

Judging a Book by its Author

Female Authorship and Pseudonymity in Nineteenth Century England

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Introduction

Three of the most notable British female authors of the nineteenth century published their works either anonymously or using pseudonyms: Jane Austen published as “a Lady,” Charlotte Brontë used the name Currer Bell, and Mary Ann Evans used the pseudonym George Eliot. Robert Griffin discusses authorship and pseudonymity in eighteenth and nineteenth century England, and explains that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century an author’s personal identity, and thus his or her gender, gained importance (877). In Britain, there was no official censorship of female authorship, so the decision of these authors not to publish under their own names can be seen as a form of self-censorship. For a woman in nineteenth century Britain to become an author was “in itself a feminist act” (Kirkham 33), as this defied a societal norm which discouraged women from entering the public realm (Davidoff 319) and this was primarily considered to be suitable for men. Additionally, women were considered subjects of art, never creators (Gubar 244-5). Thus, literary creativity was connected to masculinity. Austen, Brontë, and Evans did pursue a career that was considered to be more suitable for men at the time, thereby placing themselves in the public realm, even though this was not considered appropriate for their gender. There appears to be a discrepancy between what women were legally allowed to do, and what behaviour they themselves, and society, deemed advisable or appropriate.

The climate in which Austen, Brontë and Evans were writing was influenced by the Wollstonecraft Scandal. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This work, as well as Godwin’s 1798 biography of Wollstonecraft, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, affected the development of feminism¹ and emancipation. The biography showed that Wollstonecraft had lived, what was at the time

¹ Although the term was not coined until the late nineteenth century, it may still be relevantly applied in discussing earlier movements in which women’s rights were discussed and advocated.

considered to be, an immoral life. The publication of the biography created a scandal. Before the publication of the biography, those “who advocated political rights for women and those who merely advocated that they receive an education fit for rational beings” still seemed to move in the same direction (Kirkham 48). Wollstonecraft herself mostly seems to have been concerned with woman’s right to receive an education. However, after the Wollstonecraft scandal, there was a period in which women who had any kind of public reputation were polarised into either “Unsex’d Females” (Kirkham 48) or the “paragons of sexual virtue without a rebellious thought in their heads” (idem). After the publication of *Memoirs*, Wollstonecraft’s work was often seen within the context of her supposed status of an immoral, “unsex’d” woman. Women who could be linked to Wollstonecraft and her ideas received a great deal of criticism. Margaret Kirkham argues that this affected female thinkers and writers for several decades after the publication of the memoirs (49).

Female authorship is a topic that has been given a great deal of academic attention. For example, Kirkham examines Jane Austen as part of a movement in feminist literature and Allison Booth examines how Mary Ann Evans portrays ideas of feminism and emancipation in her novels, and how she considers her own success within a masculinist tradition (3). Julia Swindells discusses female professionalism and the position of the professional writer in the Victorian era. Most research has focused on societal norms regarding female authorship, and how the authors portray femininity, and feminist ideas in their novels. The present research is different in that it will focus on the authors’ perception of their own authorship, and how this relates to their use of anonymity or pseudonymity.

This thesis will argue that because Austen, Brontë, and Evans internalised societal gender norms, they seem to have had ambivalent attitudes towards female authorship and

their own status as writers². In order to address this topic, letters and three pivotal novels by Austen, Brontë and Evans will be examined by close reading. To examine Austen's attitude towards authorship, a section from *Northanger Abbey* will be used, as this section engages closely with the reading habits at the time. For Brontë, *Jane Eyre* will be used, as this novel examines a woman's move into the public realm by working as a governess. Evans' *Middlemarch* will be used because it concerns itself with the idea of the professional woman. The novels might reveal what the author considered to be the appropriate (societal) role and attitude for women. While this thesis does not seek to argue that novels directly represent authors' personal viewpoints, the novels are positioned within a societal context and can, therefore, represent a set of societal assumptions. The novels can indicate the authors' awareness of societal views, even if they did not agree with them. The letters may give an idea of the authors' reflections on these societal norms and on the way their views on these norms influenced their opinion of their female authorship.

The first chapter will discuss Austen, her letters and a section from *Northanger Abbey*. The second chapter will focus on Brontë's letters and *Jane Eyre*. The third chapter will discuss letters and essays by Evans, and attitudes towards the social position of women in *Middlemarch*. The final chapter will provide a summary and conclusion, and suggestions for further research.

² Although I have written on this topic previously, the current thesis does not rely on any of the material in my earlier research. The former essay can be seen as a starting point or an inspiration for the current work, but is otherwise irrelevant to the present discussion.

Chapter 1 - Jane Austen and “A Lady”

Born in 1775, Jane Austen published her first work, *Sense and Sensibility*, in 1811. On the title page, Austen refers to herself as “A Lady”. Austen grew up in a family that was part of the landed gentry. The Austen family appears to have been highly literary (Kaplan 92; Stabler 41) and supportive of Austen’s career as a writer, helping her to get her works published and stimulating her to write (Kaplan 92-93). However, although Austen’s family was supportive, they also seem to have been aware of the way in which a public career could be problematic for her. Professional writing was not considered to be respectable for a woman of Austen’s social class, especially for “those [as] conscious as the Austens were of occupying a position at the margins of gentility” (Fergus 5). Austen’s brother Henry published “The Biographical Notice of the Author” along with *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1817, shortly after Austen’s death. This biography seeks to establish the author’s respectability to prevent speculation about her personal life (Kirkham 56). Henry hopes that this “account of Jane Austen will be read with kindlier sentiment than simple curiosity” (v). He further states that Jane’s life was “not by any means a life of event” (v), and emphasises that the one character trait that “makes all others unimportant” (xvi) was that Jane “was thoroughly religious and devout” (idem). When first attempting to become a published author, Austen was twenty-two years old and unmarried. Kirkham explains that if Austen’s name or novels had become associated with the controversy surrounding Mary Wollstonecraft, she would have been “a vulnerable subject of attack” (53).

Although Austen published anonymously, she made public that “a Lady” wrote the novels, which suggests that she did not think female authorship in itself was problematic. Unlike Brontë and Evans, she did not use a masculine pseudonym to hide her gender. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century “a masculine penumbra surrounded [...] the public while [upper and middle class] women were increasingly engulfed by the private realm, bounded

by the physical, social and psychic partitions” (Davidoff 319). Women were discouraged from entering the public realm. By publishing, Austen moves against these societal gender norms, but she seems to protect herself by attempting to keep as much of her identity private as possible (Kirkham 56). This suggests that Austen did not want to be personally connected to female authorship, even if she may have supported it on a more ideological level. While Austen received help from her father and brother when it came to publication, she often retained copyright (Griffith 889), and her novels were published on commission (Littlewood 202), which meant Austen herself was responsible for the financial risk of publication. As was stated before, becoming a published author was in itself “a feminist act” (Kirkham 33), and this seems to be true for Austen. She steps outside the traditional role for women by publishing, gains autonomy through her authorship, and can be considered to be a professional woman³. However, there is a contrast between the feminist act of publishing and Austen’s insistence to remain in the private realm.

Austen’s desire to remain in the private realm can be recognised in her letters. Although only about 5% of Austen’s letters survived, (Le Faye, “Letters” 33) they can provide an insight in her personal attitude towards her own authorship. The remaining letters were partially censored by Austen’s sister, who omitted accounts of “illness [and] unhappiness” (Fergus 3). Austen’s letters show that by publishing anonymously she did not simply want to avoid fame, but the “attribute of assertiveness or authority in novel-writing,” which Deborah Kaplan explains was common among women in the nineteenth century (532). Firstly, Austen’s desire to remain anonymous can be recognised in a letter to her brother Francis: “Henry [Austen’s brother] heard *P. and P.* [*Pride and Prejudice*] warmly praised in Scotland by Lady Robert Kerr & another lady; & what does he do, in the warmth of his

³ The term “professional woman” will be used to describe a woman who portrays an independent attitude by taking part in the professional, in this case literary, world, by making (some) money, and who shows that she is both willing and capable of making autonomous decisions regarding her career.

brotherly vanity and love, but immediately tell them who wrote it!” (Le Faye, *Jane Austen’s Letters* 241). Secondly, her wish to avoid being considered assertive is visible in a letter to her sister Cassandra: “I should like to see Miss Burdett very well, but that I am rather frightened by hearing that she wishes to be introduced to me. If I am a wild beast I cannot help it” (Le Faye, *Jane Austen’s Letters* 221). Miss Burdett had heard that Austen was the author of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* and wished to meet her. In this passage Austen seems to be afraid that her authorship, and the assertiveness that comes with it, makes her less human, or perhaps less feminine. While her comment could be read as an ironic exaggeration, it implies that Austen may have considered her authorship to be unfitting for a woman of her station.

Over the years Austen became increasingly independent. While her father and brother usually corresponded with publishers in her early twenties, Austen later developed a more professional attitude. In 1809, she decided to write to her publisher, Mr Crosby, herself, asking him whether he was planning to publish *Susan*, a hitherto unpublished novel that had been sold to this publisher a few years prior. As he did not wish to publish *Susan*, she managed to recover the copyright by paying the publisher the original sum for the manuscript, thereby successfully regaining autonomy. However, she wrote to him under a pseudonym: “Mrs Ashton Dennis” (Austen-Leigh 224). It is remarkable that Austen used a married woman’s name, as it implies that her unmarried status may have been part of the reason for desired anonymity.

Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* engages closely with reading habits of the time. *Northanger Abbey* was most likely the first novel Austen prepared for publication, around 1798-99 (Le Fey, “Chorology” xxv-xxix), but it was one of the last to be published, posthumously in 1817, the year of her death. Austen, in *Northanger Abbey*, seems to defend the novel as a form of art and defends female authorship. This becomes most clear in a

passage that is often referred to as “the Northanger Defence of the Novel,” which Kirkham explains can be seen as an “uncharacteristic” passage in which the undervaluing of women’s writing is explicitly discussed and attacked (Kirkham 67). In this passage, Austen makes use of an “intrusive narrator” (Gerster 117) in order to address the reader directly. The passage seems strangely set apart from the rest of the novel: the narrator distances him or herself from the plot and characters. The passage starts by discussing negative societal attitudes regarding novels, and criticises novelists for not standing up for their work. Austen states that a common “custom . . . with novel-writers” (21) is that they degrade novels “by their contemptuous censure” (idem), and by “bestowing the harshest epithets on such works” (idem). She states that novel writers “scarcely ever [permit] [novels] to be read by their own heroine, who if she accidentally takes up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust” (21). This custom is criticised by the narrator, who states: “I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom” (idem). Novelists are asked to “leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure” (idem), and are called upon to support other novelists: “let us not desert one another” (idem). The passage continues to defend the novel as a way of examining human nature: the novel is a “work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language” (23). Although the “Northanger Defence” does not state that reviewers only overlook *female* novelists, the novels discussed in this passage are exclusively by female authors, while the reviewers mentioned are male, which may indicate a favourable attitude towards female authorship. The novel also criticises *The Spectator*, a periodical that was well known for “its frequent papers in which women as authors or readers were mocked” (Kirkham 70). *Northanger Abbey*, thus, shows an awareness of “the sexist bias in ‘the Tradition’ [of literary criticism]” (Kirkham 67), and appears to criticise this.

A comparison of the Northanger Defence and the previously discussed letter linking female authorship to animality implies the ambivalence of Austen's attitude towards female authorship. She seems to advocate female authorship, but also appears not to want to be personally associated with it, possibly regarding it as improper. Austen may have internalised societal norms regarding the position of women in such a way that she felt uncomfortable with the idea of entering the public realm, in spite of supporting female authorship and emancipation on an ideological level.

Chapter 2 - Charlotte Brontë and Currer Bell

The Brontë children, especially the daughters, were raised “within a milieu of respectability and chaperonage” (Maynard 7). Brontë was born in 1816, and brought up in a religious (Anglican) middle class family. Brontë spent several years of her childhood away from home to go to school, but was at home between the ages of ten and fifteen (Shorter 71). During this time, writing appears to have been a popular pastime for the Brontë children: over a hundred manuscripts from this period are still in existence, most of them having been written by Charlotte and her brother Branwell. Brontë wrote her stories using a masculine pen name: one of her stories, *The Green Dwarf*, was written in 1833 under the pseudonym Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley (Christian 191). The fact that Brontë was able to write so much during her childhood suggests that writing was not necessarily an inappropriate pastime for girls of Brontë’s social class, but this did not stretch to professional writing for women. There was limited freedom for women in the public sphere: although they could pursue careers as governesses or teachers (Poovey, *The Proper Lady* 126), this was mostly considered appropriate for unmarried woman, and professional authorship was not considered to be appropriate.

The Brontë children’s open attitude to writing and sharing stories seems to have disappeared as they grew up. Clement Shorter explains that the Brontë sisters (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne) remained, for a long time, private about their writing and their wish to publish: they “did not breathe a word to any member of their household” (329). The three sisters possibly kept their writings hidden even from one another: in her “Biographical Notice” for the 2nd edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte writes that she “accidentally lighted on a . . . Volume of verse in my sister Emily’s handwriting . . . It took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made” (qtd. in Shorter 317). For most of Brontë’s

childhood, writing appears to have been a form of entertainment, but as she grew older, writing became an almost secret activity.

Brontë's work was published under the pseudonym Currer Bell. The first work Brontë attempted to publish was a collection of poems by herself and her sisters. She writes: "[a]verse to personal publication, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine" (qtd. in Shorter 317-318). In spite of the conscious choice for gender-neutral names, Brontë refers to the authors as "Messrs. Bell" in letters to her first publishers, Aylott & Jones (qtd. in Shorter 327), implying that she considered the pseudonyms to embody or convey masculinity. The use of the name Currer Bell "transformed pseudonymity . . . into a strategy for disowning the difficulties of female embodiment by exploring the powers of abstraction" (Marcus 207). Brontë was able to achieve success in the public sphere by the creation of a masculine authorial persona and thus separating femininity from authorship. Sharon Marcus further explains that "[t]he concept of abstraction is crucial to understanding the relation of writing to female subjectivity . . . because it mediates between apparently contradictory categories: . . . femininity and professional identity" (206-7). Brontë abstracts her professional identity through the use of the pseudonym. The pseudonym appears to mediate between the two separate identities of the masculine author and domestic woman. Brontë may have felt this was necessary as it was difficult for women in the early Victorian period to handle the conflict between the "domestic and public worlds" (Scholl 65). Brontë managed to enter the public sphere and "male preserve of professional writing" (Scholl 66), but only through pseudonymity. Linda Peterson explains that Brontë managed to be professional in a "modern sense" (1), by showing interest in money, dealing with publishers in a professional manner, and actively pursuing a literary career (1-2). However, Peterson further explains that she "was not a professional woman of

letters . . . in the Victorian terms” (131): she did not write articles or reviews, and “never expressed her literary opinions in print” (idem).

The separation of identity can be recognised in friendships Brontë maintained through letter writing. Before Brontë published *Jane Eyre* in 1847, most of her letters were addressed to her close friend Ellen Nussey. These letters are mainly concerned with her daily life, family, and friends, and not with her authorship. After the publication of *Jane Eyre*, Brontë developed a friendship with Mr Smith Williams, the “reader” (Shorter 381) in the firm of Smith & Elder. Brontë regularly corresponded with Mr Williams (Shorter 382), writing roughly a hundred letters to him, “most of them treating . . . interesting literary matters” (idem). The two friendships illustrate the divide in Brontë’s identity: her correspondence with Nussey was of a personal nature, and in this correspondence she uses her own name, whereas her friendship with Mr Williams was of a more professional, intellectual, and literary nature, and Brontë writes to him as Currer Bell. This shows that Brontë separated her personal from her professional life. In one of her letters to Mr Williams, Brontë, as Currer Bell, discusses the “destiny” (66) of women:

It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked – but where or how could another be opened? Many say that the professions now filled only by men should be open to women also – but are not their present occupants and candidates more than numerous enough to answer every demand? . . . One can see where the evil lies – but who can point out the remedy? When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident. (66)

This illustrates both Brontë’s support of female authority and her concerns regarding female professionalism. Scholl reads this passage as “amplifying the bondage of the domestic sphere” (65). Brontë appears to support women entering the public sphere, and certainly

seems to consider women as capable of having a career, but she acknowledges that women may have a different calling in life, and that it may not always be possible for them to enter the public sphere and pursue a career. She seems to suggest that a woman's primary task in life is raising a family. It is interesting that Brontë uses the masculine pseudonym to convey these ideas about womanhood.

Brontë also exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards female authority and authorship in *Jane Eyre*. Several critics have analysed *Jane Eyre* as a typical story of female development (Lamonaca 245-6; Marcus 208). Marcus reads *Jane Eyre* as “the story of its heroine's successful attainment of full personhood and her transcendence of self-division and alienation” (208). In *Jane Eyre*, Jane expresses the wish for more female authority. She states that women, like men need “exercise for their faculties” (389) and that there should be “a field for their efforts” (idem). However, Brontë's work also manifests an “anxiety about authorship” (Johnson 174). Similarly to Brontë, Jane uses anonymity to enter the public sphere. In Jane's case, the public sphere is the newspaper, where she advertises for work as a governess. To do so, she uses anonymity: she signs the advertisement as “J.E.” (129). In “[s]cenes of writing” (Marcus 208) Jane is depicted as “being most successfully herself when she suppresses, evacuates, or commodifies her material being” (idem). Marcus explains that “Jane becomes an economic actor and apparent author of her fate only when she alienates herself into writing, into advertisements, and into an abstract professional body” (idem). In a sense, Jane alienates her professional self from her personal self when she advertises. By using “J.E.” to advertise, Jane remains (nearly) anonymous, and she separates her personal identity from the abstracted “J.E.”. The possibility of anonymity in the public world sets Jane at ease. She writes: “let the worst come to worst I can advertise again” (140). Advertising, especially anonymously, enables her independence. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë appears to portray writing as a form of abstraction. Marcus states: “Jane's strategies for abstracting herself into

texts and writing instruments parallel Brontë's strategies for advertising herself as the author of *Jane Eyre*" (213). Both Jane and Brontë separate their professional identities from their personal identities. Marcus suggests they do this "in order to bypass the scrutiny to which women were subject as writers or governesses" (213).

When Brontë's letters, personal life and works are compared it becomes clear that she separated her feminine self from the masculine persona of the author, which meant that she could be successful in the public sphere without compromising her private life. By using a pseudonym, Brontë was able to enter the male public world. She distinguished between her own name and her pseudonym for writing letters of a personal and professional nature, respectively, which shows that she upholds a separation between her personal and professional life. Additionally, it shows that she links her professionalism to a masculine identity, either from an ideological or practical perspective. Like Brontë, her character Jane Eyre in the eponymous novel uses anonymity to enter the public sphere. With this, Brontë might suggest that anonymity enabled a woman to be independent.

Chapter 3 – Mary Ann Evans and George Eliot

Mary Ann Evans was born in 1819, as the second child of Robert and Christina Evans. She portrays an ambivalent attitude towards femininity and authorship. There are very few indications suggesting that Evans was a keen writer during her childhood (Bodenheimer 164). In the night of 30-31 May 1849, which would be the last night of Robert Evans' life, Mary Ann wrote to Charles and Cara Bray, a befriended couple: "What shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining influence" (Eliot, *Selections* 54). Evans seems to have been afraid of what would happen to her moral judgement when the main male influence in her life was gone. Her father's death provided her with a large degree of freedom, that she ultimately enjoyed: twelve days after Robert's death, Evans travelled to France, Italy, and Switzerland with the Brays, and soon after, she moved to London, where she started her professional life. In London, she met George Lewes, a married man with whom she began a relationship that would last until Lewes' death in 1878. Evans' family considered this relationship to be "immoral" (Hardy 9), and they cut her off.

In 1851, Evans officially became an assistant editor for the *Westminster Review*, and in a sense, entered the masculine public sphere. However, Evans chose to publish her articles anonymously. Rosemarie Bodenheimer explains: "formal anonymity and the virtual invisibility of [Evans'] role created a working situation in which her intellectual ambitions could freely play" (168). Evans' anonymity gave her the opportunity to develop her professional career without being scrutinised or judged by the public for being a woman. It was not until several years later that Evans started writing and publishing novels, for which she used a male pseudonym and thus constructed a masculine authorial persona (Swindells 51). Booth argues that the main struggle for female authors was that, in patriarchal culture,

one had “to resemble the male hero” and “have some standing in a public story” (5) to accomplish success. Success, so it seemed, required masculinity. Evans’s husband, George Lewes,⁴ explained to their friend Barbara Bodichon: “the object of anonymity was to get the book [*Adam Bede*] judged on its own merits, and not prejudged as the work of a woman, or of a particular woman” (qtd. in Flint 177). However, crucially, Evans did not publish anonymously: she decided to use a masculine pseudonym instead. This created an image of a masculine author, which may have been beneficial to the success of Evans’ novels. Her novels were not simply judged “on their own merit,” but as novels by a male author. Evans did not take the gender aspect of authorship out of the equation. In a sense, she bypassed any possible societal prejudices regarding female authorship.

In essays, Evans portrays a highly critical attitude towards female authors. She was a productive writer of essays. It has been suggested that Evans used “a gentlemanly voice” (Booth 71) for the essays that were published in *The Westminster Review*. These essays were published anonymously, and it is likely that the general public would have assumed a male author, as this was the standard for *The Westminster Review* at the time. In 1854, Evans published “Woman in France: Madame de Sablé.” This essay offers insight into Evans’ attitude towards female authorship. Evans states: “[w]ith a few remarkable exceptions, [English] feminine literature is made up of books which could have been better written by men” (Eliot *Essays* 31). This clearly suggests a negative attitude towards female authorship. Evans goes on to suggest that gender plays a role in literature: “it [is] an immense mistake to maintain that there is no sex in literature” (32). However, she also explains that women can have a specific, and not unimportant, role to fulfil in literature: “[In] art and literature . . . woman has something specific to contribute. Under every imaginable social condition, she

⁴ Although Mary Ann Evans and George Lewes were never legally married, both referred to each other as husband and wife, and lived together as husband and wife, so Lewes will be referred to as Evans’ husband.

will necessarily have a class of sensations and emotions—the maternal ones—which must remain unknown to man” (32). Evans seems to suggest that maternal feelings separate women from men, and that this is something that women could perhaps use in literature. This implies that Evans places male and female authors in separate categories. Although both can be good, female authors have a very specific place in literature.

The notion that female authors are inherently different from male authors is also expressed in Evans’ essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” published in the *Westminster Review* in 1856. This essay shows Evans’ highly critical attitude towards female authors. She states: “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists are a genus with many species, determined by that particular quality of silliness that predominates in them” (178). Evans states that the only reason these “silly novels” (180) have become successful in spite of their “faulty” (180) English is because the authors’ “motives [for writing] are irreproachable” (180). She further states that “[t]here seems to be a notion abroad among women, rather akin to the superstition that the speech and actions of idiots are inspired, and that the human being most entirely exhausted of common-sense is the fittest vehicle of revelation” (188). Evans was, apparently, unambiguously negative of these “Lady Novelists,” and does not include herself among them. The essay also offers insight into Evans’ view on the nature and duties of women. Evans states that “the average nature of women is too shallow and feeble a soil to bear much tillage; it is only fit for the very lightest crops” (195), suggesting that female authors should perhaps not attempt to write serious literature. Later on, Evans seems to be more forgiving towards women in general. She states:

Happily, we are not dependent on argument to prove that Fiction is a department of literature in which women can, after their kind, fully equal men. A cluster of great names, both living and dead, rush to our memories in evidence that women can produce novels not only fine, but among the very

finest—novels, too, that have a precious specialty, lying quite apart from masculine aptitudes and experience. (203)

This passage shows an attitude similar to the one expressed in the essay “Woman in France”: women can be good authors, and their novels can be meaningful, but mainly, and perhaps only, when they do not attempt to write like men: female authors are different from male authors, but not inherently of lesser importance or quality.

Evans’ letters also indicate that she had a clear view on womanhood. In her opinion, women had a very specific role to fulfil in society: in a letter to Madame Bodichon in 1868, she writes that “the deepest disgrace is for women to insist on doing work for which we [women] are unfit” (Eliot, *George Eliot’s Life* 38). Evans seems to believe in a strict division of the masculine and the feminine. Swindells explains that Evans was “anxious to redress injustices to women, and to raise their general status in the community” (63), but it was also “one of the most distinctly marked traits in [Evans’s] character that she particularly disliked everything generally associated with the idea of a masculine woman” (idem). According to Booth, Evans’s ideal woman may be called “the domestic public servant” (30). This type of woman is a woman “ministering to human need in the marginal realm of charity or social causes” (idem). However, Evans herself does not adhere to her image of the ideal woman as Booth explains it. Evans actively pursued a paid career, wrote novels that could be, and are, considered to be serious literature, and never had a traditional family life.

In *Middlemarch*, Evans’ magnum opus, Evans addresses the issue of the professional woman. Dorothea Brooke appears to have the qualities needed to become a professional woman. She is focused on planning the redesigning of cottages for her uncle’s tenants, drawing up plans and taking control where this perhaps should have been her uncle’s responsibility. She is described as someone who could be capable of professionalism: “[Dorothea’s] mind was theoretic” (8), she has an “active conscience” (28) and “a great

mental need” (28). She wants to learn and improve herself. However, Dorothea is never allowed, or given the opportunity to develop her professionalism. Zelda Austen explains that this has angered feminist critics for decades: “George Eliot [. . .] did not permit Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* to do what George Eliot did in real life: translate, publish articles, edit a periodical” (549). Swindells goes so far as to say that in *Middlemarch*, Evans “allows [. . .] fiction to complete a containment of woman domestic” (63). Although Dorothea does appear to have the qualities that could make her a professional woman, she herself has thinks differently about woman’s destiny. After falling in love with Mr Casaubon, her greatest wish becomes assist him. She states: “it would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works” (29). In the final chapter of the novel Dorothea’s belief that she should put her qualities to her (second) husband’s use are made explicit: “Dorothea could have liked nothing better [. . .] than that her husband should be in the thick of struggle against them [parliament], and that she should give him wifely help” (836). The passage continues by explaining that, although it is “a pity”(836) that a woman as “substantive and rare” (idem) as Dorothea is so “absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother” (idem), this is what society expects of women: “[b]ut no one stated what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done” (idem). It seems inevitable that a woman, no matter how capable she is, remains in the private, domestic sphere.

It is interesting to see how Evans retrospectively reflects on her own career. When she was young, Evans stated in a letter to Charles and Cara Bray that “the only ardent hope [she had] for [her] future life [was] to have given to [...] some woman’s duty, some possibility of devoting [herself] where [she] may [have seen] a daily result of pure calm blessedness in the life of another” (68). In this letter, Evans portrays traditional Victorian views of womanhood: women belong in the domestic sphere, and were responsible for the household and for raising children. However, years later, she wrote:

I often think of my dreams when I was four or five and twenty. I thought then, how happy fame would make me! I feel no regret that fame, as such, brings no pleasure, but it *is* a grief to me that I do not constantly feel strong in thankfulness that my past life has vindicated its uses, and given me reason for gladness that such an unpromising woman-child was born into the world. (qtd. in Bodenheimer 161).

These two letters show conflicting attitudes towards professionalism and femininity. In the first letter, she seems to want to live a traditional life for a Victorian woman, whereas the second letters seems to suggest that even when she was in her twenties, Evans desired fame. In some ways, Evans, when looking back at her life, seems to think she has failed in her womanhood, because she did not end up adhering to the Victorian ideals.

Comparing Evans' letters, essays and *Middlemarch* shows that Evans was a very professional woman, but that she is simultaneously very critical of female authorship and professionalism. She advocates standards of femininity and womanhood that she herself does not seem to meet. Evans seems to struggle with this and seems to feel that she has failed as a woman. Evans separates herself, and her authorship, from womanhood, which her use of the masculine pseudonym enabled. For Evans, it seems to have been difficult to link authorship to femininity.

Conclusion

The nineteenth century appears to have been a difficult time for female British authors to publish their work. Societal norms for women of the (upper) middle class demanded that they remain in the private realm, which meant that professional authorship was considered to be inappropriate. Internalisation of these societal norms in female authors may have generated conflicting feelings regarding their own authorship, and female authorship in general. Three notable English authors, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Mary Ann Evans, published their work either anonymously or under a pseudonym. This thesis has attempted to show that they internalised societal gender norms, and that they therefore were ambivalent towards their own female authorship.

Austen, Brontë and Evans can all be considered to have been professional women. Austen, throughout her life, developed a professional attitude and successfully attempted to gain autonomy, by publishing and by being personally responsible for the financial risk of publication. Like Austen, Brontë appears to have been a professional woman: she showed an interest in money, dealt with publishers, and actively pursued a literary career. Evans too pursued a paid career, unlike Austen and Brontë, not just as a novelist, but also as an editor for a literary periodical and writer of essays.

Austen, Brontë, and Evans entered the public, professional world using anonymity and pseudonymity. A major difference between Brontë, Evans and Austen is that Austen does not seem to have had a problem with female authorship in general, and made sure it was known that her novels were written by a woman. She also defended female authors and authorship in *Northanger Abbey*. However, Brontë and Evans presented their authorial personas as being masculine, and seem to have found female authorship more problematic than Austen: Brontë seemed to believe that, in practice, it may not have been possible for women to enter the public sphere and have a career, as it was a woman's duty to raise a

family. Evans seems to have wanted to separate herself from femininity and womanhood, and portrayed a much more negative attitude than both Brontë and Austen towards female authorship. In essays, Evans was highly critical of female authors, and seems to suggest that women should not attempt to write serious literature. Evans portrays strong ideas about the destiny of women and femininity, and authorship does not suit Evans' idea of the ideal woman. Evans seems to have believed in a strict division between the masculine and the feminine, and seems to place the female author in a separate category from the male author.

Austen, Brontë, and Evans had an ambivalent attitude towards their own authorship. Austen seems to have been both a strong advocate for female authorship, but simultaneously seems to feel personally uncomfortable with the idea of entering the public sphere and being a professional woman. Brontë seems to have separated her feminine self from the masculine author, and the masculine pseudonym she used can be considered to be a mediator between the two contradictory categories. Evans', similarly to Brontë, seems to have used the masculine pseudonym as a way to mediate between the woman and the author. However, Evans barely seems to have counted herself among the female novelists and separated herself from female novelists. She does not adhere to the ideas of womanhood as she herself formed them. Austen never seems to have separated her authorship from her personal identity, while both Brontë and Evans seem to have done so. This may explain why Austen did not use a pseudonym but published anonymously, whereas Brontë and Evans used a masculine pseudonym that could mediate between their two different identities.

When comparing the three authors it becomes clear that there was less of a clash between authorship and womanhood for Austen than for Brontë and Evans: Austen seems to have been able to integrate femininity and authorship more. This may be explained by the period in which the women were writing and publishing: Austen published in the pre-Victorian era, whereas both Brontë and Evans would have been much more influenced by the

societal norms of the Victorian period. Societal norms regarding the position of women became much stricter in the Victorian period and “the natural difference between ‘manly’ men and ‘womanly’ women dictated social roles” permitted in society (Poovey, *Uneven Develoments* 6). Laurie Rudman and Julie Phelan studied how imposed gender roles can affect people. They have that found women, who were “primed” (192) with traditional gender roles, often show increased “automatic gender stereotypes” (193), which may account for the difficulty the authors seem to have had with their authorship, and for the differences between Austen, Brontë and Evans. It also may be important that Evans was the only one of these three authors who lived in London: both Brontë and Austen spent most of their lives in the countryside. This may have meant that Evans was much more aware of the male public space. Another explanation for the differences may be that the women came from very different families: Brontë and Evans’ families seem to have been much more religious than Austen’s, which may account for stricter views on womanhood and femininity.

For future research, it could be interesting to examine more novels by these authors, or to extend the research to include more female authors who published anonymously, or using a pseudonym such as Elizabeth Gaskell. It might also be interesting to examine uses of anonymity or pseudonymity by male authors during the same time period, to create a more comprehensive overview of publishing tactics of the time period, and to be able to compare this use of anonymity and pseudonymity to the way it was used by female authors. Additionally, it might be interesting to see how female authors and professionals in this time period considered their own gender identity, rather than merely their identities as authors of a certain gender. Further research along these lines could help create a more informed analysis of femininity, and the effect of imposed gender norms on gender identity, and the way this linked to writing and publishing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

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