creator.”⁷⁷

The invasion of life into art represented by the discovery of “real” people (what Gwyther calls “living Character[s]”) in Eliot’s fiction is a demonstration of how realist fiction undermines itself, welcoming its own destabilization. The author’s often-vehement reactions to claims of portrait-making indicate that they were challenges to her ability as an artist, which rests on creation, not replication. We recall that David Lodge believes total success in realism, defined as the perfect replication of reality, is necessarily failure. I contend that for realism to reveal its inescapable defect it has only to press close enough to reality for a Gwyther to recognize himself and for one of Bracebridge’s informants to recognize Elizabeth Evans. The failure of realism is the failure of art to defend its integrity as a stable, definable space: non-art — that is, the “real” — invades Eliot’s realism and destabilizes “art” as a prior category. Simultaneously, realism shows us how fiction can invade and destabilize the reader’s sense of “reality,” and I want to end with an identification of this more elusive, more insidious accomplishment.

The use of nostalgia, especially in Eliot’s early novels, helps to create the sympathy associated with the “real effects” characters produce in readers when they edge into life space (tears, anxiety, friendship, etc.). However, nostalgia also reveals the constructedness of memory, and thus of consciousness itself. And as consciousness provides an individual’s only access to the “reality” of lived experience, a threat to the integrity of consciousness is a threat to the integrity of the “real.” For Susan Stewart, nostalgia is storytelling, and storytelling is nostalgia: “Narrative is [...] a structure of

⁷⁷ Bodenheimer 142.

desire, a structure that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified that is the place of generation for the symbolic.” Nostalgia is a form of lack, the desire for presence in the absence between signifier and signified — it is “a sadness without object,” the longing for a past that only ever existed as narrative.⁷⁸ The definition of nostalgia as a “longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual’s own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past,”⁷⁹ is a kind of origin myth, like the desire in *Daniel Deronda* for the “make-believe of a beginning.”

Such origin-hunts are doomed to failure in a Derridean linguistic system. Narrative does not merely describe but *produces* reality, and nostalgia reveals this fictive activity of language and memory: we tell ourselves stories in order to create a sensible past, and we come to desire that constructed past-reality rather than any “real” reality (which may or may not exist prior to our language-based consciousness, but is permanently inaccessible).

Although *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, and *Silas Marner* are all considered evidence of Eliot’s facility with nostalgia for bygone, rustic English life, *The Mill on the Floss* is the most called-upon of her works in discussions of nostalgia. From the first reviews it was clear that readers preferred the two volumes of Maggie’s bucolic childhood to her trials as a young woman, a preference that in itself suggests the workings of nostalgia, the desire to regain lost youth. John McGowan identifies the novel’s crucial “impasse”: it wants to create a perfect, idyllic childhood that was *real* but is now too distant to recapture, yet it also shows us how Maggie herself produces “fictional” nostalgia for a time that never truly existed (when she and Tom

⁷⁸ Stewart ix, 23.

⁷⁹ *OED* entry: “nostalgia, n.”

lived in perfect harmony).⁸⁰ Upon George Eliot's death, Leslie Stephen wrote an obituary that eulogized *Mill on the Floss* and the other novels of "her first period" almost as an authorial childhood, a purer time that all readers now recall fondly and desire a return to. The early novels were truly original, Stephens claims, with no substitutes available: "Strike them out of English literature, and we feel that there would be a gap not to be filled up; a distinct vein of thought and feeling unrepresented; a characteristic and delightful type of social development left without any adequate interpreter."⁸¹

To position these works as the antidote to absence, and yet to express such obvious nostalgia — "we half wish that we could back to the old days"⁸² — is to reveal the desire for an imaginary, retrospectively created, linguistically constructed (and therefore hollow, endlessly deferred) reality. Eliot's realism, by producing and participating in nostalgic yearning, forces us to acknowledge an unexpected "truth": our process of understanding the "real world" and our own "real" selves is itself a fiction-making activity. Those "exquisite series of scenes so lovingly and vividly presented," the "snuffy old Mr. Gilfil" and "the inimitable Mrs. Poyser" are part of the very definition of "the name of George Eliot."⁸³ That "name," then, must consolidate not only the biographical and professional designations of the woman (Marian, Mary Ann; Evans, Lewes; translator, editor, author; Sibyl, Madonna), but must also incorporate all her imaginary productions. "George Eliot" is a character constructed out of her own realist fictions.

⁸⁰ McGowan 182.

⁸¹ *Cornhill* (Feb 1881) CH-GE 469.

⁸² *Ibid.* 470.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 469.

CHAPTER 7
ALL DRESSED UP:
CLOTHES AS PERFORMANCE IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Q: When is a bonnet not a bonnet?

A: When it becomes a pretty woman.

—Victorian riddle, *Young Ladies' Treasure Book*¹

This chapter is concerned with the extent to which a person was expected to “be” her dress — that is, to be what her appearance suggests. As the *Treasure Book* elsewhere insists, character is “impressed upon” one’s garments, creating an indelible link between identity and dress: “A woman possessed of individuality impresses her personality upon what she wears. The best means she can adopt to disguise herself is to wear some one else’s clothes.”² But identity is also transmitted *through* clothing, a manipulable medium that can corrupt the message. The mores advanced and the advice offered in conduct books and dress manuals make evident the Victorian belief that clothes could be *read*. Similar to the popular mid-century “science” of phrenology, clothing promises to decipher a person, offering visible indications of an invisible character. If dress is to be treated as expression, then, as with any expression, we must recognize its capacity for theatricality and the resulting destabilization of meaning.

The treatment of clothing in Charlotte Brontë’s novels replicates and problematizes the readability of dress and, by extension, of self. Jane Eyre, whose “Quakerish dress” is permeated by the threat of a “dress Quaker,” catches her man by her clothes just as much as a Blanche Ingram would. Lucy Snowe’s wardrobe choices, like the whole of her narrative, are carefully made to tell us as little as possible about her. The domesticated Caroline Helstone wields a subtle power by being almost inconceivably pliant and impeccably dressed, while the maddeningly inconsistent

¹ *Young Ladies' Treasure Book* 777.

² *Ibid.* 656.

Shirley Keeldar romps in and out of either gender, using her clothes when they are necessary to the performance and ignoring them completely when they are not.

I argue that Brontë's own "wearing" of the androgynous pseudonym "Currer Bell" gives us an intriguing angle on the significance of clothing in her work. This chapter will address the sartorial problems in each of these heroines, focusing on the issues of ambiguity which make pseudonymity both unstable and productive. "The Name is the earliest Garment you wrap round the Earth-visiting ME," Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh says, regarding his onymous but otherwise unknown origin, "to which it thenceforth cleaves, more tenaciously (for there are Names that have lasted nigh thirty centuries) than the very skin."³ The citation of Sterne's "Walter Shandy" in support, as well as the unflattering etymology of "Teufelsdröckh" itself, should tip the reader off to the ironic undertones of this statement — a name, like a garment, can both embody and disguise a "real" person. Also at stake here is Victorian gender ideology: dress and its implications for character are especially *feminine* concerns, and thus the capacity for performativity through clothing is inherently related to the performativity of gender.

The *Quarterly Review* proposes that women's dress is "a sort of symbolical language," that "to a proficient in the science, every woman walks about with a placard on which her leading qualities are advertised."⁴ In Brontë's novels, the heroines' clothes function as letters of introduction when no actual written document is available. While Lucy Snowe's initial admission to the pensionnat is on the strength of M. Paul's phrenological endorsement, Mme. Beck has her own reading later that night. Lucy awakes to find her new employer studying her clothes — the motive, she surmises, being "the wish to form from the garments a judgment respecting the

³ Carlyle 67.

⁴ Quoted in Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism* 132. The *Treasure Book* explores the "double aspect" of dress: to clothe the body and translate the mind (655-56).

wearer, her station, means, neatness, &c.” (V 131) As she remains an inmate of the Rue Fossette, it is safe to assume that the reading was not unfavorable. When Jane Eyre runs away from Thornfield, she has nothing but the clothes on her back, and the people she encounters make their judgments based on those garments. The Rivers sisters surmise that their new guest “is not an uneducated person [...] by her manner of speaking: her accent was quite pure; and the clothes she took off, though splashed and wet, were little worn and fine.” (JE 339) They interpret Jane by the things about her which “speak”: her voice and her dress.

In another of Jane’s introductions, however, we see how her clothes can fail to speak definitively. She baffles Rochester upon their first meeting:

“You are not a servant at the hall, of course. You are —” He stopped, ran his eye over my dress, which, as usual, was quite simple: a black merino cloak, a black beaver bonnet; neither of them half fine enough for a lady’s maid. He seemed puzzled to decide what I was: I helped him.

“I am the governess.”

“Ah, the governess!” he repeated; “deuce take me, if I had not forgotten! The governess!” and again my raiment underwent scrutiny. (JE 114)

Such indecision might be read as part of the liminal nature of the Victorian governess — neither quite a servant nor quite a member of the family, and often of the same class (though of reduced circumstances) as her employers. Whatever the specific interpretation, the “symbolical language” of dress, like any system of signs, is necessarily *misreadable*. If names “announce us, advertise us and embody us,” if a person “is [...] able to declare what he irreducibly is by naming himself,”⁵ there is nonetheless always a Curren Bell waiting in the wings to muddle the issue by not properly signifying.

It may be that Rochester is not, as the *Quarterly Review* would have it, a “proficient” in reading dress. And indeed fashion has an investment in keeping its

⁵ Room 7; Lejeune 199.

codes from being broadly accessible, thus maintaining the cognoscenti as a privileged set. Fred Davis, in *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, promotes the “language” of clothes as one of underestimated complexity. He claims that the relation between signifier and signified is particularly unstable here, because whereas most “conventional” sign systems communicate something already known, aesthetic codes are constantly trying to move past convention — fashion is always modifying its own sign system.⁶ Yet even a little proficiency in the language of clothing can allow a wearer to manipulate the message. Thus Lucy’s predecessor at the pensionnat, Mrs. Svini/Sweeny, manages to pass herself as a respectable English lady by giving Mme. Beck “forged” clothes:

By some means or other she had acquired [...] a wardrobe of rather suspicious splendour — gowns of stiff and costly silk, fitting her indifferently and apparently made for other proportions than those they now adorned; caps with real lace borders, and — the chief item in the inventory, the spell by which she struck a certain awe through the household, quelling the otherwise scornfully disposed teachers and servants, and, so long as her broad shoulders wore the folds of that majestic drapery, even influencing madame herself — *a real Indian shawl* [...]. I feel quite sure that without this ‘Cachmire’ she would not have kept her footing in the pensionnat for two days [...]. (*V* 133, emphasis original)

Lucy, in this immediate detection of a fraud, seems to be a better reader even than Mme. Beck. But, crucially, Lucy’s opinion does not rely on dress alone: she has the advantage of another text, Mrs. Sweeny’s debased accent. “[S]he spoke a smothered brogue, curiously overlaid with mincing cockney inflections” (*V* 132), our good English heroine observes, as the francophone Mme. Beck could not.

Easy readability is rejected in Brontë’s works, not just in the use of clothing but also in cases such as Jane’s furious reaction to Helen Burns’s “Slattern” placard (*JE* 74), or what Nicholas Dames identifies as the pleasure Lucy takes in being misread by M. Paul (and the reader). As we saw in the third chapter of this thesis, the furor of interest surrounding Currer Bell’s entrance on the literary scene revolved around attempts to read in *Jane Eyre* the answer to the “much vexed question of sex”

⁶ Davis 11.

— attempts which were liable to be undermined by other texts (another review, a second novel, gossip), no matter how “incontrovertible” the evidence. Edwin Percy Whipple, in the *North American Review*, presents the “elaborate descriptions of dress” in *Jane Eyre* as one of the clues proving a female pen. The interest in and familiarity with clothing and fashion is, according to Whipple, one of those “unconscious feminine peculiarities, which the strongest-minded woman that ever aspired after manhood cannot suppress.”⁷

Two months later, Elizabeth Rigby’s infamously scathing review argues precisely the opposite, using Blanche’s “morning robe of sky-blue crape, a gauze azure scarf twisted in her hair” and Jane’s “hurrying on a frock” in the middle of the night as evidence of Currer Bell’s masculinity.⁸ Perhaps we can accuse Rigby, who attempts to disguise her own gender in her review, of falling prey to the same irrepressible feminine “peculiarity” — a fixation on clothing. Although the apparent misuse of dress can destabilize Currer Bell’s gender, the assessment of that error by a woman critic re-confirms the link between clothing and femininity. The salient point is that Victorian clothes are deeply, and problematically, encoded with multiple contradictory meanings, and Brontë’s heroines are dressed for just such an occasion.

“Quakerish Dress”: Jane

The prevailing stereotype of the “plain Jane” Brontë heroine derives almost entirely from — and is strictly only applicable to — the protagonist who bears that name. The self-proclaimed “plain, Quakerish governess” (*JE* 259) is maybe the most distinctly dressed of the lineup: we know the number, color, and fabric of her frocks from her

⁷ “Novels of the Season” (Oct 1848) CH-CB 98.

⁸ CH-CB 111, cf. Chapter 3 of this thesis.

admittance to Lowood school until her departure from Thornfield. The dress-based assumptions she sets out form the groundwork for complications offered by Lucy and Shirley (and Caroline to a lesser extent). Therefore I begin with *Jane Eyre*, in which the use of Quaker dress opens up the possibilities and problems of a “dress Quaker,” and the ideological membrane separating the authenticity of “clothing” from the artifice of “costume” begins to rupture. The role of “plain Jane” is not the stripping away of affect, but in fact a performance itself.

In her study of sexuality and reform in the Victorian novel, Suzanne Keen points to Jane (alongside Eliot’s Dinah Morris and Dorothea Brooke) as an example of the Quakerish heroine, whose clothing is traditionally understood to be “part of the package of reticence, reserve, and repression associated with the evangelical wing of nineteenth-century dissenting sects.”⁹ However, Keen argues, in the case of Brontë and Eliot, Quaker dress actually means the opposite. The incongruity is not due specifically to the character’s use of a simple, reserved wardrobe, but to the general perceptions of character encoded in that clothing. What the Quakerish heroine signified was not sexlessness and classlessness, but “marriageability and the promise of sexual fulfillment; respectability and reassurance about class boundary-crossing; reforming tendencies; social consciousness; and a body that may be moved by the spirit to speak, to travel outside the domestic sphere, and to act on feelings of desire.”¹⁰

Jane, while possessing the remarkable ability to find herself consorting, unchaperoned, with her male employer at all hours of the night, nonetheless retains a rigid sense of middle-class propriety that eventually wins her an elevated marriage. While the Hetty-like social climber adorns herself in finery in the hopes of catching a

⁹ Keen, “Quaker Dress, Sexuality, and the Domestication of Reform in the Victorian Novel” 211.

¹⁰ Ibid. 212.

husband out of her star, a Janian young woman expresses her suitability (and thus imminent success) through her restrained dress.¹¹

Jane does not outright reject the idea of fine appearance — “I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit,” she admits (*JE* 98). Her appreciation of Blanche Ingram and Rosamond Oliver, both of whom she paints, suggests that physical attractiveness (including the use of sky-blue crapes and purples and velvets) is by no means lost on her. The problem is the disconnect between finery and Jane’s station in life. During the Millcote shopping excursion with Rochester, it is not the jewels and silks themselves that disturb, but rather their juxtaposition with “a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain” (*JE* 161): “Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange,” she tells her extravagant fiancé, “I would rather not have them” (*JE* 259).

The disjuncture between “Jane Eyre” and “young Mrs. Rochester — Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride” that he “can and will realize” in heir-loom jewelry (*JE* 258) — causes Jane to cast about for means of reconciling the two, of making the former suitable to wear the latter’s wardrobe. “I will write to Madeira the moment I get home, and tell my uncle John I am going to be married, and to whom: if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now” (*JE* 268-69). This letter, of course, is the means by which the crisis of the book (the altar-side revelation of Bertha Mason Rochester) is brought about, but it also paves the way for the happy ending consistent with the best of middle-class domestic morality.

In refusing to pretend to a rank above herself, rejecting attempts to make her into “a jay in borrowed plumes” (*JE* 259), Jane is behaving precisely in the manner

¹¹ *Ibid.* 214.

advocated by Victorian dress and conduct books. Mrs. Haweis, in *The Art of Dress*, applauds above all the “woman clad consistently [with] every line and hue in harmony and accord [...]”¹² The bulk of contemporary fashion advice offered to women consists of hints, tips, and rules on achieving the ultimate goals of “proportion” and “harmony” — endless pages are devoted to which colors look finest with which complexions, which styles and cuts best suit which figures.¹³ A successful costume is not simply in accord with itself, but with the woman who wears it: high praise is given the woman whose dress “becomes,” that is, befits her. In conduct-book terms, this is equivalent to behaving in a manner consistent with your situation in life. Mrs. Ellis makes a particular point of addressing the *women* of England, not the ladies, and encouraging her readers not to aspire or pretend to be what they are not.¹⁴ A jay’s borrowed plumes, then, are not necessarily made of fabric, but include affectations of any kind.

Jane’s wardrobe is proportional to itself, right down to her lone ornament, “a single little pearl” (*JE* 119), and appropriate to her social standing. While the Quakers themselves may have been part of a movement of “oppositional fashion” — using dress to set themselves against the mainstream¹⁵ — the Quakerish dress of Brontë’s heroine demonstrates what is, ultimately, an adherence to the strictures of the conventional, Mrs. Ellis-reading multitudes. This is where *Jane Eyre* begins to complicate things, using her respectable Quaker dress and obedience to middle-class morality to self-promote. There is an element of opportunism in her ability to exploit mainstream mores to rise above the position dictated to her *by* those mores.¹⁶ The strongest argument

¹² Haweis 10.

¹³ See also Merrifield, *Dress as a Fine Art*, in which she campaigns for balance in all things, including the judicious use of ornament according to age: flowers are suited to girls, while jewels are suited to middle age, and to confuse the two is like pairing May with December (85).

¹⁴ Ellis, *Women of England* 102-03.

¹⁵ Keen 222ff.

¹⁶ The methods, means, and paradoxes of Jane’s class-jumping success story have been examined by numerous critics: Wyatt writes that “[a]gainst the pull of its patriarchal love fantasy, *Jane Eyre* presents an equally passionate protest against patrimonial authority” (“A Patriarch of One’s Own” 200), while

against taking Jane's dress at face value (that is, as an expression of an intrinsically modest, unpretentious personality) is her eventual transition out of her plain drabs.

To understand the significance of this change, we must also examine the change Rochester undergoes. In exploring *Why Women Wear Clothes*, C. Willett Cunnington contends that "Man [...] sees mirrored in [Woman's] costume the moral standards which are so flattering to his self-esteem; he perceives held up before his eyes an emblem of *his* accomplishments, *his* progress, so that it is no wonder he is captivated by the image."¹⁷ Rochester's moral standards, reflected in the dolls he makes of the Varens women (mother and daughter) and would make of Jane, must be abolished for a happy resolution. His "Eastern" harem mentality is hardly consistent with the industrious, monogamous, anti-sensualist Protestant ethic promoted in Victorian England. Leaving the silk warehouse and jeweller's shop, Jane recognizes and repels Rochester's attempt to see her as an "image":

I ventured once more to meet my master's and lover's eye; which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched [...].

"You need not look in that way," I said: "if you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter." (*JE* 269)

Rochester's vision is corrected (in proportion to his sin) by his blinding, by making it impossible for him to use Jane as a mirror in which to puff himself up.¹⁸ His admission "Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip" (*JE* 446) completes his education in suitability and propriety, and as a result he is rewarded with the (eventual) return of his sight.

Eagleton remarks on Rochester's attraction to "Jane's stoical Quakerish stillness" as an example of how "[h]er refusal to act prematurely for her own ends both satisfies restrictive convention and leads ultimately to a fulfilling transcendence of it." (*Myths* 18)

¹⁷ Cunnington 52.

¹⁸ Jane instead becomes her husband's eyes — she is responsible for transmitting the outer world, rather than merely reflecting.

Interestingly, Rochester's re-initiation into the visible world begins with a recognition of the finery Jane had once so staunchly resisted. After two years of marriage, he asks his wife, "Jane, have you a glittering ornament round your neck?" Answered in the affirmative, he correctly identifies her "pale blue dress" (*JE* 451). Jane Eyre, governess, neither glittered nor wore blue (though, we may recall, Blanche Ingram did). Jane Rochester, heiress and legal wife, does both. Separating these two women are divisions of clothing as well as narrative stance (as discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis). I want to examine another aspect of the gap — the difference in social standing between the two Janes, as expressed in their clothes. Jane does not deny herself material desires for the benefit of her spiritual purity — her manner of dress is not, as it would be for a practicing Quaker, an expression of a *religious* belief. Instead it is an expression of a certain kind of *moral* attitude associated with the Friends — an important distinction, and one we can attribute to Jane's internalization of what she learned at Lowood.

It is important to note that what was *learned* is not necessarily what was *taught*: as a child, she immediately recognizes Brocklehurst's hypocrisy, as his repressing of the students' bodies to save their souls runs up against his own spoiled, decadently dressed family (*JE* 63-64). Despite his sermonizing, Brocklehurst, like the Reeds, is more concerned with the upholding of class differences. Accordingly, Jane's insistence upon "appropriate" clothing is not based on spirituality, but on secular, classist morality.¹⁹ By following the rules of class distinction in dress, she helps to define the social ladder she has set out to climb. Upholding the disparity between "a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain," and Mrs. Rochester, mistress of Thornfield

¹⁹ In terms of her understanding of social standing, Jane is not merely humble and unpretending towards her betters, but also snobbish in regards to the lower classes. Her hyper-consciousness of class is discussed by Eagleton (*Myths* 28-29) and Boumelha (70-71), among others.

(or Ferndean, as the case may be), is a way to ensure that the transition between the two is a recognizable accomplishment. Part of Jane's triumph is not merely crossing the class gap and making herself eligible to wear un-Quakerish garb, but also that she uses Brocklehurst's clothes philosophy to her own devices, opposite to his.

Mrs. Rochester's glittering ornament and blue dress suggest that Miss Eyre's resolutely plain wardrobe was less an expression of a Quakerish character than the means to an end. The Quakeress fulfilled her purpose, outlived her usefulness, and departed. Jane's wardrobe helped her play a part; it was a costume, however much the actress believed in her role. Much as the nun or nurse or school-girl functions in the context of a modern costume-party, so the "dress Quaker" was from at least the time of Richardson's *Pamela*: she "manipulate[d] the outward signs of modesty and chastity for a context in which reversals of meaning rule: the masquerade," and was "flirtatious by implication."²⁰ The problem is in the interchangeability of the terms "dress" and "costume," as an indication of the instability of their ideological meanings: dress can (and should) "become" a woman, but costume is extrinsic to the "real" person. Clothing is a kind of performance, one which crosses the line between the theater that advertises itself as such — a fictional space bound by a proscenium arch — and the day-to-day enactments of gender, character, class, and so on. The game of charades the Ingram party plays at Thornfield highlights the distinction, or lack thereof. Rochester "dresses up" as what he actually is: a married man, an orientalized character participating in an arranged marriage, and a criminal.²¹ Just to press the point home, Jane notes when the participants "resume their ordinary costume" (*JE* 184), using the theatrical synonym for "clothing" once the play-acting is ostensibly over.

²⁰ Keen 215-16.

²¹ The necessary garments are already present in everyday Thornfield, part of the "resources of the house" (*JE* 182) — yet another reason to be wary of appearances in this particular country manor.

The conduct-book writer Mrs. Sandford cautions against theatricality, warning that a proper lady “may copy the skill, but certainly nothing else that marks the professional performer.”²² But the worlds of Brontë’s novels are worlds of pervasive theatricality — never professional, but perhaps all the more disturbing for that. Brontë’s use of costume not only adds a psychological complication to the relationships of her heroines and their lovers (most prominently in the case of Rochester the gypsy and Lucy the fête fop), but is reflective of a societal anxiety about appearance and reality. Between the Romantic and Victorian periods, Quaker dress in the “real” world went through a crisis wherein it became a site for concerns about appearance and insincerity. By the mid-1800s, the duality of emphatically simple attire was present not only in the difference between dress Quakers and Quakers’ dress, but within the religious order of the Friends itself. The significance of austere clothing was a contested subject throughout the 1840s and 1850s, with the Friends expressing concern that the Fourth Query (the tenet governing dress codes) was a peculiarity preserved for peculiarity’s sake, and the members of their order “adopted one style for the world and another for going to meeting.”²³

By the time Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre*, the representation of Quakerish clothing had been detached from its original intention and become a much more complicated issue. It was a “double sign” that “evoked contradictory meanings simultaneously,”²⁴ and a wearer could *use* (without necessarily *being*) either meaning: with Quaker dress a woman could advertise her wanton sexuality or she could catch a socially superior husband. One costume stays on for the length of a masquerade ball, the other is retained indefinitely, but the question remains as to whether the difference between

²² Sandford, *Woman, in her Social and Domestic Character* 10.

²³ Keen 224. The Fourth Query was amended in 1860, and the regulations on clothing were removed.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 217.

the two is of kind, or only degree.²⁵ Similarly, we have Curren Bell, whose name was required in order to authorize the Brontë body, and George Eliot, who “became his own Agent” — each was (ostensibly) created to be a mask or disguise yet each ended up resisting his creator’s attempts to “wear” him and discard him like a costume.

Ambiguous Fashion and “Working with Pieces”: Lucy

Nevertheless, we remain fairly confident that at some fundamental level, Jane Eyre is what she dresses as: “poor, obscure, plain, and little,” orphaned and dependent for a living, but, when “moved by the spirit” able to speak and act out. She is the respectable, marriageable body broadcasted by her “Quakerlike” black stuffs and grey silks and clean, white tuckers (*JE* 98). What Jane “means” in her clothing is earnest, if not permanent. But another Brontë heroine fully exploits the ambiguities of dress — simultaneous contradictory meanings and reversals of masquerade are her forte. This, of course, is Lucy Snowe, the secretive, manipulative cipher of *Villette*. In her clothing and otherwise, Lucy offers a third-term performance of self: she inhabits an indistinct “in between” space, challenging the notion of distinct categorization. She also acts as a classical third term in the sense which Garber uses it — she cross-dresses. However, as we shall see, her transvestism is not about acting “male,” but about acting an ambiguous role and gender; Lucy actively and repeatedly chooses to be indeterminate.²⁶

Ginevra speaks for the reader’s frustration: “But *are* you anybody? [...] Do — *do* tell me who you are?” In almost the same breath, she hits on the key to Lucy’s

²⁵ As a coda to troublesome Quakerish dress: the only use of the term “Quaker” not applied to Jane is applied to Grace Poole, when she is interrogated after the fire in Rochester’s room. Conduct, appearance, and “evidence” are all troubled in this interview, and to her interlocutor’s suspicious hints, Grace replies calmly and “with the demureness of a Quakeress.” Jane is “absolutely dumbfounded at what appeared to me her miraculous self-possession and most inscrutable hypocrisy” (*JE* 155).

²⁶ cf. Davis’s assertion that an ambiguous nature is especially susceptible to the modes and styles of fashion (17-18). His first chapter is entitled “Identity Ambivalence: Fashion’s Fuel.”

fascination *as* a third term: “As if one *could* let you alone, when you are so peculiar and so mysterious” (*V* 394; emphasis original). As with a “Great Unknown” or “puff mysterious” pseudonym, reticence can be productive — uncertainty provokes speculation and ensures a reader’s interest, both in the case of Ginevra (reading the text “Lucy Snowe”) and the book-buying population of Victorian England (reading the texts “Currer Bell” and *Villette*).

Lucy is never called a Quaker, nor is she, like Jane, explicitly (and repeatedly) described as “plain” in either dress, appearance, or taste. As with most of our information about Miss Snowe, we gather what we can from second-hand judgments and throwaway comments. The best we get from Lucy herself is the admission that she has “no flowers, no jewel” to compliment her new dress, nor any “natural rose of complexion.”²⁷ Our impressions of this heroine come from implied comparisons with other women: the “lamp chastely lucent” of Paulina Mary (*V* 359); the bejewelled, decaying hunchback Madame Walravens (*V* 481-82); and the flirtatious, finery-loving Ginevra, whose attractiveness Lucy admires from their first meeting until her last entrance as a “blooming and beautiful” bride.²⁸ Although the opinions of the featherbrained Miss Fanshawe are to be taken judiciously, she does give us our clearest picture of an austere, no-frills Lucy. She accuses her “Timon,” “old Crusty — old Diogenes,” of having “puritanical tastes” and “no beauty” (*V* 153, 215).

Nevertheless, I intend to show that it will not do to pass Lucy Snowe off as another Jane Eyre — which, indeed, poses a problem for reading both novels as

²⁷ *V* 200. “As a narrator, Lucy tends towards self-characterisation by negatives” (Boumelha 114).

²⁸ *V* 575. It is worth noting that Lucy is first attracted to Ginevra on the boat from London to Labassecour, when the younger woman is wearing a “simple print dress, untrimmed straw-bonnet, and large shawl, gracefully worn [...] a costume plain to quakerism: yet, for her, becoming enough” (*V* 113). The very un-Janian Ginevra is the only named “Quaker” in the novel, adding a layer of facetiousness, perhaps, to such characterization through dress. On their next meeting, she has reverted to her “true” colors, “a mere jay in borrowed plumes” (*V* 153). Lucy likes her best as she first saw her (“in *my* eyes, you will never look so pretty as you did in the gingham gown and plain straw bonnet”), but Ginevra’s first costume, however well it appeared to suit her, was not an indication of her character.

Brontë's autobiography. Her clothing, we shall see, is as destabilizing and ambiguous as everything else about her; the woman and the wardrobe resist any affirmative classifications except that of "Lucy Snowe." While Jane does not use clothing to express her religious views, Lucy's attitude towards dress is one of the ways she maintains her identity as an Anglo-Protestant. However, this is not the positive identification it might on the surface seem to be — the declaration "I am a Protestant" is, in Lucy's case, more to the effect of "I am not a Catholic."

The intensity of her devotion is not especially strong in itself; she certainly never voices the spiritual longings or challenges that Jane does. Had Lucy remained in England for the entire narrative, her status as a Protestant probably would never have been mentioned (as it is not mentioned at Bretton nor with Miss Marchmont). But once exiled in Catholic Villette, her faith becomes part of what defines her against her surroundings. She finds in clothing a way of expressing her individuality, via rejection of the fashions sported by papist Labassecouriens. The first time she calls our attention to her dress it is to refuse the "uniform" of the Rue Fossette schoolgirls. The pensionnat is dressing for Mme. Beck's fête:

A clear white muslin dress, a blue sash (the Virgin's colours), a pair of white, or straw-colour kid gloves — such was the gala uniform, to the assumption whereof that houseful of teachers and pupils devoted three mortal hours. But though simple, it must be allowed the array was perfect — perfect in fashion, fit, and freshness; every head being also dressed with exquisite nicety, and a certain compact taste — suiting the full, firm comeliness of Labassecourien contours, though too stiff for any more flowing and flexible style of beauty — the general effect was, on the whole, commendable. (*V* 199-200)

Despite such commendability, Lucy wants nothing to do with the fête uniform. "In beholding this diaphanous and snowy mass, I well remember feeling myself to be a mere shadowy spot on a field of light," she continues. We might consider this alongside her later refusal to be Paulina's paid companion: "I was no bright lady's shadow" (*V* 382). In both cases, Lucy actually affirms her "shadowy" status:

"Overcast enough it was my nature often to be; of a subdued habit I was: but the

dimness and depression must both be voluntary [...]” (*V* 382-83). For the fête, she goes out and searches “a dozen shops” to find a suitable non-uniform: a dress made of “a crape-like material of purple-gray — the colour, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom” (*V* 200). She chooses an indistinct fabric (not crape but crape-like) in a shadowy, indistinct shade.²⁹ What Lucy achieves with the purple dress is a bolstering of her individuality — different from the students, from the Catholics who read blue and white as “the Virgin’s colours,” and, as she has it made with particular care by her “*tailleuse*,” from everyone else — as well as her ambiguity.

Part of the problematic third-termness of Lucy is her refusal to adhere to an established trend in clothing. We cannot call her either a Quaker or a clothes-horse; she is erratic in her behavior towards fashion. The best illustration of this is her complicated reaction to “the pink dress,” which Mrs. Bretton insists that she wear to a concert:

“That is not for me,” I said hurriedly, feeling that I would almost as soon clothe myself in the costume of a Chinese lady of rank.

“We shall see whether it is for you or not,” rejoined my godmother, adding with her resistless decision. “Mark my words. You will wear it this very evening.”

I thought I should not: I thought no human force should avail to put me into it. A pink dress! I knew it not. It knew not me. I had not proved it. (*V* 283)

This aversion reminds us of Jane’s protest against the strange sound of “Jewels for Jane Eyre” — a rejection of something at odds with her notion of self (“I knew it not. It knew not me.”). But where Jane remains adamant, Lucy is bundled passively into her new frock: “Without any force at all, I found myself led and influenced by another’s will, unconsulted, unpersuaded, quietly over-ruled.” Here we have quite the reverse of the purple-gray dress, which she selected entirely of her own accord and as a “voluntary” statement of her shadowy nature.

²⁹ She happens to be following popular fashion advice: “when you see a colour which is moderately dull in tone, and so far indescribable that you question whether it is blue or green, green or brown, red or yellow, grapple it to your soul with hooks of steel” — it is an “artistic” colour (Haweis 110).

Lucy does not remain consistent even in her attitude towards this single garment. From her initial refusal she moves to an undefined reaction — she looks in the mirror twice, but on neither occasion do we see precisely what she sees nor does she identify for us the exact nature of her response. First: “I was pronounced to be en grande tenue, and requested to look in the glass. I did so with some fear and trembling; with more fear and trembling, I turned away” (*V* 283-84). And then, at the concert hall, Lucy is offered the de-familiarized “giftie” discussed in Chapter 5:

We moved on — I was not at all conscious whither — but at some turn we suddenly encountered another party approaching from the opposite direction. I just now see that group, as it flashed upon me for one moment. A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son [...]; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle.

I noted them all — the third person as well as the other two — and for the fraction of a moment, believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror [...] dispelled it: the party was our own party. Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the ‘giftie’ of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse. (*V* 286)

We see her see, but not reveal; she does not even recognize herself, let alone give us something by which *we* can be certain of her identity. Although Ginevra will later accuse her of being “dressed, actually, like anybody else” (*V* 314), this moment of misrecognition and “discord” (being neither/nor, not flattering and not worse) is Lucy’s moment of reconciliation with the pink dress — she “knows” it now, as in its very unknowability she finds a familiar face.³⁰

³⁰ M. Paul later berates her for her “scarlet dress (‘Pink! pink!’ I threw in)” (*V* 420). His mis-reading adds another layer of transmission between us and the “meaning” coded in clothing: Lucy broadcasts a message in her choice of color, M. Paul interprets it as “scarlet” (with connotations sexual as well as religious, “cardinal,” being a “deep scarlet” named for its use by the Catholic ecclesiastic [*OED*]), and Lucy translates his reaction into English. The two languages have some slippage around the many variations of red (particularly “pinks” and “purples,” not necessarily in a one-to-one correlation with “roses” and “pourpres”) which returns us to the “translator” and her role as a decider of meaning. Like Jane changing Quaker drabs for Blanche blue, Lucy later intentionally clothes herself in the color that so aggravates M. Paul: during the picnic outing, “the new print dress I wore, being pink in colour [...] made me feel something as I have felt, when, clad in a shawl with a red border necessitated to traverse a meadow where pastured a bull” (*V* 470). Perhaps Lucy recognizes that however “pale” and “subdued” (*V* 419), pink is always, necessarily tinged with red; they are not clearly defined categories.

Another of Lucy's most ambiguous exploits is her performance as the fop in M. Paul's play. Transvestism, a typically disruptive act, is here normalized (to a certain degree) by the circumstances of a vaudeville staged at an all-girls school. But Lucy revives the transgressive singularity of cross-dressing by doing so incompletely: to the protests of the other participants, she rejects the full male costume for nothing more than a man's vest, collar, cravat, and paletôt worn over her "woman's garb" (*V* 209). Rather than present herself as a complete transvestite, she (to use the lingo of the drag show) "works with pieces," calling attention to isolated parts, or "artifacts," and thereby challenging the idea of an authentic "whole."³¹

Even offstage, the fashion of Brontë novels is often a fashion of pieces. The use of synecdoche, or a part standing for the whole, is especially prevalent throughout *Villette*. It tends to come across as a Cheshire Cat effect: M. Paul frequently appears as no more than "a cap-tassel, a brow, two eyes," or a "wild inburst of a paletôt" disrupting the classroom (*V* 310, 491). *Villette* itself, during Lucy's opium-laden perambulations on a fête night, is represented by pieces of set and costume, creating a highly theatrical, disjointed atmosphere:

No matter that in five minutes the secret was mine — the key of the mystery picked up, and its illusion unveiled — no matter that I quickly recognized the material of these solemn fragments — the timber, the paint, and the pasteboard — these inevitable discoveries failed to quite destroy the charm, or undermine the marvel of that night [...].

I rather liked to find myself the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbour of the short petticoat and the sabot; and only the distant gazer at the silk robe, the velvet mantle, and the plumed chapeau. (*V* 550, 552)

Lucy crosses back and forth between audience member and backstage witness to theatrical revelations. Both sides are equally strange and pleasant to her — perhaps as a result of the drug, but equally likely as a function of her own awareness of performance and fragmentation.

³¹ cf. Garber on the different kinds of drag show, including mixing "pieces" (151-52); Butler on the attempt to discover a coherent, unified object in a necessarily fragmented body (*Gender Trouble* 114-15).

This is a useful place to inquire into the ways “pieces” figured in Victorian dress and fashion, and the concern with breaking clothes (and bodies) into distinguishable segments. Cunnington, in his 1941 retrospective of the previous century’s fashion, suggests that while “[t]he Greeks must have thought of the body as all of a piece; we think of it as composed of interesting bits and dull bits: bits to be exploited and bits to be suppressed.”³² We do, indeed, tend to saddle the Victorians with no small degree of fetishism regarding the “interesting bits”: a fascination with what was hidden (ankles and above), what was emphasized (waist and hips, via corseting), and what made advances and retreats depending on the whims of the season (arms, neck, bust). However, the attraction is inextricably linked to anxiety — there was a wrongness in the isolation of pieces and parts as much as there was a drive to separate them. The anxiety underlying body and clothing synecdoche stems from what I see as three separate but related issues: the importance of proportion and “harmony” in dress; the tension between disembodiment and embodiment; and the blurring of the line between a woman and her clothes.

Mrs. Merrifield, in her *Dress as a Fine Art*, is one of the greatest advocates for promoting balance and symmetry in a woman’s wardrobe. Her stance on the corset debate (which raged throughout the century, not merely towards the end when the silhouettes were most extreme) is firmly against tight-lacing, a position she defends with an emphasis on proportion. “[T]he evil of tight-lacing,” she writes, “was perpetuated by the poets and romance writers of the Norman period; and we are sure that the novelists of our own times have much to answer for on this score.” That is, these perpetrators sung the praises of tapering waists in isolation, not showing, as sculptors do, the elegance of a complete, proportionally slim figure. The reader is not

³² Cunnington 20.

assumed competent to extend the synecdoche back to its referent, and thus he comes to idealize tapering waists as individual parts rather than as components of a harmonious, whole woman: “When we say, therefore, that writers leave much to the imagination, it may too frequently be understood, to the *ignorance* of the reader [...].”³³

Elaine Freedgood offers an intriguing take on a particular strategy for harmony and wholeness — she explores the Victorian obsession with fringe as a program (not unconnected to Imperialism) for baffling borders and alleviating the condition of “edginess.” Nineteenth-century fashion writers do indeed recommend that an edge be “carried a few inches beyond” the wrist, ankle, or neck.³⁴ Fringe allows for variability and permeability, Freedgood argues, but also has the ability to unify a costume: “Not so much camouflage or decoration, trim becomes a kind of sartorial aggression in which a dress is a metaphorical suit of armor — it is nearly impossible to reduce it to its component parts.”³⁵

At its extreme end, the reduction of a body to parts through an ill-advised choice of dress is a particular kind of disembodiment — that is, dismemberment. *The Art of Dress* attacks the low, short-sleeved, bare-shouldered neckline of a particular style of evening gown because a wearer with the misfortune to be displayed against a background similar in tone to the fabric color will appear to be no more than a head, neck, and pair of arms. Mrs. Haweis illustrates her point not only with a diagram but also a particularly vivid metaphor: “Temple Bar stuck with ghastly limbs of

³³ Merrifield 20-21, emphasis original.

³⁴ e.g., Haweis 76.

³⁵ Freedgood, “Fringe” 257-58. The likening of a dress to a suit of armor is provocative — Waugh’s *Corsets and Crinolines* offers excerpts from 19th-century articles in which writers protest against the similarities of feminine dress and “an ancient warrior’s hauberk [or] new-fashioned coat-of-mail for the fair [or] formidable breast-plate” (100); *Punch* asks if there isn’t “metal more attractive” than a woman in “steel armour” or “entrenched in an impregnable hoop petticoat” (136). The desirability of a properly unified, indivisible costume can only be carried so far, it seems, before the opposing urge — to fetishize and conquer (visually or otherwise) individual pieces — asserts itself.

malefactors was only a little worse.”³⁶ Synecdoche in this sense is a form of violence done to women’s bodies, making them more like unsettling apparitions (“ghastly”) than flesh-and-blood creatures.

However, that word “flesh” signals the slide into danger at the other end of the spectrum. A person, especially a Victorian woman, should be something significantly more than the collection of her physical parts. While the state of her body and its clothing is expected to define certain elements of her non-corporeal self (character, morality, etc.), she should always manage to transcend the fleshy plane of noses and legs and petticoats. The Angel of the Hearth has a sacred duty to maintain the material world of the home, but an even more sacred duty to uphold a sense of spiritual perfection. Not only is she responsible for the religious and moral education of the next generation, but her irreproachable character acts as a specter that accompanies her husband when she cannot — out of her sphere (home) into his (world). She must be “a kind of second conscience,” a form of spiritual surveillance in which a man finds himself “corrected before the clear eye of woman, as it looked directly to the naked truth, and detected the lurking evil of the specious act he was about to commit.”³⁷ This disembodied ideal cannot comfortably coexist with the notion of woman as a collection of body parts needing covering or uncovering, shaping, trimming, and cleaning.

The kind of woman who *is* her frock or her “toilette” is a Ginevra Fanshawe or an Adèle Varens, or a conduct-book cautionary tale even more dire. The prevalence of vain, fashion-obsessed anti-heroines in the style of Eliot’s Hetty Sorrel or Rosamond Vincy no doubt has to do with the fact that the Victorian woman’s concern with appearance is actually a feminine virtue that only needs a little exaggeration to be

³⁶ Haweis 74-75.

³⁷ Ellis, *Women* 51-52.

made vicious (not at all unlike the relationship between a slim waistline and a corset-crushed liver). We have, for instance, the following slightly unnerving but sincere passage from the *Treasure Book*:

But our bright girl-housewife will treat her house as she does her garments. She will let the fringe — that is, the approaches — be spotlessly clean; the paths, answering to her ribbons, will be neat at the edge and not frayed or soiled; the mats, as her pretty French boots, will be thoroughly cleaned and immaculate. The windows, which are as the eyes of the house, will be bright and clear as her own; the doors will fit like Jouvin's gloves. The hearthstones will be as white as her own little teeth, and the bars of the grates black and shining as her ornaments of Whitby jet.³⁸

The connection between a well-kept home and well-kept garments plays out unremarkably enough; but somewhere towards the middle of the passage — certainly by the time the hearthstones are equated with “her own little teeth” — the effect becomes unsettling. Perhaps the culprit is the suggestion that “[t]he windows, which are as the eyes of the house, will be bright and clear as her own.” The eyes, as anyone knows, are windows to the soul, linking the material body and immaterial essence of a person. The notion of looking into a woman's eyes and seeing nothing more than her tidy house may be stretching the reverence for domesticity too far for comfort.

This passage — in which the categories “girl,” “house,” and “garments” shift and run together — reveals the instability of the domestic ideal. Although the material and spiritual planes were usually considered separate, even inimical to each other (e.g., Brocklehurst's program of subduing the flesh), the materiality of a perfectly kept home was, in Victorian ideology, a direct link between the two. Viewed this way, domesticity is both the most revered of virtues, the cornerstone of sanctioned middle-class culture, and also a transmissive middle layer, not at all unlike a third term. The presumably stable, central principle of the Angel of the Hearth exhibits, under inspection, an anxiety similar to Garber's category crisis. The “girl-housewife” is an

³⁸ *The Young Ladies' Treasure Book* 186.

exaggeration of the human being divided between a corporeal body and immortal soul; she is both intensely spiritual (the specter of “surveillance” monitoring her husband) and intensely material (the superintendent of the tangible domestic “minutiae”), but neither wholly spirit nor wholly flesh.

Maintain, Adapt, Perform: Shirley

The paradox of the ideal Victorian woman is that she can only rise *above* being merely the sum of her parts by devoting constant, careful attention *to* those pieces of fabric and flesh. Conduct books and fashion manuals, therefore, fight against the consequences of the doctrines they themselves promote. Infused with praise for the economical, self-sacrificing, higher-minded woman (the Dorothea Brooke paradigm), they nonetheless focus a terrifying amount of attention on the details of appearance. An offhand comment about whether or not a woman is re-wearing the same dress can overthrow “the whole fabric of a woman’s philosophy,” while the “neglect of minute attentions,” such as the crime of receiving a visitor with “one papillote untwisted, and one untied string dangling,” results not only in disgust for the slatternly woman, but, worse, in contempt for her husband.³⁹

The danger of material interests ultimately taking precedence over spiritual concerns, however, is not the only problem with the continual maintenance required by Victorian dress. An impeccably attired woman is, like the idealized femininity she represents, not a natural phenomenon. She requires endless effort to keep herself looking as the conduct books advise, and a significant part of that effort is making it all look effortless. The calm, clean vision of loveliness called “Woman” is constructed and maintained — is, in fact, performed. “Dress” and “costume” again overlap and

³⁹ Ellis, *Women* 307; Sandford 217-19.

intersect. The maintenance, changeability, and adaptability of clothes, combined with the unavoidable association of clothes/body with conduct/character, reveal the endemic quality of “performance” in the concept of the Victorian woman.

Perhaps the best place to get a sense of the effort required to produce the conduct book-and-fashion magazine woman is the laundry room. In one sense, the nineteenth-century housewife had an easier time cleaning her clothes than we do, as she knew her materials far more intimately, and as both the fabric to be washed and the substance soiling it were non-synthetic.⁴⁰ In every other respect, however, laundry was a much more difficult and even dangerous procedure. Let alone the *size* of the operation (often requiring multiple rooms, several machines, the hiring of temporary staff, and five full days — if the weather was cooperative) and the resulting “muddle” it made of the household,⁴¹ laundry was a task of specific, scrupulous attention. Each fabric, depending on where and how it was used, needed an unique cleansing compound (ranging from the absurd, like gin and honey, to the hazardous, such as sulfuric acid or lye) and a specific mechanical procedure (soaking, mangling, brushing, pinning, rolling, sponging, etc.).

Brontë only mentions the laundry once in her novels, but it is a significant mention. Shirley Keeldar, careless heiress, shows little respect for the effort needed to maintain her clothing — she is “almost culpably indifferent to slight accidents affecting dress, &c.” (S 306). She soils her gown on purpose in order to chase an unwanted suitor away (S 305) and, to the horror of Mrs. Pryor, she lets her dog Tartar crush another dress, shrugging “Oh, it is only muslin: I can put a clean one on to-

⁴⁰ Walkley & Foster, *Crinolines and Crimping Irons* 13. My other primary sources for Victorian laundry techniques are the *Treasure Book* and Mrs. Beeton’s *How to Manage House and Servants*.

⁴¹ Mrs. Beeton’s advice on the subject is geared towards making sure that “washing-week [is] not the excuse for having everything in a muddle [...]”, a sure indication that laundry had the tendency to be exactly that (92). Much to the same effect, Mrs. Ellis cautions against giving your husband a washing-disrupted household to complain about (*Wives of England* 174).

morrow" (S 373). Later, when Shirley is bitten by the possibly rabid Phoebe, the laundry room is the site of punishment: "While the maid was busy crimping or starching, I took an Italian iron from the fire, and applied the light scarlet glowing tip to my arm: I bored it well in: it cauterized the little wound." (S 477-78) Shirley's laundry-inflicted reproof seems to suggest that only at one's peril does one take the phenomenon of well-kept clothes for granted.

The "gem-tinted" satin dress Shirley strategically ruins with a tipped teacup brings up another issue of clothing maintenance: the preservation of hue and texture, both of which had a tendency to fade or even change outright. A great deal of the care of fabrics was the fixing and restoring of color — Blanche Ingram's purples and blues were almost certainly fragile and short-lived, but even Jane Eyre's sensible blacks lacked permanence, and would turn rusty without regular application of new dye. The element of changeability in clothing is also present in the practice of "unpicking" and altering dresses to accommodate a new wearer, season, or style. A frock was often taken apart along its seams before washing, then re-sewn — reduced to its individual parts and reconstructed into a completely different whole.

This capacity for change was, of course, used in many positive instances. A woman's ability to use and re-use her dress was economical and resourceful, and commended by any conduct-book maven. Even the prospect of near-complete change in the woman herself was lauded: "Physiologists tell us that our bodies change so utterly every seven years that at the end of that time no particle of the human frame is identical with an particle which had its share in it at the beginning of the seven years," the *Treasure Book* tells us, allowing for an ugly-duckling alteration in both figure and temperament, and claiming that "we have observed such transformations as these

more frequently in girls than in boys.”⁴² Thus the unruly, angry Jane of the red room at Gateshead can come out of Lowood School convincing others and convinced herself that she is “quite a lady” (*JE* 92) — respectable, marriageable, Quakerish.

However, just as the requisite concern for appearance can tend towards materialistic vanity, there is a dark flipside to changeability. The theme of women changing themselves to suit the tastes of men was hardly something to be condemned, but rather a mainstay of Victorian gender relations. Women, as Mrs. Ellis so famously put it, are “relative creatures.”⁴³ The trouble surrounding changeability lies not only in the instability of identity (if a duckling can become a swan, what might the swan become?), but in the threat of intentional, manipulative change.

A woman’s body, in the world of corsets, padding, and stiffening, is made of “malleable flesh.”⁴⁴ What nature might change in the course of seven years can be effected in far less time with help from the *corsetière* and *tailleuse*. A reader’s letter to the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* during a tight-lacing debate of the 1860s proclaims: “I shall keep my waist where nature has placed it, and where art has improved it, for my own comfort, and because a certain friend has said that he never could survive if it were any larger or shorter.”⁴⁵ The ideal dress-maker, according to *The Book of Trades*, “must know how to hide all defects in the proportions of the body and must be able to mould the shape by stays, that while she corrects the body she may not interfere with the pleasures of the palate.”⁴⁶

⁴² *The Young Ladies’ Treasure Book* 253.

⁴³ Ellis, *Women* 149.

⁴⁴ Waugh 92.

⁴⁵ Quoted in W.B.L., *The Corset and the Crinoline* 179. W.B.L.’s “neutral” assessment of fashion devices such as the corset is saturated with personal testimonials from women who (usually via mother or boarding school, but sometimes through sheer self-discipline) had their bodies trained with tight-laced stays and thereby became not only physically elegant but accomplished and polished as well.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion* (vol. 1) 9.

The magazine reader insists that while she finds her stay-shaped waist comfortable, she is also motivated by the desire to please her “certain friend.” The problem inherent in this concept is in the language used by *The Book of Trades*: “moulding” and “correcting” is all fine and good, but using dress to “hide all defects” leads us into dangerous territory. Mrs. Merrifield begins her fashion manual with the following condemnation of a practice even more nefarious than painting and padding and refusing to age gracefully: “We allude to those physical defects induced by disease, which are frequently united to great beauty of countenance, and which are sometimes carefully concealed by the dress, that they are only discovered after marriage.”⁴⁷ The idea of “dress,” saddled with notions of “costume” and “masquerade,” is also troubled by the implication of “disguise.” We previously examined the tension between the allure of an apparently unified woman (her segments and borders melded by fringe into a “metaphorical suit of armor”) and the fetishizing of individual parts. Something of the same tension is in play here, between the impenetrable harmony of a woman perfectly dressed and the desire to penetrate, to know what appearance may be concealing. Mrs. Ellis warns against the ineffective disguise of decay:

if there steal from underneath her graceful drapery, the soiled hem, the tattered frill, or even the coarse garment out of keeping with her external finery, imagination naturally carries the observer to her dressing-room, her private habits, and even to her inner mind [...].⁴⁸

The lesson here might be that a lady’s attire should be irreprouchable whether visible or not — certainly this is how Mrs. Ellis would have us read it. But attention to the minutiae of dress is also figured as a guard against invasion, as a way to keep a (presumably male) intruder out of her “dressing room” and “inner mind.” (In considering this decorous defensiveness, we might recall Sutherland’s analogy of

⁴⁷ Merrifield 4.

⁴⁸ Ellis, *Women* 93.

those writing “ladies” who “prohibited publishers from entering the privacy of their writing processes as they might have banned a man from their boudoir.”⁴⁹)

Shirley offers us Louis Moore writing in his diary about how he infiltrated his former pupil’s desk, through her carelessness in leaving it unlocked — an oversight which he admits would irritate his brother Robert. But Louis finds “all her little failings [...] a most pleasurable vexation” (S 489). His metaphor for her domestic carelessness is telling, especially when compared to the admonitions of Mrs.

Merrifield and Mrs. Ellis:

indeed, through this very loophole of character, the reality, depth, genuineness of that refinement may be ascertained: a whole garment sometimes covers meagreness and malformation; through a rent sleeve, a fair round arm may be revealed. (S 489-90)

Louis is not satisfied with the face of the performance — he wants to tour backstage, examine the costumes, and *know* what is part of the act and what is “real” or “genuine.” If clothing is performance, however, then Louis is looking into a *mise en abyme*: there is no disguise, there is no real or genuine, there is only iteration. The impeccably dressed woman, through continual assessment and maintenance, performs what her costume advertises: selfless concern for the tastes of her society,⁵⁰ propriety, refinement, and unfailing attention to domestic detail.

Conduct books stress the importance of a yet another theatrical quality: adaptability. *Women of England* describes the ordeal of acquiring selflessness: “it is necessary for [a woman] to lay aside all her natural caprice, her love of self-indulgence, her vanity, her indolence — in short, her very *self*,” and, like an actress dressing for a new role, she then must go about “assuming a new nature, which nothing less than

⁴⁹ Sutherland 84.

⁵⁰ The most important member of which is her husband, who likely married her on the strength of her “neat shoe [and] pure-white gloves, the pale scarf, the quiet-coloured robe, and with the general aspect of her costume accommodated to his taste,” and who will recoil in disgust at her “moral degradation” if, after marriage, she displays an “unbecoming cap” or “soiled handkerchief” (Ellis, *Women* 258-59).

watchfulness and prayer can enable her constantly to maintain [...].”⁵¹ The advice given in *Wives of England* is even more explicitly associated with performance:

Have you, during the season of courtship, been acting a part which you never before sustained, or which you do not intend to sustain as a wife? [If so,] you must either defer your marriage until your real character has been brought to light, and clearly understood; or, you must determine, from this time forward, by the Divine blessing on your endeavours, that you will be in reality the amiable being you have appeared.⁵²

The role to which the deceitful bride must adapt herself is not natural and permanent, but an “endeavour” that will no doubt require “constant maintenance,” if not divine intervention. The Victorian woman’s ability to adapt is the ability to play a part — as we saw with the “Quakerlike” Jane Eyre, even a role played in all sincerity can still be cast away. Mrs. Sandford suggests that “one of the first secrets of her influence is, — adaptation to the tastes, and sympathy in the feelings, of those around her,” because, after all, “she must, in a certain degree, be plastic herself, if she would mould others.”⁵³

We might point to Caroline Helstone as an example of influence through adaptation. Nancy Armstrong devotes the “Shirley” section of *Desire and Domestic Fiction* almost exclusively to the quiet rector’s daughter, noting that “[r]etiring, feminine, and thoroughly benevolent, Caroline’s power is hardly acknowledged.”⁵⁴

This model of passivity (she does not seek a governess position and breaks off relations with the Moores in obedience to her uncle) is the only character who can convince Hortense Moore to exchange her awkward Belgian fashions for more “presentable” British attire (*S* 106), get an indolent Shirley dressed for the party (*S* 292), or demand that Mrs. Pryor not “disguise [her]self like a grandmother” and instead wear clothes more “becoming” (*S* 422-23). Caroline, notable for her pliancy and resemblance to her

⁵¹ Ibid. 43-44, emphasis original.

⁵² Ellis, *Wives of England* 7.

⁵³ Sandford 3.

⁵⁴ Armstrong 218-19.

aunt, Mary Cave, who silently suffered and wasted away, is nonetheless the one who regulates the suitability of appearance in her fellow women.⁵⁵

The characteristics of good dress and behavior, such as Caroline displays, can be learned and replicated — hence the very industry of conduct books and fashion manuals. In the vocabulary of performativity theory, the ideal woman is iterable, and thus the concept itself is undermined by a successful replication. Louis Moore is an appropriate character to be concerned with the deception of a performance, as his love-object is an accomplished (amateur) actress and mimic. Judith Wilt calls this secondary, late-arriving Moore “the figure for ‘copy’ in the novel,”⁵⁶ but I contend that the Squire of Fieldhead is much more often the one replicating. Shirley is a quick study; her fellow pupil Henry Sympson remarks that “[s]he learned fast — you could hardly tell when or how” (S 435). The reader is treated to a demonstration of Shirley-as-student: Louis demands that she recite a piece she had to memorize as a school girl, and she admits that without hearing “the whole repeated,” she cannot. So Louis “recited the passage deliberately, accurately, with slow, impressive emphasis.”

Shirley, by degrees, inclined her ear as he went on. Her face, before turned from him, returned towards him. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips: she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them: she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression. (S 463, emphasis original)

If we return to an earlier moment, when we have only just met Miss Keeldar, we find this aptitude for mimicry a seemingly harmless element of her character. Mrs. Pryor demands to know when her mistress started whistling (a transgressive act for a young lady of good breeding), and Shirley responds “Oh! I learned to whistle a long while

⁵⁵ Armstrong notes Caroline’s regulation of the *masculine*, specifically Robert Moore. Her decision that they should read *Coriolanus* together is “one of her notably few acts of self-assertion” (215), but it is a significant part of the “process of socialization [which] begins at home under the supervision of the mother [...]” (217). Caroline gently but successfully molds Robert, “soften[ing] him into an amiable mate” (221).

⁵⁶ Wilt 7. Consider Louis’s entrance in the narrative as an Uncanny Robert-doppelgänger, as discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

ago.” Asked who taught her, she replies, “No one: I took it up by listening” (S 218).

We later realize that this is an important moment for more than its demonstration of Shirley’s quick learning — although the reference only functions in retrospect (that is, prophetically), this is the first time that she alludes to her tutor and lover, Louis the whistling Gérard Moore.

The ability to copy is the key to a successful performance, and while the reproduction of a whistle or an accent seems harmless enough, Shirley does not stop there. Upon her first entrance, she admits her inclination to replicate gendered behavior: “when I see such people as that stately Anglo-Belgian — that [Robert] Gérard Moore before me, gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentlemanlike” (S 213). She uses pieces and circumstances to perform “masculine”: she “wears” a male Christian name, responds to (and encourages) the male pronoun in address, and she holds a male social position; she also carries Helstone’s pistols the night she is left to protect Caroline and the Rectory. While this behavior is transgressive for crossing out of the gender she belongs to, it is equally transgressive for calling attention to her consequent ability to perform “feminine” — something a woman should not *act* but rather *be*. At the Whitsuntide picnic, she uses bits of her costume to play the part of a girl waiting for her beau to arrive: “ever and anon she spread her satin dress over an undue portion of the bench, or laid her gloves or her embroidered handkerchief upon it.”⁵⁷ Finally, to dispose with the unwelcome Mr. Ramsden, she upsets her own teacup, resulting in what the narrator remarks as a noticeable step out of character: “Shirley, usually almost culpably indifferent to slight

⁵⁷ S 303. Shirley’s performance here is one of pieces, like Lucy’s at the fête, only with the gender of the costume reversed. The significance of the drag show is such that it makes the gender inscribed “naturally” on the performer’s body equivalent to the removable “artifacts” of drag; thus Shirley’s enactment of “woman” can be considered in the same light as Lucy’s of “man.”

accidents affecting dress, &c., now made a commotion that might have become the most delicate and nervous of her sex" (S 306).

These "consistent inconsistencies"⁵⁸ are problematic, both for the other characters in the novel (Robert mistakenly thinks she loves him, as does Caroline), for the reader, and for modern critics, who cannot make sense of a strong proto-feminist character envisioning Mother Gods and female genius, but nonetheless capitulating almost without protest to a conventional marriage plot. The giveaway to Shirley's character is coded into her clothing, in keeping with her fellow Brontë heroines: Jane is the respectable, socially mobile Quaker; Lucy dresses in whatever will most convey her ambivalent status; and Shirley wears "an attire simply fashioned, but almost splendid from the *shifting* brightness of its dye, warp and woof being of tints deep and *changing* as the hue on a pheasant's neck." (S 252, emphasis added)

We have seen these characters dress themselves up in order to play with (and as, and against) the ideal Victorian woman as related by conduct books and fashion manuals. What we have not yet asked is whose Ideal this is. From whom (or what) comes the conduct-book paragon? Put another way, who is responsible for the clothes women wear? The amount of finger-pointing that occurs in this debate, both in Victorian and modern times, leads us to suspect everyone and, ultimately, no one. The riddle, like the Nun of the Rue Fossette and like the "reason" for Victorian pseudonymity, is insoluble. Mrs. Merrifield, as we saw, blames (the mostly male) poets and novelists for the practice of tight-lacing. The extension of her argument makes culprits of masculine tastes and fetishes; thus we have Cunnington's "Man" standing in front of the mirror he has made of women's fashion. A writer for the

⁵⁸ cf. Vanškike, "Consistent Inconsistencies: The Transvestite Actress Madame Vestris and Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*."

nineteenth-century fashion magazine *Petit Courrier des Dames* claims control for Woman: “It is she, and she alone, who has imposed upon us these enormous skirts and she will wear them as long as she pleases [...]. If skirts diminish this winter it will be because a certain dame à la mode so wished it, and not a certain dressmaker.”⁵⁹

In *Corsets and Crinolines*, Norah Waugh initially makes a similar suggestion of female agency — “when a line became exaggerated [Woman] developed it to the utmost limit, and unhesitatingly encased herself in whalebone, cane, and steel [...] and then later [...] just as unhesitatingly discarded all these artificial props.”⁶⁰ This sounds like Mrs. Haweis’s insistence to her fair readers that they are free to make their own clothing decisions, that “[i]t is no part of a milliner’s business to think for us.”⁶¹ But Waugh’s eventual waffling — “who can say what strange distortions of shape the artist-corsetière, inspired by *his* new technique, will devise for woman’s malleable flesh?”⁶² — is indicative of how unsettled the question is even in a single mind.

Fred Davis argues that to call the intention behind fashion’s signs spontaneous or unpremeditated “would be tantamount to attributing a persistent efficacy to free-floating ghosts.”⁶³ In a system so full of replication and mirrors, blaming ghosts, or the abstracted “chase of Desire after Ability,”⁶⁴ for the “restlessness of fashion”⁶⁵ sits more comfortably than does pinning down a single, definitive origin. Cunnington claims that from an examination of a suit of Victorian women’s clothing we deduce a Dora Copperfield, “[a]nd when we turn to the contemporary novels and find that this type constantly appears as the heroine it is a fair assumption that this sort of young

⁵⁹ Quoted in Waugh 121-22.

⁶⁰ Waugh 7.

⁶¹ Haweis 22.

⁶² Waugh 92, emphasis added.

⁶³ Davis 12.

⁶⁴ *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* (1867), quoted in Arnold (vol. 2) 4.

⁶⁵ Haweis 29.

woman was not only usual but held up as an ideal.”⁶⁶ The dress, however, remains empty: an ideal that can be inferred through the condition of clothing and through literary reproduction must be a performance, not an empirical “reality.”

Dress disrupts. The hollowness of the Nun remains, even after it is revealed that “her” appearances were actually Alfred de Hamal playing prankster in order to tryst with Ginevra. The concept of meaning or origin has been destabilized, and it does not completely re-stabilize with a belated explanation. Shirley’s “capsizing” of patriarchal convention cannot be neutralized by the marriage-plot ending of the novel.⁶⁷ The threat of performance and “costume” is encoded in the idea of “dress,” and cannot be effaced. Likewise, the critical discovery of Currer Bell’s “true” gender does not recover the crisis of inscrutability which occurred with the publication of *Jane Eyre* — by dressing herself as a pseudonymous, androgynous author-editor, Charlotte Brontë undermined the concept of gendered authorship, even of authorship — in the sense of “authenticity” — itself.

⁶⁶ Cunnington 28.

⁶⁷ “The reimposition of a patriarchal system at the end of the narrative, while it safely contains the space opened up by Shirley’s aggressive challenge to authority, fails to erase the impact of that challenge.” (Langer 277)

CHAPTER 8

MYTHMAKING: THE AFTERLIFE OF A PSEUDONYM

HERE LIES THE BODY / OF / 'GEORGE ELIOT' / MARY ANN CROSS

ADJOINING LIE THE REMAINS OF / CHARLOTTE, WIFE
OF THE REV. ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS, A.B.,
AND DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTË, A.B., INCUMBENT.

To quote another Eliot, "In my beginning is my end." Having addressed the life and works of the pseudonyms "Currer Bell" and "George Eliot," I intend now to examine their "afterlives" — how a name survives, or does not. We return, then, to the gravestones where we began, and to the question they beg: "What happened to 'Mary Ann Cross' and 'Charlotte, Wife'?" This chapter means to answer that they have been ghosted by their reputations, reduced to effective invisibility by the practices of biography and criticism. Despite the fact that they are for official, legal purposes the most "real" names behind "the Author of *Middlemarch*" and "the Author of *Jane Eyre*," they do not suit the purposes of the narrative art required by bio-critical practice.¹ The ghostly married names cannot actually be effaced, as the *removal* of John Walter Cross and Arthur Bell Nicholls would strain the flexible limits of biography past their breaking point, so they must instead become specters, haunting graveyards and old indices.²

¹ I use this slightly inelegant phrase to mean the whole critical field, denying a "purely" biographical or "purely" literary criticism. The afterlives of CB and GE demonstrate that it is never possible to judge "life" and "work" separately. cf. Stillinger on the "nearly insurmountable problems in sorting out the differences between a historical author [...] and the author's created narrators and characters" (5), and how "it is sometimes difficult to think of a type of literary research or critical activity that is *not* fundamentally biographical." (9, emphasis original)

² As an example of how quickly "readers" (gossipers and interpreters of all kinds) can transform a solid legality into an uncanny issue: "I am still thrrrrrrrilling over a conversation I had yesterday with Charles Lewes," Anne Thackeray Ritchie writes in May 1880; "Lionel Tennyson was here; he declared that his hair stood on end as he listened." These literary progeny were discussing the marriage which was the birth of the problematic new "Mary Ann Cross" — literally a hair-raising experience, and "altogether [...] the strangest page of life I have ever skimmed over." (GE Letters VII.284)

The seemingly universal consensus regarding the disappearance of Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Nicholls reveals story-making elements in such eminently *non-fictional* disciplines as biography and criticism. Neither Nicholls nor Cross is especially well-served by bio-criticism; neither fits neatly into the desired narrative. There is, for instance, an undeniable devotion to the idea of Charlotte Brontë-as-spinster. Nina Auerbach invests the role with a mystical power — “becoming an old maid is an awesome activity, a baptism into transcendental new incarnations”³ — and such transcendence is encouraged by Thackeray’s mythically resonant reference to “the three poetesses — the three maidens, Charlotte, and Emily, and Anne,” a trio difficult to disrupt despite the entrance of “Charlotte Nicholls” a paragraph later.⁴ It also seems that many biographers simply do not *like* Charlotte’s husband, perhaps because he cannot be read as a Rochester or M. Paul,⁵ perhaps because, as Margot Peters claims, “[j]ust as surely as Mary Ann Evans’s union with Lewes expanded her powers, Charlotte’s marriage to Nicholls blighted the great powers of Currer Bell.”⁶

This quotation also suggests why Cross, a last-inning replacement for George Henry Lewes, is a similarly uncomfortable fit with the George Eliot narrative. Even Bodenheimer, who is more flexible than most in her references to the “real” person behind the pseudonym (using Mary Ann then Marian, Evans then Lewes, according to the self in play), cannot quite face that final name change. While admitting that with her marriage, Eliot “erased all the names that had signified her self-making and

³ Auerbach 118. Even GE, who lived as a married woman for most of her adult life, nonetheless “inaugurated her official spinsterhood,” even “consecrated” it (120, 124).

⁴ Thackeray, “The Last Sketch” 486.

⁵ “[I]n terms of the imaginative life of her novels, the marriage with the Reverend A.B. Nicholls seems so inappropriate,” Ewbank writes, though she tries to recuperate him *as* a passionate Romantic hero, citing his “paroxysm of anguish” at CB’s refusal (*Their Proper Sphere* 203). CB’s first “biographers,” the Gaskell/Winkworth/Shoen set, worried that ABN was “altogether far too narrow for her,” “quoting” CB that “[h]e is a Puseyite and very stiff,” but “I shall never let him make me a bigot,” all the while they “*guess[ed]* the true love was Paul Emmanuel after all, and is dead” (Shoen 113-15, emphasis original).

⁶ Peters, *Unquiet Soul* 399.

signed herself with the names her father and husband gave her: Mary Ann Cross,”⁷ Bodenheimer never afterwards refers to her as such, instead using “George Eliot” exclusively, a name previously reserved for authorial context.

Returning to our original question — “Why did George Eliot live and Currer Bell die?” — Bodenheimer’s answer, quoted previously, is a useful opening gambit: “because it is the only stable name in her large repertoire, ‘George Eliot’ has become the subject of biography as ‘Currer Bell’ could not.”⁸ The connection of name with identity, and thus the proliferation of identities with the proliferation of names, suggests that there is an intrinsic difference between the selfhood of “Mary Ann [Marian Evans Lewes] Cross” and “Charlotte [Brontë] Nicholls.” The former is defined by the internal divisions between daughter, mistress, wife, and can only be “summed up” by the fictional George Eliot; the latter is defined by unity and singularity, and that “real” individual is most appropriately known by the name “underneath” her non-original names “Currer Bell” and “Mrs. Nicholls.” Like the question which provoked it, this argument is over-simplified at best, specious at worst; yet I will allow (with the intention of problematizing) the imaginary distinction “George Eliot the Divided” and “Charlotte Brontë the Unified” to inform my reading of pseudonymous afterlives.

This chapter will also address the problematic status of a “monument” — an object which by its presence commemorates a thing necessarily absent — particularly as pseudonymity reveals that the names to be commemorated are radically unstable. Memorialization requires forgetting and erasure as part of its strategy for preservation: the survival of the names “Charlotte Brontë” and “George Eliot” effaces not only “Currer Bell” and “Marian Evans,” but also “Charlotte Nicholls,” “Marian Lewes,” and “Mary Ann Cross.” The interchangeability of “monument” and “myth,”

⁷ Bodenheimer 111.

⁸ Ibid. 144.

furthermore, indicates a tension between the material guarantee of the former and the ephemeral status of the latter. The name, as always, stands at the intersection of presence and absence — between *nominis umbra*, a name without substance, and *stat magni nominis umbra*, a name so great (so substantial) that it casts a shadow.

The other substantial shadow under examination here will be the practice of biography, which, like autobiography, I see as a third term: not a thing so much as an interaction, the process by which a life (reality) becomes a story (fiction). We shall see how the successful (“faithful”) translation of life into text paradoxically results in the increased fictionality of the subject. As demonstrated most clearly by the Brontës, a biographical image felt by readers to be exceptionally “truthful” achieves the status of myth: “A widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of the truth. Also: something existing only in myth; a fictitious or imaginary person or thing.”⁹

Such vacillation between the categories of reality and fiction brings us again the problem of control — we shall see how biography was a Victorian strategy for regulation of an identity, while the existence and persistence of myth is the defiance of regulation. A myth cannot be authorized; in many cases it cannot even be adequately defined, but rather exists outside acknowledged boundaries; it “lives below the formulated surface of its age.”¹⁰ I want to propose, furthermore, that as essential unreality, myth cannot be eradicated.¹¹ The attempt, for example, to “rescue” Charlotte Brontë as a “filthy minx,” thereby killing off the “female eunuch created by

⁹ *OED* “myth, n.” Other senses of the word at play in this chapter: “A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something”; “A person or thing held in awe or generally referred to with near reverential admiration on the basis of popularly repeated stories” (cf. legend, from *legenda*: what is read).

¹⁰ Auerbach 10.

¹¹ cf. Barthes, *Mythologies*: “Myth [...] is a language which does not want to die: it wrests from the meanings which give it its sustenance an insidious, degraded survival, it provokes in them an artificial reprieve in which it settles comfortable, it turns them into speaking corpses.” (133)

Gaskell,”¹² *depends* on myth for its existence. It requires the “unreal” Charlotte to attack, while purporting to reveal the “real” Charlotte through her fictions, as “truer” than biographical studies. Furthermore, the supposed de-mythologizing (which, even when successful, is only re-mythologizing) depends on the image of Gaskell-as-culprit: if the portrait originally offered in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* can be proved inauthentic, then the subsequent myth-built temple should come tumbling down. What I intend to show is that the monument has no vulnerable keystone. Myth has no parent or single author, but is originless, dependant on absence and relation. Ultimately, the key relation in pseudonymity is circular — the surviving names Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot enforce ways of reading, and the way we read enforces the names which have survived.

Biography and Control: Letters and Literary Reputation

Although biography enacts the same fact/fiction transmission previously explored in autobiography, there is a tension in an other-written life — particularly a nineteenth-century other-written life — that does not produce quite the same anxiety as in a self-written life. The problem is the public/private distinction: how to reconcile the “search for role models” and a “sense of wanting to know the woman behind the books”¹³ while yet remaining true to the “conviction [...] that the principles and the practice which in England make it indecorous to withdraw the veil from purely domestic affairs [...] have a true basis in fortitude and delicacy of feeling and are

¹² Tanya Gold, “Reader, I shagged him.” For the 150th anniversary of CB’s death, Gold offers an overtly radical introduction to “the real Charlotte — filthy bitch.” However, while condemning Gaskell et al. for their “long, gossipy, gawking letters,” she replicates almost perfectly the novel-based interpretive speculation they favored. “Charlotte’s fixation with sex could not be realised in truth — so she realised it in fiction,” specifically *JE* — itself a myth-producing text, which “has spawned a thousand luscious anti-heroines, and a million Pills & Swoon paperbacks.”

¹³ Shattock 7.

paramount to considerations of gratifying public curiosity [...].”¹⁴ According to D.J. Trela, who offers an examination of J.A. Froude’s contested biography of Thomas and Jane Carlyle, the conflict remained unresolved among the “confused, shifting, yet evolving standards of the age,” as ultimately “the Victorians offered no consistent answer to the question of what authors of biographies could properly reveal.”¹⁵ One particular problem was not only Froude’s intimate friendship with his subjects, but his inclusion of Jane Carlyle’s personal letters, making the Carlyles’ marriage “public property.”¹⁶ We will begin, then, by exploring the public-private category crisis enacted by biography’s dependence on the “borderline activity” of letter-writing.¹⁷

Charlotte Brontë calls her correspondence with Ellen Nussey “the next best thing to actual conversation — though it must be allowed that between the two there is a wide gulph still — I imagine your face — voice — very plainly when I read your letters.”¹⁸ Epistolary correspondence inhabits the boundary between J.L. Austin’s “face-to-face situation” and the steep slope of textual communication progressing downwards as the gap between the sender and receiver widens, plagued by the “incommensurabilities of other times and other cultures.”¹⁹ “These letters lie before me as I write,” enthuses Thomas Wemyss Reid, in his 1877 monograph. He wonders “what outpourings of the mind of Charlotte Brontë are embodied in this precious pile of cherished manuscript!” and suggests that “it is with a tender and reverent hand that one must touch these ‘noble letters of the dead’; but those who are allowed to see them, to read them and ponder over them, must feel as I do, that the soul of Charlotte

¹⁴[W.C. Roscoe], review of Gaskell’s *Life*, *National Review* (June 1857) CH-CB 347.

¹⁵Trela, “Froude on the Carlyles: The Victorian Debate over Biography” 184.

¹⁶Ibid. 187. He contrasts this to the “gauzy veil” Gaskell draws over the CB-ABN marriage (205 n.10).

¹⁷Bodenheimer 28. She calls a series of letters “necessarily fragmentary, discontinuous, and unfinished” (18) — an excellent series of adjectives to describe the haecceity or space of possibility.

¹⁸Margaret Smith opens her volumes of the CB correspondence with this Jan 1847 letter (I.1); the text in Wise & Symington is slightly different, including, crucially: “I imagine your face, voice, *presence* very plainly when I read your letters” (II.121, emphasis added).

¹⁹Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally* 38.

Brontë stands revealed in these unpublished pages.”²⁰ In Reid’s exultation of the physical “closeness” of the objects²¹ we can see how the promise of unmediated presence, which makes letters a boon to the biographer, also makes them a threat to the person who would regulate the public circulation of a private identity.

We find some of the most extreme, even absurd, forms of posthumous control located around the Brontë and Eliot letters — from Margaret Wooler’s emendations to a note from her former student, absolving Brontë of an indelicate reference to “chemises”²² to Cross’s rigorous “pruning” of George Eliot’s correspondence before publishing it as her *Life*. Interestingly, Haight’s condemnation of such editorial practice actually upholds the supposed “direct link” between self and text that motivated Eliot’s cautious widower: “She was not allowed to speak of...”; “He could not permit her...”. It is not the texts that Cross is restraining, but Eliot herself.²³

Another important issue of posthumous control is the struggle between Ellen Nussey and Arthur Nicholls regarding the publication of Brontë’s letters, “dangerous as lucifer matches,” which began during Brontë’s lifetime and continued long after her death.²⁴ We might locate the crux of the letters’ “danger” in Constantin Heger’s advice to Nussey on their publication (which he opposes):

Has [my friend] not allowed me to see more of himself than he would wish to show to the first comer? What he has whispered to me at the ear of my heart, can I go and cry it to the passers-by in the public street? Those fugitive impressions, those unguarded

²⁰ Reid 4-6.

²¹ cf. Benjamin on the importance of the “original” object in guaranteeing the very concept of authenticity, and the role of “aura,” or “the unique phenomenon of distance,” as crucial to the desire for “bring[ing] things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly” (*Illuminations* 214-17).

²² CB has an “urgent necessity to buy and make some chemises,” Wooler changes the final word to “things”; “these excellent chemises” becomes “the things I require” (CB Letters IV.11-12; 21 Oct 52). The scoring out and penciling in, of course, only draws attention to the offending phrases.

²³ GE Letters I.xiii. Haight also notes that GE’s journal is lacking the crucial years 1849-54, during which time she met and “eloped” with GHL. He suspects Cross’s censorship, though admits that GHL’s early journals are also missing (xiv-xv). Again, as we saw with Lucy Snowe, much of an editor’s work is invisible, and cannot be traced.

²⁴ The “lucifer matches” simile is CB’s, though she is describing ABN’s position; she claims to find whole matter “mighty amusing” (CB Letters IV.156-58; Oct-Nov 54).

appreciations, thrown with an open heart, in private talk, when the pen runs with a free rein, can I deliver them up as food for the malignant curiosity of readers?²⁵

The *Young Ladies' Treasure Book* offers a similar admonition against written correspondence with a man not kin or betrothed, as “[h]e may show the superscription, or the signature, or both, to his idle friends, and make insinuations much to her disadvantage, which his comrades will be sure to circulate and exaggerate.”²⁶

Possessing a letter was literally to hold a woman’s reputation in one’s hands.

The attitude which privileges letters above other kinds of texts for their promise of unmediated access to an author’s “inner self” is not a purely Victorian phenomenon. Compare Sidney Biddell in 1882, who claims in reading Brontë’s letters to have “learnt more of her inner nature from them, than I got in reading all previous literature concerning her,” to Gordon Haight in 1954, who writes: “If George Eliot’s letters offered nothing else they would be important for what they show of her inner life. The homely little touches that Cross too often omitted as beneath her dignity give occasional glimpses of the real George Eliot.”²⁷ A generation later, in 1994, Bodenheimer proposes that “letters may express particularly public and fictions particularly private versions of a contested site in the writer’s consciousness.”²⁸

That phrase — “particularly private” — summons the gradations of private suggested by Lucy Snowe in 1853: “The reader is requested to note a seeming contradiction in the two views which have been given of Graham Bretton — the public and private — the out-door and the in-door view.” As it happens, “[b]oth portraits are correct.” (V 273) What Lucy implies throughout her relationship with Dr.

²⁵ CB Letters IV.250 (7 Sep 63; trans.)

²⁶ *Treasure Book* 312-13.

²⁷ CB Letters IV.274; GE Letters I.xlvii. Haight’s use of “the real George Eliot” is fascinating, suggesting some level of transcendental reality to an invented name/identity and calling into question a reality defined by its relation to a pseudonymous novelist.

²⁸ Bodenheimer 21. While problematizing the line between “fiction” and “letters,” she retains a sense that a text *can* communicate unmediated, “private-private” presence: in the letters and early novels, “the reading audience is not so much addressed as called to witness a confrontation between the writer and an audience located in some fearful and scornful part of her consciousness.” (51-52)

John is that there are many possible degrees of “private,” some of which are entirely inaccessible to anyone but the self. Witness, for instance, her method of replying to his letters: “I wrote to these letters two answers — one for my own relief, the other for Graham’s perusal.” (*V* 334) Within the realm of “personal” epistolary correspondence, there is a public-private (the letters sent to Graham) and a private-private (the unsent letters buried under the pear tree). These gradations disrupt the notion of a single clean line dividing the “in-door” from “out-door” self, and demonstrate the constructedness of an identity presented in letters.

Joanne Shattock claims that Victorian readers, who were “seemingly unaware of these subtleties,” considered a letter to be “the equivalent of an overheard conversation, an intimate glimpse of the ‘real’ woman.”²⁹ I suggest it is not only Lucy Snowe’s distinction between “in-door portraits” and “buried selves” that robs the nineteenth-century of such innocence, but also remarks such as Gaskell’s to William Smith Williams, returning Brontë’s letters: “it is curious how much the spirit in which she wrote varies according to the correspondent whom she is addressing, I imagine.”³⁰ Moreover, as is the case with so many of the distinctions we make between ourselves and our charmingly primitive Victorian forebears, modern critics often manage to turn a similarly blind eye in the case of letters. Barker quotes Charlotte Brontë’s note to Catherine Winkworth after a near-disaster with an unruly horse on her honeymoon — “I had my thoughts about the moment — its consequences — my husband — my father” — observing that “[i]t is an interesting indication of how much Charlotte’s priorities had changed in the past month that her first thought was for her husband, not her father,”³¹ not taking into account that the “spirit” which directed the letter-

²⁹ Shattock 9-10.

³⁰ CB Letters IV.196 (15 Dec 55).

³¹ Barker 760.

writer was likely well aware that the addressee was the same woman to whom she had once expressed concern regarding her compatibility with her husband-to-be.

Letting this stand as a caution regarding my own critical practice and the unavoidable dependence on text in all forms of bio-criticism, let us turn to biography — the conflicted, “borderline” genre built from the conflicted, “borderline” foundations offered in letters. What I hope to show is that the first biographies, Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* and Cross’s *George Eliot’s Life*, though ostensibly opposed in both philosophy and construction, are united in their ultimate fabrication of the subject and in their resulting “force,” an ability to “do” things to the subject’s identity and reputation.

“I try to delight in the sunshine that will be when I shall never see it any more,” writes George Eliot in a famously Dorothea Brooke-like statement, “[a]nd I think it is possible for this sort of impersonal life to attain great intensity, — possible for us to gain much more independence, than is usually believed, of the small bundle of facts that make our own personality.”³² In the absence of that ghostly consciousness which unifies a string of experiences into a self, biography depends upon such “bundles of facts” (and bundles of letters) for its construction of a person’s identity. Eliot was suspicious of the fact/fiction boundary in self-writing — “Is it then possible to describe oneself at once faithfully and fully? In all autobiography there is, nay, ought to be, an incompleteness which may have the effect of falsity”³³ — and was flatly critical of the public/private distinction troubled by biography — “Is it not odious that as soon as a man is dead his desk is raked, and every insignificant memorandum which he never meant for the public, is printed for the gossiping

³² GE to Mrs. Robert Lytton (July 1870) GE Letters V.107.

³³ *Theophrastus Such* 6. GE uses this ambivalence as an excuse when, after over a year of denial, she finally “came out” to the Brays and Sara Hennell: “We are quite unable to represent ourselves truly — why should we complain that our friends see a false image?” (24 June 59; GE Letters III.90)

amusement of people too idle to re-read his books?”³⁴ She does not merely disparage a life as represented in biography, but privileges the representation of self available in a novelist’s fictions. We will return to this point, but for the moment I am interested in Eliot’s belief in biography’s powers of representation. The “disgrace” of “our national habits in the matter of literary biography” is that it amounts to “something like the uncovering of the dead Byron’s club foot,” she concludes. The self is embodied — indeed, her objection is that it is *too* embodied, accurate down to the deformities the living subject hoped to hide.

In the case of Eliot’s own biography, however, the problem was not the inappropriate presence of a private self, but rather a disappointing absence, a “reticence in three volumes,” a “lifeless silhouette.”³⁵ While *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a novelist’s composition, was considered so “true” that it would come to be seen as the origin of a myth, *George Eliot’s Life*, whose author eschewed novelistic methods in favor of allowing the life “to write itself in extracts from her letters and journals,”³⁶ failed to present the subject to its readers’ satisfaction. Those readers, I suggest, expected biography to be an exercise in storytelling in spite of the genre’s reliance on verifiable evidence. The editor could not merely assemble the required “truth” from the available “bundle of facts,” the author had to create in order to be faithful to what Eliot identified as the “impersonal,” transcendent self.³⁷ Gaskell’s commitment to fictional practice *re*-produced an accurate portrait; Cross’s assemblage of pre-existent parts was, in a sense, an original production — a “strange new art of transformation.”³⁸

³⁴ GE to JB (20 Feb 74) GE Letters VI.23. This response was provoked by the Leweses having just finished Dickens’ biography. Opposed in principle but accepting enough in practice, GE’s attitude is, I think, less hypocritical than it is an enactment of the Victorian anxiety surrounding biography.

³⁵ William Gladstone, quoted in Haigh xiv; Carroll CH-GE 40.

³⁶ Cross v.

³⁷ cf. Trela, who notes that “truth” required interpretation as well as accumulation, which necessarily allowed for mis-interpretation; it was possible, moreover, that “the more unscrupulous the biographer was toward his or her subject, the greater likelihood that it *would* be wrong.” (202, emphasis original)

³⁸ Margaret Oliphant, quoted in Mangum “George Eliot and the Journalists” 172.

What is particularly intriguing about the new, unfamiliar George Eliot³⁹ shaped by Cross's *Life* is that it was fabrication by censorship rather than embellishment — Cross's "lies" were of omission rather than commission, revealing once again the productive possibilities of absence. The preface explains his policy of constraint and negation: "I have confined myself to the work of selection and arrangement" and "[e]ach letter has been pruned of everything that seemed to me irrelevant to my purpose — of everything that I thought my wife would have wished to be omitted." The result is what he calls an "autobiography," "[f]ree from the obtrusion of any mind but her own."⁴⁰

We might expect that the image resulting from a principle of absence will be indefinite and abstract (or at least stunted and incomplete from all the pruning), yet what we find is quite the opposite. The George Eliot built out of censorship is described in language informed by tangibility: "By the end of the century," writes Bodenheimer, "the *monumental* figure he had created was no longer in fashion, and the literary reputation of George Eliot went temporarily into decline."⁴¹ The Cross-created Eliot may be a "lifeless silhouette," but much like the *nominis umbra* it is still substantial enough to "intervene stubbornly between the novels and the reading-public for many years."⁴² An "unreal" subject summoned by biography turns out to be as potent as any of the specters encountered in pseudonymity, as we see this ghost held responsible for a decades-long downturn in an author's popularity: "the novels

³⁹ For instance, William Hale White offers his own physically *present* version of GE — "I can see her now, with her hair over her shoulders, the easy chair half sideways to the fire, her feet over the arms, and a proof in her hands..." — in opposition to her absence in Cross's *Life* (quoted in Haight xvi).

⁴⁰ Cross v-vi. Absence and presence are as likely to produce as to counteract each other: readers find Cross himself "an insistent presence" (Shattock 16) whose "prudent hand is everywhere apparent." (Mangum 161)

⁴¹ Bodenheimer, "A Woman of Many Names" 37, emphasis added. See also Haight: "His book created a George Eliot who never really existed, a *marmoreal* image that could never have conceived of a Mrs. Poyser or Mr. Brooke or the Gleggs and Pullets. The legend of lofty seriousness, fostered in the beginning by Lewes, became through Cross's efforts *so firmly fixed* that it colored her reputation as a novelist." (xv, emphasis added)

⁴² Carroll, CH-GE 40.

had been used to substantiate the obscure story of George Eliot's life; now the life becomes a limiting judgment on the novels."⁴³

In contrast, the early monuments to Charlotte Brontë and her sisters seem to achieve precisely the opposite effect. The revelation of biographical detail increased their popularity and "turned their stand for anonymity on its head: their lives were now the excuse for their works and henceforward it would be impossible to judge the two separately."⁴⁴ The effect of Gaskell's *Life* is the mirror of Cross's *Life*: while they both expressed the intent "to make known the woman, as well as the author,"⁴⁵ Eliot failed to appear as a woman⁴⁶ and subsequently failed to impress as an author; the resulting Brontë, on the other hand, was an archetypal feminine martyr to duty and thus her books increased in value. "How I misjudged her!" exclaims Charles Kingsley, confessing his prior disliking in a letter to Gaskell,

and how thankful I am that I never put a word of my misconceptions into print, or recorded my misjudgments of one who is a whole heaven above me. Well have you done your work, and given us the picture of a valiant woman made perfect by sufferings. I shall now read carefully and lovingly every word she has written [...].⁴⁷

In 1857, the *Christian Remembrancer*, a notorious Brontë-detractor ten years previously, admits that of the early, harsh critics, "which amongst them [...] would not now and then erase an epithet, spare a sarcasm, modify a sweeping condemnation?"⁴⁸ It would seem that Gaskell offers the long-sought key to

⁴³ Ibid. 39-40. Haight notes that Cross dies in 1924, with GE's reputation at its lowest ebb, and wonders, "Did he ever suspect that his misguided devotion may have contributed to its decline?" (xv) Mangum and Shattock try to resuscitate Cross somewhat against the general outcry: the GE of the *Life* would have been approved by GE herself, as it showed "impressive fidelity" to the "private person" (Mangum 177); GE's reputation had already begun to decline before her death, as "[t]he height of Eliot's popularity as a novelist was reached with *Adam Bede*, not *Middlemarch*" (Shattock 15).

⁴⁴ Barker 797.

⁴⁵ Cross v; cf. Gaskell "I am sure the more fully she — Charlotte Brontë — the *friend*, the *daughter*, the *sister*, the *wife*, is known, and known where need be in her own words, the more highly she will be appreciated." (CB Letters IV.207, emphasis original)

⁴⁶ Cross's *Life* was "precisely what Austen-Leigh [Jane Austen's nephew and biographer] and Gaskell left out of their biographies, an account of a writing life. They had concentrated on the woman, not the writer. Cross did the reverse." (Shattock 16)

⁴⁷ CB Letters IV.222-23 (14 May 57).

⁴⁸ CH-CB 370. Barker calls the critical response "a general chorus of breast-beating" (797).

deciphering the Bell novels — the public has been educated how to approach the works “correctly” and, like Kingsley, will not continue reading in error.⁴⁹

If it is in fact the case that “[t]he book is a perfect success, in giving a true picture of a melancholy life,”⁵⁰ then the Brontë story should be complete. However, even a glancing familiarity with the extensive bio-critical history of Charlotte Brontë suggests very much otherwise. Gaskell’s work was both a gravestone marking the end of a life and the beginning of an afterlife, the “birth of a school of hagiography.”⁵¹ As a monument, as a myth, as a third term it both constitutes and disrupts the boundary. Its conflicted, uncertain nature is productive, provoking replication as well as revision, while simultaneously giving the lie to origin.

Myths and Monuments

In his introduction to the second edition of *Myths of Power*, Terry Eagleton regrets having “look[ed] at the myths of the Brontës, but not enough at the myth of the Brontës: the construction and reconstruction of the sisters in critical history, for varying ideological purposes.”⁵² This section deals primarily with the “Brontë myth,” but I want first to address the question of a “George Eliot myth” — which, if it exists at all, does not approach anything like the monolithic status of “the Three Virgins of Haworth.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Helms notes that Gaskell offers “*The Life of Charlotte Brontë*”: the definitive, singular version (“The Coincidence of Biography and Autobiography” 353). See also Lawrence on CB and teaching readers to read “properly”: the “cypher as blank becomes cypher as sign, only when her ‘public’ is educated enough to read her.” (452)

⁵⁰ Mary Taylor to Gaskell (30 July 57) CB Letters IV.225.

⁵¹ Barker 797. The opening lines of Brontë biographies perhaps prove the point; there is hardly one which does not begin with a nod to Gaskell, either explicitly — “In the whole of English biographical literature there is no book that can compare in widespread interest with the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* by Mrs. Gaskell” (Shorter 7) — or implicitly, apologizing for joining the stampede she started — “Yet another biography of the Brontës requires an apology, or at least an explanation.” (Barker xvii) Frank sums up effectively: “As a species, Brontë biographers would seem to suffer from an ‘ancient mariner’ complex: they feel compelled to tell their tale over and over.” (“The Brontë Biographies” 141)

⁵² Eagleton, *Myths* (2nd ed.) xix.

⁵³ This is the title of a 1930 biography by E. & G. Romieu.

The closest thing to a mythical Eliot that I can find is the “masculine,” even “mannish” Eliot. The tradition of describing “the Author of *Middlemarch*” as “man-womanly and woman-manly”⁵⁴ extends back practically to “George Eliot’s” birth. In her review of *The Mill on the Floss*, Dinah Mulock paraphrases Elizabeth Barrett Browning that a novelist should possess “‘the brain of a man and the heart of a woman’, united with what we may call a sexless intelligence, clear and calm, able to observe, and reason [...]”⁵⁵ Leslie Stephen’s obituary in *Cornhill*, twenty years later, harps on the same theme: “The so-called masculine quality in George Eliot — her wide and calm intelligence — was certainly combined with a thoroughly feminine nature; and the more one reads her books [...], the more strongly this comes out.”⁵⁶ John Blackwood’s letter to his wife after meeting the Lewes/Eliot body suggests that the physical verdicts supported the critical — “[s]he is a most intelligent pleasant woman,” he writes, “with a face like a man, but a good expression.”⁵⁷ John Friske, also writing to his wife, claims differently: “I never saw such a woman. There is nothing a bit masculine about her; she is thoroughly feminine and looks and acts as if she were made for nothing but to mother babies.” Later in the same letter, however, he effectively undoes this assertion, adding: “She thinks just like a man [...]”⁵⁸

Unlike the neither/nor condition of androgynous writing, the George Eliot which emerges from such portraits is not “sexless” (or, as was accused of Currer Bell, “unsexed”), but double-sexed — her femininity and masculinity are both re-iterated. I suggest this as a kind of myth rather than an oddity of Marian Lewes’ physical appearance because it encourages, and is encouraged by, the “masculine” text “George Eliot” as well as the bio-critical narratives surrounding “the Author of *Middlemarch*.” I

⁵⁴ cf. Beer, *George Eliot* 26.

⁵⁵ *Macmillan's* (April 1861) CH-GE 158.

⁵⁶ CH-GE 474.

⁵⁷ GE Letters II.436 (1 Mar 58).

⁵⁸ GE Letters V.464-65 (23 Nov 73).

will return to explore this claim at the end of the chapter, but for the moment I am proposing such a tentative myth in order to introduce a far more tenacious one.

In examining the differences in the mythical versions of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, we cannot discount the role of place and edifice — there is a well-known “Brontë Country” and an essentially non-existent “Eliot Country.”⁵⁹ Myth is the interaction of biographical and critical practice, a product of the circular referentiality between fiction (novels) and life (biographical incident), and thus has no origin; but it does require a *home*. The pseudonym Currer Bell required the presence of a body (Charlotte Brontë) to be authorized, and that body in turn required the abstracted, “empty” signature in order to exist as an authorial self. Similarly, the nebulous Brontë myth is housed in the physically “real” Haworth Parsonage and all its embodied relics, a museum which owes its very existence to the initial absence of those relics.⁶⁰ The mythical Brontës find a physical “home” not only in Haworth, but in Gaskell’s *Life*, “one of the masterpieces of English biography,”⁶¹ which Lewes called “a triumph for you” and “a monument for your friend.”⁶²

This monument, however, owes a massive debt to Charlotte Brontë’s 1850 “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell” — “the edifice under which the Brontës have sheltered ever since.”⁶³ This brief portrait of the sisters, so often identified as degree-zero of the Brontë myth, nonetheless defies any attempt to locate “origin” within

⁵⁹ The Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council do indeed publish a pamphlet, “George Eliot Country: A self-guided tour” — a triple-folded, single-sheet map. However, a comparison with the corresponding larger, glossier “Brontë Country” book rather proves my point than otherwise.

⁶⁰ “After the death of Patrick Brontë in 1861 the household contents of Haworth Parsonage were sold at auction. As the Brontës’ fame spread, souvenir hunters made visits to Haworth, and people who had been connected with the family, or who had purchased items at the 1861 sale, were persuaded to part with their treasures. In this way the Brontë relics began to be dispersed. It was in an attempt to halt this dispersal that the Brontë Society was founded in 1893.” The Parsonage was acquired by the Society in 1928. (Dinsdale and White, *Brontë Parsonage Museum* 37-38)

⁶¹ Reid vi.

⁶² GHJ to Gaskell (15 Apr 57) GE Letters II.315. He continues in a vein resonant with the concern for “teaching” in bio-critical memorialization: “One learns to love Charlotte, and deeply to respect her.”

⁶³ Barker 654-55.

it, ultimately offering only trace and relation: spectral, rather than “real” images of Anne and Emily Brontë. The latter, in particular, is one of the most famously “absent” characters in literature: “No great woman who ever lived has left so little behind her that can be written about as Emily Brontë.”⁶⁴ Whereas the textual Currer Bell was a “Great Unknown” until he was attached to the embodied Charlotte Brontë, the “real” Emily remains a cipher due to the lack of texts by which we can read her.⁶⁵ Much like the early (“anonymous,” “iron-chest”) form of pseudonymity, she is especially vulnerable to interpretation: as Alan Shelston asks, “would criticism feel free to take such liberties with *Wuthering Heights* had it not been the work of the Brontë about whom, in biographical terms, we know least?”⁶⁶ “Because of the dearth of documents by the hand of Emily Brontë,” writes Muriel Spark in her introduction to a collection of Brontë letters, “it is around her that the wildest theories have been woven.”⁶⁷

The text of *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, quite literally lacks origin: there is no extant manuscript, and in such absence claims of authorship proliferate. Generally these claims provoke scorn; Clement Shorter, for instance, dismisses the “foolish” supporters of Branwell’s authorship: “‘My unhappy brother never knew what his sisters had done in literature.’ — these words of Charlotte’s may be taken as final for all who had any doubts concerning the authorship of *Wuthering Heights*.”⁶⁸ Nonetheless, without the physical evidence, neither case can be “proven,” but must

⁶⁴ Sidney Biddell to Ellen Nussey (27 March 82) CB Letters IV.269.

⁶⁵ EB is as unruly and boundary-troubling as the previously explored pseudonym-as-cipher; cf. Batho & Dobrée insisting on her status as “completely outside the main Victorian current” (37). AB is a cipher of a different kind, though still demonstrating the principle of production-out-of-absence: ignored or elided almost as a rule for the better part of a century, she nonetheless achieves her own kind of myth as “a sort of literary Cinderella” (George Moore, quoted in Spark, *The Brontë Letters* 22).

⁶⁶ Shelston, “Biography and the Brontës” 72. His use of the qualifying phrase “in biographical terms” is an example of the pervasive notion that there is a way to “know” a subject outside of the “incidents” and “bundles of facts” that make up biography.

⁶⁷ Spark 21.

⁶⁸ Shorter 131, with a footnote that a proposal of CB’s claim to *WH* is “even more absurd.” Mary Robinson seeks “to deal a death-blow, once and for all, to the absurd supposition that Branwell Brontë wrote ‘Wuthering Heights’.” (CB Letters IV.276) See also editorial comments, CB Letters II.55-56.

rely on interpretation of contextual sources — Brontë’s words “may be taken as final,” but, as Shorter’s protest itself reveals, they may *not* be.

Upon their rapidly successive deaths in 1848 and 1849, Charlotte Brontë was left to confront not only the personal absence of her sisters, but a literary, textual absence that could produce mis/readings (of Anne’s “coarse” *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as well as *Wuthering Heights*), which she considered an insult to her sisters’ memories. Her solution was to become The Editor, mediating on the one hand between readers and abstract textual ciphers (the confounding novels by Ellis and Acton Bell), and on the other between “the public” and the private identities “Emily” and “Anne.” As we saw in the fifth chapter of this thesis, the two projects are intimately connected, not only employing the same interpretative strategies but relying on each other for generation of meaning. While Brontë’s editing of her sisters and their works tends to be read as restrictive, an attempt to control and singularize their reputations to fit her own vision,⁶⁹ I mean to show that her mediation served rather to promote rather than constrain interpretation. Even one of the most famous examples of exercising editorial control to the detriment of literature — the supposed burning of Emily’s second manuscript⁷⁰ — encourages speculation in absence of positive proof. As we saw with Lucy Snowe’s narrative reticence and Cross’s rigorous “pruning” of George Eliot’s *Life*, omission (including censorship) is creative, generating rather than regulating interpretation.

⁶⁹ On CB’s editing: “it is doing no wrong to the dead to suggest, as I think we must, that almost everything Charlotte says about Anne as a writer is misleading” (Visick 355); even in the case of her own poetry, a comparison of poems in ms. with their printed versions “shows how destructive had been the editorial pencil” (Gérin 310). Peters has a typically melodramatic view — “Did the icy fingers of Emily and Anne tap in protest against the windowpane as she ruthlessly determined to suppress all but seven of Anne’s and eighteen of Emily’s poems?” (307) — which is useful for its activation of an editor’s uncanny effect, turning the edited subjects into, in EB’s case, a ghost of her own character.

⁷⁰ cf. Barker 533-34.

The whole performance of Brontë's 1850 editorship only becomes monumental when interpreted in conjunction with the novels, letters, reviews, and biographies (even "absent" texts such as Emily's lost manuscript) which attach to the family — there is no one text which offers a point of origin, no one "builder" of the Brontë edifice that became the Brontë myth. To summon Melchisedec again, I propose that the Emily and Anne of the Biographical Notice are parentless, "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life" — the "true" point of origin for these portraits constantly recedes.

Let us start from the two clearest, most monumental images in the Biographical Notice. First, the dying, defiant Emily:

I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. [...] In Emily's nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, inartificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and a fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero; but she had no worldly wisdom; her powers were unadapted to the practical business of life; she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her most legitimate advantage.

And then Anne:

Anne's character was milder and more subdued; she wanted the power, the first, the originality of her sister, but was well-endowed with quiet virtues of her own. Long-suffering, self-denying, reflective, and intelligent, a constitutional reserve and taciturnity placed and kept her in the shade, and covered her mind, and especially her feelings, with a sort of nun-like veil, which was rarely lifted.⁷¹

If we distill these portraits to the notions of conflict (Emily, in whom "extremes seemed to meet") and reserve (the "quiet virtues" of "nun-like" Anne), we find similar descriptions sent to William Smith Williams even before the incognito had been lifted. "You are not far wrong in your judgment respecting 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey,'" writes "Curren Bell," describing his eccentric brother-author: "Ellis has a strong, original mind, full of strange though sombre power. When he writes

⁷¹ Bio Notice 746.

poetry that power speaks in language at once condensed, elaborated, and refined, but in prose it breaks forth in scenes which shock more than they attract.” Of his other, unnamed brother, he says merely that “‘Agnes Grey’ is the mirror of the mind of the writer,” replicating Acton/Anne’s silence and simplicity.⁷²

It is not, moreover, merely her own previous observations that Charlotte Brontë recycles in the Biographical Notice. Emily’s character, for instance, depends very much on the reviews of *Wuthering Heights*, particularly on their language — they describe the work’s “power,” “vigour,” “ferocity,” and “its dark fascination”; they find it a “harsh,” “primeval,” portrayal of “humanity in this wild state”; it keeps the reader “spellbound,” “fascinated by strange magic.”⁷³ Indeed, in its review of the 1850 edition, the *Examiner* quotes its own early reviews of the Bell novels, noting that “Currer Bell must herself share the reproach, for the language in which she speaks of her sister Emily’s early habits and associations, as explaining what was faulty as well as what was excellent in her writings, does not materially differ from this which has just been quoted.”⁷⁴

While Emily might be seen as the product of conglomeration — extremes meeting, reviewer language wed with sisterly affection — Anne remains a blank. She is not even properly named until the penultimate page, referred to until then by the cipher “Acton Bell” and the shifter “my younger sister.” The veiled-ness and silence that constitutes the portrait of Anne Brontë is a quality which can be traced back to well before the advent of the Bell brothers. In 1834, the teenaged Charlotte Brontë ventriloquized her brother Branwell, under the half-alias “Benjamin Patrick Wiggins” (a double-displacement which is, I think, important to this discussion), in a description of “some people who call themselves akin to me in the shape of three girls”:

⁷² CB Letters II.165 (21 Dec 47).

⁷³ CH-CB, esp. *Britannia* (15 Jan 48) 223-26; *Literary World* (April 1848) 233-34.

⁷⁴ CH-CB 291 (21 Dec 50).

Oh, they are miserable silly creatures not worth talking about. Charlotte's eighteen years old, a broad dumpy thing, whose head does not come higher than my elbow. Emily's sixteen, lean and scant, with a face about the size of a penny, and Anne is nothing, absolutely nothing.⁷⁵

This passage reveals Brontë's long-standing interest in portraying the three sisters as though to outside eyes (and *from* outside eyes), and indicates a consistency in the silence surrounding Anne. Furthermore, the repeated "nothing, absolutely nothing" and the initial dismissal of all three as "not worth talking about" alert us to a quality of absence that informs *both* portraits in the 1850 Notice. Even the vivid Romantic heroine Emily is a negative creation: "I have seen *nothing* like it," "I have *never* seen," "*unsophisticated* culture, *inartificial* tastes, and an *unpretending* outside," "she had *no* worldly wisdom; her powers were *unadapted*," "she would *fail* to defend her most manifest rights."⁷⁶

Instead of fighting the "nothing" produced by her sisters' deaths and their strange novels, Charlotte Brontë *utilizes* absence: she keeps the cipher in play, offering authorized readings of unavailable texts (Emily and Anne) which can either overturn or confirm prior assessments. Thus the *Examiner* uses the 1850 edition to justify its own harsh criticisms, while other Victorian readers such as Peter Bayne believe the biographical image should inflect the novels — the portrait, "vividly drawn of a frail form standing up undaunted in the scowl of death, should be kept before us as we turn to the work left us by Ellis Bell."⁷⁷

Nancy Armstrong claims that in order to "make her sister's novel more readable," Brontë attached the Biographical Notice, presenting a "fatally ill, mentally disturbed, and culturally prim female," *then* the *Wuthering Heights* preface, which

⁷⁵ Quoted in Barker 208.

⁷⁶ Compare the quality of "un-" by which GE describes, through negation, the "really cultured woman" in her "Silly Lady Novelists" essay, as discussed in the sixth chapter of this thesis.

⁷⁷ "Ellis, Acton, and Currer Bell," *Essays in Biography and Criticism* (1857) CH-CB 322.

“transforms these features into those of a creative genius [...]”⁷⁸ I argue that the “readability” of the sisters is accomplished not by offering specific definition or clear guidelines, but rather by using juxtaposition, relation, and uncertainty. Instead of making “the” reading of her sisters more accessible, Brontë kept them empty and fluid enough to allow (and encourage) “more” reading.⁷⁹ Lewes, for instance, took the bait:

Curious enough it is to read *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and remember that the writers were two retiring, solitary, consumptive girls! Books, coarse even for men [...] turn out to be the productions of two girls living almost alone, filling their loneliness with quiet studies, and writing these books from a sense of duty, hating the pictures they drew, yet drawing them with austere conscientiousness!⁸⁰

Although clearly subscribing to the “authorized” version of the domestic, feminine, duty-driven Emily and Anne, these new figures do not in fact “displace their public images as coarse and unseemly women.”⁸¹ Instead, like Bayne, Lewes holds contrasting ideas up for the sake of comparison. The result is not an answer, but further questions: “There is matter here for the moralist or critic to speculate on,” he suggests,⁸² demonstrating another kind of “puff mysterious” in action, stimulating interest through a refusal to conform to expectations.

To conclude this discussion of the Biographical Notice, I offer Brontë’s own closing statement:

I may sum up all by saying, that for strangers they were nothing, for superficial observers less than nothing; but for those who had known them all their lives in the intimacy of close relationship, they were genuinely good and truly great. This notice

⁷⁸ Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* 202. CB “situat[es] her sister’s name in circumstances that might explain away the peculiar discontinuities shaping *Wuthering Heights*,” something “neither the novel itself nor Emily’s pseudonym apparently could.” (“Emily Brontë in and out of her Time” 377)

⁷⁹ Hillis Miller, in his essay on “Repetition and the ‘Uncanny’,” describes how CB’s “layers of prefatory material” function as the interpretational “threshold itself.” The preface to *WH* offers four “incompatible” readings, kicking off a frenzy of interpretation. C. Levine also catches CB in the Bio Notice proposing different versions of the story of the pseudonyms: either the sisters *knew* they were unfeminine, or they were completely innocent of Victorian gender expectations; in any event, CB seems “intent on having it both ways” (“Harmless Pleasure” 276).

⁸⁰ *Leader* (28 Dec 50) CH-CB 292.

⁸¹ Bock, “Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser’s Magazine*” 255.

⁸² CH-CB 292.

has been written, because I felt it a sacred duty to wipe the dust off their gravestones, and leave their dear names free from soil. / CURRER BELL.⁸³

We find here something like the cipher-mathematics of androgyny, where masculine plus feminine equals zero: Brontë “sums up” with an answer of “nothing.” We are also left with a final uncertainty regarding which of “their dear names” are being commemorated, as the text refers to both Emily/Anne and Ellis/Acton. The issue is complicated by the signature “CURRER BELL,” as “he” might be expected to consider the names of his “brothers” more “dear” than those of Charlotte’s sisters.

The choice of pseudonymous signature makes “Charlotte Brontë” a presence everywhere implied but entirely invisible in this text. She lurks inside the “we” and behind the “I”, but the third member of the trio is manifest in name only as “Currer Bell” (who, incidentally, receives the masculine pronoun, as opposed to “[n]either Ellis nor Acton allowed herself for one moment...”). Brontë *does not* “out” herself, as it is the “Biographical Notice of *Ellis* and *Acton* Bell,” but maintains, even if “in name only,” the fiction of the pseudonym. Even to access the name “Charlotte Brontë,” the reader must seek elsewhere than the text on hand.

Nonetheless, the third member of the trio does indeed emerge through the ghostly combination of implication and absence; the autobiographer appears inside the biography. Brontë’s effacement of her own identity is paradoxically her self-affirmation as custodian, caretaker, and mediator. The modesty implicit in the backward step required to introduce Emily and Anne can be read as an opening gambit in what would later become her mythical role: the “victim of duty,” who exists in a holy trinity with the “wild child of genius” and the “quiet, conventional one.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Bio Notice 747.

⁸⁴ Barker offers these three labels, remarking: “What is surprising is that, despite so much activity, the basic ideas about the Brontës’ lives have remained unchanged.” (xvii)

The attempt to pull apart the identities “Editor” and “Author,” or “Biographer” and “Autobiographer,” reveals their intricately woven nature. What is the difference between assembling and creating? How much mediation is required before the result is not faithful to the “original” (authentic, identical) but rather has become itself “original” (new, novel; a fabrication)? How can we determine when a story “by you” becomes a story “about you”? These problems are particularly resonant in the monument which succeeded (and eclipsed) Charlotte Brontë’s Biographical Notice. Gaskell’s *Life* is a contested site, offering conflicts between biography and autobiography, between verifiable fact (assemblage of biographical incident) and narrative fiction (the “truth” of selfhood that requires movement beyond the “bundle of facts”), and between two authors (one being memorialized, the other memorializing).⁸⁵ It also enacts the conflicts within a single author: it is, as we shall see, the space in which Gaskell shadow-boxes with her own gossiping fabrications of seven years previous.

Recent critics such as Gabriele Helms identify in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* a story as much “about” Gaskell as “by” Gaskell — proof that the “Berlin Wall” separating the supposedly distinct genres of fiction, biography, and autobiography “not only has breaches, it has actually collapsed.”⁸⁶ As is frequently the case, there is a Victorian critic who “got there first” — E.S. Dallas’ 1857 review in *Blackwood’s* readily identifies the “biographer-persona” and questions her intentions:

If we do Mrs. Gaskell any injustice, we ask her pardon, and we dare say that in reality she is very different from the author of these volumes, who appears in the character of a shallow, showy woman, fond of her own prattle, and less intent on describing Currer Bell (even if it be by saying that she is “half a head shorter than I am”), than on speaking

⁸⁵ Even this relationship is hardly uni-directional, as the *Life* “became another text, the last work by Charlotte Brontë” (Shattock 10). Similarly, “[i]n many cases Brontë biography has become a kind of posthumous novel” (Frank 142) — it seems CB managed to colonize Gaskell’s text from the grave.

⁸⁶ Helms 339. She is less worried about “blurred boundaries, unclear definitions, and questionable genre distinctions” than the presence and influence of the “biographer-persona.” She also notes the opposite movement — autobiography necessarily turns into biography through the othering of the “I” (343ff.).

of “myself,” “my husband,” “our little girls,” “an aunt of mine,” “a friend of mine,” “a visit I paid,” “a letter I received,” “what I partly knew,” and “what my feelings were.”⁸⁷

Gaskell’s “I” is, indeed, at times strikingly present in the work. As early as the title page we can see a sort of battle between biographer and subject, who share the designation “author”: “THE LIFE / OF / CHARLOTTE BRONTË / Author of / ‘Jane Eyre’, ‘Shirley’, ‘Villette,’ &c. / by / E.C. GASKELL, / Author of ‘Mary Barton’, ‘Ruth’, &c.”⁸⁸

There is another, invisible “I” which the biographer both depends upon and necessarily excises in her pursuit of an accurate *Life*. Dallas brushes up against this phantom presence when he suggests that Gaskell’s (quintessentially feminine) “talent for personal discourse and familiar narrative” is not “properly controlled,” and thus “degenerates into a social nuisance” — in short, she is “a gossip and a gad-about.”⁸⁹ While Dallas admits that the woman “in reality” may be different from the author’s “character” who appears in the text, his distinction is destabilized by a third Gaskell: “Lily,” whose gossiping with the Winkworth/Shaen sisters “Mrs. Gaskell” was hired to control and counteract.

An article on Brontë was published in *Sharpe’s London Magazine* for June 1855; Ellen Nussey, finding it full of “misrepresentations” and “malignant falsehoods,” wrote to her fellow Brontë survivors at the Haworth Parsonage suggesting “refutations” for such fabrications. She proposed they ask “Mrs. Gaskell to undertake this just and honourable defence,” as she “is in every way capable, [...] and would give a sound castigation to the writer.”⁹⁰ However, as Barker notes almost gleefully, “[t]he great irony — and one that has passed unrecognized to the present

⁸⁷ Dallas, “Curren Bell” 78. Thanks to what is either fantastic coincidence or fantastically clever manipulation on the part of a canner-than-he-let-on John Blackwood, Dallas’ piece on “Charlotte Brontë, better known as Curren Bell,” follows on directly from the opening chapters of the third and final “Scene of Clerical Life” by the yet-unknown GE.

⁸⁸ In “‘Bookmaking out of the Remains of the Dead’: Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*,” Deirdre D’Albertis suggests that the Gaskell is in fact “in competition” with her subject.

⁸⁹ Dallas 77.

⁹⁰ Ellen Nussey to ABN (6 June 55) CB Letters IV.189.

day — is that Mrs. Gaskell was actually responsible for the article, which quoted extensively from the two letters she had written from the Lake District in 1850 after her first meeting with Charlotte.”⁹¹

Gossip is ghostly — there is no visible trace between “the writer” Ellen wishes to see castigated and the chattering “Lily.” Thus, Patrick Brontë engages Gaskell, as an “established author,” to refute her own prior testimony. His formal request includes, crucially: “I should expect and request that you would affix your name, so that the work might obtain a wide circulation and be handed down to the latest times.”⁹² Between the “gad-about” biographer-persona and the invisible gossiping Lily, stands the formidable “Mrs. Gaskell,” whose *name* on a title page (“E. C. Gaskell, Author of...”) guarantees not only fame but authenticity. The author-character’s “I” is doubly a ghost — a fictionalized identity of a “real” author who is yet distinct from another “real” identity.

Lessons from Bio-Criticism: How to Read Art as Life

I want now to examine the biographical and literary practices which inform each other, and which inform and are informed by the names that survive on the title pages — “Charlotte Brontë” and “George Eliot” — as well as the names that these names eclipse — “Currer Bell” and “Marian Evans Lewes,” “Charlotte, Wife” and “Mary Ann Cross.” Put another way, the novels teach us how to read the title pages, and the title pages teach us how to read the novels. Turning first to the different ways auto/biography interacts with the works of Brontë and Eliot, I propose a simplified

⁹¹ These letters in turn were informed by “Lady Kay Shuttleworth’s gossip, itself drawn from the only servant ever to be dismissed from the Brontë household.” (Barker 780-81)

⁹² CB Letters IV.190-91.

but useful distinction: each Brontë novel suggests an autobiographical reading, whereas Eliot's "life story" is found *across* rather than *within* her works.

This distinction in turn relies on critical modes proposed by the respective authors — a circular referentiality that absolves me of the crime of proposing an origin for these ways of reading. The "influence" Brontë detects "when authors write best" promotes her texts as unmediated personal experience, suggesting that each is a free-standing autobiographical document. Eliot's realism, on the other hand, strives for a "complete" view of life and requires the composite telescope/microscope lens of *Middlemarch*, encouraging us to read both within and across her works to locate the "real" author. Although the methods by which they are read into existence may be entirely different, the "selves" of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot created by bio-criticism are equally ghostly — each is a product of the inescapable relation between literary and biographical texts, and each "taught" her creators how to create her.

To begin with Charlotte Brontë, bio-critical practice appears to have a pervasive interest in the *unity* of her character: "she was the same Charlotte who had written more than fifteen years before"; "[t]he acclaimed author of *Jane Eyre* was still at heart the same girl who had once written, 'I'm just going to write because I cannot help it'"; "[d]espite appearances, Arthur Bell Nicholls was of the same stamp as all the men who had haunted Brontë's fantasies and dominated her experience."⁹³ Likewise, this unity is reflected in critical appraisals of her work ("in one way or another, each of her novels is a different version of the same 'truth'"⁹⁴) and in the conflation of fictional and biographical narratives, as "[a]stute readers read Gaskell's

⁹³ Gérin 526, Barker 547, Moglen 232-33. Peters, as an exception, bases her work on what she sees as CB's "internal conflicts, ambivalent drives that warred within her, never allowing her to rest" (xiv).

⁹⁴ Ewbank 170-71.

Life in conjunction with the novels, moving easily between the two.”⁹⁵ Indeed, John Skelton, reviewing for *Fraser’s* in May 1857, suggests that “[w]hen you read her life, you read *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette*, in fragments.”⁹⁶

While Skelton, in all his supposed Victorian primitiveness,⁹⁷ admits that the transition between novel and biography will never be perfectly smooth because “between lies the mystery of genius,” more “enlightened” modern biographers have attempted seamless blendings. They use the Lowood sections of *Jane Eyre* for descriptions of Cowan Bridge school, and *Villette* as a travel guide to Brontë’s Brussels.⁹⁸ Gérin suggests that if the “dream” of a marriage with George Smith “was ever clearly expressed, [it] has been deleted from all records, unless it is hidden in the pages of *Villette*.”⁹⁹ This promise of an invisible “real” love-plot tied to the imaginary, aborted love-plot (with John Graham Bretton) is one of the many ways in which absences become less like holes and more like tiny, insidious fibers knitting both kinds of text together — their very invisibility makes them impossible to eradicate.

The ease of movement between fictional and biographical narratives, I suggest, is not the province only of “astute” readers, but is a requisite shuttling back and forth through the vacancies inherent to language. Even those biographers who set out intentionally to avoid — if possible, to eradicate — these connections fail in the face of the monumental, ineluctable, *undetected* presence of the Brontë myth.

⁹⁵ Shattock 11. See also Showalter, on Gaskell’s “myth of the novelist as tragic heroine,” “for which readers had been prepared by reading *Jane Eyre*.” (106)

⁹⁶ *Fraser’s* (May 1857) CH-CB 332. cf. Stephen: “the study of her life is the study of her novels.” (7)

⁹⁷ Karl, “Contemporary Biographies of Nineteenth-Century Novelists,” claims that “novelistic” practices may be “a Victorian conceit, but not the way contemporary biography proceeds.” (539)

⁹⁸ Brontë biography is “marked by the intensity of its practitioners’ commitment to their subject and their inveterate wilfulness in their assessment of evidence” (Shelston 67). Peters, especially, is not only “casual with her facts,” but “embarrassingly effusive” in her prose; her “heavily dramatic emphasis” is “not simply distasteful; in biography it leads to a disastrous blurring of the line between fact and fiction.” (68) I agree that *Unquiet Soul* is one of the very silliest of CB biographies, but such criticism makes me suspect that our discomfort with Peters’ work is evidence of the anxiety produced through category crisis: we want an (impossibly) clear line between “reality” and fiction.

⁹⁹ Gérin 483. This is suspiciously similar to Hardy’s reading of disruptive, imagined “ghost plots” in GE’s realism — proof that something like the opposite is true: “real” life plots ghost their way into fiction.

Barker, the most self-declaredly iconoclastic of Brontë biographers, calls the association of lives with works “fanatical,” “irrelevant,” and “peculiar,”¹⁰⁰ but despite her careful “iffing” she repeatedly affirms the links: “If the character of St. John Rivers is also drawn from that of Henry Nussey, then Charlotte was indeed wise not to marry him”; “If Charlotte’s experience reflected that of Lucy Snowe, it was not an altogether happy one”; and so on.¹⁰¹

I propose that this enduring view of a single, transcendental Brontë repeatedly manifested in her heroines, or “avatars,” is a committed belief in the “author-as-character” which Scott played with in his Prefaces (discussed in the second chapter of this thesis). As Dallas asked in 1857, “How was this humdrum little creature — this Frances Henri, this Lucy Snowe, this Jane Eyre, this Charlotte Brontë — raised into a heroine of romance?”¹⁰² In order to become a character so vivid that readers can always discover her, no matter how she dresses herself up, Brontë must forfeit her claim to “reality” and join the ranks of fiction, where, paradoxically, she can be “believed” in.¹⁰³

Furthermore, the “dying” of the “real” Brontë into the author-character Brontë — the ghosting of each by the other — does not depend for its activation on either Gaskell’s *Life* or her pseudonymity. Mary Taylor (a friend for whom Currer Bell was by no means a “Great Unknown”) writes to Brontë in 1848 after having read *Jane Eyre*: “I begin to believe in your existence as much as I do in Mr. Rochester’s. In a believing mood I don’t doubt either of them.”¹⁰⁴ This entanglement of “real” and fictional identities is both peculiar to the case of Brontë (in its intensity), and general

¹⁰⁰ Barker xix.

¹⁰¹ Barker 302, 425. Tillotson’s benchmark *Novels of the 1840s* claims as a rule to be interested in “novels” not “novelists”: except in the case of *JE*, where “the concurrence of events is important.” (267)

¹⁰² Dallas 92.

¹⁰³ Auerbach attempts to distinguish a “contemporary myth of stardom,” based on the “creator,” from the Victorian “immortality” of the character. She claims of 20th-century celebrity: “[a]s the actress in her own person is transfigured into a star, no longer needing the magic of character to consecrate her, so, too, is the writer.” (226) Her example, the pseudonymous Marilyn Monroe, is (in)felicitous.

¹⁰⁴ CB Letters II.235.

to the case of published authorship. The difference, again, is of degree and not kind — the category-crossing accomplished by authorship defies us to draw clean lines.

In contrast, the critical practice surrounding George Eliot has a long history of identifying the dividing lines in her work. In 1876, the *Gentlemen's Magazine* declared that “[f]or our own immediate selves, there is all the difference in the world between *Daniel Deronda* and *The Mill on the Floss* that lies between Now and Once Upon a Time.”¹⁰⁵ This opinion seems to have a longevity comparable to the autobiographical readings of Charlotte Brontë, as it is verified over a century later by Alexander Welsh: “There really does appear to be an early and a late George Eliot, marked by *Romola* and the two stories that preceded it.”¹⁰⁶ Eliot herself offers testimony in support of a “broken” canon on numerous occasions; for instance, she observes to Alexander Main, regarding his newly published compilation of aphorisms from her work:

In one sense the book is marvellously new to me — since I had forgotten the greater part of what I had written. In another sense it is rather startlingly familiar — namely, that I find my old self (meaning my past self) very much like my present self. If there is any progress I fear it is downhill.¹⁰⁷

This expression of a divided self — here a gap achieved by time and forgetting — is further emphasized by Eliot’s famous understanding of authorship itself as alienation. As she wrote to John Blackwood in February 1861, while juggling the writing of both *Romola* and *Silas Marner*:

I like my writings to appear in the order in which they are written, because they belong to successive mental phases, and when they are a year behind me, I can no longer feel that thorough identification with them which gives zest to the sense of authorship. I generally like them better at that distance, but then, I feel as if they might just as well have been written by somebody else.¹⁰⁸

What this dividedness and authorial Othering ultimately accomplishes is not a detachment of the person (the self, “ego”) from the work. Instead, I argue, it affirms a

¹⁰⁵ CH-GE 394.

¹⁰⁶ Welsh 169; the preceding stories were *Silas Marner* and “Brother Jacob.”

¹⁰⁷ GE Letters V.289 (28 Dec 71). Main’s collection was *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse*, published by Blackwood, Dec 1871.

¹⁰⁸ GE Letters III.382-83 (24 Feb 61).

specifically biographical connection: the attempt to categorize Eliot's work encourages a reading of her canon as a life-story. The almost universal identification of *Romola* as the breaking point is especially revealing, as it is bolstered by referring to Eliot's claim that "I started it a young woman and finished it an old one,"¹⁰⁹ thereby matching the "narrative" of her canon not only to authorial but to personal development. We find in Eliot's protestations of divided works and divided selves that she is very definitely not talking about the alienation of schizophrenia, but rather about the distance necessary to a narrative of development (even if that development, as she so modestly claims, is "downhill").

George Eliot's resistance to biography — which, we recall, she considered "odious," a "disgrace" pandering to "gossiping amusement of people too idle to re-read [an author's] books" — is not resistance to bio-critical practice, but precisely the opposite. In disparaging biography as a specific, distinct genre she is actually promoting the idea that a reader can, in fact *should*, look to an author's works to discover the "successive mental phases" which they are product of and evidence for. By the end of her life Eliot was routinely refusing to offer any kind of biographical information for publication,¹¹⁰ but what she denies with one hand she gives with the other: "It seems to me that just my works and the order in which they have appeared is what the part of the public which cares about me may most usefully know," she writes by way of refusal to the *American Cyclopaedia*.¹¹¹

Eliot's stance may very well be explained away as a function of her scandalous "non-wife" situation, but putting biographical resistance down to the management of the "Mrs. Lewes" issue is as over-simplifying as it is important.

¹⁰⁹ e.g., Welsh 169. Whether the break is "real" or not *Romola* deserves an examination as a third-term novel because it is so universally *understood* to be an anomaly, situated in a breach.

¹¹⁰ As a result the entries on "George Eliot" in the 7th-9th editions (1868-75) of *Men of the Times* are full of fabrications (GE Letters VI.68-69).

¹¹¹ GE Letters VI.68 (15 July 74).

While the situations are related to each other, they are also both related to a larger issue of control — specifically, the attempt to control the necessarily unruly business of interpretation. As Eliot explains to Haim Guedalla, who is seeking to publish a letter she wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle*, even the casual words of a “public person,” once put into print “are copied, served up in a work of commentary, misinterpreted, misquoted, and made matter of gossip for the emptiest minds.” Therefore, allowing the publication of her letter would be “stepping out of my proper function and acting for what I think an evil result.”¹¹² While she may not approve of this freedom in interpretation, she recognizes that it is not within her power to control the reading of a text; her “proper function” is to control the availability of that text.

When Elma Stuart asks permission to include George Eliot in her memoirs, Eliot allows her to include the influence of her work alone: “My writings are public property,” she admits, “it is only myself apart from my writings that I hold private, and claim a veto about as topic.”¹¹³ The power to veto — to control through refusal and negation — is only available so long as there is a self present to apply that control. In contrast, absence allows meaning to proliferate: the absence of those “emptiest minds,” the absence of a cipher (the text “George Eliot,” the text *Middlemarch*), and ultimately, the final absence achieved by the death of that vetoing self. It is noteworthy that in her refusal to the *American Cyclopaedia* Eliot is opposed to “the system of *contemporary* biography”¹¹⁴ — exercise ye vetoes while ye may, for when the “private self” is gone only the (public) texts will remain.

Thus we see that Eliot’s statements which seem on the surface to be expressions of belief in an intrinsically divided self (public vs. private, authorial vs. personal) actually reveal a concession to bio-critical practice. Her insistence that biography-

¹¹² GE Letters VI.289 (2 Oct 76).

¹¹³ GE Letters VI.167 (2 Sep 75).

¹¹⁴ GE Letters VI.67, emphasis original.

hunters confine themselves to her works might even be read as a *guarantee* that there is a definite “self” available therein — particularly a self whose “successive phases” can be traced in “the order in which they have appeared.” Although any given George Eliot novel will resist autobiographical interpretation, the novels taken together as a canon are “read” as a narrative of development, both artistically and personally.

A rough sketch of the Eliot life story as interpreted by the Eliot canon might run as follows:¹¹⁵ the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, with its explicitly masculine narrator, is the first attempt of a writer new to fiction, fresh from condemning “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” and test-driving her male pseudonym; “The Lifted Veil,” an unusual first-person narration expressing pessimism and discontent with the lifting of veils and the prying into private minds, is the product of a post-Liggins disillusionment; *Silas Marner* explores a now-successful author’s concern with the value of money over personal connections; the peculiar discontents of *Romola*, including its traitorous, lucrative publication by Smith, Elder rather than Blackwood, come from the disruptions of a newly “outed” pseudonym managing both identities; “Brother Jacob” springs from the anxiety of an estranged sister who has converted her family “treasure” into art (in the recognizable Evans portraits of *Adam Bede* as well as the more personal *Mill on the Floss*); *Middlemarch*, famously described by Woolf as a novel for grown-ups, is the accomplishment of a fully mature author, with both Casaubons shifting to accommodate both Leweses, portraying the devotion, complication, and humor of a long-standing marriage;¹¹⁶ and the return to masculine narrator in *Theophrastus Such*

¹¹⁵ The following readings are borrowed from biographer-critics including, primarily, Welsh, Bodenheimer, and Beer.

¹¹⁶ GHJ calls GE “Mrs. Casaubon” in letters to JB, and claims “the shadow of old Casaubon hangs over me” as he tries to finish his ““Key to All Psychologies.” “Surely Dorothea is the very cream of lovely womanhood?” he asks. “She is more like her creator than any one else and more so than any other of her creations.” (GE Letters V.291, 308). GE writes to Harriet Beecher Stowe that she is *not* the Dorothea of her marriage, but “I fear that the Casaubon-tints are not quite foreign to my own mental complexion.” (V.322) cf. *Homans* 183.

brings the canon full circle precisely at the end of a writing life.

Even *The Mill on the Floss* — a piece of “explicitly autobiographical fiction,” “the novel most visibly close to George Eliot’s life,” which readers such as Oliphant found truer to life than Cross’s biography¹¹⁷ — is significant for its moment in time and sequence. It was written at the height of the crises provoked by attempting to manage the fictional names “George Eliot” and “Marian Lewes” — as the latter was rejected and disowned by Isaac Evans, the author’s resulting feelings of betrayal, loss, and nostalgia transform the Evans siblings into the Tulliver siblings.

While I do not necessarily subscribe to any of the individual readings outlined above, it is important to recognize how the autobiographical George Eliot emerges from the relation of life and art. A “realist” picture of the self depends not upon singularization but an incorporation of difference and the judicious regulation of viewpoint. The autobiographical Eliot can be discovered, that is, if her reader applies the very techniques she recommends in her fictions. The result is a figure who is implicit but invisible, as everywhere and nowhere as her own narrators, as pervasive but insubstantial as the mythical Brontë.

Lessons From Title Pages: How to Read the Author’s Name

In conclusion, I want to propose a way of reading title pages that will support, and is supported by, the quality of “afterlife” experienced by each of these two authors. The names which have been commemorated by literary history — “Charlotte Brontë” and “George Eliot” — were each selected out of several possible options, and each choice

¹¹⁷ Auerbach 183; Hardy, *Particularities* 58; Mangum 174.

was made in the total absence of the author.¹¹⁸ I suggest that although the selection was inevitable, it was not incidental. “Charlotte Brontë” suits a reading of “the Author of *Jane Eyre*” as a *character*, a singular presence identifiable in both art and life, the production of an imposing but inexplicable, transcendental “influence”: it is the “true,” unmediated name buried under the additions “Currer Bell” and “Mrs. Nicholls.” Meanwhile, “George Eliot” is suited to a reading of “the Author of *Middlemarch*” as an *author*, whose life is not told within her books but rather *in the writing of* her books: it is the name invented for the sake of an authorial existence, and it implies intercession, encouraging the consideration of alternatives, of “the larger picture.”

I want to begin a discussion of the relation between name and afterlife by investigating the “emptiness” and “fullness” of the specific ciphers “George Eliot” and “Charlotte Brontë.” The former is a “quiet and neutral”¹¹⁹ name; its ordinariness makes it “mouth-filling” yet empties it of association; its fictionality severs any possibility of familial relations and allows it to stand entirely alone. Simultaneously, however, it is a “remarkable amalgam”¹²⁰ of various Mary Anns and Marians. “Brontë,” on the other hand, is almost certainly the most family-fraught name in English literature. “Charlotte Brontë” signifies “the Author of *Jane Eyre*” as a uniquely identifiable character, while at the same time prompts us to recall that it is “the charm of the name of Brontë lies in the associated genius of the whole family, and is not concentrated in one individual.”

Wise and Symington offer this platitude in their introduction to the volumes of letters which “are designed to give a complete history of the lives of the Brontë family

¹¹⁸ For example, it would be intriguing, if unproductive, to speculate on how CB would “feel” about being known universally as “Charlotte Brontë.” Similarly, GE and GHJ spent a good deal of ink “killing off” Marian Evans, who is enjoying a long and happy afterlife, if only in brackets.

¹¹⁹ Harris, “The Names of George Eliot” 29.

¹²⁰ G. Levine, *Cambridge Companion* 5.

of Haworth.”¹²¹ The question of “completeness” in regards to portrayals of Charlotte Brontë is variously answered: Gérin justifies her individual biography with the claim that “[n]o serious attempt has been made in recent years to present her *whole*,”¹²² while others subscribe to Kathleen Tillotson’s belief in “an essential truth about the Brontës which too much subsequent criticism has lost sight of: the literary interdependence of the family.”¹²³ While it would be impossible to write the story of Charlotte Brontë’s life — or the story of her novels — without including her family, the issue of wholeness cuts both ways: if an individual biography, such as Gaskell’s *Life*, forces Charlotte Brontë into an unnatural starring role,¹²⁴ the juxtaposition of Brontë with Brontë is equally productive of a novelistic narrative. For instance, the relations and contrasts of the family are crucial to Peters’ *Unquiet Soul*, perhaps the most novelistic of all Brontë biographies. In snapshot, during Branwell’s downward slide, each family member plays his or her myth-assigned role: “Papa indulgently forgave him, gentle Anne prayed seriously for his soul, Emily calmly dragged him upstairs in her strong arms when he staggered home drunk from the Bull, but Charlotte recoiled in scorn and fury. In doing so, she of course sent him down faster to destruction.”¹²⁵

Since the first Victorian reviewers of the Bells’ *Poems*, critics have used comparisons of the three published Brontës in order to categorize their works. Juxtaposition, as we have seen, is not used merely to define categories, but rather to create narrative. Sydney Dobell persistently argued the unity of the three, claiming to

¹²¹ CB Letters I.viii, vii.

¹²² Gérin xiv, emphasis original. Gérin has also written individual biographies of AB (1959), BB (1961), and EB (1971), but despite this consistently individual focus, hers is a very specific view of CB’s “wholeness”: she reads “Phisis” [sic; “phthisis”] on CB’s death certificate as “uniting her thus, as if proof of any closer ties were needed, with the sisters and brother who had gone before, and of whose lives her own was an integral part; bone of their one, flesh of their flesh, soul of their soul.” (566)

¹²³ Tillotson 263.

¹²⁴ Shelston notes that, for instance, in an AB biography CB is reduced to supporting role, and thus “appears in a distinctly unfavourable light,” though the same traits in her own biography will look like evidence for the difficulty of her position: “the biographer’s — and the reader’s — instinctive sympathy for the central character leads, one suspects, to an inevitable shift in the interpretative stance.” (70)

¹²⁵ Peters 163.

be able to read the novels as a story of a single mind's progression, from *Wuthering Heights* to *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, then *Jane Eyre*, and finally *Shirley*.¹²⁶ The narrative of the Brontë family which produces the mythical Brontë sisters is made stronger by consideration of the three sisters *as three* (giving Charlotte her role as survivor and martyr-to-duty), as well as by the inclusion of Branwell, squanderer of genius, and Patrick, eccentric and distant *paterfamilias*. The individual and interdependent myths each have their monuments: Gaskell wrote *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which includes her original memorial stone, identifying her as "Adjoining."

The name of "the Author of *Jane Eyre*" is undeniably singular ("Charlotte") and indisputably relative ("Brontë"), and it tells the narrative of the character authorized by bio-criticism. "Currer Bell," though retaining connections to Ellis and Acton, would remove Branwell and Patrick, not to mention the lost mother Maria, and the tragic sisters Maria and Elizabeth. "Charlotte Nicholls" would sever all ties except that to her husband Arthur Nicholls, a figure with whom the bio-critical narrative is distinctly uncomfortable. Thus we can read the afterlife of Charlotte Brontë through the cipher "Charlotte Brontë," paradoxically individual and incomplete, endlessly interpretable and generative. This is also the narrative "Charlotte Brontë" — the story of the triumph over Currer Bell, mask, and Charlotte Nicholls, wife, by the originary, transcendental self, as manifested most "truly" in the creations *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

The narrative "George Eliot," on the other hand, reads in the opposite direction: the transcendental identity is not produced by returning to the authentic, but by progressing to the authorial. Charlotte Brontë is what remains when the carapace is

¹²⁶ *Palladium* (Sep 1850) CH-CB 277-83. Note his use of a GE-like composite lens, a further indication of how fundamentally similar bio-critical interpretation is, even when the results appear at such odds.

stripped away; George Eliot is what results from a surplus of colliding identities.¹²⁷ Whether or not Eliot can be said to have had “more” identities than Brontë, or than any given person, she *did* have a whole “galaxy of new names”¹²⁸ by which those identities can be labeled. Ruth Harris, for instance, counts seventeen names that Eliot “chose or was given,” some of which “were chose for her because people wanted to define her own capacity for change.”¹²⁹ “There is so much that I want to do every day — I had need to cut myself into four women,” Eliot complains to Charles Bray in a letter detailing the duties of four distinct people: a discussion of Bray’s personal troubles in Coventry and his wife’s new publication (a role for “Pollian” or “Marian,” as she was known when she met and lived with the Brays); her mothering of “our big boy Charley” (this is the “Mutter” of Lewes’s sons); the letting of their house (“Mrs. Lewes”); and the reviews of *Mill on the Floss* (“George Eliot”).¹³⁰ Even within “George Eliot”, there are more names and more divisions: “[w]ith Maggie’s infatuation for Stephen Guest, the Charlotte Brontë in George Eliot had taken over from the Jane Austen with a vengeance.”¹³¹

Ideally for bio-criticism, the many names of “the Author of *Middlemarch*” can not only be read into narratives of life and narratives of art, but into a narrative *between* life and art, the systole and diastole through which the autobiographical George Eliot emerges from her canon. Gillian Beer proposes, albeit cautiously:

¹²⁷ “‘George Eliot’ retains its singular power to identify both the person and the writer. Exactly because it is an assumed name, it brings into play the odd quality of a life that could develop its great capacities only under the cover of partly fictional social roles.” (Bodenheimer, “A Woman of Many Names” 20) The original rationale for pseudonymity was not “fear” but a wish to separate “the body of intellectual work” from “the new and risky creative venture of novel writing. If George Eliot fails, Marian Evans remains intact.” (Beer, *George Eliot* 21) Marian Evans “the critic became the sibylline Madonna of the Priory and of England itself, as George Eliot was formed out of the mistakes of Mary Ann Evans.” (Auerbach 183)

¹²⁸ Beer, *George Eliot* 10.

¹²⁹ Harris 25.

¹³⁰ GE Letters III.323-24 (14 July 60).

¹³¹ Carroll CH-GE 13. He is paraphrasing the *Saturday Review* on *AB*, who detected a “third” authoress to match with, and contrast to, “Miss Austen” and “Miss Brontë” (114-15) Carroll simplifies the comparison *between* to a comparison *within*, in what I believe is the tendency of bio-criticism towards the divided GE. See also Showalter 103-04.

It would be possible to read the relationship between George Eliot's life and work in this style: Mary Ann Evans, the rebel against her father's religious views; Marian Evans, the free-thinking and free-living literary journalist, the independent woman who had friendships with widely various men; Marian Lewes, Polly, Madonna, the lover of a married man who shared a life with him until his death and then married a man almost twenty years her junior, — yet the judiciously conservative writer, George Eliot.¹³²

It is the very conservatism of George Eliot, as a writer and as a name, which, paradoxically, is read as an indication of the considerable fractures between the personalities “beneath” it. Its ordinary, “good, mouth-filling” quality is important, its sobriety and solidity are read as a “wish to occupy some more quiet and neutral place”¹³³ — “more” quiet than that is, than the conflicted world of Evans vs. Lewes. We need only look to the words of a prior Great Unknown, however, for an example of the trouble in finding a “neutral” name. “The Author of *Waverley*” mocked such an attempt in claiming for his titular character “an uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil, excepting what the reader shall be hereafter pleased to affix to it.”¹³⁴ Indeed, every name *is* uncontaminated if we remove what the reader affixes to it, but a word has no “white shield” existence prior to its associations, nor can those associations be whitewashed — would Edward Waverley be read as so wavering a character if his name did not immediately, inevitably suggest it?

“‘George Eliot’ was name without person,” writes Beer. “It emptied her text of context, making it speak within the terms of its own statements and representations.” And yet that “space was not quite cleansed,” she admits, reciting the litany of “George Eliot’s” associations: from George Henry Lewes to George Sand to Jane Eyre’s incognito “Jane Elliott.” Beer also enacts Scott’s vision of a reader

¹³² Beer, *George Eliot* 7.

¹³³ Harris 29. GE was “a solid masculine name with no nonsense about it, and no inner meaning for Mary Ann other than to overcome male prejudice and shield her from scandal-mongers” (Bonham-Carter 110).

¹³⁴ Scott, *Waverley* 3.

affixing howsoever she pleases, as she spells “Eliot” backwards into “toile,” matching her own interest in the webs and weavings of the novels.¹³⁵

The survival of the pseudonym also ensures the survival of what I previously argued is the closest we have to a “mythical George Eliot”: the masculine name inevitably suggests a “man-womanly and woman-manly” author. This “significant and mysterious sexual ambiguity”¹³⁶ provokes and is provoked by a debate about “the woman question” in Eliot’s works and around Eliot herself, both of which seem to reject easy feminist readings. On the one hand, it is argued that using her female identity to promote a specifically female political agenda would undermine her artistic “universality” project.¹³⁷ Thus we have interpretations which preserve a sense of Eliot’s masculinity, or at least non-femininity: “She despised what she called ‘silly novels by lady novelists’,” Sutherland notes, “and she was damned if she was going to be a lady novelist.”¹³⁸ The 1994 BBC production of *Middlemarch*, accused of having a “soap-operaish quality” and revealing Eliot to be the “godmother of ‘Neighbors’,” provokes a similar response from Ellen Bayuk Rosenman: “This is Eliot’s worst nightmare: to have her writing gendered feminine and absorbed into popular culture, a silly novel by a lady novelist.”¹³⁹

On the other hand, there are plenty of efforts to “recuperate” Eliot as a feminist, in spite of her ambivalent position on hallmark issues such as women’s suffrage. Refuting the suggestion that she qualified only under Derrida’s definition (“the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man”), Sherri Catherine Smith chooses instead to redefine “feminist” to encompass the unruly George Eliot:

¹³⁵ Beer, *George Eliot* 22. Hirsch says GE did not try very hard to disguise herself, as “the name ‘George’ itself should have given the more cosmopolitan readers a nudge in the direction of ‘George Sand’” (91).

¹³⁶ Carroll, “George Eliot: The Sibyl of Mercia” 14.

¹³⁷ Easley, “Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s” 155.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Feedland, “What’s in a pseudonym?”

¹³⁹ Rosenman, “More Stories about Clothing and Furniture: Realism and Bad Commodities” 57.

feminism cannot be considered simply the binary opposite of masculinity, which itself has a “lack of fixity and unity as a cultural and historical product.”¹⁴⁰ In their determination to rescue Eliot for the side of the good, feminist critics sometimes display tinges of desperation — “Evans’s anger demonstrates itself as ‘Eliot’ portrays the main male characters of *Middlemarch* as moral weaklings and repeatedly manipulates her plot to extract vengeance on them,” maintains Patricia Lorimer Lundberg. She examines these “nasty events,” all of which “unfold directly or indirectly at the hands of a submissive woman created by Mary Ann Evans, alias ‘George Eliot’, alias Pollian, the Angel of Destruction.” Even so apparently minor a character as Bulstrode’s housekeeper is implicated in the gender war, as with the death of Raffles, Mrs. Able becomes “(Able to Kill?).”¹⁴¹

Regardless of any “true” feminist status, George Eliot’s ambiguous name fits nicely the critical narrative of George Eliot’s literary reputation. Upon her death, argues Shattock, Cross’s “masculine model of the writing life” caused “a kind of collective resentment” in her female contemporaries because it was “a model that their own circumstances made impossible.”¹⁴² Therefore, as Showalter explores in “The Greening of Sister George,” Eliot had to be “resurrected” into a twentieth-century female canon; it took no small effort from a community of women writers (including, perhaps most importantly, Virginia Woolf) to achieve her transition from resented, masculine “mother” to accepted “sister”¹⁴³ — efforts perhaps complicated ever so slightly by the fact that it was a “George” being resuscitated.

What I mean to suggest by all of this is that the conscientiously ordinary, “empty” cipher “George Eliot” does not neutralize, but rather activates speculation and

¹⁴⁰ S.C. Smith, “George Eliot, Straight Drag and the Masculine Investments of Feminism” 98, 106.

¹⁴¹ Lundberg, “George Eliot: Mary Ann Evans’s Subversive Tool in *Middlemarch*” 272-76.

¹⁴² Shattock 17.

¹⁴³ Showalter, “The Greening of Sister George” 298-99.

produces mythologies. Moreover, the narrative “George Eliot” is *not* the story of a “writing self” that eliminated the contrasts between “the not always harmonious selves of Mary Ann Cross, Marian Evans, Marian Lewes, and even Mrs. John W. Cross.”¹⁴⁴ It is the story of a “writing self” that activates such incompatibilities, acknowledging but regulating their differences to achieve a varying and thus faithful view of “reality.” And indeed, what name would be better suited to “the Author of *Middlemarch*”?

Conclusion

1st Gent. Why did George Eliot live and Currer Bell die?

2nd Gent. And what happened to Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Nicholls?

Like murderers to the scene of our crime, we return yet again to the gravestones — one in Highgate Cemetery, one in Gaskell’s biography — memorials to the dead bodies of “Charlotte, Wife” and “Mary Ann Cross,” whose names did not linger in following those bodies but, like the mythical Emily Brontë, “made haste to leave us.” If we seem to be caught in the orbit of these monuments, it is because they are the boundary in question: they are epitaphs for the two women but epigraphs to the story of their afterlives. They are *the* “space of possibility,” *the* “border or line of flight” of haecceity — ideally situated in absence (graveyard and text), they are the place where everything happens.¹⁴⁵

It is particularly fitting to acknowledge the role which gravestones play in the lives (and deaths) of the Authors of *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch*, as we find them marking spaces of productive absence in their texts as well. After nine chapters of

¹⁴⁴ Redinger 3.

¹⁴⁵ cf. Hillis Miller’s on *WH* — “a dreadful collection of memoranda,” full of the “coinages” of Catherine’s absence. The drive to trace the line of mediation, “from the reader-critic to Charlotte Brontë to Emily Brontë to that pseudonymous author ‘Ellis Bell’ to Lockwood to Nelly to Heathcliff to Cathy,” is a necrophilic desire to dig up the graves and seek their occupants “wherever they now are.” (392) The novel’s present tense opening “resurrects” the characters as well as the title page’s “Ellis Bell,” while its ending, Lockwood lingering around the headstones, “prevents them from dying wholly” (387).

Gateshead and Lowood, Narrator-Jane breaks out from Protagonist-Jane's story, steps away from the bed where "I was asleep, and Helen was — dead," and jumps forward to a spot in time well past the end of P-Jane's narrative: "Her grave is in Brocklebridge churchyard: for fifteen years after her death it was only covered by a grassy mound; but now a grey marble tablet marks the spot, inscribed with her name, and the word 'Resurgam.'" (*JE* 82) Although N-Jane returns from her own present ("now") to the story of her younger self, she does not re-enter it where she left. Instead she leaps into the first notorious CHAPTER X, asking our forgiveness for her omission of ten full years and cautioning us not to expect a "regular autobiography." Thus she opens a gap — in which we can read the work of a ghostly Editor (a role that the title page originally supplied with the name "Curren Bell"), whose presence causes us to question the difference between recollection and construction — and Helen's gravestone marks the boundary.

Similarly, the borderlands of *Middlemarch*, Prelude and Finale, are haunted by the "finely-touched spirit" and "inconvenient indefiniteness" of an unknown Saint Teresa — a "foundress of nothing," whose effect is "incalculably diffuse" though both the author and her reader ("you and me") are "partly dependent" on it (*Mm* 4, 838). While the book these thresholds enclose is a monument to Dorothea, one of the many nameless Teresas, its end is marked by the presence (or rather absence) of all the others in their "unvisited tombs."

But even a tomb — especially a tomb — cannot defend the line it supposedly draws: "Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending." For an author, the limit of the private self is reached at the name on a title page, where the public, textual self begins, while the end of life is the beginning of afterlife, or literary reputation. Each is also the limit of control, "[f]or there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not

greatly determined by what lies outside it" (*Mm* 838). If we have justified how bio-critical practice determined the survival of "George Eliot" and "Charlotte Brontë," we are nevertheless left with the ghostly "bodies" of other names littering the stage — Mary Ann Evans and Mary Ann Cross, Marian Evans and Marian Lewes, Currer Bell and Charlotte Nicholls, all of whom had equal claim to the immortality of a title page, and none of which could ever have survived the reputations of their creators.

We might imagine this performance ending differently, had we only selected an author whose naming was less encumbered. Perhaps not Scott, the paternal Great Unknown, nor the maternal Frankenstein, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, with her patchwork names. Perhaps not the Trollopes, who Newby used to ghost each other in his advertisements. Certainly not Gaskell, whose own literary afterlife has been an exercise in hiding her history as "Anonymous" and "Cotton Mather Mills," while the war between "Elizabeth" and "Elizabeth Cleghorn" and "Mrs." battles on in almost total silence. Dickens keeps his "Boz" mostly in a drawer, but it is there should we call for it. Surely Thackeray, Brontë's own "Titan," stands alone, surely we can dismiss his invisibility on the title page of *Henry Esmond* as the observance of a "purely conventional ritual."¹⁴⁶

I suggest that we cannot. I suggest that even if we managed to locate a nineteenth-century author who had no anonymous or pseudonymous skeletons in the closet, whose surname was not always-already inhabited by literary family members, he would still be haunted by his title pages. The fact that those title pages would bear "his own name" only makes the haunting that much more uncanny, because while it looks for all the world identical, it is not "him" — he is a body, that is a text.

¹⁴⁶ Genette 45.

Genette's "onymity" is the cleverest, most lifelike of waxworks, precisely on Freud's *unheimlich* border between "alive" and "not alive."

When "the Author of *Jane Eyre*" finds that the London literati expect something of her she cannot deliver, she can give her unsettling experience a name; she can call him "Currer Bell," and sign the letter a laughing "Charlotte Brontë." Should "the Author of *Middlemarch*" fail to impress readers, Marian Lewes can "cut" George Eliot "on the first intimation of that disagreeable fact." Though it be "in name only," an "onymous" author has no such recourse for discovering even imaginary lines where the "real" person stops and the public, "fictional" persona starts, but is perpetually uncertain, trapped in an agon.¹⁴⁷ The ghosts and fractures of pseudonymity are only more tangible — and thus, ironically, less threatening — manifestations of the disrupted state of Authorship.

*

¹⁴⁷ "A verbal contest or dispute between two characters in a Greek play" (*OED*); cf. Karl on GE, "caught in an agon, a tension between progressive ideas and the fixed, stable quality of her own background in rural Warwickshire, a tension she never resolved." (542)

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APPENDIX
ORIGINAL TITLE PAGES

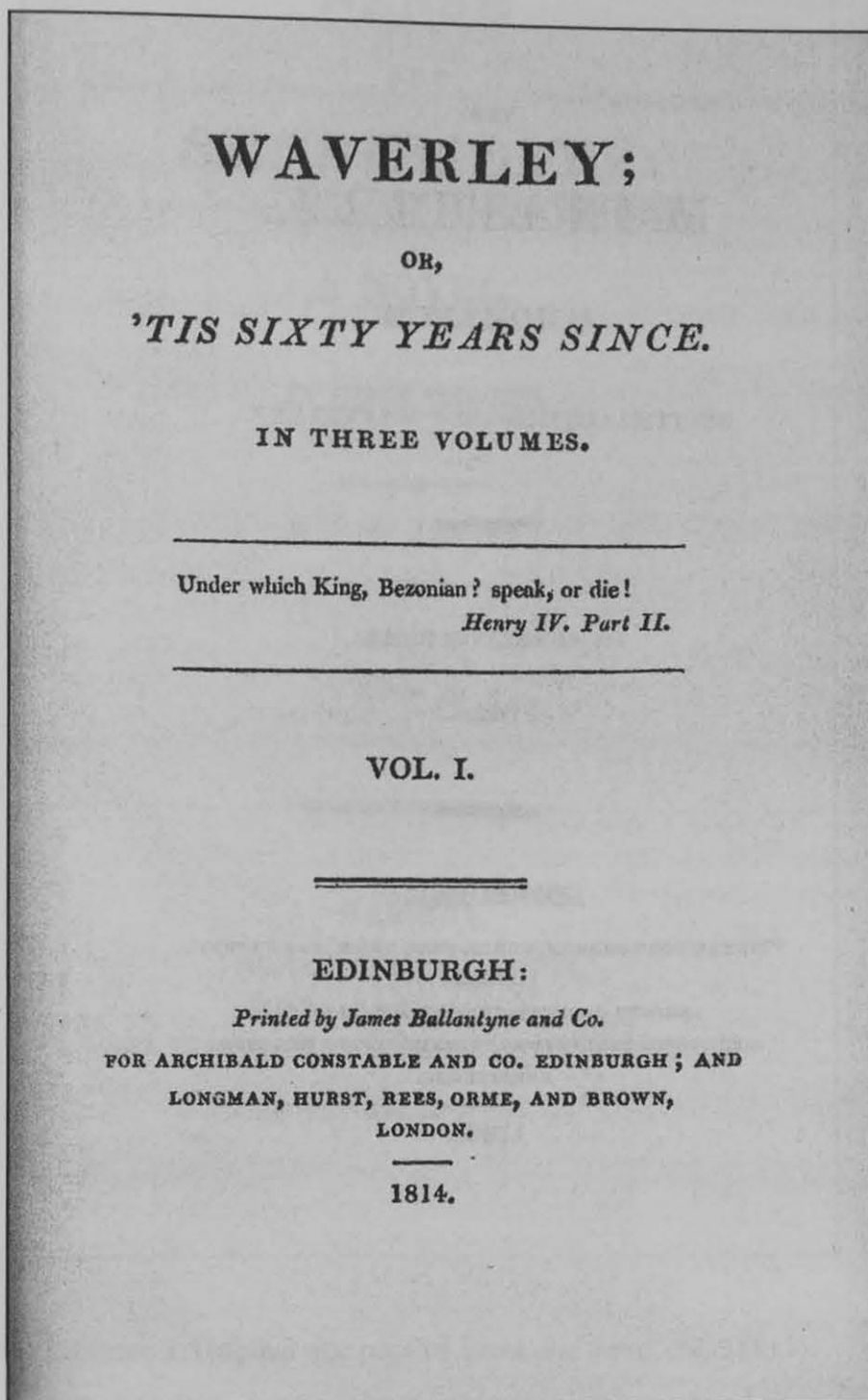


Figure 1: Original title page of *Waverley* (1814)

Taken from: Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. Andrew Hook (London: Penguin, 1972).

THE
MONASTERY.

A ROMANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "WAVERLEY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH :

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
LONDON ;
AND FOR ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO.,
AND JOHN BALLANTYNE, BOOKSELLER TO THE KING,
EDINBURGH.

1820.

Figure 2: Original title page of *The Monastery* (1820)

Taken from: Walter Scott, *The Monastery*, ed. Penny Fielding (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000).

**SENSE
AND
SENSIBILITY:**

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY A LADY.

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

By C. Roworth, Bell-yard, Temple-bar,

AND PUBLISHED BY T. EGERTON, WHITEHALL.

1811.

Figure 3: Original title page of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)

Taken from: Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Ros Ballaster (London: Penguin, 1995).

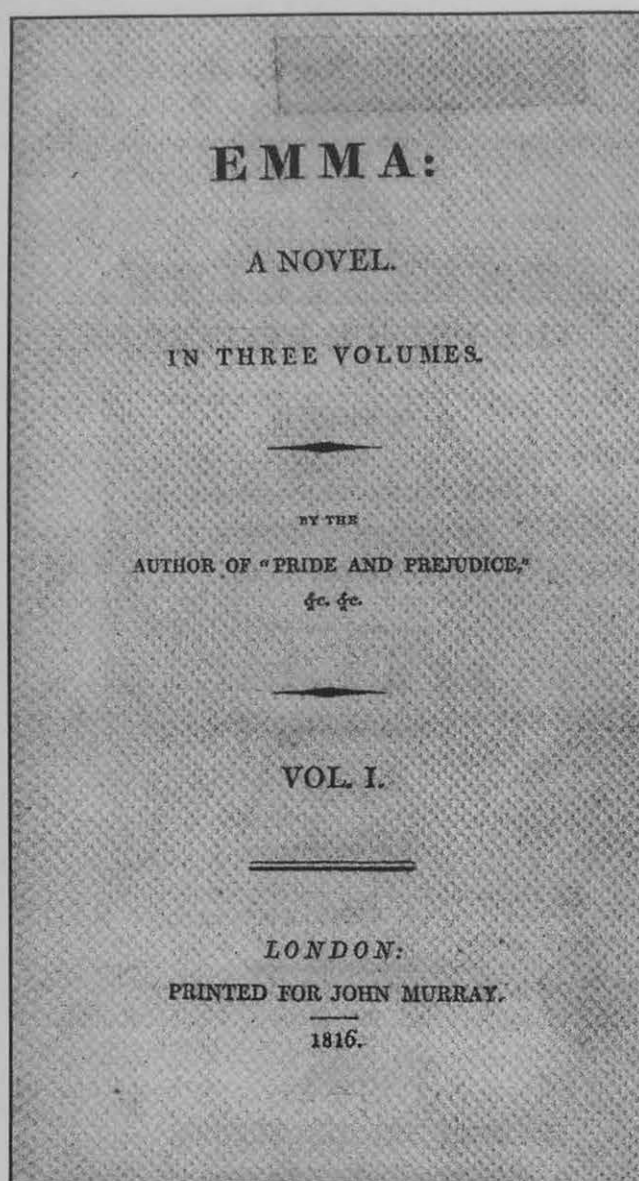


Figure 4: Original title page of *Emma* (1816)

Taken from: Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

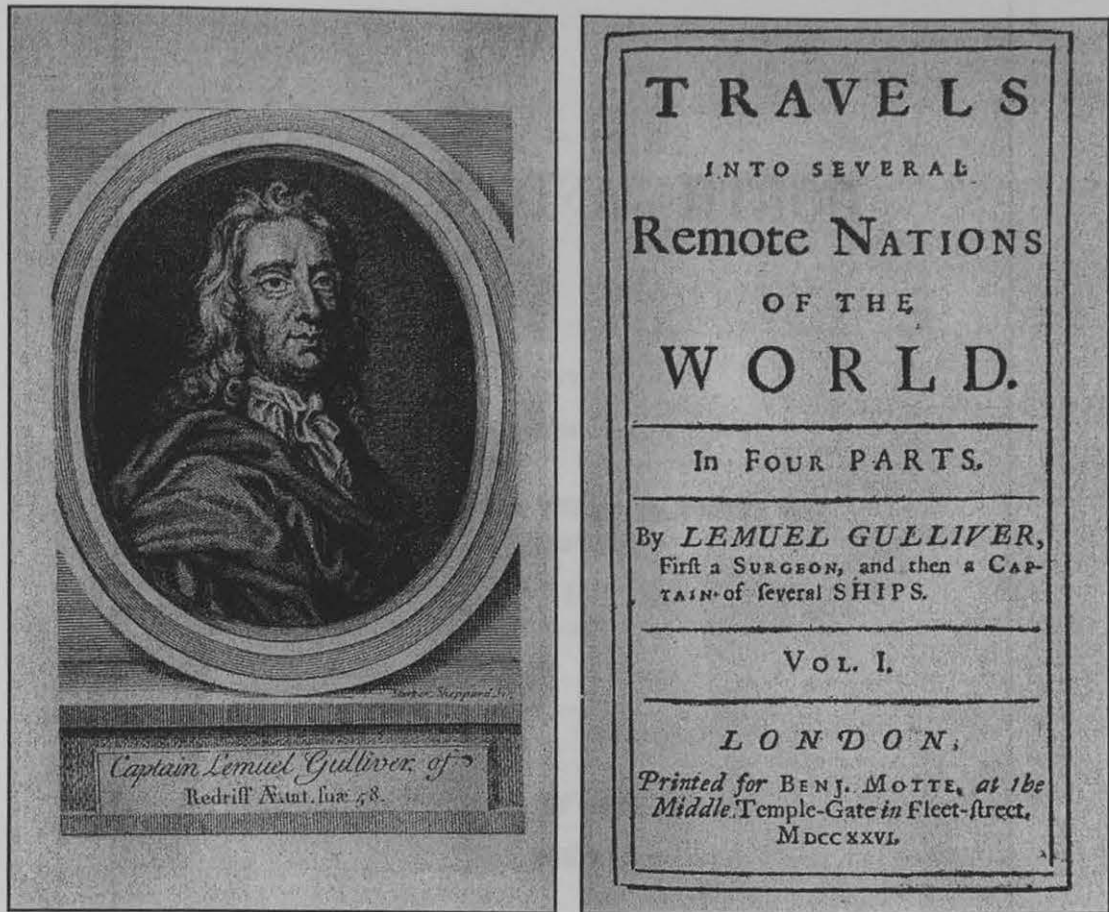


Figure 5: Original frontispiece and title page of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)

Taken from: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. G. Ravenscroft Dennis (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1922)

NORTH AND SOUTH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY BARTON," "RUTH,"
"CRANFORD," &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1855.

[The right of Translation is reserved.]

Figure 6: Original title page of *North and South* (1855)

Taken from: Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Dorothy Collin (London: Penguin, 1970).

THE LIFE
OF
CHARLOTTE BRONTË,

AUTHOR OF
"JANE EYRE," "SHIRLEY," "VILLETTE," &c.

BY
E. C. GASKELL,
AUTHOR OF "MARY BARTON," "RUTH," &c.

"Oh my God,
Thou hast knowledge, only Thou,
How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
(In winter nights by solitary fires
And hear the nations praising them far off."
AURORA LEIGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1857.

[The right of Translation is reserved.]

Figure 7: Original title page of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857)

Taken from: Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1997).

WIVES AND DAUGHTERS.

AN EVERY-DAY STORY.

BY
MRS. GASKELL.

WITH EIGHTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE DU MAURIER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1866.

[The right of Translation is reserved.]

Figure 8: Original title page of *Wives and Daughters* (1866)

Taken from: Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, ed. Frank Glover Smith (London: Penguin, 1969).

FRANKENSTEIN ;

OR,

THE MODERN PROMETHEUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?—
PARADISE LOST.

VOL. I.

London :
PRINTED FOR
LACKINGTON, HUGHES, HARDING, MAJOR, & JONES,
FINSBURY SQUARE.

1818.

Figure 9: Original title page of *Frankenstein* (1818)

Taken from: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Maurice Hindle
(London: Penguin, 1992).

SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLVIII

Figure 10: Original title page of three-volume reprint of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858)

Taken from: George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. David Lodge (London: Penguin, 1973).

A D A M B E D E

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

AUTHOR OF

"SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE"

"So that ye may have
Clear images before your gladden'd eyes
Of nature's unambitious underwood
And flowers that prosper in the shade. And when
I speak of such among the flock as swerved
Or fall, those only shall be singled out
Upon whose lapses, or error, something more
Than brotherly forgiveness may attend."
WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL I

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCLXIX

The Right of Translation is reserved.

Figure 11: Original title page of *Adam Bede* (1859)

Taken from: George Eliot, *Adam Bede*. ed. Stephen Gill (London: Penguin, 1980).

JANE EYRE.

An Autobiography.

EDITED BY

CURRER BELL

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.
1847.

Figure 12: Original title page of *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Taken from: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Michael Mason (London: Penguin, 1996).

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