

The Attention of the People: *Mein Kampf* and Thurber's Owl

GYÖRGY FOGARASI

Affiliation: Department of Comparative Literature

University of Szeged, Hungary

Email: fogarasi@hung.u-szeged.hu

Abstract

During the spring of 1939, a new and complete English translation of *Mein Kampf* was issued, which induced Kenneth Burke to publish his genuinely rhetorical analysis of Hitler's writing shortly after that. The same spring also saw the publication of one of James Thurber's fables, "The Owl Who Was God." Coincidental as this constellation may be, the present paper ventures to critically juxtapose the Hitlerian recipe for war propaganda and the satirical Thurberian treatment of totalitarianism. The argument is organized around two notions: concentration and prosopopoeia. While *Mein Kampf* aims at concentrating the attention of the people on a single enemy, to be expelled by a single *Führer*, Thurber's fable demonstrates, on multiple levels, the ways in which such a concentration is inscribed in the figural workings of prosopopoeia, understood here as a trope not simply of personification but of figuration in general, as well as a trope of spectrality. Since, however, the fable does not lend itself to easy instrumentalization for didactic or satirical purposes, it also showcases a certain resistance, which may, in turn, also help us think about the materiality of literature.

Keywords: attention, propaganda, concentration, prosopopoeia, materiality

On February 28, 1939, just about a week after the infamous pro-Nazi rally of the German-American Bund—held at Madison Square Garden in New York on February 20, and marking the peak of NSDAP popularity in America—a new and complete English translation of *Mein Kampf* was published. Hitler's partly autobiographical and partly programmatic two-volume work had originally been issued in 1925 and 1926 in German (with a sequel written in 1928 but discovered and published only posthumously). It gained heightened American popularity after the 1933 appearance of the Dugdale translation, which was an abridged version entitled *My Battle* in the US and *My Struggle* in the UK. The new and complete

translation of 1939, published by Reynal & Hitchcock (Hitler, 1939), preserved the German title of the original. It was carefully prepared and richly annotated by a team of scholars from the New York-based New School for Social Research—it even indicated the beginning and the ending of passages omitted from or condensed in the Dugdale version.¹ Shortly after its appearance, this new translation induced Kenneth Burke to publish his genuinely rhetorical analysis of Hitler's writing *The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"* (Burke, 1973). Burke's lucid commentary came to be the first in a series of linguistically oriented analyses aimed at Nazi rhetoric, from works by contemporaries like Victor Klemperer and Svend Ranulf to more recent readings by Umberto Eco or the team of the 2016 German critical edition of *Mein Kampf*.

The spring of 1939 also saw the publication of James Thurber's fable, "The Owl Who Was God." Thurber gained a reputation during the 1930s as America's number one literary satirist and cartoonist, while he was working for *The New Yorker* as a member of a socially sensitive editorial team. He produced a whole series of fables during those years in his career. After its publication on April 29, 1939, "The Owl Who Was God" would get reprinted in Thurber's 1940 collection *Fables for Our Time and Famous Poems Illustrated*. Even though it can by no means be considered a direct reaction either to Hitler's book or to the growing popularity of Nazi ideology, "The Owl Who Was God" was a warning just months before the war when there was almost no sense of danger in the United States (Cashman, 1989, p. 562). It exemplifies the tone of social satire present all over Thurber's art of writing and drawing. Besides the infrequent sporadic mention of Hitler in Thurber's correspondence (Thurber, 2002, pp. 251, 281, and 296), one could mention his satirical engagement with the emerging cult around the Nazi leader in a cartoon he had made the previous year, in which a woman looks up from a newspaper asking her husband, "Who is this Hitler and what does he want?"² Interestingly, just a year before that, Thurber's humor itself elicited a critical response from none other than Kenneth Burke, who produced a psychoanalytical reading of Thurber's recurrent gesture of making fun

¹ There were two more unabridged English translations coming out in those days, which only shows the intensifying rivalry for a growing number of fanatic readers. The Stackpole edition of Barrows Mussey's anonymous translation appeared the same day as the Reynal & Hitchcock edition, on February 28; however, the primer was without copyright permission. James Murphy's translation for Hurst & Blackett followed within a month on March 20. During the war, in 1943, another complete English edition came out in Ralph Manheim's rendering. For an overview, see the German Critical edition (Hitler, 2016, pp. 1761–1762). All these complete translations bore the title of the German original. Also worthy of mention is the so-called Stalag translation, issued as *My Struggle*, presumably in 1940, by the official publisher of NSDAP. It was based upon an early version of Murphy's translation, a work originally commissioned by Joseph Goebbels (Barnes et al., 1986, pp. 376–377).

² Cartoons became increasingly popular as a form of social commentary by the end of the decade (Solomon, 1984, pp. 202–203).

of the psychoanalytic clichés of self-help books. While Burke acknowledged Thurber's art as "a very amusing burlesque of psychoanalysis," he still suggested that Thurber should "go after bigger game" (Burke, 1972, pp. 56–57; cf. Bassett, 1985, p. 38; Pauley, 2009)—an advice Thurber might have heeded a year later, in his cartoon on Hitler.³

Contingent as it is, the simultaneous publication of the complete English translation of *Mein Kampf* (followed by Burke's analysis) and Thurber's fable "The Owl Who Was God" might serve as a suggestive metonymy, and thus, an occasion to critically juxtapose the Hitlerian recipe for war propaganda and the satirical Thurberian treatment of totalitarian ideology. As I will argue, both texts seem to be occupied with the question of leadership, specifically, with the control over the attention of the people; however, they do so from two fundamentally different aspects. Two notions, concentration and prosopopoeia, will help us articulate that difference. To put it briefly, while *Mein Kampf* aims at concentrating the attention of the people on a single enemy (to be pointed out by a single *Führer*), Thurber's fable demonstrates the ways in which such a concentration is inscribed in the phantasmatic workings of prosopopoeia, understood here not simply as a trope of personification but as a trope of figuration in general, as well as a trope of spectrality. Against the backdrop of *Mein Kampf*, Thurber's fable appears to foreground the attention of the people not so much as a mental state engineered purely by propagandistic manipulation but as a quasi-spontaneous and, to some extent, even inevitable immersion in a collective fantasy.

Concentration in *Mein Kampf*

Writing in "Propaganda and Organization" in the second volume of his book, Hitler formulates his understanding of political leadership as follows: "to lead means: to be able to move masses [*Führen heißt: Massen bewegen können*]" (Hitler, 1939, p. 848; 2016, p. 1473). As the title of the chapter already suggests, the task of the leader is twofold: propaganda comes first, and organization is second. Propaganda aims at attracting "followers" (*Anhänger*), inactive sympathizers, while organization is built upon propaganda, as far as its task is to recruit "members" (*Mitglieder*) from among followers, turning them into activists in the service of the party. Propaganda must always precede organization in order to "win for the latter the human material to be utilized" (1939, p. 846; 2016, p. 1471). No wonder that a great part of *Mein Kampf* deals with the prime task of propaganda.

From early on in the book, whenever the question of leadership comes up, it is usually linked with the ability of the leader to attract and guide the attention of the people

³ Several years later, however, in his essay on "The Case for Comedy," Thurber still bitterly discussed the condemnation of humor by "arrogant intellectual critics" (Thurber, 1961, pp. 118–119).

by means of propaganda. One such instance occurs in chapter 3 of the first volume, in a passage also quoted by Burke (1973, pp. 193–194), where Hitler spells out his conception of the “art” (*Kunst*) of leadership. We learn that the true leader must be able to concentrate the attention of the people on a single enemy:

As a whole, and at all times, the efficiency [*Kunst*] of the truly national leader [*Volksführer*] consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of a people, and always in concentrating it on a single enemy [*die Aufmerksamkeit eines Volkes nicht zu zersplittern, sondern immer auf einen einzigen Gegner zu konzentrieren*]. The more uniformly the fighting will of a people is put into action, the greater will be the magnetic force of the movement and the more powerful the impetus of the blow. It is part of the genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only, because to weak and unstable characters the knowledge that there are various enemies will lead only too easily to incipient doubts as to their own cause.

As soon as the wavering masses find themselves confronting too many enemies, objectivity at once steps in, and the question is raised whether actually all the others are wrong and their own nation or their own movement alone is right.

Also with this comes the first paralysis of their own strength. Therefore, a number of essentially different enemies [*eine Vielzahl von innerlich verschiedenen Gegnern*] must always be regarded as one in such a way that in the opinion of the mass of one's own adherents the war is being waged against one enemy [*gegen einen Feind*] alone. (Hitler, 1939, pp. 152–153, translation slightly modified; 2016, pp. 353–355)

The threatening image of “paralysis” (*Lähmung*) in the last paragraph indicates how important it is for the leader to be able to keep the masses in motion and mobilize them during political or military campaigns. He can only do so by arresting and directing their attention to an object singled out as an enemy. The key notion that governs the passage is that of concentration (*konzentrieren*) used here as a technical term taken from the psychological discourse of attention. It is far from self-evident that it should be used this way. When one hears the loaded word “concentration” in the context of the Nazi movement, one more readily expects the term to crop up with reference to concentration camps (*Konzentrationslager* or *Sammlungslager*, as distinguished, however problematically, from work camps, *Arbeitslager*, or extermination camps, *Vernichtungslager*), specific type of camps set up in rapidly growing numbers from 1933 on, to gather and keep at bay allegedly dangerous ethnic, social, or political groups. Also, one could think of the concentration of military forces on the battlefield, foreshadowed by the concentration

of political forces, that is, large crowds formed at giant rallies or “mass gatherings” (*Massenversammlungen*) during political campaigns, or even masses of spectators or supporters at politically staged sporting events like the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Both these meanings of “concentration”—as a gathering of one’s enemies or one’s own forces—are implied in the psychological meaning of the word. For just as a military concentration of forces makes sense only after a target has been established, or the concentration of enemies in a camp is a decisive step in the process of demarcating such a target, so concentration as a mental state of attending implies the direction of mental powers onto a delineated object of focus that can be singled out for targeting.

In fact, throughout the two volumes of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler heavily relies on fashionable psychological clichés taken from Gustave Le Bon’s mass psychology⁴ or, especially, from the turbulent discourse of attention as it has developed since the end of the 19th century. In his seminal book on *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James defined attention as a state of “focalization” or “concentration,” preceded by a moment of selection, by which an object is singled out from a multitude of objects, the rest of which remain neglected (1890, vol. 1, pp. 403–404). This is behind the seemingly paradoxical claim that attention implies inattention, rather than being its opposite. According to James, the “real opposite” of attention is “distraction”—the total lack of selection—understood as a “confused, dazed, scatterbrained” state of mind, which, he adds, is “called *Zerstreuung* in German” (1890, vol. 1, p. 404). With the advent of new forms of media in the 19th century—including steam-powered rotary printing press, photography, telegraph, telephone, phonograph, gramophone, film, and radio—there is a growing anxiety concerning one’s control over one’s own mental faculties, and primarily, over one’s attention. The multitude of publications in this field, the “explosion of research and debate,” as Jonathan Crary put it (2001, p. 23), can be seen as a symptom of that anxiety.

In Germany, during the Weimar Republic, self-help books on the “art” of controlling one’s attention, like Reinhard Gerling’s *Die Kunst der Konzentration* from 1920 (not to mention the very device called *Konzentrator*, advertised on the cover of Philipp Müh’s guide from c. 1927, *Coué in der Westentasche!*), became highly popular.⁵ They were soon followed by books on the “art” of influencing others, first in commerce, and then in politics.⁶ As the title

⁴ Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (*Psychologie des foules*, 1895) was available in German translation from 1908

⁵ For an overview, see Carolin Duttlinger’s chapter on “The Art of Concentration: Weimar Self-Help Literature” in her book *Attention and Distraction in Modern German Literature* (2022, pp. 204–220).

⁶ Gerhard Schultze-Pfaelzer’s *Propaganda, Agitation, Reklame* (1923) was preceded by early works by Werner Sombart (“Die Reklame” and “Ihre Majestät die Reklame,” both from 1908) and Victor Mataja (*Die Reklame*, 1910).

of Friedrich Schöenemann's *Die Kunst der Massenbeeinflussung in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (1924) indicates, much of the lore of the rhetoric of advertising came from the United States, where none other than Freud's émigré nephew Edward Bernays implemented the insights of psychoanalysis into commercial and political "propaganda," initially a technical term which Bernays gradually replaced by his own euphemistic inventions, "public relations" and "the engineering of consent." These formulations also indicate how propagandistic activity shifted emphasis from direct advertising to more sophisticated mechanisms of influencing the masses through dramatic events. The fact that Joseph Goebbels, minister of "public enlightenment and propaganda" in Nazi Germany, was himself heavily relying on Bernays' early work (both his *Crystallizing Public Opinion* from 1923 and his *Propaganda* from 1928, see Tye, 1998, pp. 89 and 111), creates an uncanny entanglement in the modern parallel histories of liberal democracy and fascism. The linguistic fact that self-help "guides" were (and are) called *Führer* in German further complicates that confusion (Duttlinger, 2022, p. 211).

The modern concept and discourse of attention is born out of the mourning over its loss, as the frequent reference to the menace of distraction indicates. One such reference appears, in close temporal proximity to our present field of focus, in the 1939 (third) version of Walter Benjamin's essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." Critically reflecting on the by-then "commonplace" dichotomy of "concentration" (*Sammlung*) and "distraction" (*Zerstreuung*) (2006, p. 268; 1991, vol. 1, p. 504), Benjamin attempts to demonstrate how the emergence of modern art or media (as epitomized in film, that is, in mass cinema) profoundly changes the process of apperception and establishes distraction as the default mode of modern-day reception (2006, p. 269; 1991, vol. 1, p. 504). For him, modernity is characterized by the loss of attention as an ability to concentrate. What it brings is an endless dispersal or scatteredness in the form of amusement orchestrated by the entertainment industry. Benjamin's interpretation of fascism as a propagandistic instrumentalization of art for the purposes of politics appears in this context as a critique of the nostalgic effort that tries to stick to the ideal of attention as concentration.⁷ Fascism tries to gain control over the masses' attention, a faculty the masses themselves are no longer capable of controlling.

According to the *Mein Kampf* passage, concentration is the prime prerequisite for mass mobility. Distraction would lead to paralysis. To avoid such a scatterbrained state of mental

⁷ For Benjamin, this might have been part of a broader critique of the very dichotomy and hierarchy of attention vs. distraction (see Duttlinger, 2007, pp. 35, 43, 51, and 2022, pp. 6–7 and 275, and North, 2012, pp. 4–5 and 143–174).

dispersal or “division,” which Hitler pinpoints by the verb *zersplittern*—a term not very far from *zerstreuen*—one needs to find an object of focus. However, since that object does not offer itself spontaneously, it must be formed artistically by a systematic reduction of heterogeneity. The enemy is essentially manifold, composed of “*inherently different*” (innerlich verschiedene) adversaries.⁸ Only by reducing that diverse plurality to “one category” do we arrive at a “single enemy” that can, in turn, serve as a target. That reduction is also elemental to the unification of forces—the uniformity of the “fighting will”—which otherwise would be overwhelmed by doubts and uncertainties, with an imminent relapse into the paralyzing state of hesitation. By leaving “objectivity” behind, the inherent heterogeneity of the enemy can be reduced to a “single” target—say, the Jew—against which the people can be “uniformly” mobilized.

Besides distraction, there is however another, slightly different but just as (if not even more) challenging threat that *Mein Kampf* attempts to tackle: the menace of “diversion” (*Ablenkung*). As opposed to distraction, diversion does not dissolve attention. It keeps the people focused but on the wrong object. The Jew does not simply figure in the text as the “single enemy” to be targeted. Represented as master of the bloodsucking “spider” of international capital (1939, pp. 251 and 534, cf. 288; 2016, p. 529) and the “so-called liberal press” (1939, p. 331; 2016, p. 643), he also figures, as Burke pointed out (Burke, 1973, p. 195), as the abject “rival” of the *Führer* in his effort to concentrate the attention of the people. (More specifically, the Jew is a male rival, as far as the masses are deemed to be feminine, cf. Eco on “machismo,” 1995.) By diversionary activity, the “smiling,” “cunning” Jew purposefully misguides the masses’ attention (1939, pp. 331, 817–818, cf. p. 108; 2016, pp. 645, 1405–1409, cf. p. 283). The figure of the Jew is an abject one precisely for his alleged ability to gain control over the people’s attention and thereby become the double or specular counterpart of the *Führer*. The latter will need to present himself as the one who points to the right target. As opposed to *diversion*, he will need to exercise *aversion* in the sense of turning the attention of the people *to*—rather than *away from*—the proper object of focus. He does so by importing the modern psychology of advertising into the field of politics.

The commercial advertisement appears in *Mein Kampf* as the prototype for “political advertising” (1939, p. 236; 2016, p. 505). As the chapter “War Propaganda” in the first volume clearly shows, Hitler’s idols in this regard are Germany’s WWI adversaries,

⁸ I have slightly modified the English translation, which mistakenly renders innerlich not only as “essentially” but also as “internal,” and thus, speaks of “essentially different internal enemies.” Burke, who was fluent in German and was teaching at The New School for Social Research (Pauley, 2009), also omitted the false reference to “internal” enemies when he quoted the passage (1973, pp. 193–194).

the British and the Americans, who followed the psychological principles of advertising in all their propagandistic practices. Those principles can be derived from the nature of the audience to which propaganda is designed to appeal: "To whom has propaganda to appeal? To the scientific intelligentsia or to the less educated masses? It has to appeal forever and only to the masses!" (1939, p. 230; 2016, p. 497). Since propaganda is aimed at the masses (the majority of which Hitler, following Le Bon's mass psychology,⁹ deems feminine and primitive, 1939, p. 237; 2016, p. 507), it has little to do with education or scientific training. It is directed toward the feelings of the people, and "the greater" the mass, "the lower" the level of its spiritual workings (1939, p. 232; 2016, p. 499). This becomes fundamental to the "art of propaganda," which is only able to find "the way to the attention, and further to the heart, of the great masses," if, "understanding the great masses' world of ideas and feelings," it applies "a correct psychological form" (1939, p. 233; 2016, p. 501). To explain what that form indeed looks like, Hitler turns to the medium of the poster: "A poster's art lies in the designer's ability to catch the masses' attention by outline and color [*Die Kunst des Plakates liegt in der Fähigkeit des Entwerfers, durch Form und Farbe die Menge aufmerksam zu machen*]" (1939, p. 230; 2016, p. 497). Placed in the masses' "field of vision" (*Gesichtskreis*), the poster has the power to direct their attention or to move things into that field (1939, p. 231; 2016, p. 499). Hitler brings two examples: first, the poster of an art exhibition, then the poster of a soap advertisement.

To exemplify the art of the poster by a poster of an art exhibition provides an occasion for Hitler to separate the "real art" (*wirkliche Kunst*) of propaganda (1939, p. 227, translation modified; 2016, p. 489), made for the masses, from the art of museums, made for intellectuals ("scholars or 'aesthetic' languishing monkeys" [*Gelehrt[e] oder "ästhetisch[e]" Schmachtaffen*], or "aestheticists" so often seen at "literary tea parties" [1939, pp. 233 and 238; 2016, pp. 499 and 509]). Even if it advertises an art exhibition, a poster must always be designed to capture and turn the masses' attention. It must refrain from any aestheticist autotelic finery. At a later point in the book, Hitler brings his own functional design of the NSDAP flag with the Swastika to explain what a right combination of "outline and color" means (1939, pp. 734–735; 2016, pp. 1249–1251).

The example of the soap poster allows Hitler to draw some further conclusions related to an earlier observation concerning the limitations of the masses' cognitive and memorizing capacities (their "brief attention span," Koschorke, 2017, p. 37): "The great masses'

⁹ Since crowds, according to Le Bon, can only think in images, they are incapable of critical thinking. For Le Bon, crowds are in the position of the sleeper (1986, p. 56), whose thoughts and feelings can be influenced unconsciously by suggestive images—in fact, by one image at a time, like that of the fall of the Eiffel Tower, an example foreshadowing the imagery of 9/11 (1986, p. 60).

receptive ability is only very limited, their understanding is small, but their forgetfulness is great" (1939, p. 234; 2016, p. 501). Accordingly, the emphasis now falls on the way posters combine simplicity with repetition. Speaking the verbal and the visual language of antithesis, the soap advertisement simplifies all differences to the brute binarism of good and bad. Similarly, war propaganda should not be afraid to be one-sided or "subjectively biased" (*subjektiv einseitig*), telling "its own truth" (*eigene [Wahrheit]*) to the point of even telling a "lie" (1939, p. 236 and 238; 2016, pp. 503–507). It must get rid of the German illness of a "mania of objectivity" (*Objektivitätsfimmel*) and all the "half measures" (*Halbheiten*) that come with it (1939, p. 237; 2016, p. 507). No matter how magnificent the goals of the war are, the means must be basic and simple to an extreme. Once that bottom line is reached, only the task of endless mechanical repetition remains.¹⁰

Just as commercial posters, political slogans also need to be in line with the above principles. They need to be able to point to the themes they address, formulate them in a simplified and polarized way, and repeat them unaltered without end. They need to personify the enemy but also to dehumanize it. Personification and dehumanization do not contradict each other, provided they both work toward the figural production of a perpetrator who can be blamed for all the trouble. This time, Hitler took his example from the British, who successfully prepared their compatriots for the terrors of war by introducing "the German as a barbarian and a Hun," and speaking of the "Hunnish brutality" of the adversary (1939, p. 234; 2016, p. 503).¹¹ The German or Austrian propagandists, on the other hand, only ridiculed the enemy in comic papers, which proved tragically disappointing as soon as the dark reality of war turned out to be anything but funny. More in accord with the example set by the British was the later poster and slogan, designed by Hans Schweitzer ("Mjöltnir") in 1943, in which a finger can be seen pointing at a Jew banker, with the exclamation: "He is to blame for the war! [*Der ist Schuld am Kriege!*]" Guilt and innocence couldn't be more sharply apart. As far as the debilitating

¹⁰ As the editors of the critical edition of *Mein Kampf* note, Hitler highly exaggerates the constancy and uniformity of Allied propaganda during the First World War. With the change of targeted audiences (from allied troops and civilians to neutral states and enemies), the form and content of propaganda had to be permanently adjusted (Hitler, 2016, p. 510).

¹¹ The British campaign was later joined by the American propaganda machine with posters (like the one popularizing war bonds, from 1917, showing the bloody handprint of a Hun with the inscription "The Hun—his Mark/Blot it Out with Liberty Bonds", see Schönemann, 1924, p. 142) and films (like *The Hun Within*, *The Claws of the Hun*, or *The Leopard's Spots*, also known as *Once a Hun, Always a Hun*, all three from 1918, cf. Taylor, 2003, pp. 186 and 194). False atrocity propaganda about the "Prussian Ogre," the "Beastly Hun," or the "Corpse-Converting Factory" producing soap out of dead bodies had a tragic backlash later in the 1930s and 1940s, as they caused a general disinclination on the part of the public to give credit to news about real atrocities committed by the Nazis (Taylor, 2003, pp. 179–180 and 197).

repetition of the same is concerned, the 1939 editors of *Mein Kampf* also note Hitler's barely changing theatrical pose and gestures (1939, p. 239), so aptly parodied by Charlie Chaplin in his 1940 satire, *The Great Dictator*.¹²

As we have seen, *Mein Kampf* outlines the Hitlerian conception of propaganda as a concentration of the attention of the people on an artfully fabricated enemy. As the editors of the German critical edition have shown in their chapter "Hitler's Language in *Mein Kampf*" (2016, pp. 21–24), the book also performs what it outlines: its style consists of affective concepts, hyperboles, first-person plural forms, exaggerating prefixes and adverbs, biological vocabulary and military metaphors, at points even loan words to indicate erudition (even though this contradicts Hitler's despisal of intellectuals), slogan-like formulations, frequent questions (immediately answered, if not rhetorical), reductions and polar homogenizations, and so on. Beyond these, *Mein Kampf* also foregrounds a certain paradox, which can be formulated in the following question: how is it possible that a text like this, so openly admitting its inclination to manipulate and so voluntarily revealing its tactical secrets, can remain efficient and widely influential among its readers? Or, in the words of the editors of the critical edition: how can such a "tactical instruction manual [*taktische Handlungsanleitung*]" have such a "destructive propagandistic effect [*verderbliche propagandistische Wirkung*]" (2016, pp. 10 and 4)? One answer could be that even though *Mein Kampf* was a global bestseller, the multitudes who purchased it did not necessarily read it as well. Or, even if they did, most of them might have been members of a less educated class who did not have the critical tools to uncover the text's inconsistency, its self-debunking character. Or, as one could also argue, precisely because readers were critical they found the book's claims so absurd that they simply could not take them seriously. All these explanations could be valid to some extent. However, in the reading that follows, I will try to offer another route to account for this paradox by means of a different genre and vocabulary.

Prosopopoeia in Thurber's "The Owl Who Was God"

James Thurber engaged the spread of authoritarian rhetoric and war propaganda in several of his works at *The New Yorker* in the 1930s and 40s (for a context, see Gale,

¹² Just a few years before that, in *Modern Times* (1936), Chaplin had also sarcastically presented mechanical repetition as a seminal component of modern factory work. It was precisely this terror of working by the production line that formed the basis of Disney's propagandistic anti-Nazi animation from 1943, *Der Fuehrer's Face* (dir. Jack Kinny; with the original working title *Donald Duck in Nutzi Land*), a short film that visualized the inhumanity of Nazi terror by the imagery of the dehumanizing work by the production line, thus providing us yet another example for the ambivalent entanglement, mentioned above, of Nazi totalitarianism and liberal democracy.

1984, p. 11, and Arner, 1984, p. 237). So much so that the FBI even had a file on Thurber categorizing him as “prematurely anti-fascist” (Grauer, 1994, p. 106). Besides the 1938 cartoon on Hitler mentioned above and the 1939 fable “The Owl Who Was God,” which I am going to discuss below, one could mention his earlier joking with the swastika in 1929 in “The Nature of the American Male” (Tobias, 1970, 27), or his antiwar picture booklet “The Last Flower” published near the end of 1939. Some other pieces of the period, mostly from the 1940 collection *Fables for Our Time*, also formed part of that engagement. To mention but three examples: “The Rabbits Who Caused All the Trouble” is a parable of the blaming rhetoric of Nazism; a later version of this is the “The Peacelike Mongoose”—from the 1956 collection *Further Fables for Our Time*—whose pacifist main character is labeled crazy, sick, coward, and even “mongoosesexual;” and as an even more relevant example, there is “The Very Proper Gander,” a story based upon the pun of “proper gander” being mistakenly overheard as “propaganda,” which then creates a growing suspicion among the animals and leads to the banishment of the innocent gander.¹³

“The Owl Who Was God” is a unique combination of all these: it has a cartoon illustration, it thematizes admiration and personality cult along with practices of blaming and banishment, it also heavily builds upon the material aspect of language in the form of wordplay. The cartoon Thurber prepared for this fable shows the emblematic image of a sage owl (a Eurasian eagle owl, to be more precise) perching alone on the branch of a tree, with its body whitely shining against the night darkness of the background. Its large staring eyes and face-like head seem to explain why the owl could become an emblem of wisdom for centuries. While the brightness of its figure seems to emanate wisdom, the black pair of eyes might still remind us of the world of darkness to which it belongs.

The title further elevates the owl’s status to heavenly heights, referring to it as the divine center of a monotheistic cult, most probably with attributes of limitless power and omniscience. Yet, according to the logic and tradition of fables, the past tense of the formulation also suggests the temporary and mutable character of that divinity, the profanation of its sanctity, foreshadowing the ultimate loss of any superhuman features the owl may seem to have. From a philological aspect, there is one more element we need to point out. According to its first publication in *The New Yorker* in 1939, the title of the fable was, in fact, slightly longer: “The Owl Who Thought He Was God” (Thurber, 1939, p. 23).¹⁴ This was shortened to “The Owl Who Was God” when the text got reprinted

¹³ On the latter story, see my “Propaganda, Proper-ganda, Proper Gander: Edward Bernays and James Thurber,” forthcoming in *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*.

¹⁴ The original formulation might remind us of an earlier story, “The Greatest Man in the World,” whose title character is said to behave like “the animal that knows its power” (Thurber, 1935, p. 212).

in Thurber's collection of fables a year later (Thurber, 1940, pp. 35–36).¹⁵ The difference points to a hesitation or insight concerning the owl's perspective. The first version makes mention of a belief or perception on the owl's part, which the second version decides to omit, raising the question of whether the owl really "thinks"—believes or knows—that it is God or is just considered God unknowingly, without notice, by others, his followers. We shall come back to this question.

In contrast to its title, the moral of the story, as well as the narrative itself, remained unaltered. It reads: "You can fool too many people too much of the time." Upon first reading, this lesson seems to formulate customary wisdom concerning manipulation, the credulity of the people, their constant vulnerability to demagoguery, their inclination to be deceived by their leader—the many to be misled by the one. At a closer look, however, the phrasing seems more nuanced, at least from two aspects: firstly, it mentions multitude or frequency not as a clear majority but simply as "too many" or "too much," allowing for lower numbers with a countdown to even one—the implication being that even one victim could be too many and a single occurrence too much—and secondly, it uses the general subject "you" which does not limit the potential manipulators to any privileged individual but leaves the position open, to be occupied by perhaps anyone. What it states, therefore, is that whenever there is fooling, it is always one person fooling another or others—fooling is an act with a perpetrator who has the power to control the people, if only occasionally and partially.

The story of the fable involves a colorful group of anthropomorphized animals who fluently communicate with each other, even though they belong to different species, both wild and domestic. This miniaturized version of the American melting pot soon becomes a growingly hierarchized society as religious sentiments begin to dominate the life of the "creatures." The owl takes on divine powers right from the outset. His night vision invokes omniscience in the two ground moles who encounter him, supposedly due to their implicit assumption of his panoptic ability.

"Once upon a starless midnight there was an owl who sat on the branch of an oak tree. Two ground moles tried to slip quietly by, unnoticed. "You!" said the owl. "Who?" they quavered, in fear and astonishment, for they could not believe it was possible for anyone to see them in that thick darkness. "You two!" said the owl. The moles hurried away and told the other creatures of the field and forest that the owl was the greatest and wisest of all animals because he could see in the dark and because he could answer any question." (Thurber, 1940, p. 35)

¹⁵ Due to the brevity of the text, I will only give page numbers for the block quotations.

This is a scene of fear and trembling, where total darkness means safety until there is one who can see in the dark. It is also a scene of address and response, a scene of interpellation. In response to the owl's address, the ground moles ask a question, followed by a repeated and reaffirmed address. While the owl might indeed appear to have night vision, the initial dialogue hardly establishes him as an omniscient being. What is initially just an assumption is turned into empirically substantiated knowledge once the secretary bird decides to investigate the situation.

"I'll see about that," said a secretary bird, and he called on the owl one night when it was again very dark. "How many claws am I holding up?" said the secretary bird. "Two," said the owl, and that was right. "Can you give me another expression for 'that is to say' or 'namely'?" asked the secretary bird. "To wit," said the owl. "Why does the lover call on his love?" "To woo," said the owl. (Thurber, 1940, p. 35)

The secretary bird poses a rather diverse series of questions to the owl, trying to test both his vision and wisdom, and receives an accurate answer to each. Since, however, there is some resistance among the rest of the animals—the red fox and his friends posing questions concerning the owl's daylight vision—a unified common stance can only be reached after their banishment from the land. By now, the social setup is fully hierarchized. Having expelled the sceptics, a clear stratification ensues with animals of the air above—volant birds—and ground animals below—including non-volant birds. The owl is still missing from the top, but that place is reserved for him, to be immediately followed by the "secretary" bird—a name highly suggestive of that rank—who is later assisted by a hawk below him. Then come the rest: ground moles, Plymouth rock hen(s) —only mentioned later—and all the other unspecified creatures.

That is when the animals decide to ask the owl, by way of a messenger, to occupy his place and lead them: "They sent a messenger to the owl and asked him to be their leader." The text is significantly elliptical regarding the details of that message. We get no information either about the messenger, what he said to the owl, or how the owl reacted or responded, if at all. With a leap forward, we are immediately placed into the final scene, a scene of leading and following, but also a scene of catastrophe:

When the owl appeared among the animals it was high noon and the sun was shining brightly. He walked very slowly, which gave him an appearance of great dignity, and he peered about him with large, staring eyes, which gave him an air of tremendous importance. "He's God!" screamed a Plymouth rock hen. And the others took up the cry "He's God!" So they followed him wherever he went and when he bumped into things

they began to bump into things, too. Finally he came to a concrete highway and he started up the middle of it and all the other creatures followed him. Presently a hawk, who was acting as outrider, observed a truck coming toward them at fifty miles an hour, and he reported to the secretary bird and the secretary bird reported to the owl. "There's danger ahead," said the secretary bird. "To wit?" said the owl. The secretary bird told him. "Aren't you afraid?" he asked. "Who?" said the owl calmly, for he could not see the truck. "He's God!" cried all the creatures again, and they were still crying "He's God" when the truck hit them and ran them down. Some of the animals were merely injured, but most of them, including the owl, were killed. (Thurber, 1940, pp. 35–36)

What first appears as a neatly symmetrical scene of leading and following—the scene of a leader leading his followers and of the followers following their leader—becomes imbalanced and shaky precisely because it is also a scene of catastrophe. Not that there were no signs of the approaching doom. However, all the signs are seen from the perspective of a desire to have a leader who can be trusted and followed. A slow walk is seen as a sign of dignity, and a peering look is seen as a sign of importance. In fact, we read that this behavior "gave" such an appearance to the owl. Disregarding the fact that the owl's daylight vision has never been proved—something we might be reminded of when, before the accident, the narrator notes that the owl "could not see the truck"—the animals begin to call him "God," to blindly follow the blind¹⁶ and "bump into things" just as he does. The linkage of religious belief to the act of following, so emphatic in this passage—"So they followed him," "all the creatures followed him"—implicitly invokes the definition of religion as an act of following. If religion is "following" (*Nachfolge*), as Martin Heidegger claims (2000a, p. 590),¹⁷ then the movement of the animals as they are tracking the movement of the owl is rightly represented here as deeply religious in its nature. It is also political, as far as the movement of "followers" if we recall the English rendering of *Anhänger*

¹⁶ Besides its general significance, there is also an autobiographical relevance to blindness. Blinded to one eye in a childhood accident, Thurber was beginning to lose sight in his other eye around this time and turned totally blind for his last years, before his death in 1961. Around 1939, he used extra strong glasses along with a Zeiss loupe and many large sheets of paper both for his writing and drawing tasks.

¹⁷ Here Heidegger himself is presumably following Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 1937 book *Nachfolge* (translated into English as *The Cost of Discipleship*). Already in his 1933 rectoral address, though in a somewhat different wording, Heidegger speaks of the crowd of followers (*Gefolgschaft*) and the act of following (*Folgen*) as counterparts of the leader (*Führer*) and leadership (*Führung*, *Führen*). For him, the act of following is both a march or service and a resistance (2000b, pp. 112–116). The former implies focusing, selective simplification, "the reduction of the gaze" (*Vereinfachung des Blickes*) to the proper object (2000b, p. 111). Its threatening opposite, distraction, will be the subject of a later essay, "The Pathway" (*Der Feldweg*, 1949), where he writes: "The danger looms that men today cannot hear its [the pathway's] language. The only thing they hear is the noise of the media, which they almost take for the voice of God. So man becomes disoriented [zerstreut] and loses his way. To the disoriented [Den Zerstreuten], the simple seems monotonous. The monotonous brings weariness" (1981, p. 70; 1989, p. 89).

in *Mein Kampf*) is not reserved for religious movements. Le Bon formulates succinctly how certain practices beyond religion, including atheist fanaticism, can attain a religious character: "A person is not religious solely when he worships a divinity, but when he puts all the resources of his mind, the complete submission of his will, and the whole-souled ardor of fanaticism at the service of a cause or an individual who becomes the goal and guide of his thoughts and actions" (Le Bon 1896, p. 64). Whenever there is following, it is patterned after religion. However, to follow is not just to move in space. It also means copying, reproducing, or inheriting. That is exactly what we see happening as all the animals begin to bump into things and suffer the material resistance of the world much the same way their leader suffers it himself. That happens until the fatal moment of catastrophe occurs. The catastrophic moment is "coming" not just as a particular object, a truck—a metonymy of ultrahuman presence in a world of already-humanized animals—it is just as much the coming of the future as coming, as something entirely unforeseeable or incalculable and, therefore, brutally material.¹⁸

This materiality has, in fact, been lurking all way long in the apparent addresses and responses of the owl. Read together as a series, they appear as so many instances of inarticulate hooting: "You," "You two," "Two," "To wit," "To woo," again "To wit," and finally, "Who." These soundings might very well compose an animal semiosis but also threaten to remain pure noise to human ears—unless those ears have the power to hear in them meaningful words or expressions, even minimal sentences. The series of questions posed by the secretary bird during his test of the owl's capabilities turn out to be fatally answerable by terms that can be mistakenly heard in the sounds of the bird. The sophisticated incoherence of these questions might even raise suspicion in the reader unless their randomness is taken as nothing more than an instance of spot-checking. On the level of writing the fable, one can sense Thurber's ingenious arsenal of wordplay, his fascination with the material aspects of language (Gale, 1984, p. 19; Chiba, 2015, p. 159). One could also call it the homonymic—or, in this case, homophonic—aspect of language as far as the mistaken overhearing of the owl's sounds creates a contingent interface between two "natural" languages utterly foreign to each other: the language of animal semiosis and the language of human verballity, or rather, between two singular languages within one and the same language. Neither entirely animal nor entirely human, they can, ironically, coincide, much the same way "proper gander" was overheard

¹⁸ From the perspective of its catastrophic ending, "The Owl Who Was God" appears to combine two other pieces: "The Hen Who Wouldn't Fly" (the image of a fatal road accident) and "The Hen and the Heaven" (the theme of a community running carelessly into their doom).

as “propaganda” in another of Thurber’s fables, mentioned above.¹⁹ Insofar as contingency dominates the interpretation of the owl’s hooting and behavior, his appearance among the animals at noon can be seen as merely coincidental. Rather than responding to the messenger and fulfilling the request of the community (about which the narrative was so elliptical), the owl happens to be there by pure chance or some misunderstanding—rambling about having been awakened from his daytime sleep—regardless of how unlikely his midday appearance might otherwise seem.

In all the above instances, the senseless—or radically foreign—hooting of Thurber’s owl is given a meaningful shape. In the language of classical rhetoric, as it has been reinterpreted by Paul de Man, we can identify the trope at work here: it is prosopopoeia, understood not simply as a trope of personification or anthropomorphism, but, in line with its etymology, as a trope of giving or lending a face to something faceless, of “face-making” (*prosopon poiein*), and by extension, as a trope of figuration, of giving—visual, auditory, or other—figure to that which has no figure at all.²⁰ What “gave” it dignity and importance, was not its slow walk or peering look, as the narrative put it from the perspective of the other animals, but the phantasmatic perception of the other animals themselves. As far as prosopopoeia is hallucinatory, the figures it provides will have a spectral character. The owl’s initial address turns out to have been a mere projection. The God followed by the community of creatures is a specter, an ideological phantom made up not by some propagandistic manipulation but by their own hallucinatory fantasy. In this respect, the story diverges from its moral (Chiba, 2015, p. 161),²¹ and suggests that people are more likely to be spontaneously fooled by themselves than by others, because the leader they choose to follow is to some extent an idol of their own making.²² Even if one considers

¹⁹ For a linkage of wordplay to human-animal relations in Thurber, see Eckler, 1973, pp. 241 and 247.

²⁰ In de Man’s formulation: “...in its most restricted sense, prosopopeia makes accessible to the senses, in this case the ear, a voice which is out of earshot because it is no longer alive. In its most inclusive and etymological sense, it designates the very process of figuration as giving face to what is devoid of it” (1996, p. 46).

²¹ That the moral of “The Owl Who Was God” lives its own life, independently of the story, is not without precedent. Something like that also occurs, perhaps ironically, in “The Very Proper Gander,” or in “The Stork Who Married a Dumb Wife.” A story can only be “complete with moral” (says “The Tortoise and the Hare”). But speed is just as important: “Don’t get it right, just get it written!” (says the moral of “The Sheep in Wolf’s Clothing,” a narrative of competing publications). Thurber’s spontaneous writing habit always involved a bunch of titles and morals waiting for a story (Rosen, 2019). As he said: „I don’t believe the writer should know too much where he’s going. If he does, he runs into old man blueprint—old man propaganda” (Fensch, 1989, p. 54).

²² In a letter dating from March 24, 1938, Thurber writes: “it[']s terrible to think of [Vienna] in the hands of the worst bastards the history of the world has ever known. The worst of it is that the rank and file of young Germans are all little Hitlers. I think Hitler’s claim that Fascism will last a thousand years is probably true. [...] It’s a wonder I don’t lose patience with the wonderful freedom of democracies—the right of squabble, the right to have a to-hell-with-it attitude, the right to make fools of themselves—like a bunch of drunken bums in a barroom” (Thurber, 2002, p. 296, emphasis mine).

the “secretary” bird, rather than the owl, to be the prime manipulator, one needs to explain why on his lone visit to the owl he poses his questions, for if he wanted to deceive the others, he could have just lied to have tested the owl, without actually testing him. The very fact that the secretary bird does indeed pose his questions suggests that he himself wants to be convinced, and that he either becomes the victim of a fatal coincidence by asking questions that can be answered by misheard hootings, or his questioning is preconceived from the start and all he needs is just a self-calming reaffirmation, which he needs in order to be able to make others give credit to what he himself can only scarcely believe.

A similar discrepancy might have been why Thurber chose to modify the original title of the fable, omitting any reference to the owl's belief or perception of being God. The owl seems unaware of being considered God (Kenney, 1974, p. 288). The resistance of the story to its moral is based upon a resistance, within the story, of animal noise to human voice, which in turn can also be seen, on a broader level, as a resistance of animals to the very genre of the fable, to the sacrificial structure of that genre, its ruthless putting of animal singularities to the service of human self-conceit (Sun, 1994, pp. 52–53; Williams, 2022, pp. 51–75).²³

Conclusion

To view Thurber's owl against the backdrop of *Mein Kampf*, and inversely, to put the latter in critical perspective through the lens of the fable, means a modification in both. The totalitarian dream of control over the people through control over their attention is supplanted in the fable by a spontaneous figurative mechanism that generates ghosts. Concentration is displaced by prosopopoeia. The leader is formed phantasmatically by his followers, who are then captivated by a phantom of their own creation. Moreover, even though propaganda can always try to capitalize on existing fantasies, it can never totalize its control because it is deeply embedded in that phantasmatic process.

To better estimate the significance and consequences of the above conclusion, let us cast a passing look at a passage in the chapter on “Propaganda and Political Leadership” in Edward Bernays' 1928 book *Propaganda*, where he quotes Disraeli's lament “I *must* follow the people. Am I not their leader?” and replies with an inversion: “I *must* lead the people.

²³ In this last respect, “The Owl Who Was God” prefigures Thurber's later treatment of the human-animal relationship in “The Human Being and the Dinosaur” (from *Further Fables for Our Time*), with the ironic moral (implicitly also citing and mocking Alexander Pope) that “The noblest study of mankind is Man, says Man” (Thurber, 1956, p. 69).

Am I not their servant?" (Bernays, 1928, p. 92). Disraeli rethinks the relation between leader and followers according to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, implying that the leader is forced to change from being the master of his followers to their slavish follower if he is to maintain his popularity and his leading position, which, thus, is only a "leading" position by the name. Bernays, on the other hand, continues to claim the uninterrupted leadership of the leader, presumably concerning the sophisticated techniques of propaganda, the figural modes of influencing others, whereby spin doctors can manipulate the will of the people, to make them want what they, spin doctors, want them to want. As a result, the leader will only seem to be following his followers, whereas, in reality, he will remain their actual and absolute leader through manipulation.

The very fact that in Thurber's text the owl does not appear to manipulate anyone at all and the secretary bird does not manipulate others either—unless, in a rather limited sense, being compelled to prove to himself what he attempts to prove to others—indicates that, even if regarded from the perspective of Bernays' propagandistic view, leadership cannot be limitless, because it is always inscribed in a phantasmatic process to which even the leader is exposed and which he himself is a part of, rather than being its external manipulator. This is not to say that manipulation or the attempt to manipulate is not something real. Far from it; however, it cannot be fully controlled and thus, it cannot be used as a reference to explain away one's own responsibility.

In this regard, the prosopopoetic generation of phantoms could account for the apparent paradox of *Mein Kampf's* ability to manipulate, despite its openly admitted intention to do so, since even an open admittance will not help if readers do not want to see the contradiction. On the other hand, Thurber's story does not simply replace manipulative propaganda by some ideological phantoms that would spring from the heads of individuals according to their will. Although the story does not fully eliminate consciousness and responsibility—as indicated by the homogenizing banishment of the sceptics—the fable does not simply replace one control with another—external political control with internal cognitive control.

For the formation of figures, one needs some material that can be formed or reformed, and one cannot decide how to form it or whether to form it at all. Formation is a historical process involving a certain amount of spontaneity to it. Prosopopoeia, as a trope of figuration, is a historical figure. To the extent that it is historical, it is subject to contingency. If the attention of the people gets concentrated and the masses mobilized, that is just partially due to deceptive propaganda or the conscious decisions of members of the community. It has just as much to do with a quasi-spontaneous event of prosopopoeia,

an imaginative perception, which forcefully invents a single leader, who just as forcefully invents a single enemy, his rival, against whom all forces can then be concentrated—until the accumulation of material resistance, the coming “truck” of the future, erases that concentration and enforces a reorganized restart.

References

- Arner, R. D. (1984). “The black, memorable year 1929”: James Thurber and the Great Depression. *Studies in American Humor*, 3(2/3), 237–252.
- Barnes, J. J., Barnes P. P. & Carey. A. E. (1986). An English translation of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* printed in Germany, ca. 1940. *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 80(3), 375–377.
- Bassett, J. E. (1985). Thurber and the critics: The problem of Humor. *Studies in Popular Culture* 8(2), 33–41.
- Benjamin, W. (1991). Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: Dritte Fassung [The work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility: Third version]. In R. Tiedemann & H. Schweppenhäuser (Eds.). *Gesammelte Schriften I.1* (pp. 471–508). Suhrkamp.
- Benjamin, W. (2006). The work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility: Third version. In H. Eiland & M. W. Jennings (Eds.), *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940* (pp. 251–283). Harvard University Press.
- Bernays, E. L. (1928). *Propaganda*. Liveright.
- Burke, K. (1972). Thurber perfects mind cure. In G. A. Harrison (Eds.). *The critic as artist: Essays on books 1920–1970*, (pp. 55–58). Liveright.
- Burke, K. (1973). The rhetoric of Hitler’s “Battle”. In K. Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (pp. 191–220). University of California Press.
- Cashman, S. D. (1989). *America in the twenties and thirties: The Olympian age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*. New York University Press.
- Chiba, Y. (2015). *On faith in conduct: The aesthetic of American fiction of 1930s*. [Dissertation]. University of Tsukuba.
- Crary, J. (2001). *Suspensions of perception: Attention, spectacle, and modern culture*. MIT Press.
- De Man, P. (1996). *Aesthetic Ideology*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Duttlinger, C. (2007). Between contemplation and distraction: Configurations of attention in Walter Benjamin. *German Studies Review*, 30(1) (February), 33–54.
- Duttlinger, C. (2022). *Attention and distraction in modern German literature, thought, and culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Eckler, A. R. (1973). The wordplay of James Thurber. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.34570981>.
- Eco, U. (1995). Ur-fascism. *The New York Review of Books* (June 22). <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>.
- Fensch, Th., ed. (1989). *Conversations with James Thurber*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Gale, S. H. (1984). Thurber and the “New Yorker.” *Studies in American Humor*, 3(1), 11–23.
- Grauer, N. A. (1994). *Remember laughter: A life of James Thurber*. University of Nebraska Press.

- Heidegger, M. (1981). The pathway, trans. Th. F. O'Meara & Th. Sheehan. In Th. Sheehan (Ed.) *Heidegger: The man and the thinker* (pp. 69–72). Precedent Publishing.
- Heidegger, M. (1983). Der Feldweg [The pathway]. In M. Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens, 1910–1976*, ed. H. Heidegger. Gesamtausgabe, vol. 13 (pp. 87–90). Vittorio Klostermann.
- Heidegger, M. (2000a). Aus Gesprächen mit einem buddhistischen Mönch [From conversations with a Buddhist monk]. In M. Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges, 1910–1976*, ed. H. Heidegger. Gesamtausgabe, vol. 16 (pp. 589–593). Vittorio Klostermann.
- Heidegger, M. (2000b). Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität [The German university's self-assertion]. In M. Heidegger, *Reden und Andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges, 1910–1976*, ed. H. Heidegger. Gesamtausgabe, vol. 16 (pp. 107–117). Vittorio Klostermann.
- Hitler, A. (1939). *Mein Kampf*, trans. and annot. A. Johnson et al. Reynal & Hitchcock.
- Hitler, A. (2016). *Mein Kampf: Eine kritische Edition* [Mein Kampf: A critical edition], ed. and annot. Ch. Hartmann et al. Institut für Zeitgeschichte.
- James, W. (1890). *The Principles of Psychology*. Macmillan.
- Kenney, C. M. (1974). *The world of James Thurber: An anatomy of confusion* [Dissertation]. Loyola University Chicago.
- Koschorke, A. (2017). *On Hitler's Mein Kampf: The Politics of National Socialism*, trans. Erik Butler. MIT Press.
- Le Bon, G. (1896). *The crowd: A study of the popular mind*. Macmillan.
- North, P. (2012). *The problem of distraction*. Stanford University Press.
- Pauley, G. (2009). Criticism in context: Kenneth Burke's "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'". *KB Journal*, 6(1). <http://kbjournal.org/content/criticism-context-kenneth-burkes-rhetoric-hitlers-battle>.
- Rosen, M. J. (2019). A fabulist for our time. In J. Thurber, *The collected fables*, ed. M. J. Rosen. Harper Perennial. epub.
- Schönemann, F. (1924). *Die Kunst der Massenbeeinflussung in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* [The art of influencing the masses in the United States of America]. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.
- Solomon, E. (1984). Eustace Tilley sees the thirties through a glass monocle, Lightly: "New Yorker" cartoonists and the depression years. *Studies in American Humor*, 3(2/3), 201–219.
- Sun, D. (1994). Thurber's Fables for our time: A Case study in satirical use of great chain metaphor. *Studies in American Humor* 3(1), 51–61.
- Taylor, Ph. M. (2003). *Munitions of the mind: A history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present*. Manchester University Press.
- Thurber, J. (1935). *The middle-aged man on the flying trapeze: A Collection of short stories with drawings by the author*. Grosset & Dunlap.
- Thurber, J. (1939). The owl who thought he was god. *The New Yorker* (April 29), 23.
- Thurber, J. (1940). *Fables for our time and famous poems illustrated*. Harper & Row.
- Thurber, J. (1956). *Further fables for our time*. Hamish Hamilton.
- Thurber, J. (1961). The case for comedy. In J. Thurber. *Lanterns and Lances* (pp. 117–123). Harper & Brothers.

- Thurber, J. (2002). *The Thurber letters*, ed. H. Kinney. Simon & Schuster.
- Tobias, R. C. (1970). *The art of James Thurber*. Ohio University Press.
- Tye, L. (1998). *The father of spin: Edward L. Bernays and the birth of public relations*. Crown Publishers.
- Williams, P. (2022). *The US graphic novel*. Edinburgh University Press.