

Who Are These "Anonymous" Reviewers?!

Posted 2/16/2004 1:02 AM
NEW YORK (AP)

Many sign their names. Many don't.

They're the book reviewers on Amazon.com who use such words as "masterful," "page-turner" and "tear-jerker."

But the ones who sign their critiques only as "a reader from (fill in the city)" lost their anonymity this week when their identities were revealed on Amazon.com's Canadian Web site.

Among those named were authors who posted glowing reviews of their own work, apparently to boost sales.

The glitch, reported Saturday by *The New York Times*, replaced pseudonyms with reviewers' real names, laying bare a culture of self-promotion.

Amazon spokeswoman Patricia Smith told the *Times* the problem, fixed after a week, was "an unfortunate error."

Posted 2/16/2004 1:02 AM Updated 2/16/2004 1:05 AM

Glitch identifies "anonymous" reviewers on Amazon.com

NEW YORK (AP) — Many sign their names. Many don't.

They're the book reviewers on Amazon.com who use such words as "masterful," "page-turner" and "tear-jerker."

But the ones who sign their critiques only as "a reader from (fill in the city)" lost their anonymity this week when their identities were revealed on Amazon.com's Canadian Web site.

Among those named were authors who posted glowing reviews of their own work, apparently to boost sales.

The glitch, reported Saturday by *The New York Times*, replaced pseudonyms with reviewers' real names, laying bare a culture of self-promotion and potential for revenge among authors and users of the online retailer.

Amazon spokeswoman Patricia Smith told the *Times* the problem, fixed after a week, was "an unfortunate error."

"We'll examine whatever happened and make sure it won't happen again," she said.

Amazon allows readers to write reviews without providing their names or other personal data, an aspect of the sites that the company says is popular. About 10 million reader reviews have been posted, a number that continues to grow.

One writer, John Rechy, confessed to writing a review of his new book, *The Life and Adventures of Lyle Clemens*, under the pseudonym "a reader from Chicago," the *Times* said.

"That anybody is allowed to come in and anonymously trash a book to me is absurd," Rechy told the *Times*. "How to strike back? Just go in and rebut every single one of them."

The author of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Dave Eggers, confirmed to the *Times* that he reviewed the first novel of friend Heidi Julavits, calling it "one of the best books of the year," after he suspected rivals had panned it anonymously.

"I've done that one or two times before, when I like a book and the reviews on Amazon seem bizarre," Eggers told the *Times*. "In this case I just tried to bring back some balance."