

PEN NAMES IN GERMAN LITERATURE 1900-1933

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A short theoretical section on literary pen names is followed by an anecdotal part, covering all well-known German authors of the early twentieth century who used pseudonyms.

It is characteristic of civilized societies that individuals, including future authors, have names given to them at birth by others. Since the Middle Ages in Europe the father's surname is usually passed on to the child, along with one or more forenames chosen by the parents.

Therefore, the assumption of a pen name by an author is always a rejection of an existing name; a freely chosen name is substituted for inherited or assigned names. The reason an author rejects the name he has borne since birth is often the inferiority of the class of persons which bears such names, as perceived by society or even the name-changer himself. When women are considered inferior to men, a woman writer may assume a man's name. Since gender is expressed through the forename, this may simply be changed or suppressed through the use of initials, or a completely new name can be selected (George Sand, George Eliot). When Jews are thought

inferior to Christians, a Jewish writer may assume a Christian pen name: the American dramatist Elmer Rice was originally named Elmer Reizenstein. Similarly, members of any ethnic or religious minorities discriminated against may assume mainstream names.

Aside from pseudonyms inspired by social prejudice, an author may change his name to conceal a personal history, such as political, revolutionary, or criminal activities. Here a perfectly satisfactory given name has been spoiled or made dangerous by the deeds of its bearer, so that it is discarded for a fresh name.

Both types of name rejection are a negation or denial of a former self; they may be viewed as a kind of symbolic self-destruction, a figurative suicide. Sometimes the use of a pen name may be for a limited period in the author's life or for only a certain genre or subject matter within his production. The latter situation is like schizophrenia.

The assumption of a pseudonym need not demonstrate negation, but the emphasis may be on the positive qualities of the chosen new name, such as allusive names which are borrowed from heroes of history or literature, as in Martin Luther King, or denotative names which have positive intrinsic meanings, as in girl's names like Faith, Patience, or Prudence. In a way a writer who assumes an allusive or denotative pen name becomes his own parent, choosing a name for his new-born literary self, with the parents' opportunity for idealistic statement or aspirations.

C. Grant Loomis, in an article in Names (1955, 236-8), suggests other reasons for adoption of a pen name, such as modesty, safety, and mystification. Adrian Room's book, Naming Names (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1981) includes no less than forty lists of name changes, each for a different purpose; only some of his types of change are relevant to literary pseudonyms. But I think it is also worthwhile to think of pen names initially in a dualistic way, as either a negative or positive decision, against the old name or for a new name.

In German literature of this century the old tendency of women writers to assume male pseudonyms has largely disappeared, no doubt due to the movement for women's emancipation, culminating in feminism.

When Netty Reiling (1900-1983) sought a pen name at the beginning of her literary career, she chose the name Seghers, an allusion to the period of art history in which she had just earned her doctorate. Hercules Seghers was a painter contemporary of Rembrandt, her dissertation topic. Since Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara (Revolt of the Fishermen) (1928) listed Seghers alone as the author's name, critics believed the author to be a man. But the next printing gave her full pen name, Anna Seghers. The assumed forename may be a variant from Netty, her given name, or the selection of a widely-used working class name (she became a

communist in the year of publication), or an allusion to various Anna's of the Rembrandt period, even an Anna Segher, a Dutch painter of miniatures. While the name is allusive it does not appear to be meaningful.

Alexandra Ramm, born in Russia in 1883, was a minor poetess and companion to an important editor of Expressionism, Franz Pfemfert of Die Aktion. Her pen name, Anna Mahr, seems to be a German substitute for a foreign-sounding name and a backward spelling of the surname, Ramm-Mahr. Actually it is an allusive name, to a character in Gerhart Hauptmann's famous Naturalist drama Finsame Menschen (Lonely People) of 1891. There Anna Mahr is an emancipated young woman, one of the first German women university students; she is also, like Ramm, an ethnic German from the Slavic East (Reval in Estonia). Unlike the choice of Seghers, Anna Mahr is thus a meaningful allusive name, to a well-known recent dramatic portrait of the "new woman."

Margarete Rosenberg's choice of Henriette Hardenberg as a literary pseudonym was suggested by the editor of Die Aktion when her father objected to her publishing poems in that radical journal. Hardenberg is the true name of Novalis, the great Romantic poet, and thus has an allusive quality. It conceivably could also have been chosen to mask her Jewishness, although the periodical showed no antisemitism and she herself married a Jewish poet, Alfred Wolfenstein. I am including another German woman writer although

she was not born until 1935, because she provides an interesting example of the reversal of Jewish name suppression. The East German Ingrid Bernstein, who married the writer Rainer Kirsch, took the pen name Sarah Kirsch to show her personal defiance of Germany's Nazi past and her solidarity with the martyred Jewish people of Europe. The Old Testament name Sarah was a German stereotype for Jewish women. (The name Sarah, like David and other names from the Old Testament formerly identified as Jewish in Germany, has now become a fashionable German forename, although this new naming practice is not perceived as a repudiation of the Hitler period.)

Turning to male writers, Friedrich Kantor (1908-1979) is often imagined as concealing his Jewish origins by choosing the pen name Friedrich Torberg. Torberg is composed of the second syllable of his father's name "Tor" and a syllable of his mother's maiden name "berg." The author stated that he had already used his given name, in the form of Fritz Kantor, for light verse and cabaret appearances and thus needed a new name for serious poetry. This use of two or more authorial names by a writer in different genres occurs often.

The fact that Friedrich Torberg is often listed in lexicons and literary histories as Kantor-Berg is thought to be a residue of anti-Semitism, an ironic insistence on his Jewish origins, since he never used Kantor-Berg, and Torberg had become his legal name. It

is not uncommon for authors to follow the use of a pseudonym by making it their legal name as well.

A common technique of creating a pen name, especially for humorists or satirists whether they be Jewish or not, is to play games with the letters in their original names, shortening or rearranging the elements. Thus the writer Hans Davidsohn (1887-1942?) whose radical poem "Weltende" ("End of the World"), published January 11, 1911, has been called the beginning of German literary Expressionism, chose the pen name Jakob van Hoddis. Coined in the year his father died (1909), van Hoddis is an exact anagram of Davidsohn. His assumed forename reintroduces the aspect of Jewishness, which was removed in the surname change Davidsohn-van Hoddis, by replacing the Christian Hans (New Testament Johannes) with the common Jewish forename Jakob from the Old Testament. The author spent most of his mature life in mental hospitals until deported to Theresienstadt in 1942. He was in the unusual position of qualifying for extermination under Hitler's policies in three separate categories: as a Jew, as a leftist, and as incurably insane.

Dr. Salomo Friedlaender (1871-1946) wrote philosophical works under his given name, but used a pseudonym for his comic poetry and literary grotesques, often published in the satirical weekly Simplicissimus. His pen name Mynona is simply anonym (anonymous) spelled backwards. One recalls the title Erewhon of Samuel Butler's

satirical novel (1872), also an anagram created by spelling a word backwards.

Ha Hu Baley is a pseudonym which conceals plurality (see Room's list "E Pluribus unum," 216 ff.). Hugo Ball (1886-1927) and his friend Hans Leybold combined parts of their surnames to form the fictitious surname, while using the initial syllables of their respective forenames to create the comic forename sequence. After Leybold was killed in World War One, Ball wrote: "Wir erkannten einander und setzten ein Psychofakt in die Welt, das wir Baley nannten und das den Zweck hatte, Posen, Gesten, Vexationen zu kultivieren." ("Rede auf Hans Leybold" in Die weissen Blätter 1915, 526. "We knew each other--in the biblical sense--and brought into the world a creature that we called Baley and whose purpose it was to cultivate poses, gestures, irritations.")

The Austrian cavalry officer Sandor Friedrich Rosenfeld (1872-1945) became a well-known cabaret humorist, specializing in satires of the old empire and its officers' caste, using the pseudonym of Alexander Roda Roda. With his sister he formed a family publishing collective under the name of Roda & Roda (two books by her and forty-eight by him); and he later made Roda Roda his legal name.

A final example of name de- and reconstruction appears in the case of Eduard Schmid (1890-1966) who first called himself Ed Schmid to achieve an English-sounding name, then combined these two name

parts to form a new surname, Edschmid, adding a Slavic forename, Kasimir. This is the name of the patron saint of Poland.

Related to rejection of Jewish and female names for pen names from favored social segments is the rejection of one's own social class through pseudonym. Whereas once middle-class authors might assume a name from the nobility, in the twentieth century the opposite is more likely to occur. The aristocracy is perceived as an anachronism or even as an enemy from a socialist, class-struggle perspective.

Arnold Veith von Golssenau (1889–1979) from the high Prussian nobility, an officer in World War One, became a communist in 1928, like Anna Seghers, and wrote a cycle of highly-successful war novels from the enlisted man's perspective. As a pen name he used the name of his working-class first-person narrator, Ludwig Renn, thus signalling his change of class loyalty and, incidentally, confusing reviewers who assumed an identity between author and protagonist. Although it is not uncommon for an author to derive his pen name from a literary character, it is unusual for him to adopt the name of his own fictional creation. After leading the communist Thalmann brigade in the Spanish Civil War, Renn spent the next world war in Mexico and returned to East Berlin in 1947, where he was revered as a link to the pre-Hitler left, like Anna Seghers.

Another aristocrat who achieved class reduction through adopting a commoner pseudonym was Hans von Flesch Brunningen, a

lyric poet from the Aktion circle who simply shortened his name to Hans Flesch and also used Vincent Brun, the surname shortening Brunningen.

The coming to power of Adolf Hitler caused great upheavals in German and later European society. The immediate emigration of many leftist and Jewish intellectuals and authors was accompanied in some cases by the assumption of pen names to gain acceptance among a new reading public or, like the aristocrat to middle-class changes just reported, to reject or disguise German origins. Most significant writers did not attempt this, so I will list no examples. The important dramatist and novelist Lion Feuchtwanger (1884-1958) should be mentioned since he used the amusing Wetcheek, a literal translation of his surname, not only as a pen name, but to get an emergency visa into the United States (October 5, 1940).

As in other languages and other periods, German writers of the early twentieth century sometimes assumed multiple pen names, while not as numerous as the ninety-eight of Daniel De Foe or the seventy-nine of Voltaire, themselves both pseudonyms (see Room).

Isaac Lang (1891-1950), born in France but part German and a German citizen since 1908, is better known under the pseudonym Iwan Goll. He was associated with the DaDa Movement in Zurich during World War One, where he also knew James Joyce; he was one of the founders of Surrealism in Paris in 1924. He wrote in French and English, returning to the German language at the end of his life.

It is thus appropriate that this many-faceted, many-languaged internationalist should have a number of noms de plume.

Lazang and Lassang (Der Panama Kanal) were contractions of his German stepfather's name (Lang) and his mother's maiden name of Lazard. Jean de St. Die commemorates his birthplace, while Jean Longeville seems to derive from Lang. He used two Tristan's, Torsi (1914) and Thor for late German poetry. The Romanian poet Tristan Tzara was an important figure in both DaDa and Surrealism, but the Tristan of medieval epic is a more likely source for this forename. Iwan Goll has never been satisfactorily explained, but I suspect it may be a partial anagram of I. Lang, whereby Lang is reversed, with the "n" being added to the forename initial "I" to form Iwan. The use of a Russian forename in his main pen name recalls Eduard Schmid's use of Kasimir and reflects the dominance of Russian writers, like Tolstoi, in European culture of the early twentieth century, as well as the Russian revolutionary model in politics for many avant garde activist writers.

Also the well-known Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935), a political writer and poet, used an array of pseudonyms, because of his numerous contributions to a single periodical, Die Schaubühne, around the time of World War One, and his many kinds of writing. Theobald Tiger and Peter Panter are alliterative, denotative surnames derived from the great felines. Used for poetry and theatre reviews respectively, they were suggested by one of his

university teachers. Ignaz Wrobel repeats a mathematics textbook in high school; his name was used for political articles. Kaspar Hauser is an allusive name, referring to the famous founding from Nuremberg, about whom many authors have written. Tucholsky went beyond other users of multiple pseudonyms in calling them his homunculi, imagining his pen names as characters, describing their physical appearance and personalities. Furthermore, he viewed his own given name, also used as an author, as simply another pseudonym among the invented ones, denying any primacy of the real over the pretended.

More common than these inventors of multiple name extravaganzas are those authors who while using a single pen name also publish under their correct name, to make some distinction of genre, mood, or phase important to themselves.

Alfred Döblin (1878-1957), the author of Berlin Alexanderplatz, used the pseudonym Linke Poot (left hand) for political satiric essays before World War One. The name alludes to his leftist orientation as well as suggesting they were a sideline activity, done with the left hand, for this busy medical doctor.

Theodor Tagger (1891-1958), a Viennese poet, published Expressionist poetry under his real name, but after World War One used a pseudonym, Ferdinand Bruckner, for his second career as a playwright, recalling Mynona's and Torberg's splitting of two kinds

of literary publications between two names, although not consecutively as for Tagger-Bruckner.

When the young poet Alfred Henschke (1890-1928) noticed that the editor Alfred Kerr enjoyed discovering unknown Bohemian contributors for his journal Pan, he obliged by submitting poems, along with an imaginary self-description as a vagabond, under the pseudonym of Sami Klabund. Poems under both names, the real and the pen name, appeared in a single issue of the magazine. The Yiddish sounding Sami, an inside joke, was first shortened to "S." and then dropped entirely, so that Klabund became the complete pen name of this important figure of the Weimar Period.

The source of this pen name Klabund is interesting: the son and grandson of druggists, Henschke employed the name of a rival apothecary, who competed with the family business in Frankfurt an der Oder. Somewhat of an onomastic bent, he also explained the name as combining syllables from Klabautermann (bogeyman, or figure seen on ships about to be wrecked) and Vagabund: Kla-bund. Beyond this denotative analysis, he told his younger brother that the Kla- was supposed to suggest the sound of a trumpet, while the -bund should sound like the beat of a drum. Aside from these somewhat gratuitous "explanations," the choice of a pen name from a family business competitor is simply a private allusion, like Seghers above, which has no particular significance, except perhaps to signal a competitive stance to his family and the establishment.

Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970), the author of Im Westen Nichts Neues (All Quiet on the Western Front), 1928, was originally named Erich Paul Remark. The change to a French spelling of his surname was not inspired by Francophilia or an internationalist perspective, but because under the original German form he had published a novel (1920) of which he was thoroughly ashamed: "a novel whose name I will not reveal, even under torture. For this reason Remark becomes Remarque." Actually his great grandfather also used this French form of the name; Maria, the substituted second forename, was that of his mother. It was long believed that Remarque was a pen name, masking the actual author's true name of Kramer (Remark spelled backwards).

Hans Pötticher (1883-1934) published many books under his given name before assuming a pen name, Joachim Ringelnatz, in 1919. Ringelnatz is denotative, taken from Ringelnatter or Ringelnass, meaning a ring snake, and is meant to be self-mocking, as well as an indicator of his stinging function as a satiric critic of his society. Another meaning, that of sea horse, apparently is not relevant.

Rudolf Ditzen (1893-1947) was the son of a judge, a troubled youth who killed his boyhood chum in a duel over which of them had written the better drama, tried to kill himself as well, was constantly confined in corrective institutions, and also became a drug addict. He went on to become a major novelist of the Weimar

Period with bestsellers like Kleiner Mann was nun? (Little Man, What Now) (1932). When his first novel appeared in 1920 he took the pen name Hans Fallada, in order to spare his parents any embarrassment-- a somewhat belated attack of filial piety. He found the name Fallada in one of Grimm's fairy tales, "Die Gänsemagd" (The Goose Girl), in which a faithful horse of that name always tells the truth. Veracity was an important aesthetic tenet for the author, who thus chose a meaningful allusive name as his pseudonym.

Such allusiveness is common in literary character namegiving: Alexandra Ramm, who chose the name of a liberated heroine from a Hauptmann play, Anna Mahr, also exploited such symbolic possibilities in her choice of a personal pen name. Perhaps Hardenberg should be added here. Not to be discussed but merely noted are Ludwig Thoma's (1867-1921) use of Peter Schlemihl (until 1906) and Willy Haas' (1891-1973) choice of Shakespeare's Caliban. But other allusive pen names we met were merely private allusions to some episode in the author's life--Seghers and Klabund--that would not be decipherable to the average reader.

Aside from Ringelnatz and Döblin the German pen name choosers also neglected the denotative, tag-name potential in their pseudonym choices--in a language in which a great number of personal surnames have a literal, concrete meaning built in. The element of rejection of the original bestowed name seems to outweigh the positive

creative possibility of name selection referred to here at the outset.

The choice of pen names to escape social prejudice against women and minorities, familiar from earlier literary periods, also has faded in this era of emancipation and defiant ethnic pride.

What is consistent with earlier practice is the frequent occurrence of word play in pseudonyms, such as the anagram, backward spelling, or truncated names. As always this appears most frequently with comic or satiric writers, whose cabaret appearances in Germany of 1900-1933 link them to that other major group which employs occupational pseudonyms, actors, singers, and other performers on stage. But the pseudonyms of the theatre and film world would entail a whole other story.

Adrian Room in Naming Names describes cases of pseudonyms so successful that they have never been deciphered, like the eighteenth century journalist Junius or the sixteenth century Italian poet known as Pietro Aretino (63-67). An important German example is the name Bonaventura under which a Romantic masterpiece, Die Nachtwachen, appeared in 1804. Dissertations are still written to establish the author's identity.

The most notable unresolved pseudonym of this century is that of the German-language novelist B. Traven. The secret of the author's identity was maintained from the publication of Das

Totenschiff (The Death Ship) in 1926 and Der Schatz der Sierra Madre (The Treasure of the Sierra Madre) in 1927, until his death in 1969. His many novels, often about the plight of the Mexican peasants, were translated into fifteen languages and sold millions of copies.

From the nineteen-thirties on, articles and books were written about this mystery man, especially after John Huston's filming of Sierra Madre in 1947. The search for B. Traven's origins and identity was so extensive that a new word was coined to describe the sport: "travening."

What now seems clear is that Traven is identical to a Bavarian revolutionary and literary radical named Ret Marut, this name itself a pseudonym, who published an anarchist journal, Der Ziegelbrenner from 1917 to 1922 and also a novel under the pen name of Richard Maurhut (1916). Arrested after the overthrow of the ninety-day Räterepublik of Bavaria in 1919, Marut escaped just before being executed and went into hiding.

The same man next takes part in a Mexican archaeological expedition in 1926 under the name of T. Torsvan, a Norwegian engineer. Now his manuscripts begin arriving in Germany from Mexico. In 1951 he becomes a Mexican citizen with the name of Berick Traves Torsvan. It may be noted that Torsvan and Traven almost comprise an anagram.

He attended the filming of The Treasure of the Sierra Madre as the literary agent and script writer for B. Traven, naming himself

Hal Crovis, although Huston and others believed him to be Traven himself.

While the pen name sequence Ret Marut- B. Traven is generally accepted by scholars, with the identity change due to the author's revolutionary activities, which he believed permanently incriminating or dangerous (particularly in the Hitler Period), what has never been explained is the origin and early life of Marut-Traven, before about 1907 when Ret Marut first is recorded as an actor and theatre worker in Germany.

Traven encouraged speculation by cryptic and contradictory references to his origins in rare public statements and in official documents. He claimed to have been born in San Francisco or Chicago, as well as Germany or other European countries. Even the East German scholar Rolf Recknagel, who spent ten years on the problem, is unable to decide on the original identity and true name of B. Traven. Most credible to me personally is a book by Will Wyatt, The Secret of the Sierra Madre (1980), which grew out of a BBC documentary. Wyatt demonstrates rather convincingly that Traven was a native German, Otto Wienecke, born in Schwiebus in 1882. The relatives and descendants of Wienecke, tracked down by Wyatt, agree that Traven is their long-lost relative.

But other recent commentators, including a former colleague of mine at Stony Brook, Jonah Raskin in My Search for B. Traven (also 1980) who had special access to Traven's widow Rosa Elena, reject

the theory that Traven-Murat was originally this Otto Wienecke. It was even long believed that Ret Marut was the illegitimate son of the last German emperor. In our field, the Who's Who of Room's book of 1981 lists B. Traven as really being Berick Traven Torsvan (?1890-1969), U.S. novelist of Swedish or German parentage.

In our context, we have a world-famous author, writing in German for over forty years, who managed to conceal his true name and origins through a series of literary pseudonyms and aliases, assumed identities, outright lies and mystification, against the intense scrutiny of many scholars and great media organizations, not even leaving a "confession" at his death. Traven's literary career is an amazing example of the power of pseudonyms and aliases to efface an historic, flesh-and-blood human being, well into the age of bureaucratic and technological controls.

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