

## Ten authors who had two lives

*Pseudonyms in literary culture and why we still need them.*

By Olivia Foster

Throughout literary history, from as far back as 1860 to as recent as 2013, authors have been publishing works under a pseudonym. Whether they possessed a successful career beforehand or not, pseudonyms have been manipulated to insure a range of factors for an author's autonomy.

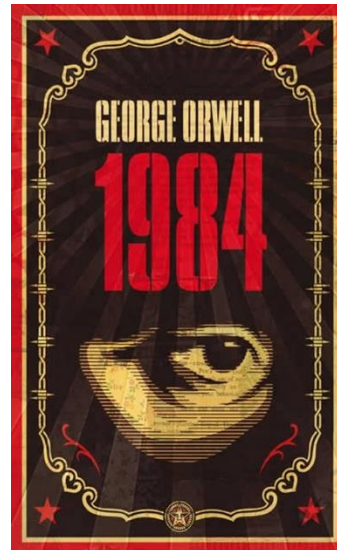
In a culture that tends to fixate on labels and names, the significance of a name is of significant consideration for an author. As a reader, an author's name may be a consolidate an expectation of a genre and style that you enjoy or expect. Here's some authors who hid in plain sight:

### 1.) Benjamin Franklin: Mrs. Silence Dogood

Known most commonly as a founding father of the United States of America, Benjamin Franklin commonly used a pseudonym in his youth. After facing rejecting from the *New-England Courant*, founded by his brother, Franklin wrote letters to the paper as a widowed woman. Many female writers would often write under the pen-name of a male, which makes it significantly interesting that Franklin should choose a female persona. However, it seems that the consideration of this pseudonym was sufficient as two letters were published in the newspaper.

### 2.) The Brontë Sisters: Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell

In 1846, a collection of poems titled 'Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell' were published. This volume of poetry was produced by Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte who chose male forenames to avoid prejudice against female writers.



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Unfortunately, the first edition of the collection did not perform as successfully as the second edition, published in 1850. The success of the second edition could be attributed to the addition of unpublished poetry from Emily and Anne, who had passed away in 1849. Despite this, the sisters had success individually, with works such as: *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey*.

### 3.) Washington Irving: Geoffrey Crayon

Washington Irving first used the pseudonym, Geoffrey Crayon, in 1819 when he published 'The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon'. Irving frequently used pseudonyms however this was his first publication of short stories and his most popular work. There is no confirmed reason for Irving's use of pseudonyms, yet theories argue that each fictitious author was intended to provoke particular themes and feelings.

### 4.) Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot

Born in 1819, there are multiple aspects to consider that resulted in the use of pseudonym, George Eliot. Most significantly, when Mary Ann Evans decided to begin a career in writing novels, she had already been established as a notorious editor and critic at *The Westminster Review*. It is reasonable to

expect that she did not want any opinions on her previous work to influence her future endeavours as a novelist. It is though that Evans created her pseudonym with a personal recognition in mind, to her partner George Lewes.

### **5.) Eric Blair: George Orwell**

Unknown to many, the well-known named author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a pseudonym. In 1933, Eric Blair published his first novel *Down and Out in Paris and London*. This was the first of many works to come from the name, George Orwell. Blair never revealed his reasons for developing a pseudonym, but speculation believes it may be a nod to the Orwell River which he would frequently visit. It is also believed that Blair wanted to prevent any embarrassment because of his time in poor living conditions. Although he is most commonly known as George Orwell for novels, he often published periodicals under Eric Blair.

### **6.) Patricia Highsmith: Claire Morgan**

Patricia Morgan is the author of *The Talented Mr Ripley*, amongst other successful works. In 1952, Morgan decided that when she published her novel *The Price of Salt*, it would be under a pseudonym. The novel is allegedly the first lesbian novel to be published, that would end happily. As a lesbian woman herself, Highsmith was conscious of the impact this may have on the perception of her novel. For this reason, she chose to release it under the pen name Claire Morgan to avoid any preconceived responses. 38 years later, the novel is now titled *Carol* and published under the name Patricia Highsmith. In 2015, the novel was adapted into a film that would receive a 10-minute standing ovation at its premiere.

### **7.) Stephen King: Richard Bachman**

Stephen King is known to many as one of the most successful authors of the horror genre. In a bid to investigate whether his

success was a result of talent or luck, King began to publish seven novels under Richard Bachman. The first novel was titled *Rage*, a psychological thriller published in 1977. Unfortunately for King, he did not have long before he was revealed to be the author behind the works and therefore did not get his answer. Whilst this contributed to the use of a pseudonym, authors were often expected to release one novel a year and King wished to avoid saturation of the market.

### **8.) Agatha Christie: Mary Westmacott**

Six novels were published under the name Mary Westmacott between the years of 1930 to 1956. For fans of detective novels, Agatha Christie was much loved. This meant that when Christie wished to explore the romance genre, she felt that they should be published under an unestablished name. According to family members, Christie kept her authorship a secret for 20 years.

### **9.) Daniel Handler: Lemony Snicket**

*A Series of Unfortunate Events* is often acknowledged as the work of Lemony Snicket, the author that appears on the cover since the series began in 1999. Contrary to popular beliefs, Snicket is a fictional character staged as the author, but also serving as a narrator. Daniel Handler has used this pseudonym to publish his novels for children, and established his real name for his adult novels. Despite the fact Handler is now openly the author of the series, Snicket is depicted as the face of the series even now. Snicket appears in the recent adaptation from Netflix, in keeping with the façade of his characterisation as the author and narrator.

### **10.) Madeline Wickham: Sophie Kinsella**

A female writer in the modern age, Madeline Wickham writes under a pen name which is now associated with the

success of her works. Like other authors in this list, Wickham has had her novel adaptation into a film, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*. It is clear she could not have predicted the popularity of her work, since her embarrassment and lack of faith in her work is the reason she chose to publish her work under Sophie Kinsella. The 'shopaholic' series resulted in nine novels, demonstrating that Wickham did not require the security of a pseudonym.