"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

"What's in a Name?" (Act 2, Scene 2)[1]: With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

Shannon Waters

Abstract

This journal article seeks to examine the act of using a pseudonym and its effect on both authorship and reader response. By looking at the male pseudonyms of the Brontë sisters, Mary Ann Evans, Joanne Rowling and Catherine Nicholas, it provokes a discussion of the dominance of a patriarchal society. Their conscious decision to adopt a masculine identity elucidates the power imbalance that still exists today within the publishing industry.

Key Words

Pseudonyms; Victorian; Feminism; Authorship; Brontës

Introduction

This journal aims to explore if the publishing industry is still primarily dominated by men; it will achieve this by comparing case studies from the Victorian epoch, for example, the Brontë sisters (1846) and Mary Ann Evans (1856) and their use of male pseudonyms; as well as contemporary examples such as J.K. Rowling (2013) and Catherine Nicholas (2015). This journal will depict an all-encompassing viewpoint of pseudonyms while exploring readership response and thus a gendered authorship. Pseudonyms are used for a multitude of reasons, for example: they allow women to battle sexism; challenge female stereotypes and prejudice, class, gender stereotypes and ultimately the disguise of identity enables women agency to have their voices heard within androcentric society.

---

[1] William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet (Act 2 Scene 2).

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

The contemporary examples of pseudonyms emphasise the difficulties women within the 21st century face daily through the confines of the publishing world. Although the rise of feminism is a prominent movement presently within society and female writers are critically acclaimed, they do still fall short behind men. As stated on VIDA Count - a database dedicated to breaking down "thirty-nine literary journals and well-respected periodicals […] to offer an accurate assessment of the publishing world" (Anon 2017), women are still underrepresented within this industry. For example, in 2017, *The New York Review of Books* published reviews written by 702 men compared to 185 written by women, *The Paris Review* had 63 male writers and 33 female, and finally, *Harper's* who used 137 male writers and only 83 female writers. Although these are examples of writers in magazines, they represent a wider issue across the publishing industry. These figures reiterate male dominance over women writers and thus empathise why female authors may consciously decide to publish under a male pseudonym. Furthermore, this journal will examine reader responses to pseudonyms while using theorists likes Foucault and Barthes to enrich and anchor the discussion of gender and pseudonyms.

Readership, Authorship and Pseudonyms

In the 18th century, women writers started using male pseudonyms to get their work published, by disguising their overtly female identities, their writing was free of any presumptions and connotations. During the 1860s women were trying to break down the monopolising effect men were having on the publishing industry; however, they were often met with scrutiny rather than acceptance. Albeit there were myriads of female magazines during the 19th century, they were restricted by domestic and feminine tones and they were forced to be actively antagonistic towards women's rights, with the hope of encouraging passiveness amongst women. While female magazines existed, and women were allowed to write for them, higher up roles such as editor or owner were held by men and thus the patriarchy was mirrored in the publishing industry as women's voices were filtered by men. Therefore, it is no wonder that women actively sought the adoption of male pseudonyms to access social mobility and agency. Although an author's identity should not come into

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

question when considering whether to read a book - literature should be judged solely on the quality of its content - this is often not the case. Books were (and still are) scrutinised by factors of gender, class, race, economic standing and skill. According to theorist Michel Foucault, "the author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this within a society and a culture" (2006). Foucault's opinion here emphasises the power of an author's identity and views it as a social construct rather than solely anatomy, which shows how gender-focused the publishing industry was and arguably still is. Foucault is not interested in the author as a person but rather places emphasis on "author function" which is "a characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourse within a society" (2006).

Authors such as the Brontë sisters have questioned the reader's profound curiosity about their gender and its importance to the reading experience. Following criticism of her novel *Jane Eyre,* Charlotte Brontë wrote to one particular critic at *The Economist* stating, "to you I am neither man nor woman. I come before you as an author only. It is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me – the sole ground on which I accept your judgment." (Mullen 2007) Likewise, in the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant Wildfell Hall,* Anne Brontë declared "I am satisfied that if the book is a good one, is it so whatever the sex of the author may be." (Brontë et al. 1989) The Brontës reflect the frustration felt by a myriad of women during the Victorian epoch, especially upper-class women who sought out an education and wanted to be seen as equals to men. Furthermore, in her biography of Charlotte Brontë and her literary legacy, Elizabeth Gaskell states "the whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author [...] Every little incident mentioned in the book was turned this way and that to answer, if possible, the much-vexed question of sex." (Gaskell 1877) Each of these quotations focus solely on the importance of gender and the daily tyranny women faced under the patriarchal society.

In Roland Barthes *Death of the Author,* he points out that discovering the identity of an author should not influence the reader's experience and all importance should be placed upon the words on the page, not on the connotations and/or presumptions of the writer

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

(1967). By this standard, the reception of a text should not differ because of the gender of the author. However, due to the fact that *Jane Eyre* was written in a society where gender politics forced people to act a certain way and conform to certain roles, the importance of Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym - Currer Bell -and its gender was vital to the reader's response to the novel.

Although readers demanded to know the identity and thus the gender of the author, their constant queries were not of importance to the writer other than annoyance, as they were aware and willing to sacrifice their name for the opportunity to get their voice heard. "Many women writers were able to challenge the idea of gender roles through their novels and raise awareness of women's rights through their heroines […] they challenged male dominated society by showing that women were not inferior to men and that women did not lack in mental or physical strength." (Karcher 1994) By creating characters like Jane Eyre, Elizabeth Mansion, and Catherine Earnshaw, the Brontë sisters were unknowingly participating in the revolution of equality for women; today, *Jane Eyre* is critically considered a feminist novel. However, this would not have been possible if it had not been for the decision to use a male pseudonym.

Historical case studies of women using pseudonyms

As previously mentioned, many women within the Victorian epoch decided to publish their writing under a male pseudonym and thus avail ambiguity, because men were given more power over women. In 1847, the older living sibling of the Brontë family, Charlotte, submitted three novels to the independent English publisher and printer Thomas Cautley Newby. She submitted one on behalf of herself (*The Professor*) under the pseudonym Currer Bell, one written by her sister Emily (*Wuthering Heights)* using the name Ellis Bell, and one written by Anne (*Agnes Grey)* under the name Acton Bell. Although he rejected Charlotte's novel, she later went on the publish her second novel *Jane Eyre* with Smith, Elder and Company in 1847.

The conscious decision to publish under a male pseudonym gave the women agency to have their voices heard within an androcentric society that stereotypically forced women to stay

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

within the domestic-sphere. By writing about independent female protagonists who challenged the societal norms of 19th and 20th century England, the sisters as authors and their characters epitomised a type of women who were willing to fight for equal opportunities for both sexes, especially in terms of education.

Before writing novels, the Brontë sisters focused their attention on poetry, and while "averse to personal publicity, [they] veiled [their] names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine" (Brontë 1849). This quote is taken directly from the preface of Emily's *Wuthering Heights* written by Charlotte (following Emily's death). Not only does this reveal the conscious decision to publish under a pseudonym, it also implies that the sisters' façade was to embody the most respected type of voice in that era, their adoption of a Christian male name embodies the dominance of the white patriarchal ideologies. Furthermore, by stating "we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true to praise." (Abrams 2001). This emphasises the necessity of a male pseudonym for women to be taken seriously as writers. Her choice of lexis also reiterates the hardship women faced when getting their work published.

Moreover, when Charlotte sent a collection of her poetry to Poet Laureate Robert Southey (from 1813 to 1843) in the hopes of getting published, she was rejected and received the reply "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life" (Bloom 2009). His response represents the dominance of the patriarchal society that was at the heart of the Victorian era and how others were forced to conform to certain rules, in order to successfully flourish. This is the backdrop of the Brontë novels. By having a voice, and an outspoken one at that, the three sisters fought the daily plight of their restricted lives through the written word to combat sexism, prejudice, class, feminine stereotypes in writing and ultimately break into the publishing industry. By 'shrouding the "disability" of femininity, male pseudonyms offered a way for women to overcome the prejudices of the marketplace.' (Jordan & Patten,

2003) The emphasis on the hindrance of femininity as a disability reinforces how far down women were on the social ladder; it physically stopped them participating at the same level as a man.

Like the Brontë sisters, Mary Ann Evans used a pseudonym to conceal her identity; when writing novels, she published under the name of George Eliot. When considering their pseudonyms, one must deliberate why George Eliot is still remembered today whereas Currer, Acton and Ellis have disappeared. While Charlotte Brontë actively denied her identity throughout her life and thus writing career, Evans (initially) wrote essays for *The Westminster* anonymously. The act of publishing anonymously completely removes gender from the writing and thus forces the reader to just read the words presented on a page.

Due to the fact women's writing was scrutinised and not measured in the same sense as men, Evans decided to use a male pseudonym when publishing her novel because she wanted her writing to be fairly judged by her peers. Like the Brontës, Evans published during the Victorian era, a time in which women were expected to stay within the realm of domesticity and motherhood; they were without "essential freedoms like the right to own property and the right to obtain a higher education" (Abrams 2001).

Furthermore, it was particularly hard for women during the Victorian epoch because of the scrutiny they faced with marriage. Marriage enabled women social mobility and families put a lot of pressure on their daughters to marry wealthy men in order to enhance their social standing and thus economic value. This extra pressure for women from both society and family turned marriage from an act of romance to one of convenience. This society intrusion is one of the more speculated reasons why Evans used a pseudonym. If her relationship with the married William George Lewes had been revealed, as a fallen woman she would have been considered a social outcast. The pseudonym George Eliot is said to have been inspired by Lewes, as a way for Evans to declare her love for him and make him part of her literary persona. Behind a mask of ambiguity, they viewed each other equally and without

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

judgement, thus allowing the persona of Eliot to develop and Evans literary skill to be shown. (Edwards 2003)

Lewes was a known figure within Victorian society, as "an actor, drama critic and novelist who later wrote two books of popular science" (2003), he had contacts within the publishing industry and thus he made it easier for the pseudonym George Eliot to be born. It was Lewes who directly wrote letters to the publisher Blackwood on behalf of Evans, and described Eliot "as a very diffident, retiring man who needed support and encouragement to go on writing, and enjoining on him absolute secrecy about the origin of the stories" (Bodenheimer 2001). Lewes relationship with Evans's publisher meant that information regarding her books was filtered through Lewes. Blackwood was "anxious that her pseudonym should remain an effective disguise, fearing that bourgeois Victorian readers would desert his best-selling author if they knew of her personal life" (Mullan 2008). However, due to the fact that Evans published after the Brontës, she was consciously aware of how critics shifted their views on their writing when the veil of ambiguity was torn down by the analysis of their work. Evans wanted her work to be praised on skill rather than restricted by ideological views; she wrote about social realism to galvanise her readers into action.

Both case studies emphasise male dominance in the publishing industry due to women having to morph their female identities into masculine ones. The importance of gender once again shows how women were demoralised and forced to believe their inferiority to the patriarchal society.

Contemporary case studies of pseudonyms

Albeit the increase of women writers and thus feminine voices within literature, the publishing industry is still overruled by masculine dominance. This can be seen in two prominent cases of recent years, the first being J.K. Rowling's decision to publish under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith, and Catherine Nicholas decision to exploit the publishing industries treatment of women writers compared to men.

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

Firstly, Joanne Rowling, author of the highly successful *Harry Potter*-franchise (selling more than 400 million books, sold in 69 languages and in 200 countries), is especially interesting to look at when discussing pseudonyms due to her dual use of her writing career. In an exclusive interview with Oprah, Rowling states she uses the pseudonym J.K. Rowling because her "British publisher, when the first book came out thought this is a book that will appeal to boys but did not want the boys to know a woman have written it" (Anon 2018). The publisher's awareness that some readers would be discouraged if it was revealed that the books were written by a woman emphasises that gender is at the core of everything and that it is so ingrained within society that even contemporary writers cannot escape it. Rowling also used a pseudonym to disassociate herself from the presumptions linked to her writing and the magical world of *Harry Potter*.

The second example of Rowling's use of a pseudonym is the publication of *The Strike Series.* When the first book in the series, *The Cuckoo's Calling*, was published in 2013, it was believed that the author was Robert Galbraith, "a military man working in the security industry" (Rowling 2017). Unknown to the initial readership, his identity was a façade and provided Rowling with a "solid excuse not to appear in public or provide a photograph" due to the highly confidential nature of the forces. Before the pseudonym was revealed, the book received steady reviews; one reviewer stated "there's really only one problem with books as good as *The Cuckoo's Calling.* Waiting for the next one in the series" (AustCrimeFiction 2018).

However, the book only sold 1,500 copies, which was "slightly under one per cent of the number of copies of *The Casual Vacancy* [sold] in its first week, and slightly over 0.05 per cent of the copies of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* sold in the first day" (Hern 2013). Moreover, "before the news broke, the book was ranked 4,709 on Amazon's bestseller list' whereas a few hours after the reveal, it was at number three. "Unsurprisingly, that makes it the number one 'mover and shaker' on the site, with a 156, 866% increase in sales in one day." (Stock 2013). These sales show how influential the identity of an author can be and thus indicate that is it impossible to separate the author and their work. This example shows

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

how some readers put emphasis on an author as a brand over the quality of work, it can be speculated that without the backing of the brand name "J.K. Rowling", the book series would not have been made into a televised series for the BBC.

When questioned why the use of the pseudonym, Rowling declared that she "was yearning to go back to the beginning of a writing career with this new genre, to work without hype or expectation and to receive totally unvarnished feedback." (Brooks 2013) Furthermore, she states that she picked a male pseudonym because she "wanted to take [her] writing persona as far away as possible from [herself]". Similar to the Brontë sisters and Evans, once readers got an indication that the writer may be a woman they were desperate for more information and Patrick Juola (a professor of computer science) was employed to decode Galbraith's writing and inspect similarities between it and any other authors (Stock 2013).

Another 21st-century use of a pseudonym is the Catherine Nicholas-case, which puts into perspective how gendered contemporary society still is, as it shows that men still dominate over women and it emphasises that sexism still exists within this progressive society of the 21st century. In 2015, aspiring author Nicholas eagerly sent off her manuscript for a crime novel to a wide range of publishing houses. However, she was only greeted with rejection. After researching the publishing industry, Nicholas thought she would experiment with the notion of a male pseudonym to see if sexism still prevails within contemporary society. In order to fully emerge herself within her new identity, she created a new email address and within seconds her pseudonym was created. For reference she refers to him as George Leyer, although this is not the true identity she used. Within 24 hours of sending the exact same email that she sent as a woman, George "received five responses, three manuscript requests and two warm rejections." (2015)

She goes on to state the findings of her investigation as:

> Total data: George sent out 50 queries, and had his manuscript requested 17 times. He is eight and a half times better than me at writing the same book. Fully a third of the agents who saw his query wanted to see more, where my numbers never did shift from one in 25. (2015)

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

Furthermore, Nicholas states "my novel wasn't the problem, it was me – Catherine,' (2015). This reiterates the oppressive ideology of intellect that forced women to be insignificant to men – the fact that it is her gender that hinders her ability to succeed within the publishing industry shows no progression from the Victorian era to today. Fundamentally, her writing here is being scrutinised because of the connotations associated with the writer's gender; while Nicholas's writing was critiqued as "lyrical" and her protagonists judged for being "feisty", George was praised for being "clever" and creating "well-constructed" characters. This paradoxical response to the same character brings into question why the same character is greeted differently when assumptions of gender are put in place. Can a woman not write about other women without making them bossy, feisty, masculine or overtly feminine?

Conclusion

This article explored the use of pseudonyms from the Victorian era to the 21st century. By focusing on pseudonyms, it has highlighted gender inequality as a major issue that still exists within the publishing industry today. By drawing on theories such as Barthes's "Death of the Author" and Foucault's "Author Function", this article indicated the overarching problem of gender as a pivotal influence on writers and readers' responses to texts. Although Rowling's second use of a pseudonym puts emphasis on authors as brands over male dominance (thus meaning her authentic identity as a woman sold more copies of her book over the social construct of the male pseudonym), the other examples epitomise a patriarch in the publishing industry. This suggests that the gender of a man enables development, whereas a female identity restricts one's development.

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

References

2018. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1349288/Harry-Potter-and-the-mystery-of-J-Ks-lost-initial.htm.

2018. *Publishersweekly.Com*. https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-316-20684-6 [Accessed 7 Apr. 2018].

2018. *Jezebel.Com*. https://jezebel.com/homme-de-plume-what-i-learned-sending-my-novel-out-und-1720637627.

2018. *Scholarship.Law.Nd.Edu*. http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1402&context=ndlr.

"About The VIDA Count | VIDA: Women In Literary Arts". 2018. *VIDA: Women In Literary Arts*. http://www.vidaweb.org/the-count/.

Adburgham, Alison. 2012. *Women In Print*. London: Faber and Faber.

"Are Book Publishers To Blame For Gender Discrimination?". 2018. *Huffpost*. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/13/book-gender_n_1324560.html.

Barker J (2002) *The Brontës*. Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press

Bloom H (2008) *The Brontës (Bloom's Modern Critical Views (Hardcover))*. Chelsea House Publishers

"Death Of An Author: Constructions Of Pseudonymity. In The Battle Of The Books." 2018

Edwards, Mike. *George Eliot, The Novels.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Eliot, George. 1902. *Novels Of George Eliot*. New York: Harper & Bros.

Flood, Alison. 2018. "Sexism In Publishing: 'My Novel Wasn'T The Problem, It Was Me, Catherine'". *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/06/catherine-nichols-female-author-male-pseudonym.

Ingham, Patricia. 2014. *The Brontes*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Gilbert S and Gubar S (1979) *The madwoman in the attic*. New Haven: Yale University Press

Griffin, Robert J. 2003. *The Faces Of Anonymity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gaskell E (2014) *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Lanham: Start Classics

Gilbert S and Gubar S (1979) *The madwoman in the attic*. New Haven: Yale University Press

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

Ginsburg M (1980) Pseudonym, Epigraphs, and Narrative Voice: Middlemarch and the Problem of Authorship. *ELH*. 47 (3), 542.

"Masks Of Refinement: Pseudonym, Paratext, And Authorship In The Early Poetry Of Thomas Moore". 2014 *European Romantic Review* 25 (5): 551-573. doi:10.1080/10509585.2014.938231.

Mendelsohn, Francine. 2018. "How Do We Judge Books Written Under Pseudonyms?". *Nytimes.Com*. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/17/books/review/how-do-we-judge-books-written-under-pseudonyms.html.

Hargreaves G (1970) The Publishing of Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. *Library Review*. 22 (7), 353-356.

Jordan J and Patten R (2003) *Literature in the marketplace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Pears, Pamela A. n.d. *Front Cover Iconography And Algerian Women's Writing*.

Pseudonym, Epigraphs, And Narrative Voice: Middlemarch And The Problem Of Authorship On JSTOR". 2018. *Jstor.Org*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872795.

Prescott, Sarah. 2018. "Gender, Authorship And Whig Poetics."

Price, L. 2003. "The Faces Of Anonymity: Anonymous And Pseudonymous Publication From The Sixteenth To The Twentieth Century". *Choice Reviews Online* 41 (01): 41-0152-41-0152. doi:10.5860/choice.41-0152.

Richard Brooks, Arts Editor. 2018. "Whodunnit? JK Rowling'S Secret Life As Wizard Crime Writer Revealed". *Thetimes.Co.Uk*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/whodunnit-jk-rowlings-secret-life-as-wizard-crime-writer-revealed-vfxzwf72jzh.

"Robert Galbraith – Robert Galbraith". 2018. *Robert-Galbraith.Com*. http://robert-galbraith.com/about/.

SAGE Journals: Your Gateway To World-Class Journal Research". 2018. *Journals.Sagepub.Com*. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077800415572391.

Showalter, Elaine. 2009. *A Literature Of Their Own*. London: Virago.

Spawls, Alice, and Alice Spawls. 2018. "LRB · Alice Spawls · If It Weren'T For Charlotte: The Brontës". *London Review Of Books*. https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n22/alice-spawls/if-it-werent-for-charlotte.

Stock, Jon. 2018. "JK Rowling Unmasked: The Lawyer, The Wife, Her Tweet - And A Furious Author". *Telegraph.Co.Uk*. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/10192275/JK-Rowling-unmasked-the-lawyer-the-wife-her-tweet-and-a-furious-author.html.

"What's in a Name?"(Act 2, Scene 2): With a focus on pseudonyms, is the publishing industry still primarily dominated by men?

The Journal of Publishing Culture

The Cambridge Companion To George Eliot. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.2016

"THE CUCKOO's CALLING - Robert Galbraith". 2018. *Austcrimefiction*. http://www.austcrimefiction.org/review/cuckoos-calling-robert-galbraith.

"The Faces Of Anonymity: Anonymous And Pseudonymous Publication From The Sixteenth To The Twentieth Century". 2003. *Choice Reviews Online* 41 (01): 41-0152-41-0152. doi:10.5860/choice.41-0152.

Wales, University. 2018. "Women, Authorship And Literary Culture 1690–1740 | Springerlink". *Link.Springer.Com*. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230597082.

Whitehead, Stephen. 2014. "The Bell Pseudonyms: A Bronte Connection?". *Brontë Studies* 40 (1): 59-64. doi:10.1179/1474893214z.000000000135.