

GFL

German as a foreign language

**The strange history of *der deutsche Michel*:
the role of national stereotypes in intercultural
language teaching**

Eda Sagarra, Dublin

**The strange history of *der deutsche Michel*:
the role of national stereotypes in intercultural language teaching**

Eda Sagarra

In his reminiscences of his imprisonment in France on a charge of espionage, *Kriegsgefangenen. Erlebtes 1870* (1871), Theodor Fontane submitted his own hitherto unreflected perceptions of the French to a critical examination. In doing so, he aimed to sensitize his readers to the need to examine their own political prejudices towards their neighbours. It was not always as Fontane described it. Early nineteenth century perceptions of other nations were driven more by curiosity than by prejudice, although much of curiosity was naive. By the 1840s, thanks to developments in the print media, the depiction of national stereotypes became increasingly politicized, particularly in Germany. *Der deutsche Michel*, the oldest of such allegorical figures, was represented in a wide variety of genres, including cartoon, lyric verse, comic sketch and feuilleton. Yet, while other nations embodied in their allegories of the national self positive qualities, in Germany the reverse was the case. The masochistic figure of Michel seemed designed to challenge the young German nation's sense of itself. This remained a feature of Michel cartoons and texts throughout the nineteenth century, apart from the Wilhelmine period and the Third Reich. Michel cartoons enjoyed an immense vogue in the Weimar Republic, in the Adenauer years and again at the time of the fall of the Wall and its aftermath. The present article argues that these cartoons and texts provide unique insights into modern German political history and *Landeskunde*, particularly in the context of an intercultural approach to GFL.

At the beginning of the second chapter of *Kriegsgefangenen. Erlebtes 1870*, part of which Theodor Fontane began to write during his imprisonment in France on a charge of espionage in the winter of 1870 and which he published one year later, we read:

Die Engländer haben ein Schul- und Kinderbuch, das den Titel führt: *Peter Parley's Reise um die Welt, oder was zu wissen not tut*. Gleich im ersten Kapitel werden die europäischen Nationen im Lapidarstil charakterisiert. Der Holländer wäscht sich viel und kaut Tabak; der Russe wäscht sich wenig und trinkt Branntwein; der Türke raucht und ruft Allah. Wie oft hab ich über Peter Parley gelacht. Im Grunde genommen stehen wir aber allen fremden Nationen gegenüber mehr oder weniger auf dem Peter-Parley-Standpunkt. (Fontane 1962:550)

The interest in national character has a long history, and it would be both interesting and relevant to the theme of the present conference to explore the contributions to the topic of the climate theories and the anthropological debates of early modern Europe, particularly in France and Germany. However, for reasons of time and space, the focus in what follows will be on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Early nineteenth-century debate on what constituted national (or regional) character, and on its historical origins, was extremely wide-ranging. Contributors included Walter Scott, one of the most sophisticated mediators of the concept in

both his novels and his essays, of whom it has been well said that he “understood, and nobody has better illustrated by example, the true mode of connecting past and present” (Stephen, 1892 in: Cockshut, 1969:8). In Germany, some early entrepreneurial publishers played a significant role in popularising the debate via their fiction list. Thus, between the 1820s and 1850s a number of them, including Brockhaus of Leipzig and Manz of Regensburg, capitalised on the public’s curiosity about peoples different from themselves by launching on to the market a whole series of ‘national-typical’ variations based on the model of Alain Lesage’s picaresque novel *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* of 1715-35. Goethe popularised Johann Heinrich Sachse’s *Der deutsche Gil Blas* in 1822. The Irish novelist Charles James Lever had his jolly tale of life as an Irish barrister, briefly located at Trinity College, *Con Cregan*, bowdlerised as *The adventures of Con. Cregan. The Irish Gil Blas*. Other titles included a Russian, a Polish, a French and an Italian *Gil Blas* (Sagarra, 1989. German publishers or translators paid no royalties. ‘National stereotypes’ thus offered profit without risk. There was even *Der jüdische Gil Blas*, published by Brockhaus in 1834 to attest to the genuinely affirmative attitude to alterity in this type of literature.

Was it the French revolutionary wars, or perhaps the reminiscences of old soldiers from Napoleon’s campaigns in France, Germany, Spain and Russia, which prompted such curiosity in the German reading public? Or was it not rather the beginning of the railway age which so excited German poets and writers and which seemed to offer ordinary people the chance of one day joining the ‘quality’ and travelling to foreign parts? In trying to account for the popularity in Germany of travel literature and literature about other peoples between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the 1848 Revolution, we need to remind ourselves just how immobile German society then was. For most Germans in those years and for German women in particular, to ‘travel’ meant simply to go beyond one’s own town or village. ‘Travel abroad’ might mean crossing the border into a neighbouring state; it could also mean no more than a journey to another province of Germany.

It was during this same period, between the defeat of Napoleon I and the outbreak of the European revolutions in the spring of 1848, that the German media popularised and at the same time politicised the figure of the ‘typical German’ in the person of *der deutsche Michel*. The process coincided with and was conditioned by the emergence of a capitalist literary market in Germany. Initially, Michel stood for the oppressed subject of an authoritarian system. This was well expressed in a cartoon, published in the Munich satirical journal,

Leuchtkugeln, in the revolutionary period, featuring Michel and his oppressors. Here we see silhouettes of ‘poor Michel’, with downcast head and limp cap, chained by the combined forces of the ‘system’: throne, altar, military and bureaucracy. The graphic images are interspersed with satiric verses, which point to the (political) moral. The motif of *der deutsche Michel* as the victim of oppression, who, however, internalises the attitudes of his masters, is omnipresent in the literature and cartoons of the 1840s. It was only in the Wilhelmine era (apart from a brief period of weeks in the summer of 1848, when the German revolutionary troops were fighting the Danes in Schleswig-Holstein), that Michel became identified with the ambitions and resentments of German nationalists.

Of all such allegorical figures, which we now describe as national stereotypes, the German Michel has the most ancient lineage. Indeed Michel predates the second oldest, John Bull (in the *History of John Bull*, 1727), by almost two centuries¹ and Marianne of France and Uncle Sam of America by almost a further century. This is significant, given the remarkably late emergence of Germany as a nation state in Europe. Like the modern history of the people he purports to represent, Michel has always had an unstable history, beginning with the first cursory and dismissive reference to him in 1541 by Sebastian Franck in *Spruchwörter, Schöne Weise, Herliche Clugreden*, published in 1541 in Frankfurt am Main (Hauffen, 1918:41) and the first known graphic representation one century later (Harms, 1983:274). Since the mid-seventeenth century, the media profile of Michel has known periods of immense popularity, notably the *Vormärz*, the Weimar Republic and the early years of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Federal Republic, interspersed with decades in which his existence was forgotten or the semiotics of his person, body language and dress became inaccessible to the reading or observing public.

The first pictorial representation of Michel in the early 1640s as a foolish fop, aping foreigners in dress and language, coincided with the early debate on the merits (or otherwise) of the German language by comparison with the languages of her neighbour. The cartoon by an unknown artist, glossed in verse, coincided with a spate of textual references of diverse provenance to the German who has no self-respect and no regard for his language. References to this ‘teutsche Michel’ are to be found in works published in Strasbourg and Nuremberg and include among their authors Grimmelshausen and Moscherosch. Even at that time, the

¹ On the origins of John Bull see Taylor, Myles (1992) John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion. In: Past & Present 134, 93-128.

popularity of Michel was intimately associated with the technological history of the print media. But already by the late seventeenth century, Michel had disappeared from view. Between that time and his re-emergence in the short-lived periodical, *Der Teutsche Michel: Trost Einsamkeit, alte und neue Sagen und Wahrsagungen, Geschichten und Gedichte. Zeitung für Einsiedler*, edited in Heidelberg by Achim von Arnim and Joseph Görres with the help of Clemens Brentano between April and August 1808, only the occasional mocking verse kept his memory alive, usually in the form of the archetypal provincial, known as *Vetter Michel*. The Arnim-Görres enterprise is of historical interest in the present context, both because it recorded only the second known graphic representation of the figure, and, more particularly, because it marks the first association with what would become and remain Michel's most characteristic attribute: his pixie cap.

On the eve of the July Revolution of 1830, Michel emerged as a cypher of political discontent, directed at the monarchs, of which the broadsheet *Michel'sche Vaterunser am Ludwigstage* which appeared in Würzburg in 1828, is a prime example:

Allernädigster Monarch! Vater unser!
 Landesvater und Fürst! Der du bist!
 Freude und Belohnung selbst denen,
 die den Ruf haben! Im Himmel!
 Wenn du die Gewerbe und andere Steuern
 verminderst, so rufen wir Geheiligt werde dein
 Name!
 Wir wünschen, daß dein Versprechen,
 Gnade und Hilfe Zu uns komme!
 Mächtiger Segen ströme dafür auf Dein Reich!
 Und alle deine treuen Bürger
 werden sagen Dein Wille geschehe!
 Wenn die Last, die uns drückt, so
 erleichtert wird Wie im Himmel!
 Denn dies muß gefallen, wie im Himmel Also auch auf Erden!
 Durch Konzessionen und große
 Steuern entziehst du uns Unser tägliches Brod!
 Gerechter König! den verlornen
 Wohlstand Gieb uns heute!
 Befördere Ackerbau, Handlung und
 Künste, damit wir bezahlen können Unsere Schuld!
 Verzeihe deinem Volk, wenn es,
 von Abgaben gedrückt, seufzet Wie auch wir vergeben!
 Wenn Handlung und Gewerbe blühen,
 können wir auch Nachsicht haben mit Unsern Schuldigern!
 Gieb uns weise und deutliche Gesetze

steure den Muthwillen deiner
 Gerichte, und laß uns nicht zu
 Grunde gehen; Sondern erlöse uns von
 allem Übel!
 Jage die Juden, Wucherer aus dem
 Lande! Denn dein ist das
 Reich!
 Hilf uns verarmten Kindern wieder auf! Denn dein ist die
 Kraft!
 Dann, guter Vater! wirst du auch
 Ruhm und Segen haben Und die Herrlichkeit
 in Ewigkeit.

The rigorous censorship of the Restoration years and particularly of the 1830s ensured that a strict limit was set on the publication and circulation of such seditious texts and that the penalties for author, publisher and distributor on discovery were extremely grave. In Prussia, following the accession of Frederick William IV (1840-61), cartoonists enjoyed for a little over a year (1842-43) freedom from censorship on illustration. This prompted a veritable explosion of texts of diverse provenance, broadsheets and pamphlets, but also verses, sketches, plays, and occasional pieces in the ubiquitous journals, in the manner of early feuilletons, which made direct or oblique reference to *der deutsche Michel*. As Ludwig Walesrode commented from the safety of his Zurich exile in *Unterthänige Reden* (1843):

Als der König winkt mit dem Finger
 Auf thut sich der Geisteszwinger
 Und der Satyr aus halb nur geöffnetem Haus
 Speit Karikaturen in Haufen heraus.

The *Vormärz* generation witnessed revolutionary innovation in reproductive techniques, and it was only now that the transformation became complete in the figure of Michel from unreflected phrase to self-conscious national stereotype. The modern history of Michel dates from the time when, as Günter Oesterle has aptly observed, “die Physiognomie der Öffentlichkeit [...] nicht mehr von einer exzessiven Lese- und Schreibsucht geprägt ist wie noch im 18. Jahrhundert, sondern von einem unersättlichen Bilderhunger”.² The visual dimension became central, whether represented graphically in cartoons in broadsheets, pamphlets, newspapers and journals, or in the emblematic references we encounter so

² Die Schule des minutiösen Sehens und Lesens im Vormärz. Zur Raffinesse des Andeutens im Wechselspiel von Bild und Text. In: Koopmann and Lauster (1996:293). See also in the same publication Sagarra (1996) Selbstbestimmung durch Fremdbestimmung. On the history of *Der deutsche Michel* as a cartoon image in the

frequently in the literary texts of the 1840s, whether as lyric verse,³ comic sketch⁴ or journalistic essay.⁵ Several factors contributed to this sudden emergence of a public sphere in Germany in the 1840s, in which the figure of the Michel took on exemplary character. These were: the presence of substantial numbers of un- or underemployed and well-educated young men in the towns and cities; severe economic distress; political repression, and, finally, the technical capacity of the market to print and distribute such literature cheaply and quickly. Public response was indeed gratifying, despite the censorship, and the police were frequently called out, particularly in Berlin in the mid-1840s, to disperse crowds which tended to gather outside print shops to buy or just to gape at the latest product of the market. “Der Siegeszug der Reproduktionstechniken, die von der Lithographie bis zur Daguerrotypie, vom Lichtdruck bis zur Autotypie reichen, gibt dem Bedürfnis nach Optischem eine derartige Nahrung und Durchschlagskraft ...” (Oesterle 1996: 293).

Almost all Vormärz authors, artists and writers on Michel made reference to the attributes of the ‘typical German’, his pronounced belly, a propensity for sleep and his *Michelsmütze* in the shape of a night-cap. The symbolic dimension of Michel’s ‘attributes’ would have been immediately evident to contemporaries. As Franz Dingelstedt phrased it in one of his poems from the *Lieder eines kosmopolitischen Nachtwächters* of 1842, and as numerous cartoonists recorded in crude or sophisticated graphic image:

Und was der Strauß für einen Wanst
Besitzt und welchen Magen!
Nur du, mein deutscher Michel kannst
Und muß noch mehr vertragen!

In 1843 Hermann Markgraff collected a representative selection of Michel-verses and other popular political poems and published them in Leipzig (where the censorship was less stringent) under the title of *Liederbuch des deutschen Michel*. All the prominent political verse makers of the day were represented there, among them Hoffmann von Fallersleben,

Vormärz, 281-292.

³ Heinrich Heine’s political verse offers a particularly eloquent example.

⁴ See, for example Robert Prutz, *Die politische Wochenstube* (1845) or Leopold Feldmann, *Der deutsche Michel, oder Familien-Unruhe* (1849), both re-published in Denkler (1971).

⁵ A prime example is Karl Friedrich Köppen, *Der deutsche Michel*, published in the *Rheinische Zeitung für Politik, Handel und Gewerbe*, January 1843, no. 1, which describes in detail a group of onlookers gazing at a reproduction exhibited in a ‘Bilderladen’ of Robert Sabatky’s much-published cartoon of der deutsche Michel bound to a chair and guarded by police under the eye of Metternich, Pope Pius IX, the Jesuits and other representatives of the alliance of ‘throne and altar’.

author of the *Deutschlandlied* and of the best-selling *Unpolitische Lieder* (1841-2), which lost him his university post at Breslau. In the mid and late forties the congruence of pictorial image and printed word in the representation of Michel was at its most pronounced. At times it seems as if graphic artists were simply illustrating separately published verses or the other way round. Journalistic texts of these years make direct reference to particularly popular cartoons, such as that of Robert Sabatky representing Michel with the 'wounds' of the thirty-six princes on his body, as he sits, imprisoned and half awake on a seat guarded by Metternich, Pope Pius IX, the Russian Tsar and the German police (cp. Sagarra, 1994). In the years and months preceding the March Revolution of 1848, the number, variety and outspokenness of Michel-cartoons appeared to articulate the efforts of the subject to force the prince and the state authorities to re-define him as a citizen. Moreover, as the authorities well knew, the technological revolution had so drastically lowered the costs of reproduction, that it was now possible to provide and distribute hundreds of handbills with the latest cartoon and/ or verse, before the police could discover and confiscate them. Print runs could, on occasion, number up to 4, 000, to be sold for a couple of pence within hours of distribution (Denker, 1980). At the same time the regional distribution of the printing presses, from Karlsruhe to Königsberg, from Stuttgart, Munich and Vienna to Magdeburg and Hamburg, made their own contribution to the politicisation process.

Following the outbreak of revolution in Germany in March 1848, two features marked what was a new stage in Michel's evolution. Firstly, his figure suddenly slimmed down, his pose and gait were transformed, as the erect figure of a typical young German artisan⁶ suddenly confronted his oppressors, prince, army and police. Secondly, as reflected for example, in an extended series of cartoons with accompanying text which had begun to appear in 1847 in the Munich journal *Leuchtkugeln* and continued until the summer of 1848, 'Michel' began to attribute his political insignificance to the jealous machinations of Germany's neighbours. These neighbours included both the great powers, France, England and Russia, and also a number of smaller states, such as the Netherlands and also Denmark, whose role in Schleswig-Holstein in the summer of 1848 proved to be such a powerful catalyst of nationalist fervour in the German Confederation. As the Revolution faltered and failed in the autumn of 1848, Michel reverted to type. His waistline thickened and his belly re-emerged. Most notably, the

⁶ We recall the unusually high proportion of artisans who took part in the Revolution, and were counted among its first victims.

semiotics of Michel's cap now began to register Germany's political mood and destiny, as it would do in the century and a half to follow. In the heady years of 'das tolle Jahr' (Fontane), the 'Michelsmütze' had assumed the shape of the Phrygian cap of the freed Roman slave, adorned with the French tricolour. Its tassel stood erect, denoting suppressed energy. Now, as so aptly recorded in the cartoon of the Stuttgart *Eulenspiegel* of 24 March 1849, Michel's bonnet rouge of spring 1848 had begun to droop by the difficult late summer of 1848, and by autumn was once more — a night-cap. Among the political commentators of the day who employed the figure of Michel to articulate the different responses of the populace to the failure of the German revolutions, was one lone figure. The author of *Vier Zeitfragen* (1847) and *Das Wesen der Ehe. Nebst einigen Aufsätzen über die sociale Reform der Frauen* (1849) was not a woman to mince her words. In a volume of poems published in Darmstadt in 1848 under the title of *Brutus Michel*, Louise Dittmar laid the blame for the failed revolution fairly and squarely where, in her view, it indisputably belonged:

Man rief zur Tat:
Auf, auf, zum Kampfe deutsche Mannen!
Auf, auf, zum Kampf, zur Bundesschlacht!

Alas, 'die Männer von 1848' were not up to it. The volume closes with the dismissive words:

O deutscher Michel, deutsches Blut,
Wie liebst du doch die Kinderruth!

A contemporary caricature by one Ferdinand Schröder, entitled *Das Große Insiegel des deutschen Reichs*, shows Mother Germania with little Michel across her knees, administering a sound spanking. At her feet is the inscription "Mit Jott für König und Vaterland" (the motto of the Prussian Conservatives), "Liberté" in the form of a German chained to a policeman, "Égalité" showing two goose-stepping soldiers and "Fraternité" showing a prince robbing a poor man, encircle Germania. (Miscellanea in Dortmund City Library IfZF. 37/1426.)

Michel's metamorphoses in the second half of the nineteenth century reflect the rapid transitions of German history in that age. Johann Scherr's novel of 1858, *Michel. Geschichte eines Deutschen unserer Zeit*, which went into eighteen editions in the next twenty years, marked the beginning of the new direction. The hero of the novel, like Gustav Freytag's Anton Wohlfart in *Soll und Haben* (1855), is diligent, clean-living — and humourless. From the

1860s onwards Michel was claimed by the spokesmen of a whole host of opposing political groups. Thus, as recorded in the pages of the illustrated journal, *Frankfurter Laterne*, later *Laterne*, the advocates of *Großdeutschland* saw Michel as the stooge of Prussia's hegemonial ambitions, with Bismarck as the sinister manipulator of the German people. For the German liberals during Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, Michel was hailed as a new Luther, the hallowed champion of civil liberties against the might of Rome.⁷ For the Social Democrats persecuted under Bismarck's Anti-Socialist legislation of 1878-90, or simply as victims of bullying drill sergeants during military service, Michel was the victim of class justice. (*Süddeutscher Postillon* 11 (1892), Nr. 24, 8) Alternatively, he could be a kind of new St Christopher, announcing the new vision of Germany as the land of freedom and opportunity for the worker, a model for the world. (*Süddeutscher Postillon* 18, 1899). In the 1890s, Anti-Semites evoked the popular image of the day, so difficult for us now to place in its authentic context, of a Super-Michel sweeping multifarious tiny fat Jews, like vermin, from the streets. From about 1900 onwards, the satirical journals which supported a nationalist or government agenda — and this included in the immediate pre-1914 years those, such as *Simplicissimus*, which had traditionally attacked the regime — Michel was presented as exemplifying Germany's right to a 'place in the sun'. Thus a boldly drawn cartoon entitled *Aus der politischen Kinderstube. Im Nordsee-Planschbecken* in the 1913 number of the last-named journal, which at the time enjoyed sales of over one million shows brave young Michel in sailor suit, cast as the good boy, protecting a puny Marianne (France) and other smaller European states against the 'bully' at the seaside. The title of the cartoon is simply: *Michel und John Bull*. Who the bully really is, emerges from two propaganda broadsheets of 1916, showing an enormous Michel slicing a giant salami composed of French, British and Russian soldiers or whipping them soundly under the caption *Druff Michel* (*Weltkriegssammlung des Historischen Museums der Stadt Frankfurt* 10, 3/1).

The prominence which Michel had enjoyed in German war propaganda did not disappear with defeat and the birth of the Weimar Republic. Quite the contrary, in fact. However, what is noteworthy about the Weimar Republic with regard to the Michel figure is his ideological range. Even more so than in the Wilhelmine period, virtually every political agency claimed him

⁷ One of the most extraordinary of these texts was Oskar Panizza's 666 'theses' under the title of *Der deutsche Michel und der römische Papst*, published (belatedly) in Leipzig in 1894 and modelled on Luther's (in every sense) legendary challenge at Wittenberg on 31 October 1517. The cover has a bearded Michel observe the pope in tiara from the recesses of a curtain.

as their own, Social Democrats, Communists, Conservatives, pacifists, Anti-Semites, including, unusually, the Catholics. By 1924 a regional Nazi newspaper, the *Nieder-Sachsen Herold* was producing a series of cartoons on the machinations of the Jews against 'Michel' and their likely fate. The final cartoon in the series (Nr. 76: 27 November, 3) shows a giant Michel emptying the bodies of the Jews into a mass grave.

Once the '*Kampfzeit*' was over, the Third Reich had, perhaps predictably, little time for Michel. Which makes David Lowe's graphic comment on the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 in the *Evening Standard* of 16 October 1939 so extraordinarily prophetic. Here he depicts Peter the Great sitting with Stalin in a boat in the Baltic. A diminutive Hitler, clad in a *Michelsmütze*, attempts, ineffectively as it seems, to steer. The Russian artist B. Jefimov spelt out Lowe's point more bluntly, in a cartoon entitled "9 May 1945" and published in the Soviet journal *Krokodil* in 1955, the year in which Adenauer finally negotiated the return of over 100 000 German prisoners-of-war. What had the German people got out of it all other than a bloody nose? Bleary-eyed, clad in little more than Michel's cap, which describes a figure of nine round his head, accompanied by the word "*Maya*",⁸ the German looks hopelessly into the future.

Perhaps at no time, apart from the 1840s, the early 1920s and in the aftermath of 9 November 1989, did 'the typical German' Michel enjoy such popularity as in the Adenauer years. Students of forgotten regional and special interest newspapers and journals from that era will come across a plethora of such cartoons in city archives and libraries, as well as in national institutions such as the library of the *Bundestag*. Michel, like his fellow Germans was a thin lad in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Like German democracy in that era, he was young, and did not always look as though he would survive to adulthood. The political 'messages' exemplified in these often crude cartoons include 'Michel as the victim of the occupying powers', 'Michel as the stooge of crafty Adenauer', who *would* insist on re-arming him, suppressing his rights, fobbing him off with material goods to suppress his memory. But equally popular was the image of Michel as the guileless lad, who never knew what 'it' was all about, and had now passed from one oppressor (Hitler) to another (the victorious Allies). A memorable cartoon in *Simplicissimus* some five days after the erection of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961 depicts an obese Michel, his back to the *Brandenburger Tor* on which Mayor Willy Brandt stands

⁸ One recalls that the Second World war ended for the Soviet Union on May 9, not May 8 (which incidentally and with the unhappy symbolism which has dogged modern German history, is the feast of St Michael the Archangel, Germany's first patron saint).

gesticulating hopelessly, about to tuck into a Lucullan feast provided by the western Allies, in the persons of Kennedy, Macmillan and de Gaulle. The division of Germany in 1949 had been initially marked by cartoonists' attempts to express the sense of schizophrenia characteristic of these years, such as Michel portrayed as two Siamese twins. But very soon this image would be overlaid by that of the two brothers, one thin, one fat, one hungry and affectionate, the other obese and indifferent. Scepticism about the Franco-German rapprochement is documented in numerous witty cartoons,⁹ especially in the early years of the Coal and Steel Pact and during the negotiations leading up to the abortive European Defence Community and to the successful conclusion of the Rome Treaties. In 'the first kiss', Michel and Marianne, the French national stereotype, try to reach each other standing on a giant steel bar, which is balanced on a pile of coal. In another cartoon, Marianne greets Michel affectionately, and dips her hand in his pocket during the embrace to steal his purse.

In the Federal Republic of the 1970s and 1980s, politics, as in other western democracies, became increasingly personalised in the media. Michel cartoons reflect this development with reference to Michel and Marianne, his French lover or wife (though the 'love affair' was not necessarily shared by their peoples). During the Schmidt regime, Helmut Schmidt, an unlikely Michel, was partnered by Giscard d'Estaing, an equally unlikely Marianne. In the Kohl era, Germany's, 'Michel-Kohl', a much more likely candidate, had frequent trysts with 'Mitterand-Marianne' to provide plenty of copy. The 'stable state' of the Franco-German middle-aged marriage is particularly well captured in a cartoon by Josef Partiewicz ('Party') in the *Rheinischer Merkur / Christ und Welt* of 13 July 1987, which features Michel (Kohl) and his 'wife' Marianne (Mitterand) in a boat made from a spiked helmet, in the middle of the Rhine. Reminiscent of the owl and the pussycat, this marriage, however, is not going anywhere: the 'boat' simply goes round in circles.¹⁰

The boat motif occurs in one of the most brilliant cartoons of the Schmidt era, when the issue of asylum seekers began to capture headlines. Operating with the topos of role reversal, one of West Germany's most gifted cartoonists, Horst Haitzinger, articulated in 1980 the change of public mood which two years later would bring Kohl to power: A stout Michel, standing astride his boat shouts "*Hiiiiilfe*", as he vainly wards off skinny hands trying to save themselves

⁹ The Paris Goethe Institute collaborated with its French partners in the highly successful documentary exhibition of 1987, subsequently published by Dietrich and Fekl (1997) *Komische Nachbarn/ Images du voisin. Deutsch-französische Beziehungen im Spiegel der Karikatur (1945-1987)*.

from drowning.

The astonishing variety of ‘messages’ being delivered to the public becomes evident if we follow the history of German stereotypy across the pages of the newspaper and periodical press in the first thirty years of post-war West Germany.¹¹ In registering these diverse images of Michel as the bull in the china shop, the poor lad whom nobody loves, Michel being ‘put upon’ by corrupt mindless politicians, Germans tried to come to terms with what was happening to them in the aftermath of the Third Reich. The common theme, which had historical roots, but now had a different emphasis, was that the Germans, unlike other nations, were not the subject of their own history. Like some ball of Fortune, they were at the mercy and behest of others. The conclusion surely to be drawn was that the Germans were not responsible for their actions. Or was it? For by the 1980s, a new note made its presence felt. Its context was undoubtedly the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler’s seizure of power. A novel element now becomes part of the semiotics of Michel, namely the mirror. Although the *Spiegel* had been a fertile source of *Micheliaden* in these years, the cartoonist Candas’ contribution in the *Rheinische Post* of 29 January 1983 is surely the most arresting, not least through the introduction of a new dimension into the depiction of the ‘typical German’. It was one which would become characteristic of the figure in the late 1980s and the 1990s: self-irony. In Candas’ cartoon, an average-sized Michel, neither tall nor small, neither attractive nor ugly, just an ordinary fellow, looks at his own reflection in the mirror and sees — the face of Hitler. *Und das war ich vor fünfzig Jahren?* he asks in amazement.

When the Wall fell, it was as though Michel had been re-born on both sides of the former border. He dominated the national press, seemingly as popular in the *Deutsche Handelsblatt* and *Die Zeit* as in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* or the *Spiegel*. Above all, Michel offered a fairly accurate guide to political opinion on both sides of the Wall: from that first ecstatic ‘Brothers’ as depicted by Hanel (*Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*: 13.11.1989), Helmut Kohl’s ‘house cartoonist’, through the witch-hunting with Honecker as the scapegoat. Then there were the mutual recriminations of *Vierzig Jahre Unterschiede* (FAZ 28.7.1990), and the mocking of foreigners’ clichéd thinking which inspired Peter Leger’s cartoon of ‘the Fourth Reich’ in which Bismarck’s eyes look out through a Viking helmet from which emerges as a *Kopfgeburt*

¹⁰ The topical reference is to the Franco-German brigade.

¹¹ I have found very few Michel cartoons in the GDR press over a period of some dozen years research, most of them admittedly spent in Berlin and West German archives.

the figure of Moneybags Kohl, adorned with a Michel cap and holding up a pint-sized figure of Lothar de Maizière, the short-lived East German prime minister, who clutches an olive branch.

Prior to 1989, Helmut Kohl had been depicted in the media in the guise of the traditional Michel in his armchair, with his slippers on his feet and his 'household' motto '*Weiter so Deutschland*' on his wall. Kohl's personal initiative in the pursuit of German unity, from the 10-Point Plan of 28 November 1989 onwards, earned him semi-mythological status as an oversized but still 'typical' German. Thus in one cartoon, East Germans gaze at a statue of a (naked) Kohl as the discus thrower, hurling a D-Mark in an easterly direction. In another, he rides in the company of Dietrich Genscher, the long-serving foreign minister and Finance Minister Theodor Waigel, with the hapless de Maizière squeezed between them, as the four riders of the Apocalypse, in pursuit of that elusive unity of spirit of the two Germanies. But in the majority of the many memorable Michel cartoons of the post-1989 era, the element of self-irony is prominent. Even so sensitive a subject as the German public's revulsion against becoming involved in armed conflict (during the Gulf War) can inspire the sight of Michel attempting to please President Bush and his advisors by trying on boots that are quite clearly much too large for him (*Handelsblatt* 31.1.1991).

What has all this got to do with the student learner of German?

Probably, I would argue, quite a lot. For one thing, familiarity with the history of the German national stereotype, *der deutsche Michel*, across a most eventful, not to say turbulent period of her modern history from 1840 to the present, can serve a number of functions for the learner of German in an intercultural context. At their most basic, national stereotypes can be informative and stimulating guides to helping students acquire the kind of range of cultural associations with which the native speaker grows up. This is particularly evident in the case of Germany but also of France, as Maurice Agulhon has shown in his exploration of the allegorical figure of Marianne (Agulhon, 1979). She, like Michel in Germany, has been a reliable icon of political mood change in France. Tracing the evolution of Michel's image in the west German media during the Kohl era can be an instructive and entertaining guide to German *Landeskunde*, a course deemed necessary for students, but not invariably popular with them. Cartoons help to make the printed text more accessible, as Grimmelshausen recognised in Michel's early years when he observed: *Ich habe mich wollen behagen/ Mit Lachen die Wahrheit zu sagen*. Indeed his own *Simplius Simplicissimus* shared a number of characteristics with Michel at certain points in the latter's career in the German media. Furthermore, the study

of national stereotypes, presented as part of a wider study on auto- and heterotypes, can certainly teach students to be analytical about their own responses, to understand how these too are culturally conditioned, not 'given truths'. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, familiarity with the more recent history of this unique national stereotype, notably with the self-irony characteristic of modern representations of Michel, can bring home to students, just how effectively in fact the Federal Republic of Germany has come to terms with its past. Of course, one could argue that Michel tells us more about the evolution of the German media than of the political attitudes of the German people. But the popularity of the figure of Michel, and the power he has exercised over some of the best graphic talents of their day (many, incidentally, Austrian!), does suggest a degree of symbiosis between the German media and their readers. Finally, the study of the German national stereotype may succeed in helping learners of German, who probably will have little familiarity with her history, to become aware of the lack of continuity in Germany's past and to glean some insights into the cultural consequences of her unstable identity. By contrasting the negativity ascribed by Germans at many periods of their past to their own self-image, with the 'positive' attributes of Marianne, John Bull, Uncle Sam or Juan el Español, imputed to them by their compatriots, there is an obvious conclusion to be drawn: national stereotypes normally affirm the positive features nations like to ascribe to themselves. In the case of Germany, the opposite is the case. Michel does not affirm but to question. Indeed, even today, he continues to provoke or even to challenge the Germans' own sense of self.

References

- Agulhon, Maurice (1979) *Marianne au combat. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines en France de 1789 à 1880*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Agulhon, Maurice (1989) *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines en France de 1880 à 1914*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Cockshut, Anthony O. J. (1969) *The Achievement of Walter Scott*, London: Collins.
- Denkler, Horst (Hrsg.) *Der deutsche Michel. Revolutionskomödien der Achtundvierziger*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam 1971.
- Denkler, Horst (1980) Politik und Geschäft. Beobachtungen bei der Durchsicht populärer Flugblattreihen aus der Berliner Revolution 1848/49. In: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der Literatur* 5, 94-121.
- Dietrich, Reinhard und Fekl, Walter (Hrsg.) (1997) *Komische Nachbarn/ Images du voisin. Deutsch-französische Beziehungen im Spiegel der Karikatur (1945-1987)*. Paris: Goethe

Institut.

- Fontane, Theodor (1962). *Kriegsgefangen in Frankreich. Erlebtes 1870* In: Walter Keitel und Helmuth Nürnberger (Hrsg.) *Werke, Schriften, Briefe in vier Abteilungen*. Munich: Hanser, Abt. 3, vol. 4, 550.
- Harms, Wolfgang (Hrsg.) (1983) *Illustrierte Flugblätter aus den Jahren der Reformation und der Glaubenskämpfe*, Coburg: Coburger Landesstiftung.
- Hauffen, Adolf (1918) *Geschichte des deutschen Michels*, Prag: Verlag des Deutschen Vereines zur Verbreitung gemeinnütziger Kenntnisse in Prag 1918.
- Koopmann, Helmut und Lauster, Martina (Hrsg.) (1996) *Vormärzliteratur in europäischer Perspektive I. Öffentlichkeit und nationale Identität*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis.
- Sagarra, Eda (1989) Gil Blas. Geschichte und Abenteuer eines Romanhelden auf dem europäischen Buchmarkt. In: Wolfgang Frühwald und Martino, Alberto (Hrsg.) *Zwischen Aufklärung und Restauration. Sozialer Wandel in der deutschen Literatur (1700-1848). Festschrift für Wolfgang Martens zum 65. Geburtstag*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1-15.
- Sagarra, Eda (1994) The longevity of national stereotypes: The German ‘national character’ from the sixteenth century to the present day. In: *Yearbook of European Studies 7. German Reflections*, 1-28.
- Sagarra, Eda (1996) Selbstbestimmung durch Fremdbestimmung. On the history of *Der deutsche Michel* as a cartoon image in the *Vormärz*. In: Koopmann, Helmut and Lauster, Martina (Hrsg.) (1996) *Vormärzliteratur in europäischer Perspektive I. Öffentlichkeit und nationale Identität*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 281-292.
- Taylor, Myles (1992) John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion. In: *Past & Present 134*, 93-128.

Biodata

Eda Sagarra ist Vorsitzende des „Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences“ und emeritierte Professorin für Germanistik am Trinity College. Zu Ihren gegenwärtigen Forschungsarbeiten gehören Beiträge zu Grillparzer, zu den Umgangsformen junger Frauen in der Aufklärung, zur oppositionellen Journalistik der frühen Adenauerzeit (exemplifiziert an der Zeitschrift *Der deutsche Michel*) und zur Semiotik des Huts im deutschen Realismus. Frau Sagarra hat zudem beim Lexikon deutscher Schriftstellerinnen (Hgg. Gudrun Loster-Schneider und Gaby Pailer) sowie an einer (elektronischen) Neuausgabe Ihrer *Social History of Germany (1648-1914* mitgearbeitet) .