

**This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:**

Not a man of solid principles: the relevance of Edgar Bauer's polemical portrait of Karl Marx in his 1843 novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!*

**Reference:**

De Vriese Herbert.- Not a man of solid principles: the relevance of Edgar Bauer's polemical portrait of Karl Marx in his 1843 novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!*  
The European journal of the history of economic thought - ISSN 0967-2567 - 25:5(2018), p. 679-709  
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672567.2018.1523942>  
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1551320151162165141>

# Not a man of solid principles. The relevance of Edgar Bauer's polemical portrait of Karl Marx in his 1843 novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!*

Herbert De Vriese

## ABSTRACT

The protagonist of Edgar Bauer's 1843 novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* is a young intellectual named "Karl". It can hardly be doubted that Bauer's novella is a polemical character study of Karl Marx: the rather demeaning picture of "Herr Karl" belongs to the heat of controversy between Marx and die Freien, the Berlin Young Hegelians, after the end of their participation in the *Rheinische Zeitung* in late autumn 1842. So far, Bauer's novella has never been used as a potential source to shed light on the deeper causes of animosity between Marx and die Freien.

**KEYWORDS** Edgar Bauer; young Marx; young Hegelianism; principledness; critique Das Skandal, die Polissonerie müssen laut und entschlossen in einer Zeit desavouirt werden, die ernste, männliche und gehaltene Charaktere für die Erkämpfung ihrer erhabenen Zwecke verlangt.

Karl Marx, *Rheinische Zeitung*, 29. November 1842

Karl war aber im Grunde kein sehr starker Geist. Er war reizbar; er konnte daher wohl so lange fest bleiben, als es ihm äußerlich nicht zu schlecht ging.

Edgar Bauer, *Es Leben feste Grundsätze!*, 1843

This article is an inquiry into the theoretical relevance of Edgar Bauer's polemical portrait of Karl Marx in his 1843 novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* [Long Live Solid Principles!]. It is divided into two main parts. The first part focuses on the life, thought and personality of the young Marx. It examines whether the novella provides new knowledge that may be relevant to the intellectual-biographical study of the young Marx. The second part concentrates on the philosophical issue of "principledness", both in the sense of intellectual integrity and in the sense of steadfast allegiance to the good cause. Taking into account how the issue divided Marx and the Berlin Young Hegelians from late autumn 1842 onwards, it is argued that the central theme of Edgar Bauer's novella helps underline the importance of this issue. Taken together, these elements justify a call for more scholarly attention to Bauer's novella in the context of the study of Karl Marx and the Young Hegelians.

## 1. A portrait of Karl as a young man

The two parts of this article each have a different tone and distinctive approach to Edgar Bauer's novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* Whereas the second part aims to bring new and reliable findings to an already well-documented interpretation of the 1842 conflict and eventual schism in the Young Hegelian movement, the first part is of a more speculative nature, because it will attempt to get a grip on the "real Marx" through a medium as seemingly untrustworthy as a polemical novella. However, in order not to repel the reader in this first part, I will set out from a concrete and down-to-earth observation, which may be of special interest to the historian of Marxism and the Marx biographer. My article is built on the basis of a sufficiently solid and intriguing discovery: the protagonist of the 1843 novella by Edgar Bauer entitled *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* – one of two novels in a compilation under the title *Berliner Novellen*, which is now a rather rare and hard to find book<sup>1</sup> – is a portrayal of Karl Marx. As I will argue in this article, it can hardly be doubted that the novella's protagonist, a young intellectual who bears the name "Karl", is consciously intended by the author to be understood (and even to be recognized by the intellectual in-crowd) as a lively representation of

Karl Marx.

The difficulties arise, however, as soon as we try to gain fruitful insights from this discovery and to cast them into an original and useful contribution to Marx scholarship. The major dilemma in the interpretation of the 175-page novella may be put as follows. On the one hand, the book appears to be a new and reliable biographical source since Edgar Bauer (1820–1886) had been a contemporary and one of Marx's close friends during his student years in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> It can easily be proven by passages from the book that the author was well aware of the personal situation in which Marx found himself at that time. By extension, it is evident to assume that Edgar Bauer, as a philosophical companion and good friend, must have had first-hand knowledge of the young Marx's most precious ideas, thoughts, worries and ambitions, and must have been well acquainted with his distinctive character traits.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, we must take into account that the novella was meant as a strategic vehicle (but apparently, for reasons which I have not been able to detect, never came to adopt such a function) in the bitter conflict in 1842–43 between Marx and the Berlin Young Hegelians (also known as "die Freien" or "the free ones"), of whom Bruno Bauer, Edgar Bauer, Ludwig Buhl, Eduard Meyen, Karl Friedrich Köppen and Max Stirner may be mentioned here as the most prominent figures. Hence, Edgar Bauer's book is anything but an attempt at an authentic representation of Karl Marx, but rather a piece of defamatory writing boiling down to a "literary revenge" on his former friend. So, the question arises: how can a purposely distorted and degrading picture of a young German intellectual of the 1840s named Karl ever lend itself to revealing new insights into the life and personality of the young Marx?

Here is where the speculative undertaking sets in. In the interpretation of the novel, I have adopted the heuristic principle that a polemical character study, in order to hit its mark and be effective, must to a large extent be truthful, since it attempts to gain the attention of the well-informed reader by playing on the effect of recognition. Only a largely authentic approach can produce the critical impact of unmasking a person – as a powerful strategy of destructive criticism that should be distinguished from less refined and more innocent procedures such as mere travesty or caricature – and we can imagine that it is precisely this kind of destructive impact which Bauer sought to generate. To support this general consideration, three specific arguments must be taken into account. First, the similarities between the protagonist's trials and tribulations in the book and those of the young Marx in his real life are considerable, even to the extent that one may assume that most of the significant character traits of "Herr Karl" are truthful or at least not entirely fictionalized. Second, when situated in the larger context of Young Hegelian hypercritical discourse, excelling in the art of writing controversial and satirical pamphlets (such as Bruno Bauer's *Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen. Ein Ultimatum* (1841b), Ludwig Buhl's *Die Noth der Kirche und die christliche Sonntagsfeier. Ein Wort des Ernstes an die Frivolität der Zeit* (1842) and indeed the notorious mock epic *Die frech bedräute, jedoch wunderbar befreite Bibel. Oder: Der Triumph des Glaubens* (1842) written by Friedrich Engels and Edgar Bauer himself), it would have been a surprisingly weak and unconvincing gesture if the novella's protagonist had only received the first name of

Karl Marx and not some of his most remarkable and easily recognizable characteristics.<sup>4</sup> Third, it must be underlined that the novella's polemical force is not so much produced by the description of the protagonist, but rather by the imaginary future course of his life, which is projected in the then near future of the years 1843–1845 (Bauer 1843a, 179 and 261). So, it could work perfectly with a more or less reliable character sketch of Marx.

Drawing these threads together, I will defend the hypothesis that Edgar Bauer's novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* is a valuable source of information to obtain a richer understanding of the life and personality of the young Marx. More fundamentally, when it comes to the question of examining the possible motives behind Marx's theoretical and ideological development in the early 1840s, I will pursue the idea that there may be a significant core of truth in the way Edgar Bauer pictures the existential choices and attitudes of "Karl". I realize that this is a somewhat daring approach to interpret the book, founded on a heuristic principle that is far from self-evident. Nevertheless, I think it makes sense to confine myself in the first part of this article to developing a clear hypothesis and to elaborating its most obvious consequences. Insofar as my findings are new and unconventional, they may serve as an invitation to other scholars to take Bauer's novella and read it, in the light of their own expertise. And even if one retains a healthy measure of skepticism about the potential authenticity of Edgar Bauer's portrait of "Karl" as a young man, there still may be value in the less controversial claim that this is how Karl Marx was viewed by some of his former friends and associates at that time.

### 1.1. Autumn 1842: the split in the young Hegelian movement

The period in which Edgar Bauer's *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* was written can quite accurately be determined: during the two and a half months between 31 January and 16 April 1843.<sup>5</sup> This interval of time is important for a correct interpretation of the polemical function of the book. It coincides with the last months of Marx's occupation as executive editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*: he resigned on 17 March because of the rigorous and double censorship regime that had been imposed on the newspaper, and presumably in a final attempt to save the newspaper by making this sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the suppression of the journal had been officially decreed by the King of Prussia on 19 January 1843, leaving a "period of grace before execution" (Marx to Ruge, 25 January 1843, in MEGA III/1, 40) until the end of March 1843, and the decision was not reversed. The guidelines of stricter censorship were officially articulated in the new Prussian censorship instruction of 31 January 1843, which prohibited the discussion of ideas and theories that were critical for the Christian religion and the Prussian state – a stipulation so stringent that the censor complained that he would have to strike two-thirds of the articles (Klütentreter 1966, 137; Ruge 1886, 325). The date of this censorship instruction is a key date in Edgar Bauer's novella: it is described as the beginning of the fulfilment of the curse that had been laid upon the protagonist Karl (Bauer 1843a, 179).

What had happened before that time belongs to the established knowledge on the Young Hegelian movement<sup>7</sup> and has often been described in secondary literature. In late autumn 1842, it came to a clean break between Marx and the Berlin Young Hegelians, who up till then had been regular contributors to

the *Rheinische Zeitung*. The tension had built up since 15 October 1842 when Marx became the executive editor of the newspaper. Marx was annoyed by the radical ideas and provocative style of many of the Berlin contributions because he felt they might endanger the continued existence of the newspaper, while at the same time being hardly beneficial to the good cause. He demanded a more profound and more serious investigation of new political ideas. Moreover, he did not believe that an ongoing critique of religion, let alone the aggressive display of the label of atheism, was a viable strategy to stimulate social and political change in Germany.

However, the event leading to a definitive break was not situated in the Rhineland, in the editorial office of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne, but in the capital of Prussia. In November 1842, Arnold Ruge brought a visit to die Freien, the Berlin Young Hegelians, in one of their favorite bars. His ambition was to bring the progressive movement of philosophical-political journalism in Germany into line again, and more specifically, to bring a "thorough ethical principle" to the Young Hegelians in Berlin.<sup>8</sup> This attempt ended in a complete failure. The Berlin philosophers stuck to their uncompromising intellectual radicalism. Ruge was openly ridiculed as a reactionary. As a result, the former unity of the Young Hegelian movement was broken beyond repair. Still, Ruge did not intend to give publicity to what had happened, but the rumor of the conflict spread and was brought out into the open by two German newspapers, albeit in a severely distorted account. It was incorrectly reported that it was Ruge's travel companion in Berlin, the poet Georg Herwegh, who had visited die Freien, and who had passed the scathing judgment that they were beneath the dignity of criticism. In order to rectify the situation, Herwegh sent a letter to Marx in which he confirmed his contemptuous judgment of die Freien, while clarifying, though, that he had not visited the group in Berlin. Herwegh suggested that Marx could publish those parts of his letter which he thought appropriate for a contribution on this issue in the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Marx did not hesitate to publish an abridged version of Herwegh's letter and even added a self-written paragraph to it. When it appeared on 29 November, the Berlin Young Hegelians were shocked and felt deeply betrayed by Marx, who in their eyes was now openly taking sides with Herwegh, against the group of die Freien. This was nothing less than a clear decision to expel die Freien from Germany's most progressive philosophical-political movement of that time. The conflict aggravated when it became clear that Marx had not only published Herwegh's letter but edited and altered it, which quickly grew into the gossip that Marx had written the entire Herwegh letter himself (see Ruge to Marx, 10 December 1842, in MEGA III/1, 385). One specific sentence, which today can be verified as Marx's proper statement, may indeed be regarded as Marx's personal and decisive farewell from die Freien: Rowdiness and roguery must be loudly and resolutely repudiated in a period which demands serious, manly and self-restrained characters for the achievement of its lofty aims (MEGA I/1, 372).

What followed was a fury of letters from Berlin to Cologne, of which only a few explicit references (the letters from Eduard Meyen) and only one letter, from Bruno Bauer to Karl Marx, have survived. Marx replied to Meyen with a sharp and violent letter, which has neither survived, but must have had the effect of making the breach

irreparable. Bruno Bauer adopted a calm and measured tone in his letter but reproached Marx bitterly that he had taken sides against the Berlin philosophers without good reason.

Ruge, for his part, was not directly involved in this dispute, but almost immediately joined in with Marx's resolute behaviour and encouraged him to make the break with die Freien definitive. Furthermore, he openly attacked the "blasé theoreticians" of the Prussian capital in his famous essay "Eine Selbstkritik des Liberalismus", published in January 1843 – a publication which, for other reasons than those addressed here, provoked the official ban of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*. In a curious way, the explicit articulation of the schism in the Young Hegelian movement coincided with the suppression of its principal organs.

In Marx's editorial office in Cologne, too, the definitive break with die Freien was easily detectable. From December 1842 onwards until the suppression of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in April 1843, one would no longer read Berlin contributions in the newspaper.<sup>9</sup> In Berlin, the former allies of the Young Hegelian movement were outraged. They began to affirm their radical philosophical profile against the "accommodating" political liberalism of Marx and Ruge. It is in this context that Edgar Bauer decided to write a novella with a protagonist named Karl.

### 1.2. Herr Karl = Karl Marx

So, let us turn our attention to the book itself. Two possible misunderstandings must be clarified here. Bauer's novella is much more than just a demeaning picture of Karl Marx. It is a philosophical novella full of interesting thoughts, especially on the themes of censorship and love and marriage. It is a social novel making a sharp accusation against the hardship and crying abuses of the time.<sup>10</sup> The polemic with Karl Marx is interwoven in other literary registers, and even remains hidden in the first three-quarters of the book: there, the protagonist Karl is a principled and even admirable character. But, the blow in the last quarter of the book strikes hard. Karl is manoeuvred into a compromising and degrading situation, in which he renounces all of his earlier principles, and shows his true colours: not so much does he appear to be a weak and fainthearted person, but rather a sly character merely searching for his own benefit and (social) improvement. Yet, before describing and interpreting the plot, let me first ascertain that the Karl of Bauer's novella is Karl Marx.

What does the book teach about Karl that conforms remarkably well to the life of Marx? I will present three obvious similarities. I believe that these similarities, when combined with each other and placed in the above-sketches context of bitter disagreement between Marx and the Berlin Young Hegelians, establish a sufficiently strong argument to read the fictional Karl as an allusion to the real Karl.

First, there is the story of a severe conflict between Karl and his father. The son Karl openly confesses that he is not willing to aspire to the kind of job his father has in mind for him (Bauer 1843a, 162–63). On top of that, he has to acknowledge that he is engaged to a woman of the upper class. According to his father, this is an offense against the "sanctity of class society":

My son, my son, what nonsense are you talking! For sure, when I was in

France, every once in a while I heard such insane rubbish against the sanctity of the classes and against common decency. But you don't want to poison my house with the immoral principles of the frivolous French people, do you? (164)

The father speaks harsh words to his son, and tragically enough, before they can be reconciled to each other, Karl's father dies – which is interpreted in the novella as a major burden of guilt on the protagonist's conscience.<sup>11</sup> It is generally agreed in Marx scholarship that the conflict with his father, broken off by his untimely death on 10 May 1838, thus destroying any hope of reconciliation, was the central personal experience for Marx as a young man.<sup>12</sup>

Second, Karl follows the only profession “with which one can content oneself in all honesty under the given circumstances” (178): he is a writer, a journalist, and a talented one at that (303, 305). A personal letter by Karl, which constitutes the fifth chapter of the book, expresses his ambition to spread new thoughts among the people and to make it conscious of its rights (192).<sup>13</sup> On behalf of his progressive and liberal ideas, another character in the novella sizes him up in a second as a journalist of the *Rheinische Zeitung* (176). In this light, the fact that the latest censorship instruction of 31 January 1843 is interpreted as the beginning of how the curse of Karl's father comes to fulfilment (179), points manifestly in the direction of Marx, because by that time all Berlin Young Hegelians had already stopped their cooperation with the journal and hence could not suffer personal misfortune by a stricter censorship regime and the eventual suppression of the journal. If there was one “journalist” of the *Rheinische Zeitung* for whom this was a personal disaster, it was Marx, because he was the only one who was to lose a, by the standards of that time, secure, honourable and very well-paid position.<sup>14</sup>

Third, the aristocratic father with whose daughter Karl is engaged – in Bauer's novella, that daughter's name is Marie and she is pictured as a bright and self-conscious woman – is Privy Councilor [Geheimrat] to the Prussian government. This may be taken as an almost explicit reference to Jenny's father Ludwig von Westphalen, who was Privy Councilor to the Prussian Provincial Government of the Rhine Province. The specific details of his Prussian honorary decoration – Fourth Class Order of the Red Eagle [roter Adlerorden vierter Klasse] – are historically correct (Schöncke 1993, 876).

At that moment the Privy Councilor came in. (...) If it strikes you as something characteristic, then I want to tell you that he had the Fourth Class Order of the Red Eagle (...). (Bauer 1843a, 183)

The fact that the relationship between Karl and Marie is a central theme in the novella is yet another sign that Edgar Bauer is turning his book into an adaptation of the real life of Karl Marx.

Without a doubt, the third motive is the strongest and most decisive one to confirm the identity between Herr Karl and Karl Marx. For the novella is placed in a time when Marx and Jenny von Westphalen were betrothed but not yet married. The time of writing is February, March, April 1843. At that time, no one could imagine how the engagement between Karl Marx and Jenny von Westphalen would develop, especially with the prospect of Marx's loss of his job. Was this not the death-blow to Marx's final hopes that his marriage with Jenny, “the queen of the ball” and one of the most eligible young ladies of his home town Trier, would ever be established?

We can safely assume that feelings among the Berlin Young Hegelians were not excelling in compassion and sympathy. In Bauer's novella, published at least one and a half months before Marx's and

Jenny's marriage on 19 June 1843, the marriage does not take place: when Karl takes the decision to leave temporarily for another German city, where he has his "main professional connections" (191),<sup>15</sup> his fiancée is seduced by a cynical and opportunistic nobleman. It is to this man that Marie will consent yes.

### 1.3. Dramatic development and plot

In what follows, I will sketch the dramatic development of *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* in order to illuminate the sudden twist of fate that makes up the plot of Edgar Bauer's story. In the beginning, Bauer's protagonist is depicted as a courageous and strong-minded character, whose longing for authentic human freedom is more precious than any desire for material prosperity and social recognition (Bauer 1843a, 165). Karl refuses to accept the position his father has arranged for him because holding an appointment in a society dominated by privilege and tyrannical patronizing is irreconcilable with his principles (166). In addition, he comes to the fore as a sensitive and self-sacrificing character. After the death of his father, Karl decides to take care of his younger sister. They face hardship and poverty, but Karl is not the man to waver in his conviction or lose his sense of self-worth. When he bumps into his aristocratic rival, the idle creature that has won the heart of his former fiancée, he does not shrink at lecturing this person, his superior in social rank, for his behaviour (176).<sup>16</sup>

As one might expect, the aristocratic man, named Arthur, who will soon afterwards succeed in marrying the Privy Councilor's daughter Marie, is not willing to accept the humiliation. Instead of meditating on revenge, however, he simply plans to find out more about the arrogant fellow. More particularly, Arthur wishes to discover the weaknesses hidden behind this display of self-absorbed rectitude and firmness of character. And even more importantly, he resolves to see the very moment that Karl is no longer able to stick to his lofty principles and is forced to renounce his convictions.

The years pass by. Through an intermediary, Arthur is kept informed of how Karl and his sister are doing. The misery of their condition has slowly begun to erode the proud and energetic spirit of Karl. He has lost his temper and inspiration: no longer as a journalist or a writer does he work, but as a low-wage copyist (285). Only a person with an exceptionally strong self-consciousness, the novelist explains, is capable of resisting the humiliating treatment of harsh conditions. And Karl is not such a strong spirit. "He was an excitable person; therefore, he could only keep his strength as long as external things were not too bad for him." (286) Karl is no longer the independent and unyielding man he used to be. Yet, for Arthur, the awareness that Karl has succumbed to the external pressures of life and is no longer able to live up to his former ideals and ambitions, does not suffice. He wants to see the renouncement of his former principles as an expression of free will. Hence, he sends his intermediary to the place where Karl and his sister live and creates the conditions for "an offer that cannot be refused".

Well, this Karl was always a thorn in my flesh: it annoyed me that he wanted to be better than other people. Sometimes I would get downright furious when I realized that this Karl wanted to keep himself proud and pure. But now, who knows where he will adapt himself to! (...) As soon as we have bound him in the shackles of an appointment and daily bread, we will be able to have a reasonable conversation with him. He will finally become ordinary and conform to our regulations. (306)<sup>17</sup>

Karl accepts a well-paid position at the government and justifies his decision with the argument that he needs to take care of his sister

(311). His sister, by contrast, leaves him in anger and swears never to return. Shocked by his complete reversal of ideals, she reproaches him of merely following his own selfish impulses, and advises him to stay in that part of society that is best suited for this sort of “eternal preoccupation with oneself” (315).<sup>18</sup>

Karl, however, has chosen a new direction in life and does not look back. He works as a censor specialized in the radical press. His former expertise now helps him to see through and uncover the radical ideas, however, cleverly they may be hidden in veiled terms. And the final stage of his progressive insight is highly appreciated in the upper-class circles:

Karl. Yes, I admit, our thoughts were stupid fancies, empty chimeras, in which we considered ourselves great beyond compare. Using general ideas of the state, of freedom, of justice, of equality – ideas which are present in the heart of each man – nothing seemed more credible to us than our capacity to call into existence a national consciousness [Volksbewußtsein], a nation, on the basis of these ideas. (321–22)

Karl has liberated himself from his youthful idealism and now speaks the words of a real adult. And more importantly, he has arrived where he had always wanted to come: in the upper-class circles, where he is finally recognized as a man of talent and a man of sufficient wealth. Long live solid principles!

#### 1.4. Edgar Bauer's polemical character study

The hidden agenda behind the novella's plot speaks for itself. The embarrassing situation at the end of the book could not be in sharper contrast to the position Karl Marx actually held until March 1843 as a successful and widely admired editor of a liberal newspaper. Still, the way in which the unexpected turn of the story is carried out by Edgar Bauer, as a vitriolic attack and merciless mockery in the last 20 pages of the book after a generous and predominantly sympathetic picture of Karl, catches the reader by surprise. Indeed, the abrupt exposure of Karl's true nature creates the effect of having been completely wrong about this character. All of a sudden, this laudable person is unmasked as one who is fundamentally unreliable and has until then had the dexterity to conceal his true motives and inclinations. I am convinced that the abruptness of change in the protagonist's character, this sudden twist from loyalty to disloyalty, reflects how the Berlin Young Hegelians felt in autumn 1842 when Marx was no longer prepared to publish their articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Hence, it can be interpreted as Bauer's literary revenge on the objectionable behaviour of his former friend. Still, this purely imaginary attempt to square the account with Marx might be seen as a rather cheap travesty and totally impotent gesture. I even dare to assume that Bauer would not engage in such literary strategy if the sudden twist at the end of his book was not such as to make it (at least partly) recognizable for the intellectual in-crowd as one in line with the real motives and distinctive mindset of Marx. What we have read then, according to this hypothesis, is not just bitter situation humour, but a sharp and relentless character study of Marx, resulting in a personal indictment. For the sake of the argument, I have singled out three conspicuous character traits that grasp the essence of Bauer's demeaning portrait: weakness, untrustworthiness and selfishness. Karl's weakness is defined in a dialectical fashion. Weakness is the state of being of a person who is determined and molded by the external circumstances in which he finds himself

(Bauer 1843a, 310).<sup>19</sup> It stands in contrast to the condition of a person who has the strength of spirit to transcend the established order and to shape or reshape it according to his own will (286). More specifically,

weakness is related to "irritability" [Reizbarkeit], which may refer both to a nervous state of mind that is easily affected by influences and stimuli from the outer world, and to a thin-skinned and hot-tempered personality. The novella often highlights this irritable state of mind, in Karl's contact with his father (164), in his insolent conduct towards others, especially his superiors in social rank and power (176, 245–48, 286–87), and in his private life too (285, 315). Karl's weakness, which is contrasted with the strength of character of his sister,<sup>20</sup> openly comes to the fore in a personal confession at the end of the novella (310): "it is solely my own weakness," Karl writes, "that inspires me this doubt: but a weak and doubtful human being is no longer worthy to be a fighter for reason." The main point of Karl's untrustworthiness is the sudden renouncement of the lofty ideals and adamant principles he held as a journalist of the radical press. But the most striking illustration of his untrustworthiness occurs at the end of Bauer's novella, in relation to his younger sister. Karl has always been there to take care of her, after the death of their father, as if such attitude of sisterly love could not be shaken by any misfortune. Yet, the final chapter of the book reveals that Karl has only pretended to be such a laudable and reliable person. All of a sudden, he does not care about his sister anymore, and this happens as soon as he has taken the step to accommodate to upper-class life. When he is questioned about her fate, and about whether she has recovered from her misery, he simply answers: "Do not speak me about that vile creature." (325) In view of that, his untrustworthiness is of the specific kind that he is able to devote himself intensively to someone during a particular time, but then suddenly and without remorse cuts such person out of his life completely: he is able to break off an affectionate relation by the same kind of evidence as that by which he formerly showed himself fully dedicated and reliable.

The suspicion of Karl's selfishness is only revealed at the end of the novella but may be reconstructed as a continuous thread all through the book. It constitutes the core of his sister's condemnation: she reproaches him of being eternally preoccupied with himself (315). Most concretely, this is illustrated in her criticism that Karl, when he makes his decision to accept the government position that will drag him and his sister out of their miserable condition, has not even thought a second about what his sister might think of such a change of life and the motives behind it, let alone considered to ask her about her personal opinion. Hence, Karl's selfishness extends to the need to dominate and exercise his powers over others, so as to direct the course their lives (or thoughts) must take (313–14; 287).

Now, what does this all imply for gaining a better understanding of the life and personality of the young Marx? In order to soften the impression of a purely speculative undertaking, resulting in a completely new image of Marx, it must be underlined that this is not a new perspective. Rather, it is one that may yield extra support to already existing discussions on intriguing choices and behaviors in Marx's life, especially those concerning his intellectual and ideological orientation, and those related with bitter and rather unexpected personal conflicts in his life as the ones with Arnold Ruge (1844), Bruno Bauer (1845), Wilhelm Weitling (1846) and Proudhon (1847), all of which testify to an abrupt shift from deep sympathy to outright hostility.

In the context of the 1842 split in the Young Hegelian movement, with Marx and Ruge taking sides against die Freien, the Berlin Young

Hegelians, it is significant that the pattern of a totally unexpected break and personal betrayal repeats itself in the relation between Marx and Ruge during their stay in Paris. Untrustworthiness, lack of character and selfishness are at the heart of Ruge's judgment of Marx's personality, which should not pass unnoticed here:

Marx is merely the afforded Bauerian orientation: the unscrupulous, groundless critique, with lack of character, disloyalty and fierceness as its fundamental principle. (...) Marx professes communism, but he is a fanatic of egoism, and with a conscience even more concealed than Bauer's. (Ruge to Fröbel, 6 December 1844, in Ruge 1886, 381)<sup>21</sup>

In a long flood of letters, Ruge described how deeply he felt betrayed by Marx and how much this betrayal had caught him by surprise.

<sup>22</sup> Ruge realized that Marx's behaviour could not be explained by an argument they had had over a mutual friend, but simply resulted from his refusal to put all his personal wealth in a publication project that was bound to fail – the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* or a similar book project – and which until then had provided Marx with a medium of intellectual influence and a steady job and income.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the hypothesis that Edgar Bauer's character sketch of Marx is more or less authentic, sides with a specific position in a range of existing scholarly disputes. With respect to Marx's attitude vis-à-vis the philosophical radicalism of *die Freien*, it supports the argument that his rejection of *die Freien* was not a question of principle but sprouted from strategic considerations on professional success and perhaps even personal gain and ambition. With respect to Marx's intellectual and ideological reorientation during the early 1840s in the direction of economic and socialist thought, it supports the argument that this reorientation was not a steady and logical development but a sudden turnabout after the failure of "Rhineland liberalism". With respect to the deeper sources of Marx's communism, it supports the argument that his choice for communism was not merely the expression of genuine dedication to the cause, nor the outcome of an inner theoretical development, but also the result of a somewhat coincidental series of conflicts with people who had been incapable of securing his social position, and from whose authority he sought to emancipate himself as soon as it could suit the quest for social recognition and intellectual influence. These are extreme positions, to be sure. Even if Bauer's novella might succeed in reviving some of these disputes, it certainly lacks the potential to settle any of them definitively.

## 2. The issue of principledness

In the next part of this article, I will try to clarify my own position on these matters. Even though I am convinced that Edgar Bauer has hit the mark of the young Marx's irritable temperament and has persuasively exposed some of the deeper motives behind his actions and decisions in the early 1840s, I do not believe that such psychological account suffices to explain Marx's behaviour and position in his conflict with the Berlin Young Hegelians. I will attempt to show this in a less speculative, and more conventional and fact-based approach to the question of the hidden agenda of Edgar Bauer's polemical portrait of Karl Marx. More specifically, I will argue that Bauer's novella helps underline the importance of the issue of "principledness" within the Young Hegelian movement, both in the sense of intellectual integrity and in the sense of steadfast allegiance to the good cause. I will show that the novella provides significant clues to understand how Marx and the Berlin Young Hegelians were taking completely different positions

on this issue in late autumn 1842, and why Marx's position on this issue, even though it could be perceived in the circles of Berlin Young Hegelianism as a sudden and strategic change of perspective, boiling down to nothing less than defection and perfidy, must be seen as springing from deeper motives than sheer opportunism and want of social recognition.

### 2.1. The riddle in the title

In light of the dramatic development and plot of *Es leben feste Grundsätze!*, it does not take much reflection to realize that the title of the novella must be read ironically. Karl pretends to have solid principles but in due course renounces all and each of them. When at the end of the novella the catchphrase "Long live solid principles!" resounds, this occurs at a festivity in the upper-class circles.

Apparently, it is a well-known toast, proposed to the guests as an invitation to repeat it. It comes as no surprise that the solid principles which are thus celebrated are in complete opposition to those which Karl previously held as a journalist: the necessity of censorship, the authority of the state, the sanctity of marriage, the consolation of religion and the pride of serving one's government (Bauer 1843a, resp. 320, 321, 324, 327, 328).

In sum, Mr Karl, my brother in faith, for you as well I can wish nothing better than this: get married, return to God and then exclaim with me: long live solid principles! (327)

In so doing, the novelist sketches a scenario where his protagonist makes a complete turn from liberal principles to utterly conservative ones.

But there is more to solving the riddle in the title than that. Quite apart from the specific principles in question, the central theme of the novella is about a personal virtue or character trait, namely the capacity or strength of character to stick to specific principles. Time and again, Karl is pictured as a person who adheres to his principles, even in the face of great practical obstacles and dire personal and social consequences, and who attempts to arrange his entire life according to solid principles.<sup>24</sup> As the story progresses, the ideal of "principledness" is submitted to a critical analysis, in part by some of the characters, in part by the novelist himself. It turns out that the virtue or talent to remain faithful to one's principles is not so much a praiseworthy, self-sacrificing attitude, but rather a source of self-pride, a shield to protect one's selfish desires, and even – when used as a subtle instrument of subordination – a strategy to gain power and influence over others (resp. 262, 208; 313; 305–306). Step by step the ideal of "principledness" loses its lustre. In view of that, the main question of the novella is not so much whether the protagonist is able to stick to his lofty principles, but whether such achievement would be really a virtue at all. In pursuing this question, the novella turns into a philosophical investigation of what it means to be a man of solid principles.

These observations help explain why precisely the issue of "solid principles" was chosen as the central feature of a polemic with Marx. When put in the broader context of the Young Hegelian movement, it must be emphasized that the issue of "principledness" was a shared concern among many members of the Young Hegelian movement and had a specific philosophical relevance and connotation. The "feste Gesinnung" (steadfast conviction) and the capacity to hold on to "feste Grundsätze" (solid principles) were key concepts to denote the

unity of the Young Hegelians' philosophical-political radicalism during the year 1842. One of the clearest instances of the importance of this issue is given in the following account of Albert Fränkel, one of the minor figures and lesser-known members of die Freien, when he explains in 1844 how much intellectual life in Berlin has changed when compared to the year 1842:

What you still expected to find here, was the standpoint of 'steadfast conviction' and 'principle' [den Standpunkt der 'festen Gesinnung' und des 'Princip's'], the standpoint of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and the *Rheinische Zeitung*. But in two years' time, critique has made a consistent development beyond the major and decisive works that were then completed. Critique started to criticize its former essence, with all of its words and phrases. As a logical consequence, it had to break with all those who held on to these words and phrases as eternal, unassailable truths, as dogmas and idols (...). Critique, however, should not be the cause of a party (...). For critique no longer possesses a firmly established, dogmatic 'conviction' [feststehende, dogmatische 'Gesinnung'] or 'principle' ['Princip']. Its work has liberated itself from this presupposition, as from each and every presupposition as such. (Fränkel 1844, 23–25)

In Edgar Bauer's article "1842", too, written in 1844, the Young Hegelian philosophical-political radicalism of the year 1842 is epitomized by the "so-called thorough conviction [gediegene Gesinnung]".

This concept is further elaborated as the belief in the superior powers of the free state – and the determination to "seriously hold on to" such belief (Bauer 1844, 2).

Still, these characterizations remain highly abstract. And that is precisely the point: even though "principledness" (feste Gesinnung) appears to have been a catchphrase to describe the unity of the Young Hegelian movement, there was little consensus as to what the concept meant or implied. Here was a potential source of dispute and animosity, hidden behind the formal cohesion of the Young Hegelians' concerted efforts in their main organs of publicity: the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Frequently comparing themselves with the French encyclopaedists, the Young Hegelians felt united by their shared discontent with the existing order and their common purpose to transform it through a new period of Enlightenment. Yet, they never reached a shared agreement on a particular political program or party program (McLellan 1978, 24, 28–31). Even more problematically, the ways in which to achieve social and political change in Germany by the medium of philosophical theory and critique were on sharply diverging paths. Ruge, who pleaded for a serious, manly and morally exemplary dedication to the good cause, found himself in increasing opposition to the mischievous and frivolous radicalism of die Freien, which in his eyes was detrimental to the objective of realizing profound and longlasting historical change in Germany. "Without moral earnestness, even the best cause in Germany is a lost cause" (Ruge to Marx, 4 December 1842, in MEGA III/1, 383).

When Ruge visited die Freien in autumn 1842 in Berlin, in an attempt to bring the Young Hegelian movement into line again, his mission was captured in the statement that he had resolved to bring "a thorough ethical principle" to Berlin (M.L. 1844, 29). Ruge made clear that the tendency among Young Hegelians in the capital was too free and too frivolous in his eyes. In my opinion, there is no doubt that the term "principle" [Grundsatz] was at the heart of his disagreement with die Freien. I even dare to assume that Ruge had literally blamed the Berlin Young Hegelians for having "no solid principles"

when he broke with them in autumn 1842 because the kernel of his argument was that the “unprincipled” freedom of “the free ones” [die Freien] thwarted the attempt to bring freedom to man and people.<sup>25</sup> Unmistakably, there were completely different orientations when it came to a more accurate understanding of the “feste Gesinnung” of the Young Hegelian movement. So, let us delve a bit deeper into this subject.

## 2.2. Pure critique

In the early 1840s, Bruno Bauer had emerged as one of the intellectual leaders of the Young Hegelian movement. His influence was most pronounced in Berlin. From May 1842 onwards, after his dismissal from his academic post at the University of Bonn and his return to the capital of Prussia, Bruno Bauer increased his theoretical influence by his personal presence as a source of lively inspiration and agitation. In the circles of young intellectuals in the city, where he was heralded as the “Messiah of critique” (Schwegler 1843, 278), he soon took a leading position in the philosophical-political struggle against the reactionary forces of religion, political authority and the institution of the Christian state. The notorious mock epic *Der Triumph des Glaubens* [The Triumph of Faith] testifies to the wide support Bruno Bauer enjoyed among the Berlin Young Hegelians:

Praise to Bauer, Our Hero! He must lead us to battle! (Edgar Bauer and Friedrich Engels 1842, 419)

To a considerable extent, Bruno Bauer’s return to Berlin had the effect of reviving the “Doctor Club” of the late 1830s, replacing the fairly innocent internal-theoretical debates on Hegel’s philosophy of that time with a much more subversive agenda of philosophical radicalism and historical change.

The major influence of Bruno Bauer was not so much related to a specific set of ideas but to a new method of critique. Bauer had elaborated his method of “pure critique” [reine Kritik] in his theological magnum opus, the four-volume *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte* [Critique of the Gospel History], written in 1840–42. More specifically, his new critical method was designed to solve an intrinsic problem of philosophical criticism: being a negative approach to the object of criticism, any philosophical criticism was bound to be determined by the object it had criticized. This discovery of the inner dialectical relationship between philosophical criticism and its object was nothing but sound reasoning within the confines of Hegelian logic. A lucid example in this context is Feuerbach’s critique of Christianity, which in spite of (or more exactly, following Bauer’s analysis, by virtue of) its destructive impact was deemed to undergo the implicit determination by the object of criticism: consequently, Feuerbach’s human being was turned into a new God and his humanism into a new religion (Bauer 1845, 86–146; see also Stirner 1845, 43–45). Bauer’s solution to the dialectical impurity of critique was as simple as original: do not criticize the object, but its most radical critic.<sup>26</sup> In Bauer’s case, this critic was David Friedrich Strauss.

Bruno Bauer’s controversy with Strauss had started after Strauss’s publication of *Das Leben Jesu* [The Life of Jesus] in 1835–36. Bauer wrote a lengthy review in which he attacked the subjective standpoint of Strauss’s approach. The controversy intensified after Strauss’s reaction in the *Streitschriften* (1837) in defense of his work. Determined to provide a definitive refutation of his opponent, Bruno Bauer wrote his own theological analysis of the Gospel history. When read in consecutive

order, however, the four volumes of the *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte* testify to a remarkable transformation of Bauer's theories and views on the historical veracity of the Gospel accounts. In addition, and more intriguingly, they show the religious crisis and dramatic apostasy of the author himself: from a staunch defender of the Christian faith to a serious and blasphemous critic of some of the principal facts and doctrines of Christianity. As Bauer's theoretical and ideological radicalization took place during a long-term process of research and writing, in which each of the four volumes of his work was separately published as soon as it was completed (respectively in 1840, 1841, 1841 and 1842), it was as if Hegel's dialectical progression through self-negation was literally applied to research results and preliminary conclusions which only a short time before had been communicated to the public.

Indeed, as the analysis of the Gospel narratives progressed, the initial objectives and ambitions of Bauer's Hegelian-inspired theological approach to Scripture, such as his guarantee to the reader that his "most destructive criticism" would eventually lead to an entirely new view of Jesus' personality and the creative power of Christianity (Bauer 1841a, xxiii, footnote), turned out to be completely unrealistic and unattainable. The basic presuppositions that had been presented in the first volume were gradually questioned in the course of further research, and finally reversed or abandoned as untenable. One of these basic presuppositions was the assumption that Jesus had lived in the first decades of the first century and had preached a message of love and repentance in order to renew the Jewish religion of his day. Bauer even assumed at the start of his study that this message had been preserved in the Synoptic Gospels. At the end of his work, Bauer arrived at the conclusion that there never was a historical person named Jesus and that the earliest and authentic Gospel narrative was a work of fiction created by one and only one original author (Bauer 1840, 38, 218; 1842a, 308, 314–15).

Slowly but surely, the negative potential of Strauss's critical approach to the Gospel history had gained influence over Bauer's original conception of the problem. In a sincere and candid manner, Bauer gradually came to accept the cogency of Strauss's approach, and eventually radicalized it. But instead of taking the emerging contradictions within his own work as imperfections or substantial damages to its scientific status, he underlined them as proof of its theoretical quality: "it would be a bad work, if it did not move itself through vivid, inner contradictions" (Bauer 1842b, 21).<sup>27</sup> According to Bauer, this procedure constituted a new method of critical inquiry, to which any conscientious thinker should commit himself: his famous model of "pure critique". It involved the gradual discarding of uncritically accepted assumptions in the exposition of one's theoretical outlook. More specifically, it shifted the focus from developing criticism of a specific object to developing criticism of the prevailing (and preferably most radical) critique of the object. In so doing, Bauer maintained, the critical process is gradually purified from the contaminations inherent in the object of criticism and will succeed in liberating itself from the dialectical determination by the object. What is important here with respect to our question of the "feste Gesinnung" in the Young Hegelian movement, is the insight that the entire process of radicalization is not carried out in a preconceived manner, but reflects the author's sincere attitude to go along with the

logical movement of destructive criticism, also when it undermines hard-earned results of earlier steps of research, and also when it runs counter to views and convictions that are precious to the author himself. Hence, Bauer's critical procedure inaugurates a new ideal of intellectual integrity (De Vriese 2017, 288–90). It sets the permanent and uncompromising task of critical self-purification, and even of "consistent inconsistency", for it implies calling into question again and again those steps of critical inquiry that have already been attained. In this process, the critic cannot stop at any sense of loyalty or attachment to personal beliefs, values or concerns – he must dedicate himself unconditionally to the higher demands of Critique. In Bauer's personal case, these higher demands ran counter to the practical concern of finding and keeping a steady job, or of advancing his career and social status, because the publication of his increasingly radical ideas led to the dismissal from his teaching post at the university.

### 2.3. Uncompromising struggle

It can be shown that Bruno Bauer's model of pure critique and the new critical mindset it requested, was extremely influential in the circles of die Freien and even in the entire Young Hegelian movement.

<sup>28</sup> It demanded the organization of sharp oppositions and the negation of half-hearted compromises. It inspired the concerted effort of destructive criticism and hypercritical self-reflection, generating a relentless logic of surpassing the existing critical achievements along the lines of the "critique of critique". Furthermore, it not only supported the belief that such "terrorism of true theory" (Bauer to Marx, 28 March 1841, in MEGA III/1, 353) would result in a major world-historical crisis, but that history itself was able to create the positive organization of a better society after the theoreticians' purely negative work. To be sure, although this was proof of orthodox Hegelian faith in the blessings of dialectical progression, this was a rather naïve and "uncritical" idea.

In sum, there was method in the flotilla of destructive criticism launched by the Berlin Young Hegelians in the early 1840s. Moreover, the method of pure critique explains why they were engaging in the expression (and discovery) of extreme and particularly confrontational positions. As the major goal was the organization of theoretical conflict, their style and tone were often destined to provocation and agitation. Mockery rather than a serious and moderate exposition of ideas, uncompromising struggle instead of strategic considerations. In *Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit* [The Good Cause of Freedom and My Own Affair], the book written during the summer of 1842 to defend himself after his dismissal from the university, Bruno Bauer explicitly argued in favour of a philosophical strategy of ridicule. His argument reflects the essential aim of pure critique, namely the philosophical ambition of getting beyond the "dialectical sphere of influence" of the object of criticism:

In a particular phase of the battle, ridicule is a necessary weapon. It is the proof that theory has so far finished with the object, that its dominion has completely come to an end and that spirit has attained its freedom also in a practical manner. Ridicule sets in at that moment – and only at that precise moment – when theory completes itself and has to deny the former practical validity of the object also in a practical manner. Ridicule (...) is the prophecy of a world condition, in which the power that has been theoretically overthrown, will be conquered practically as well.

(1842b, 195)<sup>29</sup>

Joined to a disposition to provoke conflict and to carry matters to extremes, such kind of philosophical struggle for freedom was not likely to gain wide support among the German population, let alone to forge a strong political movement in Germany. For some members of the Young Hegelian movement, in particular, for a determined democrat like Ruge, this became a growing concern.

In the *Rheinische Zeitung*, the confrontational method of pure critique was most consistently pursued by none less than Edgar Bauer, in his critique of liberalism and of any moderate critique of the Prussian state. And again it was Edgar Bauer, with the publication of *Der Streit der Kritik mit Kirche und Staat* [The Struggle of Critique with Church and State] in August 1843, who gave the most striking example of philosophical radicalism at the cost of one's personal freedom and well-being. After *Der Streit der Kritik* had been banned and confiscated by the Prussian government, Edgar Bauer was convicted of insurrection, lese majesty and defamation of religious groups. He was sentenced to four years in prison (Gamby 1985, 21).<sup>30</sup> Indeed, provocative ridicule was not just for fun. It was pursued in earnest as an intrinsic dimension of what was considered to be the only appropriate vehicle for social and political change in Germany.

#### 2.4. Serious, manly and self-restrained characters

What about Marx? The early writings of Marx, at least until autumn 1842, demonstrate how much he was under the spell of Bruno Bauer's method of pure critique (Brudney 1998, 109–142; De Vriese 2011, 587–92; Leopold 2007, 9, 129–131; McLellan 1978, 69–75; Rosen 1977, 127–161). Among the Young Hegelians, Marx was widely regarded as one of the promising representatives of Bruno Bauer's philosophical radicalism. On 25 December 1841, Ruge wrote to Feuerbach: Bruno Bauer works together with a young man named Marx, whom he credits with extraordinary talent and erudition. They aim to produce a definitive critique of everything positive, in its full extent [einer definitiven Kritik des Positivismus nach seiner ganzen Ausbreitung]. (Pepperle 1985, 837)

This view accords with much of Marx's life and work in the early 1840s. It was no coincidence that Marx had consented to contribute to the follow-up of Bruno Bauer's satirical *Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen* [The Trumpet of the Last Judgement Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist], eventually published without Marx's cooperation in 1842.<sup>31</sup> It was no coincidence that Marx had enthusiastically responded to Bruno Bauer's idea to launch a scientific journal with the provocative label "atheism" in the title (Rosen 1977, 128, 205). In autumn 1841, when Marx was living in Bonn and entertained a close friendship with Bruno Bauer, the two "critics" had amused themselves to gallop like madmen on donkeys in order to shock decent Bonn society out of its petty bourgeois conventions (Bruno Bauer and Edgar Bauer 1844, 192). More fundamentally, when it comes to Marx's journalistic activity in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, both the decision to publish the "Ehescheidungsgesetzentwurf" and the substance of the critical footnote "by the redaction" (written by Marx), breathe the confrontational and uncompromising attitude of pure critique. And this was one of the first contributions to the journal that threatened its continued existence.

In Edgar Bauer's novella, too, "Karl" is pictured as a radical and uncompromising theorist. The dispute with his former fiancée, Marie, centers around the word "critique". Karl's favorite expression, she writes, is "criticize" (Bauer 1843a, 214). Marie reproaches him,

however, that his eternal criticism prevents people from finding rest and satisfaction, and she expressly forbids him to criticize the way she is leading her life.

Therefore, I urge you, don't come to me with your critique. Criticize as many books as you want. But the empire of your goddess should not extend further. (215; see also 225–32)

Gradually, the pieces of my analysis of “principledness” fall into place. The main source of disappointment and anger towards Karl Marx among the Berlin Young Hegelians, after the split of the Young Hegelian movement in autumn 1842, was that Marx had made an unexpected shift from uncompromising idealism to strategic pragmatism, and from the “frivolity” of die Freien to the “seriousness” of Ruge’s conception of theoretical influence.<sup>32</sup> In other words, I believe it is plausible that die Freien were not so much insulted by the fact that they were openly portrayed as anything but serious, manly and self-restrained characters, but rather by the fact that Marx had implicitly presented himself as such a laudable character.<sup>33</sup> And more importantly, the deeper grounds of animosity were not about moral excellence but about the philosophical principles of profound and effective critique of the existing order. At this juncture, we must realize, however, that Marx, probably under the influence of Arnold Ruge,<sup>34</sup> may have had sound theoretical reasons for rethinking his conception of critique and hence for making a clean break with his former friends and allies.

Against this backdrop, the self-written statement by Karl Marx that was added to the publication of Herwegh’s letter on 29 November 1842 in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, the event that had the effect of banishing the Berlin Young Hegelians from one of the main organs of the Young Hegelian movement, appears in a new light:

Rowdiness and roguery must be loudly and resolutely repudiated in a period which demands serious, manly and self-restrained characters for the achievement of its lofty aims.

The peculiar sharpness of Marx’s statement does not arise from a prescription of ethical standards but from his definition of the exigencies of the time: the heart of the matter is not what moral decency demands, but what a historical period of critical transition demands.

As I have argued in this article, I believe here is the key to find the deeper sources of the ironic title *Long live solid principles!* of Edgar Bauer’s 1843 novella and of its polemical function in the broader conflict between Karl Marx and the Berlin Young Hegelians.

## Acknowledgements

The seminal ideas of this article were presented at the conference “Marx 1818/2018. New developments on Karl Marx’s thought and writings”, Lyon, 27–29 September 2017. I owe special thanks to Gilbert Faccarello who encouraged me to broaden my initial approach of a predominantly intellectual-biographical study of Edgar Bauer’s novella and to deeper investigate the theoretical relevance of the book. Furthermore, I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers of *EJHET* for their careful reading of the manuscript and their valuable suggestions to improve it. I am particularly grateful for their insistence to better explain the connection between both parts of this article and to clarify my own position on Edgar Bauer’s polemical portrait of Karl Marx.

## References

Allgemeines Verzeichniß der Bücher, welche von Ostern 1843 bis Michaelis 1843 neu gedruckt oder aufgelegt worden sind, mit Angabe der Verleger, Bogenzahl und Preise. 1843. Leipzig: Weidmann’schen Buchhandlung.  
“Berliner Novellen” [Anon.]. 1843. Buchbesprechung von A. Weil und Edgar

Bauer, Berliner Novellen. In "Litterarischer Monatsbericht für Mai 1843", Deutsche Monatsschrift für Litteratur und öffentliches Leben, herausgegeben von Carl Biedermann, 80.

Bauer, Bruno. 1840. Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes. Bremen: Carl Schünemann.

Bauer, Bruno. 1841a. Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker. Erster Band. Leipzig: Otto Wigand.

THE EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT 29

Bauer, Bruno [Anon.]. 1841b. Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen. Ein Ultimatum, Leipzig: Otto Wigand.

Bauer, Bruno. 1842a. Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker und des Johannes. Leipzig: Otto Wigand.

Bauer, Bruno. 1842b. Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit. Zürich: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs.

Bauer, Bruno [Anon.]. 1842c. Hegel's Lehre von der Religion und Kunst von dem Standpuncte des Glaubens aus beurtheilt. Leipzig: Otto Wigand.

Bauer, Bruno [Anon.]. 1845. "Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs." Wigand's Vierteljahrsschrift 3, 86–146.

Bauer, Bruno and Edgar Bauer. 1844. Briefwechsel zwischen Bruno Bauer und Edgar Bauer während der Jahre 1839–1842 aus Bonn und Berlin. Charlottenburg: Egbert Bauer.

Bauer, Edgar and Friedrich Engels [Anon.]. 1842. Die frech bedräute, jedoch wunderbar befreite Bibel. Oder: Der Triumph des Glaubens. Das ist: Schreckliche, jedoch wahrhaftige und erkleckliche Historia von dem weiland Licentiaten Bruno Bauer: wie selbiger vom Teufel verführet, vom reinen Glauben abgefallen, Oberteufel geworden und endlich kräftiglich entsetzt ist. Christliches Heldengedicht in vier Gesängen. Neumünster bei Zürich: Heß.

Bauer, Edgar. 1843a. "Es leben feste Grundsätze!" In Berliner Novellen, A. Weil and Edgar Bauer, 153–328. Berlin: Berliner Verlags-Buchhandlung.

Bauer, Edgar. 1843b. Die Censur-Instruktion vom 31. Januar 1843. Leipzig: Otto Wigand.

Bauer, Edgar. 1843c. Der Streit der Kritik mit Kirche und Staat. Charlottenburg: Egbert Bauer.

Bauer, Edgar [Anon.]. 1844. "1842," Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung, no. 8: 1–8.

Blumenberg, Werner. 2000. Karl Marx: An Illustrated History. London: Verso.

Brudney, Daniel. 1998. Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buhl, Ludwig. 1842. Die Noth der Kirche und die christliche Sonntagsfeier: Ein Wort des Ernstes an die Frivolität der Zeit. Berlin: Hermes.

Cieszkowski, August von. 1838. Prolegomena zur Historiosophie. Berlin: Veit.

De Vriese, Herbert. 2011. De Roes van de Kritiek: Bruno Bauer en 'die Freien'. Brussel: ASP.

De Vriese, Herbert. 2017. "Intellectual Integrity in the Philosophy of Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner." SGEM Conference Proceedings, Vol. I, 285–292.

Durant, Will and Ariel. 1965. The Age of Voltaire. A History of Civilization in Western Europe from 1715 to 1756, with Special Emphasis on the Conflict between Religion and Philosophy. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Edler, Erich. 1977. Die Anfänge des sozialen Romans und der sozialen Novelle in Deutschland. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann.

Eßbach, Wolfgang. 1988. Die Junghegelianer: Soziologie einer Intellektuellengruppe. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1988.

Fränkel, Albert [Anon.]. 1844. "Briefe aus Berlin." Norddeutsche Blätter, für Kritik, Literatur und Unterhaltung, no. 2: 20–27.

Gamby, Erik. 1985. Edgar Bauer: Junghegelianer, Publizist und Polizeiagent. Mit Bibliographie der E. Bauer-Texte und Dokumentenanhang. Trier: Schriften aus dem Karl-Marx-Haus.

Hosfeld, Rolf. 2009. Die Geister, die er rief: Eine neue Karl-Marx-Biografie. München: Piper Verlag.

Klutentreter, Wilhelm. 1966. Die Rheinische Zeitung von 1842/43 in der politischen und geistigen Bewegung des Vormärz. Dortmund: Fr. Wilh. Ruhfus.

Leopold, David. 2007. The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1975a. Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe. Erste Abteilung: Werke Artikel Entwürfe. Band 1 (MEGA I/1).

Berlin: Dietz Verlag.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1975b. Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe. Dritte Abteilung: Briefwechsel. Band 1 (MEGA III/1). Berlin: Dietz Verlag.

M.L. [Anon.]. 1844. "Correspondenz aus der Provinz. 6." Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung, no. 6: 28–30.

McLellan, David. 1978. The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx. London: Macmillan.

Mehring, Franz. 2003. Karl Marx. The Story of his Life. London: Routledge.

Pepperle, Heinz und Ingrid, ed. 1985. Die Hegelsche Linke: Dokumente zu Philosophie und Politik im deutschen Vormärz. Leipzig: Philipp Reclam.

Peters, Heinz F. 1984. Die rote Jenny. Ein Leben mit Karl Marx. München: Droemersche Verlagsanstalt Knauer.

Rosen, Zvi. 1977. Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx: The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx's Thought. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Ruge, Arnold. 1842. "Die Zeit und die Zeitschrift. Zur Einleitung." Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst 5 (1): 1–4.

Ruge, Arnold. 1843. "Vorwort. Eine Selbstkritik des Liberalismus." Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst 6 (1): 1–12.

Ruge, Arnold. 1886. Briefwechsel und Tagebuchblätter aus den Jahren 1825–1880. Erster Band: 1825–1847, herausgegeben von Paul Nerrlich. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung.

Schöncke, Manfred. 1993. Karl und Heinrich Marx und ihre Geschwister: Lebenszeugnisse, Briefe, Dokumente. Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein.

Schwegler, Albert. 1843. "Die Hypothese vom schöpferischen Urevangelisten in ihrem Verhältniss zur Traditionshypothese." Theologische Jahrbücher 2 (2): 203–278.

Stirner, Max. 1845. Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum. Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand.

Strauss, David Friedrich. 1835–36. Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet. Tübingen: Osiander.

Strauss, David Friedrich. 1837. Streitschriften zur Vertheidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie. Tübingen: Osiander.

Weigel, Siegfried. 1976. Der negative Marx: Marx im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen. Eine Dokumentation. Stuttgart: Hohe Warte – v. Bebenburg

<sup>1</sup> This was particularly the case until just a few years ago, when I discovered and studied the book at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin during a research stay in Berlin. In the meantime, a digital copy has become available through Google Books. As for the published editions, according to an extensive worldwide search with Karlsruhe Virtual Catalog, today only five public libraries, all located in Germany, appear to own a copy

<sup>2</sup> During Bruno Bauer's two and a half year stay at the University of Bonn, Marx's regular visits to the house of the Bauer family in Charlottenburg attest to an enduring friendship with Bruno's younger brother Edgar Bauer (Bruno Bauer and Edgar Bauer 1844, 55–56; Bruno Bauer to Karl Marx, April 1841, in MEGA III/1, 356).

<sup>3</sup> The energetic portrait of Karl Marx, 'ein schwarzer Kerl aus Trier', in the mock epic *Der Triumph des Glaubens* (Edgar Bauer and Friedrich Engels 1842, 28; Blumenberg 2000, 36) is by Edgar Bauer, because Engels had not yet met Marx in person: "Who comes last, wild and free? / A black lad from Trier now we see. / (...) / His fist is clenched, he rages without compare, / As if then thousand devils had him by the hair."

<sup>4</sup> The strategy of making a 'Charakteristik', originally developed by Arnold Ruge in *The Hallische Jahrbücher* as a new form of critical journalism, must also be taken into account here as a potentially illuminating source of influence. 'Charakteristik' was based on the (orthodox Hegelian) conviction that genuine criticism is not an active interference with the object of criticism, but simply a detached representation allowing the object 'to criticize itself' (viz. to expose and even eliminate itself). This idea was central to the method of 'pure critique' employed by many of the Berlin Young Hegelians, and was the hallmark of Edgar Bauer's conception of 'die Ruhe des Erkennens' (see De Vriese 2011, 575–77, 583)

<sup>5</sup> There is only one exact time reference in the novella, and it is written in the conditional

mood: "If our story took place in the year 1843, then you would consider the latest censorship instruction for the beginning of how the curse of the father was fulfilled on Karl." (Bauer 1843a, 179) The fact that Edgar Bauer mentions in his book the latest censorship instruction – the Prussian censorship instruction of 31. Januar 1843 (on which Edgar Bauer wrote a 60-page pamphlet, by the way) – and gives it a crucial role to develop the plot of the novella may be taken as a fairly certain starting date for the conception and writing of the book. The time of publication can be determined between 16 April and 1 May 1843, because the book is mentioned in *Allgemeines Verzeichniß der Bücher, welche von Ostern 1843 bis Michaelis 1843 neu gedruckt oder aufgelegt worden sind*, 197 (Easter Sunday 1843 was on 16 April), and because Carl Biedermann's *Deutsche Monatsschrift für Litteratur und öffentliches Leben* of May 1843 has a review of the book.

6 Attempts to save the newspaper continued until the end of March (Klutentreter 1966, 128–133).

7 For the sake of convenience, I will capture the 'left', 'progressive' or 'young' wing of the Hegelian school here by the term of a Young Hegelian movement. With this general term, I refer to the journalistic activity and outspoken political activism undertaken in the period between 24 December 1841 (date of the Prussian censorship instruction that opened a period of relative freedom of the press) and 31 January 1843 (date of the Prussian censorship instruction that reversed the liberal measures) and supported by a large group of Hegelians participating in Arnold Ruge's *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Rheinische Zeitung* (these three organs of publicity were all suppressed at the end of 1842 and the beginning of 1843). However, the sociological dynamic of the Young Hegelians is much more complicated, as is convincingly shown by Wolfgang Eßbach's useful distinction between philosophical school, political party, literary bohemia and atheist sect. In view of that, the category of 'movement', which favors the connotation of a political party, is misleading. See Eßbach 1988

8 M.L. 1844, 28–29: "I still remember with joy the summer of the year 1842. What a united life we had among us 'radicals', in spite of all debates over atheism and popularity and Jacoby and Königsberg. We were connected by the *Rheinische Zeitung* – in short, we almost felt like a party. But then, in autumn, the Anhalt railway brought us those two 'men of freedom' [Freiheitsmänner], who appeared to have come to Berlin, which seemed too free and too frivolous in their eyes, with the exclusive aim of bringing a thorough ethical principle and the anchor of the religion of freedom." See also Ruge, Letter to Prutz, 18 November 1842, Letter to Marx, 4 December 1842, Letter to Prutz, 7 December 1842, Letter to Fleischer, 12 December 1842, in Ruge 1886

9 A significant observation is that Friedrich Engels, who started writing correspondence from England to the *Rheinische Zeitung* from the beginning of December 1842 onwards, abruptly stopped his cooperation after four weeks. Klutentreter believes this to be an obvious consequence of Engels' awareness, probably through letters from Berlin that have been lost, of Marx's break with die Freien. According to this hypothesis, one should include Engels within the group of the 'Berlin' Young Hegelians (Klutentreter 1966, 107)

10 To the best of my knowledge, research on the genesis of the social novel in German literature is the only scholarly context in which Edgar Bauer's novella has been discussed so far. See Edler 1977, 118, 169

11 The psychological analysis of Edgar Bauer distinguishes between Karl's conscious rejection of the influence of his father's admonishment and its disastrous effects on an unconscious and existential level: "And this Karl! He doesn't seem affected by the curse, that he has taken upon him." (Bauer 1843a, 168, my italics)

12 See for instance Blumenberg 2000, chapter "Life at the University – Conflict with his Father", 16–32.

13 Karl's ideas in the novella on censorship and marriage can easily be traced back to some of Karl Marx's articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Especially striking is the analogy between Marx's main argument in "Der Ehescheidungsgesetzesentwurf" and the lengthy and well-elaborated critique of marriage in the novella (Bauer 1843a, 251–255). See also Marie's correspondence to Karl (213): "Again, you will come to me and say: marriage is not a free relationship, because it rests on the belief in the sanctity of its institution." Whether the novella contains substantial and sufficiently reliable material to extend our knowledge on the thought of the young Marx, should be investigated more deeply. In my reading, the philosophical reflections in the book are in part allusions to ideas of Karl Marx that were well-known in the intellectual in-crowd of that time, and in part those of Edgar Bauer himself.

14 Mehring (2003, 44) underlines that Marx was 'heart and soul' in his work for the *Rheinische Zeitung* and succeeded in steadily increasing the number of subscribers under his editorship. According to Mehring, the goal of turning the *Rheinische Zeitung* into a successful journal appeared important enough to Marx "to risk a breach with his old companions in Berlin".

15 An allusion to the distance between Marx's romantic life in Trier and his professional life in Cologne

16 I make abstraction from a much more complicated narrative thread (see 239–47)

17 Without a doubt, this plan to ‘buy’ Karl out of his situation – and out of his solid principles – is the most curious passage of the entire novella. For it is a historical fact that Karl Marx had effectively received an offer to enter the state service in Berlin. This occurred in the period between the banning of the *Rheinische Zeitung* and his marriage to Jenny von Westphalen – the period in which Edgar Bauer wrote his novella. Is it credible that Bauer knew about this offer, which was most probably arranged thanks to the efforts of Jenny’s half-brother Ferdinand (who would later become the Prussian interior minister) in order to turn her improper liaison into a decent and respectable marriage? If so, it can hardly be doubted that the entire novella *Es leben feste Grundsätze!* has sprung from this specific knowledge, because in Bauer’s eyes this unexpected move from the Prussian government could be nothing else than unambiguous proof of Karl Marx’s secret connections and intriguing with the powers that be, and thus as the real cause of his sudden break with the too radical Berlin Young Hegelians in autumn 1842. I will leave it an open question. At any rate, if it should be answered affirmatively, it is sure that Bauer had not (yet) been informed that Marx had rejected the offer. Probably – but I am building speculation upon speculation here – this may also explain why Bauer’s book completely missed its mark at that time. The Cologne censor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, who wrote a final evaluation of Karl Marx to the Prussian government, acknowledged that Marx might be accused of “anything, but not a lack of principles [Gesinnungslosigkeit]” (Peters 1984, 42–48; Hosfeld 2009, 32).

18 Bauer 1843a, 304, for the deeper reasons of her repugnance, and 313.

19 The dialectical relationship between individual and society is an important philosophical theme in the book (see 155, 178, 182, 191, 194–95, 209, 214, 218, 259–60, 283, 292).

20 The following passage (289) depicts Karl’s sister as a strong, and therefore exceptional, human being: “The uncomplicated dignity, the serene elevation, with which she resigned herself to her misery, reconciled him [August, another character in the novella] with his own misery. It was the first time that he had seen a strong human being.”

21 The reference to Bauer is to Bruno Bauer, Edgar’s brother. With respect to Marx’s ‘egoism’, see also Ruge 1886, 350: “Marx (...) has attracted the German laborers for no other reason than to have a party and to have people as servants.” Cf. Hosfeld 2009, 28–29. With respect to Marx’s ‘excessive irritability’, see Ruge 1886, 344. For a broader analysis, see Weigel 1976.

22 Ruge to Fröbel, 6 December 1844, in Ruge 1886, 380: “In his eyes, I am the cause of the failed project.” *Ibid.*, 343–45, 351, 367.

23 An analogous argument can be developed for the conflict between Marx and Bruno Bauer: it was mainly due to the latter’s radicalism in his theological writings, which in March 1842 led to Bauer’s removal from his academic post at the University of Bonn, that Marx himself lost a viable prospect on a future academic career (Rosen 1977, 128).

24 The following passage (Bauer 1843a, 242) clearly expresses a world view in which everything is arranged and determined according to a formula: “Deep down, he is a good guy – Arthur thought – but it is his misfortune, that he sees all things too sharply and that he wants to act according to principles everywhere. (...) With this Karl, everything must go according to a formula.” See also 176 (“the principles of a radical”), 246–47, 249, 262.

25 According to an eyewitness account, this is how one of Ruge’s reproaches rang: “You want to be free and do not notice, that you are up to your ears in the mud! One cannot liberate people and populations by means of dirty tricks [Schweinereien]!” (Ruge 1886, 286 footnote). Ruge defined political freedom as “serious passion for a particular formation and transformation, not for revolution as such” (291, my italics).

26 Bruno Bauer’s method can be seen as a theoretical application of the theorem of the ‘second *Aufhebung*’, which had been proposed by August von Cieszkowski (1838) as a historical tool of analysis to compare the world-historical significance of the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1830: definitive emancipation is in need of a second negation, after the result of the first negation has been neutralized. The influence can also be traced in Marx’s famous contention that great historical events always occur twice: once as tragedy, then as comedy.

27 In the opinion of his brother Edgar Bauer (1843c, 41), the presence of apparent contradictions in Bruno Bauer’s work is a proof of the purity of his critique: “This inner and necessary development of the critique of Bruno Bauer explains why apparent contradictions can be found in it – contradictions, however, that eventually resolve themselves. They, in specific, are proof of the purity of Bauer’s critique. Only those who do not understand a thing about the organic growth of a scientific work, can use them to refute Bauer.

28 For an extensive analysis, see De Vriese 2011, the chapter “Reine Kritik”, 547–602.

29 The historical example Bruno Bauer has in mind, is the French Enlightenment. I am reminded here of a striking characterization of the French philosophes by Will and Ariel Durant (1965, 324): “Never in literature had there been such subtle wit, such delicate

pleasantry, such coarse buffoonery, such lethal ridicule. Every orthodoxy of Church or state trembled under the assault of these sharply pointed, sometimes poisoned, usually nameless, pens.”

<sup>30</sup> Gamby's study of Edgar Bauer's stay in London during the 1850s and his regular contact with Karl Marx at that time throws an entirely new light on the issue of 'principledness'. Under the cover of friendship and devotion to the communist cause, Bauer actually spied on the activities of Marx and other revolutionaries in London. Working as a secret agent for the Danish government, he sent more than hundred reports with information on revolutionary movements and organizations, including reports on Marx and Engels (Gamby 1985, 30–37). The irony of history? Because my focus in this paper is on the split in the Young Hegelian movement of the early 1840s, I have decided to leave out this dubious episode of Edgar Bauer's later life. I feel obliged to mention it here succinctly, in order to remove the false impression that it is Edgar Bauer who, in contrast to 'Karl', is the more laudable and 'principled' character: strong, reliable and self-sacrificing. Moreover, my main concern in this paper is about better understanding the personal and philosophical motives behind the split in the Young Hegelian movement, not about passing a moral judgement. If one were to embark on such a precarious investigation, one would certainly have to pay attention to personal and philosophical developments of the later 1840s, and in particular to the impact of the failed 1848 revolution in Germany.

<sup>31</sup> That book was entitled *Hegel's Lehre von der Religion und Kunst von dem Standpuncte des Glaubens aus beurtheilt*. See also Rosen 1977, 159.

<sup>32</sup> Unlike Strauss and Feuerbach, Ruge had for a long time been sympathetic to, and even in support of the Bauerian method of 'extreme liquidation' (Ruge to Prutz, 8 January 1842, in Ruge 1886, 258–60). In his introduction to the 1842 volume of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, he had even developed similar views: "Can one reproach theory with being extreme? Isn't extremity its mode of existence?" (1842, 3–4). One year later, in his introduction to the 1843 volume of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, Ruge offered a sharp philosophical refutation of the 'blasé consciousness' of the Berlin Young Hegelians, unmasking their 'frivolity' as sheer vanity and their 'self-satisfied theory' as a 'vain movement inside one's own subjectivity'. Instead of promoting dedication to the philosophical cause, Ruge now realized, the frivolous radicalism of *die Freien* would only engender 'lack of character' and 'cowardice' (1843, 9–12).

<sup>33</sup> An alternative view is that this was essentially a dispute over the correct interpretation of 'earnestness and manliness'. See Bauer to Marx, 12 April 1841, in MEGA III/1, 357: "They cannot bear earnestness and acuteness and manliness."

<sup>34</sup> In light of Ruge's visit to the Young Hegelians in Berlin, it seems obvious to conclude that Ruge was the principal instigator of a philosophical campaign against the 'frivolity' of *die Freien*, eventually succeeding in winning Marx's support for his view. Nonetheless, the opposite interpretation can be developed, with Marx being (partly) responsible for the change in Ruge's opinion. See Marx to Ruge, 9 July 1842, in MEGA III/1, 28–30.