



Stefan Zweig 1920

Steffzweig and the Radioten

For the second time I have read in some statistics published in Berlin that my books are among the top-selling titles (Berliner Tageblatt). That may be disagreeable for Insel, because I have to pester you so often for new editions, but not for me.¹

Letter to Insel Verlag 6th November 1922

IN A COLLECTOR'S EDITION published in 1920 under the pseudonym Peregrin Steinhövel, which later went through several reprints, the writer Franz Blei had devoted a section to a curious creature dubbed the 'Steffzweig'. Under the mock baroque title *Bestiarium literaricum, or: An Exact Account of the Beasts of German Literary Life, compiled by Dr Peregrin Steinhövel. Printed for animal lovers in Munich*, he described this creature in the following terms:

The Steffzweig—

Mention must be made of the Steffzweig in this Bestiarium, since there are a few who still regard it as a living being. However, the Steffzweig is an artificial creation, constructed for a writers' convention in Vienna from feathers, skin, hair etc taken from all manner of European animals. It is, so to speak, a Volapük creature. A belief in its organic existence now survives only in far-distant lands and in certain Genevan circles. There are some who claim to have seen the Steffzweig under a little glass dome in a house at Kurze Strasse 7 in Leipzig.²

While the artificial language Volapük, developed at the end of the nineteenth century and designed, like Esperanto, to facilitate international communication, was still a familiar concept to people at the time of Blei's publication, the reference to the habitation of the peculiar "Volapük creature" is likely to have been understood only by the initiated even in those days—Kurze Strasse 7 was the Leipzig office address of Insel Verlag director Anton Kippenberg.

Harmless fun of this kind could not divert Zweig from his commitment to the cause of peace and understanding, even if the thought of ever winning the world over to his way of thinking struck many outsiders as utopian or hopelessly idealistic. In March 1922 he travelled to Paris with the writer