

Nina Kristin Fjærvoll

Invisible authors: The authorial personae of Charlotte Brontë and Mary Anne Evans

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature



Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Abstract of master's thesis

This master's thesis centers on the idea of authorship by looking at anonymous publishing in nineteenth – century England, focusing on the authorial persona of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. The aim is to reveal authorship as a form of performance, rather than being something that you are. The thesis is sectioned up into three main chapters, starting with a broad theoretical background on the nineteenth-century authorship. The chapter includes sections on anonymous and pseudonymous publishing, authorial personae, the author's gender, as well as the literary ideas and theories by Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author". The discussion is divided into two chapters organized chronologically after the time of the authors' careers. The discussion starts by examining the authorial persona of Charlotte Brontë, Currer Bell, and continues with the authorial persona of George Eliot, originally named Mary Anne Evans. Each chapter involves research based on scholarly material and close readings of selected primary sources, including novels and letters. The research revealed a paradoxical behavior from both Brontë and Eliot. The research showed that they did not only create their personae as a strategy to free themselves from the cultural prejudice against female authors, but also to separate themselves from their personae by creating a cultural and creative performance as authors. The discussion does show some similarities between the authorial performances, there are also some elements that separates them. The main difference is the fact that their authorial performances resulted differently, seeing as only one of the authorial personae lives on today. Within today's literary field, the name Currer Bell has become part of a distance past, while George Eliot has survived and left the name Mary Anne Evans as non-existing. This master's thesis concludes that authorship is not something you simply are, it is a cultural performance leading back to the nineteenth – century.

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Table of content

1 Introduction	1
2 Theoretical background	5
2.1 Anonymous and pseudonymous publishing	5
2.2 The author's function	6
2.3 The author's gender	9
2.4 Literary production and cultural performance	12
3. The Disappearance of Currer Bell	15
3.1 The gender of 'Currer Bell'	15
3.2 The personal and professional self	17
3.3 The 'Bell brothers'	21
3.4 The invisibility shield	23
4. The Endurance of George Eliot	27
4.1. Becoming George Eliot	27
4.2 Eliot's authorial performance	33
4.3 The function of a name	38
5. Conclusion	41
Works Cited	43
Appendix 1: Brontë title pages	47
Appendix 1: Brontë title pages	48
Appendix 2: The master's thesis' relevance for the teaching profession	49

1 Introduction

She was careful that her occupation should not be suspected by servants, or visitors, or any persons beyond her own family party. She wrote upon small sheets of paper which could easily be put away, or covered with a piece of blotting paper. There was, between the front door and the offices, a swing door which creaked when it was opened; but she objected to having this little inconvenience remedied, because it gave her notice when anyone was coming.

(James E. Austen-Leigh qtd. in Mullan 73).

For centuries, Jane Austen has been regarded one of the treasures of English literature. For modern-day readers, the fact that her name and identity was concealed behind the simple disguise of ‘by a lady, and that none of her novels were published under her name during her lifetime, might be hard to comprehend. The idea of anonymous publishing in the eighteenth century was, however, not only accepted but also a rather common practice (Mullan 57). Historical documentations such as letters and memoirs written and collected by Austen’s family members reveals the story behind the successful but anonymous author.

During her career, Austen concealed her name and identity from the reading public with considerable help from her male family members. The primary communication between her and the publishers went either through her father or brother. By the time of the publication of her second novel, *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, the speculation about the identity of the author had begun growing. Professor John Mullan explains Austen’s anonymity as “a matter of form” (70) based on a letter saying: “Keep the *name* to yourself. I sh^d not like to have it known beforehand” (qtd. in Mullan 70). Based on this letter there is a possibility that Austen considered revealing her identity eventually; although, it did remain hidden from the common public until after her death. Mullan describes that by 1815, “Austen’s authorship was an ‘open secret’ ” (71); although, her brother’s biographical notice published after her death is regarded as the official reveal of her identity (Mullan 71-3). Even though Austen’s brother protected her anonymity, Jan Fergus dismiss the image of Austen being an inspired amateur writer, an image supposedly created by her brother. Fergus describes Austen as a woman valuing her position as a professional writer, seeing herself as being more than “the homely spinster who put down her knitting needles to take up her pen” (qtd. in Fergus 13). Austen’s determination to become published is illustrated perfectly through a letter to the publisher who bought the manuscript of the first version of *Northanger Abby* in 1809. As they experienced a publishing delay Austen took on the pseudonym ‘M^{rs} Ashton Dennis’, allowing “her to sign herself ‘M.A.D.’ ” (Fergus 19), resulting in the novel not being published, at least not until after her death in 1817. Mullan explains Austen’s meeting with her publisher in 1814 as “a step that could be of great symbolic importance for successful women writers in the nineteenth century”

(71); although she was accompanied by her brother. This meeting in combination with raising her unpleased female voice in a man-dominated industry through playing with the function of name, set a good base for the development of her authorial performance, which Mullan describes as “an ‘open secret’” (71). The meeting with her publisher enabled Austen to come out as an author. As she negotiated the publication of *Emma* with her new publisher John Murray, Austen wrote to him under her real name; although, she still wanted to preserve a sense of anonymity, thus Murray persuading Walter Scott not to include Austen’s name in his review in *Quarterly Review* (Mullan 71). Austen’s family understood her want of anonymity as a sign of female modesty. Mullan argues that it was rather a strategy to protect herself from having her novels being considered as autobiographies, which was a common misconception about female writers (74). As a woman growing up in a world where her dreams of becoming a published writer, might threaten her reputation and social position, Austen should be viewed as one of the authors who inspired and brought forward the idea of authorship being a cultural performance.

Authorship is not something originating in our biological being, it is not a quality one is born with, but an artistic performance (Berensmeyer, Buelens and Demoor). My thesis will examine how Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot performed their authorship as anonymous female writers. Both Brontë and Eliot, whose birth name was Mary Anne Evans, created and obtained a masculine authorial persona in order to be judged by their creative intelligence, rather than by their gender. There are obvious similarities between Brontë and Eliot’s authorial performances, however, there are also some interesting differences. The main difference is found in the development of their names. Today it seems completely unnatural to refer to these women by any other name than Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, which paints a paradox picture of the function of a name. The author’s name functions as a form of quality for the readers but can also provide readers with ideas or expectations regarding the author’s texts, which we see often being the root to pseudonymous publishing. George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë both wrote under male pseudonyms; although, only one of the personae survived the test of time. Today the name Currer Bell has disappeared into Charlotte Brontë’s distant past, while Mary Anne Evans has throughout centuries been able to stay consistent in the shadow of her authorial persona George Eliot. This paradox introduces questions about each of their careers and how their authorial performances differ from each other. It is easy to view George Eliot’s authorial performance as stronger than Brontë’s persona concerning the gendered hierarchy. Modern-day readers possibly experience George Eliot as the strongest representative of the idea of invisible authorship, because she still goes by the name of her author persona today. Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault discuss the author’s role and function in literary studies and analysis. Their theories on ‘the death of the author’ and ‘the author function’ present interesting theoretical perspectives on both Brontë and Eliot’s motivation for creating and

obtaining their authorial performances. Barthes and Foucault do agree that there does not need to be possible to draw parallels between an author's personal life and text, but they do have different perspectives on an author's function and role. Their theories together with the historical context of nineteenth-century authorship will be the theoretical framework for my discussion on Brontë and Eliot's authorial performances. In this dissertation, I will examine and discuss the concept of authorship by focusing on the idea and practice of authorial performance concerning the gendered cultural hierarchy in the nineteenth century. The focus of the discussion is to examine how and why both Eliot and Brontë persisted on preserving their authorial persona; although, they received great reviews of their novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Adam Bede* especially, and their real identities grew into public knowledge. To do a proper examination on this subject, I will be analyzing primary sources, such as letters, journals, as well as excerpts from their novels and essays.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Anonymous and pseudonymous publishing

The idea and act of anonymous publication take us back to the beginning of print in the sixteenth century. Up to this time in history, the author's name and identity were neither relevant or of interest to neither the readers or critics. The actual term 'anonymous writer' originated with the start of the printing press which introduced title pages and developed an interest for the books, an interest that "shaped readers' interpretations" (Mullan 296). Many of the novels that we today consider classics and literary treasures were originally published anonymously or under a pseudonym. Mullan explains that "[t]here is no single book giving [us] the history of anonymity" (4) because there is not one clear reason or pattern for publishing anonymously. Halkett and Laing's *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature of Great Britain* places diffidence, fear of consequences, and shame as the primary motives for anonymous publication (Mullan 5). Mullan argues that these reasons are not sufficient to achieve an accurate understanding of the action and idea of anonymous writing and publishing. He argues there are many reasons why writers decide to publish their work anonymously, ranging from modesty to mischief in the form of self-promotion (6-7). By "[p]rovoking curiosity and conjecture – highlighting the very question of authorship – can often be the calculated effect of authorial reticence" (Mullan 20). The uncertainty in authors' motives for publishing anonymously opens up for great a discussion on Brontë and Eliot's authorial performances, seeing as they might have had different motivations.

Continuing with the historical pattern of anonymous publication, we see that the majority of the novels published in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain was published anonymously. Around the 1750s, literary critics developed an interest in the identity and gender of unknown novelists (Mullan 57), and in the nineteenth century the act of guessing an unknown author's gender was "part of the pleasure of reading" (Mullan 76). Even though research is limited, studies show that male writers also disguised themselves with female names. This method seems to have been most common within the eighteenth century when over seventy percent of the novels published had anonymous authors. The best-known example of men taking on female pseudonyms is William Sharp, who after being an established writer started publishing under the name 'Fiona MacLeod' while still publishing works under his actual name. Sharp's wife and friends described him as leading a 'dual life' (Mullan 129-135). The idea of a 'dual life' ties in with an author persona as an 'alter ego', or a second-self used to step outside the traditional social frames and move more freely both creatively and socially. Author personae are therefore seen as alter egos where the author's entire personality is given a voice, without the restrictions of stereotypical social conventions. Despite the connection between 'alter ego' and 'authorial persona' as a way of freeing oneself,

periodicals dating back to the nineteenth century do not portray this as a shared understanding of the practice. One of the most interesting articles discussing the idea and act of anonymous publishing is “The Critic” published in *The Critic* in 1859. The writer of the article criticized George Eliot for keeping her identity hidden. The argument was that the only possible reasons for authors to withhold their identity was personal or creative shame, or uncertainty for their success. The writer of the article did not believe these reasons as valid. Anonymous publishing was not to be respected (“The Critic” 387). In the article “On Anonymous Literature” in *Fortnightly review* in 1865, Trollope expressed the same lack of respect for anonymous writers. He argued that “[a] man should always dare to be responsible for the work which he does, and should be ready to accept the shame ... [and] [t]he young poet whose timidity induces him to send forth his verses under a pseudonym, is either too timid or not timid enough” (491).

The negative views on anonymous writing moved into the twentieth century. In 1987, Toby Forward wrote a collection of stories about the lives of young Asian women living in Britain; titled *Down the Road, Worlds Away* under the female name Rahild Khan. When discovered that Khan did not exist, Forward explained it as one of his many forms of aids to creativity, saying that: “[a] woman writes as a man so that she can write about a woman. A white man writes as an Asian girl so that he can write about an Asian girl” (qtd. Mullan 115), and according to Mullan, Forward was inspired by Charlotte Brontë’s authorship, which we do see signs of in the fact that he uses the example of women writing as men. Despite Forward defending his actions as a creative liberation, it still was viewed as a hoax. However, while anonymous and pseudonymous publishing often have been met with criticism, we still see it in contemporary literature. There are examples of pseudonymous publishing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but Mullan argues that as we live in a time with a significant focus on digital media, it is somewhat impossible to promote a book without also promoting its author. The books published pseudonymously today, do not evoke the same curiosity amongst readers as in the nineteenth century. Pseudonymous publishing has gone from a form of disguise to what Mullan explain as a ‘mock-disguise’, where the pseudonym gives an established author the creative freedom to write within different genres (287-8).

2.2 The author’s function

Barthes argues in his 1967 essay “The Death of the Author” that having the author be a factor in literary analysis and personal readings, only results in an isolated reading where the author’s ideas and personal life affects our interpretation of the text. Barthes describes this relationship as a form of tyranny, and that giving “a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (279). In other words, the author’s interference with the text injects expectations and limits our ability to interpret the text freely. Barthes compares it to a father-

child relationship where “[t]he Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it” (278). Thus, Barthes brings us the idea of separating narrator and author. However, depending on the author’s choice of narration technique it is easy for the reader to confuse the narrator for the author, especially when the story is narrated by a personified narrator, often in the form of the first person. When questioning who is speaking, Barthes again dismisses the author as the speaker. He argues that the speaker is simply the language itself, being “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture” (279). According to Barthes, the texts we read are simply ideas which the author has interpreted from different cultures and arranged in a specific way. Consequently, Barthes disproves ‘the arrogant figure of the Author’ and turns the focus over to the reader. He concludes his essay by stating that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (280). In other words, the future of the text lays in the birth of the reader, and the death of the Author.

Andrew Bennett explains this gesture as simply replacing one limiting and controlling subjectivity with another (18). According to Bennett, Barthes’ argument on “the birth of the reader [having to] be the cost of the death of the author” (qtd. in Bennett 18) is questionable seeing as reading is considered a form of unity, also in the eyes of Barthes. Bennett argues that we might find the author’s life continuing through the imagination of the reader (18). He also points out that Barthes continues to contemplate the author’s life in his previous texts, and stating that while the author as an institution is dead, Barthes still desire the author in the text, saying that they need each other’s figure (19). Based on Bennett’s arguments, one could question how much reliability Barthes’ theories have, especially seeing as he struggles to separate himself entirely from the author. Michel Foucault respond to Barthes in his 1969 essay, “What is an Author?” by echoing his question on who is the speaker of a text and quoting Beckett: “what does it matter who is speaking?” (281). Foucault argue that it should not matter who we believe is speaking; although, he is interested in the space the author leaves behind when removed from the equation. Foucault views the writing subject’s disappearance as “a continues process, one that itself requires analysis” wanting to focus on “the social and historical construction of a ‘writing subject’ ” (Bennett 20). Foucault argues that there are dangers involved with the author’s disappearance. The main issue being that “there can be no concept of the *oeuvre* [work of art] without an organizing authorial origin, the formalizing appeal to the *work* itself, to the work in itself, depends on the individual author’s unifying presence” (Bennett 21). Bennett explains that the absence of the author leads to the presence of ‘a transcendental anonymous author’, invisible but omnipresent, being the source ‘behind’ the text (21). Foucault believes today’s writing no longer to be a form of expression and that the author “cancels out the sign of his particular individuality” (282).

Barthes and Foucault’s theories present ideas about the author’s position and function with

how we understand and interpret an author's work. Although their theories do not represent a sociohistorical perspective, they do together with the historical context help the discussion on Eliot and Brontë's author personae by opening one's perspective on possible reasons for why they decided on writing under male pseudonyms. Their agreement on the idea that it should not matter who is speaking shows high relevance to how one's interpretations of a text can be affected by the author's personal life, and in the case of Eliot and Brontë their gender. Barthes and Foucault's ideas are especially important for our understanding of why Brontë and Eliot continuously separated themselves from their authorial personae, even though Eliot and Brontë received great reviews. They were trying to dismiss themselves from the stereotypical idea of authorship, an idea rooted in the form of gendered hierarchy, which in short links to a belief that the women's brain is inferior to men because of women's hormonal cycle. This theory will be presented in more detail in the section on author's gender. Both Barthes and Foucault's ideas have similar significance to this discussion, seeing as Eliot and Brontë tried to preserve their anonymity, ties together with Barthes idea of 'the death of the author', while also seeking to obtain their authorial persona which links to Foucault's idea of 'the author function'.

One of the main factors separating Foucault and Barthes is Foucault's idea of the concept of 'author function'. Foucault argues that instead of settling for the disappearance of the author, one should rather locate the space which this departure leaves empty. Foucault argues that the author's proper name has a clear function, permitting us to group together texts and defining them. He classifies the proper name of the author as separate from the author's personal self. Where the author was born, the author's eye color has no relevance to the function of their name. The only element that can affect how we understand the author's name is if it is proven that he or she did not actually write the text (283-284). Foucault further explains that it "manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and culture" (284). Foucault explains four characteristics of the 'author function', starting with the juridical notation of ownership the sense of copyright, the second characteristic is that the function's effect depends on the different discourses such as history, economics, culture and institutions. Meaning that we understand and regard the author function differently depending on the time and place. This links us to the third characteristic which evolves the author being constructed by the text's cultural position. Lastly, the function does not link back to a real individual, but rather several different subjects. Leaving us with the idea that authorship is complex idea, consisting of more than the author (Bennett 23 – 26). The first characteristic includes the element of ownership and copyright laws, a system which originated in the shift between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. Before this shift, the publishing industry experienced no trouble with the author's anonymity, seeing as "their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as sufficient guarantee of their status" (285).

Of course, this only referred to the publishing of fictional narratives. Within the eighteenth century, “literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function” (285). Foucault explains that ‘the author function’ is viewed as a highly important factor within today's literary field and society. Foucault argues that one will always be able to detect “a certain number of signs [of the text] referring to the author” (287), such as the use of personal pronouns and adverbs related to time and space, which is a reference to the real speaker, which he explains to be an 'alter ego' (287). Foucault's argument suggests that even though anonymous and pseudonymous publishing was a common practice in the eighteenth century, the readers might still be able to detect some factors that might identify the anonymous writers. Seeing as many of the writers that published anonymously or under pseudonyms are known today, these parallels are easier to find and connect. Foucault concludes his essay by saying that we are accustomed to regarding authors as a transcendent genius creator, instead of an actual ideological product of our representation.

According to Foucault, the author function will disappear because of the changes in our society, and the question and importance of the voice of a text will slowly disappear with it, leaving one focusing on and questioning the mode and function of a text, rather than the voice (290-291). Mullan presents the situation of Doris Lessing, who in the 1980s published a science fiction novel under the pseudonym, Jane Somers. By keeping her true identity secret from the reading public and the publishers, she “asked how reading might depend on the preconception attached to an author's name. To what extent do we *need* that author's name in order to read?” (Mullan 290). These are both interesting questions, especially presented in a society where the idea and concept of anonymity is often seen as impossible. Also in the field of publishing. Mullan goes on to discuss Barthes' essay “The Death of the Author”, arguing that Barthes' theories on the author's position and lack of importance, could provide us with a clue on how the first readers of the novels which we today view as classics might have been affected by the lack of name or the use of pseudonyms (296 – 297). As one looks at theories on the subject and the position of authors, one could see that the idea of anonymity is not necessarily about the authors themselves, but rather what they mean to the reader and how they affect the reading experience.

2.3 The author's gender

It is necessary to have an understanding of women's professional position in nineteenth-century England, to achieve an accurate and broad understanding of their position as authors. In 1849, higher education became available to women, further developing women's opportunities to have a more active role in society. Between 1849 and 1857 we see several significant changes for women, one of the most important being the Marriage and Divorce Act which improved the domestic relations for women. Throughout the 1850s women started entering new forms of employments,

and a group of women got involved with the printing industry and published *The English Women's Journal* and offered series of popular public lectures on women (Schor 175-176). In many ways, it portrays a realistic representation, also in the sense of a gendered hierarchy, where female authors did not find themselves being fairly judged by their creative mind. The idea of contextualizing female's professional role is something we often find being portrayed and discussed within Victorian novels. According to David Kramer the most traditional professions addressed to women were often teachers and governesses, different forms of domestic services were regarded the "single most important form of employment of women and girls" (Davidoff qtd. in Kramer 317) between 1850 and 1950.

The root of the gendered hierarchy is found in the idea that the female body has "a limited amount of heat or energy" (Brady 2). Apparently, the female reproductive organs release natural heat during menstruation, thus limiting the energy travelling to the woman's brain, compared to the male body which was not restricted by their reproductive organs (Brady 2). In other words, the idea of the female body during the nineteenth century was based on the theory that because of their hormonal cycle their brains did not develop the same way men's brain did. In connection to this idea, we need to look at how it affected women's position and how they were regarded in comparison to their opposite gender. A woman stepping out and not fitting the expected norm was viewed as having a hysterical uterus, and women were seen as strange if they possessed masculine traits and characteristics. George Eliot is an excellent example of creating discussion around the stereotypical characteristics between genders. Eliot evoked great curiosity seeing as she was considered unattractive to men and was sexuality expressive outside the traditional forms of marriage, together with mastering classic languages, scientific and philosophical ideas. These characteristics created the assumption "that she was born with a male head and a female trunk" (Brady 3). This theory was influenced by the pseudoscience of phrenology, which did not difference between genders. Although, it did imply that women's inferiority depended on the size of their brain (Brady 4). It is interesting seeing how much attention and speculations women like George Eliot received, simply because they did not necessarily fit the standard fixed to their gender. Thompson points to Jonathan Culler's argument that readers' interpretation depends on the reading conventions and sign systems applied, rather than the text itself, meaning that their expectations were affected by the author's gender. The Victorian readers expected women's writing "to form a natural extension of female domestic roles; in the 1840s 'domestic realism' formed the most prevalent female genre" (Thompson 44). Thompson uses the example of the novels of the Brontë's, especially Emily's *Wuthering Heights* to illustrate how the element of masculine factors affected the reception they received. In 1850, the *Examiner* wrote: "The Bells are of a hardy race. They do not lounge in drawing rooms or boudoirs. The air they breathe is not that of the hothouse or of perfumed

apartments... whatever may be their defects ... they are not common- place writers” (qtd. in Thompson 48). Thompson explains the concept of ‘common-place’ being linked with women writers, meaning that the *Examiner* did not believe the Bells to be women (48)

The idea of a distinct separation of the genders in literary circles did not only take place through writing, but also within the reading public. Thompson presents Elizabeth Flynn’s argument on there being three different groups of readers: ‘submissive’, ‘interactive’, and ‘dominant’. (45). Through Flynn argument on men often being more dominant readers than women, we can get a deeper understanding of critics’ base for their review on novels such as *Wuthering Heights*. Dominant readers often “apply an externally derived framework to the text they are reading, and this framework allows them to remain emotionally distant from the text, to the point of ‘silencing’ it” (Thompson 45). Thompson argues that this emotional separation shows through their focus on the author’s biographical information, the context provides the critics with a sense of controlling the text. By being provided limited information on the author’s life, not being able to draw possible connections enables them the opportunity to shape how they perceive the text. This lack of control leads “to an ambivalent mix of confusion, shock, and admiration” (Thompson 46). Although this example focuses on the literary critics, it is also easily connected with the general reading public, especially after reading reviews that are suspicious about the author’s gender. Demoor explains that “[u]ntil recently, scholars underestimated the height of the hurdles women had to cross as well as the subtle strategies they deployed in doing so” (8). Despite their growing independence, they still were restricted by the assumption that their ability was not measurable to men.

Women were perceived as the weaker sex, an idea which easily translated into cultural communities, an area which they in fact dominated. John Sutherland’s research shows that the profession of novel writing was “open both to middle-class man and middle-class women on more or less equal terms” (350). Sutherland argues that out of his analysis done on 878 Victorian novelists, 312 of them were female. Not only did women have longer life expectancy than man at average, but they also have longer writing careers and published an average of 21 titles, compared to men's 15.7. (350-351). Most of the men who ventured into literary societies either worked within law, journalism, business, church or the army, while female writers were often either married or spinsters, the latter being the most productive, “with an average output of 24 titles” (353). Although Sutherland’s research proves that women did publish more than men, there are still factors that play into the idea that both genders published on equal terms. Sutherland points to the understanding that while women could publish, they were still met with a sense of restriction motivated by society, thus enhancing their modesty which for many resulted in a growing use of pseudonyms, or anonymous publishing (Sutherland 350). The modesty that Sutherland describes can be understood to be because of the limited perspective on women’s role in society, resulting in

many doubting their subjectivity and chance to prosper as individuals. Richard Altick explains that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, women outside of the working class often adapted masculine pseudonyms to financially support themselves and their family better, because of prejudices prohibiting them from working. They were expected to pass their days with supervising the household, needlework, sketching and playing the piano, etc. (51-52). In connection to this, Berensmeyer et. al explains that the number of female authors increased towards the end of the century, illustrated in Gissing's novel *New Grub Street* where Jasper Milvain are advised to try writing for money (13,75). Berensmyer et. al do not elaborate on the reason for this development; although, we can see it as a result of both a growth in publishing industries and that more women had 'the courage' to reach outside of societies conservative frames, especially seeing as there was a possibility for financial improvement. Sutherland's research is especially interesting seeing as it in a way dismisses the social and cultural expectations and the gendered hierarchy, by proving that women were not in fact as absent in literary circles. Sutherland does not describe the methods the women used to public their novels. However, if a majority of the women featured in Sutherland's statistics published under masculine pseudonyms, that would illustrate the gendered hierarchy, while also dismissing its theoretical base.

2.4 Literary production and cultural performance

There is a great deal of discussion surrounding the element and relevance of the author within literary studies. Looking back at the Barthes' theory on 'the death of the author', we do detect some trouble within areas of the theory, especially when compared to Foucault's theory about the 'author function'. In their essay, Berensmeyer, Buelens and Demoor bring the discussion on authorship to a new level by discussing authorship as a cultural performance. They argue that authorship might be a vital part of the literary studies, a statement that dismisses Barthes' theory about the author's non-existing role within the literary field. According to their essay, looking at authorship as a cultural performance is not viewing him or her as an isolated element, but rather as one of many agents working together to construct a performance. It is important to underline that the form of cultural performance referred to here is not to be confused with the public readings done by authors such as Dickens. A cultural performance in this context is about creating and shaping an identity. The idea of cultural performance ties directly in with the concept of author persona: authors who write under pseudonyms do not only create a name, they also create an identity. In some cases, an author persona could be understood to be an entirely different person, which the author distances him or herself from completely. It becomes more than a name on a title page, it often develops into a public figure, although often just by name.

Berensmeyer et. al argue that "[i]n order to study authorship as cultural performance [...], it

will be necessary to take into account the continuous interrelations and irritations between actual historical practices of writing and publishing on the one hand, and changing concepts of authorship on the other” (23). In other words, when analyzing authorship one must view it in the cultural, social and historical context. Our present idea of authorship is in many ways different from how it was perceived in the nineteenth century. Historical studies have shown several developments taking place in the nineteenth-century literary industry. As a result of the Education Act of 1870 and reading as a requirement for many professions, approximately ninety percent of the population, both male and female, developed a broader literacy (Flint, “The Victorian novel and its readers” 19). This act naturally enhanced the writing and publishing industry. According to data collected by Sutherland, approximately 50,000 novels were published between 1837 and 1901 (345). Despite the growing development, Berensmeyer et al. explain that there was lots of controversy around the concept of authorship in the nineteenth century, especially regarding legal matters surrounding the publishing industry. Many writers joined in to establish the Society of Authors. This establishment is portrayed in George Gissing’s novel *New Grub Street* (Berensmeyer et al. 19). Through *New Grub Street*, Gissing provides the readers with a realistic representation of the Victorian literary society, by showing the different forms of authorship, especially through the competences between the men of letters and the idea of the struggling author. Although we are given a diverse insight into the literary industry, it is a sense of narrow representation of female writers. Gissing shows us how women’s literary opportunities are more restricted through a gendered hierarchy. The three women representing the literary world of women are either advised to pursue the field of children’s literature, seeing as any higher forms of literature was unavailable to them, or they find themselves being denied the credit for their work (13, 75).

We can see a defined change in the perception of the author figure by the turn of the century. The critics, as well as the reading public, developed a greater interest in the author’s personality, thus creating a form of celebrity culture (Berensmeyer et al. 20). This interest did not go unnoticed by the authors themselves, especially seeing as it influenced their income, thus influencing how they portrayed themselves and further developed their public image (Demoor 4 – 5). Here we see Foucault’s idea of ‘author function’ emerging to the surface, both regarding the element of the juridical system and how it becomes a form of coping device for the readers, providing them with a promise of quality (Berensmeyer et al. 22). As the interest in the author’s personality and life developed, the idea of marketing the author became a spreading factor within the industry. The publishing industry grew into a business, and by the 1870s and 1880s advertisement had become a rather common practice and independent agencies started acquiring both power and money (Demoor 1-2). The Education Act had a significant influence on the publishing industry; however, they had to lower the prices and lean on advertisement to be able to reach out to new readers in the

working class. This rise of new readers made sociopolitical changes, and they were believed to be either a threat to the intellectuals or a controllable political force. Marysa Demoor explains that authors might have been the first to notice these changes, and saw it as an opportunity to profit from the growing market (2 -3). Although Demoor's research shows how the idea of authorial marketing first became an important factor after Brontë and Eliot's careers it will still be included as part of the discussion, seeing as it affects the way we understand their reasons for preserving their persona. Within the next chapters, we will examine how the growing publishing industry and interest in the author figure affected Brontë and Eliot's careers and authorial performances.

3. The Disappearance of Currer Bell

As we have seen, female writers in the nineteenth century often experienced a lack of respect and honest reception, compared to male authors at the time. Both their creativity and the ability to earn a living was restricted by this discrimination. Even though not all women felt the need to give in to this cultural injustice, there was still a great majority who did. This injustice resulted in many turning to masculine pseudonyms, having their novels being judged rather than themselves. One of the most discussed examples of this is Charlotte Brontë, who together with her two sisters, Emily and Anne veiled themselves and published under the masculine pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Today their novels are often considered a significant part of the literary canon; however, when discussing the subject of author persona, Charlotte stands out as the most significant of these brilliant sisters. Through analyzing the example of Charlotte Brontë, and the reception her novels received within her lifetime, we get an interesting perspective on the how the concept of an author's biographical elements play in with their novels and how they affected their author persona, also how reception plays into a representation of literary quality.

3.1 The gender of 'Currer Bell'

In the case of Charlotte Brontë, studying the reception of *Jane Eyre* provides a broad understanding of the elements surrounding her author persona. Not only was it her first published novel, but it was also the first of the novels published by the 'Bell brothers'. *Jane Eyre* became broadly discussed in literary circles and became a subject of speculation. *Jane Eyre* received a good mixture of different reviews, ranging from critical opinions, praise, and of course curiosity around its origin and author. Sixteen days after the first publication of *Jane Eyre* in October 1847, *The Critic* stated that "*Jane Eyre* is a remarkable novel [...]. Being such, we can cordially recommend [it] to our readers, as a novel to be placed at the top of the list to be borrowed, and to the circulating-library keeper as one which he may wish with safety order. It is sure to be in demand" ("*Jane Eyre; an Autobiography*" 277). Despite Currer Bell being credited as the editor and not the author, *The Critic* still addressed him as the author. When the novel was reprinted in 1848, Currer Bell was given the credit as the author (Passel 3), as originally intended by Brontë. Altering Currer Bell's credit was based on a suggestion by the publisher, changing the title from *Jane Eyre* to *Jane Eyre, An Autobiography*, to evoke more interest amongst the readers and hopefully increase its profits. Making Currer Bell the 'editor' was therefore obviously a method, making the supposed autobiography seem more authentic. A month after *The Critic*'s review, *The Examiner* rewarded *Jane Eyre* with a great review, while arguing that they did "not believe [it] to have been written by a woman" and that they liked "an author who

throws himself into the front of the battle, as a champion of the weaker party” (756). Around the same time, *Era* wrote that “all the serious novel writers of the day lose in comparison with Currer Bell, for we must presume the work to be his. It is no woman’s writing” (qtd. in Mullan 82). It is interesting for the modern reader, who know that the novel was in fact written by a woman, to see how many argued that it was written by a man. By comparing these reviews, we see that the alterations in the title and Currer Bell’s credit did not make much difference in how people viewed the text. Despite it claiming to be an autobiography, critics still believed it to have originated from a man, Currer Bell. The review by the *Era* represents the idea of gender and literature, by insinuating that each gender has a specific style of or ability to write, that one can identify the author’s gender based on the text’s style. However, the claims in *Era* seem to be a question of literary quality rather than gendered style.

Although many reviews agreed that *Jane Eyre* was written by a man, *Fraser’s Magazine for town and country* published their review December 1847, before Currer Bell was credited as the author, arguing that “the writer is evidently a woman, and, unless we are deceived, new in the world of literature”. Despite the often-experienced prejudice over the quality of women’s writings, *Fraser’s Magazine for town and country*, together with most other critics expressed both admirations over the text, and curiosity around the author’s life experience and how it could be linked to the text. Although there is no name connected to this review, Mullan claims that it was written by G.H. Lewes, which with great certainty is believed to be the literary critic George Henry Lewes (83) who later became romantically involved with George Eliot, whose authorship and author persona will be discussed in the following chapter. The idea that *Jane Eyre* was written by a woman was supported by *The Christian remembrancer* who published their review in 1848 in the article “Book review”. Although the name and sex of the author of *Jane Eyre* were still unknown, they believed the author to be female and from the North part of the England, and that ‘Currer Bell’ might be an anagram. They argued that the author was female seeing as no other than a woman would have “ventured, with the smallest prospect of success, to fill three octavo volumes with the history of a woman’s heart?” (396). Furthermore, they claimed that it portrayed mysterious elements of “female life which no man can possess, or would dare to counterfeit” (396).

Although they were correct about Currer Bell being a woman, *The Christian remembrancer’s* arguments provided a further development of the cultural and social division between the genders, by saying that one of the genders cannot represent the other. According to this review, the thoughts and feelings that Jane represents seem not to be known by the male mind. This argument is especially interesting seeing as Jane represent a less traditional woman, someone whose mind is not restricted by society’s expectations. This unusual nature is seen in the following quotation: “And for the rest, though you have a man’s vigorous brain, you have a woman’s heart,

and - it would not do” (Brontë 408). Through this sentence, Brontë not only illustrates Jane’s unconventional way of thinking but also addresses and criticizes the conservative idea of nineteenth-century gender roles. This criticism was discussed in reviews which argued that *Jane Eyre* was a collective authorship between a man and a woman, seeing as it had both masculine and feminine tones (Mullan 87). By having a male character describe a woman as having “a man’s vigorous brain” (408), Brontë addresses discrimination by arguing that the difference between the genders are not as extensive as it was believed to be. It is particularly interesting how the critics based their arguments and theories on the style of writing, disregarding elements such as credit and titles such as *Jane Eyre – An Autobiography*. Although, seeing as the actual text is the only certain thing which they could analyze since anonymous publishing was a common practice, it is understandable that they often tried to reveal the author’s identity through the style of the text.

3.2 The personal and professional self

Although the author’s gender was a widely-discussed factor, some critics developed a further curiosity around the actual identity of the author. One of the reviews that first started assuming who wrote *Jane Eyre* was *The Christian remembrancer*. In their 1848 review, not only did they argue that Currer Bell was an anagram for a female writer, they also argued that the story was influenced by the authoress’ personal life. In the review, they speculate around the origin of the author, claiming she is a woman from the North of England. Furthermore, they argue that “[i]f the authoress has not been, like her heroine, an oppressed orphan, a starved and bullied charity-school girl, and a despised and slighted governess [...], at all events we fear she is one to whom the world has not been kind” (397). Based on what we know about Charlotte Brontë’s life today, there are some similarities between her and Jane Eyre; the reviewer was, therefore, correct to assume Currer Bell’s gender and where she came from. Although Brontë did not experience the same childhood traumas as her heroine, there are still some similarities which are worth mentioning. Although Brontë was not an orphan like Jane, her mother Maria Brontë did pass when Charlotte was only five years old (Gaskell 13-14). Both Brontë and Jane worked as governess, and there are speculations on whether Charlotte experienced romantic feelings towards a married man, like her heroine towards Mr. Rochester. It is suspected that Charlotte developed romantic feelings towards her literature teacher, Constantin Heger, during her stay in Brussels. There is no clear evidence proving that her feelings were romantic; however, based on the content of her letters there are many factors that can support this theory.

One of the most valid arguments is the way she expresses a passionate longing after hearing from him in a letter dated 8 January 1845: “If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely, I shall be absolutely without hope – if he gives me a little friendship – a very little – I shall be

content – happy, I would have a motive for living – for working” (*Selected Letters* 58). She also ends her last letter to him on 18 November 1845, with the following passage:

You will perceive by the defects in this letter that I am forgetting the French language – yet I read all the French books I can get, and learn daily a portion by heart – but I have never heard French spoken but once since I left Brussels – and then it sounded like music in my ears – every word was most precious to me because it reminded me of you – I love French for your sake with all my heart and soul” (*Selected Letters* 68 – 69).

Based on these quotations, the sense of passion that is expressed are easily understood as romantic feelings; which raises the question of how much Charlotte’s life influenced her novels. *The Professor*, which was the first novel Charlotte wrote tells a story of a young man named William Crimsworth who starts working as a professor at an all-girls school and throughout the novel the narrator being confronted with sexually alluring, young women (Mullan 80). Based on the passionate longing represented in Brontë’s letters to Heger, and her telling him on 24. July 1844: “I would write a book and I would dedicate it to my literature master – to the only master that I have ever had – to you Monsieur” (*Selected Letters* 52), leaves little doubt that her life did influence her novel, especially her first novel *The Professor*, especially with the title referring to a teacher figure. The idea of authors injecting fragments from their personal experiences into their texts brings us back to Barthes’ essay “The death of the author”. According to Barthes’ theory, we should not view the text as a reflection of the author’s life nor ideas. Barthes argues that it is not the author’s voice we hear while reading, it is rather society’s ideas reflected through the author’s experiences (279). One could, therefore, view the author as a medium for these ideas. In other words, Barthes believe the text to be a mirror reflecting the society, rather than the identity of the author. Seeing as there are clear parallels between Brontë and her novels, it seems that Barthes is wrong in dismissing the author completely. It seems impossible to separate the novel completely from its author, especially for modern-day readers. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, the similarities are so apparent that it is a challenge seeing Jane and Charlotte as two separate people, rather than one.

When studying Brontë’s author persona, it is interesting seeing how she continually distanced herself from Currer Bell. Throughout her career, Brontë requested her publisher George Smith not to be introduced as Currer Bell. Although it was a growing public knowledge, Brontë continuously refused to acknowledge the authorship of her novels. One would believe that a woman breaking through the literary and cultural prejudice of the society, becoming one of the most known and admired authors of her time would step out of the shadow of her male persona, but this was not the case for Brontë. In the first letter to her publisher in August 24th 1847, we witness how Brontë naturally separates herself from her persona: “I now send you per rail a MS entitled ‘Jane Eyre’, a novel in three volumes, by Currer Bell. [...] It is better in future to address Mr Currer Bell, under

cover to Miss Brontë, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire, as there is a risk of letters otherwise directed not reaching me at present” (qtd. in Gaskell 257 – 258). In a later letter, she again explains why Currer Bell’s letters need to be addressed to Miss Brontë: “Currer Bell is not known in the district, and I have no wish that he should become known” (qtd. in Gaskell 261). Brontë addresses Currer Bell in the third person; although, she signs the letters C. Bell, indicating that Currer Bell addresses himself in the third person. This paradox is evident in the sentence; “Currer Bell is not known in the district, and I have no wish that he should become known” (qtd. in Gaskell 261). In this quotation, we see how Charlotte distance herself from Currer Bell and portrays ‘him’ as an entirely different individual, a strategy which she continued to use throughout her career. In connection to these letters, we also see her distancing herself from Bell in her letter to the publisher of the *Poems of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. According to Mullan, Charlotte actually signs her letters ‘C Brontë’ in the beginning of her career which resulted in the publishers assuming that she was a man, in response to this Charlotte wrote:

As the proofs have hitherto always come safe to hand – under the direction of C Brontë ESQRE. – I have not thought it necessary to request you to change it, but a little mistake having occurred yesterday – I think it will be better to send them to me in future under my *real* address which is
Miss Brontë
Revd P. Brontës’s &c. (qtd. In Mullan 79).

Mullan explains that after this letter, Charlotte started signing her letters with her pseudonym, together with her sisters (79). I will argue that seeing as this was in the beginning of Charlotte’s career she had not have given much thought to the strategy of her authorial performance yet. And seeing as she moved over to signing her letters ‘C. Bell’, might indicate that she was having second thoughts about being so open about her identity and gender, being scared that it might result in prejudice on either her or her novels. With the consistency in her later letters, where she signs ‘C. Bell’, there is a stability and determination which gives the impression that there is a possibility that she was considering stepping out of Currer Bell’s shadow eventually. Indicating that Bell is not a real person by having him be depended on her help to send and receive letters, might be Brontë giving the publisher hints on her identity. It is important to remember that the idea and practice of anonymous or pseudonymous publishing were not uncommon within the nineteenth century. Brontë might have imagined this detail to go unnoticed by her publisher, while also wanting to test the waters as a new novelist.

The publishing house, Smith, Elder & Co did expect Currer Bell to be a woman based on the handwriting on her manuscript (Mullan 81). Despite this, there was a sense of surprise within Mr. Smith when meeting Brontë in 1848, when she together with Anne travelled to London to clarify a misunderstanding about the authorship of the ‘Bell Brothers’. Emily and Anne’s publisher Thomas

Newby was involved in spreading rumors about Currer Bell being the actual author of all their novels (Mullan 88). Charlotte describes her meeting with Mr. Smith in a letter to a friend: “He looked at [his letter] – then at me – again – yet again – I laughed at his queer perplexity – a recognition took place – I gave him my real name” (qtd. in Mullan 88). It is interesting that Mr. Smith reacted so surprised seeing as he was convinced from the beginning that Currer Bell was a woman. One could argue that this meeting lacks significance; although, their meeting strengthens the analysis of Charlotte’s authorial performance. We see this by looking at how she continued to sign her letter in the same fashion, as Currer Bell; although, her identity was known by the publisher. This paradox proves Brontë’s determination to separate herself from Currer Bell, by making ‘him’ a label of professionalism.

One of the most interesting examples illustrating Brontë’s relationship with Currer Bell are found in her “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell” in the fourth edition of *Wuthering Height*, published in 1850. Throughout the biographical notice of her sisters, Charlotte draws a distinct line between revealing the truth and concealing herself. Interestingly, while she writes in the first person, she occasionally addresses ‘Currer Bell’ as if he was a separate individual:

Ellis Bell produced *Wuthering Heights*. Acton Bell *Agnes Grey*, and Currer Bell also wrote a narrative in one volume. [...] At last *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were accepted on terms somewhat impoverishing to the two authors: Currer Bell’s book found acceptance nowhere, nor any acknowledgement of merit, so that something like the chill of despair began to invade his heart (309).

By this point in the text, Charlotte had already explained that they were three sisters who veiled themselves under positively masculine names, because of the gendered literary hierarchy, but also because they did not consider their style of writing to be feminine (307-8). Charlotte does reveal the actual names of her sisters; although, there is no mention of their surname or her name, and again she signs the text with ‘Currer Bell’. With the next paragraphs she wrote, “I was then just completing *Jane Eyre*, at which I had been working while the one volume tale was plodding its weary round in London [...]” (309). This deliberate change from the third person to the first person could be a way of preventing a change in the readers’ experience of both her persona and her texts. Brontë might have thought that having her identity revealed could affect how the readers experienced her novels. Brontë’s continual avoidance and denial of being Currer Bell could be a strategy to preserve the quality of her writing. She is not deliberately denying that she is a female writer, nor trying to convince the readers that she is a man. I believe she was trying to avoid the prejudice limiting both her creative freedom and her right to be evaluated simply by her creative talents.

3.3 The 'Bell brothers'

Seeing as *Jane Eyre* was the first novel published by one of the 'Bell brothers' and received such great reviews and profit, it is easy to understand that the 'Bell brothers' were often misunderstood to be one person. The fact that all three of the Brontë sisters published under the same surname developed theories and misconceptions around each of their novels. Many understood their novels, all published within a couple of months, to be written by the same man. This theory resulted in a misconception which unfortunately created some trouble with their publishers. Emily and Anne's publisher, Thomas Newby was involved with spreading these rumors, possibly trying to better his profit. Findings on archive.org show that Anne Brontë was given the credit of being the author of *Wuthering Heights* on the title page of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* published by Harper & Brothers Publishing in New York 1848¹ (Illustration 1, Appendix 1). This observation is critical for the study of Charlotte Brontë's authorial persona. Foucault explains one of the factors of the author function to be copyright through the author's name. This copyright is not only a form of financial or juridical security for the author and publisher's financial situation but also a sense of quality security for the readers (287). This possible misunderstanding between Harper & Brothers Publishing and Thomas Newby, and the potential consequences for Newby's unprofessionalism can be the main reason for Charlotte writing the biographical notice on her sisters. Within this notice, Charlotte provides a detailed clarification on the relationship between the 'Bell brothers'. She starts off by saying:

It has been thought that all the works published under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, were, in reality, the production of one person. This mistake I endeavored to rectify by a few words of disclaimer prefixed to the third edition of *Jane Eyre*. These, too, it appears, failed to gain general credence, and now, on the occasion of a reprint of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, I am advised distinctly to state how the case really stands (307).

Through her notice, Charlotte expresses herself very openly, with a strong voice. She claims that the critics did not do her sisters' novels justice, and describes their reviews, and assumption that *Wuthering Heights* was an earlier attempt by the author of *Jane Eyre*, as an "[u]njust and grievous error!" (309). While defending her sisters' novels against the unfavorable reviews, by labeling the reviews as unjust, Charlotte might have written this notice as a way of clearing her own 'name', Currer Bell. The possibility that people linked these reviews to her 'name' might have pushed her to clearing her 'name', especially seeing as she was the only surviving 'Bell brother'. Charlotte might have wanted to take control and continue marketing her author persona Currer Bell, which she continued to refer to herself as; although, her identity at the time was commonly known. It seems

¹ <https://archive.org/details/tenantwildfellh10brongoog> and <https://archive.org/details/tenantwildfellh12brongoog>

Thank you to Yuri Cowan for sharing this discovery.

that it was easier for Charlotte to take this control at this point in her life as she was the only surviving 'Bell'. Not having to consider her sister's feelings nor opinions anymore, Charlotte found herself having a unique opportunity to stand more independently, similarly to the future George Eliot. Although people knew her identity and her sister's novels had established their own status in literary circles, Charlotte now stood independently as 'the most famous "Bell brother"', which possibly strengthened her authorial persona. Signs point to this being Charlotte's aim, as she focused on the lack of overwhelming reception of her sisters' novels, saying that: "for strangers they were nothing, for superficial observers less than nothing" (312). There is also a clear sense of wanting to defend and honor her sisters and their creative ability. Charlotte continues by saying: "for those who had known them all their lives in the intimacy of close relationship, they were genuinely good and truly great. This notice 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" (312). Although she aimed to shed honor and justice over her sisters' memory, I need to point out that the honor focused around their personal identities, rather than directly honoring their writing and authorial personae. Throughout the notice, Charlotte refers to her sisters by both their actual names and their pseudonyms, like she is separating their personal and professional identities. Charlotte gives a detailed presentation of their personalities and how it affected their writings. She explains that neither of them were learned, and that "they had no thought of filling their pitchers at the well-spring of other minds; they always wrote from the impulse of nature, the dictates of intuition, and from such stores of observation as their limited experience had enabled them to amass" (312). Through this, Charlotte strips away her sisters' authorial personae, slowly revealing their real identities making their names be Emily and Anne, rather than Ellis and Acton Bell, leaving her the only surviving 'Bell brother'. The fact that Charlotte never talks about her own identity in detail; although, openly surrendering her sisters creates an interesting paradox about her idea of author persona. She seems to be lacking respect of her sisters' author performances, not able to put herself in their positions. It is a paradox how Charlotte worked so hard to obtain her own persona, while there seems to have been limited respect for others' personae. It is also possible seeing Charlotte's biographical notice as a public statement, denying any connection between her and Currer Bell; however, if this was the reason for writing the notice, then she does in fact fail. She confirms the readers' suspicions; although. Charlotte never mentions surnames nor her name; she unveils herself by presenting the fact that they were sisters, and by revealing her sisters' names. This only confirms the readers' suspicions, rather than succeeding in the separation.

Concerning the function and the importance of names and honoring the author, it is interesting seeing how the Brontë sisters' pseudonyms are crossed out, and their real names have been written above, and vice versa, on the title pages shown on the online database on archive.org

(Illustration 2, Appendix 1). Unfortunately, there is no data telling us the origin of these cross outs. There is, of course, a possibility that it was done within the nineteenth century, presumably after Charlotte's death in 1855. The change goes against the concept of building an authorial persona, disregarding any possibility of respect towards their choice-preserving their author personae, especially if they were written in the nineteenth century. It also shows how quickly dismissed their personae were when they no longer had the opportunity to obtain them themselves. It can also be a result of Charlotte's biographical notice in *Wuthering Height* and Elizabeth Gaskell's biography on Charlotte Brontë, published in 1857, two years after Charlotte's death. I have previously argued that Brontë's motivation for adopting their authorial personae was to distance themselves from the gendered hierarchy women writers often feel subjected off. The alteration of their names on the title pages, seem to be a form of disrespect towards their wish to distance themselves from the stereotypical perspective on 'female writers'. However, using their real names can also be understood as a way of honoring their work, gender and success.

3.4 The invisibility shield

Charlotte Brontë might have feared that critics and readers were able to detect some similarities between her personal life, and her texts, especially her heroine Jane Eyre. Through her persistent denial, one would almost start questioning if there was something she was trying to suppress or hide from the public, something that could have not only changed the way the public viewed *Jane Eyre* but also how they viewed her. Although there are parallels, many remain as theories. Whether Brontë had something to conceal from the public or not, we are still left with her consistent denial of her relation to her novels. Barthes describes the relationship between the author and the text to be a form of tyranny, determining how the reader will interpret the text and its moral. Based on this, one could argue that Brontë in her own way eliminated any sense of tyranny in connection to her texts. According to Mullan, Brontë addressed the widely-accepted idea that Currer Bell could be a woman with a sense of anger: "I *do* wish these hirelings of the Press were still ignorant of my being a woman. Why can they not be content to take Currer Bell for a man?" (qtd. by Mullan 96). This passage was part of a letter Brontë wrote to James Taylor in 1849, the same year as Brontë's second novel *Shirley* was published. In the passage, we see that Currer Bell was initially intended as an invisibility shield within the literary society. She addressed the problem again within a letter to Smith Williams:

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 judgement (qtd. in Mullan 96).

Based on this we can understand that Currer Bell continued being a form of invisibility shield for Brontë. We see signs of Barthes' ideas on the identity of the author playing a role in the readers' judgement and interpretation through Brontë arguing that she did not want to be judged as a woman, nor a man, but as an Author. By demanding to have the public's focus on her identity removed, Brontë exemplifies what Barthes claimed one hundred years later in "The Death of the Author". She wanted to remove the tyranny over the texts; she wanted her novels to be judged simply by their content and their quality, regardless of who wrote them.

Based on these arguments one could say that Brontë saw herself as a medium and a reflection tool of the environment, leaving it to the reader to give the text its voice. Through the way she portrayed herself, especially in the "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell", she seems to be trying to preserve the speculations regarding the identity of Currer Bell. These speculations were not only to evoke interest, but also a way of avoiding placing herself and her works in a category which according to her and Barthes could affect the idea and the interpretation of the texts. It is especially interesting to look at how this message of not judging by the gender or one's background shows through Brontë's novels, especially *Jane Eyre*: "Do you think I am an automaton? - a machine without feelings? [...] Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? - You think wrong! - I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart (Brontë 253) "It is known that you are not my sister; I cannot introduce you as such: to attempt it would be to fasten injurious suspicions on us both. And for the rest, though you have a man's vigorous brain, you have a woman's heart, and - it would not do" (Brontë 408). These quotations are good reflections of the idea Brontë portrays through her letters, and how she distances herself from her author persona. Through creating a persona, Charlotte could move within the literary circles, listening to their honest reviews on her texts. In the first quotation, we find it is not only intended to specify towards women who often found themselves subjected off the gendered hierarchy, but rather any social groups that ever felt inferior to others, shown through her use of the words "poor, obscure, plain, and little". Charlotte Brontë becomes a voice against the different forms of social injustice. The idea that she raised a political statement within her novel makes the idea of the persona being an invisibility shield even more authoritative. Raising one's voice in a society based on so much division and lack of empathy for the ones socially below you are an important and brave act. And by having the voice be a mix between a masculine and feminine tone, only evoke more focus, which her anonymity emphasized. Again, we see her invisibility being a tool to protect herself, but also ironically to evoke more focus to herself and her words. The second quotation is said to Jane by St. John Rivers, and addresses the problem of gendered hierarchy and makes Charlotte's social and cultural criticism stand so much stronger. Having a man tell a woman that she possesses a man's brain is a direct critic towards the idea on the lack of optimal

development of women's brains. Here Charlotte voiced her opinion on genders not to being limited to stereotypical frames. Women can be just as creative, talented and intelligent as men if only given a chance to raise their voices.

Although these arguments are both good and valid, there are still reason to believe that the choice of being invisible links to a set of different personal emotions. In 1837, Charlotte Brontë sent a letter to the poet, Robert Southey asking him for his judgement on a selection of her poems. Southey wrote back saying that “[l]iterature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation” (qtd. in Gaskell 123). Southey advised Charlotte to write purely for it being “wholesome both of the heart and soul; it may be made the surest means, next to religion, of soothing the mind and elevating it” (qtd. in Gaskell 124). He explains that being motivated by the celebrity is unhealthy, since “[m]any volumes of poems are now published every year without attracting public attention, any one of which if it had appeared half a century ago, would have obtained a high reputation for its author” (qtd. in Gaskell 123). In receiving his letter, Brontë first found herself being embarrassed, especially for troubling him with her letter. But as she reads the letter again, she finds his advice to be very helpful and shows her gratitude by writing him back:

I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. [...] I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print: if the wish should rise I'll look at Southey's letter, and suppress it (qtd. in Gaskell 125).

This quotation illustrates a mix of emotions, linking together Brontë's personal desire to venture into the world of publishing and still hesitating on her ability to succeed. She seems to have tried to suppress her disappointment and desires, trying to fit into the traditional roles provided to her by society. Although, she does claim “I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print” (qtd. in Gaskell 125) she based her decision on the disappointing response and advice she received from by a male writer, leaving still the possibility to change her mind. This quotation and her correspondence with Southey, presents the possibility that Currer Bell is a form of invisibility shield protecting her against any possible disappointment and shame for failing as a novelist. The correspondence between Brontë and Southey can be analyzed in the context of Haworth. The letters were written in 1837 when Charlotte was only 21 years old and living in Haworth, which at the time was “a working-class manufacturing town” (Barker 16). According to both Elizabeth Gaskell's autobiography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and theorists such as Juliet Barker, Haworth played an important role in the Brontës' lives and success as novelists. Gaskell devoted her first two chapters

of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* to the history and living environment of Haworth (9-33), a description which Barker argues “was almost a hundred year out of date” (15). Barker’s text provides insight into the Brontës’ childhood and describes Haworth as a town that valued cultural life. Thus, the Brontës were involved in the art of music and drawing. A good selection of literature was also available, mainly through the town’s circulating libraries. The selection of the Brontës’ personal library was limited, consisting mainly of works by Horace and Homer and Walter Scott, the latter having had great influence on the imagination of the Brontë children. Their father, who worked as a clergyman had throughout his career published works of poetry and simple tales preaching moral messages. Despite his joy of writing and creating imaginary worlds, Patrick Brontë advised his children to prioritize their daily duties, leaving the pleasure of imagination to their free time. (Barker 24-7) This advice echoes in Southey’s letter which Charlotte received years later. Being advised not to peruse a career in writing from the two male figures who Charlotte admired and respected, who also had experience with could have had a negative effect on Charlotte Brontë’s development to become a published author. However, it is crucial to view this advice as an honest portrayal of reality, and a form of protection. Looking back at Southey’s letter, he does mention the overall struggle of publishing, and the art of making a name for yourself, thus making an honorable profit. Through this mention, Southey provides Brontë with an insight into the real world of the publishing industry, which at this point were not familiar with, which could also be seen done by her father. Besides receiving advice from her father and Southey at a young age, and having a good selection of literary available, there are no significant elements that directly link Haworth to the origin of Currer Bell. Although, her father’s interest in politics, religion and literature are an indirect but resourceful inspiration for the children and their imagination. These are essential building blocks which later developed Charlotte and her sisters into authors, especially by making a political standpoint by proving the idea of gender roles wrong by adopting a male pseudonym.

As we have seen, there is a reason to believe that Charlotte Brontë concealed herself behind the name Currer Bell because she experienced self-doubt regarding her ability to write. This self-doubt can be rooted in the gendered hierarchy which seems reinforced through the correspondence between her and Southey. It is easy to believe it to be the base of Charlotte’s authorial persona; one can also understand it as a strategy of distancing herself from a stereotypical perspective and idea of authorship. Through close readings of personal writings of Charlotte Brontë, we have detected several incidents of paradox reference to herself both in first and third person. Based on this paradox and her constant denial of being the author of her works, we can detect clear indications of Currer Bell being a strongly established role in Brontë’s authorial performance. Despite having her real identity becoming publicly known, Brontë continued her performance as Currer Bell, freeing her creativity and herself from restrictions and cultural prejudice by which she felt threatened.

4. The Endurance of George Eliot

As discussed in relation to Charlotte Brontë's persona, Currer Bell, the reason for adopting a male authorial persona can be understood as an invisibility shield protecting women from the emotional strains potentially caused by a gendered cultural hierarchy. Today Currer Bell has disappeared into the shadow of Charlotte Brontë's career. Unlike Brontë there are authors whose authorial persona has overshadowed their actual name, the best-known example being George Eliot, whose birth name was Mary Anne Evans. Even today, Eliot is sometimes misunderstood to be a male author, and Mary Anne Evans has become a name that has no relations to literature. The difference in how the authorial performances of Eliot and Brontë developed, where only one persona survived the test of time, will be examined and compared in this chapter's discussion.

4.1. Becoming George Eliot

Seeing as both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* were inspired greatly by Eliot's childhood in Warwickshire, many of Eliot's readers recognized elements reminding them of their personal life. These familiar elements resulted in a circling rumor on Eliot being "a poor, disreputable Nuneaton clergyman named Joseph Liggins" (Bodenheimer 29 – 30). Similar to the reviews of *Jane Eyre*, critics of Eliot's works did not share the future ideas of Barthes. The idea of separating the author's personal life from the text was non-existing for both the critics and readers, resulting in nineteenth-century reading growing into a form of decoding. Although Eliot's first two fictional works did draw close parallels to her personal life, there is no reason to believe that they were a way for Eliot to reveal her identity, rather it being an element of realism. Nancy Henry describes Eliot's writing as "a bridge between her past and present – a way to communicate the common experiences of the type of people she had known in her youth to the type of people she met in her new life" (46-7). We see the bridge linking the past and present together in the plot of Eliot first novel, *Adam Bede*, which was published in 1859. *Adam Bede* draws parallels to a story about a young woman sentenced to death for killing her child, a story told by one of Eliot's older family members, while the protagonist Adam based on aspects of the life of Eliot's father (Henry 52). Seeing as the plot of *Adam Bede* draws such close parallels to someone's past life in Warwickshire, I have no trouble understanding the readers' growing curiosity of the origin of the novel. Seeing as the protagonist Adam based on parts of Eliot's father life, it is easy to understand that Eliot would like to keep her identity a secret, as a way of protecting herself and her family. The same year of the publication of *Adam Bede*, *The Critic* published an article addressing an author's presumed right to be anonymous; briefly mentioned in the chapter on the theoretical background of anonymous and pseudonymous

publishing. The unknown writer of the article, presents a letter from Eliot where she addresses her right to preserve her anonymity and explains the rumors about her identity as indefensible:

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 rumors which such prying may give rise to, seems to me quite indefensible, still more so to state these rumours as ascertained truths. George Eliot (“The Critic” 387).

The Critic's article respond to Eliot's request for respect and privacy, arguing that authors do not have the right to publish novels anonymously, seeing it from the view of law and “the moral good of society” (387). The writer presents five possible motives that might cause writers to publish anonymously, where the overall idea is that authors either feels a sense of shame or personal uncertainty regarding their work or ability to write. The writer continues saying: “[w]e must candidly declare that we have no great respect for any of these reasons. They are not all absolutely disgraceful; but they are none of them highly creditable. Why should a man be ashamed to acknowledge that which he is not ashamed to write?” (“The Critic” 387). The writer of the article addresses the concept of an author as male, up to the last paragraph where it starts talking about female authors (388). No negativity is given in relation to female authors; although, his narrow and generalized portrayal of an author figure illustrates the social and cultural perspective on women writers. By waiting to include the female pronoun up to the end of the article can be understood as a way of removing them from the equation; giving the idea of gender roles a louder voice. Despite the great reviews of *Jane Eyre* and Brontë's gender being publicly known four years before, this article illustrates how strongly many believed and supported the gendered hierarchy in literary circles.

The rumors on George Eliot being Joseph Liggins evolved into “London's literary set [being] divided between pro and anti-Ligginsites” (Henry 9). In 1860, a year after the article in *The Critic* was published, Eliot and her partner George Henry Lewes agreed on announcing that she was George Eliot, after unsuccessfully attempting to put an end to the rumors in an anonymous letter published in *The Times* (Bodenheimer 30). Up to this point, Eliot had been writing anonymously for years. Rosemarie Bodenheimer explains that Eliot's anonymity as a journalist gave her the ability where “her intellectual and managerial authority could function freely and successfully. [...] Officially under cover, her gender was no impediment to the full exercise of her talents” (26). Removing herself from the safety of anonymity was perhaps not what Eliot had attended, at least not this early in her career. While Eliot seemed to prefer the freedom that anonymity provided, she also understood the value and function of a name. Adopting the name George Eliot in 1857, was not the first time Mary Anne Evans altered her name. Bodenheimer describes Eliot as “a woman of many names” (20). The first alteration was dropping the 'e' from Anne after the death a member of

her immediate family, as a possible symbol of “the rejection of an unnecessarily elegant frill” (Bodenheimer 22). After the death of her father in 1849, Mary Ann began working as a translator and eventually as an assistant editor for the *Westminster Review*. As entered the life of an independent woman, she changed her name again, this time to “the more sophisticated ‘Marian’” (Bodenheimer 26). When she became romantically involved with George Henry Lewes, she unofficially changed her last name from Evans to Lewes, which was the name she signed herself as she adopted ‘George Eliot’ (Bodenheimer 28-9).

Eliot’s continuous alterations of her name can be understood as a way of entering new stages of her life. Unlike her other identities, George Eliot becomes a professional alter ego which limits the possibility of drawing parallels back to her, unlike her other names. Through examining Brontë’s authorial persona, one discovers a paradox in the way she referees to herself in both the first and the third person. This paradox is especially evident in Brontë’s “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell”. Here Brontë revealed the actual names of her sisters, while there being no mentioning of their surname nor Charlotte’s actual name. The name Bell being connected to three different authors caused great confusion and misunderstandings among critics and readers, as many mistook them for being one person. Seeing as Eliot did not share her authorial persona with anyone she did not experience this as a problem in obtaining her performance. Based on the constant change in Eliot’s name, understanding the idea of a name as a creative tool becomes much more apparent in relation to George Eliot than Charlotte Brontë. In her letter to Blackwood, Eliot address ‘George Eliot’ as something she can easily replace with another name if ‘he’ proves himself to be an ineffective writer (Mullan 103). The name George Eliot is therefore understood as one of many possible tools making it possible for Eliot to enter and walk invisible in a society where she felt a sense of inferiority. Eliot regarded names as something that can be easily altered, therefore not having much significance to it standing alone. Eliot’s ability to separate herself from her persona even in the beginning stages, is also seen done in Charlotte Brontë’s authorial performance. While Brontë consistently shifted between addressing herself in the third and the first person, Eliot portrayed herself and her persona as two separate identities, each with their own individual qualities and abilities. Despite Eliot’s identity eventually being revealed, she was like Brontë determent on keeping her personal and professional life separated. When asked by the editor of the Oxford English Dictionary what name she would like to be referred by, Eliot answered, “I wish always to be quoted as George Eliot”, while signing the letter with ‘M. E. Lewes’ ” (qtd. in Mullan 108). Despite the shortness of the letter it brings great insight into the strategy and concept of authorial persona and authorship as a cultural performance. By comparing Eliot’s letter to Brontë’s correspondences and public mentions of her relationship with Currer Bell, one detect both similarities and contrasts between the two authors and how they address themselves. The most

interesting contrast is how Eliot signs the letter with her real name, rather than continuing concealing herself behind the masculine pseudonym which Brontë continuously did - even in correspondence with her publisher who knew who she was. The significant of Brontë's switch between addressing Currer Bell in the third and the first person fades in comparison with the paradoxical letter of Eliot, where she showcased both of her identities. Venturing into the path of novel writing, Marian offered the name 'George Eliot' to her new publisher, Blackwood, to use as "a tub to throw to the whale in case of curious inquiries" (qtd. in Bodenheimer 20). From this metaphor, we understand that Eliot had no clear intentions of revealing her identity, only viewing her author persona as something to satisfy curious readers. However, the comparison between a tub and a whale in her metaphor indicates that she understood that the name would not be enough to satisfy the curiosity her work would potentially face. Unfortunately, revealing the truth about her identity resulted in new rumors, this time about her relationship with George Henry Lewes, which had lasted for about six years after Lewes had forfeited his right to divorce his wife who had had an affair (Bodenheimer 28). Having their relationship be non-legal was a possible threat to Eliot's pride and reputation, her authorial performance can be understood as a way of protecting herself and their relationship.

The constant rumors about her personal life influenced how Eliot developed her authorial persona further. In a letter addressed to her publisher Blackwood in 1857, she wrote:

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 (qtd. in Mullan 103).

The anxiety expressed in this quotation reveals Eliot's doubt about her ability to succeed as a novelist, while also illustrating a pragmatic approach to her authorial persona. Within this quotation, we see Marian Evans distancing herself from George Eliot by addressing the possibility of dismissing George Eliot and potentially moving over to another name. The name George Eliot was inspired by George Henry Lewes (Edwards 176), and possibly George Sand, the pseudonym of the of an author which Marian admired in her youth (Mullan 103). It is easy to understand that Eliot decided to use Lewes's name as a way of declaring her love for him, by indirectly making him part of her persona. It was, however, a brave decision since George Henry Lewes was a known name within different cultural societies, as "an actor, drama critic and novelist who later wrote two books of popular science" (Edwards 175). By linking her professional name indirectly to Lewes, Eliot shows signs of struggling to fully devoting herself to her authorial persona and her new identity. Choosing to use the first name of her non-legal husband as a form of protection from the danger of

being labeled a "fallen woman" (Bodenheimer 28) seems more like a confirmation of their relationship than an invisibility shield. Both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* received great reviews and attention by the public. While Eliot became overwhelmed by success, she still found herself fearing a possible future failure, writing in her journal: "Shall I ever write another book as true as 'Adam Bede'? The *weight* of the future presses on me and makes itself felt even more than the deep satisfaction of the past and present" (qtd. in Bodenheimer 30). This quotation shows an emotional impetus that Eliot had to overcome in the beginning stages of her career as a novelist. The insecurity is also shown in one of her journal entries from the start of her career as a fictional writer:

I was too proud and ambitious to write: I did not believe I could do anything fine, and I did not choose to do anything of that mediocre sort which I despised when it was done by others. I began, however, by a sort of writing which had no great glory belonging to it, but which I felt certain I could do faithfully and well (qtd. in Nestor 23).

Based on Eliot's first career as a journalist, translator and writer of periodicals, this quotation shows her reflecting on her past experiences as a writer and how she felt more comfortable with the journalistic format. In 1854 Eliot, then known as Marian Evans, worked on a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, resulting in it becoming "the only work of hers to appear with a name other than 'George Eliot'" (Mullan 102). Considering this was someone else's work, Eliot did not feel the need for a pseudonym. Her name would go by unnoticed, and therefore she did not feel the need to conceal or protect herself, nor her opinions which she expressed anonymously as a journalist, critic and essay writer. The fact that she addressed the idea of novelists having a sense of glory links back to the growing status of a novelist in the nineteenth century, and the interest around the author figure. It is easy to argue that we see a sense of uncertainty in Eliot as she grows into a public figure by labelling her writing with a name. This form of label might have scared her away from using the strong voice she had used in her journalistic career. The quotation can also indicate a feeling of insecurity about her ability to succeed in a new style of writing. According to George Henry Lewes, Marian had not tried fictional writing before she met him, resulting in him advising her to try it. In a conversation with Lady Holland, George Henry Lewes said: "The extraordinary thing is that I never discovered this power in her – that she never should have written a line till her 35th year" (qtd. in Nestor 23). While providing these quotations which sheds light on Eliot's insecurities, Nestor describes Eliot's development into a novelist as both headstrong and attentive to the function, affect, and quality of the text. These three are elements which come with the literary style of realism (24-5).

Eliot's use of elements which many readers and critics familiarized with based itself on her

strong admiration of realism as a reflection and representation of the moral system within the societies. Eliot viewed realism as “depended on a capacity for psychological veracity” (Nestor 25) and believed “in an ‘undeviating law’ which pertained as much to the moral as to the material world” (Nestor 25). This determination breaks the image of Eliot being an uncertain inspiring novelist. During the production of her short story “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story”, published in 1857, Eliot received advice on modifying the character of Caterina where she replied:

I am unable to alter anything in the relation to the delineation or development of character, as my story grow out of my psychological conception of the dramatis personae... And I cannot stir a step aside from what I *feel* to be *true* in character” (qtd. in Nestor 25).

The making of George Eliot was a rather complex process showing signs of both determination and insecurities. Nestor explains realism as something “much more than an aesthetic preference: it was ‘doctrine’ (24). It is understandable that Eliot experienced some self-doubt when venturing into a such respected style of writing as realism. Eliot’s respect for the creative form of realism and how it made her insecure, shows itself in her questioning if she will be able to “write another book as true as ‘Adam Bede’?” (qtd. in Bodenheimer 30). The choice of the word ‘true’ in this quotation and how it connects to the weight of the future represents the solid building blocks in the base of Eliot’s authorial persona, not only her insecurity on her ability to succeed as a novelist, but also as a real author of realism. Eliot had a strong voice which she had used anonymously to comment on different social defaults as a journalist and essay writer. Between 1849 and 1856, she wrote periodicals which according to Nancy Henry can “help us to understand why she began to write fiction and also how she thought fiction ought to be written” (41). This political voice in Eliot’s essays and periodicals links back to the style of realism which she ventured into as a fictional writer. Henry explains that during her career as a reviewer and essay writer, Eliot “measured the writing of others according to a standard of ‘truth’ and argued passionately for the moral necessity of such truth” (41). Eliot’s focus on the importance of morality is interesting in relation to her untraditional living situation with George Henry Lewes, which goes against the social expectations and frame of nineteenth-century societies. In other words, we do see a clear link between George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë’s authorial personae. Both personae originate from wanting to break through in literary circles, but also wanting to conceal themselves from the potential of being judged, both for being women and having romantic feelings for married men, which according to Barthes can affect the receptions of their texts.

4.2 Eliot's authorial performance

The difference in how Brontë and Eliot address themselves in relation to their authorial personae illustrates a different strength within their authorial performance. In her letters to Blackwood, Eliot refers to her persona in the third person, showing a similar strategy of authorial performance as seen in Brontë's letters. Compared to Eliot, Brontë seemed more determined and secure in her performance and role. By not declaring herself as Currer Bell, Brontë tried to conceal her identity throughout her whole career, while Eliot revealed her identity within the first years of her career as a novelist. Brontë's consistency in this matter illustrates an early representation of Barthes' idea of the 'death of the author'. Eliot's strategy differs from Brontë's in that she acknowledges her personal authorship of her early works. The lack of strength in Eliot's authorial performance shows through different forms of insecurities. The fact that George Henry Lewes was the one introducing Eliot to Blackwood through a letter, illustrates that she might not have had the courage to do it herself. When presenting Blackwood's future author George Eliot, Lewes described her "as a very diffident, retiring man who needed support and encouragement to go on writing, and enjoining on him absolute secrecy about the origin of the stories" (Bodenheimer 29). I will like to include that Blackwood had suspicions regarding the identity of his new author; although, he saw himself satisfied not knowing the whole truth (29). Seeing as George Henry Lewes was an established name in the literary world, this letter can also be understood as a way to convince Blackwood to give this new author an honest chance, having George Henry Lewes be a good and reliable reference.

Although we see clear signs of insecurities within Eliot's authorial performance, she did stand up against Blackwood's suggested changes saying that "as an artist I should be utterly powerless if I departed from my own conceptions of life and character" (qtd. in Gray 186). Here we see a great determination which directly links Eliot's personal and professional side. Eliot's gender portrayal often receives some criticism. Kate Flint explains that critics, especially women such as Mathilde Blind, and Florence Nightingale, who reviewed *Middlemarch* in *Fraser's Magazine for town and country* in 1873, commented on Eliot's conservative portrayal of gender and how this portrayal did not fit the image of Eliot as an untraditional woman herself. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar goes as far as to call Eliot's writing "feminine antifeminism" ("George Eliot and Gender" 160). Eliot defended herself by arguing that she portrayed both genders in the actual social state they live in, not concealing the imperfections of the social structure and idea (Flint, "George Eliot and Gender" 162). Through this realistic portrayal, Eliot makes "her readers think about the connections between power, authority, and gender" (Flint, "George Eliot and Gender" 163). Seeing how Eliot during her time as a literary critic herself highly valued the 'truth' in the texts, we easily understand her point. Her strong defense against criticism on her gender portrayal made her authorial performance stand strong. It is important to note that the critics mentioned based their arguments on the fact that they

knew Eliot's gender, making us question how her gender portrayal was viewed before she revealed her gender in 1860. The traditional portrayals might have passed unnoticed, or at least not as effective when they were believed to have been given by a man. While there is a clear difference between Eliot's gender portrayal and the gender portrayal we see in *Jane Eyre*, Eliot's female voice and authorial performance become strengthened through her revealing her identity. By revealing her identity and proving the gendered hierarchy wrong with her 'masculine' intelligent, and her authorial persona still going strong till this day demonstrates the strength of her authorial performance.

Similar to Charlotte Brontë, Eliot experienced a sudden and growing interest around her identity with the publication of her first fictional work, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, first published anonymously in serial form. Within the beginning of the next year, January 1858, it was published in book form, introducing George Eliot as an upcoming author. Within the next few months, critics started questioning the identity of this new author. *The Saturday Review* wrote: "The republication of these stories in two volumes, with the name of George Eliot attached, has done little towards satisfying curiosity, since the suspicion is pretty general that George Eliot is an assumed name" (566). The reviewer also rewards Eliot's "courage and [...] talent to paint what he [knew], and only what he [knew]" (566). Courage was found through the choice in topic:

As might have been expected, a writer who selects topics so unlike those of other novelists, and who disregards conventions in conception will not be likely to fall into the slipslop and conventions of expression which make the generality of novels difficult to read twice. In no page of these volumes have we noticed writing for writing's sake, or phrases flung out at hazard. The language always expresses distinct ideas, and the epithets are chosen because they are fitting (567).

In connection to the idea of women being intellectually and creativity inferior to men, it is interesting and ironic seeing how they applaud Eliot's style of writing, believing it to be by the hand of a man. Eliot received praise for mastering the art of expressing clear ideas through her use of language, an art that supposedly a female brain was not able to master. The fact that the reviewer suggested that George Eliot was an assumed name brings us back to *The Christian Remembrancer's* review of *Jane Eyre* in 1848. In this review, the writer argues that Currer Bell had to be a woman from the North part of the country, and that 'Currer Bell' might be an anagram (396). Each of the reviews was given in the early stages of Eliot and Brontë's careers, illustrating how we might understand the impression that new authors received in the nineteenth century. Not only was writing and publishing a growing industry as a result of reading becoming a professional requirement, but there was also an increasing interest in the author figure. It is, therefore, easy to argue that the assumptions about Currer Bell and George Eliot being pseudonyms, rather than their actual names, were based on the growing literary industry and the common practice of anonymous and

pseudonymous publishing. While they did assume that Bell and Eliot are pseudonyms, only Charlotte Brontë was believed to be a woman. While *The Saturday Review* article argue that Eliot was an assumed name, there were no speculations about the author being a woman. This tie back to Eliot's conservative portray of gender and her 'masculine intelligent' making it hard to believe her to be a woman.

Kristin Brady studied the idea of George Eliot as an icon going against the stereotypical idea of her gender. Brady explains that while reviews such as by *The Saturday Review* labelled Eliot's writing as masculine, there were critics who experienced being “fearful of applying the label ‘masculine’ to [her], even though they could see attributes in her that they thought were exclusively confide to men. To do so, apparently, would be to deny her femininity and therefore to identify her with the stereotypical blue-stocking” (5-6). Brady explains the idea of 'blue – stockings' through Elaine Showalter’s definition of women who were “seen as tough, aggressive, pedantic, vain, and ugly” (qtd. in Brady 6). It is questionable if this is a justifiable description of Eliot; however, it is easy to detect a sense of toughness and aggression within Eliot. The aggression towards the gendered hierarchy portrays itself through Eliot taking on the role of an anonymous journalist, assuming “the authority of a male voice while making hard-hitting points about the position of women within patriarchy – and within the professional establishment of writers” (Brady 45) before starting her career as a novelist. Even though she spoke her mind behind a masculine voice, one still get a strong sense of Eliot’s aggression towards the cultural division between genders, translating into the literary industry and circles. This political voice is especially seen in her essay “Silly Novels and Silly Novelist”, which she got published anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in 1856. In her essay, Eliot shaded light on factors that strengthen the culturally gendered hierarchy, arguing that works written by upper-class women who write "because they had no other 'lady-like' means of getting their bread" (302) had a bad effect on the works of female writers from other social classes. Eliot describes upper-class women as 'silly novelists' who were unable to create characters and plot that are realistic and relatable for the diverse types of readers, thus affecting the quality of their work. The lack of quality in 'the silly novels' resulted in their writings struggling to be taken seriously, which easily translates over to other women writers who become prejudged as 'silly novelists'. Eliot argues that the “fair writers have evidently never talked to tradesman except from a carriage window; they have no notion of the working-classes except as 'dependents' ” (302). This argument illustrates the lack of life experience that affects the upper-class women's ability to produce quality texts; while women from lower social classes had the ability to create a much more realistic portray of the society, but are potential ‘victims’ of the prejudice of ‘silly novelists’. In another one of her critical writings Eliot argued that “the most mischievous form of feminine silliness is the literary form, because it tends to confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid

education of women” (qtd. in Henry 44). Through labelling the literary work of upper-class women as 'silly novels' Eliot tried to prove that not all novels written by women are 'silly' and that they deserve the same judgment as novels written by men. By trying to prove this difference between women writers, Eliot also tried to prove that gender is not the factor that determines one's ability to create quality texts. And she proved her argument further through her own authorial performance, discussing as a man.

Within her essay “Silly Novels by Silly Novelists”, Eliot present strong arguments against the stereotypical conception of female novelists and their work; although, we do question whether Eliot's arguments goes against Barthes and Foucault's ideas on the author figure and its function. Barthes and Foucault agree that it should not matter who is speaking, they both regard the personal and individual elements of the author as irrelevant for the readers' individual interpretations of the text. In other words, the author is nothing more than a name or a label connecting the texts together. By focusing her arguments on woman's social status and living conditions, Eliot seems to go against Barthes and Foucault's idea of removing the author from the equation. Eliot argues that the limited life experience of 'silly novelists' affects the quality of the work, rather than the readers' interoperation of the text. If upper-class women write a novel representing the life of people in lower classes than their own, their portrayal will lack accuracy, resulting in a lack of quality. Eliot essay, therefore, strengthens her authorial performance, rather than weakens it; although, it was written years before she created her authorial persona and pursued a career as a novelist. Seeing as Eliot wrote anonymously, under a masculine voice before she adopted the name George Eliot, means that the name George Eliot was not the beginning of her authorial performance, but simply a new step.

The year after Eliot revealed her identity the *Dublin University Magazine* published the anonymous article “Recent Popular Novels” which discussed the concept of female writers writing under male pseudonyms. The writer asks: “Why are female novelists so prone to masquerade in garments borrowed from the sterner sex?” (192). The writer argues that women are not able to conceal their gender, despite hiding behind male names, because their style of writing reveals their gender. The anonymous writer of the article argues that had women, including George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, not concealed their gender, they “would have lost none of their present fame”, and “[t]heir place in modern literature will be determined, not by their genders but by their books” (192). These arguments tie directly to the idea of gendered hierarchy in a paradox way. The writer both support the idea of cultural division between genders by staying that one's gender shines through the writing style. But the argument also dismisses the division by saying that women are equally able to write good texts as men. Looking back on the reviews Brontë and Eliot's first novels received makes it hard to agree with the arguments presented in the *Dublin University Magazine*

article. Looking at the cultural and social construction and development of nineteenth-century England, I have great trouble understanding the base of the writer's arguments. Brontë and Eliot received praise for their work; however, the first reviews based themselves on the belief that the authors were men. The arguments presented in the article disregard the cultural and social frames which are hard to come by, especially for women and those belonging to various social classes. The article's lack of a realistic representation of society portrays the arguments as naïve and vague. The limited perspective shines through the fact that the writer base his or her arguments on women who were successful and whose gender was known. The lack of a realistic perspective on cultural and social differences make me question the social class and gender of the article's writer. Based on the narrow and naïve perspective and understanding of society's fault, I have good reason to argue that the writer of the article was a man from the upper-class. There was some minor drop in the reception of Brontë and Eliot's novels after they revealed their gender, but they had both proven their ability to write quality literature, thus securing a sense of quality in their future works, linked to their names. The revealing of their gender did make it easier to connect possible parallels between Eliot and Brontë's personal lives and their texts, which Barthes argued having a limiting effect on the readers' perception and interpretation of the texts.

Eliot was aware of the risk of losing the ability to have her novels being judged without the prejudice of her gender when she revealed her identity in 1860. Twelve years before she had witnessed how the reviews of *Jane Eyre* "had changed radically in tone when [Brontë's] identity was discovered" (Brady 48). Eliot waited until receiving reviews of her first novel, *Adam Bede*, before revealing her who she was. *Adam Bede* received great reviews; although, the praise was often based on its masculine traits. When Eliot announced herself as the author, reviews did not focus much on the masculine tone, as *Adam Bede* become an object of assumption about female authorship. Many were shocked by the discovery of Marian Evans being the author of such an admired piece of literary fiction seeing as many know about her untraditional relationship with George Henry Lewes. Her second novel, *The Mill on the Floss* did unfortunately not receive the same reviews; although, people had seen the value in her writing resulting in the success of *Adam Bede* which protected her authorial performance against possible downfalls in her career. After announcing herself as George Eliot, reviewers started comparing Eliot to other female writers while praising her "as the greatest *woman* writer" (Brady 49-50). By starting her career as a novelist with a male pseudonym Eliot was, similarly to Brontë, not only able to prove her ability to produce quality work but also to prove the idea of the gendered hierarchy wrong. By acknowledging her authorship and revealing her identity, Eliot removed a significant part of the wall dividing male and female writers, even though she continued to go by the male name, George Eliot.

4.3 The function of a name

Much of our identity connects to our name, and by changing their names Eliot and Brontë both created new identities. George Eliot and Currer Bell were both gateways into literary societies, they were a way for Brontë and Eliot to walk invisible amongst critics and readers, having the focus be on the quality of their texts rather on themselves. An author's name has great significance to the idea of authorial performance. Foucault's ideas on 'author function' plays especially well into Eliot's view on her name as a tool to portray herself differently than her personal self. Foucault explains that an "author's name is a proper name, [which] does not have just one signification" (283). He explains that there are difficulties that arise with the connection of an author's proper and individual name by providing the example of Shakespeare. He explains that if it was discovered "that Shakespeare was not born in the house that we visit today, this is a modification which, obviously will not alter the functioning of the author's name" (284). Although if it was proven "that Shakespeare did not write those sonnets which pass for his, that would constitute a significant change and affect the manner in which the author's name functions" (284). It is very interesting seeing this concerning Brontë and Eliot's authorial persona. It is challenging to truly identify how to analyze the function of their authorial persona linked to Foucault's idea. Looking at it from the perspective of Foucault's example on Shakespeare, there are no alteration in the function of the name, even though they wrote under pseudonyms because their identities and individual names were publicly known. One might ask why both Brontë and Eliot, amongst other authors, created an authorial persona which were the opposite gender. Adapting male pseudonyms were deliberate decisions by Eliot and Brontë, not only to be able to enter literary circles without being judged either by their gender or as what Eliot defined as 'silly novelist', but also to prove a point and take a stand against the cultural and social separation of the genders. By publishing under male pseudonyms, Eliot and Brontë experienced it much easier being accepted as new authors, and their texts received honest reviews without being limited by their gender.

One might ask, how Eliot and Brontë's authorial performance can be seen as a protest against the gendered hierarchy since neither of them began their authorial performance intending to reveal their identity? With the growing publishing industry and interest in the author figure, both Brontë and Eliot might have either predicted or at least hoped, that their names would be no exception to the interest, seeing as it meant having their text do well. And with the growing curiosity around authors, they decided on trying to control and avoid having their novels being judged based on their gender. Using pseudonyms can be seen as a strategy of diminishing the stereotypical conception of female writers, while still being able to avoid shame by using another name, if their novels did not become successful. The author's gender seems irrelevant to Foucault's idea of the function of an author's name, and especially for modern-day readers who pay little

attention to this minor element. It can be compared to the irrelevance of Shakespeare's birthplace, seeing as these factors are not what determines the quality of a text; however, this was not a practice supported by nineteenth-century critics and readers. With the growing interest in the author figure, many critics believed that they were able to detect and discover the author's gender based on the author's style of writing. Based on the reviews of Brontë and Eliot's texts previously examined, there is no clear evidence supporting this theory. The idea of a biological difference between the genders, being the base of the idea of men being the dominating gender, also in the art of creative writing became crushed by the fact that both Eliot and Brontë's novels received praise while under the disguise of male pseudonyms. By comparing the authorial performances of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, one cannot help noticing how Currer Bell ended up fading into Brontë's distant past, while George Eliot stands strong - even today, especially seeing as there was such a difference in their authorial performances. While Eliot revealed her identity in the beginning stages of her career, Brontë continuously denied her authorship throughout her career. Unfortunately, there are no clear answers to why only one persona survived the test of time, especially seeing as George Eliot was the one to survive. One could say that Currer Bell slowly faded after Charlotte's death based on a combination of two factors. The Brontë family's requesting Elizabeth Gaskell to write Charlotte's biography after her death, which teared down the walls which Charlotte had built was the first factor. Since Charlotte wrote a long text about her sisters, revealing their identity in the biographical notice in *Wuthering Heights* while continuing keeping her identity a secret only five years before she died, I have reason to believe that she did not plan on announcing her identity within the next few years. The fact that she shared part of the name of her authorial persona with her sisters is the second factor playing in with the reason for the disappearance of Currer Bell. This factor is perhaps the most valid factor, especially seeing as together with Eliot's reveal, this is the most obvious difference between Eliot and Brontë. While Eliot stood independently with her name, Brontë had to obtain her authorial persona much more, seeing as her sisters were involved with her performance.

Going back to Barthes' idea and argument on the 'death of the author', Eliot and Brontë's examples of authorial performance shows that the author's gender and personal life is not relevant nor needed in the readers' interpretation of the texts. Despite this, Barthes' idea of possible parallels between text and author resulting in tyranny is illustrated through the interpretations of nineteenth-century readers and critics. While there were minor changes in the sense of reviews of Brontë and Eliot's texts after the revealing of their gender, they were in a sense protected by the fact that they had by then proven their ability to write. The idea of women not being able to produce as good a text as men started fading based on the praise Brontë and Eliot's writings received. The fact that they both received reviews questioning their identities, while the critics not being able to agree on their gender, shows a paradox in connection to Barthes' theory. Barthes believes that we need to

look away from the author to get a subjective interpretation of their texts. As most critics easily shifted their focus between the author and text, not being able to separate them, we see that Barthes' theory does not fit with the nineteenth-century readers and critics way of reading. By later discovering that their analyses and arguments were wrong, readers and critics were shown that the author's identity should not affect the readers' interpretations. The idea of authorial persona in connection with Barthes and Foucault's theory proves that the use of pseudonyms does not limit the author function which Foucault describes. The author is still able to preserve his or her copyright, and the readers still have a sense of quality guarantee of the text. Even if the name is a pseudonym, it still works as a form of label, in the same form as any other name. The author's name still functions as a way of organizing the texts, juridical security for the author and a sense of quality label for the readers despite it being a pseudonym. Pseudonyms minimize the chance of drawing parallels between the author and the text, seeing as the name connects to the author's 'alter ego', often completely separated from the author's real name and personal life. Eliot and Brontë used their pseudonyms as tools to make way for themselves in literary circles, becoming seen and viewed for their honest work and talent; however, they also illustrate the concept of invisible authorial performance by attempting to conceal their identities behind male names. Through these performances, Eliot and Brontë prove that neither their gender nor identity should be seen playing into how their texts should be reviewed nor interpreted. By having fake names, they not only concealed their name, but they also limited the information which their readers' interpretation can be affected by, especially seeing as they both drew on personal experiences when writing their books, making it much easier to draw parallels. And lastly, adopted their pseudonyms to free their work from cultural prejudice as 'women novels' or as Eliot calls them 'silly novels'. The use of pseudonyms is a way of separating one's personal and professional life like shown through Mary Ann shifting her name to Marian when she entered the world of journalism and periodicals. We can, therefore, see George Eliot and Currer Bell as Mary Anne Evans and Charlotte Brontë's professional selves, the selves that they wanted and needed for their work to be valued and judged free from the cultural restrictions of their gender.

5. Conclusion

Authorship is not something originating in our biological being, it is not a quality one is born with. Authorship is a performance. Throughout this dissertation, I have examined this idea in the light of two national treasures of English literature, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. This dissertation has discussed Brontë and Eliot's authorial performance as female authors veiling themselves behind masculine pseudonyms. Today, Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym Currer Bell has disappeared into her distance past, while Mary Anne Evans' pseudonym George Eliot has survived the test of time. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the concept of anonymous authorship when the author's identities were public knowledge. The discussion focused especially on the effect of gender in literary reception of nineteenth-century England, in relation to Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault's ideas on the author's role and function in relation to their texts.

Through the discussion of Charlotte Brontë's authorial performance, we saw a clear and early representation of both Barthes and Foucault's ideas. Charlotte's determination and consistency in her authorial performance are easily linked to Barthes' idea on 'the death of the author'. Barthes rejects the idea of an author's personal life being included in our reading, as it limits the readers' ability to do an objective interpretation of the text. Brontë's continuous denial of being Currer Bell was a way of preventing the readers from making parallels between her life and her novels, and most importantly preventing her gender from affecting the novels' reception and the readers' interpretations, the reception and profit. The most significant representations of this denial are how she continued to sign her letters to her publisher 'C. Bell' throughout her career, secondly the way she addressed herself and Currer Bell. Within letters and especially in the "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton" in 1850, we find her shifting between the third person reference to Currer Bell and the first person 'I'. I have argued that this was a strategy to preserve her author function, as well as not giving the reader a clear understanding of her identity, especially seeing as by this time her identity was very much public knowledge. Unlike George Eliot whose authorial persona stood independently, Charlotte Brontë had to handle the element of copyright and work harder to preserve the quality stamp linked to her authorial persona seeing as she shared the surname Bell with her two sisters. Foucault's concept of 'author function' consists of the idea that the author's name functions as a form of certainty for the readers, linking directly to their works. Foucault's explains that the function of the author's name is not linked to their personal lives, but rather to the fact that they produced their texts, linking to the concept of copyright. The discussion proved that this was a major factor in Charlotte's authorial performance, especially seeing as her novels were the one receiving the best reviews.

George Eliot did not have to battle the idea of copyright to preserve the function of her name. She still faced challenges that could affect her authorial persona, such as personal doubt and being regarded an untraditional woman. Unlike Brontë, Eliot revealed her identity in the early stages of her career, while demanding to continue being referred to by her authorial persona, a request which was accepted beyond her death. Unfortunately, there is no specific data answering the question why George Eliot has survived the test of time while Currer Bell has faded into the shadow of literary history. While, there are elements that separate Eliot and Brontë individual authorial performances, their common base is the cultural gendered hierarchy they and their many of their fellow female writers felt subjected to. George Eliot commented on this in her essay 'Silly Novels by Silly Novelists'. She argued that upper class women who pursued writing with their limited real life experiences strengthen the idea of women being inferior to men, also in cultural society. Despite the idea of a gendered hierarchy, research has shown that women were still able to succeed in publishing industries, unfortunately we do not have numbers specifying how many of these women wrote anonymously or under a masculine pseudonym.

Through the examination of Brontë and Eliot's authorial performances, I have discovered that both focused very much on their author function. Eliot demanded to continue being referred to by her persona despite having revealed her own identity, and Brontë refused to admit to being Currer Bell. Eliot's performance worked to a clear advantage of disproving the idea that women were inferior to men seeing as she revealed her gender. Although, by eventually revealing her identity five years into her career in "The Biographical notice of Ellis and Acton Bell", Brontë also contributed to a future change.

The idea of 'the death of the author' is more evident through Brontë's authorial performance, especially when through answering critics who based their judgement by assumptions on her being a woman: "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 the right to judge me – the sole ground on which I accept your judgement" (qtd. in Mullan 96). This quotation is an excellent representation of Brontë's authorial performance, while also tying itself into Eliot's performance. They both, in their own unique way, separated themselves from their personae. Through creating a personal and professional self, they proved that women can equal to men create quality literature. While they primarily used their male pseudonyms to receive honest reviews, we can also understand their author personae as a way of illustrating that there is no difference in the creative ability of men and women, which Brontë and Eliot were trying to prove. Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot performed authorship can be seen as a cultural and creative parallel of how men and women perform gender, not as something we *are* but something we *do*.

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Appendix 1: Brontë title pages

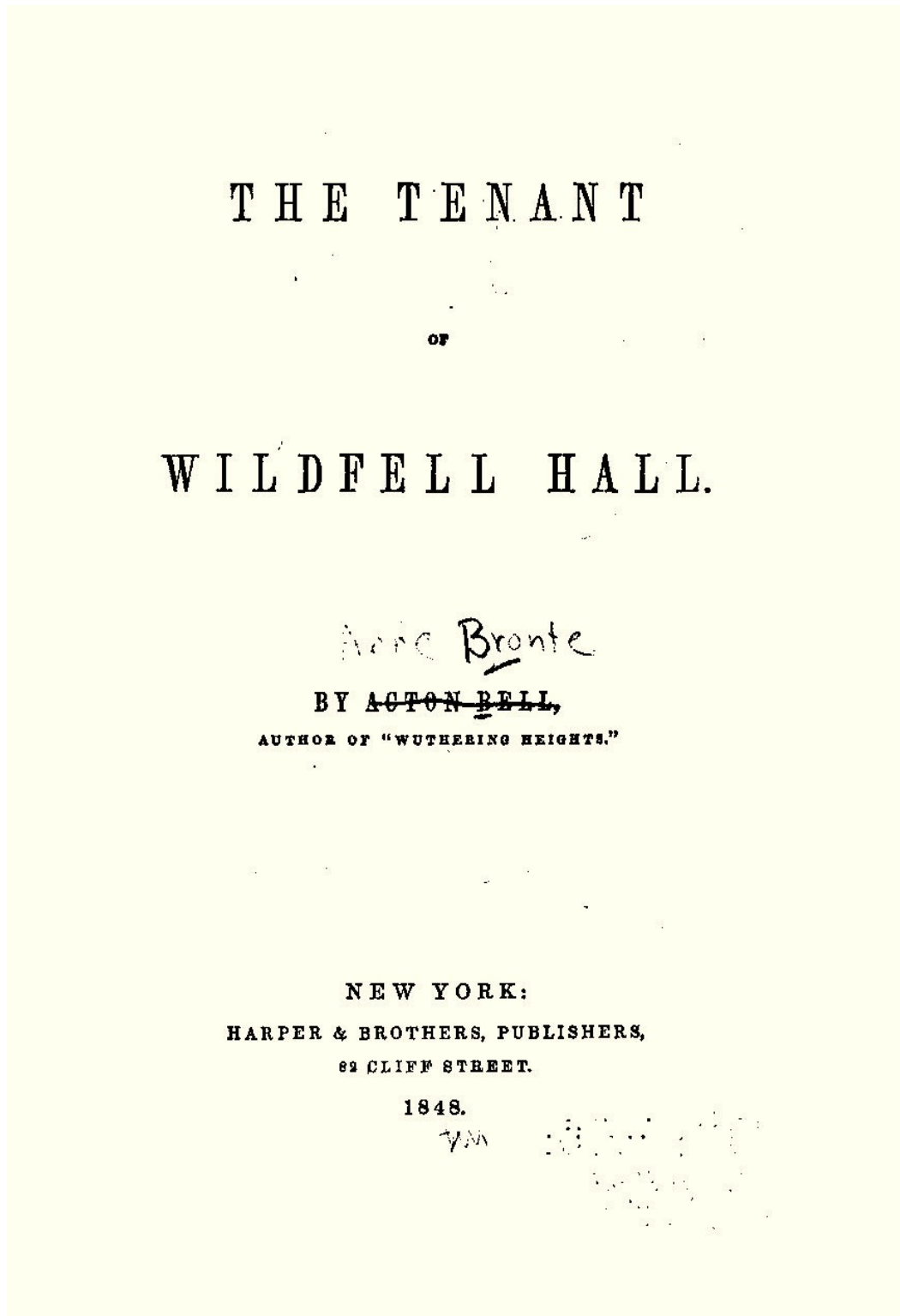


Illustration 1: Title page of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë (Acton Bell) 1848.

<https://archive.org/details/tenantwildfellh10brongoog>

Appendix 1: Brontë title pages

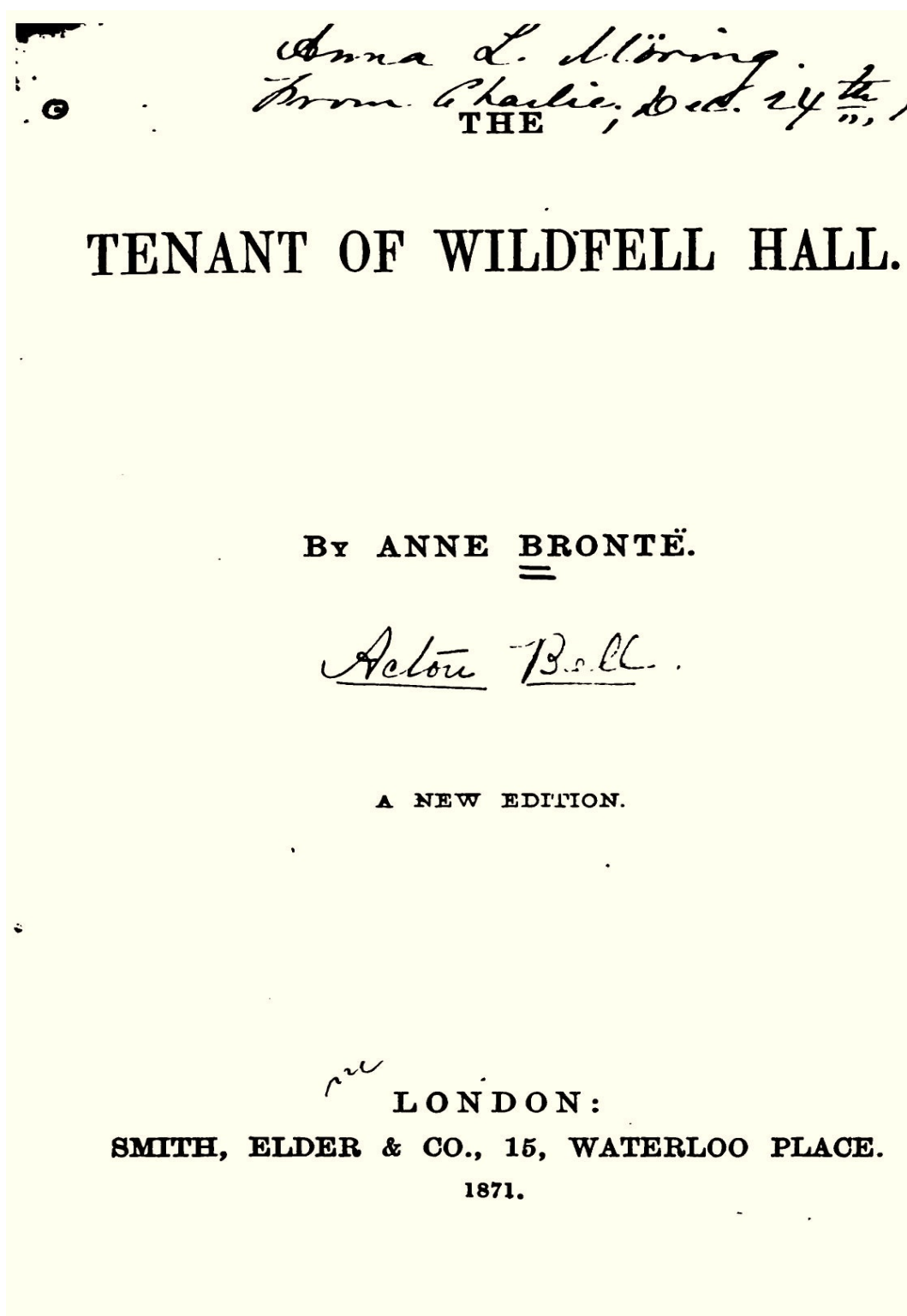


Illustration 2: Title page of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë (Acton Bell) 1871.
<https://archive.org/details/tenantwildfellh12brongoog>

Appendix 2: The master's thesis' relevance for the teaching profession

This master's thesis was a part of my teacher's education at NTNU. Due to this, it is necessary to look at the relevance this research has for the teaching profession at lower and upper secondary education level. Firstly, literature is considered a third of the English subject's focus areas, together with language and cultural studies. According to the competence aims listed on the English subject curriculums for both levels, the cultural, social and literary aims are found to be combined under one. Despite there being no direct mentioning of authorship on this document, there are several reasons why one could further one's understanding of literature by turning the focus to the historical content and origin of the text.

Through having written this master's thesis, I as a teacher will be able to provide the student with a broad understanding of literature. This research has illustrated that we need to understand literary texts as historical documents reflecting the cultural and historical context of the time they were produced. Through having this knowledge, I will be able to teach the students critical use of sources, as well as seeing the value of a classical novel as a valid source and piece of history, rather than simply an isolated fictional text.