

Anon is Not Dead: Towards a History of Anonymous Authorship in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain

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Article abstract

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ANON IS NOT DEAD: Towards a History of Anonymous Authorship in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain¹

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ABSTRACT

In 1940, Virginia Woolf blamed the printing press for killing the oral tradition that had promoted authorial anonymity: “Anon is dead,” she pronounced. Scholarship on the printed word has abundantly recognized that, far from being dead, Anon remained very much alive in Britain through the end of the nineteenth century. Even in the twentieth century, Anon lived on, among particular groups and particular genres, yet little scholarship has addressed this endurance. Here, after defining anonymity and sketching its history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I offer three findings. First, women had less need for anonymity as they gained civil protections elsewhere, but anonymity still appealed to writers made vulnerable by their marginalized identities or risky views. Second, in the early twentieth century the genre most likely to go unsigned was autobiography, in all its forms. Third, on rare occasions, which I enumerate, strict anonymity achieves what pseudonymity cannot. I conclude by suggesting that among British modernist authors, the decline of practiced anonymity stimulated desired anonymity and the prizing of anonymity as an aesthetic ideal.

RÉSUMÉ

En 1940, Virginia Woolf écrivait « Anon est mort », et attribuait la disparition de l'anonymat de l'auteur qu'avait favorisé la tradition orale à l'apparition de l'imprimerie. La recherche portant sur l'œuvre imprimée indique au contraire qu'Anon était encore bien vivant en Angleterre à la fin du XIX^e siècle. On le retrouve même au XX^e siècle, chez certains groupes ou dans certains genres littéraires. Or cette persistance n'a fait l'objet que de peu d'études. Après avoir défini le concept d'anonymat et évoqué la manière dont il se déployait à la fin du XIX^e siècle et au début du XX^e, j'aborderai trois constats que mes travaux m'ont permis de faire. Premièrement, les femmes ont moins recours à l'anonymat dès lors que leur statut juridique s'améliore dans d'autres sphères; l'anonymat reste néanmoins courant parmi les auteurs juridiquement vulnérables du fait de leur

appartenance à un groupe marginalisé ou de leurs opinions transgressives. Deuxièmement, au début du XX^e siècle, le genre pour lequel l'usage de l'anonymat est le plus répandu est l'autobiographie, quelle que soit sa forme. Troisièmement, en de rares circonstances, que j'énumérerai, l'usage de l'anonymat permet plus que celui d'un pseudonyme. Enfin, je suggérerai que le déclin de l'usage de l'anonymat a suscité le désir d'être anonyme chez les auteurs modernes britanniques, et l'idéalisation esthétique de l'anonymat en littérature.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf famously suggests that “Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.”² And in her unfinished essay “Anon,” written in 1940, Woolf blames the printing press for killing the oral tradition that had promoted authorial anonymity: “The playwright is replaced by the man who writes a book. The audience is replaced by the reader. Anon is dead.”³ Woolf's broad-stroked literary history appeals as much for its crisp narrative arc as for its romantic vision of lullabying nurses and large-hearted bards. But what is its truth? Scholarship on the printed word has abundantly recognized that, far from being dead, Anon remained very much alive in Britain through the end of the nineteenth century. Even in the twentieth century, Anon lived on, among particular groups and particular genres, yet little scholarship has addressed this endurance. This essay reflects the beginning of my research on anonymous authorship in Britain between 1890 and 1950. Here, after defining anonymity and sketching its history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I propose answers to three questions. First, in the early twentieth century, did anonymity still appeal to women writers specifically on account of their sex? Second, in this period, which genre or genres particularly attracted anonymity? Third, what can strict anonymity offer that pseudonymity cannot? These questions are a start to the many one might ask about early twentieth-century anonymity.

My definition of anonymous publication is capacious. I consider as anonymous all publications that are unsigned, signed by Anonymous, signed with stars or other non-alphabetic symbols, signed with a phraseonym, or signed with a name that is not a form of the author's legal name. That is, I recognize pseudonymity as a form of anonymity.⁴ I am led to this inclusion by borderline cases, as when strict anonymity and pseudonymity blur into each other. Two forms of authorial signing that are often considered

anonymous are initials that correspond to an author's legal name (as with Victorian versifiers L.E.L. or J.K.S.) and a phraseonym on the model of "By the author of . . ." ⁵ But the former is only a lazy signature or a token discretion; the name behind the initials can usually be filled out by the author's acquaintances and regular readers. And the latter hints at a coherent, flesh-and-blood creator in the same way as a pseudonym, pointing as it does to an "author," one who shares physical integrity and temporal development with his textual corpus. Phraseonyms, of course, can be more or less revealing: "A Lady" is nondescript enough, but "A Merchant of Newcastle and Friend to the Catholic Faith" is less so. Borderline, too, are cases where the text is unsigned but the author reveals his name or the names of his family members somewhere in the text. Another reason I include pseudonymity is that a pseudonym that is not obviously so may preserve an author's anonymity better than signing as Anonymous, which invites inquiry. In my definition of anonymous works I do not include those signed by lightly revised versions of a legal name, as when an author simplifies orthography or adds an ennobling prefix ("de" or "van"); these are clearly not attempts to mask identity or to *look* like one is masking identity. Throughout this essay, "anonymity" includes pseudonymity, except when I want to refer to works entirely without reference to someone identifiable (that is, to recall from above, works unsigned, signed by Anonymous, signed with stars or other non-alphabetic symbols, or signed with a generic phraseonym). In these cases I use the phrase "strict anonymity." The word "signature" refers to the author's signing with a form of his legal name. ⁶

Until the end of the nineteenth century, anonymous publication was common in Britain. Motives were various and genre-dependent. Periodical pieces were by default unsigned, to protect the author of a controversial piece and to promote objectivity and impartiality in reviewing. Anonymity likewise protected the authors of satires and political verse, and, for the especially mischievous, facilitated deceit. Concealing the authorship of novels seems often to have increased sales, as in the case of Sir Walter Scott, for many years "The Great Unknown." Anonymity also helped preserve distinct authorial identities: Scott withheld signature of his novels so as to distinguish these productions, to his mind vaguely ignoble, from his poetry, which he signed. Acknowledging his poetry did not injure the respectability of this officer of the court at Edinburgh, but acknowledging his novels

might have had more violent consequences. Women had particular reasons to choose anonymity, in columns and on spines: to act modestly, to guard against slander and injury, and to gain a hearing. That respectable women should keep their name out of the papers, and that less respectable women should keep out of sight altogether, were views characteristic of a society compelled by a clutch of unsigned novels concerning London women of uncertain reputation. The *Anonyma* series, as it came to be known, began with the unsigned *Anonyma, or, Fair but Frail* (1863), possibly by Bracebridge Hemyng. This was quickly followed by sequels credited to “the author of *Anonyma*,” written by multiple authors and published mostly but not exclusively by George Vickers.⁷

The *Anonyma* series seems to have been the first of several similar publishers’ series, in Britain and in America. The multiplication of such series marks the start of Anon’s declining years. It also attests to a moment when Britain and America shared certain trends in authorship and publishing; every country has its own Anon, but at times these Anons resemble each other. The American No Name series, published between 1876 and 1887 by the Boston firm Robert Brothers, comprised thirty-seven commercially successful unsigned novels. Most were written by women, and most by established authors.⁸ There could be lots of authors with no name, but only one No Name series: when rival Boston publisher Aaron K. Loring planned his own No Name line, Thomas Niles, Jr., the partner in Robert Brothers who had conceived and steered the original No Name series, threatened suit. Another second act took its own name: between 1881 and 1883, James R. Osgood published what he advertised as “The Round Robin Series: A New Series Of Anonymous Novels Of The Best Writers.” Among these “best” were several of the No Name authors, who effectively assumed two group pseudonyms by publishing in two series. In Britain, T. Fisher Unwin’s Pseudonym Library, proposed by Edward Garnett, then a reader in the firm, saw fifty-five novels published between 1890 and 1896 and again in 1903.⁹ The Pseudonym Library particularly served writers *without* established names, and, like the *Anonyma* and No Name series, capitalized on readers’ attraction to conspicuously mysterious authorship. Many of the pseudonyms could not, on their own, be detected as such, but by advertising his authors’ pseudonymity, Unwin achieved the same end as a tantalizing “Anonymous” on the title page. The only difference between anonymity and pseudonymity here was that the pseudonyms distinguished authors

from one another, thus creating brands within the larger brand of the series. A review of the series in the London *Times* praised the model thus: “It was a bold and original idea to invite a variety of writers, presumed to be exceptionally gifted, to merge their personalities in that of the publishers, and bring any fame they might gain into a common stock.”¹⁰ In the absence of a recognized signature, the stamp of a well-regarded publisher and unified series ensured quality. Readers unlikely to read a novel by an unfamiliar author grew curious and patient when the same novel was issued in the tall, narrow, yellow covers that distinguished Unwin’s Pseudonym Library. At one time, every book, anonymous or not, could expect to be find an audience, but in the crowded market of the late nineteenth century, the unknown author had little chance. Unwin offered a chance to a fortunate few by marketing the unknown as unknowable.

The Pseudonym Library, like the No Name series, inspired imitators. All three were American, and all were sanctioned by Unwin and often sold his titles in their own series: J.S. Tait & Sons issued their own Pseudonym Library, Putnam’s issued the Incognito Library, and the New York division of Cassell issued the Unknown Library.¹¹ These series stopped publishing new titles around 1896. Why? Frederick Nesta suggests that “The novelty may have worn off” (183). Readers could not delight endlessly in speculating on the identities of veiled authors. At some point publishers had to admit authors’ real names or make clear that they would not; either way, the guessing game would end. Further, a surfeit of a rare commodity kills its market. By the 1870s, in Britain and America, anonymous novels must have already become sufficiently rare that calling attention to their authorship sufficed to drive a series. But as more and more publishers issued similar lines, they undermined the scarcity of mysterious authorship that had prompted initial success. And once these lines existed, would-be anonymous authors who did not make it into the series seemed unsponsored, their disowned books doubly orphaned. Perhaps prompted by the several series of anonymous works, the noun *anonymity* became common in periodicals. The *OED* dates the word’s first use to 1820, but it was rare until the 1880s.¹²

The observation in the *Times* that the authors in the Pseudonym Library “merge their personalities in that of the publishers” suggests that over the course of the nineteenth century, publishers of novels traded more and

more not only on an author's name but also on an author's personality. Readers demanded a real person behind a signature, someone who could write letters to readers, distribute photos of himself and his home, and—least yielding to dissemblance—appear in public. The cult of the author flourished partly thanks to the Romantic legacy of readers' identification of the author with his speaker or protagonist. This identification particularly clung to poetry, and so, as Anne Ferry wrote, gave poets “a new reason for anonymous publication.”¹³ But if autobiographical interpretation gave poets more cause to be anonymous, the market gave less cause. Robert Browning acutely felt the new motive for anonymity at the start of his career, when he published *Pauline* (1833) without a name, but, Ferry suggests, later developed the dramatic monologue as a way of guarding privacy while admitting authorship, crucial for turning a profit. Alfred, Lord Tennyson likewise withheld his name from his first book of poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), which was actually by three (Alfred, Frederick, and Charles), and then signed his name to all subsequent volumes except *In Memoriam* (1850). The cult of the author contributed to the decline of anonymity, as did women's foothold in the literary establishment and readers' desire for provocative authors to own up to their conduct.¹⁴ By the 1890s, most periodicals used signatures, the ideals of objectivity and impartiality replaced by new ideals of transparency and responsibility. The *Times Literary Supplement*, for which Woolf wrote her only unsigned publications, was a notable holdout, and remained so until 1974. In the new century, novels and poetry still attracted anonymity but most books, in these and all genres, usually featured signature.

Anonymity had declined particularly quickly for books informed by original research. Here the authority of the argument depended on that of its proponent. When Robert Chambers self-protectively issued without a name his 1844 treatise on evolution, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, thousands of intrigued readers bought the book, speculating on its true parent and welcoming or rejecting its substance, according to their household faith.¹⁵ James A. Secord notes, in his book on Chambers, “Anonymity was especially rare in history, biography, and science An anonymous book claiming conclusions at the highest theoretical level was a curiosity, and demanded an exceptional degree of trust from its readers.”¹⁶ Eighty years later, publishers would blame the poor sales of Elizabeth Robins' *Ancilla's Share: An Indictment of Sex Antagonism* (1924) on the

“Anonymous” on its title page: “it won’t move without a name.” This was a doubtful claim, since reviewers identified the author, but it is telling that the publishers thought the claim *could* seem plausible.¹⁷ The differing receptions of Chambers and Robins intimate that by the 1920s, the public was no longer willing to indulge anonymous texts informed by research, even if the author were known. What once read as caution and inspired tolerance now seems to have read as cowardice and inspired dismissal.¹⁸

This capsule history of anonymous publication in Britain through the nineteenth-century is possible because of the work of generations of bibliographers and scholars.¹⁹ A history of anonymous publication in Britain since 1900, capsule or otherwise, remains a desiderata. The massive proliferation of books discourages the would-be bibliographer, and the challenge of combing the dense flora frustrates the scholar. Halkett and Laing’s *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature* ends at 1950 and was last revised in 1980, and then only partially. Further, as Leah Orr has recently emphasized, Halkett and Laing declined any authoritative status: they merely gathered leads, many false, for other to pursue.²⁰ Sifting through publishers’ and authors’ archives, the necessary groundwork of this project, is a slow and collective, though happy, task. As an individual scholar, I find immediate if extremely partial gratification by searching “anonymous” or “pseudonymous” in the author or keyword box at online databases and digitized periodicals.²¹

The difficulty of gathering and organizing data on anonymous books was already apparent in 1901, when Henry Guppy, Head Librarian of Manchester’s newly built John Rylands Library, published the short pamphlet *The Cataloguing of Anonymous Literature*. Guppy defines anonymous publications in a more restrictive sense than I do. He excludes pseudonymous works and considers as anonymous only works that do not identify an author on the title page, including those credited to initials or “By the author of . . .” His own publication, originally printed in the *Library Association Record*, would qualify, since he signed with the phraseonym “The Editor.” After describing the widely divergent cataloguing approaches of several major libraries, Guppy recommends that all libraries catalogue anonymous works by first substantial title word or subject and cross-reference generously. But Guppy’s proposal would not allow easy discovery of more than a particular anonymous work. To go beyond Guppy and

identify multiple works at once in library catalogues, we would need the field tag “anonymous,” reflecting the attribution of a particular text on its publication, even if the author were later revealed. A sub-tag could specify the form of signature (lack of name, avowed “By Anonymous,” phraseonym, stars, etc.). The field tag “pseudonymous” could be another such sub-tag (as I think it should be), or it could be independent; each library or bibliography would have to formulate and state its approach. Squinting at the blurry line between anonymity and pseudonymity has prompted headaches in bibliographers before and after Guppy. In 1880, Olphar Hamst—anagram-pseudonym of Ralph Thomas—lamented of anonymous titles, “This class of books has resisted the most strenuous efforts of the learned to bring it within rules, every rule for cataloguing such books requiring an exception.”²² In 1951, Archer Taylor and Fredric J. Mosher motioned towards such rules: “Only the difference between an anonymous and a pseudonymous book is fundamentally important [in a reference work because an] anonymous book can be placed only under its title.” They do not define this difference.²³ Today, our bibliographical practices no longer confined by the codex, we can use field tags to cross-reference more generously than Thomas, Guppy, and Taylor and Mosher could have imagined.

Whatever the limitations of Guppy’s cataloguing techniques, we can be thankful that he inadvertently acquitted Gutenberg of murdering Anon, the charge Woolf leveled against the printer, by showing that strictly anonymous publication had abounded until the twentieth century. Yet the need for Guppy’s effort indicates that strictly anonymous publication was past its peak. The ardor of reviewers’ speculations about authorship had cooled to librarians’ suggestions for tidiness. As periodicals came to embrace signature, books unsigned or signed by Anonymous came to draw greater notice, often precisely what evasive authors wished to avoid. Thus pseudonymity, especially imperceptible pseudonymity, assumed a larger role in concealing an author’s identity. In the early twentieth century, the same motives obtained as in the nineteenth century for anonymity in all its forms, as we can see from glancing at some who chose to obscure their authorship. We will consider writers who shared a particular motive, even as motives were sometimes plural.

Many early twentieth-century authors shared Sir Walter Scott's motive for anonymity, that of preserving distinct authorial personae, with an eye to both propriety and the purse. Elizabeth Robins published her early fiction and drama, such as the novel *George Mandeville's Husband* (1894), under the pseudonym C.E. Raimond, so as to be judged on the merits of her writing and not on her fame as an actress.²⁴ But times had changed since the Waverley novels: Robins' publisher, William Heinemann, sighed, "there's no money in a shadow . . . The public like a personality."²⁵ As an established poet, Siegfried Sassoon initially published *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928) without a name because he was unsure of his power as a prose writer and wanted to preserve his reputation.²⁶ The invented name of George Sherston, in whose voice Sassoon speaks, offers a form of pseudonymity. Sassoon also withheld a name from his first several volumes of poetry, and used pseudonyms in certain later volumes—here too, evidently, to shield himself from harsh critics.²⁷ Eric Blair published his literary memoir *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) as "George Orwell" in order to separate this nonconformist voice from that of the British imperial policeman he had once been. He also wished to avoid shocking his parents, and to gain favor, as an unknown rather than an Etonian, for this account of living among the working-classes.²⁸

It was the purse more than propriety that moved Hesketh Pearson, an actor and the author of essays, stories, and memoirs published in his own name, to publish *without* a name *The Whispering Gallery: Leaves from the Diary of an Ex-Diplomat*, which reads like *Eminent Victorians* told in the first person, rendered in dialogue, and plunged in acid. The figure of a whisper captures not only the reverberating chatter of diplomatic life but also shrouded authorship: "some things should be disclosed only in whispers," the Foreword explains.²⁹ Pearson and his publisher, The Bodley Head, to whom he had presented himself as the author's agent, editor and amanuensis in one, recognized that anonymity would stir interest in these gossipy accounts of Cecil Rhodes, King Edward VII, Lloyd George, Lenin, Mussolini, Henry James, H.G. Wells, and other political and literary worthies. Allen Lane, the rascally twenty-four-year-old secretary of the Bodley Head and one of its directors, was keen on publication, and his fellow directors were eager to encourage him. The publishers rather breezily accepted the book, and Lane wrote to Pearson that he could "assure the Diarist that under no circumstances should we call upon him and you to go into the box in the

event of an action being brought.”³⁰ The extravagantly detailed accounts were invented, as journalists and noblemen were quick to guess and grieve. The Bodley Head demanded that Pearson share the name of the author with Allen Lane in confidence. Pearson named the real diplomat Sir Rennell Rodd, who, promptly visited by Lane, denied having had anything to do with the book. To avoid persecution, The Bodley Head declared themselves victims of a fraud. They withdrew the book from publication and charged Pearson with seeking to profit on false pretenses. When asked in court why he had persisted in avowing the existence of a real diarist independent of himself, Pearson testified, “I was mad.”³¹ His candor won him an acquittal. The Bodley Head, who had probably suspected the prank long ago and then turned on their lucrative author, gave Pearson his due royalties. The outraged reaction to *The Whispering Gallery* was not so much because of its anonymity—a justifiable discretion had the accounts been true—as because it billed maligning fantasy as fact. Here both author and content were a pretense; perhaps the public could tolerate only a single fiction.

Some authors used several pseudonyms to distinguish among several genres. Marie Carmichael Stopes, for example, signed her legal name to her works on botany, birth control, and eugenics, but, to banish associations with the controversial author of *Married Love* (1918), assumed pseudonyms for her literary work: “Mark Arundel” for the stage comedy *Don’t Tell Timothy* (1925), “Erica Fay” for the children’s book *The Road to Fairyland* (1926), and “Marie Carmichael” for the novel *Love’s Creation* (1928), the last arguably a signature yet one signalling a remove.³² The strangest of Stopes’ pseudonymous works, *Love-Letters of a Japanese* (1911), predated her reputation as a feminist crusader against the Catholic Church. This book, edited by one “G.N. Mortlake” and with an introduction signed by Marie Stopes, presents itself as a collection of love letters between now-dead scientists, the British “Mertyl Meredith” and the Japanese “Kenrio Watanabe.” These letters were indeed real: they were drawn from Stopes’ passionate exchange with the Japanese cytologist Kenjiro Fujii, young and alive at the time of publication.³³ Stopes’ motive for hiding behind the phantom Mortlake is clear; less clear is her motive for publishing these letters at all. She may have convinced herself that she wanted to testify to sympathy across cultures: her introduction celebrates the book as “a design, a revelation, of Japanese character and Japanese inner life [. . . which] holds a thousand interests which need no exposition by an editor.”³⁴ A less noble

impulse seems more probable. The love affair over, she sought to make public and permanent a private joy that had since fled. Ruth Hall, one of her biographers, notes, “It was merely the first example of Marie’s lifelong habit of dispelling her personal traumas in print.”³⁵ Among the personae that pseudonymity offers are those that live in the past.

Many early twentieth-century writers chose anonymity for reasons of family pride. For instance, Edmund Gosse published the memoir *Father and Son* (1907) without a name because he feared seeming cruel in detailing the cruelty of his long-dead father, and feared too seeming to want to have the last word. Yet he names his father’s books, and sits on his father’s lap in the frontispiece photograph.³⁶ After seeing that the book had been received appreciatively, Gosse signed his name to the fourth impression. Elizabeth von Arnim signed *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898) without a name, to avoid sullyng her status as a Prussian countess with this semi-fictionalized diary received by some reviewers as a novel.³⁷ By identifying only its author’s surname, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* kept up social appearances but kept little from readers in the author’s circle. In 1917 von Arnim adopted a pseudonym for the first and only time, signing as Alice Cholmondeley *Christine*, a novel presented as real letters from a British daughter in war-torn Germany to her mother in England. Christine is the daughter, Alice her mother and the editor of the letters.³⁸ To this resuscitation of von Arnim’s daughter Felicitas, who, like “Christine Cholmondeley,” had died in Germany of pneumonia, a pseudonym gave the reader verisimilitude and gave the author a public distance from private pain. Finally, in 1920 von Arnim signed without a name the autobiographical novel *In the Mountains*, for fear of being sued by Francis Russell, her second husband, from whom she was separated: the novel related her recovery from their miserable marriage.³⁹ To protect one’s family from oneself, and oneself from one’s family, pseudonymity can serve just as well as anonymity. In a well-known case, Cicily Fairfield became “Rebecca West,” protagonist of Ibsen’s *Rosmerholm*, so that her family would not suffer for her radical ideas. She also adopted additional pseudonyms for additional purposes. For example, she published without a name *War Nurse: The True Story of a Woman Who Lived, Loved and Suffered on the Western Front* (1930), the first-person account of “Corinne Andrews,” to reinforce the aura of truth and to avoid embarrassment at this slapdash harlequin turned out for quick profit.⁴⁰

Modesty, sometimes religiously inflected, continued to prompt the withholding of signature. Adelaide Mary Champneys signed the autobiographical novel *The House Made With Hands* (1924) as Anonymous, yet put on the back cover a photograph of her family's distinctive Hampstead home, designed by her father, the architect Basil Champneys (who, incidentally, also designed the John Rylands Library, which employed Guppy). Although this Gossean gesture did much to betray her anonymity, Champneys was alarmed when her local library rebound her books with her family name on the spine.⁴¹ She could not have expected the book to become the best seller it did, but she might have expected neighborly scrutiny. However halfheartedly she concealed her identity, modesty and Anglican piety seem to have numbered among her multiple reasons for doing so.⁴² The book ends with a religious awakening, the protagonist shifting her affection for the ancestral home, “the house made with hands” of the title (and presumably the jacket photo), to “the house *not* made with hands,” the infinite immaterial world.⁴³ But wearing a fluorescent shroud (“By Anonymous”) is arguably less modest than donning the grey cloak of a credible pseudonym. Balzac observed this in 1829, when he signed his name to *Le Dernier Chouan*, the first of his books not to be signed with a pseudonym, explaining that “il y a peut-être aujourd’hui de la modestie à signer un livre, lorsque tant de gens ont fait de l’anonyme une spéculation d’orgueil.”⁴⁴ The modesty of an unremarkable pseudonym appealed to the Catholic mystic Evelyn Underhill, who published two devotional books as “John Cordelier,” *The Path of Eternal Wisdom* (1911) and *The Spiral Way* (1912). Her biographer surmises that she took a pseudonym to “provide some anonymity to the author of *Mysticism* as she ventured into a new genre.”⁴⁵ This common motive may have played a part, but a less common one also seems plausible: devotional work calls attention to God, so Underhill may have wished not to steal any personal glory from the object of her praise. A male pseudonym aligns the author with the authors of the gospels, including that original John, and also, as she knew well, added authority. *Mysticism* (1911), which she signed, had been a great success in part because “Many thought it the work of a man (the name Evelyn being given to people of both genders), a trained theologian.”⁴⁶

Unusually frank about its modesty-inspired anonymity is the book *Anonymous: 1871–1935* (1936), whose author signs with the title. This

memoir of late Victorian writers and theater professionals includes a one-page preface explaining,

In my young days I was for ever denouncing the custom of anonymous criticisms, and now I send out my recollections in that guise. It measures the change in the times, for then we expected to suffer for our sins and now we flourish our idiosyncrasies like banners, gaudy and defiant, so that to parade one's personality seems to smack of self-advertisement. Besides, what self have I to advertise? Chance threw me into the company of artists, authors, actors [. . .] making me a quiet observer of those whose names mean much.

The back matter advertising the book is at odds with this explanation: "The book's anonymity gives an added pungency to many a story of present-day reputation that was then in the making." Author declares modesty, bookseller mystery. The latter was easily solved: the author supplies so many biographical details, including the name of her grandmother, that it is easy now, and would have been easy then, to determine her identity. She is Agnes Platt, author of several guides to acting, for theater and cinema.⁴⁷ Her use of anonymity is an irritating mystification that in fact "smacks of self-advertisement." The conjunction of memoir and anonymity was characteristic of its time, but the pleas of modesty read as distinctly Victorian, that age for which the author has such warm feeling. She may once have been a fly on the wall amidst "artists, authors, actors," and so wants to recover that status by signing as Anonymous, but in 1936 Anonymous is eye-catching, a hawk moth rather than a fly.

A contemporary instance of possibly modest pseudonymity is that offered by "Elena Ferrante," an Italian writer of unknown sex whose autobiographical novels have received as much praise as her(?) identity has received speculation. The amount of speculation proves the contemporary rarity of elusive female authorship (if indeed Ferrante is a woman). Ferrante recalls George Sand, George Eliot, and the Brontës ("Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell"), with three important differences: first, there is no reason to think that her camouflage is specifically motivated by her sex; following this, unlike her foremothers, she can confidently assume a *female* pseudonym; and finally, as an international success, she can displace attention onto her

English translator, Ann Goldstein, who gamely stands in for the author at interviews and signings.

In the early twentieth century, protection from opprobrium remained a motive for marginalized groups, among which women came to count less firmly. Women had fewer motives for publishing anonymously as they gained the vote, joined the work force, and in other ways found civil protection. Speculating on the decline of anonymity, Robert J. Griffin writes, “Arguments against authorial anonymity and in favor of the kind of personal accountability supposedly guaranteed by the signature began to seem more reasonable at some point after the middle of the nineteenth century, only because the protections afforded by authorial anonymity began to be diffused more generally throughout the society.”⁴⁸ Women who still had reason to feel vulnerable were moved by a gender-neutral risk factor, such as the sensitive political and/or personal content of their work. For example, Christopher St. John (the name Christabel Gertrude Marshall took when she converted to Catholicism) published without a name her second novel, *Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul* (1915), a *roman à clef* about her unrequited love for Edith Craig.⁴⁹ Those in the know could recognize her in the protagonist Joanna Montolivet, an androgynous woman also known as John or John-Baptist. For another example, Rose Allatini signed *Despised and Rejected* (1918), sympathetic towards homosexuality and pacifism, as “A.T. Fitzroy,” and used various pseudonyms (male and female) throughout her career. One thinks also of Dorothy Bussy, whose 1949 autobiographical novel featured a Duncan Grant cover on which the Place de la Concorde is sandwiched between large block letters reading *Olivia* above and *By Olivia* below. The subtitle drew close the author and the protagonist while drawing apart the author’s real name and this dramatization of her adolescent passion for her headmistress.⁵⁰ Further examples abound of anonymous accounts of homosexual experience, typically memoirs or autobiographical novels. The law had not caught up to the market for literature on homosexuality. This disjunction had been made clear when, in 1895, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years in prison for sodomy. He published one more work before he died in 1900, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), which he signed as C.3.3., the number of his cell. His authorship was an open secret, but publishing under this metonym prevented libel action by prison officials.⁵¹ Wilde’s anonymity was only an indirect result of his persecution for homosexuality, but his example of post-sentencing anonymity, and the

fear his sentence inspired, encouraged anonymity among later writers on homosexual themes. In 1928, publishers Jonathan Cape were tried for obscenity after issuing Radclyffe Hall's signed autobiographical novel on a lesbian theme, *The Well of Loneliness*, supplying further grounds for fear.

Outside of Britain, other groups, too, had reason to withhold signature. Europe under Hitler saw anonymous autobiographical accounts such as the unsigned *Refugee: An Autobiographical Account of Life Under the Nazi Régime by a German Woman, with a Chapter by her Husband* (1942). African-American writers who wrote of passing as white had cause to conceal their work from those they knew. James Weldon Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) was signed as Anonymous, and E.C. Williams' similarly-themed novel *When Washington Was in Vogue* (1925–26) was initially serialized as *The Letters of Davy Carr: A True Story of Colored Vanity Fair*, with no name except that included in the title. Both books, notably, were presented as nonfiction, to increase readers' concern for the sensitive material. While nonfiction rooted in research gained credibility from signature, nonfiction (or seeming nonfiction) rooted in the author's life gained credibility from the lack thereof. Here we recall Pearson, Gosse, von Arnim, and—with less cause—Platt. If an author wants to protect his extra-textual life from scrutiny, there must be a reason worth reading about.

To maintain distinct authorial personae, to gain financially, to defend against a hostile reception, to guard or assuage loved ones, to act modestly, and to seek asylum for voicing radical or risky views—these are the usual motives for anonymity in the early twentieth century. Most of these motives come under Isaiah Berlin's categories of negative and positive liberty, *freedom from* and *freedom to*. The former category includes freedom from dangers such as reviewers' judgment, libel charges, familial alarm, social censure, and political or religious persecution; the latter category includes freedom to write what one wants, aesthetically and ideologically. We have considered titles published between 1898 and 1949 by fifteen British writers, two American, and one German. This data helps us answer the three questions with which I opened this essay, even as conclusions drawn from this small sample of Anons are necessarily provisional.

In the early twentieth century, did anonymity continue to appeal to women writers *as women writers*? Increasingly, no. Before the twentieth century,

women had three major reasons to publish anonymously, as noted above: to act modestly, to guard against slander and injury, and to gain a hearing. Only the latter seems to have held wide continued appeal. In the early twentieth-century, humility ceased to be a prominent female virtue, and the stigma of print, which had affected aristocrats as well as women, faded. Women, including aristocratic women, felt more free to sign their names. One thinks, for instance, of Vita Sackville-West, and surmises that von Arnim, a fellow designer of gardens, might have signed her full name to *Elizabeth and her German Garden* had she not been a Countess living in late nineteenth-century Germany. Champneys, Underhill, and occasional others still harbored the desire to be modest, but those who *affirmed* that they chose anonymity out of modesty, such as Platt, sounded obtuse, unable to judge their era or their reader. To guard against slander or injury remained a common reason for withholding one's name. But the camps seeking protection, or negative liberty, shifted as women gained protection elsewhere and publishing welcomed once-observed voices (e.g. those of African-Americans) and topics (e.g. homosexuality, pacifism). As for gaining a hearing: biased reception was less threatening than slander or injury, but nonetheless endured as a reason for women to withhold signature. In the 1890s Robins took the sexless name C.E. Raimond so that her readers would not identify her with her protagonists, much like Browning and Tennyson leaving their names off their early work.⁵² And in the 1920s, it was still the case that readers looked more kindly on certain genres if the author were thought to be male or at least not necessarily female. Edited by G.N. Mortlake, Stopes' love letters come to seem like historical documents of academic interest; written by the pen of John Cordelier, Underhill's prayers continue the tradition of male-authored evangelical texts. For Allatini, the ambiguous gender of A.T. Fitzroy may have reinforced her novel's insistence on fluid sexuality. I do not know how the male pseudonym of Mark Arundel benefitted Stopes' stage play. Drama, along with fiction, children's literature, and forms of autobiography, seems not to have been hurt by female authorship, and in some cases may have been helped by it, as Marie Carmichael, Erica Fay, Elizabeth, Corinne Andrews, and Olivia would suggest. For other genres, including poetry and criticism, I need more data to observe how an author's professed gender affected reception. Without venturing into gender essentialism (are women more likely to want to protect family members? to try on personae? to be modest?), it is fair to observe that most of the women writers I have mentioned chose anonymity

for a reason other than their sex, and where sex was a motivation it was not the only one. My sampling of authors includes more women than men, but this is only because it is easier to find anonymous twentieth-century women writers, thanks to endeavors such as the Orlando Project. This signals one triumph of feminist scholarship: if “Anon was often a woman,” her name and her works are now often reclaimed.

At this time, which genre or genres particularly lacked signature? Overwhelmingly, the genre most likely to be signed anonymously was autobiography, in all its forms. The texts published between 1898 and 1949 that we have considered include memoirs (*Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *Father and Son*, *Anonymous: 1871–1935*, *Refugee*), an autobiographical poem (*The Ballad of Reading Gaol*), a semi-fictional diary without an indication of genre (*Elizabeth and her German Garden*), a fictional diary presented as a true one (*The Whispering Gallery*), autobiographical novels (*In the Mountains*, *The House Made With Hands*, *Hungerheart*, *Olivia*), novels presented as autobiography (*War Nurse*, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*), epistolary novels presented as real letters (*Christine*, *When Washington Was in Vogue*), and a genuine collection of letters (*Love-Letters to a Japanese*). Perhaps the decline in anonymity and the growth in autobiography are proofs of the same trend, a move towards exposure.⁵³ Anonymous autobiography seems to be a halfway point, historically, between the dearth of the genre and its profusion. Today, Elena Ferrante and her uncommon kind notwithstanding, autobiography tends to be signed. We also see a morally ambiguous perversion of minority memoirs such as James Weldon Johnson’s: autobiography or autobiographical fiction about a traumatic and/or ethnically marked experience that is in fact fiction by someone remote from the supposed experience. An early example of this genre is *Down the Road, Worlds Away* (1987), a short story collection issued by Virago Press and signed by Rahila Khan, a British Muslim woman writing about British Muslim women. Khan turned out to be the pseudonym of Reverend Toby Forward, a white male Anglican priest. On his outing, Forward pleaded to an outraged public that he was bringing the problems of a minority population to greater attention. But the public was unappeased, and Virago pulled the book from the market. (And had the grace not to persecute Forward, as The Bodley Head had persecuted Pearson.) Once, we drove women and minorities to seek protection and power in a withheld or invented name; for this sin, and for glutting ourselves on autobiography,

Rahila Khan and similar hoaxes serve as penance.⁵⁴ The fraught identity politics of this penance exemplify our time. But the complicity of anonymity and autobiography (genuine or not) has long characterized much British fiction. We might recall Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* [...] *Written by Himself* (1719), often considered the first novel in English. What is distinct about the early twentieth century is the coincidence of waxing autobiography and waning anonymity. In this context, the former helped prolong the latter's own biography.

What can strict anonymity offer that pseudonymity cannot? For centuries, when the majority of texts were not issued under authors' legal names, and when the real names of authors tended to be known or easily discoverable, the mode of mask must have often been immaterial. But in the late nineteenth century and after, as pseudonymity displaced strict anonymity, authors who chose the latter usually had an excellent reason for calling attention to their self-effacement. Isolating the justifications for strict anonymity helps clarify why it now trails behind pseudonymity, and why in rare cases it has persisted. The reason for strict anonymity is sometimes the same as that for publishing anonymously at all, but usually it is the result of a secondary consideration—the author has decided to withhold signature for X reason, and then must choose a particular form of anonymity for Y reason. As with the first decision, the second too may have more than one cause. Neither strict anonymity nor pseudonymity prohibits branding: if the first book “by Anonymous” or unsigned does well, the second can be attributed to “the author of [*First Book*].” This is how Champneys' publishers marketed her (“By the author of *The House Made With Hands*”), creating a brand in the same way that “Elena Ferrante” is a brand. Nor, following from this, is one approach necessarily more remunerative than the other: speculating on an elusive author's identity can drive up sales, but this can work just as well for strict anonymity (e.g. Champneys) as for advertised pseudonymity (e.g. Ferrante). Instead, the following six reasons for strict anonymity suggest themselves: to avoid standing out from the mass, to call attention to the author's shame or risk, to call attention to the work's content, to promote a cause, to act without an alternative, and to create the impression that the work exists *ex nihilo*. To illustrate these reasons, I draw not only on the works we have surveyed published between 1898 and 1949, but also on works published earlier and later.

The first reason, to avoid standing out from the mass, appealed when anonymous publication was common, from the dawn of print to the late nineteenth century. And it appeals again today, but the platforms have shifted: periodicals have yielded to Internet forums. When most periodical pieces were unsigned, withholding signature drew attention only to the author's wish *not* to draw attention; it was a way of embracing convention and avoiding branding. Platt gives the impression of having chosen anonymity for this reason, but in 1936 modesty-inspired anonymity was distinctly *not* conventional, and thus it branded her. Today, at Internet forums, pseudonyms might appeal to those who comment often (at the same site or at several), but anonymity serves those who comment rarely and/or might wish to leave a light digital footprint. In the early twentieth century, when periodical pieces were generally signed and the Internet had not yet been born, the wish to blend into the mass rarely applied.

The second reason, to call attention to the author's shame or risk, may be the most common in twentieth-century book publication. Among the strictly anonymous authors I have mentioned, Edmund Gosse (no name), Elizabeth Robins (Anonymous for *Ancilla's Share*), Christopher St. John (no name), the author of *Refugee* (no name), and James Weldon Johnson (Anonymous) were all driven by this reason. Gosse, Robins, and *Refugee* sensed risk; St. John and Johnson sensed both risk and shame. One gleans many more shamefaced titles on browsing "Books by Anonymous: Writing in the Shadows," a website at Abebooks.com aptly showcasing the cover of the purported memoir *Streetwalker* (1960), all London fog and lurid streetlamps. A century earlier, *Anonyma* managed a similar slippage between author and protagonist, and here the lack of signature likewise implied the disgrace of the prostitute who shares her name with the book in which she features. Published around the time as *Anonyma* and its sequels, and just as popular, was the unsigned erotic novel *The Autobiography of a Flea* (1885), where the viewpoint of an insignificant insect, that of a perverse, vastly shrunken God, facilitates seeing (and touching) all without being seen.⁵⁵ Abebooks.com also exhibits *Ex-Mistress* (1930), *Ex-Judge* (1930), *Lady Chatterley's Husbands* (1931), and *A Room in Chelsea Square* (1958). And most people who have been teenagers will be familiar with *Go Ask Alice* (1971), signed "by Anonymous," the apparent diary of an unnamed teenager girl but really an anti-drug crusade by Beatrice Sparks. A phraseonym could also emphasize shameful content (e.g. "By One Who Should Have Known

Better”), as could a significant pseudonym (e.g. “I. Repent”) but the whiffs of the eighteenth century would undermine any intended gravity and hint at wholesale invention. A phraseonym or significant pseudonym would be even less appropriate for works whose publication carries risk, such as autobiographical accounts of mental illness. Here strict anonymity both protects and advertises in equal measure; a pseudonym protects but does not advertise.⁵⁶ Somewhere between shame and risk, anonymity and pseudonymity, lies the *Alcoholics Anonymous* handbook. The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous signed the so-called “Big Book” as Bill W., nodding at anonymity though the “W.” was widely known to stand for Wilson. The second edition of the material book, like the organization to which it is adjunct, invites the reader to join the author in his flaunted anonymity: the inside back flap reads, “If you wish to preserve complete personal anonymity when carrying this book, just turn this jacket inside out. It has been especially designed for your convenience.” Indeed, the dustjacket reverses to an opaque white. But here too, making an exhibition of the wish to be unknown defeats the attempt. Reading a book with a blank dustjacket, alas, looks much like drinking something wrapped in a paper bag.

The third enduring reason for strict anonymity, to call attention to a work’s content, is the most aesthetically satisfying, because it unites text and paratext.⁵⁷ John Edward Jenkins’ *Ginx’s Baby: His Birth and Other Misfortunes* (1870) satirizes British hypocrisy by way of the sorry saga of an unnamed Westminster child abandoned by his impoverished parents. The nuns rescue him for a moment and dub him Ambrosius, but after they quarrel over him with the Protestants, they return the baby to his family. The Ginxes soon unburden themselves again. Ambrosius, remote from the gods despite his name, grows to a child. Every part of society rejects him, and he drowns himself in the Thames, belatedly fulfilling his father’s plan for him at birth. Unsigned on publication, the book became an extraordinary best seller and had the intended effect of spurring social reform and the unintended effect of spurring reform of Canadian Copyright law.⁵⁸ Here anonymity aligns book with protagonist, both effective orphans. Further, those in the know might hear in *Ginx’s Baby* a pun on “Jenkins’ baby,” an equally accurate appellation for the book. Even as “Ginx” echoes the author’s name, it also plays on “jinx,” suggesting that the protagonist, his parents’ thirteenth child, is the accursed son of accursed parents. While Jenkins’ orphaned novel earnestly advanced social reform, the *Anonyma* series profited from prurient

interest in fallen women. Again the lack of signature signifies. In 1861 the *London Times* published a series of pseudonymous letters sardonically lamenting “Anonyma,” a figure for the courtesan, scourge of the London marriage market. Two years later, *Anonyma, or, Fair but Frail* took its departure from these letters, and part of the novel’s plot entails the eponymous courtesan determining their authors. Thus, in the words of Rachel Buurma, “the figure of the London courtesan becomes a figure for journalistic anonymity.”⁵⁹ I have not yet found a post-Victorian example of anonymity reinforcing content, but there is no reason it should not exist. We are less concerned today with orphans and journalistic anonymity, but social isolation, anonymous hacktivists, and cults founded upon mysteriously authored texts should supply the necessary fodder.

Ginx’s Baby points to the fourth motive, that of promoting a cause. Where an author wants to subsume his identity into that of the group whose case he advances, he might use the phraseonym of a representative member. This was a common eighteenth-century practice, as in “By a Scholar and a Christian Gentleman,” “By a Member of the Church of Scotland,” and “By a Friend to Religious and Civil Liberty.” More recently, French priest Lev Gillet assumed the phraseonym “A Monk of the Eastern Church” (“un moine de l’Église d’Orient”), in such works as *Orthodox Spirituality* (1945). For his time, Gillet was anomalous: in the twentieth century, religious histories, evangelical tracts, political pamphlets, and other anonymous publications advancing a cause are more likely to want a name than don a phraseonym. As with the parading of shame, here too strict anonymity has pulled ahead of the mustier device. But while shameful or sensitive narratives tend to be those of individuals, as implied by the singular “By Anonymous,” a cause tends to be espoused by a group, as implied by the absence of a name. The suggestion of group authorship lends weight to the cause.⁶⁰ Among the early twentieth-century authors we have considered, only Elizabeth Robins might qualify for this category, for *Ancilla’s Share*. Signing as Anonymous not only called attention to her risk, but also conjured up the whole feminist movement behind her.

The fifth enduring reason for strict anonymity is that one has no choice. Such was arguably the case for Hesketh Pearson, given that he wanted to present *The Whispering Gallery* as nonfiction. Though to Allen Lane he credited a real diplomat as author in order to guarantee the truth of the

work, to the public he credited only an unnamed Ex-Diplomat, a mystery that itself momentarily guaranteed the truth. A case in more recent memory is that of Joe Klein, political journalist and author of *Primary Colors: A Novel of Politics* (1996), a *roman à clef* about Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign that spent nine weeks on the top of the *New York Times*' best seller list. The cover prominently announced "By Anonymous" and reviewers were quick to deprecate this as an advertising strategy. But only a Washington insider, from a limited pool of candidates, could have written the account, and no Washington insider, one would have thought, could claim both authorship and a steady paycheck. When Klein finally admitted authorship, six months after the book's publication, he was able to keep his job at *Newsweek* but had to resign from his post at *CBS News*. He landed softly in December 1996 at *The New Yorker*.⁶¹ Mark Salter, speechwriter for John McCain during his 2008 presidential bid, was in a similar position with his fictionalization of the 2012 Obama campaign, *O: A Presidential Novel*, signed by Anonymous. This claim initially fueled speculation and sales, but both were dampened by marketing missteps and aesthetic flaws. The publisher's strenuous marketing emphasis on mysterious authorship made anonymity look more of a ploy than a necessity; the eventual revelation that the book was by a McCain staffer shaded the book as hack job; and the book suffered from plebian style, lethargic plot, and dull characterization, surprising for a speechwriter—or maybe not.⁶² Mark Salter's position of speechwriter may have prepared him, if not for writerly flair, then for the role of Anon: enforced anonymity is a job requirement for ghostwriters, those who mute their identities to make a living. Such writers are often responsible for political speeches, celebrity memoirs, pop songs, and web content—including the Abebooks.com site "Books by Anonymous: Writing in the Shadows," whose author may have wryly smiled at just how shadowy her task was. Ghostwriters trade on the generic tone of their creations; in some ways they are the modern counterparts to wandering minstrels, peddlers of formulaic paeans and complaints.

The sixth reason for strict anonymity, to imply that a work exists *ex nihilo*, hints at an authorial power that exceeds the single human body implied by a name. Not signing at all serves here better than signing as Anonymous, because the latter stands in for a name while the former ignores the possibility of unique human authorship. This reason moved Tennyson to put no name on *In Memoriam* (1850), his epic elegy on his closest friend,

Arthur Hallam, dead at age twenty-two. Tennyson's authorship was an open secret, but readers were urged to forget this knowledge by the title page, which read: "IN MEMORIAM / A.H.H. / OBIT MDCCCXXXIII." Matthew Reynolds observes, "To have put an authorial name on *In Memoriam* would be like a driver signing a car crash: it would blithely assert the confidence in personal agency which the work itself terrifyingly smashes apart." Denying personal agency, the poem diffuses a collective one: the lack of name, in addition to abnegating control, allows the reader to imagine that he too voices the anguish. The 131 cantos in ABBA tetrameter quatrains draw the audience into a universal effort at self-steadying. Tennyson suggested as much, saying of the poem's speaker, "'I' is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him."⁶³ The gravestone-like title page adds to this effect: a gravestone is a work of unsigned craftsmanship rather than signed art, and serves to express a grief resembling many others' griefs, similarly expressed. By implying that *In Memoriam* could have been written by anyone, Tennyson also implied that it could have been written by *everyone*.

Some authors choose strict anonymity to imply that the text was written by *no one*, or at least no one human. These authors wish to convey the same omnipotence as God, anonymous in the Hebrew and Christian bibles. Speaking to God at the burning bush, Moses asks, "[W]hen I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them?" God replies, "I AM THAT I AM."⁶⁴ The desire to convey divine omnipotence was one of Robert Chambers' many motives for leaving the title page of *Vestiges* unsigned: the multiple roles assumed by the authorial voice "created a sense of the author as a neutral, all-seeing guide, free from human subjectivity, and subtly associated with the 'Author of nature' to whom reference is so often made."⁶⁵ If Tennyson aimed to convey communal thought, Chambers aspired to the supra-communal, the divine.

Only one of the strictly anonymous writers I have considered was not obviously motivated by one of these six reasons: Champneys, writing as Anonymous. Though she may have withheld her name in part out of modesty, like Platt, she knew better than Platt that she would not therefore blend into the crowd. I have found no satisfying explanation of why

Champneys did not sign with a pseudonym. Among our fifteen British authors publishing books anonymously between 1898 and 1949 (I exclude the two Americans and one German for standardization), three signed as Anonymous (Robins, Champneys, Platt), one signed with no name and arguably hinted at none (St. John), three signed with no name but hinted at their real one (Oscar Wilde signing with his cell number, Gosse identifying his father's books, von Arnim signing as Elizabeth), one signed with no name but hinted at a false one (Hesketh Pearson naming Rennell Rodd in secret), two signed with no name but implied a pseudonym by narrating an autobiographical account in the first-person (Sassoon speaking as George Sherston, Cicily Fairfield speaking as Corinne Andrews), and nine signed with pseudonyms (Robins, Sassoon, Blair, Stopes, von Arnim, Fairfield, Underhill, Allatini, Bussy). The total is more than fifteen because some of our authors (von Arnim, Robins, Sassoon, Fairfield) achieved anonymity in multiple ways. I have been considering all anonymous work not signed with a pseudonym as "strictly anonymous," but this grouping here reveals that the case is more complicated. Our authors occupy positions all over the spectrum of authorial disguise, and many of our "strictly anonymous" Anons were far from strictly so. Of this small sample, no single approach to signing predominates. But I would venture that given more data, we would see that among anonymous publications (that is, excluding Internet forums), and especially among books (as opposed to periodicals), the percentage of pseudonymous texts grows greater and greater with each decade of the twentieth century. For the genuinely modest or guarded, a subtle pseudonym provokes no suspicion. And what was true in T. Fisher Unwin's day is only truer in our own. A book without a name has already given up much of its claim on the reader's attention, the cults of the author and the ego thrive more than ever, and I suspect that of the six categories that justify strictly anonymous authorship, only books that "call attention to the author's shame or risk" exist in great quantity, in the form of proudly shameful erotica.

It is strict anonymity that especially appealed to the imagination of British modernist writers, who nurtured a nostalgia for balladeers and church-builders and their supposed unconcern for their names. The decline of practiced anonymity seems to have stimulated desired anonymity and the prizing of anonymity as an aesthetic ideal. In her admiration for Anon, Woolf was in the company of W.H. Auden, E.M. Forster, James Joyce,

Walter de la Mare, Laura Riding, Stephen Spender, and W.B. Yeats. These writers' distinctive styles, the fading orality of culture, the brand-name quality of signature, and the fragmentation of the reading public forbade their stories, dramas, and poems from being absorbed by the community as minstrels' songs, mummers' plays, and *In Memoriam* had been. While these writers longed for a community that would respect unsigned art, and even adopt it as their own expression, T.S. Eliot and the New Critics were promoting an authorial ideal of impersonality, a metaphorical anonymity. Understanding actual anonymity would contextualize this ideal, perhaps a displacement of publishing conditions onto aesthetic conditions.

The marketplace importuned for relics of its authors, even as these authors aspired to be disembodied. In 1926 *The New York Evening Post* complained, “when we enjoy a book very much we like to identify its author. We are not satisfied with his or her . . . name; we aim to learn how he—well, make it she, if you wish—lives and where; what her background is, and the rest of it.” By contrast, one year earlier, E.M. Forster had written in “Anonymity: An Enquiry” that “all literature tends towards a condition of anonymity . . . so far as words are creative, a signature merely distracts us from their true significance.”⁶⁶ This striking divergence between readers' and authors' desires invites us to extend Forster's enquiry. Anon did not die in 1455, as Woolf lamented, nor in 1900. Though he is not what he once was, he is not likely ever to die. Bringing the early twentieth-century Anon out of obscurity will shed light also on publishing history, autobiography, marginalized writers, and the central aesthetic of modernism.

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Notes

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² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2005), 49.

³ Virginia Woolf, “‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’: Virginia Woolf’s Last Essays”, ed. Brenda Silver, *Twentieth Century Literature* 25 (1979): 398. One might think Woolf insincere, given that her own unsigned contributions in the *Times Literary Supplement* helped give Anon continuing life. But the absence of signatures in the *TLS* was unusual among British periodicals of its day, and Woolf privileged fiction, poetry, and drama above periodical essays.

⁴ My definition is modeled on that of Robert J. Griffin in “Anonymity and Authorship,” *New Literary History* 30.4 (Autumn 1999): 879–80.

⁵ Ralph Thomas (signing as Olphar Hamst), in his *A Martyr to Bibliography: A Notice of the Life and Works of Joseph-Marie Quérard, Bibliographe* (London: John Russell Smith, 1867), 47–48, supplies an amusing list of bibliographical terms to describe varieties of pseudonyms and of pseudonymous or anonymous books. This list adapts from the French version of Claude Charles Pierquin de Gembloux, published in the periodical *Le Quérard* (1855). William Prideaux Courtney, *The Secrets of Our National Literature: Chapters in the History of the Anonymous and Pseudonymous Writings of our Countrymen* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), 32–33, quotes the list as Thomas gives it.

⁶ Here I follow the example of Oscar Maurer, Jr., whose “Anonymity vs. Signature in Victorian Reviewing,” *Studies in English* 27.1 (June 1948): 1–27, offers a succinct analysis of the debate that concluded with near-universal signature. See also Dallas Liddle, “Anonymity and Mid-Victorian Theories of Journalism,” *Victorian Studies* 41.1 (Autumn 1997): 31–68, and Sarah Nash, “What’s in a Name?: Signature, Criticism, and Authority in *The Fortnightly Review*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 43.1 (Spring 2010): 57–82.

⁷ For more on the *Anonyma* series, see Rachel Buurma, “Anonyma’s Authors,” *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 48.4 (Fall 2008): 839–48.

⁸ For a study of the No Name series, together with a bibliography, see Madeleine B. Stern and Daniel Shealy, “The No Name Series,” *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1991): 375–402.

⁹ Studies of the Pseudonym Library include Troy J. Bassett, "T. Fisher Unwin's Pseudonym Library: Literary Marketing and Authorial Identity," *English Literature in Transition* 47.2 (2004): 143–60; Rachel Buurma, "Anonymity, Corporate Authority, and the Archive: The Production of Authorship in Late-Victorian England," *Victorian Studies* 50.1 (Fall 2007): 15–42; and Frederick Nesta, "The Series as Commodity: Marketing T. Fisher Unwin's Pseudonym and Autonym Libraries," in *The Culture of the Publisher's Series, Vol. 1: Authors, Publishing and the Shaping of Taste*, ed. John Spiers (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 171–87.

¹⁰ "Pseudonym Library," *The Times*, September 1, 1891: 6. Qtd. in Nesta, 176.

¹¹ Nesta, 181.

¹² "anonymity, n.," OED Online; Anne Ferry, "'Anonymity': The Literary History of a Word," *New Literary History* 33.2 (Spring 2002): 193–214, 197, and see also 213n10.

¹³ Ferry, "'Anonymity,'" 197.

¹⁴ One factor that seems *not* to have hastened the decline of anonymity is copyright law. As Griffin has put it, "There is no cause-and-effect relation between the ownership of literary property, or the lack of it, and the presence or absence of the name of the author" ("Anonymity and Authorship," 889). Griffin points out that English law required the name of the author to be printed on the title page of a book or pamphlet only for about twenty years, from 1637 to 1641 (between the 1637 Star Chamber Decree and its abolishment) and again from 1649 (the start of the interregnum) to 1662 (the Licensing Act). Outside of these few years, the name of the printer or bookseller, not the author, was legally required at the bottom of the title page. That is, "authorial anonymity in England was, essentially, an officially tolerated form of sanctuary" (Griffin, 888).

¹⁵ In "What Is an Author?" Michel Foucault briefly and loosely sketches the long history of signature in scientific texts before Chambers' time: "... those texts that we would now call scientific ... were accepted in the Middle Ages, and accepted as 'true,' only when marked with the name of their author ... A reversal occurred in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Scientific discourses began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always demonstrable truth; their membership in a systematic ensemble, and not the reference of the individual who produced them, stood as their guarantee" ("What Is an Author?" ["Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?"], 1969, trans. Josue V. Harari, in *Criticism: Major Statements*, ed. Charles Kaplan and William Davis Anderson (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 550–51). It would be worthwhile to pursue if, when, and why "[a] reversal occurred" and to pursue when the proposed reversal itself reversed, such that Chambers' unsigned treatise was a rarity.

¹⁶ James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 19–20.

¹⁷ Angela V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862–1952* (London: Routledge, 1995), 214.

¹⁸ Admittedly, the comparison is imperfect. Robins' book declaims and indicts where Chambers' describes and enchants, Chambers' anonymity was preserved for forty years while Robins' was hardly preserved at all, and the open secret of Robins' sex, together with her subject—pacifism and feminism—may have helped suggest fragility or indecision. *Ancilla's Share* seems to have been one of many prompts for Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), as Jane Marcus postulated in "Art and Anger," *Feminist Studies* 4.1 (1978): 69–98. Robins' disappointing sales may have thus suggested to Woolf one danger of publishing as Anonymous. With *Orlando* (1928) Woolf had become a best seller, so her name surely helped to sell her next book, *A Room of One's Own*. In its first six months it sold over 12,000 copies in England and over 10,000 in America (J.H. Willis, Jr., *The Hogarth Press, 1917–41*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992, 154).

¹⁹ Besides the scholars cited elsewhere in this essay, many others have added to the enterprise, including Alexis Easley, Edward Jacobs, Marcy North, Michael Sadleir, Charles Swann, Robert Lee Wolff, and the contributors to the collections edited by Herbert F. Tucker, Robert J. Griffin, and Janet Wright Starner and Barbara Howard Traister. See the citations to their works in the bibliography. This survey is not exhaustive, and in particular leaves out the many studies of individual authors. Excellent scholarship exists as well on anonymity in other countries and languages. Anonymity has a particularly rich history in France and the French language, a history that has attracted due scrutiny. Anonymity in Quebec may be of particular interest to the readers of *Mémoires du Livre*. On this topic, see the essays of Manon Brunet and Marie-Pier Luneau, which include between them an extensive bibliography of scholarship on French-language anonymity. Brunet, in "Anonymat et pseudonymat au XIXe siècle: l'envers et l'endroit de pratiques institutionnelles," *Voix et Images* 14.2 (41) (1989): 168–82, traces the evolution, over the nineteenth century, of strict anonymity to pseudonymity to signature, arguing that this evolution reflects the solidification of Quebec literary institutions. Signature, especially in literary magazines, served to build national identity and the prestige of the belletristic establishment. Brunet draws out the signatorial practices of several genres and distinguishes between one-time and permanent pseudonyms. Luneau, in "L'auteur en quête de sa figure: évolution de la pratique du pseudonyme au Québec des origines à 1979," *Voix et Images* 30.1 (88) (2004): 13–30, considers the 1,192 pseudonymous books or pamphlets published in Quebec before 1979. She delineates five phases in the history of the pseudonym in Quebec, corresponding to five motives: (1) to represent a group, usually one advocating for a political cause, (2) to protect an author for voicing sensitive religious views, (3) to establish symbolic capital in the literary sphere with a permanent pseudonym, (4) to create a mythic author figure, via a pseudonym not only permanent but also transparent, and (5) during the Quiet Revolution, to protect the author, once again, for articulating dangerous political and/or religious views, but also to indulge in playfulness.

²⁰ In the bibliography I cite the second edition of Halkett and Laing, completed in 1932. Subsequent volumes exist: a volume of Index, a volume for 1900–1950, a volume of Addenda, and one volume of the planned third edition. See n1 of Leah Orr, "The History, Uses, and Danger of Halkett and Laing," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 107.2 (2013): 193–240, for full bibliographical detail. Halkett and Laing is one of hundreds of bibliographical dictionaries assessed in Archer Taylor and Fredric J. Mosher's magnificent *Bibliographical History of Anonyma and Pseudonyma, with a Bibliography of Dictionaries and Lists of Anonyms and Pseudonyms* (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1951). This book surveys efforts

from all places and times to identify anonymous and pseudonymous authors and catalog their works. A crucial resource for the scholar of anonymity, it is nonetheless more concerned with bibliography than with authorial practice.

²¹ The crude statistical analyses that I have tried cloud more than they clarify. At online library catalogues, such as those of the British Library and the Library of Congress, it is difficult to identify anonymous publications because pseudonymous authors are not always identified as such, unsigned publications are not searchable as “Anonymous” in the “author” field, and many books initially unsigned or signed by Anonymous are catalogued by their authors’ legal names. One avoids at least the last difficulty with the Google Ngram Viewer, which searches OCR scans of books in the Google Books database. When searching here the frequency of the phrase “By Anonymous” and setting the parameters for 1700–2000, I turn up the elegant result that occurrences of this phrase in English-language books declined from about 1800 to 1920 and then ascended slightly until 2000. But if I make this search case-sensitive I get a series of small mounds and a steep ascent between 1770 and 1785 *and again between 1920 and 1929*. It is of course *possible* that in the 1920s the phrase “by anonymous” was little used in the body of a book while signing *as* Anonymous assumed an unusually high percentage of authorial attributions (including in a much-reprinted book, which would sway the data), compared to flanking decades. But more robust data and field-tagging are needed. At a minimum, one wants to be able to separate places of publication (which should be simple enough) and genres (less simple), as well as to disentangle phrase occurrences in reprintings from those in individual works. Further, the data before 1800 and after 2000 are unreliable (according to the website Culturomics, By Jean-Baptist Michel et al., December 16, 2010, <http://www.culturomics.org/Resources/A-users-guide-to-culturomics>), OCR scanning errors muddle what data there is, and making a search case-sensitive or searching “by...” are clumsy traps to catch title-page attribution.

²² Ralph Thomas, *Aggravating Ladies, Being a List of Works Published Under the Pseudonym of ‘A Lady,’ with Preliminary Suggestions on the Art of Describing Books Bibliographically* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1880), 15.

²³ Taylor and Mosher, 88.

²⁴ John, *Elizabeth Robins*, 145–49.

²⁵ Qtd. in John, *Elizabeth Robins*, 147.

²⁶ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Journey from the Trenches: A Biography (1918–1967)* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2003), 175, 205.

²⁷ Geoffrey Keynes, *Bibliography of Siegfried Sassoon, A Bibliography of Siegfried Sassoon* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), *passim*.

²⁸ Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation*. 1979 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 10. We might also think of contemporary writers of genre fiction, who often use a different pseudonym for each kind of writing, such as J.K. Rowling, who published the thriller *The Cuckoo’s Calling* (London: Little, Brown, 2013) as

“Robert Galbraith” so that readers wouldn’t come to it expecting games of quidditch. Rowling also explains, at her pseudonymous website, that she wanted to “receive totally unvarnished feedback” and, as a man, to “take [her] writing persona as far away as possible” from her real self. See “Robert Galbraith: About.”

²⁹ Hesketh Pearson, *The Whispering Gallery: Leaves from the Diary of an Ex-Diplomat* (London: The Bodley Head, 1926), Foreword, vii–viii. Michael Holroyd in “The Whispering Gallery” “The Whispering Gallery,” in *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2002), 38–51, describes in full the book’s publication and prosecution. See also the considerations of the case in J.W. Lambert and Michael Ratcliffe, *The Bodley Head 1887–1987* (London: The Bodley Head, 1987), 219–28, and Jeremy Lewis, *Penguin Special: The Life and Times of Allen Lane* (London: Penguin, 2005), 36–50. These three accounts differ somewhat; Lewis most clearly documents his sources, which include the archives of Allen Lane.

³⁰ Qtd. Lewis, *Penguin Special*, 38.

³¹ Qtd. Lewis, *Penguin Special*, 48.

³² Ruth Hall, *Passionate Crusader: A Life of Marie Stopes* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 258. *Love’s Creation* has been identified by Jane Marcus in “Sapphistry: Narration as Lesbian Seduction in *A Room of One Own*,” in *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 175–76, as a source for the passage in *A Room of One’s Own* about an imagined contemporary novel called *Love’s Adventure*.

³³ For introducing me to *Love-Letters of a Japanese*, I am indebted to Janine Utell’s “Obscuring Intimate Lives: Marie Stopes in Public, in Private (and in Japan),” a paper pre-circulated for “Lives of the Obscure,” a seminar at the conference of the Modernist Studies Association, 2014.

³⁴ Marie Stopes, *Love-Letters of a Japanese* (London: Stanley Paul, 1911), “In Explanation,” n.p.

³⁵ Hall, *Passionate Crusader*, 57.

³⁶ John Mullan, *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 282–83. See also Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 150–60.

³⁷ Karen Usborne, “*Elizabeth*”: *The Author of Elizabeth and her German Garden*. London: The Bodley Head, 1986.

74, and Juliane Römhild, *Femininity and Authorship in the Novels of Elizabeth von Arnim*, 2.

³⁸ Römhild, *Femininity and Authorship in the Novels of Elizabeth von Arnim*, 155n22.

³⁹ Usborne, “*Elizabeth*,” 221–22.

⁴⁰ Katherina M. Wilson, Paul Schlueter, and June Schlueter, eds., *Women Writers of Great Britain and Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 531.

⁴¹ Champneys, Bobbs-Merrill MSS., Author Files, Box 30, Files 00474–75, Adelaide Mary Champneys ALS to Mr. [David Laurance] Chambers, August 23, 1932.

⁴² I arrived at this conjecture after reading Champneys’ author file held in the Bobbs-Merrill archive.

⁴³ Adelaide Champneys, *The House Made With Hands* (London: Arrowsmith, 1924), 337–43.

⁴⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Les Chonans*, “Introduction de la Première Édition” (1829), 503. Qtd. in Gérard Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. [Seuils] (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 44, where Jane Lewin’s translation reads, “[The author] has reflected that, today, perhaps signing a book evinces modesty, at a time when so many people are flaunting their anonymity.”

⁴⁵ Dana Greene, *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁷ Charles Mosley, ed., *Burke’s Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, 107th ed. Vol. III. (Wilmington, DE: Burke’s Peerage & Gentry, 2003), 3148. Oddly, Agnes Platt was born in 1872, which means that her recollections of the Victorian age begin in utero.

⁴⁸ Griffin, “Anonymity and Authorship,” 891.

⁴⁹ Katharine Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869–1947): Dramatic Lives* (London: Cassell, 1998), 23–24. I am thankful to the Orlando database for directing me to sources on Elizabeth Robins, Christopher St. John, Marie Carmichael Stopes, Evelyn Underhill, and Elizabeth von Arnim.

⁵⁰ Ruth McCann’s “Finding and Keeping Olivia” [Prize-winning essay in the 2009 Competition of The Byra J. and William P. Wreden Prize for Collecting Books and Related Materials, offered by Stanford University.], https://lib.stanford.edu/files/ruth_mccann.pdf, accessed September 20, 2015, is a lively study of the origins, packaging, and reception of the book, and includes a useful selective bibliography.

⁵¹ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 523.

⁵² John, *Elizabeth Robins*, 146.

⁵³ Max Saunders persuasively argues that anonymous autobiography grew more common in the late nineteenth century. See “Pseudonymity, Third-personality, and Anonymity as Disturbances in *fin de siècle* Auto-/biography: ‘Mark Rutherford’, George Gissing, Edmund Gosse and Others,” in *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 108–64.

⁵⁴ Forward explained his motives in his LRB “Diary” piece. Considerations of the Rahila Khan hoax include Barbara Schaff, “Duplicitous Games: Faked Authorship from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” in *Fakes and Forgeries*, eds. Peter Knight and Jonathan Long (Amersham: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2004), 52–65; K.K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Sue Vice, *Textual Deceptions: False Memoirs and Literary Hoaxes in the Contemporary Era* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). These studies also consider related hoaxes, as does Brian McHale’s “‘A Poet May Not Exist’: Mock-Hoaxes and the Construction of National Identity,” in Griffin, *The Faces of Anonymity*, 233–52.

⁵⁵ The author is reputedly British lawyer Stanislas de Rhodes, but I have not been able to confirm this in a scholarly source. The book has been reprinted many times over, often with a fictitious imprint. A recent reissue belongs to the Harper Collins series of “Forbidden Classics.” For more information, see Lisa Z. Sigel, “The Rise of the Overly Affectionate Family: Incestuous Pornography and Displaced Desire Among the Edwardian Middle Class” in *International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800–2000*, ed. Lisa Z. Sigel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005) 100–24.

⁵⁶ For a selective bibliography of strictly anonymous accounts of mental illness, see Gail Hornstein, *Bibliography of First-Person Narratives of Madness in English, 4th edition* (Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA: November 2008), <http://phsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/Narratives-of-Mental-Illness-Gail-Hornstein1.pdf>, 2, and for pseudonymous accounts see Hornstein, *passim*.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of signature as paratext, see Genette, *Paratexts*, 37–46. This volume introduced the title term.

⁵⁸ Eli MacLaren, *Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade, 1867–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 75–77.

⁵⁹ Buurma, “Anonyma’s Authors,” 845.

⁶⁰ For a study of group pseudonymity, see Marco Desiriis, *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

⁶¹ Doreen Carvajal, “Columnist’s Mea Culpa: I’m Anonymous,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/18/us/columnist-s-mea-culpa-i-m-anonymous.html>; Lawrie Mifflin, “*Primary Colors*’ Author Resigns as Commentator at CBS

News,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1996.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/26/us/primary-colors-author-resigns-as-commentator-at-cbs-news.html>.

⁶² Robert McCrum, “O: *A Presidential Novel* by Anonymous: Review,” *Guardian*, February 6, 2011, www.theguardian.com/books/2011/feb/06/o-a-presidential-novel-review; Colby Hall, “Report: McCain Speechwriter Mark Salter Revealed as Anonymous Author of O,” *Mediaite*, January 27, 2011. <http://www.mediaite.com/online/report-mccain-speechwriter-mark-salter-revealed-as-anonymous-author-of-o/>.

⁶³ Excerpt from Hallam Tennyson’s *Memoir: Tennyson on In Memoriam*, in Tennyson, *The Major Works*, ed. Adam Roberts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 534.

⁶⁴ King James Version, Exodus 3:13–14.

⁶⁵ Secord, *Victorian Sensation*, 367.

⁶⁶ E.M. Forster, *Anonymity*, 81.

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