



Made in Germany - A proof of technical perfection. Stereotypes of Germans in British advertising

Cornelia Neumann

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Seminar paper from the year 1998 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 1,0 (A), Humboldt-University of Berlin (Institute for Anglistics/ American Studies), course: Great Britain and Europe - Great Britain in Europe, 12 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The British attitude towards Germany seems to be ambiguous: there are still many World War II movies on television, there are serious newspaper articles and hostile tabloid cartoons, unfriendly governmental memos and – last but not least – advertising: The people dealing with this issue are of different political background. Therefore, they have contradictory intentions and express either friendly or hostile opinions: Nevertheless, certain stereotypes of Germans are recurrent, regardless of which attitude is represented.

The two following lists of German attributes have only recently been compiled: The first one is the result of the Chequers-Conference in March 1990, when Margaret Thatcher discussed the aspects of German reunification with some confidants: The Conference's consensus on „eternal“ German characteristics was : “insensitivity to the feeling of others, [...] aggressiveness; assertiveness, bullying, egotism [...].” The memo was not designed to be published, therefore one can assume that the participants spoke frankly.

Several other „German“ features can be found in a poll in which students were asked about national characteristics: According to the majority, Germans are: "orderly, (disciplined, organises, efficient, obedient to rules, inflexible, punctual); hard-working, (laborious and ambitious); arrogant (particularly in intellectual matters); complex (difficult to understand, Angst-ridden)".

My paper will focus on the occurrence of several of these images in advertising, especially in four campaigns released between 1993 and 1997: Three of them deal with German products promoted for German consumers, one of them deals with a British product for the British market but refers to Anglo-German conflict in order to tell its story. We will see that especially the stereotypical German virtues (as mentioned above) are applied in order to emphasise the value of the goods. In contrast, one example shows how negative images are used to show British superiority.

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