



Brand, Adolf (1874-1945)

by Hubert Kennedy

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Editor, photographer, poet, polemicist, activist, anarchist, *enfant terrible*, Adolf Brand was the acknowledged leader of a faction of the homosexual emancipation movement in Berlin in the early twentieth century whose cultural views were expressed in his long-running journal *Der Eigene* (The Self-Owner), the first homosexual literary and artistic journal. In opposition to the better-known faction headed by Magnus Hirschfeld, Brand and his followers objected to the medical model used to describe same-sex relations and to the scientific approach of the sexologists.

Biography

Adolf Brand was born in Berlin on November 14, 1874. He was the son of the master glazier Franz Brand and his wife Auguste, who also had another son and a daughter.

After a brief career as a teacher, Brand established a publishing firm. In 1896, he began publishing *Der Eigene*, a literary and artistic journal dedicated to "male culture." The first homosexual journal, *Der Eigene* became the voice of a faction of the early German homosexual movement that was opposed to the dominant faction led by Magnus Hirschfeld. Brand attacked sexologists for imposing a medical model on homosexuality, declaring that their research "took away all beauty from eroticism."

In 1903, Brand founded the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* (Community of Self-Owners) in order to support his publishing and political activities. An attempt to circumvent censorship of *Der Eigene* by establishing a closed circle of readers, the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* was more of a literary and intellectual circle than a political group per se. It, however, functioned to offer an opposing viewpoint to that of Hirschfeld's Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee, which was the dominant group arguing for glbtq rights at the time.

An impetuous militant, Brand often became involved in public quarrels and scandals. Not only was he frequently prosecuted because of his homoerotic publications and illustrations, but also because of his own rash behavior.

For example, in 1899 he publicly attacked with a dog whip a member of parliament with whose views he disagreed; he was sentenced to a year in jail. In 1907, he was involved in the sensational Harden-Eulenberg scandal in which two advisers of Emperor Wilhelm II were accused of homosexuality. In the wake of this scandal, Brand, an early proponent of "outing," published a pamphlet in which he accused German Chancellor Prince Bernhard von Bülow of having a homosexual relationship with Privy Councilor Max Scheefer. In response, Bülow sued Brand for libel. The publisher was convicted and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

During World War I, Brand served two years in the German army. It was probably during this time that he



Top: Adolf Brand.
Above: A *Der Eigene* cover from 1906.
Image of Adolf Brand courtesy Archiv für Sexualwissenschaft, Berlin.
Image of Der Eigene (1906) courtesy Archiv und Bibliothek des Schwulen Museum, Berlin.

married Elise Behrendt, a nurse who loved him and accepted his homosexual inclination.

Several of Brand's male companions may have posed for the nude photographs that he featured in his journal, but only one is known for certain, Max Miede, who lived for a time with Brand and his wife.

During the Weimar period, the circulation of *Der Eigene* was surpassed by other homosexual publications, and Brand seemed to grow disillusioned with the prospects for decriminalizing same-sex sexual relationships.

Brand's activism came to an end with the rise to power of the Nazis in 1933. Soon after the Nazis took power, *Der Eigene* was silenced, and storm troopers raided Brand's house several times, seizing his books and photographs and remaining copies of his journal.

On November 29, 1933, he wrote to the Sexological Society in London, complaining that as a result of these raids, "I have been plundered of everything. I have nothing left to sell and am financially ruined. I no longer know from what I and mine can continue to live. For my whole life's work is now destroyed. And most of my followers don't have even the courage to write me a letter, not to mention support my work with any kind of payment. My loss through the confiscations and the prohibition comes to around 10,000 Mark."

Although he was not imprisoned by the Nazis, he was financially ruined and his spirit seems to have been broken. As a result of his financial difficulties, he sold his apartment to Miede and lived with his wife in only one room. They would probably have survived World War II if an Allied bomb had not destroyed the building where they were living. They were both killed on February 2, 1945.

Brand apparently tried to preserve some of his personal papers by burying them in a garden, but this legacy seems not to have been recovered.

Der Eigene

Der Eigene began in 1896 as an anarchist journal reflecting the ideas of the egoist philosopher Max Stirner, but was openly homosexual from 1898 until its demise in 1932. Although it experienced various interruptions, due mostly to police interventions, and several changes in subtitles (the first eight volumes had eight different subtitles), the journal is among the most significant publications of the early German homosexual rights movement.

The title of the journal requires explanation. The German word *eigen* is ambiguous, but in his brilliant 1907 English translation of Stirner's 1844 book *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, Steven T. Byington notes that Stirner uses the word *eigen* "in a way that German dictionaries do not quite recognize." He translated it "own," and translated *Eigenheit* as "self-ownership," a phrase that captures the individualistic nature of Stirner's philosophy.

In the very first issue of *Der Eigene*, dated April 1, 1896, Brand declared, "This journal is dedicated to *eigen* people, such people as are proud of their *Eigenheit* and wish to maintain it at any price." That he understood these words in Stirner's sense of "self-ownership" was confirmed in 1920, when he wrote: "Whoever has always attentively read the leading articles of the journal long since knows of course that *Der Eigene* stands on the basis of individualist anarchism and that for it the weltanschauung of Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche is the great working program of the future. For *Der Eigene* represents the right of personal freedom and the sovereignty of the individual to the furthest consequence."

As a homosexual journal, *Der Eigene* experienced constant difficulties with censorship. The extent to which censorship dogged the journal was amusingly illustrated in 1903 when the state attorney accused a poem entitled "Friendship" of being "obscene." When it was pointed out at trial that the poem was by the classic author Friedrich von Schiller, the court concluded: "It is self-evident that with the poem Schiller did not

wish to describe a homosexual love. But the reader of the journal recognizes immediately that the poem is by Schiller from the author's name printed under it. A misunderstanding of the poem on the part of the reader is therefore excluded from the beginning." Apparently, "Our Schiller" could not have written anything indecent!

During the period of the German Empire, *Der Eigene* was the only journal that published what could be called "gay literature." Later, during the Weimar Republic following World War I, there were competitors, especially in Berlin, with greater circulations.

Gemeinschaft der Eigenen

In part because of the constant threat that the journal would be confiscated or charged with obscenity, Brand founded the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* in 1903 as a kind of closed readers' circle. It was hoped that if he could argue that the journal was published for a particular group, then it would be exempt from censorship.

This ploy was not successful initially, but in 1905, with the testimony in court of some friendly expert witnesses, *Der Eigene* was officially recognized as an "artistic journal" and was thereafter somewhat less vulnerable to harassment by censors.

Contributors to *Der Eigene*

Among well-known authors who published in *Der Eigene* were Erich Mühsam, Kurt Hiller, and John Henry Mackay (under the pseudonym Sagitta). In addition, the giants of world literature who had been appropriated in the cause of the gay movement were also represented, including Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Walt Whitman, Hans Christian Andersen, August von Platen, and many others.

Well-known artists whose work appeared in *Der Eigene* included the photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden and Fidus (pen name of Hugo Höppener, 1868-1948), whose most popular work, "Lichtgebet" (Prayer to Light), became an icon of the Life Reform Movement, a group that promoted the attainment of a healthier life by liberation from overcrowded urban dwellings, reform of diet, outdoor exercise, and nudism. His drawings appeared in *Der Eigene* as early as 1898 and were included in the state prosecutor's accusations of obscenity in 1903. Sascha Schneider, who illustrated the books of Karl May, one of Germany's most popular authors of all time, also contributed to *Der Eigene*.

Opposition to Hirschfeld

Brand himself was well represented in the journal--as poet and photographer, as polemicist and activist--and always impatient with the progress of his cause. If Hirschfeld, as head of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (founded by him and others in Berlin in 1897) and as editor of the journal *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (Yearbook of Sexual Intermediates, 1899-1923), was the acknowledged leader of the mainstream homosexual liberation movement in the early twentieth century, then Brand, with *Der Eigene* and supported by the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*, was the leader of a second movement for homosexual liberation. With him were gathered those whose inclination was homosexual--or at least homosocial--and who wished for a change in social attitudes, but were opposed for various reasons to the views of Hirschfeld.

One important figure in this movement, for example, was the wealthy private scholar Benedict Friedlaender (1866-1908), whose substantial *Renaissance des Eros Uranios* (Renaissance of the Uranian Eros, 1904), a scholarly treatise arguing that same-sex friendship is "a normal, fundamental drive of mankind," had a large impact on members of the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*.

Friedlaender argued against Hirschfeld's designation of a homosexual category and his identification of

homosexuality with femininity, believing most men to be essentially bisexual. Like most supporters of *Der Eigene*, Friedlaender yearned for a return to the Greek ideal, including the recognition of the educational and cultural advantages of intergenerational friendships, as well as the rejection of any leading role for women in society. Friedlaender supported Hirschfeld at first, but broke with him in 1906.

The Scotch-German writer John Henry Mackay may be taken as representative of the part boy-lovers played in this movement, although he was never a member of the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*. His first boy-love poems appeared in *Der Eigene* in 1905. Contrary to later allegations, none of this group supported sexual acts with preadolescent boys; Mackay himself was attracted to boys from 14 to 17 years of age. True to his anarchist principles, Mackay rejected the idea that freedom was only for men. He believed that all persons, male and female, should be judged as individuals.

Rejection of the Medical Model

Above all, the members of this movement rejected the medicalization of homosexuality, a process they saw as continued by Hirschfeld, himself a medical doctor, in his insistence that homosexuality was inborn and that homosexuals represented a biological minority to be distinguished from "normal" men.

As Harry Oosterhuis has observed, "Most authors of *Der Eigene* were of the opinion that their feelings and experiences could not be understood in scientific categories and that art and literature provided the better means of expression." The love of one man for another was for them, not a matter of biology, but of culture.

They rejected any idea that those who loved their friend (and "friend-love" was a term commonly used by them in opposition to "homosexual") were in any way unhealthy or degenerate. There was also an element in this group that saw male-male love as superior to male-female love, an attitude that reflected a strain of misogyny.

Nudism and Nationalism

Not surprisingly, many members of this group supported the newly emerging nudist movement, especially its glorification of health and strength. The many nude illustrations in *Der Eigene* often emphasize the health of the nude body rather than any explicit eroticism. This is true to a certain extent of the photographs of Brand, but may be seen especially in the drawings of Fidus and Sascha Schneider, which illustrate strength and determination.

The idealization of manly friendship and male bonding by many of the contributors to *Der Eigene* was in line with some tendencies of German nationalism. For example, they shared with Nazism an ideal of national renewal through the promotion of manliness. However, the commitment of many of them to anarchist principles distanced them from Nazism. Moreover, they were aware that the Nazis firmly rejected any open promotion of homoeroticism. As Oosterhuis bluntly points out, "The realization of male bonding and the glorification of male strength and beauty in National Socialism was accompanied by the persecution of homosexual men."

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About the Author

Hubert Kennedy has published in several fields and several languages. Among his books is a biography of the German pioneer of gay liberation, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. He has also translated the gay novels of John Henry Mackay.