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What's in a Name? Characterization and Caricature in Dorothy Thompson Criticism

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VOLUME XXXI • 1996

- Benjamin Spock: A Two-Century Man
By Bettye Caldwell, Professor of Pediatrics,
Child Development, and Education,
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences 5
- While reviewing Benjamin Spock's pediatric career, his social activism, and his personal life, Caldwell assesses the impact of this "giant of the twentieth century" who has helped us to "prepare for the twenty-first."
- The Magic Toy Shop
By Jean Daugherty, Public Affairs Programmer,
WTVH, Syracuse 23
- The creator of *The Magic Toy Shop*, a long-running, local television show for children, tells how the show came about.
- Ernest Hemingway
By Shirley Jackson 33
- Introduction: Shirley Jackson on Ernest Hemingway:
A Recovered Term Paper
By John W. Crowley, Professor of English,
Syracuse University
- For a 1940 English class at Syracuse University, Shirley Jackson wrote a paper on Ernest Hemingway. Crowley's description of her world at that time is followed by the paper itself, which he finds notable for its "attention to the ambiguity surrounding gender roles in Hemingway's fiction," as well as its "intellectual command and stylistic ease."
- What's in a Name? Characterization and Caricature in
Dorothy Thompson Criticism 51
- By Frederick Betz, Professor of German,
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
- By the mid-1930s the journalist Dorothy Thompson had become "sufficiently important for writers and cartoonists to satirize her." They gave her a multitude of labels—zoological, mythological, and otherwise—which Betz surveys herein.

The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Nine)
By Gwen G. Robinson, Former Editor, 75
Syracuse University Library Associates Courier

In the writing of authors Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, E. E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, George Orwell, and Ernest Hemingway, Robinson traces the development in the twentieth century of two rival styles, one "plaindealing" and the other "complected." In the "literary skirmish" between the two, the latter may be losing—perhaps at the expense of our reasoning powers.

Edward Noyes Westcott's *David Harum*: A Forgotten Cultural Artifact
By Brian G. Ladewig, Secondary-School Teacher, 107
West Irondequoit, New York

The 1898 novel *David Harum* occasioned a major transition in the publishing industry and, over a period of forty years, profoundly influenced American culture. According to Ladewig, the middle class saw in *David Harum* a reflection of itself.

Marya Zaturenska's Depression Diary, 1931–1932
Introduction by Mary Beth Hinton, Editor, 125
Syracuse University Library Associates Courier

Selections from a diary kept by the poet Marya Zaturenska reveal her struggles as a mother, a wife, and an artist during the Great Depression.

News of Syracuse University Library and of
Library Associates 153

Post-Standard Award Citation, 1996, for Mark F. Weimer
Recent Acquisitions:
Margaret Bourke-White Negatives of Olympic Athletes
The Geography of Strabo
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
Materials from the Albert Schweitzer Center
Albert Schweitzer: A Message for a New Millennium
Library Associates Program for 1996–97

What's in a Name? Characterization and Caricature in Dorothy Thompson Criticism

BY FREDERICK BETZ

I

DOROTHY THOMPSON (1893–1961), who was a foreign correspondent in the 1920s and a syndicated columnist from the 1930s to the 1950s, is most well known today as the “Blue-Eyed Tornado” or as the “Cassandra” of her profession (see section IV). There were many other names and labels, for by the mid-1930s she had become “sufficiently important for writers and cartoonists to satirize her.” Indeed, “there was no other columnist on the national scene—and no other woman at Dorothy’s level,” as Peter Kurth, her latest biographer, observed, “whose writings and personality so lent themselves to exaggeration,” and “when she could not be dismissed any other way,” “she was dismissed as a ‘woman.’”¹ In representative surveys or collections of biographical essays on contemporary journalists, Dorothy Thompson (DT) stands out, not only as one of few women in a male-dominated profession, but also as the colleague most often subjected to name calling.²

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I wish to thank Carolyn A. Davis and the staff of Special Collections for assistance in working with the Dorothy Thompson Papers. —F. B.

1. John Gunther, “A Blue-Eyed Tornado,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, 13 January 1935, Magazine Section, pp. 6–7, 22; Charles Angoff, “Dorothy Thompson: Kansan in Westchester,” *The Tone of the Twenties and Other Essays* (New York: Barnes/London: Yoseloff, 1966), 116; Peter Kurth, *American Cassandra: The Life of Dorothy Thompson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 233. Subsequent quotations from Kurth’s biography will be cited in the text with the abbreviation PK.

2. DT is the only woman named in Harold L. Ickes’s 1939 radio attack on the “Columnists and Calumnists,” in *America’s House of Lords* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939), 96. Along with the social columnist Dorothy Dix and the newspaper editor Eleanor Patterson, DT is one of only three women in a collection of twenty-two *Post Biographies of Famous Journalists* (1942); Jack Alexander’s profile of DT (see n. 4) contains far more names and references than any of the other profiles, including those of such controversial contemporaries as the archconservative Westbrook Pegler or the ruthless gossip columnist

In a more recent biographical anthology of newspaper women in America, *Brilliant Bylines*, one can find other contemporaries who were called names. Anne O'Hare McCormick, the respected foreign affairs correspondent for the *New York Times*, was labeled "Verbose Annie" (171), and Sigrid Schultz, the long-time *Chicago Tribune* bureau chief in Berlin, was called "a female bloodhound," or "a small Sherman tank in motion," and the Nazis referred to her as "that dragon from Chicago" (208). But such names or labels do not begin to compare in number or range to those applied to DT.³

What was it about DT's person, personality, and career that subjected her to such satirical characterization or caricature? DT was, according to Jack Alexander, "statuesque and handsome."⁴ "She shone with success and power" (PK, 258). On the other hand, John Gunther, a long-time friend and fellow foreign correspondent, thought that she was "the worst photographed woman in America." Her lawyer, Louis Nizer, recalled in his memoirs the "malicious intention toward Dorothy" on the part of a photographer, who "caught her [in 1948] with her mouth wide open, eyes distended, hair standing straight up as if lifted by electric shock, copious breasts without a waistline so that they became part of a protruding stomach, and a clenched fist on top of a trunk-like arm to add a touch of belligerence to the pose" (PK, 297).

Beyond her appearance, DT was "a master of the dramatic entrance and immediately [made] herself the center of attention whenever she enter[ed] a roomful of people," and "she seem[ed] incapable of doing the simplest acts without infusing drama into them in some way." Perhaps her most celebrated dramatic gesture was her disruption of a German-American Bund rally at Madison Square Garden in February 1939 with "strident gales of raucous laughter," until she was muscled out the door by

Walter Winchell. Charles Fisher's chapter on DT in his book on *The Columnists* (see n. 12) also contains many more names and labels than the twelve other chapters devoted to nineteen other columnists, all men. John S. Kennedy's chapter on DT in *Molders of Opinion* (see n. 11) is the only one of his fourteen chapters that profiles a woman journalist.

3. Barbara Belford, *Brilliant Bylines: A Biographical Anthology of Notable Newspaperwomen in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

4. Jack Alexander, "The Girl from Syracuse," *Post Biographies of Famous Journalists*, ed. John E. Drewry (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1942), 433 (reprint of a two-part profile: "The Girl from Syracuse: The Story of Problem Child Dorothy Thompson" [18 May 1940]; and "Rover Girl in Europe: Dorothy Thompson Abroad; or, The Romance of Sinclair Lewis" [25 May 1940], in the *Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 212.)

Fritz Kuhn's storm troopers (PK, 288). Similarly, DT was regarded as "perhaps the only person in the United States who [made] a career out of stewing publicly about the state of the world."⁵

She took up her major themes in her "On the Record" (OTR) column for the *New York Herald-Tribune* (1936–41) and "rolled them into a ball of outrage, which she commenced to hurl, over and over . . . at the 'cowards' and 'appeasers,' the isolationists, the America Firsters, and 'the architects of cynicism' in American life. . . . Her columns were not distinguishable from her radio broadcasts, nor her speeches from her open discourse" (PK, 308–9). As a news commentator for NBC in 1937, "she had a way of punching her words that was nothing short of electrifying," but "over time, Dorothy's sponsors began to worry about her 'belligerent tone'" (PK, 265–6).

Nevertheless, from then until the end of World War II she was never far from a microphone, which, according to another veteran journalist, Vincent Sheean, did more than anything else to speed her rise as "an American oracle, one of those very few people who have the corporate, general permission to tell people what to think." In her "OTR" columns, as Lewis Gannett observed in a review of her book *Let the Record Speak* (1939), she wrote "fireily . . . sometimes almost hysterically." She would get "mad"; she would "plead"; she would "denounce."⁶ Indeed, the reviewer for the *New York Times* thought that the book would have been better titled "Let the Record Shout," but not so much because DT's prose style often produced that effect, but rather "because her book show[ed] how often she [had] been prophetically right" (PK, 264–5).

To be sure, DT had misjudged Hitler in her interview with him in November 1931 and predicted that he would never come to power,⁷ but since then she had warned the American public relentlessly about the Nazi terror and persecution of Jews, and then about Hitler's intentions of conquest, first of Austria, then of Czechoslovakia, and finally, of Poland. For opposing America's neutrality, or rather isolationism, and urging America's support of and then participation in the war, however, she was widely branded as a "warmonger" (PK, 311).

When she switched her support from Willkie to Roosevelt in the 1940

5. Alexander, "Girl from Syracuse," 433, 431.

6. Vincent Sheean, *Dorothy and Red* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 254; Louis Gannett, *New York Herald-Tribune*, 25 August 1939.

7. Thompson discusses her interview in "I Saw Hitler!" (New York: Farrar & Rhinehart, 1932).

presidential election, because she had concluded that FDR could better lead America in the world war against Hitler, her contract for the “OTR” column was not renewed by the staunchly Republican *New York Herald-Tribune*. Her support for FDR was all the more astonishing, as she had persistently warned of fascist tendencies in the economic planning of the New Deal, in FDR’s Supreme Court “packing” plan in 1937, and in the president’s Government Reorganization Bill in 1938, measures which, she feared, would threaten the constitutional separation of powers. For such warnings she was accused, especially by liberal critics, of “hysteria,” “emotionalism,” “wild exaggeration,” and “rampant paranoia” (PK, 228–9). For vehemently opposing first the policy of “Unconditional Surrender” in 1943 (because it would discourage all German resistance to Hitler), and then the “Morgenthau Plan” in 1944 (because it would only repeat the economic consequences of the vengeful and ill-considered Treaty of Versailles following World War I) she was now widely criticized as “pro-German,” even though she had been regarded “around the world as a leading opponent of the Hitler regime” (PK, 364–6, 201). And when, finally, after the war she criticized Zionism and defended the Arab cause in the Middle East, she was accused of being an “anti-Semite” and lost her contract with the pro-Zionist *New York Post* in 1947, even though she had been considered too pro-Jewish when, for example, she urged the United States to take the lead in finding a solution to the international refugee crisis in 1938 (PK, 275–80).

With her commanding presence, then, her dramatic gestures, her insistent, Cassandra-like warnings, and her crusading and seemingly contradictory stands on the issues, DT inspired or provoked her contemporaries to give her a great many labels. Perhaps only H. L. Mencken and Eleanor Roosevelt had more.⁸ The following survey presents examples—mostly from 1935 to 1945, when DT was at the height of her career—of labels in

8. Cf. *Menckeniana: A Schimpflexikon* (1928), in which the most controversial journalist of the 1920s and editor of the *American Mercury* (whose assistant was Charles Angoff) had collected from various sources 132 pages of invective about himself, arranged in such categories as “zoological,” “genealogical,” “pathological,” “Freudian diagnoses,” “penalogical,” “as a critic,” “as an American,” “as a scoundrel,” etc.! Cf. also George Wolfskill, *All But the People: Franklin D. Roosevelt and His Critics, 1933–39* (1969), chap. 2, “We Don’t Like Her, Either,” especially 37–44, for such references to the tall, unphotogenic, “ubiquitous,” and “loquacious” First Lady as “The Lady Eleanor” or “that Amazon.” *Time*, vol. 33 (12 June 1939), noted that DT and Eleanor Roosevelt were “undoubtedly the most influential women in the U.S.” (47); no doubt they ranked as well among the most criticized or ridiculed women in America!

four broad categories: (1) references to natural phenomena; (2) zoological references; (3) biographical references; (4) references to figures, types, or occupations. These categories reveal a remarkable network of interrelated references to DT, as displayed by techniques of substitution or combination, name association or word play; in many instances the characterization of DT is a caricature, i.e., an exaggeration by means of highlighting or distorting some part (of her physique), trait (of her personality), or aspect (of her work) in order to ridicule or discredit her.

II

1. *References to Natural Phenomena*

John Gunther's 1935 profile of DT, published more than a year before her appointment as a columnist for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, was entitled "A Blue-Eyed Tornado," referring to the enterprising reporter who would travel anytime and anywhere in Europe in the 1920s to get a scoop or an exclusive interview. For the admiring Gunther the reference to a "tornado" (as a violent or destructive force of nature) had no negative connotation, which he made clear in the subtitle: "For Eight Years in the 1920s Dorothy Thompson Swept Through Europe, a Blue-Eyed, Amiable Tornado. She Went Abroad an Unknown. She Returned a Famous Journalist." Gunther's label captured the essence of the legendary foreign correspondent, and therefore it is not surprising to find variations of it in almost all subsequent profiles of DT, who, for example, had "enormous vitality and moved with irresistible force" (Ross), "tore through Central Europe with a freshness that won prime ministers and rival correspondents" (Wharton), or "breezed through Europe in a blaze of newspaper reporting" (Harriman). More critical of her history of "showmanship," however, Carey Longmire extended the metaphor back to DT's early life: "Dorothy, by all accounts, was a blue-eyed tornado from infancy."⁹

Subsequent references to natural phenomena are also not positive. In 1937, during the protracted controversy over FDR's Supreme Court "packing" plan (see section IV), the liberal columnist and Democratic Party insider Jay Franklin dismissed DT's "OTR" columns on the subject

9. Gunther, "Blue-Eyed Tornado," 6; Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider* (New York: Harper, 1936), 361; Don Wharton, "Dorothy Thompson," *Scribner's* 101 (May 1937): 10; Margaret Case Harriman, "The 'It' Girl," part 1, *New Yorker* 16 (20 April 1940): 29; Carey Longmire, "God's Angry Woman," *Collier's* 115 (23 June 1945): 75.



Dorothy Thompson. Photographs in this article are courtesy of Syracuse University Library.

as “an avalanche of tosh” (PK, 233). Another liberal columnist, Heywood Broun, commented sarcastically, “If all the speeches she has made in the past twelve months were laid end to end they would constitute a bridge of platitudes sufficient to reach from The Herald Tribune’s editorial rooms to the cold caverns of the moon.” H. L. Mencken, who detested DT’s

“evangelical character,” relentless diligence, and missionary zeal “to inform and save humanity,” is reported to have referred to her repeatedly in the 1930s as a “shrieking hurricane.”¹⁰

Jack Alexander recalled a visiting lady journalist who had started her interview with DT with a casual remark about a move that Germany had made the day before: “The caller was so taken aback by the sight of the volcanic columnist in eruption that she forgot to bring up a list of questions which she had prepared in advance,” and “she came away convinced that she had seen one of the natural wonders of America at close range.” Similarly, the English novelist and publicist for the armed forces, Hilary St. George Saunders, noted that a meeting with DT in 1943 “was like sitting at the foot of Vesuvius.”¹¹

Finally, there are references to DT as a comet, a meteor, or a cosmic force. In his almost hagiographic account of DT’s visit to England in the summer of 1941 for a wartime propaganda campaign, J. W. Drawbell recorded how she had talked for two hours to a gathering of journalists in a London hotel, “her mind flashing like a meteor.” DT had already in 1937 referred to herself as “an ascending comet,” naturally without anticipating the inevitable descent or decline in her later career. She had gained her reputation as a “cosmic force,” directing “her monitorial attention to the whole world,” or as a “cosmic thinker” (Fisher), who “ingests the cosmos and personalizes its pain, thereby conveying in her writings a feeling of imminence that worried citizens find comforting” (Alexander).¹²

2. Zoological References

Zoological references in DT criticism are almost uniformly unflattering, starting with Heywood Broun’s observation in 1937 that she was “a victim of galloping nascence,” a sarcastic characterization of her all too swift development from a reporter to a columnist. H. L. Mencken recalled that

10. Heywood Broun, “The Right People,” *New Republic* 92 (23 September 1937): 203; H. L. Mencken, *My Life as Author and Editor* [1945], ed. Jonathan Yardley (New York: Knopf, 1993), 342; Mencken also quoted in Angoff, “Dorothy Thompson,” 117.

11. Alexander, “Girl from Syracuse,” 432. Saunders quoted in John S. Kennedy, “Global Lady,” *Molders of Opinion*, ed. David Bulman (Milwaukee: Brace, 1945), 13.

12. James Wedgwood Drawbell, *Dorothy Thompson’s English Journey: The Record of an Anglo-American Partnership* (London: Collins, 1942), 67; Marion K. Sanders, “Ascending Comet,” *Dorothy Thompson: A Legend in Her Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), chap 6; Charles Fisher, “Dorothy Thompson, Cosmic Force,” *The Columnists* (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1944), 16; Alexander, “Girl from Syracuse,” 431.

DT “worked like a horse,” while *Time* magazine compared her to a loud grasshopper: “Guided by her most passionate emotion—a consuming hatred of Hitler—Columnist Thompson began writing with shrill assurance that startled readers. As insistent as a katydid, never at a loss for an answer, almost invariably incensed about something, her column has pleased a national appetite for being scolded.” Carey Longmire recollected that “she campaigned so fervently for Roosevelt and internationalism, against those whom she branded as ignorant of realities in the modern world, that some Republicans started calling her a harebrained girl wonder, a fishwife intoxicated with her own voice, or worse.”¹³

Crueler still was Mencken’s comment after DT had left his party at the 1948 Progressive Party Convention (which nominated Henry A. Wallace, whom she fiercely opposed as a “tool of Moscow”), “My God, she’s an elephant, isn’t she?” as quoted by Alistair Cooke, who himself referred to DT as “a lady journalist of declining fame and rising girth.” When she finally retired as a columnist, *Time* hailed her as “the first and finest of political newshens,” with ironic allusion, however, to a hen as a fussy middle-aged woman and word play on newsmen who dominated the profession.¹⁴

3. *Biographical References*

In a 1939 cover story, *Time* dubbed DT the “Cartwheel Girl,” tracing her persistent “habit” of contrived exhibitionism back to her childhood, when she came into the parlor one day “doing a cartwheel” and “displaying her panties to six ladies of the Methodist Church.” On 21 October 1940 *Time* attributed DT’s late and sudden switch of support from Willkie to FDR in the presidential election to this same habit: “The sight of Miss Thompson’s skirty cartwheel ‘saddened,’ ‘astounded,’ ‘shocked’ readers of her column in the arch-Republican New York *Herald-Tribune*.”¹⁵

In 1940 Margaret Case Harriman entitled her two-part *New Yorker* profile “The ‘It’ Girl” to highlight DT’s growing obsession in the 1930s with the political situation in Europe (especially in Nazi Germany), which had alienated her husband, Sinclair Lewis, who simply referred to “the international situation as it relates to Dorothy” as “it.” According to

13. Broun, “The Right People,” 203; Mencken, *My Life*, 342; *Time* 32 (22 August 1938): 45; Longmire, “God’s Angry Woman,” 77.

14. Alistair Cooke, *Six Men* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 116–7; *Time* 72 (1 September 1958): 46.

15. *Time* 33 (12 June 1939): 47; *Time* 36 (21 October 1940): 19.

Vincent Sheean, Lewis would give the ultimatum “No more *situations* or I will go to bed” at dinner parties with Dorothy’s journalistic friends, and he generally “pronounced it *sityashums* in order to make it seem more contemptible”; in his novel, *Gideon Planish* (1943), published after his divorce from Dorothy, Lewis vented his spleen in the character of Winifred Marduc Homeward, the “Talking Woman.”¹⁶

Jack Alexander entitled part one of his 1940 profile of Thompson “The Girl from Syracuse” to refer to DT’s formative years (1910–14) as an undergraduate at Syracuse University, where “the men of the campus remember Miss Thompson as a girl who was dated infrequently because she had a penchant for stalling off romantic approaches with arguments on public questions.” Fisher noted in 1944 that there was “still a legend at Syracuse that she regarded a moonlight walk as the perfect time to discuss politics, philosophy and the Meaning of Life”; no doubt for that reason Alexander had entitled the subsection of his profile covering DT’s undergraduate years “The Girl Who Knew Too Much”—perhaps also an ironic allusion to “The Man Who Knew Too Much,” Alfred Hitchcock’s 1934 film of international intrigue and heart-pounding suspense. Margaret Marshall had discerned already in 1938 “the present character and preoccupations of the girl from Syracuse” in DT’s triweekly “OTR” columns, the pattern of which Marshall outlined with a play on the columnist’s own initials: “She begins soberly enough; she gradually becomes intoxicated with her own spirits; and she ends up with D. T.’s,” a sarcastic characterization that anticipated Republicans calling her later “a fishwife intoxicated with her own voice.”¹⁷

More positive than “The Girl from Syracuse” (part one) is the title of part two of Alexander’s profile, “Rover Girl in Europe,” a biographical reference that serves as a variation on Gunther’s “Blue-Eyed Tornado of

16. Harriman, “The ‘It’ Girl,” part 1, 24; Sheean, *Dorothy and Red*, 263; Sinclair Lewis, *Gideon Planish* (New York: Random House, 1943), 320. According to Sheldon Grebstein (in *Sinclair Lewis* [New York: Twayne, 1962]), “some reviewers” of *Gideon Planish* “recognized Miss Thompson herself in Lewis’s acidulous portrait of Winifred Homeward, ‘The Talking Woman’” (158). For further parallels, especially lectures on Conditions and Situations and relentless criticism of Hitler, see *Gideon Planish*, 320, 330, 336.

DT had already served as a model, in “a gallery” of historical, contemporary, and literary figures (see below), for the title character in Lewis’s novel, *Ann Vickers* (1933), and some of DT’s friends from her suffrage days (1914–17) were reportedly not amused by Lewis’s satirical portrayal of a feminist and social reformer (PK, 172).

17. Alexander, “Girl from Syracuse,” (see n. 4), 455–6; Fisher, “Cosmic Force,” 33; Alexander, part 2, 21; Margaret Marshall, “Dorothy Thompson,” *The Nation* 146 (25 June 1938): 721, 723; Longmire, “God’s Angry Woman,” 77.

Europe.” Girl-references to DT’s subsequent career are more critical, however. Following her interview with Hitler in November 1931, DT’s name could not be brought up, as Don Wharton noted, without someone remarking, “Oh, she’s the girl who said Hitler wouldn’t be dictator.” Charles Fisher called the columnist “the Bloomer girl of the trade,” an allusion to Amelia Bloomer (1818–1894), an American editor, lecturer, and reformer devoted to women’s rights and temperance, who advertised and wore clothing that became known as the Bloomer costume or bloomers. The allusion implied criticism not only of DT’s style (technique), but also of her blunders in the “OTR” columns, as also suggested by Margaret Case Harriman’s observation that “among the prophecies for 1939, she made the following bloomers: ‘There will be no new major war,’ ‘The Chinese-Japanese War will end, with a negotiated peace,’ and ‘The vacancy on the Supreme Court will be filled with a mediocrity.’ (The vacancy was filled by Felix Frankfurter.)”¹⁸

There are critical references to the columnist as “child” and “lady.” In part one of his profile, subtitled “The Story of Problem Child Dorothy Thompson,” Jack Alexander detects a connection between the “self-assertive, willful, mischievous” problem child and the later journalist who “savored the satisfaction of getting under Hitler’s skin so effectively by her writings that he had her expelled from the Reich in 1934”: “It was the second time that Dorothy Thompson has suffered an expulsion—she was once fired from high school for impertinence.” Further on Alexander notes that she had described her feeling for Germany as “one of frustrated love,” or “eine unglückliche Liebe,” as DT called it in her article on Germany, “The Problem Child of Europe,” which had just appeared in *Foreign Affairs* (April 1940).¹⁹

John S. Kennedy labelled DT “Global Lady,” not only because she was chiefly interested in international politics, but also because “global” was “one of her favorite words,” although it was, as Kennedy added to underscore the negative criticism, “hardly so frequently used as the word ‘I.’” The year before Charles Fisher had quoted from DT’s article, “I Saw Hitler!” to illustrate “the pontifical manner which has now become the lady’s basic article of trade”: “‘Now he is prepared to address the world,’ she added modestly, ‘and so he granted me an interview.’”²⁰

18. Alexander, “Girl from Syracuse,” 20; Wharton, “Dorothy Thompson,” 13; Fisher, “Cosmic Force,” 16; Harriman, “The ‘It’ Girl,” part 2, *New Yorker* 16 (27 April 1940): 28.

19. Alexander, “Girl from Syracuse,” 10, 10–1, 442; Dorothy Thompson, 397.

20. Kennedy, “Global Lady,” 20; Fisher, “Cosmic Force.”

4. References to Figures, Types, or Occupations

The largest category of references by far in DT criticism comprises names of mythological, biblical, legendary, historical, contemporary, literary, and film figures, or representative types and occupations.

References to mythological figures ridicule DT's assumed wisdom and gift of prophecy or allude to her physical attributes. According to Heywood Broun, DT, the reporter-turned-columnist, was not only "a victim of galloping nascence," but also "unfortunately . . . sprang Minerva-like out of the head of Jove." The allusion is to the grave and majestic Roman goddess of wisdom, who is fabled to have sprung, with tremendous battle cry and fully armed, from the head of Jupiter (Jove) and whose statue (by Phidias) was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.²¹

Margaret Case Harriman noted that DT's "curiously split personality—half mother and half firebrand—was apparent at an early age" and that "anger at inexplicable happenings" was "still a part of Miss Thompson, and . . . never far from the surface, although she" was "physically built to look as placid as Mother Ceres [the Roman name for Mother Earth] walking the abundant fields." Discussing DT's caustic radio exchange in 1940 with Clare Boothe Luce (see section III), Carey Longmire referred to "the Junoesque Miss Thompson," alluding to the majestic, well-developed figure of Juno, the Roman war goddess and wife of Jupiter.²²

Most common, however, are references to DT as a modern Cassandra (the Trojan princess and prophetess of doom in Greek legend), which in the late 1930s and 1940s became her national nickname (see section IV), perhaps because she encouraged the comparison herself, as Harriman noted: "In her reflections upon the future of the United States, Dorothy Thompson is so sure of disaster . . . that she has fallen into the habit of referring to herself sombrelly in print as a Cassandra."²³

Biblical names refer to the alleged seductiveness and treachery of DT's stands. In his critical review of her book *Let the Record Speak* (1939), John Chamberlain warned that "simply because she has the gift of unsettling your mind with an appeal to your emotions, Dorothy Thompson is a dangerous woman, a Delilah of the ink-pot," an allusion to the beautiful and seductive courtesan in the Old Testament who betrayed Samson to the Philistines.²⁴ And in 1949 a correspondent for the *Jewish Advocate* in

21. Broun, "The Right People," 203.

22. Harriman, "The 'It' Girl," part 1, 24; Longmire, "God's Angry Woman," 77.

23. Harriman, part 2, 28.

24. John Chamberlain, "Delilah of the Ink-Pot," *New Republic* 100 (27 September 1939):

Boston called DT a “Jezebel,” referring to the scheming and cruel queen of Israel who attempted to kill Elijah and other prophets of God, for her pro-Arab stand and criticism of Israel (PK, 422–3); in the 1950s she was often labeled a “traitor” in the Jewish press in America.

Legendary figures in DT criticism are national heroines or warrior queens who display great physical strength and fighting spirit. Margaret Marshall characterized DT’s relentless opposition to the Government Reorganization Bill of 1938 as that of “our self-appointed anti-fascist Joan of Arc,” alluding to the fifteenth-century Maid of Orleans and French national heroine, who is portrayed in a suit of armor with sword by the French historical painter Ingres (1780–1867). Outraged by DT’s appearance at the war front in France in 1940, Clare Boothe Luce dubbed her “the Molly Pitcher of the Maginot Line,” alluding to the American revolutionary heroine Mary Ludwig Hays, who brought water to exhausted troops at the Battle of Monmouth (1778); retired General Hugh S. Johnson went so far as to call DT “a breast-beating, blood-thirsty Boadicea,” referring to the warrior queen of the Iceni (Norfolk) who rebelled against Roman occupation of Britain in A.D. 61.²⁵

Similarly, DT was castigated in Nazi German radio broadcasts to America in late 1940 as “that German-hating Amazon.” To Jack Alexander, however, DT seemed at times to be “setting herself up in opposition to Hitler as the Protectress of the True Germany.” To John Hersey, who

220. Mencken, too, considered DT to be a Delilah who ruined her husband, Sinclair Lewis (see *My Life as Author and Editor*, 345).

25. Marshall, “Dorothy Thompson,” 723; Luce quoted in Sanders, *Legend in Her Time*, 269; Hugh S. Johnson, “Voting from Fear,” *New York World-Telegram*, 23 October 1940, 21.

Time, vol. 33 (12 June 1939), characterized DT “as something between a Cassandra and a Joan of Arc” (47); when DT finally retired as a columnist, *Time*, vol. 72 (1 September 1958), returned to its characterization of her in June 1939 by reporting that “to approving readers . . . durable Dorothy Thompson was a snappish combination of Cassandra and Joan of Arc” (46). To today’s readers, however, she has survived simply as Cassandra or “American Cassandra” (Kurth).

Regarding General Johnson’s comment, see DT’s “OTR” column, “On Hysteria” (25 October 1940), in which she sarcastically wished that “the General,” a columnist for the *New York World-Telegram* who defended neutrality and supported Willkie, “would straighten out his classical references,” for she had “got accustomed for weeks to being his Cassandra” and did not imagine that she could change so easily to the role of Boadicea. Sheean thought that Boadicea was a better name for DT than Cassandra (see *Dorothy and Red*, 301); but it was the Cassandra label that continued to be used, while Boadicea was replaced by comparable references, e.g., Brünnehilde (Longmire, “God’s Angry Woman,” 22).



Dorothy Thompson emerging from the underground fortification
of the Maginot Line in May 1940.

served as Sinclair Lewis's secretary in 1937, DT appeared in her personal relations as "an overpowering figure in a Wagnerian opera, a Valkyrie, deciding with careless pointing of her spear who should die on the battlefield." The most famous Valkyrie in Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs* was "Brünnehilde," the mighty warrior queen, with whom Carey Longmire compared DT in 1945, perhaps because she had seemingly been pro-German since 1943, when she vehemently opposed the Allied demand (at Casablanca) for the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany.²⁶

Historical figures or representative types of legendary fame or notoriety also serve as models for comparison. According to Klaus Mann (1942), the German exile writer and son of Thomas Mann, DT had begun already in the mid-1930s "to assume the appearance of a Roman Empress, whose imperious charm we can still admire—not without respectful trepidation—in certain busts of the decadent period" (PK, 259–60). In his satirical portrayal of DT in the character of Winifred Marduc Homeward, Sinclair Lewis compares her with, among other historical figures, Queen

26. Charles J. Rolo, *Radio Goes to War* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 116; Alexander, "Girl from Syracuse," 442; John Hersey, "First Job," *Yale Review* 76 (Winter 1987): 195; Longmire, "God's Angry Woman," 22.

Catherine, who after obtaining the crown through the murder of her husband, the legitimate Tsar, ruled Russia with enlightened vigor from 1762 to 1796, and Lucrezia Borgia, the treacherous sister of Cesare Borgia, who is considered to be the model for Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513).²⁷

Referring to DT's earlier career as a foreign correspondent, Carey Longmire noted that in both Vienna and Berlin "she assumed the role of a latter-day Madame de Staël" (1766–1817), the famous French author and critic, and that "through her salons passed diplomats and bohemians, prime ministers and writers, poets and economists." Heywood Broun used famous explorers of the New World once again to ridicule DT's development from "an active if not particularly profound foreign correspondent" to a syndicated columnist in America: "Returning to her native land, she [was] suddenly filled with the same fervor of discovery as 'stout Cortez' or Columbus." By referring to the conqueror of Mexico as "stout Cortez," Broun plays on the double meaning of the adjective to characterize DT sarcastically as both bold in spirit and bulky in body!²⁸

With references to nurses, reformers, and preachers, DT's critics express admiration for her as a model of inspiration or, more frequently, ridicule her as an uplifter and do-gooder. In 1938 Jay Franklin referred to DT as "the Florence Nightingale of the wounded Tory intellect and Clara Barton of the plutocrat in pain," alluding to the famous English nurse (1820–1910) and the founder of the American Red Cross (1821–1912), to scorn DT's conservatism and her labeling of "all critics of plutocracy" as "Fascists."²⁹ By contrast, J. W. Drawbell depicted DT on her visit to Britain in summer 1941 "as a figure of benevolent inspiration, very nearly the equal of Florence Nightingale" (PK, 337).

To illustrate DT's "double talent for brooding in print over the welfare of mankind and at the same time inflaming it to further disasters," Margaret Case Harriman began her profile with a dream reported by one of DT's millions of readers: "She [DT] appeared . . . as a trained nurse, starched, crisp, and tender, hovering beside a bed in which a sick world lay. The sick world was depicted by the familiar cartoonist's symbol of a frail figure with a bandaged globe for a head, and Miss Thompson was

27. Lewis, *Gideon Planish*, 320.

28. Longmire, "God's Angry Woman," 22; Heywood Broun, "The Right People," 203.

29. Franklin quoted in George Seldes, *Lords of the Press* (New York: Messner, 1938), 352; Chamberlain, "Miss Thompson Goes to War," *New Republic* 96 (24 August 1938): 80.

ministering to it by taking its temperature with one hand while she deftly gave it the hotfoot with the other. The chart that hung at the foot of the patient's bed was labelled simply 'On the Record.'" In his review of DT's book *Listen, Hans* (1942), however, Hans Habe characterized her with unequivocal admiration as "an ambulance driver of civilization," for, "She knows that an ambulance driver must push on to the front in order to be of use. Her 'invasion of the German mind' does not begin after the armistice, but right now during the war."³⁰

But already in 1937 DT had been introduced on a radio program "as a cross between Harriet Beecher Stowe and Edith Cavell by an announcer who said that about her person were 'crystallized the elements and forces which are arrayed against the barbarism threatening the civilization of our day.'"³¹ Edith Cavell (1872–1915), the heroic English nurse who enabled many Allied soldiers to escape to Holland, was executed by the Germans in 1915, while Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), whose novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) is the most famous piece of antislavery literature in nineteenth-century America, wrote as well on women's suffrage.

In 1937 it was also predicted that as a result of her frequent lecturing around the country in opposition to government (FDR's) policies, DT "could easily become the Lady Astor of America," an allusion to the first woman to be elected (in 1919) to the British House of Commons, where as a Conservative member Lady Astor (1879–1964) had distinguished herself with her sharp tongue and passionate espousal of temperance and reforms in woman and child welfare.³²

Charles Fisher considered DT to be "one of the most overwhelming American females since Carrie Nation and quite as noticeable as any since the determined Amelia Bloomer." According to Fisher, DT shared certain characteristics with these two crusaders for women's rights and temperance, namely, "an undiminishably aggressive nature; an extravagant lack of diffidence; and limitless faith in herself, her intuitions, her judgments and her place as a wet nurse to history." Alluding to the brawny (6 ft., 175 lbs.) Carrie Nation (1846–1911) and her legendary use of a hatchet to smash saloons in Kansas around the turn of the century, Fisher noted, however, that circumstances had not made it necessary for

30. Harriman, "The 'It' Girl," part 1, 24; Hans Habe, "Political Warfare: How to Invade the German Mind," *New York Times Book Review* (29 November 1942), 3.

31. Quoted in Fisher, "Cosmic Force," 50.

32. Wharton, "Dorothy Thompson," 14. It should be noted, however, that whereas Lady Astor and her husband supported appeasement in the late 1930s, DT remained an implacable foe of fascism.

DT “to express herself by chopping saloons into small pieces.” Alluding to Amelia Bloomer’s fashion reform, Fisher added that DT had also “never been obliged to constrict her powers to any issue as minor as a campaign to revise women’s dress,” but had instead “directed her monitorial attention to the whole world.”³³

In the “gallery” of models for his character Ann Vickers, Sinclair Lewis includes, along with DT, such famous American leaders of women’s suffrage and social reform as Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906) and Jane Addams (1860–1935), but also Alice Paul (1885–1977), head of the militant National Women’s Party in the 1920s, and Frances Perkins (1882–1965), the first woman cabinet officer, who served as FDR’s Secretary of Labor (1933–45) (PK, 172). Among the reformers with whom Lewis compares Winifred Marduc Homeward (in *Gideon Planish*, 320) are not only Lady Astor and Carrie Nation, but also Frances Willard (1839–1898), president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (1879), Victoria Woodhull (1838–1927), child performer and later editor of *Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly* (1870), which advocated women’s rights and free love, and Aimee Semple McPherson (1890–1944), “the holy woman of Los Angeles,” who also served as the model for Sharon Falconer, the evangelist in *Elmer Gantry* (1927), and is cited as a religious fraud in *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935).

In 1945 Carey Longmire noted that “extremists” among DT’s critics “have charged her with thinking of herself as a messiah in skirts,” while John Chamberlain predicted that in ten years, “when we look at this war period in a critical mood, she may loom out of the past as the Reverend Newell Dwight Hillis of the Second World War,” alluding to the eloquent preacher and widely known lecturer (1858–1929), whose books include *Great Men as Prophets of a New Era* (1922).³⁴

Like the warrior queens and the reformers, General George S. Patton (1885–1945) and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover (1895–1972), with whom DT is also compared, were zealous fighters against their enemies, namely, the German Army in World War II, Nazi spy rings in the U.S., and Communists during the Cold War.³⁵ General Patton had won the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and crossed the Rhine in March 1945, and

33. Fisher, “Cosmic Force,” 16.

34. Longmire, “God’s Angry Woman,” 75; Chamberlain, “Delilah,” 220.

35. Like J. Edgar Hoover, DT was a zealous opponent of both American fascist organizations in the 1930s and 1940s and of the American Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s; she relentlessly warned against “fifth columns” taking advantage of free speech in the U.S. for their subversive purposes (PK, 286–9, 391–4).

therefore it is not surprising that Carey Longmire, in June 1945, included “Old Blood and Guts” in his characterization of DT, “who combines the seeing eye of Cassandra and the appearance of Brünnehilde with the gusto of General Patton and the holy fire of a crusading apostle.” Referring to DT’s earlier career as a foreign correspondent, Jack Alexander noted that “often her very presence gave a special significance to the desultory and tarnished affairs of impoverished Austria, Hungary and Germany” and that “the effect was similar to that of having J. Edgar Hoover or Gene Tunney at the monthly meeting of a boys’ club.”³⁶

Appropriately enough, Gene Tunney (1898–1978), who defeated Jack Dempsey twice (1926, 1927) for the heavyweight boxing championship of the world, would not be the only boxer used to allude to DT’s physique and fighting spirit, for in *Gideon Planish* (1943) Winifred Marduc Homeward is described as “just under thirty in 1937” and as having “the punch of Joe Louis” (320), the “Brown Bomber,” who had won the heavyweight boxing championship of the world in 1937 and gone on in 1938 to knock out the German champion, Max Schmeling, touted by Hitler because he had defeated Louis in 1936. Charles Fisher reduces DT, however, to the “principal lady mental welterweight of our current civilization,” and the characterization is all the more ironic in juxtaposition with reference to Carrie Nation (see above)!³⁷

References to contemporary figures include, finally, fellow journalists. Noting that John Gunther, “the best authority on Dorothy Thompson’s European experiences,” had called her “an amiable and blue-eyed tornado,” Don Wharton characterized her as “a Richard Harding Davis in evening gown,” to whom “nothing prosaic ever happened,” for example, when she “covered a Polish revolution [in 1926] in evening dress and satin slippers.” Called “the Beau Brummell of the Press,” Davis (1864–1916) was a flamboyant, fearless, and indefatigable journalist, war correspondent (Spanish–American War, World War I), and popular novelist, who, however, often gave the impression of being somewhat of a fraud, and so when *Time* noted that, by the time DT “went to Berlin in 1924, as chief of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* bureau, she had a Richard Harding Davis reputation,” it was not meant as an unambiguous compliment. “But,” *Time* added, “she had the good sense to stop trying for scoops and to study the temperament and philosophy of the German people.”³⁸

36. Longmire, “God’s Angry Woman,” 22; Alexander, “Girl from Syracuse,” 454–5.

37. Lewis, *Gideon Planish*, 320; Fisher, “Cosmic Force,” 16.

38. Wharton, “Dorothy Thompson,” 11–2; *Time* 33 (12 June 1939): 48.

Time also reported that in July 1939 DT would go to Europe and write her “OTR” column from there, and that this would be “good news to those who have detected in some of her recent writings the personal pontifications of a Lippmann, the intransigence of a Broun and the peskiness of a Westbrook Pegler.” As perhaps the most famous journalist in America at the time (Mencken’s reputation having declined in the 1930s), Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) wrote with great authority in his column, “Today and Tomorrow,” which had appeared in the *New York Herald-Tribune* since 1931. As a syndicated columnist for the *New York World-Telegram*, the liberal Heywood Broun (1888–1939) devoted much of his attention to the “underdog” in society, while the conservative columnist for the same paper, Westbrook Pegler (1894–1969), took on the likes of Huey Long, Hitler, and Mussolini, but increasingly attacked his pet hates, such as Eleanor Roosevelt (“La Boca Grande”) and Heywood Broun (“Old Bleeding Heart”).³⁹

The intuitive method and pontifical manner displayed in DT’s interview with Hitler and “still discernible in her work at times” were, according to Charles Fisher (1944), “very similar to” the methods “of the late Arthur Brisbane of the Hearst organization.” Brisbane (1864–1936) had the reputation of a sententious columnist and a master of the platitude; when he visited the trial of Bruno Hauptmann in 1935 for the kidnapping and murder of the Lindberghs’ baby, he explained, as Fisher relates to illustrate his comparison, that he just wanted to see if he was guilty, and after only thirty minutes in court he pronounced that Hauptmann was guilty and then left!⁴⁰

DT’s critics compare her, finally, to literary or film characters. Alluding to the young woman in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) who, pursued by bloodhounds, makes her famous escape with her boy Harry across the Ohio River on ice, Heywood Broun sarcastically proclaimed that DT was “greater than Eliza because not only does she cross the ice but breaks it as she goes” and because, moreover, she was “her own bloodhound”! In a column of 1938, Jay Franklin quoted from a letter from one of his readers, who characterized DT as “Lady Macbeth in pink tights, alternately babbling of industrial democracy and screaming with rage at every actual attempt to attain it.”⁴¹

39. *Time* 33 (12 June 1939): 50–1.

40. Fisher, “Cosmic Force,” 31–2.

41. Broun, “The Right People,” 203; Franklin and his reader quoted in George Seldes, *Lords of the Press* (New York: Messner, 1938), 352.

No doubt with the film version (1939) of Frank Baum's *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) in mind, Margaret Case Harriman (1940) noted that in 1920 the young DT "set out—somewhat like that other Dorothy who wandered through the land of Oz—to travel through Europe, writing freelance pieces and selling them at space rates" to various news services and newspapers.⁴² Discussing DT's childhood, Jack Alexander was reminded of Lulu, the figure of pure sexuality who causes the downfall of men in Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* tragedies of the 1890s and Alban Berg's *Lulu* opera of 1937: "Dorothy rebelled against her world from the start. . . . She was a sort of little Lulu in many respects." Similarly, the foreign correspondent DT reminded Alexander of the character in the movie series (1914 and thereafter) who was always in danger, but always managed to escape: "Her active days as a correspondent, . . . bore as close a resemblance to the Perils of Pauline as the unsettled state of Central Europe and her own talent for self-dramatization could manage. Miss Thompson was never pushed off a cliff or dynamited in a submarine, but she got into jams that would have flustered Pauline herself."⁴³

The reporter DT reminded J. W. Drawbell rather of Agatha Christie's detective Hercule Poirot, who in almost every one of her novels since 1920 says: "Something is missing. One small thing. I do not know what it is, but it will explain everything. It will turn up. I will find it." Likewise, DT would, according to Drawbell, always look for the one small thing that would give her the clue to the whole. Finally, while Ann Vickers was intended to rival Portia, the "lady barrister" in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1595), as a female advocate, Winifred Marduc Homeward was endowed with not only "the punch of Joe Louis" (see above), but also "the wisdom of Astarte," the lady who prophesies the death of the title character in Lord Byron's dramatic poem, *Manfred* (1817).⁴⁴

42. Charles Angoff records a conversation with a slightly drunk DT in which she accused him of thinking that she came "from Kansas or some such place," to which he responded in jest: "Why yes, don't you? Mencken led me to believe that." (See Angoff's "Dorothy Thompson," 121.) Angoff's title characterization of DT as a "Kansan in Westchester," picked up from his conversation with her (one of DT's residences was in Westchester County outside New York City), could perhaps be understood as an ironic double allusion to Carrie Nation, notorious for her saloon smashing expeditions across Kansas, and "that other Dorothy," a Kansas girl who goes "over the rainbow" to the mythical kingdom of Oz.

43. Harriman, "The 'It' Girl," part 1, 26; Alexander, "Girl from Syracuse," 447, 454.

44. Drawbell, "Thompson's English Journey," 95; Lewis, *Gideon Planish*, 320.

As a composite of biographical references as well as of historical, contemporary, and literary figures, Sinclair Lewis's "Talking Woman," Winifred Marduc Homeward, is perhaps the most devastating characterization of DT in the contemporary literature. However, DT not only defended her designated role as the "Cassandra of the columnists," but also anticipated Lewis's portrayal of the "Talking Woman" with ironic self-criticism: "And as for Dorothy Thompson," she concluded in her "OTR" column "On Party Material" (29 March 1939), "she is terrible. She always talks politics and has a horrible habit of holding forth. Given the slightest opportunity she makes a speech, and nothing that she says to herself in a cab on the way home seems to cure her" (PK, 260).

On the other hand, DT was quite capable of counterpunching with creative name-calling, which she demonstrated perhaps most notoriously in her verbal sparring in 1940 (the peak year for names and references in DT criticism) with the former *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* reporter and playwright, Clare Boothe Luce, who had married the staunchly Republican publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, Henry R. Luce, in 1935.

Outraged by DT's sudden and late switch of support from Willkie to FDR in the presidential election, Clare Boothe Luce devoted her first public speech (15 October 1940) to diagnosing DT as "the victim of that emotional disease called acute fear," reminding her audience of the attacks DT had made on FDR and the New Deal, and likening DT's flip-flop to "a girl in an apache dance team who succumbs adoringly to her partner's brutal treatment."⁴⁵ When DT heard this, she was, as Kurth notes, "fighting mad," and "Clare got back as good as she gave—better, really" (PK, 325). Shrewdly calling her adversary by her maiden name and alluding first to the elegant, but still mass-produced automobile chassis and then to the Debutante of the Year 1938 (featured on the cover of *Life* magazine for 14 November), DT replied sarcastically that "Miss Boothe" was "the Body by Fisher in this campaign" and "the Brenda Frazier of the Great Crusade," who "had torn herself loose from the Stork Club to serve her country in this serious hour" (PK, 325).

PM (New York) reported in its cover story, however, that the CBS audience was deeply offended by DT's vicious attack on Mrs. Luce; to go with the story, the newspaper ran two photos: DT in a stern, straight-on, unflattering pose and Clare Boothe Luce in a three-quarter demure and

45. Luce quoted in Stephen Shadegg, *Clare Boothe Luce: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 120.

smiling face.⁴⁶ While FDR went on to win an unprecedented third term in November, DT lost her contract with the *New York Herald-Tribune* the following March; it would not be the last time she would suffer from controversy. When a reporter for the *Boston Globe* assigned to do a story on “the First Lady of American Journalism” asked DT at the end of her career, “What is the best thing you can say about yourself?” DT replied simply, “I never wrote to be popular. It cost me a lot” (PK, 451), a point that is richly illustrated by the great range of characterization and caricature in DT criticism.

IV

The “Blue-Eyed Tornado of Europe” and the “Cassandra” of American columnists are the most frequently cited characterizations of DT, but whereas the source for the first label has always been known, the origin of the second label has remained obscure. This is all the more surprising following the publication of Kurth’s 1990 biography, *American Cassandra*.

Discussing the controversy over FDR’s Supreme Court “packing” plan, announced in February 1937, Kurth notes that “the outcry against” the president “was swift and acrimonious,” and that “one of the loudest voices in the fray was Dorothy’s. Between February and July 1937 she devoted no less than eight columns to this one subject, speaking in tones of such rich indignation that Interior Secretary Harold Ickes gave her the nickname Cassandra” (PK, 228). For this reference, Kurth cites three contemporary sources: Vincent Sheean’s memoir, *Dorothy and Red*, Dale Warren’s recollections, “‘Off the Record’ With a Columnist,” and DT’s autobiographical fragment, “I Try to Think,” an unpublished manuscript at Syracuse (PK, 502, n. 52). However, none of these sources gives a precise date and citation for the “Cassandra” label! Sheean, who had known both DT and Sinclair Lewis since the late 1920s, merely observed that “she was called, quite currently [in the late 1930s and early 1940s], by a sort of national nickname, ‘Cassandra.’” Warren, a close friend and her editor at Houghton Mifflin Company, which published her books *Let the Record Speak* (1939), *Listen, Hans* (1942), and later *The Courage to Be Happy* (1957), recalled only that she was “labelled ‘Cassandra’ by Harold Ickes, the late Hugh Johnson, and others, and pigeon-holed as a prophetess of calamity.” And in her undated manuscript, “I Try to Think,” DT simply quotes her critics in general: “‘Don’t get so wrought up,’ they said.

46. Shadegg, *Clare Boothe Luce*, 121.

'Don't be a Cassandra.' An unpleasant woman, draped in black and wailing on the walls of Troy."⁴⁷

Years later Dale Warren remembered DT "shrugging off the epithet by announcing to a roomful: 'Say what you will about Cassandra, the chief thing about her, and the unfortunate thing about her, is that she was always right.'"⁴⁸ By quoting this remark and then commenting that "Dorothy's first column on the Court-packing plan set the righteous tone for hundreds of others, on hundreds of subjects, in the years to come" (PK, 229), Kurth apparently assumes that Harold Ickes first called her "Cassandra" sometime between February and July 1937. To be sure, she had by then the reputation of a Cassandra, whose predictions, however, had often been dismissed as spectacularly wrong or wildly exaggerated; but neither in the DT literature nor in the national press of that time was she actually called "Cassandra."⁴⁹

In fact, it was only two years later that FDR's Secretary of the Interior, Harold LeClair Ickes, the "most vociferous U.S. critic of the U.S. press," as *Time* reported on 24 April 1939, "rose to tell the New York Newspaper Guild and a radio audience what he thought of the 'calumnists' (columnists)." After prefacing his remarks with one of his own ventures in prosody ("Wouldst know what's right and what is wrong? / Why birdies sing at break of dawn? / Ask the columnists, . . . / Who run the earth and sun and moon? / Just Thompson, Lawrence, Franklin, Broun. . . . / When F. D. R. you want to sock, / Page Lippmann, Johnson, Kent or Krock. . . ."), Ickes proceeded to characterize individual columnists, including DT, whom he called "the Cassandra of the columnists" and "a sincere and earnest lady who is trying to cover too much ground."⁵⁰

Time reported that Ickes's speech had been given "one night last

47. Sheean, *Dorothy and Red*, 301; Dale Warren, "'Off the Record' With a Columnist," *Saturday Review of Literature* 27 (10 June 1944): 13; Thompson, "I Try to Think" (ca. 1943), Dorothy Thompson Papers, Syracuse University Library, Department of Special Collections.

48. Dale Warren, "I Remember Dorothy," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 4 (Summer 1964): 23.

49. Cf. Wharton, "Dorothy Thompson," 9-14; "The Big Debate," *Time* 29 (1 March 1937): 10-3. The latter article includes an unflattering photo of Dorothy Thompson Lewis, with the caption: "You can bet that our dictator . . . will be a great Democrat" (11), which is taken from a longer quote (on 10) from her "OTR" column, "Ruffled Grouse," *New York Herald-Tribune* (17 February 1937), 23, and echoes the warning of a fascist takeover of the United States in Sinclair Lewis's satirical bestseller of 1935, *It Can't Happen Here*.

50. *Time* 33: (24 April 1939), 34.



Dorothy Thompson called herself Cassandra in her
17 March 1939 column.

week,” but the *New York Times* for 12 April 1939 reported more accurately that Ickes had spoken to the Newspaper Guild of New York the evening before. Moreover, the *New York Times* elaborated more on what Ickes had said about DT, who was described as “the Cassandra of the columnists” and as “a sincere and earnest lady who is trying to cover too much ground by setting herself up as a final authority on all social, economic, governmental, national and international questions.” Ickes paid tribute, however, to “her really fine stand” against the dictatorships.⁵¹

51. Ibid; *New York Times* (12 April 1939), 24. For the complete text of Ickes’s speech (without reference to 11 April 1939) see his *America’s House of Lords* (1939), chap. 13, especially 112–3: “She has written and spoken vigorously on the subject of brutalitarian dictatorships abroad, which, I am bound to say, would be more convincing if it were not for her tendency to see an American dictatorship in every move made by the Administration for the improvement of our social and economic conditions. However, Miss Thompson is to be commended for the splendid stand that, with both courage and intelligence, she has taken on the subject of dictatorships abroad, ultra-conservative though she may often be on domestic economic issues.”

What had provoked Ickes to call DT “the Cassandra of the columnists” on 11 April 1939? No doubt it was her own “OTR” column in the *New York Herald-Tribune* for 17 March 1939, entitled “Cassandra Speaking,” in which she had defended herself by reminding her readers of her correct predictions in 1938 about Hitler’s annexation of Austria and warnings against Chamberlain’s policy of “appeasement.” Possibly Ickes had also read her column “Rebirth at Easter” on 10 April, when she continued her self-defense, referring to herself now in the plural: “Those who for the last three years have been saying consistently, and sometimes insistently, that our world is moving with extreme expedition in the direction of dissolution have been described as ‘hysterical.’ The repetition of unpleasant facts has caused these people to be described as ‘warmongers.’ . . . Events set in motion by the Nazi revolution six years ago have moved according to a pattern that could be predicted.”⁵²

However, the *New York Times* report makes it clear that Ickes was criticizing DT more for her views on domestic issues than on foreign affairs. Indeed, in his article on “Mail-Order Government” in *Collier’s* magazine for 18 February 1939, Ickes went after DT and other critics who had loudly and persistently warned that the Government Reorganization Bill of 1938, like the Judiciary Bill of 1937, threatened the constitutional separation of powers. But here he ridiculed her for “pursu[ing] resolutely the starry-eyed Jeanne d’Arc role that she so capably affects” (15); very likely Ickes picked up that reference from Margaret Marshall (see note 17).

When *Time* quoted Ickes calling DT “the Cassandra of the columnists,” it claimed in an asterisked footnote at the bottom of the page (34) to have “said it first”; in an article on “Who’s for War?” on 27 February 1939, *Time* distinguished between two camps in the U.S. and included in Camp No. 1 “isolationists like Senator Hiram Johnson,” “the drafters of the 1937 Neutrality Act,” and “such public spokesmen as Mr. Herbert Hoover”; in Camp No. 2 were “liberals who are for spanking the dictators with petitions and boycotts,” “practically all U.S. Jews, many militant Christians and that girlish-voiced Cassandra, Miss Dorothy Thompson” (20). It would appear, then, that by entitling her “OTR” column for 17 March 1939 “Cassandra Speaking,” DT was responding to *Time’s* characterization of her on 27 February, and that by referring to herself as Cassandra, she inspired Harold Ickes to call her “the Cassandra of the columnists” on 11 April.

52. Thompson, *Let the Record Speak* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 307–10, 334.