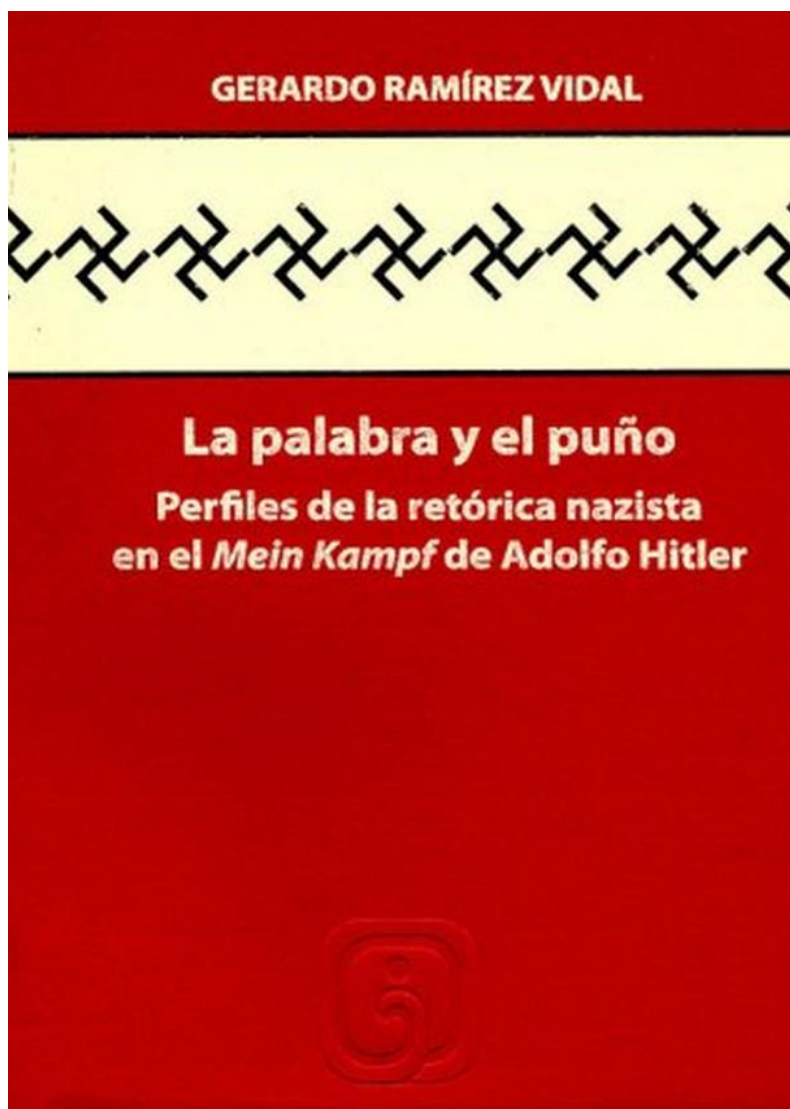


**RAMÍREZ VIDAL, Gerardo. *La palabra y el puño: perfiles de la retórica nazista en el Mein Kampf de Adolfo Hitler* [The Word and the Fist: Approaches to Nazi Rhetoric in Adolfo Hitler's *Mein Kampf*]. México D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2013. 152 p. [Colección de Bolsillo; 40]**

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The two nouns in the title *palabra* and *puño* [word and fist] function as equivalent linguistic signs. Based on Rhetoric's understanding of *word*, they are seen as a social and political weapon.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, they epitomize the indissoluble connection between discourse and violence in Nazi rhetoric. Another key paratext is the book dedication: "To those who fought against the PRI dictatorship with bravery and perseverance."<sup>2</sup> It allows us to understand the author's interest in this subject, but it also shows us the pertinence of his work to readers from Mexico in particular and from Latin America in general. Gerardo Ramírez Vidal, a PhD in Classical Languages from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) [Autonomous National University of Mexico] and a researcher from Centro de Estudios Clásicos del Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas [Center for Classical Studies of the Institute of Research in Philology]/UNAM, is clearly not trying to compare PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) [Institutional Revolutionary Party] with the Nazi regime. The dedication aims to help readers read his work. Thus, readers may connect characteristics of what the author calls the "authoritarian rhetoric," analyzed in *Mein Kampf*, with the rhetoric of PRI officials. For left-wing civil organizations in Mexico, PRI ruled as a dictatorship. Vidal is committed to the social and political reality of his time, but he is also committed to current Rhetoric. This commitment has been shaped by his tireless work to create and consolidate organizations in the field of Rhetoric whose members are scholars from Latin America and Ibero-America. In fact, Ramírez Vidal was the first president of the Latin America Association of Rhetoric and the Mexican Association of Rhetoric. Presently he is the president of the Ibero-American Organization of Rhetoric.

Vidal approaches *Mein Kampf* from an engaging perspective: he considers it "*un ars rhetorica sui generis*," that is, a practical "manual" or "treaty" of rhetoric. It "could offer the Nazi party leaders and occasional propagandists a set of technical elements that would allow

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this topic, see LÓPEZ EIRE, A. La naturaleza retórica del lenguaje, *Logo. Revista de Retórica y Teoría de la Comunicación* 8/9, 2005, p.5-254.

<sup>2</sup> PRI stands for Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party], a Mexican political party that held hegemonic political power between 1929 and 1989. Text in original: "A quienes con valentía y perseverancia han luchado en contra de la dictadura priista".

them to efficiently promote the ideology of the author” (p.14).<sup>3</sup> As a faithful follower of Aristotle, who saw Rhetoric as morally neutral (it can be used for good or for evil), the author starts the book by discussing the efficiency of Adolf Hitler’s text and not by making axiological or normative assumptions.

The book presents a rigorous rhetorical analysis of *Mein Kampf*, which draws readers’ attention to the author’s knowledge about rhetoric. Although he explains key concepts in rhetorical studies, he avoids scholarly jargons. This helps reading flow. Besides, it shows that experts in the field were not his only target audience. In fact, *La palabra y el puño* [The Word and the Fist] has a didactic purpose, for it is based on the premise that rhetoric has proved very important for citizenship education and for civic life, which is inherent to democracy.

*La palabra y el puño* [The Word and the Fist] is comprised of an introduction, two chapters, which are divided into different sections, and a conclusion. In the introduction, he discusses the state of the art in the field and outlines main previous studies on Hitler’s oratory skills and on *Mein Kampf*. He also shows his reading path: *Mein Kampf* functioned as a “useful manual” of rhetoric. Finally, he summarizes the content of the chapters.

The first section of Chapter 1, entitled *Mein Kampf*, focuses on the macro-rhetoric<sup>4</sup> aspects of the book, viz., its goal, target audience, and the space-time circumstances in which it was produced. Hitler successfully used those aspects. Based on the abundant number of references to classical and current rhetorical studies, Vidal refers to Germany’s unfavorable economic conditions after the following events: (1) the Treaty of Versailles, (2) the Munich Putsch (8 to 9 of November of 1923), (3) Hitler’s imprisonment, which led him to his “conversion,” when he “became the true envoy who would save Germany” (p.28),<sup>5</sup> (4) the rise of the Nazi Party, and (5) the very story of *Mein Kampf*. *Mein Kampf* is a two-volume

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<sup>3</sup> Text in original: “que podría ofrecer a los eventuales divulgadores del nazismo, y no solo a los dirigentes de la organización partidista, una serie de elementos técnicos que les permitiría a ellos mismos difundir de manera eficaz la ideología del autor”.

<sup>4</sup> It is possible to connect the notion of macro-rhetoric with that of *Intellectio* [CHICO RICO, F. La *Intellectio*. Notas sobre una sexta operación retórica. *Estudios de Literatura* 14, 1989, p.47-55]. *Inventio, Dispositio, Elocutio, Actio, Memoria, and Intellectio* are six rhetorical operations. *Intellectio* is the general overview and the guiding knowledge of a case. It implies taking into account the interrelationship between the components of the communication process, such as the text, its producer, receiver, and the general communication context in which producer and receiver are. On macro-rhetoric, see ROSSETTI, L. *Estrategias macro-retóricas: el “formateo” del acontecimiento comunicativo*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Text in original: “se había transformado en el verdadero enviado que habría de salvar a Alemania”.

text. The first one was written in Landsberg jail in 1924. It was corrected and rewritten by several people and published in 1925. The second volume was written when Hitler was out of prison. It was published in 1926. In 1930 the two volumes were published as a single book for the first time.

Vidal uses the term *kairós* to describe the appropriate moment which renders an action favorable or determines it. This first moment of *Mein Kampf* relates to Hitler's prestige, which derived from his imprisonment and the publication of the work. The second moment refers to Germany's bankruptcy, caused by the Great Depression in 1930 and 1933. It turned Hitler into "a national leader and a myth of the right-wing Germany" (p.34).<sup>6</sup>

The second section of Chapter 1 lays out the access to the work (*accessus ad operam*). This access is absolutely fundamental to determine its purpose (*telos, finis*). The purpose of *Mein Kampf* is to offer the followers of the national-socialist movement a set of principles they have to adopt while doing propagandist work. In order to achieve this goal, Hitler resorts to *paradigms*. Thus, through the example of his own life, his followers would understand the goals of the movement and its development. They would also be able to promote it effectively. As to the nature of the work (*quid*), Vidal considers it a *treaty*. Although the word *treaty* is used here in the wide sense of the concept, it shows subjectivity, and subjectivity does not fit into the *nature of the genre*. Thus, it is a *rhetorical treaty*, for "in a somewhat systematic, complete and didactical way, it teaches how to create an oral or written text of a political nature in order to efficiently promote the national-socialist ideology" (pp.42-43).<sup>7</sup>

Chapter 2, entitled Elements of the Nazi Rhetoric, is the largest chapter of the book and is composed of four sections. The first one refers to the orator. It is based on the principle that authoritarian rhetoric, be it right-wing or left-wing, is grounded on the character of a dictator, the one who articulates discourse. Thinking of Hitler, Vidal examines the skills that are required to be an excellent orator. *Mein Kampf* presents the following skills: natural, practical, and technical or theoretical. Hitler's natural skills were his good voice, "a baritone

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<sup>6</sup> Text in original: "un dirigente nacional y en un mito de la derecha alemana".

<sup>7</sup> Text in original: "expone de manera más o menos sistemática, completa y con fines didácticos una serie de enseñanzas de cómo debe construirse un texto oral o escrito de naturaleza política para la propagación eficaz de la ideología nacionalsocialista".

voice that is able to modulate from *piano* to *fortissimo*,”<sup>8</sup> and his hands, “well-formed and expressive hands” (p.51).<sup>9</sup> His body and low height were, however, natural shortcomings. As to practical skills, Hitler praised Karl Lueger’s rhetoric. Lueger was the mayor of Vienna, who happened to be a self-declared anti-Semite. He also took the Austrian thinker Georg von Schoenerer (1842-1921) as an example. Schoenerer was another renowned anti-Semite. Besides, Hitler trained with the group of propagandists of the *Reichswehr*’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment.<sup>10</sup> In relation to his theoretical skills, as an anti-Bolshevik agent, Hitler did some oratory courses offered by the Department of Information and education courses at the University of Munich in 1919. Vidal comments on the books that Hitler read, but he states that this is a controversial issue with no consensus. He points to the fact that Hitler’s eloquence seems to derive from the 38 stratagems that Schopenhauer proposed in *Eristic Dialectics (Dialektik)*. Among those stratagems, he highlights the last one, which shows how to slander opponents.

This section ends with Vidal’s reflection upon the relationship between eristic techniques and physical violence. The author presents other features of Hitler’s rhetoric: (1) the defense of one’s own point of view without taking heed of the opponent’s arguments; (2) the attempt to paralyze the opponent’s will; (3) an unidirectional symbiosis of the orator and his audience, whose replies are not taken into account, and (4) the attack move as the best form of defense. Vidal provides concrete examples of Hitler’s success, which was based on the alliance between “word” and “fist.” In fact, the statement in *Mein Kampf* that “Coercion is only broken by coercion, and terror only by terror” (DEVILLE, 2007, p.67)<sup>11</sup> is closely related to attacks against opponents in street fights, to sabotage and techniques of interrupting assembly meetings, and to the attempts to turn the National Socialist German Workers’ Party into news.

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<sup>8</sup> Text in original: “una voz de barítono, que sabía modular desde el *piano* al *fortissimo*”.

<sup>9</sup> Text in original: “bien formadas y expresivas”.

<sup>10</sup> *Reichswehr* is the name of the German Army.

<sup>11</sup> TN. The English translation we have used here, which is closer to the original in Spanish (“La coacción sólo se rompe mediante la coacción y el terror con el terror” (VIDAL, 2013, p.72-73), is found in DEVILLE, Daniel (Ed.). *National Socialism: A Philosophical Appraisal*. 2.ed. Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 2007. In James Murphy’s translation of *Mein Kampf*, we find “violence is broken only by violence and terror by terror” (p.195). The full reference is: HITLER, Adolf. *Mein Kampf: My Struggle*. Transl. by James Murphy. Decatur, GA: White Wolf, 2014.

The second section of Chapter 2 is dedicated to *Inventio*. In this section Vidal discusses three main topics. The first one refers to the loci from which arguments are drawn. Based on that, he classifies them into logical (related to the theme), ethical (related to the orator), and emotional/pathetic (related to the audience). In this sense, the author highlights that in democratic rhetoric the order of importance of arguments is logical, ethical, and pathetic whereas in authoritarian rhetoric the order is ethical, pathetic, and logical.<sup>12</sup> The second topic has to do with the class and the structure of arguments, viz., enthymeme and paradigm. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler presents himself as the paradigm par excellence of a national-socialist orator. As to enthymeme, based on Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*,<sup>13</sup> Vidal emphasizes that the great fallacy of Nazi argumentation is the absence of warrants that support the rules of procedure. The last topic is the distinction he makes between common places and proper places, which corresponds to what Hitler called basic ideas or broad points of view. The first six chapters of *Mein Kampf* present these viewpoints, which constitute the dogmas of totalitarian argumentation, such as Aryan superiority, hatred against Jews, need for intolerance, race preservation through physical training, anti-parlamentarism, among others.

Vidal focuses on the first of these dogmas. He describes some of the logical arguments used in *Mein Kampf*, such as the end and the means. Nevertheless, as authoritarian rhetoric does not consider this type of reasoning, his analysis lingers over ethical and pathetic arguments, which were adequate for Hitler, who explicitly perceived masses as incapable of understanding and memorizing. The whole first part of *Mein Kampf* attempts to create an efficient image of Hitler, an ethos of a superior man. In order to do that, it appeals to themes related to the epideictic genre, which supports self-compliments about race, culture, or

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<sup>12</sup> Based on the analysis of discourse grounded in the descriptive data of textual linguistics, Adam e Herman warned about something similar. They compared the *L'Appel du 18 juin* [Appeal of 18 June], a speech by General Charles de Gaulle, with Marechal Pétain's speech on the day before, i.e., June 17, 1940. They differentiated argumentation, based on ethos, pathos, and logos, three complementary elements, from manipulation, which discards logos and focuses on ethos and pathos. Thus, for them De Gaulle argues, and Pétain and Hitler manipulate. The full reference is: ADAM, J-M.; HERMAN, Th., Reformulation, répétition et style périodique dans l'appel du 18 juin 1940, *Semen*, 12, *Répétition, altération, reformulation dans les textes et discours*, 2000. Available at: <<http://semen.revues.org/document1862.html>>. Access on: April 14, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> TOULMIN, Stephen E. *The Uses of Argument*. Updated Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

personal life story. By tracing the works that mention Hitler's reading on the psychology of the masses, Vidal identifies the strategies used by Hitler to stir emotions in his audience (especially hatred, fear, agony, disgust, and their counterparts). Examples of these strategies are the dramatic representation of universal history and the use of expressions that denote an international conspiracy or the financial enrichment of Jews.

The third section of Chapter 2 focuses on elocution. Vidal ascribes a humble or lowly style to Hitler, who makes sure to recommend the use of common and current words so that his followers can imitate them and teach them to others. As to the elocutionary virtues, viz., purity, clarity, decorum, and ornament, Hitler privileges clarity and decorum over correction. As to decorum, Vidal underlines the use Hitler made of personifications and allegories. He also prioritizes the analysis of rhetorical figures of simile, metaphor, hyperbole, antithesis, and the use of proverbs or proverbial expressions. These rhetorical resources do not prove anything in terms of logical argumentation, but they create emotions. Besides, if they are articulated with stereotypes or myths, they exert a strong persuasive force. The power of these micro-rhetorical elements depended upon the way Hitler adapted and took advantage of the macro-rhetorical elements, especially the context in which *Mein Kampf* was written and received.

The last section of Chapter 2 is dedicated to Actio. Hitler alluded to it in *Mein Kampf* when he mentions the verbal mechanisms that he followed. Moreover, Hitler clearly establishes the difference between oral and written speech. He privileges the first over the latter due to its great power to produce, for psychological reasons, meaningful changes. Besides, he believes that oral speech can be widely adapted to the spirit of the audience, reaching, thus, a great part of the masses. For him, written propaganda would be read only by party sympathizers.

*La palabra y el puño*'s [The Word and the Fist] final remarks explicit Vidal's purpose to write his book: "to know the discursive processes to which leaders of authoritarian regimes resort in order to find in practice antidotes to confront the mechanisms of dictatorship" (p.141).<sup>14</sup> In order to do that, he reminds the reader of the features of an authoritarian rhetoric:

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<sup>14</sup> Text in original: "El conocimiento de los procesos discursivos a los que recurren los líderes de los regímenes autoritarios tiene el fin práctico de encontrar antídotos que contrarresten los mecanismos de la dictadura".

(1) it takes advantage of unfavorable social and economic conditions; (2) it is complemented with physical violence; (3) it stems from indisputable dogmas that are established by an individual who claims to be illuminated; (4) it privileges emotional arguments that support the worship of a person and tend to stir fear or panic; (5) it uses a language of a polarized, sententious and hyperbolic nature that creates stereotypes and belittles opponents, and (6) it resorts to an Actio that uses gesticulations, a pathetic tone, and an inflaming attitude. The counterpart of the authoritarian rhetoric is the democratic rhetoric.

Vidal makes sure to emphasize that the rhetoric formation of citizens is essential to democracy. Only by providing them with civic education and by their respect for laws can authoritarian rhetoric be stopped from spreading. Somehow it promotes that which Ph-J. Salazar <sup>15</sup> calls “rhetoric literacy,” which prevents democracy from becoming the manipulation of opinions.

Opposed to *Mein Kampf*, a rhetoric prototype used for evil, Ramírez Vidal’s book is a wonderful bet on the rhetoric used for good. If Hitler’s work became a manual for his followers to disseminate national socialism, *La palabra y el puño* [*The Word and the Fist*] comes out not only as a valuable manual of rhetorical analysis, but also as a model for future work that intends to contribute to democracy and justice in Mexico. This intent is extended to Latin America as a whole.

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<sup>15</sup> SALAZAR, Philippe-Joseph. Tomar el poder por la palabra. Elementos de fabricación de la retórica electoral, *Rétor* 2 (2), 2012, p.260-263.