

On Stirner and Szeliga

Edgar Bauer

1882

Contents

Editor's Note:	3
Most Honorable Sir:	3

Editor's Note:

When John H. Mackay prepared his book on Stirner, he wrote a number of letters to former members of that intellectual encounter-group, "The Free [die Freien]."

Mackay's friend, Max Hildebrandt, sent him the following letter from Edgar Bauer, which was not published, but which he nevertheless employed in his book for characterizing Stirner, and it gives a vivid portrait of two of the most active members of the group: Stirner and Szeliga. They, like Dr. Oswald [Engels], took up noms de guerre in their world-historical struggle of the Free.

Stirner's name was Johann C. Schmidt, Szeliga's name Franz Szeliga Zychlin von Zychlinsky. The former was a teacher at a private boarding school for girls, the latter military adjutant to a Prussian Prince, and Lieutenant in a Guard-Regiment; the former, poor and the author of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, died in poverty; the latter, somewhat rich, was first a contributor to Bruno Bauer's radical periodicals of 1843–46, and then of two ultraconservative studies, the *Geschichte des 24. Infanterieregiments* (1854/57), and *Das preussische Offizierskorps als Erzieher des Volkes* (1962). Szeliga distinguished himself on the battlefields of 1849, 1866 and 1870, becoming the highest decorated General of Infantry. When he died in 1900, the Kaiser ordered three days of mourning for both the 3rd Garde-Grenadierregiment and the 27th. Infanterieregiment.

As to any psychoanalytic interpretation of Stirner or anarchism in general, the information contained in this letter regarding Stirner's sexual life is certainly of interest.

The material collected by Mackay was sold by the Stirner-Archiv in 1925 to the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. During the night before delivery, the secretary of the Stirner-Archiv, Leo Kasarnowski, copied some unedited manuscripts which he thought were important. This letter of Edgar Bauer was one of those manuscripts. The original is now in the Berlin-archives of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, and is here published for the first time.

Hans-Martin Sass

Most Honorable Sir:

Max Stirner was the nickname of a teacher and doctor [Stirner was never awarded the doctorate] in Berlin, who was born of a middle-class family from Danzig [Bayreuth] and whose real name was Schmidt. He had earlier, as a student, received the nickname because of his high forehead [Stirn], which was even further heightened by the manner in which his hair was parted. The school in which he worked was a well-established private school, directed by a woman [Mme. Gropius] for young ladies of the wealthy class. He taught German and History, and had his students compose many long essays. About 1839 [1837] he married one of his students [very improbable, as he did not begin teaching until after the death of this first wife, Agnes Burtz], and had a harmonious marriage. The young woman died during her first childbirth, and the child as well.

In the beginning of the 40s, Stirner was the Berlin correspondent of the *Leipziger Allgemeinen Zeitung*, whose title, following Prussian regulations, was changed to the *Deutsche Allgemeinen Zeitung*. Stirner contributed nothing to the *Hallischen (Deutschen) Jahrbucher*. He was — and I speak here from the year 1841 onward — simply an amiable and unobtrusive person, never

offensive nor striving after brilliant effects either in phrase, conduct, or appearance. He was never drunk, was temperate in eating, cool, chaste, not a gambler, never angry, uninclined to philosophizing, being offhanded and joking during discussions. The general impression was of an intelligent, unimpressive good person. He was agreeable to be with, as he had no power to resist any request, and I know of no occasion where he made an accusation against anyone or spoke badly about someone behind their back. His basic attitude was one of easy indifference. For this reason, he was without a feeling of pride and even less of ambition. He kept in himself a quiet inclination to mockery, and a hidden imp, which whispered to him that he was more clever than all the critics and believers of his time and any other. Again and again he spread the rumor among his friends that he had been working for years on a great work, to which he had already compiled page upon page, and that it took up in its development the whole fabric of his thought. In this regard, he had revealed the secret of his life, for he sometimes pointed to the desk where his *Ego lie* concealed. No one was allowed to see the manuscript, no one had ever heard of it being examined, and its existence could have even been a fable — it was considered as such by many — until it suddenly came to light under the title of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. However, before that, Stirner had taken a step which shaped at the same time both the forward and the antithesis of his work. He married for the second time, and now with a young, monied, spirited lady from Mecklenburg. He gave up his teaching post, and devoted himself only to the securing of fitting passages, systematic order, and a stylistic clarity to his work. The book presenting the full unrestrained and total servility of the egoist, made a sensation, is immortal, and is just as valid today as it was forty years ago. It had only one drawback — the writer couldn't live on it. In order to help out with household expenses, he conceived of a plan to edit the classics of national economy, which works he intended to portray in the light of Stirnerian philosophy with the aid of an accompanying commentary. The text from Say and Adam Smith has appeared in his translation. However, the commentary has not yet come into existence, because the Stirnerian philosophy is much too unworldly to deal with factual realities — given to transitory, illusory and negative things. Stirner was so incompetent in the necessities of the marital state that his wife left and went to England, then Australia. Restrained, alone, quietly miserable, generally unnoticed, possibly working little, but always caring for good cigars — which apparently were the only things dear to him — being respectfully frugal, in poor quarters, but always well dressed, the man continued to exist as a Berliner. He was taken by an unexpectedly sad death. Poisoned by a fly-bite, he died in a

hospital from a tumor. This happened thirty years ago. He reached an age of about forty years. [Stirner died in 1856, a few months before his fiftieth birthday.] You ask if Stirner was good-intentioned or hardhearted? Neither, insofar as he had neither will nor heart, he neither loved the good, nor valued hardness as such. He was dulled by a kind of egotistical calculation, but yet not armed with the armor of selfseeking. He could not take an advantage, and yet not deny it. His character is best illuminated by the fact that no woman was able to hold onto the undemanding man. The first died, the other went to another country. He confessed to me once that he had acquired an aversion for his first wife as soon as he had caught sight of her naked. She had once unconsciously uncovered herself during sleep, and from this he was never able to touch her again. The singularity of the unique kills the unique. “Was he sociable?” Certainly, he was not a sneak. “How as external appearance?” Completely that of the best sort of a teacher for young ladies. Behind silver glasses a gentle look without any lust, normal size, clean clothes, easy mannered, inoffensive, not in the least ragged or silly.

The full name of Szeliga was Szelige von Zychlinski. A military appearance, stately in military uniform, and at that time (1842) Adjutant to one of the Princes in Berlin, First- Lieutenant. Exact in thinking and in speech, diligent, with a soldierly inclination to criticism, since this always and ever will set the way to military life. His horizon narrowly practical, as it must be with a soldier, who wants to advance. His sentiments not in the least revolutionary or oppositional. The soldier demanding from philosophy only that it free him from all middle- class concerns, because they have their work to do. I have never believed that Szeliga was the author of the article which he delivered. He was at that time about 28 years old. In the year 1848 a Major von Zychlinski distinguished himself as a fighter for the dynasty. I believe that it was that disciple of pure criticism. The name was repeatedly entered into the army-list. Apparently the 42er still lives. He originates out of the Grand Duchy of Posen. Hair: reddish- brown, Impression: Germanic, Nose: strongly and imperiously curved. A Zychlinski had married a rich heiress – court-lady. Is it the same? I don't know.

The comprehensive treatment concerning Sue's Mysteries of Paris originates from Stirner.

Yours Obediently,

Bauer.

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Edgar Bauer's retrospective on Max Stirner and Szeliga, written to John Henry Mackay.
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