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Werbecomics at the Beginning of German Comics

Emmerich Huber and Josef Mauder

Paul Malone (Waterloo, Kanada)

German comics specialize in beginnings. The recent promotion of »*die Graphic Novel*« as a loan word from English and as the flagship of the German-language comics industry is only the latest attempt at renewal in a field that has always been marginalized in Germany relative to the greater economic, cultural and symbolic capital possessed by comics in other countries. Similar fresh starts, or false starts, have been made regularly since 1945. First, there was the rise of an under-capitalized local comics industry in 1950s West Germany, including small companies like Lehning Verlag and Gerstmayer Verlag; then the entry onto the market of import-dominated multinationals, originally principally from Denmark (beginning in the 1950s with Egmont Ehapa, and gaining momentum in the 1960s as Egmont's rival Carlsen began publishing comics in Germany). Another such start was the adoption of underground sensibilities in the 1970s, through American imports and local imitations; followed by the expansion into *bande-dessinée*-style albums for a collector's market through the

1980s; and after a massive post-reunification market contraction, the embrace of Japanese manga as a lifeboat in the mid-1990s. Building upon the unprecedented, wide popularity of manga, particularly among women, the graphic novel – a term that the publishers appear to take seriously not merely as a marketing term, but also as a form capable of genuine cultural consecration – was meant to open the 21st-century market to a broader adult readership. As the recent collapse of Egmont's graphic novel imprint indicates, however, this form seems to have failed to attract the hoped-for readers from either the manga audience or the literary readership (Hofmann, 13; von Törne, 34f.). Another beginning will now be necessary.

Despite all of these recurring attempts to place the German comics industry on a firmer footing, the German market remains small and precarious, with, as contemporary comics artist Marvin Clifford has recently described it, a history, but almost no local tradition:

Das Problem in Deutschland ist, dass wir eigentlich keine Comickultur haben, weil uns 50 Jahre Comickultur fehlen, da es neben der Bücherverbrennung im Nationalsozialismus auch so etwas wie Comicverbrennung gab. In der Nachkriegszeit wurden wir dann vor allem mit den Sachen konfrontiert, die gut verkauft werden konnten. Das waren dann eben Donald Duck und Lucky Luke, Comics, die in einer eigenen Kultur herangereift sind (Steffes, 2016b).

This has become a standard explanation for the weakness of the German-language comics scene; and yet this story is incomplete.

This essay examines some of the comics that fall outside of this narrative, because they were neither comic books nor sold on the commercial market. I situate the beginning of a specific German-language comics tradition in the field of advertising periodicals (*Werbezeitschriften* or *Kundenzeitschriften*) in the 1910s and 1920s, and in the connections between these periodicals and some of the important mainstream commercial periodicals of the day. After giving some of the historical context, I focus on the pioneering magazines given away with two of Germany's major margarine brands between 1909 and 1932. In particular, I describe the careers of Emmerich Huber and Josef Mauder, who worked first for competing magazines and later for the same periodical. Huber's relevance to the history of German comics has been well known for almost forty years (Knigge; Dolle-Weinkauff 21; 35); Mauder, however, has been much better known as a book illustrator (Ries) than he has for his role in integrating comics into both advertising and mainstream periodicals. In part, his relative obscurity may be due to the fact that Mauder's period of greatest prominence in this regard fell during the increasing pro-

pagandization of the mainstream magazines under the Nazi regime.

Throughout, I also draw points of comparison with the relationship between early comics and advertising in the US, as described by Ian Gordon (1998). The objective is to argue that a similar process of modernization occurred in both the US and Germany, and that in both cases this process spurred the production of advertising and the production of comics in tandem. This production began later in Germany than in the US, but nonetheless took place earlier in Germany than has generally been acknowledged.

Werbecomics and the False Dichotomy

There is indeed a long tradition of German-language comics, itself marginalized within this already marginalized milieu: with the debatable exception of Rolf Kauka's *Fix und Foxi* (1953–94), most of the longest-running, best-produced, and most widely disseminated indigenous comics in the German-speaking countries have been *Werbecomics*, whose roots lie in the *Kundenzeitschrift* of the early 20th century, well before the Second World War. These comics are nonetheless reduced to a footnote or prologue in most accounts. For example, they are mentioned as historical precursors to the 'real' comic – that is, the American-style comic with speech balloons – peripherally, in the cases of Dolle-Weinkauff (33f.) and Kaindl (2002, 149), and more centrally throughout the series *Deutsche Comieforschung* (Sackmann et al., since 2005); their continued renewal and existence into the present day, however,

often go largely unexamined. Instead, these older comics' alleged formal conservatism is emphasized, based on an artificial dichotomy between graphic narrative with, and without, speech balloons, the »reak *Sprechblasencomic* as late, unwelcome American interloper versus the supposedly traditional German *Bildergeschichte*, with narrative verse or prose captions beneath each picture in the style of Wilhelm Busch (1832–1908).

We might note here that similarly »conservative« comics existed in Britain, in particular those published by Amalgamated Press, which regularly combined captions and speech balloons. One of these comics, the weekly *Chips*, maintained this format proudly until its final number of 12 Sept. 1953 (Perry and Aldridge, 52; 84; 87). Historians such as George Perry or Roger Sabin describe such comics with captions as »old fashioned«, to be sure, but they explain this »as a sop to those critics who continued to complain that comics were a threat to literacy« (Sabin, 28). Rather than being instrumentalized as a bulwark against American influence, these British comics are accepted as full-fledged comics, and part of the national history.

Perhaps the strongest argument against applying this dichotomy to German comics history, however, is the observation that speech balloons were more commonly used, and appeared earlier, than the standard argument acknowledges. Even if only *Sprechblasencomics* are real comics, then Germany and Austria had them long before 1945; not only, but perhaps most prominently, in *Werbecomics*. They also appeared in mass-market humour and satire magazines that are likewise margina-

lized in the history, and there were influences in both directions between the two forms. Moreover, an examination of the development of *Werbecomics* in Germany reveals some interesting parallels with the development of comics in the United States of America.

Modernization, Advertising and Comics

Ian Gordon interprets the rise of comic strips and eventually of comic books in America, with their close ties to commercial advertising, as a manifestation of a modernity whose salient features included the increasing orientation toward consumerism and the market, and the commodification of society around the turn of the 20th century (Gordon 1998, 4–6).

These modernizing developments occurred in the nascent German Empire, however, at roughly the same time. As Dirk Reinhardt has pointed out, »Vor 1870 ist für kein einziges deutsches Wirtschaftsunternehmen die Existenz einer eigenen Werbeabteilung nachweisbar« (24), but this situation changed rapidly once Berliner Johann Hoff began to use in-house advertising to speed the sales of his *Hoffschen Malzextrakt*, a health potion of dubious therapeutic value but enormous profitability (Reinhardt, 24f.). Other, more respectable manufacturers initially tried to hold to the superiority of word-of-mouth advertising and a good reputation, but the *Gründerkrise*, the 1873 recession that set in shortly after the unification of the Empire, began to weaken their resolve (Reinhardt, 25f.). Rapid industrialization was also leading to the

invention of new products, whose novel qualities had to be publicized in order to create demand: »Die Ware lobt sich selbst« could no longer be the watchword (Swett, Wiesen and Zatlin, 6f.; Reinhardt, 27), and by the turn of the century »the practices of advertising« became in Germany, as in America, »a signally important signifier of modernity« (de Grazia, xv). As Reinhardt describes it,

[Sowohl die Markenartikelindustrie als auch der Einzelhandel] unterlagen gerade in der Zeit um die Jahrhundertwende einer starken Modernisierungsdynamik, durch die sie als funktionale Bestandteile in die entstehende Massenkonsumgesellschaft integriert wurden. (26)

These developments were further accelerated by the rise of a dedicated *Generalanzeigerpresse* – part of the increasing number of newspapers and magazines thanks to technical advances in printing – and by the growing dependence of all these periodicals on advertising revenue, which in many cases amounted to two-thirds of a periodical’s income between the early years of the 20th century and the economic difficulties of the post-World War I era (Reuveni, 206–208).

Already before the First World War, however, brand-name manufacturers had adopted strategies of inculcating loyalty not only among their customers, but also among their customers’ children, with the aid of giveaway articles: »Da es noch keine billig herzustellenden Plastikartikel gab, bestanden diese Werbebeilagen oft aus gedrucktem Papier« (Lukasch, 131). As a result, advertisement-oriented magazines or *Kundenzeitschriften* for children – *Kinderkundenhefte* – became numerous, particularly between the World Wars. Jana Mikota explicitly sees

this development as an extension of the same processes that were occurring in the US:

Die Ursprünge der Werbezeitschriften liegen in den US-amerikanischen Werbemethoden, die schon früh Kinder als Objekte der Werbung entdeckt hatten. (874)

Margarine Manufacturers as Children’s Publishers

The pioneer in this form of advertising was the Rhineland firm of Jurgens & Prinzen, manufacturers of a margarine called »Cocosa« (Mikota, 875; Sackmann 2016, 6). The firm had been founded in 1888 in Goch as an offshoot of a Dutch company – the Dutch dominated European margarine production in the late 1800s – but as competition entered the field, the need to increase the efficacy of the company’s advertising spurred the founding of *Der kleine Coco: Zeitschrift für Unterhaltung und Belehrung für die Jugend* in September 1909. *Der kleine Coco* appeared bi-weekly; each issue comprised 16 pages of cheap newsprint with black and white illustrations in traditional 19th-century style by the established Munich illustrator Hermann Frenz (1880–1955). The magazine contained »Gedichte, Märchen, Sach- und Tiergeschichten, Rätsel und Preisausschreiben. ... Natürlich gibt es darin auch Koch- und Backrezepte« (Mikota, 875), as well as high doses of German imperialist patriotism, but it published neither Wilhelm Busch-style *Bildergeschichten* nor comics. The pages for each year were through-numbered, rather than beginning from »1« with each issue, encouraging readers to collect the year’s

issues and then bind them into a single volume; back issues could be purchased already bound in this fashion, a strategy established already in the 1890s by the mass-market illustrated weekly magazines, »which also extended these publications' life span«, and helped dispose of unsold individual copies (Reuveni, 206).

Current issues of *Der kleine Coco* were available free with purchase of a 500-gram packet of Cocosa margarine. The eponymous central figure of the magazine was little Coco, a German-educated black inhabitant of the colony of German East Africa. Despite the fictive literacy and agency that justified his being named as editor on the magazine's masthead (Lukasch, 133; Mikota, 853), however, in terms of visual representation Coco remained a stereotype, a »racialized, minimalized abstracted native« typical of this phase of the German colonial era (Ciarlo, 300). His fanciful name, like that of the product itself, reminded the customer that the margarine was coconut oil-based, and not a dairy product.

In 1915, however, the First World War led the German Imperial government to fix the prices of many commodities, including margarine; advertising thus became redundant, and *Coco* ceased publication until 1924, when the German currency was reformed and price controls were lifted (Lukasch, 134; 146). The magazine then resumed its biweekly publication and pre-war volume numbering, so that the first year of the new version was counted as volume eight.

The revival of *Der kleine Coco* and the introduction of Jurgens & Prinzen's new margarine brand, »Rahma buttergleich«, was met with renewed competition from Jurgens' major rival,

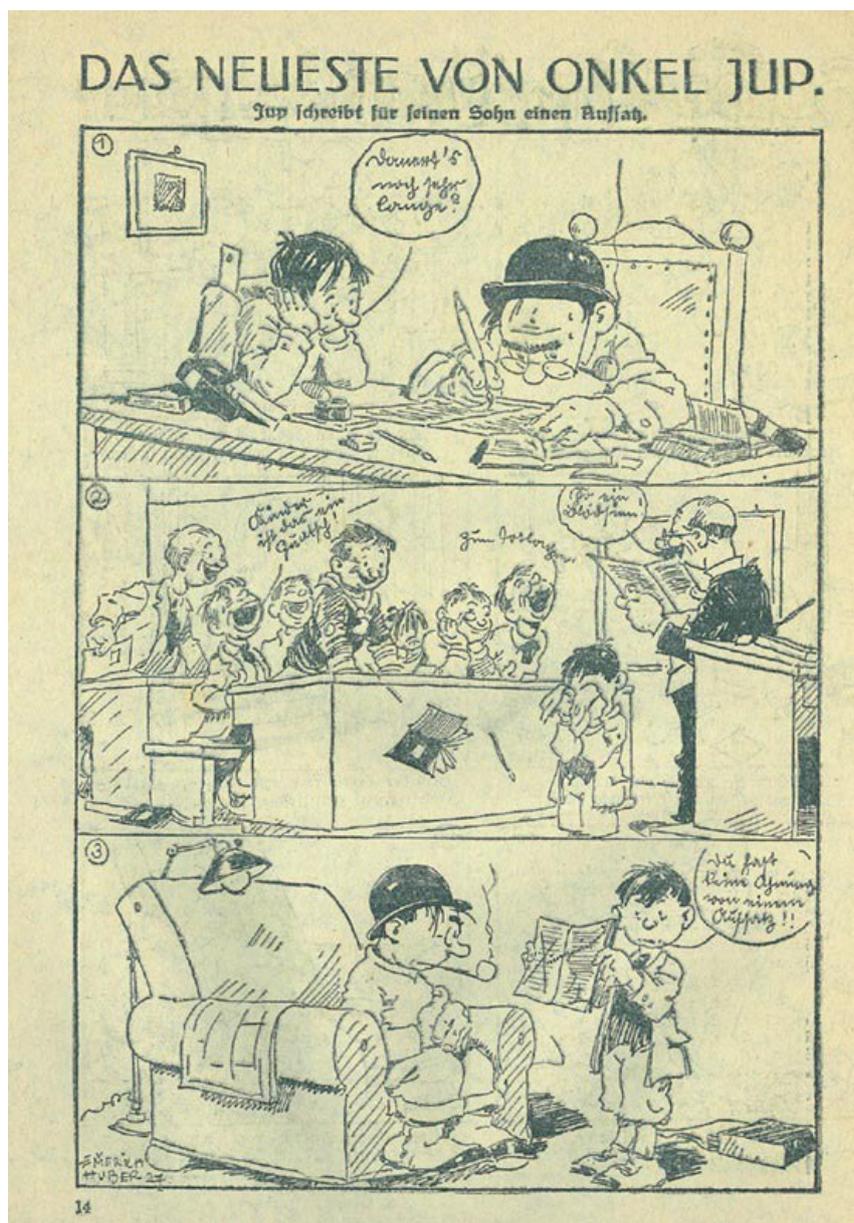
the firm of Van den Bergh – likewise Dutch – whose margarine was called »Blauband«. Van den Bergh launched its own children's magazine, *Die Blauband-Woche*, at the end of 1924 (Sackmann 2004, 59); sixteen pages thick, and offering stories, puzzles and contests, like *Coco*, but also containing comic strips, printed in two colours, and appearing weekly, twice as often as its competitor's magazine. At first *Die Blauband-Woche* was unexceptional in quality, but one of its main artists, Emmerich Huber (1903–79) would soon set his stamp on the magazine (Lukasch, 158).

Emmerich Huber and *Das Neueste von Onkel Jup*

Huber, born in Vienna, had moved to Berlin with his family as a child. As a young man, he became disenchanted with working as a technical artist for the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft, and enrolled in further training at the Berliner Volkshochschule under Hans Baluschek (1870–1935), a member of the Berlin Secession and a socially critical realist painter and illustrator (Sackmann 2004, 58). Huber then took a position at the advertising department of the publisher Rudolf Mosse, to which the illustrations for *Die Blauband-Woche* were contracted out. Huber's first known published *Bildergeschichte*, a caption comic titled *Die Tigerjagd*, appeared in the first issue of the magazine at the end of 1924; it was a clumsy and unpromising effort (Sackmann 2004, 57; 59).

Fortunately, however, the magazine's weekly publication rhythm afforded Huber a good deal of practice; by the end of the first year he

was clearly *Die Blauband-Woche*'s leading artist, particularly compared to the stiffer, traditionalist renderings of his colleague, the Swedish illustrator Johan Fredrik, or Janne, Graffman (1871–1937?). Huber was capable of working in a realistic style, more idealized than that of his teacher Baluschek, to illustrate the magazine's adventure stories; but he could also produce fully-fledged cartoons and comics in a charming, rounded style that compares well to many American comics of the time. In particular, Huber's comic strip *Das Neueste von Onkel Jup*, which appeared irregularly in *Die Blauband-Woche* from 1925 until 1932, began as a pantomime strip, but soon became notable for its early use of speech balloons, which Huber filled with dialogue written in Sütterlin script. Onkel Jup, a tiny man with a single bushy eyebrow who continually smokes a pipe and wears a bowler hat – even in bed – is a born loser with terrible luck. Jup's attempts to hang wallpaper (as in his first appearance; Sackmann 2004, 58) or to hoe the garden lead to disaster; if he attempts to catch a rabbit at Easter, he only pursues it back to the safety of its rabbit



Ill. 1: Huber's comic mastery. Emmerich Huber, *Das Neueste von Onkel Jup*. Jup schreibt für seinen Sohn einen Aufsatz. In: *Die Blauband-Woche* 3.16 (1927), p. 14.

farm; if he decides to use his umbrella to carry his groceries, a cloudburst is assured.

In one strip from 1927, for example, »Jup schreibt für seinen Sohn einen Aufsatz«, and flunks the assignment – already an old joke, and one which would again be recycled seven years later in the first appearance in the *Berliner*

Illustrierte Zeitung of *Vater und Sohn*, the famous pantomime comic strip by e. o. plauen (Erich Ohser, 1903–44; the first *Vater und Sohn* strip, *Der schlechte Hausaufsatz*, appeared in December 1934). In the first of Huber's three vertically arranged panels, divided by thick black lines rather than gutters, Jup writes the essay – sweat drips from his brow as his son Fritz asks, »Dauert's noch sehr lange?«. We see the result in the centre panel: Fritz stands, weeping into his handkerchief, as his classmates jeer and the teacher, more amused than angry, proclaims, »So ein Blödsinn!«. Finally, at the bottom of the page, Fritz has returned home to show his father the low mark: a 4, with the remark »ungenügend«. Jup glowers sheepishly at the essay booklet as Fritz remarks, »Du hast keine Ahnung von einem Aufsatz!!« (Huber, 14; Ill. 1). Each panel shows an economy of line and shading, and a mastery of perspective, anatomy and expression. The joke works not because it is original, but because it is told efficiently and gracefully.

Huber himself would later describe *Onkel Jup* as a »gewaltige[r] Erfolg[]«; indeed, by 1927, Huber was able to leave Mosse and set up his own studio (Knigge, 113). From this point, Huber became increasingly dominant as artist for *Die Blauband-Woche*, drawing most of the

comic strips that appeared in the magazine, including a series about the siblings *Hans und Lottchen* and a great number of unconnected gag strips. These strips were apparently written or co-written by Hans Flemming, then *feuilleton* editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt* and later chief editor of the satire magazine *Ulke* (Knigge, 113). Only the *Onkel Jup* strips, however, appeared without captions of rhyming couplets beneath the panels, and *Jup* thus developed »zu einem veritablen Sprechblasencomic« (Sackmann 2004, 60).

By Huber's own later account (as told to Andreas C. Knigge in 1979), this technique was a clear case of »amerikanischer Einfluss«: Huber had worked on an advertising campaign for Chevrolet automobiles »so 1930 / 31« (Knigge, 115), and he was told that his work would interest William Randolph Hearst's newspapers in New York. He found copies of *Bringing Up Father* and *The Katzenjammer Kids*, among others,



Ill. 2: The first speech balloon in *Der heitere Fridolin* – here uttered by a horse. Paul Simmel, *Die Erfindungen des Professors Pechmann. Der Sprungfeder-Flugapparat* (excerpt). In: *Der heitere Fridolin* 1.1 (1921), p. 9.

and used them as models for three trial strips that were then forwarded to New York; Huber then apparently heard nothing more about the matter (Knigge, 115).

Neither Knigge, who conducted the original interview, nor Sackmann, who employs the interview as a source, appears to note a discrepancy in Huber's story: *Onkel Jupp* was already using speech balloons, speed lines, and other supposedly American visual effects several years before the Chevrolet campaign is supposed to have taken place. Either the elderly Huber simply got his dates wrong, or his »American influence« in fact began well before his American opportunity – or these techniques were already current in Germany. In fact, among his German influences, Huber names both Fritz Koch-Gotha (1877–1956; Huber mistakenly calls him »Ernst Koch-Gotha«, but he can only mean the illustrator of the hugely popular 1924 children's book *Die Häschenschule*) and Paul Simmel (1887–1933). The latter was well known for such comic strips as *Laatsch und Bommel* and *Professor Pechmann* in the first few years of Ullstein's *Der heitere Fridolin* (1921–28), a successful children's magazine that quickly became controversial due to its emphasis on entertainment value – much of it somewhat silly – rather than educational content, though in fact it offered plenty of the latter as well (Mikota, 862). In these strips, Simmel used effects such as speed lines and, occasionally, speech balloons (Ill. 2), prompting Eckart Sackmann to write:

Die Sprechblasen wie auch die immer wiederkehrenden Speedlines verweisen darauf, dass Simmel Comics amerikanischen Ursprungs vermutlich bekannt waren. (Sackmann 2004, 55)

Simmel's caption comics bear an even stronger resemblance, however, to those in contemporary British magazines such as *Comic Cuts*, *Chuckles*, or *The Rainbow* (Perry and Aldridge, 66–70); though Simmel's use of speech balloons in *Der heitere Fridolin* was in fact much less frequent even than that in the British comics, which were themselves reticent by American standards. Though Simmel left *Fridolin* in the mid-1920s, Huber must have known this work.

Die Blauband-Woche and Character Construction

Formal techniques, however, were not the only similarities between Huber's *Blauband-Woche* strips and the American comics; decisions at the editorial level also reproduced some of the conditions prevailing in American newspaper strips. As Ian Gordon points out,

Reading the nuances of a comic strip ... requires a regular and reasonably constant exposure to it. ... Comic strip characters' identities are shaped in repetitious story lines and variations on set gags. ... Character then is re-created in each instance of a strip in a never-ending construction of identity. But even as readers take the time to assemble their knowledge of comic strip characters, they distance themselves from them. ... readers come to look on comic humor as a satire on the foibles of a strip's characters and not on the readers' own idiosyncrasies. These two features of comics – the episodic and continuing construction of identity, and a critical distance between subject and reader – lent themselves to advertising strategies that offered goods and services as a means of constructing identity and framed those messages as morality tales. This type of advertising, which increased in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, rested in part on Americans' familiarity with comic strip narrative techniques. (Gordon 1998, 10f.)

This observation applies equally well to *Die Blauband-Woche*; for one thing, the use of speech balloons and speed lines in a widely available but utilitarian publication such as *Die Blauband-Woche* in the mid-1920s demonstrates that already at this early date, the conventions of American-style comics were also known to young German readers (Dolle-Weinkauff, 21). Moreover, in the absence of the daily or weekly newspaper infrastructure that existed in America, the weekly *Blauband-Woche* used Onkel Jup and other recurring characters – Herr and Frau Müller, Lottchen and Hans – intensively: in comics, in *Bildergeschichten* with rhyming couplets, in poems, and in prose stories, building the readers' familiarity with them and referring to them at one point as »unsere ganzen lieben Mitarbeiter und Freunde von der *Blauband-Woche*« (Auf zur Gartenarbeit, 9). If these characters did not appear in strips with the regularity and frequency of their American counterparts, their identities were nonetheless fleshed out by other means; in fact, Onkel Jup, the hapless protagonist of the comic strips, and supposedly the editor of the magazine, becomes in the serialized prose stories both a gifted inventor and something of an adventurer. In various stories between 1926 and 1929, for example, he builds a rocket car, uses battery-powered roller skates to climb a mountain, and invents a time-travelling »Zeit-Lokomotive«; even during a relatively prosaic trip to Africa, when Jup is captured by stereotypical natives and fears the worst, he is spared when the locals recognize him from the cover of their copy of *Die Blauband-Woche* (Jup reist nach Afrika, 4f.)! All of these adventures explicitly inflate Jup's sense of self-importance; which, in conjunc-

tion with his continual humiliation in the comic strips, also builds the »critical distance« that Gordon describes.

In this respect, *Die Blauband-Woche* also showed further similarities to *Der heitere Fridolin*, which likewise featured a recurring cast of characters (including those appearing in Simmel's comic strips) around the eponymous editorial figure, Fridolin; these characters also appeared on the cover, in various comics, and in prose stories. In fact, *Die Blauband-Woche* seems to have been closely modeled on *Fridolin*, though it avoided its commercial precursor's anarchic streak. Peter Lukasch even suggests that the sudden and unexplained cancellation of *Der heitere Fridolin* in 1928, after it had managed to weather the worst of the Weimar recession (selling well even though its cover price rose in its first two years from one mark to 100,000 marks!), may have been due to the combination of the new, worldwide economic crisis and the increased competition in the field – not least from equally high-quality *Kundenzeitschriften*, such as *Die Blauband-Woche*, that were being given away for free (Lukasch, 199).

The Margarine Magazines Go Head to Head

The real competition of *Die Blauband-Woche*, of course, was not commercial magazines like *Fridolin*, but rather Jurgens & Prinzen's *Der kleine Coco*, which claimed a print run of two million. The popularity and importance of the Jurgens & Prinzen magazines is evidenced by the fact that as early as 1914, disreputable characters were using the addresses of children

who had written in to *Coco*'s various contests to defraud them by asking them to send in money in order to claim their alleged prizes (Lukasch, 157). *Die Blauband-Woche* appears to have equalled *Der kleine Coco* in terms of circulation and reach, and both magazines must have been very widely disseminated (Lukasch, 146; 158); Huber was well aware that *Die Blauband-Woche* »hatte eine enorme Verbreitung« (Knigge, 113). By comparison, in 1928, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, »by far the largest German magazine«, reached a peak circulation of 1.8 million copies before numbers began to drop during the economic crash; no other such magazine was able to sell even a million copies during this period (Knoch, 223). Among children's magazines, *Der heitere Fridolin* – considered among the most popular – »claimed three to 400,000 readers between 1922 and 1929« (Springman, 112); less than a quarter of *Der kleine Coco*'s reach.

The ongoing rivalry with *Die Blauband-Woche* made the new version of *Der kleine Coco* after 1924 a much more varied publication than its first iteration: it now included *Bildergeschichten*, as well as folk tales, puzzles, poems and factual reports. Little Coco himself was initially carried over – he had grown up and returned to what was now Tanganyika, communicating with the magazine by mail – but he was replaced as figurehead by *das Rahma-Mädchen*, who posed fetchingly with the company's product. That product's name was soon changed from »Rahma buttergleich« to »Rama butterfein«, to prevent the margarine from being mistaken for a dairy product (Lukasch, 147), and the magazine's title was changed to *Die Rama-Post vom kleinen Coco*, maintaining the

fiction that Coco was corresponding with the editors. The magazine also switched to full-colour printing in response to *Die Blauband-Woche*'s two-colour splendour; but the quality of the paper and printing was lowered to defray the additional expense. The actual content remained of high quality, however, with new writers and additional artists, particularly Josef Mauder (1884–1969), joining the staff beside the original illustrator Frenz (Lukasch, 149).

While Emmerich Huber had grown up as a Berliner, Josef »Sepp« Mauder spent his life in and around Munich. Mauder, whose father worked for the Bavarian royal family, studied glass-blowing at the Munich Kunstgewerbeschule, and by the time he was twenty he was illustrating children's books such as Heinrich Wolgast's wildly successful *Schöne alte Kinderreime* (1904) in a witty, colourful *Jugendstil* (Ries, 404). He also joined FC Bayern and achieved local celebrity as a footballer as well as an artist; his passion for sport led him to introduce sports caricatures into the German market (Ries, 404f.), and he contributed illustrations to specialist magazines such as *Fußball* as well as mass-market illustrated magazines and prestigious art journals. Most notably, in 1905 he took over the artistic direction of the famous humour magazine *Meggendorfer Blätter* after its founder and namesake, Lothar Meggendorfer (1847–1925), stepped down.

Mauder was only one of several important artists and writers hired by Jurgens & Prinzen at this time, turning their staff into »das Who is Who aller einschlägig tätigen Illustratoren und Dichter« (Lukasch, 151), with backgrounds extending from high art and literature to advertising. Moreover, to counter the weekly appear-

rance of Van den Bergh's *Blauband-Woche*, Jurgens & Prinzen put their creative staff to work on a second biweekly magazine, *Fips*, *Lachzeitung für liebe, kleine Kinder*, which appeared in alternation with *Die Rama-Post* and was aimed at a younger audience. Though it was only eight pages compared with the *Rama-Post*'s sixteen, and entirely in black and white, it was larger. In its second year, colour pages were added, and the title became *Fips, die heitere Post vom kleinen Coco*, though *Coco* was no more in evidence here than in his original magazine. Instead, the masthead figure and fictive editor was a

cheerful, chubby little boy in glasses, carrying an oversized pen under one arm and holding in the other hand a piece of paper reading »Ich bin der Fips!«. By the third year, the title had settled as *Die Rama-Post vom lustigen Fips*, so that the two Jurgens & Prinzen magazines now had parallel titles. *Fips* was much more visually engaging than the other magazines – Lukasch describes it as an »opulentes Lese- und Schauvergnügen für Kinder« (152) – with large pictures prevailing over brief verse texts, particularly on its full-colour pages. Main artists for *Fips* included Mauder, who also drew for *Coco*; Mauder's *Meggendorfer Blätter* associate Karl Pommerhantz (1857–1940), Heinz Geilfus (1890–1956), and Ernst Kutzer (1880–1965). Unfortunately, cheap newsprint paper and poor quality printing again offset the costs of hiring such expertise. Nonetheless, the final product was beautiful, bearing comparison to any children's periodical of the era—and like *Der heitere Fridolin*, *Fips* made no explicit claim to educational value (Lukasch, 151f.). Like *Coco*, *Fips* could also be bound together by the purchaser, or published at the end of each publication year as an already bound volume.



Ill. 3: A rare speech balloon in the more conservative Jurgens & Prinzen magazines. Josef Mauder, *Aus dem Reiseskizzenbuch des kleinen Fips*. In: *Fips, der heitere Post vom kleinen Coco* 2.13 (1926), p. 103.

Josef Mauder's Trial Balloon

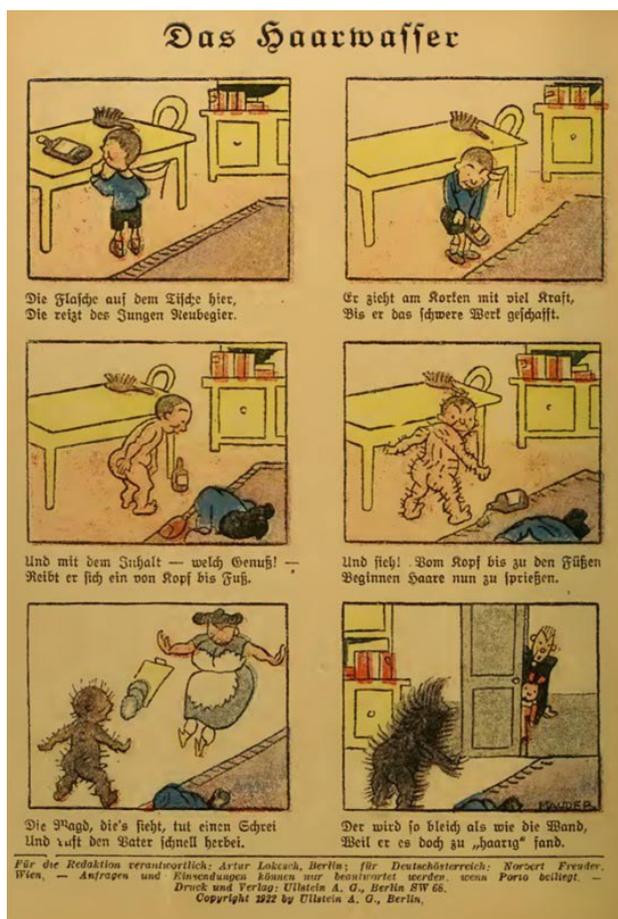
Within the boundaries of its more conservative aesthetic, *Fips* aspired to provide fun for its somewhat younger readers. However, unlike either *Blauband-Woche* or *Fridolin*, it depended much less upon recurring characters and played hardly at all with the idea that these characters both constituted a surrogate family

and contributed behind the scenes to running the magazine. Thus it is unusual and even somewhat incongruent when, in mid-1926, a dedicated »Reisenummer von Josef Mauder« – capitalizing on Mauder’s star power and featuring only his artwork – presents a full-page comic ostensibly written and drawn by Fips himself (Mauder, 103; Ill. 3). Entitled *Aus dem Reiseskizzenbuch des kleinen Fips*, the page consists of nine captioned pictures in three rows, executed in a trained artist’s imitation of a childish scrawl. There are no panels or gutters; the pictures are separated only by having a distinct caption in Sütterlin script for each. The captions describe the pictures with a touch of humour: »Tante Frida geht auch mit aufs Land« shows Frida walking laden with cats and birdcages as the sun shines above her. Next to her, the portly, mustachioed father sweats, carrying the entire family’s luggage: »Der Papa braucht nicht mehr ins Dampfbad«. The third picture shows the unpleasant result when »Onkel Willi hat sich auf die Ramabrötchen gesetzt«. In the second row, the situations become more absurd: a picture of the train conductor waving his signal baton is labelled »Der Winkewinkemann«, while the next picture shows him stuffing a massively rotund passenger onto the train car: »Höchste Zeit zum Einsteigen!« The third shows one passenger apparently astounded by another’s snoring, with the caption »Freikonzert«. In the bottom row, the train journey is over; a boy in short pants, presumably Fips himself (since this is where the page is signed »Fips hats gezeichnet«) is surprised to be licked in the face by a happy cow – the caption reads »Freundlicher Empfang«. In the centre, a

laughing little girl with a bow in her hair wades fully clothed into the duck pond, pursued by a terrified maid: »Klein Lottchen planscht«. Finally, the little boy stands, arms raised in joy, before a rustically dressed, smiling couple. Between them, a loaf of bread and a package of Rama stands on a round table. »O fein, die Bauern essen auch Ramal« exults Fips. At the page bottom, a row of farm animals runs past to form a decorative border.

The layout of this page would have been nothing new for Mauder; the full page of separate but chronologically or thematically related vignettes was a common form in the *Meggendorfer Blätter* and other humour magazines of the time, and Mauder and his colleagues produced them as a matter of course. What is unusual, not only for *Fips* but also for the mainstream humour magazines of the time, is that in the third picture Onkel Willi reacts to sitting on the sandwiches with a speech balloon – »O, weh!«. Exactly like the speech balloons in Huber’s *Onkel Jup* strips, the balloon is directed to the speaker’s mouth not by a point extending out of the balloon, but a simple thick line, as if the balloon were on a string.

In fact, the speech balloon on a string was also the form usually used by Paul Simmel in *Der heitere Fridolin*; and Mauder must also have known Simmel’s work. Not only was Simmel famous, but Mauder had briefly worked on *Fridolin* in its early years as well, providing the first and final episodes of the brief series *Stumpf und Stiel*, mischievous boys reminiscent of *Max and Moritz* (Mauder 1921a; 1921b), and a one-shot caption strip entitled *Das Haarwasser* (Mauder 1922; Ill. 4). Mauder would also have been familiar with the childlike style that



Ill. 4: Some of Mauder's early work for *Der heitere Fridolin*. Josef Mauder, *Das Haarwasser*. In: *Der heitere Fridolin* 2.7 (1922), p. 16.

most of the *Fridolin* artists used, which simplified trading off characters: the middle installment of *Stumpf und Stiel* was drawn by *Fridolin* regular Albert Schaefer-Ast (1890–1951).

Aus dem Reiseskizzenbuch des kleinen Fips caused no revolution in the format of *Fips*, the magazine; subsequent numbers of that year show Mauder returning to a more traditional style as one of a group of artists. If his strip had been an experiment, it seemed to be at an end.



Ill. 5: The cover to the newly merged *Rama im Blauband-Woche*, showing the mixture of styles from its two precursors. Masthead artist unknown, possibly Franz Würbel (1896–?); illustration by Emmerich Huber. In: *Rama im Blauband-Woche* 1.1 (1931), p. 1.

The End of the Competition

In 1929, the two major margarine firms, Jurgens & Prinzen and Van den Bergh, decided to end their competition and merged into a company known in German as the Margarine-Verkaufs-Union. Their products were likewise fused as »Rama im Blauband«, and as a result their three separate regularly appearing magazines ceased publication by 1931 and were replaced by a single weekly publication, *Rama im Blauband-Woche, Jugendzeitschrift*

zur *Unterhaltung und Belehrung*, the first issue of which appeared early in 1931. The cover of the magazine shows that the two styles of magazines have been rather crudely combined: the old-fashioned masthead is reminiscent of the previous Jurgens & Prinzen magazines, but the modern cover illustration is by Huber (Ill. 5).

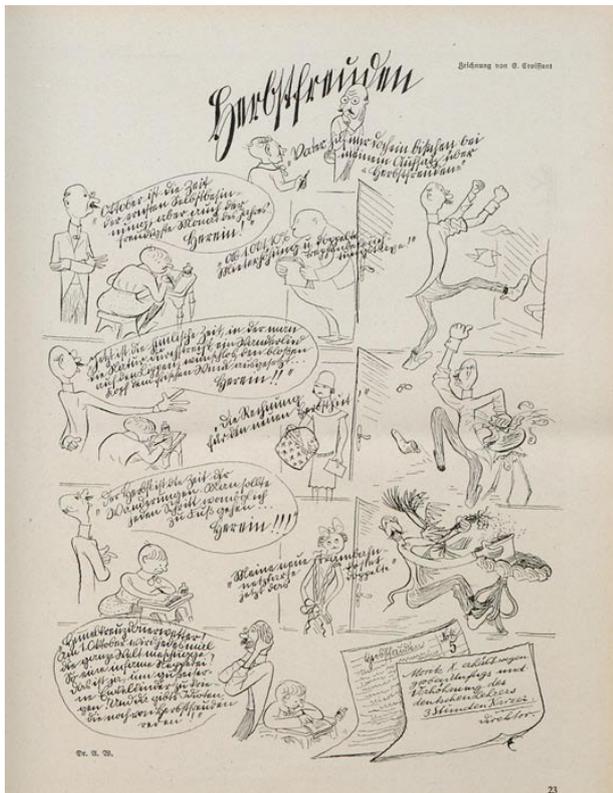
Although the magazine represented an amalgamation of all of the previously existing periodicals and their creative staffs, *Rama im Blauband-Woche* appears to have been a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth, since the two divergent styles never meshed (Lukasch, 162; Sackmann 2004, 61). After less than a year's run, it was withdrawn from publication after forty-eight issues at the beginning of 1932. Lukasch speculates that what had been a hugely successful, if expensive, promotion may have been cancelled due to a change in legislation regarding advertisement in Germany: as of 9 March 1932 it was forbidden to give away goods or services with purchases under threat of prosecution (Lukasch, 162; RGB 1932 I). There would eventually be a specific exception to the law made for *Kundenzeitschriften*; this amendment, however, was first made well after the Second World War, in August 1953 (BGB 1953 I).

In any case, by 1931 and the time of the supposed Chevrolet campaign, Emmerich Huber was about to withdraw from the later incarnation of the margarine magazine and move on to other contracts, including posters, book covers and advertising in mass-market magazines, where the quality of his work continued to be recognized (Sackmann 2004, 61; Frenzel 1932, 24–29; Frenzel 1935, 48–53), as

well as contributing cartoons to mass-market periodicals such as the *Neue Illustrierte Zeitung* (Knigge, 113). In the meantime, however, Josef Mauder's experiment did have repercussions after all.

Mauder Takes His Balloons to the Mainstream – At the Worst Time

When *Aus dem Reiseskizzenbuch des kleinen Fips* was published in 1926, nothing similar was appearing in Mauder's work in the *Meggendorfer Blätter*. His colleague Eugen Croissant published a full-page cartoon, *Herbstfreuden*, with a kind of speech balloons in the 7 Oct. number of that year (Croissant 23; Ill. 6; Croissant's illustrations, however, often played with visual representations of sound, and his idiosyncratic speech balloons do not resemble those of comics). Mauder himself seems never to have used speech balloons in his *Meggendorfer* work; and yet, soon after the *Meggendorfer Blätter* was absorbed into its older rival, *Fliegende Blätter*, at the beginning of 1930, Mauder not only continued to contribute regularly, but also added speech balloons into his drawings with surprising frequency, and the childlike style he had used in his *Reiseskizzenbuch* strip became his prevalent style in the magazine for adults as well (Ill. 7). Emmerich Huber was able to integrate speech balloons into his work only in the context of advertising, whether for children or for adults, but Mauder managed to infiltrate them into the main content of the adult magazines: His first such strip in *Fliegende Blätter*, poking fun at Bavarian hospitality toward other Germans, appeared less than a



Ill. 6: Croissant's vignettes often experimented with representing sound – here in the form of speech balloons. Eugen Croissant, *Herbstfreuden*. In: *Meggendorfer Blätter* 1868 (1926), p. 23.

year after the amalgamation with *Meggendorfer Blätter*, in the 14 Aug. 1930 number (Mauder 1930, 110: Ill. 6). Probably the pinnacle of his achievement in this realm is a 16 June 1938 full-page cartoon – not as a series of vignettes – set in his favourite spot, on a football field, in which the goalkeeper bends down to admire a four-leaf clover just as an opponent shoots a goal, and six of the players express their joy or horror via speech balloons, including the remark, »Mensch, dich hat wohl'n kranker Affe gebissen!« (Mauder 1938, 347; Ill. 8).

Unfortunately, by this time Germany was on the verge of war, and Mauder's success in integrating speech balloons into the *Fliegende Blätter*



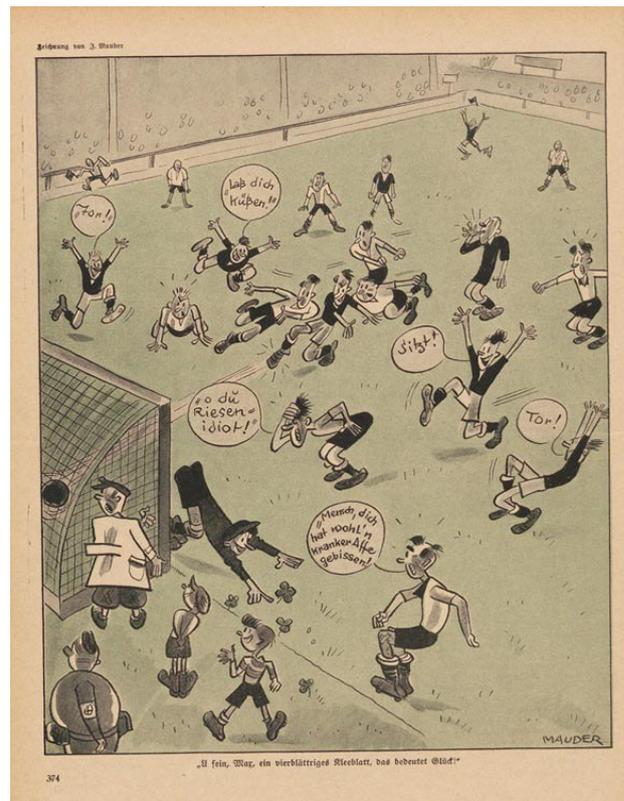
Ill. 7: Mauder's earliest speech balloons in the *Fliegende Blätter*. Josef Mauder, *Alles für den Fremdenverkehr*. In: *Fliegende Blätter* 4437 (1930), p. 110.

would be overshadowed: the magazine, with Mauder as one of its most prominent artists, was about to descend into the depths of propaganda. More and more, Mauder's work, and that of his colleagues, was mandated to the numbing repetition of anti-foreign and anti-Semitic tropes. Even Emmerich Huber was enlisted to provide an anti-Churchill cartoon in the 25 July 1940 number, showing Britain's last allies as rats (Huber 1940, 45). It was only the second, and final, time that he was ever published in the magazine, after a bland cartoon signed only »Emmerich« in the 23 June 1938 number (Huber 1938, 388), a mere one issue after Mauder's football *tour de force*. In

neither case did Huber use his signature style, nor speech balloons, though they are both technically well executed enough. Huber continued to publish advertising comics in mass-market magazines, most notably for Wybert cough lozenges (Knigge, 114), as well as being forced to provide political cartoons for the Nazi Party's *Illustrierter Beobachter* (Knigge, 113; Sackmann 2004, 56, 61); Mauder's prominence at the *Fliegende Blätter* grew as the magazine itself shrank in stature. Although his comics could still be lively and witty when he drew from everyday occurrences or sports, his enforced propaganda cartoons became increasingly formulaic and lifeless. His final full-page comic using speech balloons, informing the reader how to keep small livestock properly for the war effort, appeared on 21 Sept. 1944 (Mauder 1944, 135; Ill. 9), in the penultimate issue of the magazine before it was cancelled for the duration of Goebbels's »total war«.

The *Werbecomic* Lives On

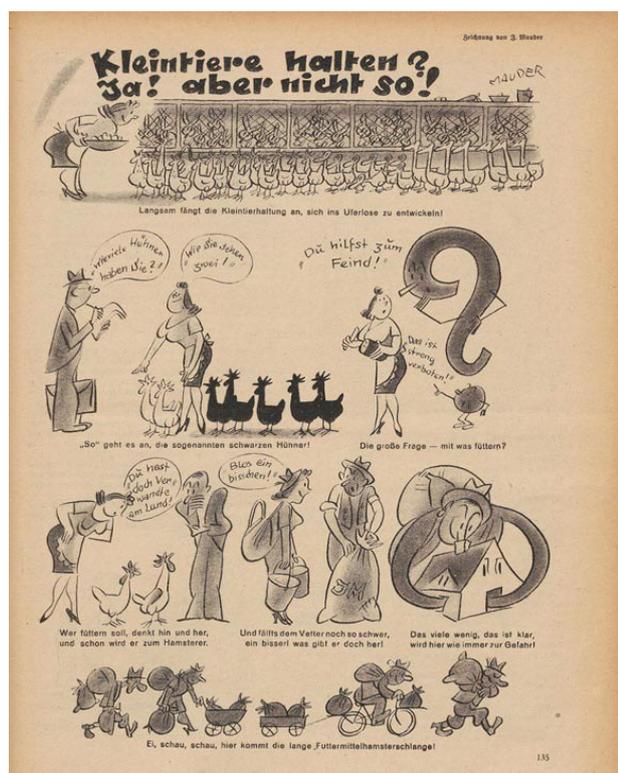
By the time *Rama im Blauband-Woche* disappeared in 1932, other companies had taken up the practice of publishing magazines and other materials for their customers' children. Not all of these early publications contained either *Bildergeschichten* or comics. Some of them, however, did so from an early stage, while others came to do so later, or became the precursors of comics that claimed a continuity with the earlier forms of publication. The Hamburg coffee importing firm of Darboven, for example, had begun by the mid-1920s to use caption comic strips featuring an anthropomorphic coffee bean,



Ill. 8: Mauder's beloved sport gets the comic treatment. Josef Mauder, »O fein, Max, ein vierblättriges Kleeblatt, das bedeutet Glück!« In: *Fliegende Blätter* 4846 (1938), p. 374.

Darbohne, to advertise its products, in a campaign that was redrawn and reissued through the 1950s and 1960s; Darboven's more recent comic *Darbo*, starring a rejuvenated Darbohne, appeared in the form of a contemporary speech-balloon comic from 2006 to 2009. A better-known example of this continuity is the ongoing existence of *Lurchi*, the comic mascot of Salamander Shoes, after eighty years.

Although these free giveaway magazines are often overlooked by historians of children's literature, and they were regarded even by their consumers as inconsequential and disposable, many of them were of an extremely high quality in terms of production values and content.



Ill. 9: Mauder's final comic with speech balloons in the *Fliegende Blätter*. Josef Mauder, *Kleintiere halten? Ja! Aber nicht so!* In: *Fliegende Blätter* 5173 (1944), p. 135.

They employed gifted writers and illustrators, many of whom also worked for adult-targeted periodicals or in the book publishing industry, and they were tremendously influential for the formation of other children's magazines, of magazines for adults and, ultimately, of comics in Germany as well.

Because the modern comic developed earliest and in its best-known form in the United States, the comics form is seen as quintessentially American. The American situation was unique not in its ability to create comics and exploit them, however, but rather in its close interconnection between comics and the spread of national mass media via syndication (Gordon 2016, 3; Gordon 1998, 38), a mechanism that did not exist on the same footing in

Germany and could not offer artists the same financial incentives. At a time when most German-language newspapers and magazines were regionally-oriented, however, the *Kundenzeitschriften* extended to a wider audience, and provided an equivalent to the reach afforded to American comic strip artists by syndication. But where the tremendous potential of American comic characters such as Buster Brown for advertising profits »was rooted in the national distribution of comic strips through local newspapers« (Gordon 1998, 38), the potential of their German counterparts, which were already advertisements, was exhausted in the course of their wide distribution, and they could not be further exploited. Thus there was no reason, despite their success, to publish a collection of the *Onkel Jup* strips as a separate book (Knigge, 113), unlike a strip from a commercial newspaper, such as *Vater und Sohn*, which began appearing in collected form already in the 1930s.

Satire and humour magazines for adults, such as the *Fliegende Blätter*, which acted as precursors for the comics in other countries, had always been political, and did not have the luxury of neutrality once the Nazi era began. They were allowed to continue only insofar as they could be turned against enemies as defined by the state; thus they, and any connections they might have had to comics, were tainted in the course of the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War. *Kundenzeitschriften*, however, as a result of their utilitarian function as enticements to customer loyalty, tended to remain ideologically neutral through the Weimar era. Most of them ceased publication not because the Nazis banned or burned comics,

as is sometimes popularly claimed (e.g., Warnimont), but rather due to the combination of new advertising legislation and, ultimately, paper rationing (Lukasch, 131; 162).

As a result, the tradition of *Werbecomics* was relatively unproblematic in ideological terms, and could be revived in the postwar era. *Werbecomics* arguably hit their peak in the 1970s and 1980s, which saw the founding of *Knax*, *Provi-Stars*, *Mike der Taschengeldexperte* and *Max und Luzie*. All of these comics represented banking or insurance firms, and all lasted twenty years or longer; *Knax* is in fact still running, and *Mike* has been carried on after a fashion, under the title *Primax*.

A New Beginning – Acknowledging an Old Beginning

Despite its long survival, however, the *Werbecomic* remains marginalized in terms of both historical and contemporary reception; as Eckart Sackmann has recently described the situation:

Um als sammelwürdig akzeptiert zu werden – und das ist in Deutschland wichtig, um Wertschätzung zu erfahren – muss man im Preiskatalog gelistet sein. Werbecomics sind das ebenso wenig wie Zeitungsstrips. *Dadurch hat man auch die Geschichte deutscher Comics lange fehlinterpretiert.* Hierzulande wurden Comics zu einem großen Teil über Zeitschriften, Zeitungen und Werbehefte weiterentwickelt. (Otten 123, emphasis added)

The result is an unnecessarily narrow view of the history, and the diversity, of the comics form in Germany, in which, for example, a *Deutsche Welle* story from March 2016 could

still falsely claim, »Erst mit den Siegermächten schafften es die Bildgeschichten nach Deutschland und stießen dort nicht auf viel Gegenliebe« (Steffes 2016a). As Ian Gordon points out:

The presentation of comic strips as uniquely American because they depicted the reality of American cities is likewise narrow. Comic strips in the United States were the product of a specific set of social relations that ripened in American cities in the 1890s. In a particular time and place comic strips developed a specific form. *But it was a form that leaned heavily on the past and that could be transported to, or invented in, other cultures with slight variation as they too achieved modernity.* (Gordon 1998, 8; emphasis added)

This form, indeed, developed in German-speaking Europe as well, in a manner parallel to its development in America, but under different conditions, in different venues, and at a different speed. Despite these considerable differences, the beginnings of German comics are surprisingly similar in many ways to the beginnings of American comics on the one hand, and British comics on the other. The similarities, however, have been obscured by several factors, among them the historical break caused by the Nazi era; a restrictive definition of the concept of »comics« that is seldom implemented, for example, when discussing older British comics; and, in the absence of a newspaper comic-strip tradition, by the narrow focus on commercially marketed comic books, at the expense of giveaway *Kundenzeitschriften* and *Werbecomics*. Better integrating the *Werbecomic*, as the beginning of a truly indigenous and long-lived German comics tradition, into German comics historiography would offer a more accurate, longer-term, and better balanced view

of the unique development of the comics form in Germany and Austria, while also recognizing intriguing parallels with its development in other countries.

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