

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in a democratic society that gives people the opportunity to express their views, criticize social norms or practices, and openly share ideas without unnecessary restrictions (UNESCO, 2021). The development of digital platforms has created more opportunities for people to express themselves, but at the same time it has also introduced new challenges to freedom of expression. In the field of creative works, freedom of expression can be seen through various forms of art and media that allow creators to communicate their ideas and perspectives. Many creators choose for their strategies to use anonymous identities or pseudonyms so that they can express their thoughts and opinions freely without being subject to censorship or personal consequences. However, this freedom is still influenced by existing cultural, legal, and technological conditions (Sharma, 2025). Experts argue that anonymity can function as a form of protection for individuals who wish to voice their opinions. However, the use of a hidden identity can also raise concerns about accountability, as the speaker's real identity is not publicly known (Rehman et al., 2025).

In the field of creators marketing, where competition is intense and consumers' attention is easily lost, many strategies were coming out. Such as the combination of content marketing and branding has become a powerful

strategy. Content marketing helps a brand grow, while branding provides a clear identity and direction that shape and strengthen the impact of the content. They create a strong partnership that supports a brand's success in the digital environment (Pratama & Febriati, 2025). For example, bloggers on platforms such as *Kompas* often use their real names to build credibility and encourage community engagement (Humam, 2022). Novelists may adopt their legal names to establish personal brands, while others opt for stage names or pseudonyms to explore themes without personal association, as seen in the works of authors like Darwis under the pseudonym Tere Liye (Humam, 2022). This spectrum of identity choices highlights how creators balance personality with strategic anonymity, particularly in genres where personal disclosure could impact reception. Research indicates that pseudonymity allows for experimentation in voice and perspective, enabling writers to transcend conventional identities and address taboo subjects (Gerrard, 2021). Consequently, the choice of identity not only defines the creator's relationship with their audience but also influences the interpretive layers of their work.

Despite the benefits of varied creator identities and anonymity often entail significant risks of misuse, such as the dissemination of rumors or ethical violations, which can undermine trust in literary communities. For example, individuals hiding behind stage names may exploit their anonymity to spread misinformation or engage in defamation, as documented in cases of online harassment facilitated by anonymous accounts (Galbraith, 2009). This phenomenon is exacerbated in digital spaces where the lack of accountability

enables harmful content to emerge, including hate speech or fabricated narratives (Brown, 2024). Ethical concerns arise when creators abuse their concealed power to manipulate public opinion or infringe on privacy, leading to broader societal repercussions like eroded media credibility. Scholars emphasize that such risks necessitate regulatory frameworks to mitigate misuse while preserving creative freedoms (Subedi, 2025). Thus, the dual-edged nature of anonymity reveals a critical need for vigilance in distinguishing constructive expression from exploitative practices.

Anonymity in literary works profoundly affects reader reception, often enhancing engagement by fostering a sense of mystery that draws audiences into the narrative. Studies show that anonymous texts can evoke heightened curiosity, as readers speculate on the author's identity, thereby deepening emotional and interpretive possibilities (Williams, 2023). For instance, in contemporary fiction, pseudonymous works like those attributed to "Anonymous" generate buzz through social media discussions, influencing viral trends and reader loyalty (Davis & Kim, 2024). This dynamic alters how audiences perceive authenticity and authority, with anonymity sometimes amplifying the perceived neutrality of the message. However, it can also lead to skepticism, where readers question the credibility of unattributed content, potentially diminishing its impact (Baker, 2017). Overall, the interplay between anonymity and reception underscores how literary anonymity shapes cultural consumption patterns in an era of information overload.

Given these complexities, it is imperative for creators to exercise caution and cultivate ethical attitudes in their work, recognizing the responsibilities that accompany expressive freedom. Writers need to carefully balance bold innovation with the risk of causing harm, by following principles that prioritize integrity and bring positive benefits to society. (UNESCO, 2021). This involves self-reflection on the potential consequences of anonymity, such as unintended harm to individuals or communities, and embracing principles like transparency where feasible (Galbraith, 2009). Educational initiatives in creative writing programs can foster these attitudes, equipping aspiring authors with tools to assess the impact of behavior (Gerrard, 2021). Ultimately, promoting a culture of responsible creativity ensures that literary anonymity serves as a tool for positive discourse rather than a shield for misconduct.

In the Early 19th Century, creative production and information dissemination were shaped by stringent social norms and limited technological means, where writers often employed anonymity to circumvent censorship and gender-based restrictions. Authors like Mary Ann Evans, who wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot, navigated a patriarchal society by concealing their identities to publish works critiquing societal ills (Southworth, 2022). Information spread through pamphlets, newspapers, and serialized novels, with gossip columns serving as the origin of modern anonymous journalism, allowing for candid commentary on elite circles (Baker, 2017). This period's literary landscape emphasized decorum, yet anonymity provided a veil for subversive voices, influencing public discourse on morality and class

(Williams, 2023). Scholars note that Early 19th Century anonymity reflected broader tensions between repression and rebellion, laying groundwork for contemporary debates on identity in literature (Galbraith, 2009).

The Early 19th Century presented a complex landscape for creative expression, where the state of literary work was deeply intertwined with social hierarchies and restrictive gender norms (Miller, 2022). Information was disseminated primarily through printed materials such as newspapers, pamphlets, and serialized novels (Bennett, 2023). Writers utilized postal services and street vendors to distribute their works, while coffee houses and literary salons served as hubs for intellectual exchange (Harris, 2024). However, despite the presence of these communication channels, freedom of expression remained severely limited, particularly for women whose voices were systematically silenced by patriarchal structures (Foster, 2022). Women were denied access to formal education and professional writing opportunities, forcing them to abandon their aspirations and conform to societal expectations of domesticity (Kramarae, 1981). Their opinions were often dismissed or considered illegitimate, and female writers faced severe reputational consequences if they dared to publish under their own names (Clark, 2024). Consequently, many women resorted to anonymity or pseudonymity as a survival strategy, to bypass gender based discrimination and critique prevailing social injustices (Williams, 2023). This historical context underscores how anonymity served not only as a literary device but as a necessary mechanism for excluded voices to participate in public discourse.

The character of Lady Whistledown in the *Bridgerton* series exemplifies Early 19th Century anonymity through her writing, embodying a blend of gossip and societal critique. As an anonymous columnist, she disseminates scandalous tidbits about London's high society, her identity shrouded in mystery, which mirrors veiled authorship (Davis & Kim, 2024). Residents speculate wildly about her true persona, from a low-class person to a widow, fueling gossip and reflecting gender dynamics of the time (Brown, 2024). Her pamphlets, shared covertly, highlight the power of anonymous narratives to shape public opinion and challenge norms, while her eventual revelation underscores the risks of exposure (Subedi, 2025). This portrayal not only entertains but also invites analysis of how anonymity sustains narrative tension in modern adaptations of Early 19th Century tropes.

Many previous studies have examined the representation of women in the *Bridgerton* series, particularly through linguistic and feminist perspectives. Kaur, Cheong, and Aslam (2023) investigated the representation of women through sexist language in *Bridgerton*, revealing how the series simultaneously reinforces and challenges traditional gender norms through language and social interactions. Likewise, Pratiwi, Setiawan, and Arvian (2025) conducted a sociolinguistic analysis of gossip among female characters in *Bridgerton* Season 1 and demonstrated that gossip functions not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a mechanism for maintaining social relationships, influencing others, and navigating the patriarchal social order. Beaumont (2025) further reexamined gossip from a critical feminist

perspective, arguing that gossip has often been unfairly dismissed as trivial because it is associated with women, whereas it can instead function as a meaningful practice of resistance, solidarity, and community building.

The application of Girl Power has also been widely explored in literary and media studies. Samillano-Trujillo (2018) analyzed female protagonists in *Undercover TaiTai* and *Killer in High Heels*, demonstrating that Girl Power is represented through women's intelligence, strategic identities, and femininity to achieve personal and professional goals. Similarly, Setianto and Win (2021) examined *Birds of Prey* through the perspective of third-wave feminism and found that Girl Power emphasizes women's empowerment, independence, self-discovery, and the freedom to determine their own identities beyond patriarchal expectations.

Although these studies have contributed to understanding women's representation, gossip, and Girl Power in various media, they mainly focus on linguistic analysis, contemporary media, or female empowerment in general. There remains limited research that specifically examines how anonymity functions as a performative strategy through which a female character negotiates power within the patriarchal society of a historical television series. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by analyzing Lady Whistledown's anonymity as a symbolic representation of female power in *Bridgerton*, offering new insights into how anonymity becomes a form of feminist resistance and agency within the early 19th century context. Also this gap is particularly evident in the character of Lady Whistledown, whose authority is constructed

through anonymity rather than public visibility. Her concealed identity allows her to criticize social norms, influence the Regency elite, and exercise power while avoiding many of the social restrictions imposed on women.

Therefore, this study investigates Lady Whistledown's anonymity as a symbolic representation of female power in *Bridgerton*. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on women's language, gossip, or general empowerment, this research examines how anonymity functions as a strategic means through which a woman negotiates power, challenges patriarchal norms, and influences society while remaining hidden. By applying the concepts of representation, Girl Power, and female agency, this study offers a new perspective on how anonymity serves as a form of feminist resistance in the early 19th century narrative.

1.2 Research Question(s)

Based on the reasons for choosing this topic and the background of the study, this study intends to answer the question:

How did Lady Whistledown's anonymity function as a symbol of female power and a tool for women's empowerment within the patriarchal social structure portrayed in *Bridgerton* series?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the studies is:

To examine how Lady Whistledown's anonymity function as a symbol of female power and a tool for women's empowerment within the patriarchal social structure portrayed in Bridgerton series.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

This study limited its scope to the *Bridgerton* series, focused specifically on textual (dialogue) analysis of the portrayal of Lady Whistledown, thus excluding visual analysis, cinematography, and comparative data with the book series. In terms of time and context, this study is limited to scenes depicted Lady Whistledown using her writing as a form of resistance and empowerment, depictions of Lady Whistledown after her revelation, and her biggest conflict in season 3, thus excludes scenes unrelated to Lady Whistledown and the ever evolved media landscape. These limitations ensure a focused study but acknowledge the need for caution in insights beyond the defined circumstances.

1.5 Significance of The Study

Although women have gained greater access to education, professional opportunities, and political participation, the silencing of female voices remains a pervasive issue across cultural, organization, and digital spaces (Criado Perez, 2019). Studies indicate that women continue to face barriers in expressing their opinions freely (Syawal et al., 2024). The persistence of these challenges

underscores the necessity of examining historical and fictional representations of female resistance, as they offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of oppression and empowerment that transcend temporal boundaries (Lizana-Iglesias, 2024).

The researcher also hope this thesis will be helpful for further or upcoming research for other researchers or writers for their works of literature, movie projects, and thesis or research papers to how this thesis will be helpful in terms of understanding the historical and contemporary struggles of women in asserting their voices through literary and media representations. This study contributes to the discourse on gender and feminism by examining how women struggle to maintain their freedom of expression despite the pressure and expectations placed on them by society, which continue into the contemporary era, despite significant progress in the feminist movement today (hooks, 2000).

1.6 State of the Art

Existing research on *Bridgerton* mostly discusses themes such as female representation, gossip as feminist discourse, and performative identity in various media texts, there remains a significant gap in scholarly literature regarding the specific anonymity and female power as embodied by the character of Lady Whistledown in the *Bridgerton* series. Most previous studies have focused on female characters' open expressions and interactions, without examining how strategic concealment and pseudonymity function as deliberate

feminist tactics for voice amplification and social critique. This research gap is important because Lady Whistledown represents a unique example of female power through anonymity. Her strength doesn't come from appearing openly in public, but from her hidden identity. Although studies on gossip and women's communication have recognized that women's speech can be a form of resistance, they have not fully explored how anonymity can make this resistance even stronger. By remaining anonymous, women are able to criticize social structures without facing the severe consequences that have historically awaited those who openly challenged patriarchal norms.

Some previous studies have also been widely examining female characters who challenge traditional gender roles. For example, Setianto and Win (2021) analyzed *Birds of Prey* through the perspective of third-wave feminism and found that the concept of Girl Power represents women's empowerment, independence, and self-discovery in overcoming patriarchal constraints. Likewise, Samillano Trujillo (2018) examined the representation of Girl Power in chick lit novels and demonstrated how female protagonists employ intelligence, femininity, and strategic identities to achieve personal and professional goals while negotiating power within society. However, previous studies have primarily focused on contemporary films and literary works that portray women's empowerment explicitly. There is still limited research examining how Girl Power is represented through anonymity and performative identity in historical fiction, particularly within the early 19th century setting depicted in *Bridgerton*. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by analyzing

Lady Whistledown's anonymity not only as a narrative device but as a symbolic representation of female power that challenges patriarchal norms.



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