

# SIMPLICISSIMUS



HE

Druck v. C. H. K. in München.

# Bulldog

A revolutionary poster for Germany's most biting  
satire magazine set a new design standard in 1896.

Heine's once-ubiquitous bulldog poster remains a model  
of simplicity and power, with lessons to teach 100 years later.

# Modern

**A** red bulldog stares menacingly through stone-cold white eyes. A broken chain hangs from its neck. With sharp spiky teeth it eagerly waits to attack unsuspecting fools, nitwits, and government buffoons.

Beware! This is not just some rabid canine, but the most unyielding watchdog ever conceived. Born not of flesh and blood but of ink and brush, it was the embodiment of a nation's anger, the charged graphic emblem of *Simplicissimus*—one of the most biting, satirically critical magazines ever published.

Its color was a flag. Its breed symbolized the snarling editorial policy of the weekly tabloid that was founded in 1896 in Munich, Germany, by a cadre of artists and writers, including Thomas Mann, and was fervently anti-bourgeois and unrepentantly Volkish, or

populist, in its rejection of materialism and modernization.

*Simplicissimus*, or *der Simpl*, as it was known, assailed German Kaiser Wilhelm II and his ministers, the protestant clergy, military officers (known as the Junkers), government bureaucracy, urbanization, and industrialization as it lionized the peasant farmer and worker. The red bulldog symbolized the Volk, or common people, who were portrayed in the magazine's cartoons and caricatures as feisty opponents to the ruling class, even if in reality this was an exaggerated view.

The authorities used stern measures to muzzle the dog, but despite frequent censorship and periodic arrests, this illustrated tabloid rarely missed an appearance. When it was confiscated by the police, the



*Simplicissimus* magazine published scathing criticism of the German political and military establishment from 1896 until 1933, when it was co-opted by the Nazis. Thomas Theodor Heine and other artists provided satirical cover art.

Right: *Simplicissimus* poster. Thomas Theodor Heine, designer. The well-informed devil was Heine's alternate mascot for the magazine.

Opposite, lower right: 1922 *Simplicissimus* cartoon by Karl Arnold exposed upper-class nostalgia for Germany's pre-WWI monarchy. Its caption read: "Between us, gentlemen: long live his majesty, the kaiser—hurrah—psst—hurrah—softly—hurrah!"



black, red, and white colored poster on which the bulldog stood poised—designed in 1897 by Thomas Theodor Heine (1867–1948), a cartoonist and co-editor of *Simplicissimus*—reminded friend and foe alike that *der Simpl* would not be chained up for long. Rows of these posters were hung for months at a time and were replenished regularly with fresh ones. Bans, on the other hand, lasted only a week, two at the most, and usually sparked more interest from new readers.

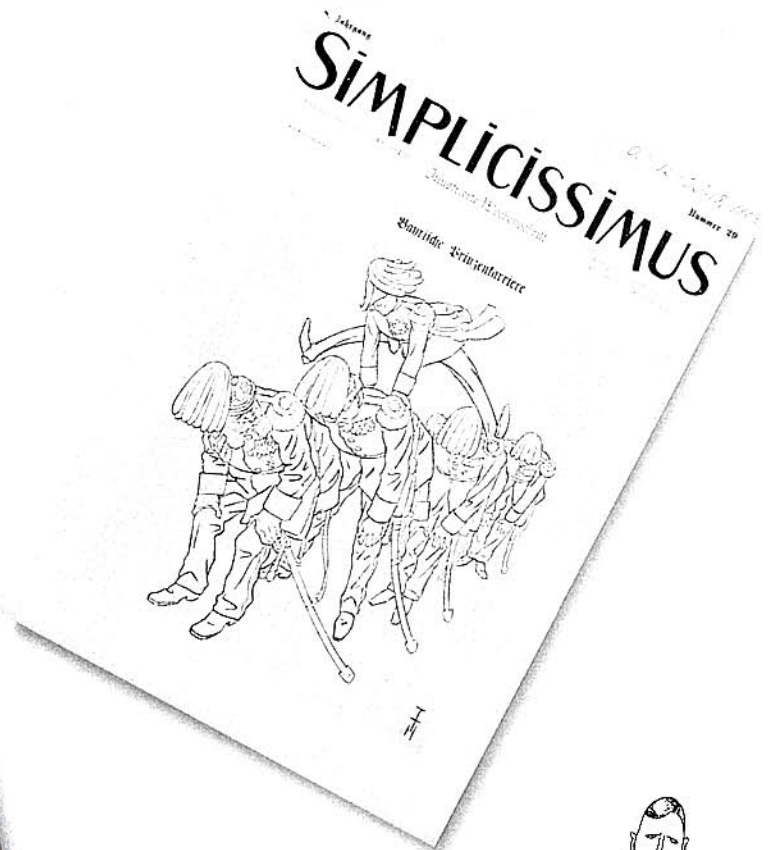
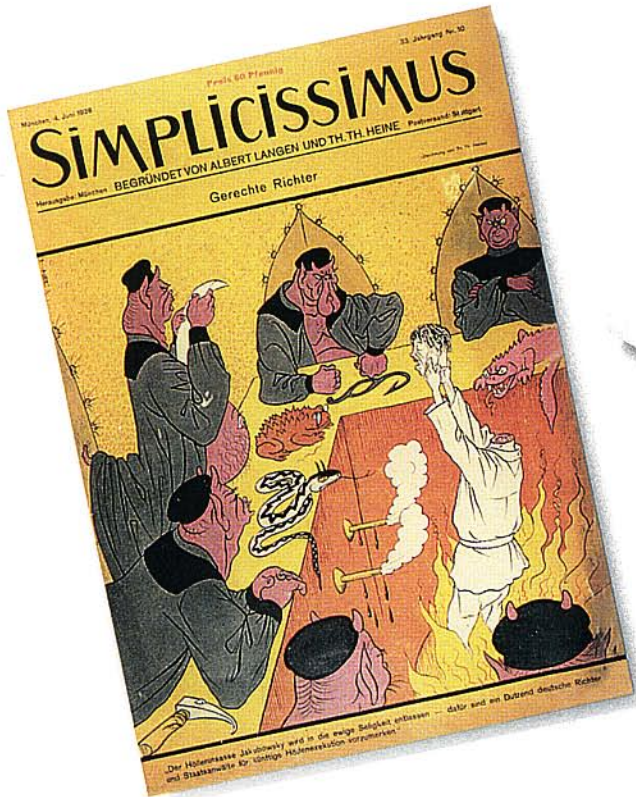
This was the power of *Simplicissimus*, the name borrowed from a fifteenth-century literary character, Simplicus Simplicissimus, who acted the fool around the aristocracy, but really tricked them into exposing their folly and corruption. This was Heine's reason for designing a somewhat comic bulldog mascot instead of a more

frightening graphic icon. In the tradition of its literary namesake, *Simplicissimus* was the comic fool that subversively ridiculed everything in sight, including its own supporters.

Many of its paid readers were not, incidentally, the revered Volk but rather intellectuals, cosmopolitans, and socialists who more or less supported progressive social and state reforms, as well as members of the very aristocracy and Junker classes it railed against. *Der Simpl*'s humor was often so subversive, indeed so razor sharp, that some of its readers did not feel the cut even as they were bleeding.

The brilliance of *Simplicissimus* was its artists' ability to get under the skin while keeping a few steps ahead of the censor. And the red bulldog was just one weapon in its graphic arsenal. There were other





mascots, though none as versatile; whether it was the angry version from Heine's poster or other, more comical iterations (including one of the bulldog peeing on the leg of an official), anyone looking for relief from Wilhelmian oppression could find an ally, at least once a week on paper, under the sign of the bulldog.

*Der Simpl* vehemently critiqued the status quo until the advent of World War I, when it was conscripted as a tool of German propaganda. Even in its patriotic form it was biting, though, proving that humor could be effectively used for the wrong causes.

After the war, during the twenties and early thirties, it resumed its critical stance, attacking Mussolini's Fascism in Italy and the emergence of the first Freikorps (paramilitary right-wing militias) and later

Nazism in Germany.

During this era the Volk were no longer portrayed as heroes. Working class and peasant romanticism was replaced by a forbidding cynicism, a logical response to a devastating and horrific war. Moreover, the Kaiser had abdicated prior to war's end and was replaced by a republic, the Weimar Republic, the doomed democratic experiment that *der Simpl* reluctantly critiqued for the deficiencies and incompetence of its leadership.

The red bulldog continued as the mascot, however, and *Simplicissimus* remained a social watchdog until 1933, when the Nazis came to power and made it into their lap dog.



Lautrec's poster art can be considered a bridge between the decorative, illustrative style current in the late 1880s and Heine's iconographic approach. Lautrec's illustrations used flatness and color, but the typography was an afterthought. Heine, by contrast, combined type and image to form a single, powerful symbol.

Left: 1896 Simpson bicycle poster. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, artist.

Right: 1893 poster advertising political memoirs to be published in the literary magazine *Le Matin*. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, artist.



*Der Simpl* must be remembered for its golden age, from 1896 to 1914, when it published hundreds of strident political and social caricatures and cartoons attacking anything that suggested social and political folly. Its artists, representing a variety of styles, were among the finest satiric thinkers and draftsmen in the world.

Among the ten or so regular contributors, Olaf Gulbransson was the master of the scabrous line—in just a few strokes he could decimate a public figure. Rudolf Wilke made the Volk into comic heroes through his witty, though poignant, characterizations. Bruno Paul introduced expressionism to cartooning in provocative graphic commentaries that wed abstraction and realism. Eduard Thöny captured the Bavarian spirit in drawings characterized by

their huge sculptural mass. And Heine created the satiric icons that were masterpieces of charged simplicity.

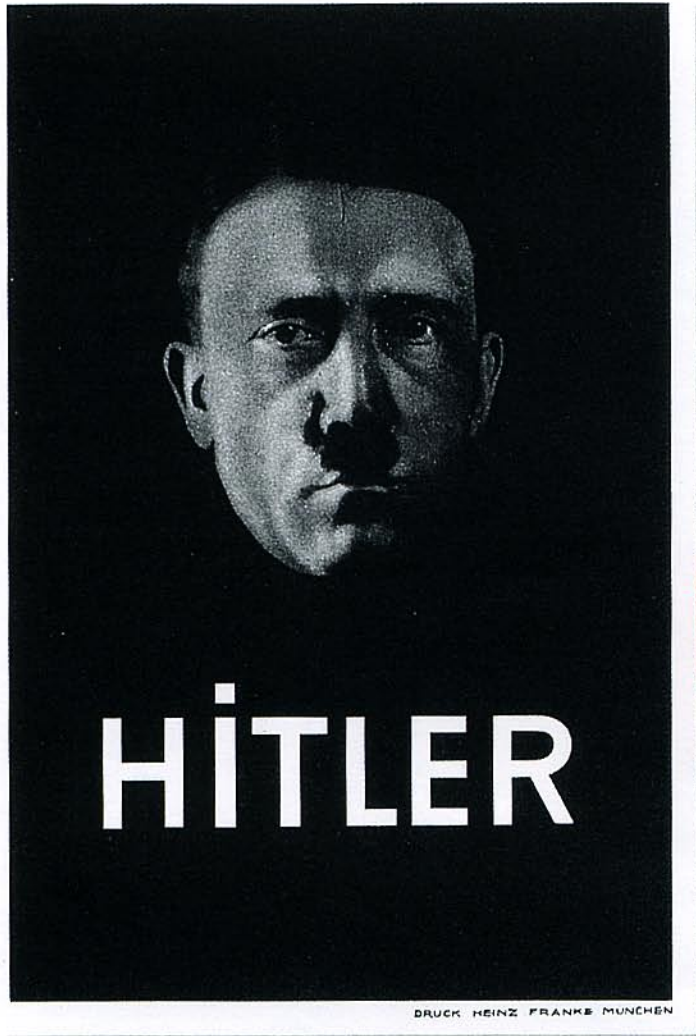
Few other journals had such a profound influence, not only on public opinion, but on graphic style. The late 1890s was the era of artistic revolution, and *der Simpl* (with its cousin, the cultural journal *Jugend*) introduced a variant of French Art Nouveau, called Jugendstil in Germany, to polemical graphics that were more rectilinear than curvilinear, and rejected the floreated decoration so popular in France (although other approaches to Jugendstil kept obsessive ornament). Emphasizing chiaroscuro values and bold, economical brush strokes, *der Simpl*'s artists departed from common academic verities; in turn they practiced a proto-expressionistic art. A few of the leading German



Those who followed Heine inherited and developed his ideas about poster art. Posters became integrated designs intended to communicate a single concept with graphic immediacy.

Left: 1932 campaign poster for Adolf Hitler. Designer unknown.

Right: 1915 advertising poster for Bosch spark plugs. Lucien Bernhard, designer.



Expressionists of the early twentieth century, notably Max Beckmann, cited *Simplicissimus* as a stylistic and conceptual influence.

*Simplicissimus* was one of the unrecognized tribunes of early Modernism. The red bulldog exemplifies modern simplicity. Drawn in the manner of a woodcut, Heine used white paint to cut away extraneous lines, leaving only the most descriptive features and penetrating expression behind. Although he was not the first to employ the cartoon bulldog, which shows up in various periodicals of the day in apolitical guises, compared to the taciturn renderings found in typical editorial illustrations, Heine's version was a design breakthrough: the prototypical modern logo. In subsequent iterations the red bulldog was further geometricized, suggesting the roots of the

late 1970s corporate logo, but with decidedly more visual interest.

In its day Heine's *Simplicissimus* poster was a radical departure from typically fussy placards layered with excessive ornamentation and multiple colors. The red bulldog set against black was the antecedent of the German Sachplakat (or object poster) introduced by designer Lucien Bernhard eight years later in Berlin. Bernhard's work was characterized by a single object (e.g., matches, shoes, typewriter) set against a flat color with only a bold headline to identify the brand being advertised.

According to Nazi-design historian Dr. Erwin Schockel in *Das Politische Plakat* (Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Munich, 1939), Heine's poster can also claim the dubious honor of being the

The bulldog continues to be a favorite symbol for strength, tenacity, and reliability. Designers can borrow such pictographs from the shared culture to communicate ideas directly and comprehensibly. Note the consistency of viewpoint and expression in these examples.

Right: Neon signage and packaging for Red Dog beer.

Below: 1928 font sampler for Bookcase Intertype Corporation, Brooklyn, New York.



**Noted for Tenacity**

Intertype Wide Tooth Matrices give for longer and stronger gripping life to the matrix. This holds the point of greatest pressure. The matrix has maximum strength, low friction machine wear.

INTERTYPE CORPORATION

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

**INTERTYPE  
FACES ARE MADE  
ON MODERN**

Intertype faces are made on modern wide tooth matrices. These matrices last long, save replacements and facilitate economical production on other line composing machines as readily as on Intertypes. A

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPO  
QRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
\$1234567890

inspiration for one of Adolf Hitler's earliest election posters: a black and white photograph of the wannabe dictator silhouetted against a black background, with only the name HITLER in gothic caps underneath. Like Heine's (who, because he was both a Jew and government critic, was forced to flee Germany when the Nazis came to power), the Nazi poster was designed to stand out on streets and boulevards flooded with colorful posters. Unlike the red bulldog, however, the Hitler poster was without humor, a portent of things to come.

In later years, Heine's designs used the bulldog as a character in more detailed comical vignettes, at times paired with *der Simpl*'s other mascot, the red devil. But like the original, these were restrained and economical.

Given the standards of commercial design during the golden era of *Simplicissimus*, one could argue that Heine's red bulldog was rather inelegant. The sans-serif logo of the magazine *der Simpl* was more refined than the poster lettering, and its inside pages were based on pre-modern standards; it still used Fraktur headlines and body text. Heine's lettering was crudely hand drawn (on those versions of the poster where the 10-pfennig price was included, it was downright messy).

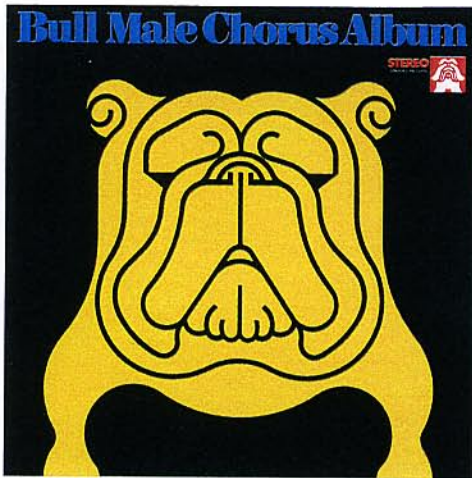
Yet the poster was a totality. The lettering suggested immediacy, and complemented the bulldog's tense, frozen stance. In fact, this is perhaps one of Heine's most brilliant works. What followed paled by virtue of being mere cartoon. From its conception, this was a poster to be reckoned with for the ages.



Upper left: Illustrated logo for Mack Trucks, Inc.

Lower left: 1982 record jacket. Keiji Ozumi, designer.

Below: Old fruit-crate label reproduced as T-shirt art.



The red bulldog poster has long been divorced from its original context of promoting the magazine, and the bulldog long ago lost its meaning as a symbol of the Volk. Nevertheless, it has not lost any of its original graphic power. Unlike other Jugendstil-era posters that are slavishly bound to once fashionable graphic conceits, the red bulldog owes no allegiance to a time-bound style; it is a paradigm of efficient design.

Today, the Art Nouveau-inspired hand lettering might suggest contemporary grunge typography, and the boldness of the image as a whole is consistent with current trends in advertising and agitational posters.

Erase the title *Simplicissimus* and this could be an advertisement

for a contemporary business or product, particularly one that has adopted the beguiling bulldog as mascot. Mack Trucks, introduced during World War I (the trucks were bulldog tough), is the most famous of the post-*Simplicissimus* adaptations; Bulldog Brand nails is another one of many examples where the hound is the symbol of strength and durability.

In 1995 Red Dog beer adopted the bulldog to introduce a beer with bite. Peering from bus shelter posters, neon signs, and bottles this red bulldog, rendered with slightly more attention to precisionist detail than Heine's, demands attention, proving that while much other twentieth-century design is under critical scrutiny, the bulldog still has the same bite today as it did a hundred years ago. ✨

© 1996 Steven Heller