

THE GERMANS AS THE *ALTER EGO* OF THE ENGLISH?

The German Doctor in Eighteenth-Century Debate

Silke Meyer

This paper investigates a little known aspect of the German national stereotype in England: the German doctor as an ambitious scientist and magical healer. This image was widely spread in the literary, political and medical culture as well as in the commercial advertisements of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In terms of national stereotyping, the English regarded the Germans as their allies and near-family relations. The German stereotype functioned as an *alter ego* of the English: the magical qualities were out-sourced from the rational self-image and projected onto the image of the German doctor.

Keywords: stereotypes, quacks, newspapers, public opinion, Anglo-German relations

“Make Theodore a Doctor, as he is unfit for any thing else, and ignorance cannot be discovered in that profession.”¹ Theodor Mayersbach, the celebrated German doctor an ignorant idler? Surely there is another side to this coin: “I have heard of many more cures performed by Dr. Theodor Mayersbach [...] I have not a doubt but thousands of instances might be found; wherein it would clearly appear that the public hath been greatly advantaged by the labour and skill of the German Doctor.”²

The case of the German doctor Theodor Mayersbach, who came to London in the 1770s and opened a practice in Berwick Street, Soho, is a masterpiece in public debate and self-promotion. Mayersbach had specialised in the art of urine-casting with considerable success and – according to his detractors – an impressive income of “about one thousand guineas a month”.³ It might have been his economic success which brought Mayersbach to the attention of Dr. John Coakley Lettsom, an eminent

London physician, who was particularly doubtful of Mayersbach’s diagnoses and their efficiency. The practice of uroscopy was a regular procedure since antiquity but its reputation as a respectable medical method had suffered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Porter 2000: 116f, 180f). The stock character of a quack without any medical training was described as a “pisse prophet” who lived on his gullible fellow men (Porter 1987: 58, 2000: 181). Still, Mayersbach’s clientele included famous names, amongst those the Duke and Duchess of Richmond, Lord Archer and the famous actor David Garrick who swore by the healing powers of the German doctor: “I feel myself at this moment better for your recommendation of Dr Mierbach [sic].”⁴

But Lettsom was not convinced of the accuracy of Mayersbach’s judgment and prescriptions. He unmasked the German doctor by publishing anecdotes in newspapers like *The Gazetteer*, the *Public Ledger* and the *Morning Chronicle*. He tested his knowledge

by presenting him with an old cow's urine sample, which Mayersbach diagnosed with a violent fever typical for young gentlemen.⁵ Lettsom claimed openly that the German doctor was a fraud and he used the stereotype of the German quack to support his argument. Not only was the nationality of Mayersbach mentioned repeatedly but he also ridiculed his accent by writing "dis be not your water", "I tink", "every little ting" and gave him a shaky grammar like "it be no good – she be very bad".⁶ Dr. Mayersbach struck back by employing hack writers – maybe his English was indeed not very good – to publish letters in the *Gazetteer* under the names of "The London Spy" and "Sally Spy". In 1776, the anonymous defence tract *The Impostor Detected; or the Physician the greater Cheat: Being a candid Enquiry concerning the Practice of Dr. Mayersbach; commonly known by the Title of The German Doctor* further defends the German doctor and aims to detect the true impostor, the physician Lettsom. This tract also includes a list with the names of Mayersbach's satisfied patients. Furthermore, his clients themselves gave witness of his integrity and wrote letters to the *Gazetteer*, like John Willan on 17 October 1776 or J.S. on 30 October 1776.⁷ Thus, the public debate went on in over 100 vituperative letters and articles for the best part of 1776 and 1777, until Mayersbach returned home to Germany as a rich man.

The quarrel of the quacks was rather prominent in London newspapers. *The Gazetteer* was one of the popular morning papers which enjoyed an average circulation of 1 650 copies per day (Black 1987: 16). In this article, the dog-fight between the two doctors introduces a rather unknown aspect of the national stereotype of the German, the German doctor as an ambiguous, but highly successful figure of the English medical market. Next to the German as a sauerkraut-devouring soldier, this image as a quack doctor was wide-spread in England in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

The German Doctor in Newspaper Advertisements

Newspaper readers found mentions of the German doctor beyond the debate between Mayersbach and

Lettsom. Advertisements in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries contained a large number of medical announcements by all sorts of practitioners, but it is interesting to note that many advertisers claimed to be a High-German or German doctor.⁸ The advertisements – their length differs from more than two pages to about four lines – generally followed a similar scheme. Starting off with the address details, the advertiser announced his arrival or a change of address and praised his innovative methods and great skills: "a very expert famous outlandish Doctor, and Citizen of Hamburgh, who is lately arrived here in London and hath brought by Gods blessing a wonderful Art with him". Others simply called themselves a High-German or German doctor, German surgeon or German operator. An extensive list of cured diseases and successful diagnoses followed:

First, he cures the French Pox, with all its dependants, viz. The Running of the Reins, Pains in the Groin and making of water, Shankers, Buboës, Sandkloat, Spanish Kraagen, Boiles and Scabs about the Head, Holes in the Throat and Neck, and rotting of the Palate and Gristles of the Nose and Gums.⁹

Another "lately arrived and Experienced and most Famous High German Doctor" added to this list:

This Doctor cureth in an Extraordinary and most easy manner the Morbus Gallicus or French POX with all its Symptoms [...] He has cured abundance when left off by other Doctors as incurable; [...], he promises to cure them in 6 or 7 days, or else desires nothing for his pains, which is as much as to say NO CURE NO MONEY. [] He would have no person despair by reason of the long continuance of their Distempers, [...] if Curable he will undertake them, if not he tells you so that you may not be abused by false Pretenders, and will give you such Satisfaction, that you may see what an honest Physitian for Counsel and Physick can perform.

As evidence for their integrity, a list of successful cases was given:

He cured a Child (next door to the Black Horse in Market Lane, near St. James Market) that was born blind in 13 days time. John Howel of the Parish of St. Thomas in the City of Bristol, Aged 72, and Alice Diddal of the Parish of Temple in the said City aged fourscore Years and that they had been Blind 9 years, he restored their sight immediately, and perfectly cured both them and others in 14 days. [...]. This Famous High-German Doctor is now for the Publick Good Setled in the Strand, betwixt St. Clements Church and Temple Bar, at his House at the Sign of the Angel, just over against Essex Street; where the Pictures of Patients, and Manual Operations are over the Door, and where there is a Red Cloth with Stones and Ruptures taken out of the Patients hanging by. And is to be spoken with from 8 in the morning till 11, and from 2 in the afternoon till 8 at night.¹⁰

The closing lines repeated the German origin as well as the contact details and warned the potential client not to mistake the doctor:

Living at present at the Black Swan in St. Giles's in the Fields, over against Drury-Lane End, where you shall see at Night three Lanthorns with Candles burning in them upon the Belcony. Where he may be spoke with all alone, from Eight of the Clock in the Morning, till Ten at Night, desiring you to be careful for your own benefit not to mistake the place because there is a new person that is lately come over and hath presumed to make use of the Bill and Piece which formerly I did make use of.¹¹

Browsing through the medical advertisements dating from 1660 throughout the eighteenth century, we can quickly establish a pattern of recurrent themes: the novelty of the method and the repeated reference to the German origin, list of diseases and the failure of other doctors, evidence through other patients' cases with exact names and the time of their recovery, apparent benevolence in the motto NO CURE NO MONEY, and the defence against quackery by calling others dishonest.

Not all advertisements are as elaborate as the examples presented here. Other aspirants to medical fame simply relied on mentioning their German origin to evoke the image of an omnipotent healer, like the itinerant doctor Christian Krebs who advertised in 1771: "To the public. The German doctor and oculist Christian Krebs, who has performed the many cures in and about Bridgwater [...] has taken up his residence at Mr. Pickard's, Exeter."¹² John Schultim similarly announced in 1762 that

The Famous High-German Operator, liveth at the Three Flower-Pots in Holbourn-Row in Lincolns-Inn-Fields. These are to give Notice, That John Schultim an High-German Physician, and Operator in Chirurgery, who [...] is resolved to continue in this City for some Time, his Art is so noble, and withal so infallible in the Effect, that the same cannot be recommended enough in Writing.¹³

Another advertisement from 1732 does not even give a name but simply refers to "a German":

In Petty-France Westminster, at a house with a black dore and a Red Knocker, between the Sign of the Rose and Crown and Jacobswell, is a German, who hath a Powder which with the blessing of God upon it, [...] If any person of known Integrity will affirm that upon following their directions the cure is not perfected they shall have their Mony returned. Therefore be not u willing to come for help but suspend your Judgment till you have try'd and speak as you find.¹⁴

Prescriptions were also advertised by associating them with a German art of healing, like a remedy against scurvy called "A Book of Directions and Cures done by that Safe and Successful Medicine Called An Herculeon Antidote, or the German Golden Elixir", which was advertised as healing "most violent Distempers [...] as stoppages, obstructions, raising vapours that causes Swimming and Fumes in the Head, Dimness of Sight; Deafness, and Drowsiness which make the body dull and heavy; and alters the complexion". For purchases, the advertiser

gives clear directions: “Mistake me not, the Sign is fastened to the Wall of the House, there is no other German Operator in that Street”.¹⁵

Foreign practitioners must have been indeed so successful that their English colleagues felt the need to warn the public:

A Caution to the Unwary. ‘Tis generally acknowledged throughout all Europe, that no Nation has been so fortunate in producing such Eminent Physicians, as this Kingdom of ours, and ‘tis as obvious to every Eye, that no Country was ever Pestered with so many ignorant Quacks and Empericks. The Enthusiast in Divinity having no sooner acted his part, and had his Exit, but on the same Stage, from his Shop, enters the Enthusiast in Physick; Yesterday a Taylor, Heel-maker, Barber, Weaver, Rope-Dancer etc. Today per saltum a learned Doctor, able to instruct Esculapius himself [...] for shame my dear Country-men re-assume your Reasons and expose not your bodies and purses to the handling of such illiterate Fellows. [...] But above all, I must caution you against a sort of Vermin (not to be suffered in a Commonwealth) your Fortune-Tellers.¹⁶

Needless to say that this warning was followed by the English doctor E. Gray announcing his skills and reassuring the reader that he was educated in England: “above thirty Years since Fellow of King-College in Cambridge and above Twenty Physician to K. Charles II at the Golden Ball in Fisher’s Alley, over against the Crown Tavern in Salisbury Court in Fleet-Street”. In another version of this advertisement, the xenophobic attitude becomes even clearer:

Nor be ye so irrational as to imagine any thing extraordinary (unless it be ignorance) in a pair of Outlandish Whiskers, though he is so impudent to tell you he has been Physician to 3 Emperours and 9 Kings when in his own Country he durst not give Physick to a Cobbler.¹⁷

Female practitioners similarly advertised under the label of the German origin:

To LADIES and All others of the FEMALE SEX. In Arundel-Street, over-against the Kings-Arms-Tavern, near St. Clements-Church in the Strand, where you will see a Red Cloth hang out at the Balconey, with Coagulated Stones taken out of the Bodies of the Female Sex, liveth Ann Laverenst, a German-Gentlewoman, who, Having but very lately Arriv’d in this Kingdom, and so consequently a Stranger, I could not propose a better Method to make myself known, than by this Printed Paper.

She specialised in problems around pregnancy and birth and devoted her skills to cosmetic challenges: “I also drive away all pimples and marks, yellow spots, sun-burns and morpew out of the Face, Hands and Body, without any Mercurial Paints, and render the Face smooth, fair and lovely.”¹⁸ The text is illustrated with a spread-eagle holding sword and sceptre, referring to the association of the spread-eagle with the German coats of arms. Two advertisements by male doctors are illustrated with a spread-eagle and another one refers to “the High-German Spread-Eagle hang over the door”,¹⁹ functioning as a sign for the German doctor.

In Anne Laverenst’s advertisement, two aspects are remarkable. Firstly, without having access to university education, she claims to have her skills inherited and not learned, thus emphasising the unscientific and irrational aspect in her art of healing. Secondly, her tone is rather apologetic. We can conclude from this tone that the amount of quack advertisements must have been so vast that readers were beginning to see them as a nuisance. The *Publick Register* felt the need to announce on 3 January 1741:

All possible care will be taken to render this pamphlet authentic, useful and entertaining. And whereas one fourth part at least of all the papers that are now extant, is filled with quack advertisements and other impositions on the public; to prevent the like in this, and to give room to matters of more importance, no advertisements will be admitted, but such as relate to books and pamphlets.²⁰

Advertising, Newspapers and Public Opinion

Since Jürgen Habermas' studies of the development of the bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth-century England in his influential book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (first published in German in 1962), scholars have come to regard the English press and particularly newspapers as the leading media in the development of the public sphere in a rational and enlightened society (Habermas 1990). Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and John H. Plumb furthermore point to consumption as a defining aspect of eighteenth-century society and the role of advertising in the process of creating a "citizen consumer" since the beginning of the eighteenth century (McKendrick, Brewer & Plumb 1982). Newspapers were not limited to political essays, reports on home and foreign affairs and parliamentary news and throughout the eighteenth century, advertising became the economic pillar for most newspapers. From the late seventeenth century, advertisements began to occupy a considerable amount of space in the papers (Black 2001: 60–65, 1987: 51–66; Barker 1998: 97–99), as the *Craftsman* slightly apologetically informed his readers in 1728:

We hope that none of our readers will take it amiss, that we have of late admitted so great a number of advertisements into this paper; since we can assure them, that we are resolved never to postpone any diverting essays, or any material articles of foreign or domestic news on that account: But as we found that they increase upon us every week (which must be allowed to be of some use to the town as well as profit to us and the Government,) we have put ourselves to a considerable expense by enlarging our paper and widening the columns for that purpose, without encroaching on the entertainment of our readers.

The Gazetteer, one of the two popular morning papers in which Mayersbach and Lettsom exchanged their snides, devoted on 2 January 1776 over half of its four-column front page to advertisements, and of the following three–six pages, 60 per cent were usually occupied by advertisements (Black 1987: 57, 2001: 60–63).

Many newspapers also carried the word 'advertiser' in their names or subtitles; *The Gazetteer's* full name was *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*.

Newspapers and especially their advertisements were thus widely accessible for the interested reader. For those who did not want to buy the paper, newspapers were laid out in taverns and coffee-houses and other public places. In 1777, the *General Advertiser* and *Morning Intelligencer* recorded a practice that may well have been more general, organised by individuals or by owners or taverns and coffee-houses: "that part of the paper allotted for advertisements [...] is daily stuck up in every public place throughout London and Westminster."²¹ Advertisements were open to a large audience and catered for the urban moneyed classes as well as for the lower middle and working classes (Barker 1998: 60–61).

Given the prominent role of newspapers in the formation of the public sphere and of the consumer citizen and given the physical dominance of advertisements in those newspapers, we can assume that advertisements contributed to this development as well. Just as essays and articles on home and foreign news shaped the public opinion in the political sphere, advertisement fashioned popular and material culture and influenced the everyday life of the eighteenth-century newspaper readers. *Mist's Weekly Journal*, 22 May 1725, points to the making of consumers as well as to the shaping of consumers' opinions through advertisements:

there is a great deal of useful learning sometimes to be met with in Advertisements; I look upon mine to a kind of Index of All Arts and Sciences, they contain Advices both from the learned and the unlearned World; Fools and Philosophers may there meet with equal Matter to divert and amuse themselves. – What can be more edifying to a Beau or a Coquet to read of the extraordinary Effects of the right Italian Cream, the finest Cosmetick in the World of the Complexion, or the Vertues of the true Chymical Washballs for the Hands [...] many Things which prove of Singular Use and Benefit could never be known to the World by any other Means but this of advertising.

And on 14 February 1736, *Fog's Weekly Journal* praised the reading of advertisements as an almost educational task:

I look upon them as pieces of domestic intelligence, much more interesting than those paragraphs which our daily historians generally give us under the title of home news [...] the advertisements are filled with matters of great importance, both to the great, vulgar and the small.

There is, however, at least one notable difference between the political pages and the consumer-oriented advertisement columns. Whereas the political pages addressed readers with “political reasoning”, just as Habermas describes it in his view of the enlightened and rational culture of public opinion (Habermas 1990: 86–98, 122–133), the advertisement columns praised innovative products of the latest fashion right next to numerous advertisements of German healers with mysterious practices and inexplicable skills. Joseph Addison remarks that “a man that is by no means big enough for the Gazette, may easily creep into the Advertisements; by which means we often see an Apothecary in the same paper of the News with a Plenipotentiary”.²²

Because publishers made their money from selling advertising space and not from subscriptions, advertisements of German doctors had become as much part of the print culture of eighteenth-century society as the announcement of books and other products. Quack advertisements and hand-bills by German doctors littered coffee-houses, were pinned up in the streets and in bookshops and thus found their way into the midst of the public sphere (Forman Cody 1999: 106–108). And in these advertisements, an unexpected juxtaposition of rational and irrational subjects can be found in the opinion-building media of public reasoning. The rational character of enlightened opinion was thus undermined with a stereotype which does not seem to fit into Habermas' bourgeois public sphere of eighteenth-century England.

The German Doctor in Literature, Popular Prints and Politics

The enigmatic character and label of the German doctor was not limited to advertising columns and the medical market. We can find numerous examples in literature and popular prints like caricatures, broadsides and ballads which show that the German doctor has been a stock character since the late seventeenth century. In 1692 Thomas Rymer employs his image in *A Short View of Tragedy* to satirise the scene when love powder is given to Desdemona: “*Nodes, Cataracts, Tumours, Chilblains, Carnosity, Shankers, or any Cant in the Bill of an High-German Doctor is as good fustian Circumstance, and as likely to charm a Senator's Daughter.*”²³ In *Peregrine Pickle*, Tobias Smollett describes his German headmaster Keystick as “an old illiterate German quack, who had formerly practised corn-cutting among the quality, and sold cosmetic washes to the Ladies, together with teeth powders, hair-dyeing liquors, prolific elixirs, and tincture to sweeten their breath”.²⁴ The German doctor became the German professor, “a cloudy metaphysician”, in the nineteenth century, amongst them Benjamin Disraeli's scientist Dr. Sievers in *Vivian Grey* (1827) of whom Grey says: “Matter is his great enemy. When you converse with him, you lose all consciousness of this world”.²⁵ Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816) introduces his Dr. Heavysterne of whom we are told he was “a good, honest, pudding-headed German, [...] fond of the mystical, like many of his countrymen”.²⁶ And Thomas Carlyle shows us the German professor as a figure with both angelic and demonic features in his portrait of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus* (1831):

Under those thick locks of thine, so long and lank, overlapping roof-wise the gravest face we ever in this world saw, there dwelt a busy brain. In thy eyes too, deep under their shaggy brows, and looking out so still and dreamy, have we not noticed gleams of an ethereal or else diabolic figure? [...] The secrets of man's Life were laid open to thee; thou sawest into the mystery of the Universe, farther than another.²⁷

This illustration has been omitted for copyright reasons.

Ill. 1: The Infallible Mountebank or Quack Doctor. Hans Buling, an itinerant medicine vendor selling his wares with the aid of a monkey and a performer dressed as Harlequin. Engraving, around 1670. (Wellcome Library, London.)

But the image of the German doctor was known beyond canonized literature. A broadside shows that the German doctor's magical skills even aspired to heal age-old maladies like the scolding wife. The satirical ballad *The New German Doctor* (1670) praises his powers as remedy for such a Xanthippe: "A Doctor of late; from the Emperor's Court, / A Person of dextrous Skill by report, / hath taken a Chamber in London of late, / And cures scolding Wives at a wonderful rate."²⁸

Here, the German doctor indeed performs a miracle. The illustration shows the married couple with a figure in a long coat standing between them. Not unusual for a ballad, there is no connection between text and image; the same image is used for different ballad texts. Another broadside emphasises the supernatural skills of the German doctor who restored a judge back to life after he had suffocated: *The dead*

brought to life. Being a true and particular account of a rich judge in England who was buried alive in his own cellar ... also how he was restored again to his tender wife, by a High German doctor. Edinburgh 1780. Broadsides and caricatures satirise the quack doctor who aspires to cure the devil for gold (British Museum Catalogue 1558) and mock mountebanks who advertised their skills on stage, like Hans Buling or Waltho van Claturbank, the name a pseudonym, in the London of the 1670s (BMC 1032, 1033, 1399, 1405, 1406, 1558, 1406). The stage-setting with various instruments and their companion, a zany and in Buling's case a monkey (ill. 1), show the theatrical elements in the representations of the German mountebanks. A common costume, after sketches by Indigo Jones, was a mixture between that of an alchemist and the *tedesco*, the German mercenary soldier of the *commedia dell'arte* (Katritzky 2001: 127–131, 142). Doctors performing to a crowd as if on stage in a theatre were a common site in eighteenth-century England, so common that Tobias Smollett describes the self-defence of a doctor with the words:

Very likely, you may undervalue me and my medicine, because I don't appear upon a stage of rotten boards, in a shabby velvet coat and tye-periwig, with a foolish fellow in motley, to make you laugh by making wry faces. [...] Take notice, I don't address you in the stile of a mountebank, or a High German doctor; and yet the kingdom is full of mountebanks, empirics, and quacks.²⁹

A finely executed version, *The High German Doctor's Speech*, printed for T. Kitchin, at No. 59, Holborn Hill, London, shows Waltho van Claturbank on stage speaking to a bewildered crowd outside a town and praising his wares to potential customers (Ill. 2). In the background, we can see his patient, his injured leg on a block ready to be treated, his zany and a man wearing a fool's cap and playing a musical instrument as well as a case and some flasks on a shelf. In anticipatory irony, the man shown under the stage has a wooden stump instead of his left leg.

The stereotype of the German doctor was also

used in political context. When Queen Anne died without a successor to the throne, the English crown was handed over to the closest Protestant relation, Georg Ludwig von Hannover (1660–1727, King George I after 1714). The English people, influenced by decades of propaganda against Catholicism, welcomed King George I as their Protestant saviour from the Catholic King James II. Eighteenth-century almanacs like Francis Moore's *Vox Stellarum* and John Partridge's *Named Ephemerides* praised George I as "the Darling of Mankind" who saved the English "from popery, French slavery and English traitors". A song sheet, printed in 1714 on the arrival of George I, uses the notion of the German doctor in the title *The German doctor's cure for all diseases*, the first line reveals the identity of this German doctor: "Welcome brave monarch to this happy isle." John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, published a satirical journal with the title *High German Doctor: A Title importing an Ostentatious Quack, or Pretender to Physick* in which he mocked the opponents of the Protestant Hanoverian King. By the way, the *ex libris* in the British Library copy, probably of the former owner Robert Lawson, very aptly shows a sorcerer in his chamber surrounded by a skull, a snake, a crocodile, some books and pots. The anti-Jacobite journal was printed from 1714 to 1715 until it ended with *The High-German doctor concluded. With a lively representation of our present distempers: the several symptoms explain'd; and a proper cure recommended*. The Jacobites answered back with the same image: an illustrated broadside, executed by and printed for George Bickham with the title *The High-German doctor and the English fool* lists amongst this German doctor's prescriptions: he has a pill that makes the weakest patient strong enough to get out of bed and encounter "Conscience, Death, and the Devil", a plaster that distracts "that predominant Monarchical Distemper", an ointment that makes "their religion subservient to their Interest" and an antidote to rebellion, disloyalty and decayed allegiance. The German doctor thus achieved a considerable fame in eighteenth-century England both in political satire and in popular culture. The figure had become a stock character and national stereotype; for some he

This illustration has been omitted for copyright reasons.

Ill. 2: The High German Doctor's Speech. A quack doctor promoting his wares before an audience of townspeople. Etching, around 1760. (Wellcome Library, London.)

redeemed the English nation from a Catholic monarch, for others he was but a quack.

The Origin of the German Doctor

It is, I think, no coincidence that many miracles in English literature, for instance in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, take place in Wittenberg, the town where the legendary Dr. Faustus was educated. Dr. Faustus provides an archetype for the German doctor, his legend telling us of his insatiable thirst for knowledge beyond human understanding. The story of this German doctor Georg or Johannes Faustus was well known in England even before Christopher Marlowe's play in 1594. The first translation of the Faust legend is said to be a ballad from 1588, and the first edition of the Faust-Book dates back to 1592 (Empson 1987: 92–95). In *The Historie of the dam-*

nable life and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus. Newly imprinted [...] according to the true Copie printed at Franckfort (London 1592), the German origin of Faustus is made clear right from the beginning of the text: "A Discourse of the most famous Doctor John Faustus of VVittenberg in Germanie, Coniurer, and Necromancer. [...] John Faustus, borne in the town of Rhode, lying in the Province of Weimer in Germany [...] having an Uncle at Wittenberg [...] where he was kept at the Universitie to study divinity". Since the late sixteenth century, the tale of the famous doctor from Wittenberg became most popular in numerous chap-books and ballads. Significantly, his German origin is an essential element of the narrative, and Faustus is always introduced with a setting of his national stage. Marlowe refers to the German context in the prologue: "Now is he born, his parents base of stock, in Germany, within a town called Rhodes; of riper years to Wittenberg he went, Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up."³⁰ A broadside from 1700 with the title *The Just Judgment of God shew'd upon Dr. John Faustus*³¹ starts with the lines "At Wertemburgh, a Town in Germany, There I was born and bred of good Degree." Though the writer here has muddled up Wittenberg and Württemberg, the German scene is clearly set. The chap-book *The History of Dr. John Faustus* (London 1750) also starts with the topos of the German origin: "Dr. John Faustus was born in Germany, his father was a poor labouring man." The image of the German sorcerer had indeed become so firmly established that, in 1610, Ben Jonson could refer to his alchemist with the words: "Or, is he a Faustus, / That casteth figures, and can conjure, cures / Plagues, piles, and pox, by the ephemerides, / And holds intelligence with all the bawds / And midwives of three shires!"³²

Narratives from Germany as a *locus horribilis* further became a literary genre in the English Gothic novel, or, the so-called German Tales, the prime example being Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818). Viktor Frankenstein's aspiration to create life originates from his reading of the works of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, all German scientists famous throughout Europe in the late Middle Ages and the

early modern era. Sir Walter Scott makes ironic use of this dark and fantastic image of the German in his introduction to *Waverley* in 1814:

Again, had my title borne 'Waverley, a Romance from the German' what head so obtuse as not to imagine forth a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke, a secret and mysterious association of Rosycrucians and Illuminati, with all their properties of black cowls, caverns, daggers, electrical machines, trap-doors, and dark-lanterns.³³

The German tales are topographically not very precise, town and place names are invented as if the mere mentioning of the German names conjured up an image of derelict ruins, baleful mountain ranges and dark forests. Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), a tale of the flight of two lovers, a wandering Jew and a bleeding nun, is situated in Bavaria but his topographical framework remains empty of real descriptions and is used to enhance the uncertainty and pleasures of horror in the reader:

The castle which stood full in my sight formed an object equally awful and picturesque. Its ponderous Walls tinged by the moon with solemn brightness, its old and partly ruined Towers lifting themselves into the clouds and seeming to frown on the plains around them, its lofty battlements, overgrown with ivy, and folding Gates expanding in horror of the Visionary Inhabitant, made me sensible of a sad and reverential horror.³⁴

Functions of National Stereotypes

National stereotypes of the German comprise, next to Sauerkraut, feathered beds and soldiers, a mysterious quality and supernatural ambition of healing incurable diseases. In looking at functions of national stereotypes in general, two purposes stand out. Firstly, stereotypes are used to create order in a complex and multifaceted environment by categorisation and classification. Secondly, they constitute and confirm a self-image by juxtaposing it with the image of the Other (Meyer 2003: 333–356). For England, the second function becomes evident when

looking at the many stereotypical images of the French: When the French are depicted as weak and cowardly, effeminate, foppish creatures with nothing on their mind but fashion, extravagance and Catholic superstition, we see, *ex negativo*, the English auto-stereotype as manly and brave, modest and down-to-earth, rational and enlightened.

English and German relations, however, were more complex. Since Monk Bede, chronicles confirmed the close alliance between the Angels, Jutes and Saxons on the continent and the island. His *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (731) was often quoted as evidence for a common family tree of the English and the Germans, and in 1605, the antiquary William Camden coined the phrase of “our Cosins the Germans”.³⁵ Especially when contrasted with the hated French nation, the Teutonic origin of the English was raised above all others, as John Hare puts it in his pamphlet *Anti-Normanism* (1642):

There is no man that understands rightly what an Englishman is, but knows withall that we are a member of the Teutonick Nation, and descend out of Germany; a descent so honourable and happy (if duly considered) as that the like could not have been fetched from any other part of Europe.³⁶

Political relations became even closer with the Hanoverian settlement and the personal union between the Hanover Electorate and the English throne in 1714. In the nineteenth century, German romanticism, set in the mythical Rhine landscapes, was well received in England. Again, family relations were emphasised, as we can see in the caption of a lithography (1837) after William Turner showing Ehrenbreitstein (Rhine): “Ode to the Germans – The Spirit of Britannia Invokes across the main, Her Sister Allemannia To burst the Tyrant’s chain: By our Kindred blood she cries. Rise, Allemannia, rise” (Blaicher 1994: 114).

When we look at the Faustian German doctor, we note above all the combination of his scientific and magical skills. This blend was sometimes mocked, often admired and taken advantage of, but never detested like French cowardice or French foppery.

The image of the German thus contained qualities foreign to the English, but not ostracized. At the same time, these qualities were much sought after on the medical market and by the consumer citizens McKendrick and others describe. In the self-image of this enlightened and rational consumer, however, there was no room for mystical skills and magical proficiency. These qualities were projected onto the stereotype of the German, a close friend and ally but not quite family. The stereotype of the German thus served as a kind of an *alter ego* for the English self-image. The same argument can be made with regard to the image of the German as a soldier. The military qualities of discipline and relentless strength were characteristics the English approved of and, in various alliances, took advantage of, but essentially, the typical Englishman John Bull was a civilian, a tradesman, not a soldier. His German cousin, however, was benevolently portrayed as a strong, disciplined and brave fighter (Meyer 2003: 166–171), as a children’s book tells its readers: “The Germans have always been a manly and warlike nation, nor is there any country in Europe where there are so numerous arises of horses and foot to be raised, if money be not wanting. The inhabitants when well disciplined can bear the long fatigues of war and are very courageous in battle.”³⁷ By projecting generally accepted qualities onto the *alter ego* stereotype, the juxtaposition of the English rational self-image and the German irrational qualities, already encountered in eighteenth-century newspapers, and of the German mercenary and the English civilian can be solved.

Looking at the German doctor, another observation on stereotypes can be confirmed. Stereotypes are part of a *longue durée* and show structural continuity within the history of mentality. The connection between the German and the scientist with a liking for the mystical and supernatural lived from Faust to Frankenstein and beyond. To this day, ambitious malevolent scientists in films are of German origin, a famous example being the James Bond villain Dr. Julius No from the film *Dr No* (1962). And perhaps we can also see the very public debate and opinion about another controversial German scientist in this light. Professor von Hagens’ exhibition

“Body Worlds” where he exhibits preserved human bodies to show anatomical structures was received in Germany as in Great Britain with very mixed emotions. While thousands flocked to see the morbid exhibits, criticism was vast. The English press, the voice of public opinion, instinctively compared him to Frankenstein, Hannibal Lecter and Joseph Mengele, the infamous Nazi doctor. And his German nationality is as much of a topos as his medical qualifications, thus a very modern German doctor who, according to Imogen Rourke in *The Observer*, 20 May 2001, still holds a gruesome fascination with the British public:

Meeting von Hagens [...] is something akin to meeting Hannibal Lecter. Pictures of this German scientist show a bloodless, dour face, shadowed by a Joseph Beuys style hat, but in the flesh von Hagens is surprisingly uncreepy. He has an honest, open face (he smiles, a lot!), a conscientious manner (he answers every question directly, perhaps with too much graphic detail) and yet there is something about those hands (definitely the hands of a sculptor) and the way you wonder if he’s sizing you up for dissection.

Notes

- 1 [John Lettson,] *The New Method of Curing Diseases by inspecting the Urine, as practised by the German Doctor*. London 1776, pp. 4f.
- 2 [Theodor Mayersbach,] *The Impostor Detected; or a Physician the greater Cheat: Being a candid Enquiry concerning the Practice of Dr. Mayersbach; commonly known by the Title of The German Doctor*. London 1776, p. 45.
- 3 John Lettson, *Fugitive Pieces*, quoted after Porter 2000: 180. According to Roy Porter, this comment was written in Lettson’s hand. The collection about Lettson and Mayersbach is held in the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London, MS 3246. For the use of this material in relation to the history of quacks in England, see Porter 1987 and 2000: 180–192.
- 4 *The Letters of David Garrick*, eds. D. Little and G. Hahrl, London 1963, vol. 3, p. 1090.
- 5 [John Lettson,] *The New Method of Curing Diseases by inspecting the Urine, as practised by the German Doctor*. London 1776, pp. 26f.
- 6 [John Lettson,] *The New Method of Curing Diseases by inspecting the Urine, as practised by the German Doctor*. London 1776, p. 29 and *The Gazetteer*, 26 August 1776, reprinted in John Lettson, *Observations Preparatory to the Use of Dr. Myersbach’s Medicines*, London 1776, p. vif.
- 7 Reprinted in Lettson: *Fugitive Pieces*, II, p. 69 and 102, see Porter 2000: 187–190.
- 8 The British Library holds two collections of medical advertisements (C.112.f.9 and 551.a.32). I have looked at more than 300 advertisements from the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and 61 of them referred to German doctors. Other nationalities mentioned were Italian (4 times), Dutch (4), Belgium (3), and French (1). In 3 cases, advertisements give Dutch and German nationalities simultaneously.
- 9 British Library C.112.f.9, item 7, item 85 is almost identical.
- 10 British Library C.112.f.9, item 2.
- 11 British Library C.112.f.9, item 7.
- 12 Christian Krebs, *To the public. The German doctor and oculist [...]*, Devon Record Office, Exeter, 9972/Z45.
- 13 British Library C.112.f.9, item 27.
- 14 British Library 551.a.32, item 25.
- 15 British Library C.112.f.9, item 35.
- 16 British Library C.112.f.9, item 38. Fortune-telling was also a skill associated with German operators, as the booklet *The High German Fortune-Teller. Laying down True Rules & Directions by which Both Men and Women May know their Good and Bad Fortune [...]*, written by the High German Artist, London 1750, shows. Herein, the High German Artist explains how to predict the future, read hands and faces, interpret dreams and find love by reading moles, hair and skin.
- 17 British Library C.112.f.9, item 39 and 551.aa.32, item 121 and 140.
- 18 British Library C.112.f.9, item 26 and 551.a.32, item 31, here decorated with a border.
- 19 British Library C.112.f.9, item 72, 77 and 94.
- 20 For the dominance of medical advertisements, see Black 2001: 60f, 63, 1987: 53f.
- 21 *General Advertiser*, 16 August 1777. For other examples, see Barker 1998: 98.
- 22 Joseph Addison, *The Tatler*, 14 September 1710, no. 224, ed. Donald F. Bond, Oxford 1987, vol. 3, p. 166.
- 23 Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693), reprint Menston 1970, pp. 70f.
- 24 Tobias Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), ed. James L. Clifford, Oxford 1983, vol. 1, chapt. XII, p. 57.
- 25 Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Grey* (1827), London 1926, p. 424.
- 26 Sir Walter Scott, *The Antiquary* (1816), London 1893, vol. 1, p. 117.
- 27 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus. The life and opin-*

- ions of Herr Teufelsdröckh in three books (1831), ed. Rodger L. Tarr, London and Berkeley 2000, pp. 10f. Teufelsdröckh's nurse, by the way, is called Gretchen.
- 28 The New German Doctor, or An Infallible Cure for a Scolding Wife, performed by this most excellent Operator, the like was never known in all Ages. To the tune of, Here I love, here I love; or, The English Traveller. British Library, Roxburghe Ballads, vol. 2, part 2, no. 382.
- 29 Tobias Smollett, *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1762), ed. Peter Wagner, Harmondsworth 1988, vol. 1, chapt. X, p. 116.
- 30 Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus* (1604), ed. Roma Gill, London and New York 1989, prologue, pp. 11–14.
- 31 British Library, Roxburghe Collection, vol. 3, part 2, no. 280f.
- 32 Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist* (1610), IV, vi. V., pp. 46–50.
- 33 Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (1814), ed. Andrew Hook, Harmondsworth 1980, p. 34.
- 34 Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk* (1796), ed. James Kinsley and Howard Anderson, Oxford 1980, p. 154.
- 35 William Camden, *Remains Concerning Britain*, London 1605, reprint 1974, p. 220.
- 36 John Hare, *Anti-Normanism*, London 1647, p. 3.
- 37 [Anon,] *The History of All Nations*, London 1771, p. 65.

References

- BMC = Frederick Stephens and Mary Dorothy George 1978: *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum*, 11 vols. London 1870–1954. Reprint London: British Museum.
- Barker, Hannah 1998: *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion*. Oxford: Longman.
- Black, Jeremy 1987: *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Black, Jeremy 2001: *The English Press 1621–1861*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing.
- Blaicher, Günther 1994: *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Empson, William 1987: *Faust and the Censor. The English Faust-book and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Forman Cody, Lisa 1999: "No Cure, No Money," or the Invisible Hand of Quackery: The Language of Commerce, Credit, and Cash in Eighteenth-Century British Medical Advertisements. *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28, 103–123.
- Habermas, Jürgen 1990: Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Katritzky, Peg 2001: Marketing Medicine: the Image of the Early Modern Mountebank. *Renaissance Studies* 15: 2, 121–153.
- McKendrick, Neil, John Brewer & John H. Plumb 1982: *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Meyer, Silke 2003: Die Ikonographie der Nation. National-Stereotype in der englischen Druckgraphik des 18. Jahrhunderts. Münster: Waxmann.
- Porter, Roy 1987: "I Think Ye Both Quacks". In: William F. Bynum & Roy Porter (eds.), *Medical Fringe & Medical Orthodoxy 1750 ~ 1850*. London: Croom Helm, pp. 56–78.
- Porter, Roy 2000: Quacks. Fakers and Charlatans in English Medicine. Stroud: Tempus.

Silke Meyer is lecturer of European Ethnology at Münster University. Her research interests and publications focus on hero figures, stereotypes, national identity, visual culture and media discourse as well as the culture of credit as part of an economic anthropology.
(meyers@uni-muenster.de)