

Breaking Down Hitler's Magic: An Analysis of Adolf Hitler's "Unifying" Rhetoric in 1934 and 1939

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Adolf Hitler dealt with several rhetorically difficult situations in the years leading up to World War II. One was his announcement of the invasion of Poland in September 1939. This should not have been a well-received message—public sentiment and general domestic conditions did not create a favorable environment for another war—yet it was. The same phenomenon had occurred five years earlier, after the Night of Long Knives, in July 1934. This analysis looks at the rhetorical strategies Hitler employed in both speeches which contributed to his success, specifically in the context of what Kenneth Burke refers to as Hitler's "unifying device." I conclude by determining that Hitler's use of several rhetorical strategies detailed by figures such as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Althusser, Koutsantoni, and Roberts-Miller were key to his rhetorical success.

Hitler's armed forces invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 as the first step of operation "Fall Weiss." What would result in six years of hostile occupation began aggressively—the operation was "ambitious" and "maximum-effort," with "more than 60 divisions—nearly two-thirds of the entire German army" assigned to it (Axelrod). And while the beginnings of World War II may have been an impressive display of German strength, the sentiments of the global community didn't necessarily reflect that. Hitler's invasion might very well have even been condemned by his own parliament, the Reichstag, as its members were representatives of a war-weary German people who were still feeling the effects of the recent "Great War." But because of a rhetorical foundation Hitler had established five years before, that never happened—instead, he was able to carry out his invasion without any real objection from the German

people. Kenneth Burke describes this as Hitler's rhetorical "magic."

American war correspondent William Shirer wrote on the morning of August 31, 1939—just one day before the invasion of Poland—that "everybody [was] against the war." Germans felt this sentiment so strongly that people were actually "talking openly" about their opposition to it, that they were "kicking about being kept in the dark" (*Berlin* 145). Shirer mentions how a German complained to him that, "We know nothing. Why don't they tell us what's up?" (145). It was clear that the German public was strongly opposed to the idea of war, and all of this even prompted Shirer to ask, "How can a country go into a major war with a population so against it?" (145). And Hitler—either already aware of this sentiment or fearing for good reason that the public might feel this way— withheld very important information from the public regarding the possibility of war.

The German populace was also war-weary because of the difficult German economy. In addition, the “war guilt clause” of the Treaty of Versailles had assigned all blame and moral responsibility for damage done to the Allies during the first world war to Germany (“Reparations”). This was especially humiliating for the country—“Germans across the political spectrum were offended by the implication that the war was a result of German aggression, and that Germany alone was responsible for it” (“Reparations”). The first world war had also distressed global economies, and Germany especially suffered from inflation on a massive scale—its hyperinflation was “the most spectacular the world had seen” (Allen). The implications of this problem would extend far beyond just the immediate effects on the German economy—so much so that in hindsight, many scholars now actually “blame the episode of German hyperinflation for creating the political conditions that led to Hitler’s rise to power” (Allen). Yet at the time, this level of economic instability meant that for the vast majority of the country, another war was the last thing on their minds.

In his 1957 book *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke describes Hitler as being a “man who swung a great people into his wake,” a “medicine-man” who “found a panacea . . . that made such sinister unifying possible within his own nation” (165). We might, and often do, call him a demagogue—one of history’s most notorious. But labeling Hitler as a demagogue doesn’t tell us much by itself. In *Rhetoric and Demagoguery*, Patricia Roberts-Miller claims that demagoguery is a continuum, “neither an identity nor a discrete category” (2). Instead of simply resigning ourselves to the fact that Hitler was

somehow able to pull off these rhetorical feats, what is more valuable is examining specific instances of demagoguery. Roberts-Miller argues that “an incident of demagoguery matters to the degree that it is part of a larger discourse” (3). And while Burke refers to Hitler’s rhetoric as being “Nazi magic,” Roberts-Miller states that the process of “trying to identify demagogues is too often grounded in the notion that particular figures are nearly magical, and they control the prejudiced, emotional, feminized masses with a word wand” (3).

What then made Hitler’s medicine so effective that it unified a shattered country? That the country was still reeling from the effects of that war, economic and otherwise, meant that convincing the German public that invading Poland and guaranteeing themselves entry into another undoubtedly costly war should have been a difficult—if not impossible—hurdle to overcome for Hitler. And it might have been, had Hitler not already succeeded in what was supposed to be another impossible rhetorical moment five years earlier, on July 13, 1934. But he did, using three key rhetorical moves to override a skeptical audience’s hesitance. And so, he did it again on September 1, 1939. In an effort to understand how this was accomplished, this essay will analyze those two speeches in the context of Hitler’s unifying, “medicinal” rhetoric.

Laying the Groundwork for Poland

Both Hitler’s July 13, 1934 and September 1, 1939 addresses to the Reichstag were instances in which he especially needed to work his medicinal magic. The former was Hitler’s public explanation and justification for the Night of Long Knives, a political purge, and the latter announced his

watershed decision to invade Poland and begin what would become the deadliest war in history. Both were addressed to a tired and worn public, and both sought to excuse and even build support for actions that divided public opinion.

But Hitler was able to circumvent these obstacles by employing three main strategies: common knowledge markers, paired terms, and ingroup and outgroup identification. The first, *common knowledge markers*, is a rhetorical device that stresses points of shared interest between the author and the reader—or in this case, the speaker and the audience. *Paired terms* contrast certain ideas and images to create ideological dichotomies, and *in/outgroup identification* is a common method of unification. To best understand how Hitler effectively used these strategies, this paper will look at the latter speech—September 1, 1939—first, as its success appears to have been built upon Hitler’s earlier rhetorical victory in 1934.

Common Knowledge Markers

Common knowledge markers, Hitler’s first strategy, are described by Koutsantoni in *Developing Academic Literacies* as rhetorical devices that “stress common knowledge between authors and readers” to “support their own claims and therefore strengthen them, by stressing the fact that they are based on knowledge that everyone in the field is (or should be) familiar with” (146-47). These markers can be “expressions of generalized attribution”—such as *it is known*—which work by “[referring] to points that are considered . . . self-explanatory” (147). They can also be adjectives such as *common*, which work to “convey normality” (146). And Hitler, whose ideas were far from normal, clearly stood to benefit by inserting such markers throughout his speech.

In introducing his plan for Poland, Hitler begins laying the foundation for his reasoning by first telling the Reichstag that “[for] months [Germany has] been suffering under the torture of a problem which the Versailles Diktat created,” a problem that “has deteriorated until it [has become] intolerable” (“1939”). Hitler adds that “Danzig was and is a German city,” that “[the] Corridor was and is German,” and that “[both] these territories owe their cultural development exclusively to the German people.” He says in addition to the fact that “[more] than 1,000,000 people of German blood had in the year 1919–1920 to leave their homeland,” “all German minorities living [in the Corridor] have been ill-treated in the most distressing manner.”

Although Hitler’s first couple of statements might be subjective and could possibly be put up for debate, the last one is less so. Even though Hitler uses absolutes—like “all” and “most”—the claim is a little harder to argue with on the merit that there does exist some empirical evidence supporting it. But it is clear in this introduction that Hitler attributes Germany’s hardships as arising solely from the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. By doing so, Hitler shifts blame away from something that might be found within the state to an external factor that is out of his control. Painting Germany as being unfairly subjected to this abuse creates a feeling of helplessness and victimization that he will gather as momentum in continuing his argument.

After airing out these grievances, Hitler begins recounting the events that he says factored in to his decision to invade Poland. He talks about his many attempts at making “proposals for revision . . . of this intolerable position” that Germany finds itself in, which he reminds the Reichstag,

“as you know, have been rejected.” Hitler tells them, “You know the proposals that I have made. . . . You know the endless attempts I made for a peaceful clarification and understanding.” And regarding the British government’s proposal that Poland and Germany should try again at arriving at a compromise, Hitler says to the Reichstag that he had “worked out a basis for these negotiations which are known to you.” Yet he never actually elaborates on what those negotiations entailed. Instead, he continues as if he assumes that his audience both remembers and understands what those negotiations were.

This is a strategic assumption. There are certain phrases Hitler continually uses when addressing the Reichstag—specifically, *you know* and *known to you*—that he offers in lieu of evidence proving he actually did what he said he did. Hitler seems to be justifying his claims with them. But he never does his audience the favor of actually explaining what he’s referring to when he uses these phrases, even though he repeats them multiple times throughout the speech.

Hitler then reminds the Reichstag that he “tried to solve the problem of Danzig, the Corridor,” simply because “[that] the problems had to be solved was clear.” He does not qualify that statement to clarify that *in his opinion*, this was clear. It just was. And he does the exact same thing when he starts talking about Germany’s relationship with Russia.

Hitler says that, “[given] the fact that Soviet Russia has no intention of exporting its doctrine to Germany, [he] no longer [sees] any reason why [they] should still oppose one another,” because “[on] both sides [they] are clear on that.” So, not only does Hitler insist that his audience already knows what he’s talking about, he also

positions issues in ways that portray them as being extremely evident or obvious. The order of his argument may be reversed so that his conclusion is first and his premise is second, but he is still assuming and implying that it is just as clear to Russia as it is to Germany what the nature of their relationship and the basis of their agreement is.

The latter part of Hitler’s 1939 speech focuses on his many attempts to address and improve Germany’s relations with Poland. He repeatedly tells the Reichstag, *I have done* this or that. He says, “On my own initiative I have, not once but several times, made proposals for the revision of intolerable conditions” and that “[in] the same way, I have also tried to solve the problem of Danzig, the Corridor, etc., by proposing a peaceful discussion.” But when his efforts were proving to be futile, he tells the Reichstag, “I made one more final effort to accept a proposal for mediation on the part of the British Government.” Hitler tells them that when he accepted it, “[for] two whole days [he] sat in [his] government and waited . . . for the Polish Government to send a plenipotentiary,” but still, “they did not send us [one].” By offering these attempts he had made as proof that he genuinely tried to resolve the issue peacefully, Hitler eliminates a possible objection to war on the grounds that there might be other non-violent avenues to take.

Essentially, Hitler gives the German people his personal account of what happened and states as fact that they do remember—or at least recognize—what he refers to in his speech. But in reality, what he said never happened. At least not in the way he said it did.

According to Shirer, Hitler agreed to the British government’s proposal only on the condition that a “Polish emissary, with full

powers to conclude negotiations, must arrive in Berlin the next day” (20th 436). This was impossible, and Hitler was well aware of it. He had only given his proposal to Henderson, the British ambassador to Germany, the night before, so there was legitimately no way that the Polish government could have received Hitler’s message and sent an emissary down in time to meet Hitler’s deadline. Shirer says this proves that Hitler’s proposals were “never meant to be taken seriously,” that they were only “a sham to fool the German people and, if possible, world opinion into believing that Hitler, at the last moment, in an attempt to reach a reasonable settlement had made a fair offer to Poland and that the Polish government would not even send an emissary to Berlin to discuss it” (438). So, the proposal Hitler said he had accepted from the British Government, “that Poland and Germany should come into direct contact and once more pursue negotiations,” the proposal he said he “worked out a basis for . . . that were known to [the Reichstag],” was purely a strategic and manipulative tactic. And when Hitler says in his speech that he waited “two whole days” for a Polish plenipotentiary, he was simply lying. But Hitler pulled it off well—Shirer writes that on 3:30 AM of September 1, listening to the German broadcast announcing the proposals to Poland, he was “taken aback by their reasonableness,” and that, “having to translate them for our American listeners immediately . . . [he] missed the catch”—that catch being Hitler’s attempt to warp time (*Berlin* 146).

Hitler later even admitted that he was lying. Shirer says that Paul Schmidt, Hitler’s interpreter, had overheard Hitler say that “[he] needed an alibi . . . especially with the German people, to show them that [he] had

done everything possible to maintain the peace,” which “explains [his] generous offer about Danzig and the Corridor” (20th 438). It also explains why Hitler says to the Reichstag that, “when [he] now [asks] sacrifices of the German people and if necessary every sacrifice,” that “[he has] a right to do so” (“1939”). Hitler was using those proposals as proof for the Germans that he had exhausted every possibility, when he really had not. And by giving his audience that illusion, Hitler is able to overcome that hurdle and take the liberty of continuing with his argument.

Given this information, it seems that Hitler was using those common knowledge markers in the first half of his speech to lay the foundation for this “proof.” By assuming that his audience already remembered what he was talking about, Hitler was able to create some facsimile of a logical chain of reasoning.

When Hitler was addressing his audience using those common knowledge markers, when he was making those assumptions, what he was doing was essentially priming them to be his enablers. Jasinski says this “process of hailing or being called on” is similar to Althusser’s definition of interpellation, which occurs when “the act of addressing [a] person does something: it *positions* the person in a certain way” (320). Interpellation works because “[when] the person recognizes or acknowledges that he or she is being called on, the person is ‘recruited’ . . . into [that] position” (320). Hitler recruited his audience through interpellation by using those prompting phrases, by positioning them to support his decision to invade Poland despite the fact that audience members opposed what that decision actually meant—war. But by layering his lies in between those phrases, by acting both like his audience agreed with him and

that what he was saying made complete logical sense, Hitler made it nearly impossible to refute what he was saying.

Hitler took full advantage of the fact that those common knowledge markers were supposed to be self-explanatory. He used those phrases to make his audience feel that they were supposed to be familiar with what he was talking about, that they should recognize and accept it. By doing so, he called them to be part of an imaginary “community” of people who supported his actions.

The Night of Long Knives

Five years earlier, Hitler had used the exact same tactic in his public speech addressing the events of June 30, 1934—also known as the Night of Long Knives. His purpose this time was similar; Hitler had to convince his audience of the existence of a problem he characterized as being an imminent reality and needing to be urgently solved.

The Night of Long Knives was just as deadly as it sounds. It was a purge of Hitler’s political dissidents that ended in the deaths of—as he lists out—nineteen high-ranking SA leaders, thirty-one other SA leaders and members, three SS leaders, five non-SA party comrades, and “three members of the SS ... guilty of disgraceful abuse of prisoners in protective custody” who were shot; thirteen SA leaders and civilians who had “resisted arrest and sacrificed their lives in the process”; and finally, “three other lives” that were “ended by suicide” (“1934,” 498). The SA, the *Sturmabteilung*, was the Nazi party’s paramilitary organization; the SS, the *Schutzstaffel*, was Heinrich Himmler’s paramilitary force.

Historian Richard Evans reports that many people already “suspected that there was more to the events of 30 June than met the eye,”

that this suspicion was so prevalent that “local police authorities [even] reported an atmosphere of widespread rumor and speculation, ‘grumbling’ and ‘carping’” (38). It should have been extremely difficult for Hitler to explain away this deadly event to such a wary public. But surprisingly, Evans concludes, this “open confession of the complete illegality of his action in formal terms,” this candid listing of lives lost on that night, “did not run into any criticism from the judicial authorities” (38). In fact, Hitler’s speech was so effective that the Reichstag “enthusiastically applauded Hitler’s justification and passed a resolution thanking him for his action”; a law was even passed soon after, which gave Hitler’s actions “retroactive legality” (38).

Evans gives an account of a schoolteacher named Luise Solmitz who had initially described that day’s events as one that had “shattered all of us right down to our innermost heart” (39). But “[as] details began to emerge” during Hitler’s public address, Solmitz began to “[find] herself overcome with admiration for Hitler’s conduct” (39). She quickly reversed her position, saying that, “The personal courage, the decisiveness and effectiveness [Hitler] showed in Munich, the decisiveness and effectiveness, that is unique” (39). Moreover, Evans says that her reaction was “not untypical” of the public (38). Hitler’s speech had apparently worked its magic.

The way in which Hitler introduced the problem in 1934 was a prequel to the way he would start his Poland speech five years later. He says that there had been “prattle of a new revolution, of a new upheaval, of a new uprising,” that eventually became “no longer possible to simply dismiss as empty chatter” (488). Hitler says that his “[repeated] attempts to remedy this [problem] through normal

official channels failed each time” (489). Just like how he would frame the problem of Poland to be one that he was finally forced to address, Hitler establishes that he had “repeatedly” tried being peaceful in the events leading up to the Night of Long Knives, but reluctance and lack of cooperation by others meant he eventually had to resort to using violence.

Hitler then says that he has “always stressed that an authoritarian regime bears particularly great responsibilities,” that he has “always insisted that higher demands be placed upon the behavior and conduct of National Socialist leaders than upon the other *Volksgenossen*” (490). By using the phrase *I have always*, Hitler tries not just to lend credibility to what he is saying, but frames it in a way that there is no excuse for his audience to have thought otherwise. Unless his audience knows every single one of his actions, which they did not, this was a non-rebuttable phrase. In this situation, they had no choice but to take him at his word.

Hitler tells his audience that he hopes the purge will “hopefully [live] on in ... history for all time as both a sad reminder and a warning,” saying that it had grown out of “a combination of objective circumstances and personal guilt, of human incompetence and human defects” (485). He does his victims no favors in painting them as a slothful enemy, saying their “inborn incompetence” meant that they were “unable ... to prove their worth by positive, useful work” (486). But the enemy were also “deserters and mutineers,” and Hitler tells the Reichstag that they must “inwardly disassociate [themselves] from these concepts” (486). These concepts, he says, are “oppositional elements” to the German Volk (487).

In describing what compelled him to act as harshly as he did, Hitler says:

Honor and obedience forced us to refuse to obey [to the usurpers]; love of the nation and Vaterland obliged us to wage war on them; the amorality of their laws extinguished in us the conviction of the necessity for complying with them—and hence we became revolutionaries. However, even as revolutionaries, we had not disassociated ourselves from the obligation to apply to ourselves the natural laws of the sovereign right of our Volk and to respect these laws. (486)

Hitler emphasizes the fact that he took action out of necessity, saying that:

It was not our intention to violate the will and the right of self-determination of the German Volk, but to drive away those who violated the nation ... When a deathly check is violently imposed upon the natural development of a Volk, an act of violence may serve to release the artificially interrupted flow of evolution to allow it once again the freedom of natural development. (486)

Hitler says these dissidents are nothing more than a “little colony of drones,” claiming that they are “without any living contact with life, with the feelings, hopes and cares of the rest of the Volk” (488). And they are especially dangerous, since they are “veritable germ-carriers for unrest, uncertainty, rumors, allegations, lies, suspicions, slander, and fear,” “[breaking] every single law of decency and modesty” and poisoning what should be a “healthy Volk,” making it so that it has become “difficult to recognize or draw the natural boundaries between them and the Volk” (488).

So, Hitler says, there could be “no question of the fact that it would be better to destroy a hundred mutineers, plotters and conspirators than to allow ten thousand innocent SA men on the one hand and ten thousand equally innocent persons on the other to bleed to death” (498). With this, he warns that “[the] nation should know that no one can threaten its existence—which is guaranteed by inner law and order—and escape unpunished!” (497).

Paired Terms

Throughout this entire disparaging narrative, Hitler also speaks in paired terms, pitting the opposition’s vision of what he calls a “Communist paradise” against his goals for the National Socialist State (485). Paired terms are a rhetorical concept essential to the idea of dissociation that is outlined by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric*. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca refer to them as “philosophical pairs,” describing them as “notions that are formed on the model of the ‘appearance-reality’ pair” typically found in philosophy (24). Here, each pair is actually an opposition that symbolizes a dissociation of certain ideas—“in each case, reality is opposed to appearance” (24). A philosophical pair works toward dissociation by “[depreciating] ... an accepted value” and replacing it with another that is then “accorded the original value” (24). The only requirements are that an opposing conception must be “shown to be valuable, relevant, as well as incompatible with the common use of the same notion” (24). Essentially, the paired terms work to create a comprehensive picture of two dichotomous images that each derive part of their image from their opposition of the other.

Hitler’s choice of terms focuses on contrasting the evils he says Germany is currently dealing with—namely, the “amoral,” “germ-carrying” conspirators—with what he says the country should be striving toward and working to protect—the true German Volk. When Hitler emphasizes the importance of dissociating from the enemy, he makes sure to draw a distinction between the revolutionaries that the enemy is and the revolutionaries he says the National Socialist State is composed of. He says that the former are revolutionaries who have “lost all inner connection to a regulated human social order,” while his revolutionaries are tied to “the obligation to apply to ourselves the natural laws of the sovereign right of our Volk” (486). The terms Hitler uses to portray the enemy are placed above the terms he uses to describe his own forces. Each contrast these terms draw builds upon each other to bolster his message.

Table 1
Paired terms in Hitler’s 1934 Speech to the Reichstag

“Lower” Term	“Higher” Term
Deserters, mutineers, plotters, conspirators	Revolutionaries, innocent persons
“Germ-carriers”	Healthy Volk
Amoral laws	Natural laws
Unrest, uncertainty, rumors, allegations, lies, suspicion, slander, fear	Inner law and order

Hitler would later use the same tactic in his 1939 speech to highlight the contrasts between his characterizations of Poland and Germany—specifically, that Poland was “strangling ... the Free City of Danzig,” that they were placing “undue pressure” and

inflicting “terror” on German citizens. Hitler himself, however, had a “love of peace and ... patience” and was striving toward a “peaceful co-existence.” To Hitler, Germany represents freedom, while Poland is the oppressive perpetrator of “serious atrocities” against peaceful German people.

Table 2
Paired terms in Hitler’s 1939 Speech to the Reichstag

Freedom	Oppression, persecution
Peace, patience	“Serious atrocities”

By using these paired terms, Hitler is able to subtly illustrate two different group memberships. Roberts-Miller says this technique is inherent to demagoguery, because “the accusation of bias is made through assertions about group membership, and such assertions release the rhetor from the responsibility of actually engaging the argument” (17). And so, Hitler’s reasons for invading Poland appear to be truly justified even without him having to prove a legitimate argument.

Ingroup / Outgroup Association

Hitler then builds upon this villainous characterization of the enemy by delving into specifics, naming the four main groups he has identified as being particularly “destructive elements” (“1934” 486). The first he calls a “phenomenon which poisons and makes dupes of the *Volk*,” while “the second group of discontented is comprised of those political leaders who regard their futures as having been settled by January 30 but who have never been able to reconcile themselves to the irreversibility of this fact” (485). The third group is “made up of those

revolutionaries who were shaken and uprooted in 1918 in regard to their relation to the State and who thus,” according to Hitler, “have lost all inner connection to a regulated human social order”; they are “pathological enemies” of the State (486). Finally, the fourth are those who “have nothing to do and thus find the time and opportunity to deliver oral reports on everything capable of bringing some interesting and important variety to their lives which are,” in Hitler’s eyes, “otherwise completely meaningless” (487). Hitler harshly criticizes the fourth group of people as being those whose “sole activity consists of doing nothing, followed by more of the same to recuperate from having done nothing”—meanwhile, “the overwhelming majority in the nation is made to earn its daily bread by toilsome labor, in certain classes of life” (487). By saying this, by characterizing these groups as being the complete opposite of what he says real “Volk” are, Hitler focuses his audience’s attention on that stark contrast. By polarizing these two main groups—the Volk and the “usurpers”—Hitler encourages his audience to foster resentment and direct enmity and hostility towards those he claims are lazy and have nothing better to do with their time but incite violence and revolution.

Outlining these outgroups gave Hitler’s audience the tools to achieve identification through antithesis, a method of unification within an ingroup that occurs when the group “focuses on uniting in the face of a shared enemy” (Jasinski 305). Identification is a concept described by Kenneth Burke that deals intimately with the role of language—language, and rhetoric more specifically, must be used to “promote identification or overcome division” within people who are

inherently divided (Jasinski 305). Yet identification is not incompatible with the preservation of personal identity: Burke says that two people, A and B, are not identical; however, “insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B” (qtd. in Jasinski 305).

In Hitler’s demagoguery, the ultimate ingroup is the *Volk*, the German people. In his 1939 speech, Hitler not only reinforced this idea by portraying Poland, the enemy, as being the ultimate “other,” but by targeting German “traitors” as well. He says, “We have nothing to do with traitors,” that “It is quite unimportant whether we ourselves live, but it is essential that our people shall live, that Germany shall live.” Poland and any traitors stand in opposition to Hitler’s community that he says is “bound together by vows, ready for anything, resolved never to surrender.”

The overwhelming sentiment created by this in- and out-grouping is that of the need for self-preservation and self-defense. Hitler was fully aware of the power of this strategy, saying that, “As a whole, and at all times, the efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of a people, and always in concentrating it on a single enemy . . . It is part of the genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only” (qtd. in Burke 165).

Conclusion

Rhetoric attempts to explain the ways in which words move people to action. How these words are used, how they are arranged, and the context in which they live—these all affect the final impact of those words. While it may not give us the ability to determine for certain an individual’s motive, rhetoric gives us the power to identify the connections between certain words and phrases, to

analyze their interactions and effects. Sometimes, the effects are big. And Hitler’s 1939 speech announcing the invasion of Poland wasn’t even just monumental; it changed the trajectory of world history. With the use of strategies as simple as common knowledge markers, paired terms, and ingroup/outgroup identification, Hitler was able to justify the unjustifiable.

Hitler had told his audience at the beginning of his 1934 speech that he would be “completely frank” with them regarding the events that occurred on the night of June 30 (485). To his credit, Hitler did present an extensive list of the people who had been killed during the purge. And given this extremely clear and straightforward depiction of the enemy, it truly might have appeared to his audience that Hitler really was just getting to the point. Using common knowledge markers that subtly positioned his audience to readily support him only added to this illusion. The things Hitler publicly admitted to doing were so inhumane that they should have been inexcusable. But by using paired terms, he was able to portray the enemy to be so terribly evil that his actions would be seen as a response of the appropriate magnitude. In addition, Hitler had offered forth four clear outgroups. He gave his audience an enemy to focus on and band together against, essentially providing them with everything they needed to participate in identification through antithesis.

All of these factors—common knowledge markers, reinforced by paired terms, combined with clear ingroup and outgroup identification—made for a deadly but extremely effective cocktail of drugs. Administered against the backdrop of the chaos lingering from the First World War, it gave Hitler his

seemingly magical ability to unite the country and rise to power. Kenneth Burke described Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as "the well of Nazi magic," as a "testament of a man who swung a great people into his wake" (164-65). Seventy-eight years ago, in 1957, Burke said that "[a] people trained in pragmatism should want to inspect this magic," to "[let] us watch it

carefully," so that we might know "exactly what to guard against, if we are to forestall the concocting of similar medicine in America" (164-65). In 2019, it's not difficult to find similar rhetorical strategies at play in the realm of US political leadership—so let us hope we continue to do so.

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