

The use of pseudonyms in English literature

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ملخص:

في هذه المقالة، ناقشت استخدام الأسماء المستعارة في الأدب الإنجليزي. وشرحت لماذا استخدم بعض الكتاب والروائيين البريطانيين والأمريكيين المشهورين أسماء أخرى لإخفاء شخصياتهم الحقيقية عند كتابة الروايات. كان لدى هؤلاء الكتاب أسباب لرغبتهم في التحرر من الأعراف الاجتماعية أو سياسات الحكومة. احتوى العمل على أربعة روائيين بارزين: جورج إليوت (1819-1880)، ومارك توين (1835-1910)، وجورج أورويل (1903-1950)، وجوان رولينج (مواليد 1965). وقد اكتمل العمل بتقديم سيرة ذاتية قصيرة لكل روائي مع مجموعة مختارة من رواياته. كلمات مفتاحية: اسم مستعار، التحرر، المعايير الاجتماعية، السياسات، البارز.

Abstract:

In this article, I discussed the use of pseudonyms in English Literature. I explained why some famous British and American writers and novelists used other names to hide their true personalities when writing novels. Those writers had reasons for wanting to break free from social norms or government policies. The work contained four prominent novelists: George Eliot (1819-1880), Mark Twain (1835-1910), George Orwell (1903-1950), and Joanne Rowling (b. 1965). It was completed by providing a short biography of each novelist with a selection of their novels.

Keywords: pseudonym, break free, social norms, policies, prominent.

Introduction

A pseudonym is a nickname that an author may use to identify himself to the public. In other words, it is a pen name that a writer chooses for a literary work. Pseudonym usage shows caution and apprehension about the prevalent threats in the author's community. Ciuraru (2011) defines it, saying: "A pseudonym may give a writer the necessary distance to speak honestly, but it can just as easily provide a license to lie. Anything is possible. It allows a writer to produce a work of "serious" literature, or one that is simply a guilty pleasure." (p. 14). Some writers prefer to be liberated from all social norms, legal requirements, moral obligations, and religious guidelines. Most of the topics covered by the pseudonymous writers revolve around love, sex, feminism, and politics. I discuss the writings of some well-known authors from several historical periods, including the Victorian and the modern eras.

1- George Eliot:



A portrait of George Eliot, pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans, by François d'Albert Durade. Photograph: Dea Picture Library/De Agostini via Getty Images, taken from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/21/the-guardian-view-on-george-eliot-a-novelist-for-now>

George Eliot (1819-1880) was an English Victorian novelist and journalist. Her real name is Mary Ann Evans. Among her best-known novels are *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). According to Dolen (2005), “Eliot had been writing and publishing, mostly anonymously, for more than a decade and had produced a handful of translations of obscure scholarly works and a steady number of essays and reviews” (p.91). Thanks to her work as a journalist, she became a prominent female icon as an intellectual author and philosopher of that period. Dolen (2005) confirms her brightness: “For five years between June 1851 and 1856 she was a leading figure in what the Victorians called the ‘higher journalism’, writing

articles for the distinguished monthly and quarterly periodicals which introduced and debated the foremost ideas in philosophy, science, social criticism, and culture.” (p.91).

Adam Bede (1859) was the first novel Eliot wrote. She put all her philosophy of women's status. It was among the first feminist literary works of the Victorian era. The main idea of the novel is that women's freedom was limited to men's. During the period of the novel, from 1799 to 1807, men owned women and children, and the adult woman passed from the authority of her parent to her husband. It was a total control of man. The protagonist, Adam Bede, is the symbol of that powerful command. He marries Dinah Morris after being rejected by Hetty Sorrel. Hetty Sorrel, in turn, finds herself in prison because she kills her baby after pregnancy from a sexual relationship out of marriage with the rich, selfish man Arthur Donnithorne. Eliot implied her philosophy of life in this novel. She sent a warning message to the people of that period regarding the negative effects of the spread of machinery and industry, saying:

Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them: it only creates a vacuum for eager thought to rush in. Even idleness is eager, now eager for amusement; prone to excursion trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels; prone even to scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through microscopes. (Eliot, 2006, p.551).

Even though there was a real conflict between Elliot and the masters of money and industries, she did not fear for her life to include her overcritical

thoughts in this novel and other works. Perhaps for that reason, she was writing under a pen name. On the other hand, she did not forget to depict the true love between two equal lovers: Adam and Dinah. She states:

What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined for life--to strengthen each other in all labor, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting? (Eliot, 2006, p.571)

Eliot aims to demonstrate to society that there is no distinction between man and woman and that they build together the project of their marriage and family. In other words, the days of male dominance are over.

2- Mark Twain



Mark Twain, c1900. Photograph: Topical Press Agency/Getty Images.

Taken from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/oct/30/mark-twain-american-sarah-churchwell>

Mark Twain (1835-1910) was another famous American writer. This personality is the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. Quirk (2024) describes him as saying: “Mark Twain was an American humorist, novelist, and travel writer. Today, he is best remembered as the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Twain is widely considered one of the greatest American writers of all time.” (para.1)

Furthermore, Quirk (2007) explains how Mark Twain entered the literary scene and the world of writing in general.

Clemens adopted the pen name Mark Twain in 1863 with the publication of the first of his three “Letters” from Carson City. He had adopted other aliases before that, but this one stuck, even though it was at the time far from the firmly established literary persona it would become. With the widespread circulation of the jumping frog tale, his literary reputation grew and was cemented with the publication and instant success of *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). (p.20).

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885) represents a journey to freedom. Twain uses the Mississippi River as a symbol for the two protagonists, Huck and Jim, to cross from slavery to liberty. This short quote summarizes the whole idea of the novel: “Human beings can be awful cruel to one another.” (p.252). With this obvious statement, Twain raises attention to how people have an innate ability to cause pain and suffering to one another. He reveals the horrific side of human nature in this novel, which is set in a period of widespread racial injustice in society. Through the terrible treatment of slaves and the deceit of con artists,

Twain depicts several people who exemplify this inhumane behavior. He urges readers to confront the dark sides of humanity in this quotation, highlighting the value of compassion, empathy, and the quest for justice and equality.

3- George Orwell



George Orwell, British author. Taken from:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Orwell>

George Orwell (1903-1950) was an English novelist and journalist who published all his works under this pseudonym. His name listed on the ID card was Eric Arthur Blair. Bowker (2013) tells the story of this pen name:

Gollancz came up with *Down and Out in Paris and London*, which satisfied both parties. He then suggested 'X' as a pen name, but Eric thought that if he was going to adopt a pseudonym, he might as well have one he could use again. He offered a choice of four names: P. S. Burton (his tramping incognito), Kenneth Miles, George Orwell, and H. Lewis Allways. He preferred George Orwell, he said, and Gollancz agreed. *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell was scheduled for publication in January 1933, a first edition of 1,500 copies. (p. 194).

Orwell opposed totalitarianism in the world's great powers, Liberalism and Communism, from both sides. However, as it is mentioned previously, he proposed a new political system, which is called 'Democratic Socialism'. Crick (2000) collected Orwell's letters, and this short paragraph summarizes all his philosophical and political thoughts. "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism, as I understand it" (p. 32). Among his books are *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which are the keys to Orwell's international fame for his new literary political path.

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) is a dystopian novella. It tells the story of Winston Smith, a low-ranking member of the Party, who is annoyed by the party's pervasive surveillance and its menacing leader "BIG BROTHER" (p.8). Throughout the story, Orwell displays themes of totalitarianism, government monitoring, mass media control, and how the

absolute power of a ruler can rewrite history, people's perceptions, and their own lives so that no one can flee oppression.

In the novel, three slogans represent Machiavellian philosophy, created by dictatorial leaders. Orwell wrote them in capital letters and repeated them four times. “WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH” (pp. 10, 19, 28, 90). Every slogan is illogical and has a paradoxical meaning. War is never a peace except in one case when a country is invaded, war becomes an honor. The party always warns people about dangers coming from abroad and programs their minds to be ready for fake wars. Freedom and Slavery are two opposite terms. Freedom is a profound sense of emancipation and independence. On the contrary, Slavery is a painful feeling due to restrictions and imprisonment. The last slogan: Ignorance is Strength means eating and living like animals and machines without thinking about who governs. The government is in the service of the people to strengthen them. Besides, Orwell listed four ministries of deception with catchy names. “The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts; the Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war; the Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order; and the Ministry of Plenty, which was responsible for economic affairs.” (p.10). Those ministries built a society of fear until people grew up in slavery, and no one could free them from themselves. “If the sky rained freedom, slaves would still carry umbrellas” (Plato, 2021). The message that Orwell wants to convey is that the conflict is between the remnants of humanity (humanists) and the barbarism of inhumanity (post-humanists).

4- Joanne Rowling



J.K. Rowling. Taken from: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/jk-rowling-reason-pen-name>

Joanne Rowling (b. 1965) is a British author. She wrote under the pen name J. K. Rowling. She is well known for *Harry Potter*, a seven-series of stories based on science fiction, mythology, and magical creatures. It is a form of children's literature. This series was published between 1997 and 2007, was translated into many languages, and was transformed into movies and video games. In addition, she wrote the Cormoran Strike series, a type of crime novel under another pseudonym, 'Robert Galbraith'. The question is: What is the story of this new alias? Joanne Rowling answers in an interview on a website named 'Robert Galbraith, Cormoran Strike novels':

I chose Robert because it's one of my favorite men's names, because Robert F Kennedy is my hero, and because, mercifully, I hadn't used it for any of the characters in the Potter series or *The Casual Vacancy*. Galbraith came about for a slightly odd reason. When I was a child, I wanted to be called 'Ella Galbraith', and I've no idea why. I don't even know how I knew that the surname existed because I can't remember ever meeting anyone with it. Be that as it may, the name had a fascination for me. (Rowling, 2024, para. 4).

Furthermore, Waters (2022) cited Rowling's reason for using a man's pen name. "I certainly wanted to take my writing persona as far away as possible from me, so a male pseudonym seemed a good idea." (Para. 10). She adds: "I am proud to say, though, that when I 'unmasked' myself to my editor David Shelley who had read and enjoyed 'The Cuckoo's Calling' without realizing I wrote it, one of the first things he said was 'I never would have thought a woman wrote that'." (Para. 11).

The Silkworm (2014) is a crime fiction novel written by Rowling and published under her nom de plume Robert Galbraith. It is the second novel in the Cormoran Strike series of detective novels. The theme of the story revolves around the mysterious assassination of a writer. A few months following the completion of the case of Lula Landry, Leonora Quine asks Cormoran Strike to find her novelist husband, Owen, an infamous character whose attempts to replicate the popularity of his debut novel have failed. Owen disappeared when *Bombyx Mori*, his most recent work, was stolen. Strike discovers that Owen was murdered in a manner consistent with his

book's description of the crime. Leonora is horrified by this troubling discovery.

Rowling included indicators of the advancement of communication technologies in society in her 2014 novel *The Silkworm*. She employed in the story the essential tools that form the foundations of the new messaging style: the internet, computers, and phones, saying: “Did you tell him that Quine had threatened to put the book out over the internet?” (p. 56), “Robin turned back to her computer monitor and started typing fast and furiously” (p. 85), “All the other private dicks I use spend their time hacking phone messages.” (p.13). Moreover, she adopted new vocabulary that she had not used in the *Harry Potter* novels. The word is ‘Email’ which means ‘Electronic mail’. She put it in three forms; noun, verb, and Ing-form, as in the following quotes: “I’ll email you, my invoice.” (p. 14), “There’s been a lockdown, emails round the company” (p. 82), “I’ve heard he scanned it and started emailing parts around, as well.” (p.89), “Fisher emailed bits of it all over town” (p.144). In addition, the compound noun ‘Voicemail’ is used six times. “I’ve got a voicemail that sounds like a recording of you being attacked!” (p. 279).

Conclusion

At the end of this article and for future studies, it is necessary to mention some other vital novelists who published novels under pseudonyms.

1- Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was an English novelist and poet who wrote under the pen name Currer Bell. famous for *Jane Eyre* (1847).

2-Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898), an English writer widely famed by the alias Lewis Carroll and his book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). 3- Agatha Christie (1890-1976), was an English writer, known as

Mary Westmacott for her six novels *Giant's Bread* (1930), *Unfinished Portrait* (1933), *Absent in the Spring* (1944), *The Rose and the Yew Tree* (1948), *A Daughter's a Daughter* (1952), and *The Burden* (1956).

4-Ruth Barbara Rendell (1930-2015) was an English author, who used another name Barbara Vine when publishing these novels: *King Solomon's Carpet* (1991), *The Brimstone Wedding* (1995), *Grasshopper* (2000), *The Birthday Present* (2008), and *The Child's Child* (2012). 5-Anne Rice (1941-2021)

was an American novelist who published under A. N. Roquelaure and Anne Rampling. She was well known for her series *The Vampire Chronicles*, published between 1976 and 2018.

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