

By Another Name:  
The Use of Pseudonyms by Writers in Sweden from 1870 to 1890

*Sonja Entzenberg*  
Sweden

**Abstract**

The change in the social structure from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century made a new approach to society and people possible. A contributory factor in this regard was the development of daily newspapers and the founding of a new kind of publishing. The number of writers increased, particularly from the 1880s. An economic value arose around book production, bringing with it new terms for the author. The expansion of the press and the book market created more opportunities to be published in different genres, both in lighter and more serious contexts.

Writing under a pseudonym or a pen-name was common among both female and male writers. This paper looks at the use of pseudonyms in Sweden in this context, with regard to the professional role of the writer. By using pseudonyms, it was possible to assume different positions as a writer. That, in turn, entailed a certain kind of freedom to create disparate types of texts.

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**1. Introduction**

For various reasons, writers may use a pen-name or a pseudonym when they publish different types of texts. A pen-name often consists of an abbreviated name, for example *T.T.* for *Torsten Tegnér*, while a pseudonym is a fictitious name, for example *George Sand* for *Aurore Dudevant*. Pseudonyms and pen-names are closely related phenomena, and where to draw the line between them is sometimes hard to determine. Examples of this are *A lady*, which was common among female writers in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mullan 2007: 50), and *Esselde*, which could be either the letters SLD in Swedish or a pseudonym for *Sophie Leijonhufvud Adlersparre*.

In this paper I will discuss several aspects of the use of pseudonyms between 1870 and 1920. My main body of material consists of approximately 100 pseudonyms from Sweden, equally distributed between the sexes, which have been collected from various reference works. The writers are authors, journalists, critics and debaters, and all of them published some type of text between 1870 and 1920. To begin with, I will describe the forms of the pseudonyms. What specific patterns were there? What types of pseudonyms were used by women and men, respectively? The concluding part of my paper deals with the circumstances and reasons determining the use of pseudonyms by writers.

**2. From anonymity to pen-name and pseudonym**

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, most publications appeared under pseudonyms. Of all the books published in Britain at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, almost 70 per cent were pseudonymous works. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the figure was approximately 50 per cent (Kastner 2008: 13). Putting your real name to a book was often dangerous, especially if it dealt with sensitive subjects such as politics and religion (Mullan 2007: 141). If anonymity had previously been a matter of survival, the use of pseudonyms and pen-names eventually developed into a specific

method of getting published in different genres. An example of this is the pseudonym *Lewis Carroll*, who was actually named *Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*. His use of a pseudonym was certainly a sign of the times, but whether the reason was modesty or because he thought it inappropriate for a mathematician to write children's literature can be debated (Mullan 2007: 40–46).

In Sweden, the advent of the modern age at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be said to mark a period of transition from total anonymity, with no pen-names at all, to more or less recognizable pen-names and pseudonyms, these in turn pointing towards the next stage, when full names were used. A typical example of this development in Sweden is the author *Ellen Key* (1849–1926). In the 1870s she wrote anonymously on some occasions, and subsequently under the pen-name *E-N*. During the 1880s there are reviews and articles by Key written anonymously, under the pen-name *E-N* and under her real name. In the 1890s she also published texts under her real name in the daily press, although this must have been rather unusual at the time (Primander 1988: 300).

### 3. Pen-names

In this paper pen-names have been grouped together, as they essentially comprise different types of abbreviations. These abbreviations assumed different forms. For example, Mathilda Roos signed her works *M. R-s.*, Olga Kullgren used *-én* and Mathilda Lönnberg *-th-*. Other writers made use of pet forms like *Betty* (for Elisabeth Chytraeus) and *Hasse Z.* (for Hasse Zetterström). Pen-names were used by men as well as women. Some writers used several different pen-names or pseudonyms, depending on the context in which the piece was to be published. For instance, Louise Tjernström used *Ft*, but also *Carl Brink* and *Erik Ejegod*.

### 4. Pseudonyms

Pseudonyms can be divided into three different groups, based on the form of the name: pseudonyms within the same sex, cross-gender pseudonyms and other pseudonyms.

#### 4.1. Pseudonyms within the same sex

Pseudonyms within the same sex occur where female writers chose to use a female first name or a female first name + surname as their pseudonym, or where men chose to use a male first name or a male first name + surname. Examples of female pseudonyms for female writers are *Runa* (Elisabet Beskow), *Lovisa Petterkvist* (Alfhild Agrell) and *Stella Kleve* (Mathilda Malling), and male pseudonyms for male writers include *Sigurd* (Alfred Hedenstierna), *Erik Fahlman* (Sigurd Dahlbäck) and *Frank Heller* (Gunnar Serner). This type was common in both sexes. However, the use of a first name only was more common among women.

#### 4.2. Cross-gender pseudonyms

Cross-gender pseudonyms are cases of female writers using a male first name or a male first name + surname as their pen-name, or the opposite in the case of male writers. Examples of male pseudonyms for female writers are *René* (Anna Branting), *Ernst Ahlgren* (Victoria Benedictsson) and *Claude Gerard* (Aurora Ljungstedt), while female pseudonyms for male writers include *Ada A:son Susegård* (Seth Bremberg) and *Emmy Stern* (Ernst Lundqvist). In Sweden it was considerably more common for women to adopt a masculine pseudonym than for men to do the opposite, and a common assumption is that women writers preferred using male pseudonyms. This applied to the use of both a male first name alone and a male first name + surname. Men who chose to use a female name + surname seem to have done so in more humorous written contexts. However, there are many examples from Britain of men choosing a feminine pseudonym in order to increase sales of their books. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was not uncommon for women authors to have their sexual identity questioned (Mullan 2007: 114–137).

### 4.3. Other pseudonyms

The third group of pseudonyms is heterogeneous and includes different kinds of formations. The pseudonym may be comprised of a word or expression in another language: Italian, French, English, Latin or Greek. *Sorella* (Mathilda Neumann), *Turdus Merula* (Aurora von Qvanten) and *Don Basuno* (Emil Norlander) are examples of this usage. Alternatively, the assumed name may be a play on words, inspired from the world of literature or art, like *Robin Hood* (Bengt Idestam-Almquist), *Huck Leber* (Klara Johanson) and *Jeremias i Tröstlösa* (Levi Rickson). The pseudonym *Huck Leber* comes from one of Klara Johanson's favourite literary characters, namely Huckleberry Finn. *Jeremias i Tröstlösa* combines the name of the prophet Jeremiah in the Bible with the place name Tröstlösa, meaning "desolate". Writers may have wanted to express a specific quality through the form of their pseudonym. An example of this is *Falstaff, fakir* (Axel Wallgren), a pseudonym that is a humorous mix of the ascetic fakir and Shakespeare's pleasure-seeking character Sir John Falstaff. It was also common for the name to be adapted to the topic of the text, for instance *Vagabonde*, which was Mollie Faustman's pseudonym in reports from her travels around the world.

In summary, it seems that pseudonyms within the same sex and other pseudonyms were the most common types among male and female writers. Pen-names were also common, especially in the daily press. A writer could use both a pen-name and a pseudonym, depending on the context in which the text was to be published. The use of cross-gender pseudonyms in Sweden appears to have been most prominent among women. Despite this, most women writers preferred pseudonyms within their own sex or other types of pseudonyms.

## 5. Pseudonyms and written context

The use of pseudonyms allowed a writer to compose different types of texts. It was not necessary to use a pseudonym in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it did give the author some freedom. The type of text was connected with the pseudonym or pen-name (Nordenstam 2001: 96–100). The Swedish writer Klara Johanson can serve to illustrate this. She used *K.J.* when writing as a serious critic and *Huck Leber* in lighter articles (Burman 2007: 134–135). Another example is Sophie Leijonhufvud Adlersparre's use of pseudonyms and pen-names in magazines. She was published there either anonymously or under one of her 14 pseudonyms, depending on the type of text: "With regard to my pseudonyms, I follow the principle of using *Esselde* for what I am most satisfied or least dissatisfied with in my work" (Nordenstam 2001: 77).

Taking another name can be interpreted as an "expression of an author's own identity" (Heggstad 1991: 52). A pseudonym also liberated the writer's creative ability, which could be hampered by his or her occupational or family connections (Ney 1993: 36). An example of this is Sigurd Dalhbäck, whose everyday profession was that of a lawyer. His pen-name was *Erik Fahlman*. Victoria Benedictsson wrote all her novels under the pseudonym *Ernst Ahlgren*. In her case, it is possible to speak of a total identification with her pseudonym in her literary role. Even in her diary she used the name *Ernst Ahlgren* as her alter ego (Holm 2002: 110).

At the dawn of the modern age, women writers encountered a number of difficult situations. The complexities of being a writing woman were dependent on genre, medium and social situation. A conventional explanation may be that a married woman who wrote children's books, preferably fairy tales, was tolerated, while an unmarried woman who wrote in newspapers about politics, science and art was much less apt to be respected. Thus, for example, one of the first women journalists in Sweden, Eva Brag, was very much afraid of losing her anonymity and being exposed to public scandal. A recurring theme in her letters to the newspaper *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* during her entire period as a contributor concerns this question of her anonymity. She urged the newspaper to burn her letters (Primander 1988: 301).

A woman writer who took a male pseudonym made a choice. It was not necessary, but it gave her freedom. It was neither an attempt to escape subordination nor an attempt to seek protection from publicity, but rather a creative device. It allowed women to write within new genres that had not been accessible to them before (Nordenstam 2001: 99). This was probably also the case for men using female pseudonyms, at least in Britain.

As we can see, there were many reasons for using pseudonyms. Writers could for example retain their anonymity, but still be a part of the literary and intellectual discussion. The same writers could also choose to use different pseudonyms in order to write in different genres – a pseudonym for each type of text. Writing by another name became an attitude to adopt towards the growing publishing industry, with its increasing importance to commercially attractive authors. The fictitious pen-name can be said to have become a trademark (Nordenstam 2001: 99).

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Sonja Entzenberg  
 Uppsala University  
 Seminariet för nordisk namnforskning  
 Box 135  
 751 04 Uppsala  
 SWEDEN  
 sonja.entzenberg@nordiska.uu.se