

# The man whose name was stolen

**The Man Whose Name Was Stolen** is a 1944 German film directed by Wolfgang Staudte and starring Axel von Ambesser in the title role.

## Plot

In the "good old days": In the registry of an old German civil servant's office, it is discovered that a certain Fridolin Biedermann is wanted by the police for several offenses: marriage fraud , forgery , refusal to pay alimony , imposture , and bigamy . All authorities, preferably registry offices, according to the senior civil servant, are to be informed. This is the starting point of the story, which tells of the very good Fridolin Biedermann, who is just about to make preparations for his marriage to his fiancée Elvira Sauer. Biedermann is a truly true German Biedermann: he runs a department store and, with his characteristic charm, even manages to sell a coffee cozy with a fabric tap on top to a whiny middle-aged customer in the hat department as the latest Parisian hat creation. Fridolin's beloved Elvira is the boss's daughter, and he is quite taken with the idea of his daughter marrying his best employee. However, at the registry office, the soon-to-be couple encounters a nasty surprise: According to the police records, the registrar barks at the "debaucher" Fridolin, he is supposed to have been married for seven years and have three legitimate and five illegitimate children. To clear up the error, Fridolin goes to the police without hesitation, but since, as is well known, everything in German offices is basically correct and documents are never wrong, they are more likely to believe the registry records than the innocent accused. So Fridolin B.

	film
title	The man whose name was stolen
Country of production	<u>Germany</u>
Original language	<u>German</u>
Year of publication	<u>1996</u>
length	78 (1996) minutes
	rod
Director	<u>Wolfgang Staudte</u>
script	<u>Josef Maria Frank</u> <u>Wolfgang Staudte</u>
production	<u>Bernhard F. Schmidt</u>
Music	<u>Herbert Trantow</u>
camera	<u>Eduard Hoesch</u>
cut	<u>Johanna Rosinski</u>
	occupation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <u>Axel von Ambesser</u> : Fridolin Biedermann</li><li>▪ <u>Ruth Lommel</u> : Elvira Sauer</li><li>▪ <u>Gretl Schörg</u> : Marlen Weber</li><li>▪ <u>Paul Henckels</u> : Detective Dr. Secretly</li><li>▪ <u>Elisabeth Flickenschildt</u> : Hella</li><li>▪ <u>Aribert Wascher</u> : police commissioner</li><li>▪ <u>Hans Hermann Schaufuß</u> : Registrar</li><li>▪ <u>Kurt Weitkamp</u> : Heini Bock</li><li>▪ <u>Hubert von Meyerinck</u> : Max Vieregg</li><li>▪ <u>Ruth Buchardt</u> : Swea, his accomplice</li><li>▪ <u>Franz W. Schröder-Schrom</u> : Consul Weber</li><li>▪ <u>Elsa Wagner</u> : Mrs. Weber</li><li>▪ <u>Leopold von Ledebur</u> : the old Sauer, called Sauer junior</li><li>▪ <u>Egon Brosig</u> : Head of the registry</li><li>▪ <u>Walter Bluhm</u> : crook and singer</li></ul>

is arrested and taken away in striped clothes in a rickety prison carriage, the wooden back panel of which even falls out during the journey.

At the police station, it quickly becomes clear that Biedermann is not the wanted crook. Fridolin remembers: There was once a waiter, a certain Max Vieregg, who "completely by accident" splashed red wine on him in a bar. He was helped out with salt, and then a somewhat shady-looking woman named Hella came along. Vieregg and Hella worked together to steal Biedermann's wallet and his personal documents. Since then, Vieregg committed numerous crimes under the guise of "Fridolin Biedermann." Now that this matter has been resolved, the police prefect orders the real

Biedermann's criminal record to be cleared of the criminal offenses, while the fake Fridolin enters into another bigamous marriage and receives a cash check from his new father-in-law. But the real Fridolin's wish to finally marry his Elvira is once again thwarted by bureaucracy. Because, the registrar tells him, the fake Fridolin's previous marriages must first be "properly" dissolved; before that, he may not be married. The registrar then gives Biedermann some splendid "good advice": He should track down the person who stole his name and convince him to "properly" dissolve his marriages so that they can be "properly" deleted from the registry. Both annoyed and stunned, Fridolin and Elvira leave the registry office.

- Karl-Heinz Peters : Crook
- Klaus Pohl : Hotel porter
- Änne Bruck : Hat seller
- Wolfgang Dohnberg : Police Prefect
- Walter Werner : Registrar
- Else Ehser : older customer
- Hans Meyer-Hanno : Police officer
- Maria Litto : Saleswoman
- Henry Lorenzen : Chairman of the choir
- Ingrid Lutz : Bar guest
- Hadrian Maria Netto : Chief of Cabinet
- Hellmuth Passarge : Policeman at the Prefect
- Louis Rainer : sinister man of honor

Fridolin confidently turns to the Röntgenblick detective agency and its eccentric boss, Dr. Heimlich. At a thugs' hangout, a disreputable dive, Heimlich outwits the city's crooks with a trick and with Fridolin's help, and thus obtains the address where the name-thief and bigamist Vieregg is supposed to be. There, Fridolin meets Vieregg's crooked bride, Hella, who runs a marriage agency and puts on a big show when Biedermann reveals that he has seen through her scams. Together with Dr. Heimlich, Fridolin visits the crooks' bar "Bar Kap Horn," where a sign at the entrance asks that firearms be silenced so as not to disturb the artistic performances. While singer Marlen Weber performs the posh schmaltzy song "Mamatschi," the tough guys on site are so moved that some of them abandon their bad intentions after the song ends and never want to pull any more shady tricks. Meanwhile, Vieregg's new accomplice, Swea, terminates her collaboration with him, whereupon Vieregg tries to shoot himself – but the gun malfunctions every time. Only when he, exasperated, puts the revolver down on the table does a shot go off... and fatally hits Max Vieregg. Now "Fridolin Biedermann" can be erased from the criminal record. But that means he is officially dead, and thus, officially, the true Biedermann is no longer alive. Where there is no Biedermann, there is no marriage. Fridolin can't be married again!

Horried, Biedermann runs to his government and asks the cabinet chief to instruct the bureaucracy to allow him to be listed again as, in official parlance, a "regular access." This is what happens, and Fridolin believes he has finally achieved his dream. But the registrar makes it clear to him that, as a virtual "newborn," he will have to wait another 21 years. As a bureaucratic access, he only exists today, and thus may only marry upon reaching the age of majority – 21 at the time. Wait a full 21 years?

Fridolin loses his temper and, in front of Elvira and the registrar, he yells that he has absolutely no desire to get married anymore and would rather join the crooks and pursue a criminal career himself. At this, Elvira starts to cry and finally gives her long-time secret admirer, Heini Bock, a chance to land her.

Biedermann now seriously believes it's time to turn his life upside down: He really wants to become a crook! So he goes back to the Kap Horn bar, where he meets the singer Marlen again. She was one of the fake Biedermann's marriage victims and is thus, from a bureaucratic and formal legal perspective, the widow of the real, still living Fridolin. Marlen, who comes from a very good family, begins to flirt with the would-be crook Fridolin and takes him for a ride when he announces that he finally wants to do something "real." Marlen already has an idea: She knows an elegant house that belongs to a rich man, the salted almond king Consul Weber. Fridolin has no idea that this is Marlen's father and that she's just teasing him. The villa is broken into, and Fridolin wonders why the two guard dogs, two Great Danes, are wagging their tails as they run past Marlen, who, of course, has come along. Marlen is sly and packs everything that isn't nailed down into a sack. But then Fridolin's honesty takes over, and he demands that Marlen put everything back in its place. During this thwarted fishing trip, they both realize they have feelings for each other, and Fridolin immediately proposes to Marlen. The Biedermann widow, however, replies truthfully: "Marriage is the one thing neither of us can do." Then she confesses to him that she is the consul's daughter and is, in fact, already married to him, Fridolin Biedermann. Now that the bureaucratic formalities have been taken care of, nothing stands in the way of a "respectable" life together, even from a bureaucratic perspective.

## Production notes

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*The Man Whose Name Was Stolen* was filmed from April 24 to July 20, 1944, and passed the film censorship board in March 1945. However, there were then demands to remove the many barbs directed at authorities and officials, which "Wolfgang Staudte delivered using expressionistic stylistic devices of the Weimar era" <sup>[1]</sup>. Before the film could be changed again, the end of the war came.

As a result, the film material was considered lost for many years. It was stored in various places and later brought together in the State Film Archive of the GDR. When, in the early 1990s, people were looking for remaining film material from Harry Piel's last production of the Nazi era, *The Man in the Saddle*, they came across 56 rolls of picture and 23 rolls of sound negatives from *The Man Who Stole His Name* in the State Film Archive of the GDR, which were painstakingly restored. <sup>[2]</sup><sup>[1]</sup> The film historian Holger Theuerkauf sifted through the countless snippets of picture, sound, positive and negative material and compiled them into an almost complete film. In the few places where only sound material was available, stills were inserted. <sup>[3]</sup> The premiere took place on June 21, 1996, at the Zeughaus Kino - German Historical Museum. One of the leading actresses, Gretl Schörg, was present at the premiere, but the actors Ruth Lommel, Ruth Buchardt and Kurt Weitkamp, who were still alive at the time, had been forgotten to be invited.

Herbert Trantow made his debut as a film composer here. The sets were designed and realized by Otto Hunte and Karl Vollbrecht, whose last collaboration on a completed production. Hans Grimm was responsible for the sound. The dances were performed by the film ballet, founded in 1943.

Hans Meyer-Hanno , who appears here for several seconds as a street cop, was arrested in his Austrian vacation resort a day or two after the end of filming. The committed communist had been active in the anti-fascist underground and was also arrested as part of the general wave of arrests following the assassination attempt on July 20 , the day filming wrapped. This was thus Meyer-Hanno's last film role.

Gretl Schörg sang the song "*Mamatschi, schenk mir ein Pferdchen*" (*Give Me a Horse*) . Axel von Ambesser, Egon Brosig , and Aribert Wäscher sang the song "*Paragraphs, Registers, Forms* ."

In 1947, Staudte remade this material, this time under the title *The Strange Adventures of Mr. Fridolin B.* Here, too, Ambesser took on the lead role of Fridolin Biedermann. Ruth Lommel and Hubert von Meyerinck also reprised their original roles, while actors such as Paul Henckels and Egon Brosig played other roles in the remake. Only one scene, in which the hero sings a chanson, was retained from the original film.

## Reception and analysis

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"The film is a phenomenon: a biting satire on bureaucracy and narrow-minded bureaucracy, thus on the administration, thus on the government—and all this in 1945. Axel von Ambesser, also a cabaret artist, plays the lead role of Fridolin Biedermann, who wants to get married, with ironic charm. Unfortunately, his official record is not clean—years ago, an imposter stole his ID and committed various offenses under his name, such as marriage swindle, bigamy, and fraud. This now comes back to haunt the innocent original Biedermann. Even the fact that the police recognize him as someone other than the wanted man doesn't help—he is then considered innocent, but thanks to the double Biedermeier, still married; even a pardon from the cabinet chief doesn't help—he is no longer considered married, but a newcomer, meaning: an infant who must wait 21 years for adulthood to marry his bride. This string of absurd regulations alone and archival-bureaucratic stupidity would be enough, especially since Staudte presents everything in a highly caricatured manner: the registrars, the police officers, the fraudster, and even the government are completely exaggerated characters, often filmed with a monstrously disfiguring camera – the official's gaze through the glasses appears to be made of frog's eyes. But Staudte goes further. He creates a subterranean, highly unstable ground that is not only pulled out from under his Biedermann's feet, no: that is supposed to support an already fragile world more or less. For the fact that there are breaks in this film, that characters suddenly reverse their thinking and behavior, that there are reversals in the plot: this is not simply conceived for comic effect; it is part of the program. Fridolin Biedermann does not fight against the bureaucratic nitpicking. He resigns himself, turns away: he decides to become a criminal, an 'Untermensch', as he once promises himself when referring to the underworld (also in this detail). the mockery of the Nazis, no: of rule in general)."

– Screenshot online <sup>[4]</sup>

## References

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1. *The man whose name was stolen*. (<https://www.prisma.de/197030>) In: *prisma* . Retrieved July 20, 2021 .
2. Ulrich J. Klaus: *German Sound Films, Volume 13, 1944/45* , p. 190 (042.45), Berlin 2002
3. F.-B. Habel: *Cut Films. Censorship in Cinema* , Kiepenheuer, Leipzig 2003, pp. 65–66
4. *The man whose name was stolen* (<https://screenshot-online.blogspot.com/2010/06/wolfgang-staudte-regisseur-fur-ufa-und.html>) on [screenshot-online.blogspot.de](https://screenshot-online.blogspot.de)

## Weblinks

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- *The Man Whose Name Was Stole* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0131470/>) at IMDb
- *The Man Whose Name Was Stolen* (<https://www.filmportal.de/fc6156cc205449fd83707b7d9aa6e6cf>) at [filmportal.de](https://www.filmportal.de)

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