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INTRODUCTION

THE ARTS, CULTURE, AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE WHITE ROSE RESISTANCE

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This Introduction to the special issue The White Rose and the Uses of Culture addresses the role of culture and the arts in the history and reception of the Weiße Rose resistance circle. Literature, music, and the visual arts were at the centre of the student resisters' lives: they brought and bound them together, and profoundly influenced their ways of seeing the world. They were also the subject of Professor Kurt Huber's academic research. This essay examines some of the cultural influences on, and interests of, the core members of the resistance group and considers how their cultural engagement might better be understood as an integral part of their individual and collective decision to resist Nazism. It also provides a brief overview of the eight articles in the special issue and sets out some of the key questions they ask about the uses of culture within the White Rose resistance pamphlets and beyond.

KEYWORDS: *Weiße Rose*, The Arts, Culture, Pamphlets, Music, Reception, Resistance, Third Reich

INTRODUCTION

On the evening of Wednesday 17 February 1943, Sophie Scholl (1921–1943), a student at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, wrote a letter to a friend while she listened to a recording of Franz Schubert's *Forellenquintett* [Trout Quintet] on the phonograph. She commented on the music:

> Man spürt und riecht in diesem Ding von Schubert förmlich die Lüfte und Düfte und vernimmt den ganzen Jubel der Vögel und der ganzen Kreatur. Die Wiederholung des Themas durch das Klavier — wie kaltes, perlendes Wasser, oh, es kann einen entzücken.[1]

[1] Sophie Scholl, Letter, 17 February 1943, cited in Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Inge Jens (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988), pp. 292–93. 'In that piece of Schubert's you can positively feel and smell the breezes and scents and hear the birds and the whole of creation cry out for joy. And when the piano repeats the theme like cool, clear, sparkling water —

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Scholl comments here both on technical aspects of the composition (the recapitulation of the theme in the piano part) and the effect of the music on her mood. The piece conjures up for her a natural idyll and the world of spring for which, as she writes earlier in the letter, she is already longing. The following day, on Thursday 18 February, Sophie and her brother Hans Scholl (1918–1943) were arrested as they deposited anti-Nazi, anti-war resistance pamphlets in the main building of their university. Four days later, on Monday 22 February, they were tried for treason along with another member of the resistance circle, Christoph Probst (1919–1943). Just hours after the sentence had been passed, all three were executed by guillotine. Further trials followed as other members of the group were rounded up, among them Willi Graf (1918–1943), Alexander Schmorell (1917–1943), and academic Kurt Huber (1893–1943). Their collective crime had been to use the written word against Hitler and his government, to expose the corruption and moral bankruptcy of the state, and to call on their fellow Germans to rise up and resist.

The pamphlets of the White Rose resistance circle ('die Weiße Rose') were produced between June 1942 and February 1943. Totalling around 5,000 words, the pamphlets urged the German people to open their eyes to the atrocities being committed by the Nazis and to mount resistance. The first four were written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell over a period of about two weeks in the summer of 1942. Following the fourth pamphlet, Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and Willi Graf left Munich for a three-month tour of duty at the Russian front as they were medical students conscripted into military service. This was a profoundly important experience for them as their letters and diaries attest.[2] When they returned to Munich in November 1942, they resumed the pamphlet campaign and approached Kurt Huber who from that point onwards was directly involved in their resistance activities. The fifth pamphlet was written, printed, and distributed in January 1943, and the sixth in February 1943. A draft of what would have been a seventh pamphlet was written but never printed or distributed.[3] It was for this act of resistance that the group's members were arrested, tried, and for which seven of them were executed by guillotine between February 1943 and January 1945.[4]

One of the most enduring questions asked about the White Rose group is *why* they staged this act of resistance. What motivated them? How was it that these individuals were able to see what so many others of their age, educational level, and

oh, it's sheer enchantment', in *At the Heart of the White Rose: Letters and Diaries of Hans and Sophie Scholl*, ed. by Inge Jens and trans. by J. Maxwell Brownjohn (Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2017), p. 311.

[2] See Willi Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Anneliese Knoop-Graf and Inge Jens (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994), pp. 44–72; Alexander Schmorell, 'Die Briefe von Alexander Schmorell', in Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. by Christiane Moll (Berlin: Lukas, 2011), pp. 495–506; and Hans Scholl, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 104–35.

[3] The draft had been written by Christoph Probst in January 1943 and was found on Hans Scholl when he was arrested on 18 February 1943. See Christiane Moll, 'Alexander Schmorell und Christoph Probst: Eine biographische Einführung', in Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, *Gesammelte Briefe*, pp. 23–283 (pp. 235–36).

[4] I discuss the White Rose pamphlet campaign in detail in *Defying Hitler: The White Rose Pamphlets* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022), pp. 10–39.

cultural background could or would not? As the journalist and author Miriam Gebhardt has rightly pointed out, these resisters were not born 'als Märtyrer des deutschen Widerstands',[5] and indeed most of them grew up under National Socialism. How was it possible, then, for them to be apparently immune to the indoctrination perpetrated by Nazism, and furthermore to act on that knowledge? There are many possible answers to this, drawing on points of intersection between the core members' backgrounds and upbringings. They all suffered losses or difficulties in their early life; they were all open to discussion and debate with others; they all had some form of personal faith, or at least an openness to Christianity and/or Christian thinkers. They also shared a serious interest in and engagement with culture and the arts. This brought many of them together and exerted a profound influence on their ways of seeing the world. This article offers an overview of the variety and diversity of the *Weiße Rose* circle's cultural interests and considers how these might be more critically viewed within the story of their resistance to Nazism.[6]

The secondary literature on the *Weiße Rose* is extensive,[7] yet I am not aware of a detailed and sustained study of the role that culture played in the lives of the whole group and in their journey towards resistance. There is an obvious contradiction here. Emphasis has often been placed on the group's apparently apolitical nature. Writing as early as 1946, for example, the publisher Franz Schoeningh noted that anyone reading the pamphlets 'mit dem Blick des politisch Erfahrenen […] ist geradezu erschüttert von deren religiöser und ethischer Glut und zugleich niedergeschlagen von der politischen Kindlichkeit, die sich hier offenbart'.[8] Theirs was

[5] '[A]s martyrs of the German resistance'. Miriam Gebhardt, *Die Weiße Rose: Wie aus ganz normalen Deutschen Widerstandskämpfer wurden* (Munich: dtv, 2017), p. 30. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[6] This study is by no means exhaustive and makes use only of published sources, and not the hitherto unpublished contents of the various *Nachlässe* (estates) and other archival holdings.

[7] On the history, legacy, and writings of the group, see in particular Ulrich Chaussy and Gerd R. Ueberschär, '*Es lebe die Freiheit!*': *Die Geschichte der Weißen Rose und ihrer Mitglieder in Dokumenten und Berichten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2013); Hinrich Siefken (ed.), *Die Weiße Rose Student Resistance to National Socialism 1942/1943: Forschungsergebnisse und Erfahrungsberichte* (Nottingham: The University of Nottingham, 1991); ibid., *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter: Dokumente, Texte, Lebensbilder, Erläuterungen* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1993). On Hans Scholl, see Robert M. Zoske, *Flamme sein! Hans Scholl und die Weiße Rose: Eine Biografie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018); Jakob Knab, *Ich schweige nicht: Hans Scholl und die Weiße* Rose (Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2018). On Sophie Scholl, see Barbara Beuys, *Sophie Scholl: Biografie* (Munich: Hanser, 2010); Frank McDonough, *Sophie Scholl: The Real Story of the Woman who Defied Hitler* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010); Robert M. Zoske, '*Es reut mich nichts*': *Porträt einer Widerständigen* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2020). On Alexander Schmorell and Christoph Probst, see Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. by Christiane Moll (Berlin: Lukas, 2011). On Willi Graf, see Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*; Peter Goergen, *Willi Graf: Ein Weg in den Widerstand* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2009). On Kurt Huber, see Clara Huber (ed.), '*… der Tod … war nicht vergebens*': *Kurt Huber zum Gedächtnis* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlag, 1986); Wolfgang Huber (ed.), *Die Weiße Rose: Kurt Hubers letzte Tage* (Munich: Utz, 2018); and Kurt-Huber-Gymnasium (ed.), *Kurt Huber: Stationen seines Lebens in Dokumenten und Bildern* (Gräfelfing: Kurt-Huber-Gymnasium, 1986).

[8] '[W]ith the view of anyone who is politically experienced […] is almost shaken by their religious and ethical ardour and, at the same time, depressed by the political childishness that is revealed here'. Cited in Christian Petry, *Studenten aufs Schafott: Die Weiße Rose und ihr Scheitern*

apparently a moral, not a political, act of resistance. This, for Kurt Sontheimer, is an argument that positions the White Rose 'in der Kontinuität des unpolitischen deutschen Bürgertums'.[9] Sontheimer argues instead that they were indeed political in the sense that they attempted to reveal the *truth* in a context in which National Socialism spread *untruths*: the pamphlets were not '"Betrachtungen von Unpolitischen", sondern eindrucksvolle Zeugnisse einer politischen, auf Sinn und Ziel der Politik bezogenen Einstellung'.[10] Given that the reception history of the White Rose has often *not* foregrounded the political dimension of their motivations and resistance activities, it is perhaps all the more surprising that the significance of the role of culture in their lives has been downplayed. Indeed, their membership of the *Bildungsbürgertum* [educated middle class] or 'Kulturbürgertum' [cultured middle class][11] has frequently been used as a shorthand to describe their class and origins.[12] Such an approach risks marginalizing the role that culture and the arts played in shaping their resistance.

This essay is not an attempt to claim that culture and the arts provided the principal impetus to resist, nor to argue that culture makes humanity more moral, as part of argument that — had their fellow Germans only read more and attended more concerts — they too might have found the courage to resist. Nor is it an attempt to perpetuate the narrative that the White Rose was somehow an 'unpolitical' group. Rather, it is an attempt to take seriously the role that culture played in their lives and in their resistance activities. It also raises important questions about elitism, and the relative privilege of members of the White Rose, especially within the wider context of German resistance to Nazism, and more broadly to contemporary debates about resistance and protest, and those who carry it out.

The Arts and Culture under Nazism

In the Epilogue to *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1935) Walter Benjamin suggests that 'Der Faschismus läuft folgerecht auf eine Ästhetisierung des politischen Lebens hinaus.[13] As David B. Dennis points out with

(Munich: Piper, 1968), p. 147. See Kurt Sontheimer, 'Der studentische Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus', in *Die Weiße Rose Student Resistance to National Socialism 1942/1943: Forschungsergebnisse und Erfahrungsberichte*, ed. by Hinrich Siefken (Nottingham: The University of Nottingham, 1991), pp. 183–95 (p. 192) for a discussion of this view.

[9] '[I]n the continuity of the unpolitical German middle class'. Sontheimer, 'Der studentische Widerstand', p. 192.

[10] '"[R]eflections of those who are non-political", but impressive testimonies of a political attitude that is related to the meaning and goal of politics'. Sontheimer, 'Der studentische Widerstand', p. 192. This reference to Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man, 1918) is particularly apt, given Mann's early advocacy of the White Rose group in his broadcasts for the BBC German Service. See Emily Oliver, '"Deutsche Hörer!": News of the White Rose on the BBC German Service', in *The White Rose: Reading, Writing, Resistance*, ed. by Alexandra Lloyd (Oxford: Taylor Institution Library, 2019), pp. 47–61.

[11] Matthias Bormuth, *Schreiben im Exil: Porträts* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2022), p. 64.

[12] See, for example, Detlef Bald, '*Die Weiße Rose*': *Von der Front in den Widerstand* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), p. 196.

[13] 'The logical outcome of fascism is the aestheticization of political life.' Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 42.

reference to Benjamin's comment, 'it can be argued that the opposite was also true: that fascism as practiced also worked to politicize artistic culture'.[14] When the National Socialists seized power on 30 January 1933, the young people who would become student members of the White Rose circle were in their early teens. Culture and the arts were a central part of Nazi propaganda from its beginnings,[15] and literature, culture, and the arts immediately became political tools to coerce and control the people. As Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia note, 'Hitler and his followers came to understand German culture and the role of the arts primarily in political terms.'[16] This meant not only the preservation of what was understood to be 'German' culture from 'allegedly degenerate, largely foreign influences that threatened to destroy it', but also contained the idea that 'art and culture were expressions of race, and that "Aryans" alone were capable of creating true art and preserving true German culture'.[17] Thus German culture was something to be defended against attack and erosion.

The process of 'Gleichschaltung' [coordination] that began in 1933, and that was enacted through a series of laws, ensured the Nazification of all areas of German society, including public institutions, the media, culture, and education. Michael H. Kater writes that this process effectively 'nipped aesthetic pluralism in the bud'.[18] At the same time, as Moritz Föllmer has argued, under Nazism culture was not only infused with so-called 'Nazi' values, but was 'derived for the most part from the *bürgerlich* […] canon of the nineteenth century and was more conservative than radical'.[19] Attempts were made to appropriate writers, composers, and artists for the Nazi cause. The state also strove to engage the people in culture, but in a way that served its own ends. In the case of literature, for example, as Frank Trommler observes, Nazi strategies towards the institutionalization of literary culture included 'the promotion of a particular kind of "völkisch" reading, in which readers experience themselves as part of a larger reading racial community (*die lesende Volksgemeinschaft*).'[20] Thus engagement with culture was framed as an act which bound the people together, yet in a way principally designed to build a 'Nazi' community and without any expectation that they might do so critically.

[14] David B. Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 50.

[15] Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia, 'Introduction: The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change', in *The Arts in Nazi Germany Continuity, Conformity, Change*, ed. by Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 1–15 (pp. 1–2).

[16] Ibid, p. 2.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Michael H. Kater, *Culture in Nazi Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), p. xiv.

[19] Moritz Föllmer, *Culture in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 3.

[20] Frank Trommler, 'A Command Performance? The Many Faces of Literature under Nazism', in *The Arts in Nazi Germany Continuity, Conformity, Change*, ed. by Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 111–35 (p. 117).

Die Weisse Rose: Literature, Art, Music

The influence of literary culture on the authors of the White Rose pamphlets is clear from the texts themselves. Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn write that the first four leaflets appeared in quick succession, 'filled with rage, brimstone, and literary citations'.[21] All six members of the White Rose were avid readers, consuming canonical works and the classics, as well as contemporary literature, banned books, and religious and philosophical texts. These included works by German-language authors, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff (1788–1857), Adalbert Stifter (1805–1868), Gottfried Keller (1819–1890), Thomas Mann (1875–1955), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Hermann Hesse (1877–1962), Ernst Wiechert (1887–1950), Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), and Reinhold Schneider (1903–1958), as well as works by authors banned under Nazism, such as Paul Claudel (1868–1955) and Georges Bernanos (1888–1948), and writers of inner exile, such as Romano Guardini (1885–1968).[22] They also read a good deal of Russian literature, such as works by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Nicolai Gogol (1809–1852), and Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), certainly influenced by Alexander Schmorell who was a fluent Russian speaker.[23] They not only encountered literary and philosophical works on the printed page, but at times they read communally, discussing together the works and the ideas they contained.[24] They also encountered literary and philosophical writings at gatherings and public readings they attended where they heard writers perform and discuss their own works and translations.

Several anecdotes about members of the White Rose concern their reading habits. A story is told about Sophie Scholl who, while undertaking 'Arbeitsdienst' [compulsory labour service], commented disparagingly on some of the other girls in her company who had with them copies of Goethe's *Faust* (1806/1832) so as to appear educated.[25] Sophie Scholl herself records reading Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain, 1924) and Augustine's *Confessions* during this period, neither of which could be termed 'light' reading.[26] Similarly, in her

[21] Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2007), p. 56.

[22] Guardini spoke at the first commemoration of the White Rose in November 1945, six months after the end of the war on the first annual 'Tag der Opfer des Faschismus' [Day of the Victims of Fascism]. See Herbert Marcuse, 'Remembering The White Rose: (West) German Assessments, 1943–1993', *Soundings*, 22 (1994), 25–38 (p. 29).

[23] The role of the group's multilingualism deserves greater attention. Alexander Schmorell was fluent in German and Russian and had English lessons as a child (Gebhardt, *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 96); Christoph learnt Russian (Elena Perekrestov, *Alexander Schmorell: Saint of the German Resistance* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, 2017), p. 52); Hans Scholl and Willi Graf engaged a Russian language tutor during their tour of duty on the Eastern Front in 1942.

[24] See Paul Shrimpton, *Conscience before Conformity: Hans and Sophie Scholl and the White Rose Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2018), pp. 105–06.

[25] Sophie Scholl, Letter, 27 April 1941, in *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 221.

[26] Sophie Scholl, Letter, 10 April 1941, in *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 211. The edition of Augustine was a collection of excerpts: *Augustinus: Die Gestalt als Gefüge*, ed. and trans. by Erich Przywara (Leipzig: Hegner, 1934).

memoir of the White Rose Inge Scholl recounts an incident between Hans Scholl and his Hitler Youth troupe leader in which Scholl was upbraided for reading a book by the Jewish Austrian author Stefan Zweig (1881–1942).[27] The Scholl family's motto — 'Allen Gewalten zum Trutz sich erhalten' — was taken from Goethe's poem 'Beherzigung I' (Taking to Heart I, 1776/77).

Visual culture was also an important influence on the group, in terms of both appreciation and practice. Christoph Probst's father Hermann counted Paul Klee (1879–1940) and Emil Nolde (1867–1956) among his friends, both of whose works were considered by the Nazis to be prime examples of 'entartete Kunst' [degenerate art]. A portrait of Christoph and his sister Angelika by Nolde hung in the Probst house.[28] Similarly, Sophie Scholl was directly influenced by the artists Bertl Kley and Wilhelm Geyer (1900–1968) who were friends of the Scholl family.[29] An artist herself, in 1939 she was invited by Hanspeter Nägele to illustrate a new translation into German of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*,[30] and was also working on illustrations for a planned edition of Georg Heym's *Ein Nachmittag* (An Afternoon, 1913) for the poet Ernst Reden, a friend of her sister, Inge.[31] Alexander Schmorell was also an accomplished artist and sculptor and a great admirer of the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917).[32]

Music-making, concert attendance, and musical appreciation also feature prominently in the lives of all five student members of the *Weiße Rose*. Hans Scholl and Sophie Scholl came from a musical family. Inge Scholl writes of Hans's love of music, recalling that he played the guitar and sang songs with his Hitler Youth troupe,[33] though his choice of Russian or Norwegian songs raised eyebrows among his superiors and he was banned from singing them. He also composed songs.[34] As a teenager, Sophie played the piano every day and sang regularly.[35] She also played the organ,[36] and indeed Inge Jens considers music to have been 'one of Sophie's staple needs in life'.[37] Alexander Schmorell also had piano lessons as a child[38] and played the balalaika. When he was stationed in Lothringen in May 1940 he spent hours playing Bach preludes in a local church.[39] A report on

[27] I. Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 16.

[28] See Dumbach and Newborn, *Sophie Scholl*, p. 69; and Moll, 'Eine biographische Einführung', p. 70.

[29] See Michael Verhoeven and Mario Krebs, *Die Weiße Rose: Der Widerstand Münchener Studenten gegen Hitler — Informationen zum Film* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1982), p. 66; and McDonough, *Sophie Scholl*, p. 39.

[30] See *Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl: Briefe*, p. 339.

[31] See *Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl: Briefe*, p. 340. Some of her drawings that survived the war are reproduced in Hermann Vinke, *Das kurze Leben der Sophie Scholl* (Ulm: Ravensburger, 1987), pp. 35, 36, 37, 82, 83, 85, 154, 155, 178; and in Siefken (ed.), *Die Weiße Rose*, pp. 79, 80.

[32] See Sönke Zankel, *Die Weiße Rose war nur der Anfang: Geschichte eines Widerstandskreises* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), pp. 23–24; and Siefken (ed.), *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 59.

[33] Inge Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2016), p. 15.

[34] I. Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 21.

[35] Gebhardt, *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 77.

[36] See *Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl: Briefe*, pp. 232–33.

[37] Jens, in *At the Heart of the White Rose*, p. 354.

[38] Moll, 'Eine biographische Einführung', p. 35.

[39] See Moll, 'Eine biographische Einführung', p. 173. There is more than can be said here about the appropriation of composers by Nazism for its cause. This included downplaying the

Christoph Probst written while he was at a boarding school in Schondorf am Ammersee in 1936 noted that Christoph was 'musikalisch' [musical] and that it would be advisable for him to have violin lessons.[40] Willi Graf learnt the viola and was a member of the Munich Bach Choir while studying.[41] To some extent, music seems to have provided a means of expressing their independence and, at times, of separating themselves from their surroundings.

In 1941, the Scholls and their circle of friends decided to set up a clandestine cultural magazine — *Windlicht* [Hurricane Lamp] — in which they could exchange ideas. As Paul Shrimpton writes, this was to 'achieve some form of self-expression beyond the reach of the regime' and to provide a space in which to declare 'intellectual independence'.[42] In 1942 Sophie Scholl was working on an article, most likely for *Windlicht*, exploring the significance and effect of music. She wrote: 'Musik aber macht das Herz weich; sie ordnet seine Verworrenheit, löst seine Verkrampftheit und schafft so eine Voraussetzung für das Wirken des Geistes in der Seele, der vorher an ihren hart verschlossenen Pforten vergeblich geklopft hat.'[43] What we find here, and elsewhere in the students' writings, is not only an appreciation of music, but a critical reflection on it that goes beyond mere escapism, although in the context of a totalitarian regime escapism is not to be discounted.

The White Rose members' engagement with music has been interpreted — if it has been addressed seriously at all — as an unexceptional part of the cultural milieu in which they lived. Thus Gebhardt suggests that the students attended concerts in Munich not simply 'aus Prestigegründen' but because they were seriously interested in engaging with music.[44] Willi Graf records having attended several concerts in the Winter Semester of 1942,[45] including performances of works by Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), Max Reger (1873–1916), and Antonín Leopold Dvořák (1841–1904). A concert performance of Handel's *Messiah* in December 1942 made a particularly profound impression on him, and in particular the aria 'I know that my redeemer liveth' which he praised for its performance and for the way it encapsulated the faith behind the words: 'Es klang wie ein Credo, wenn zuletzt in einer Arie ausgesagt wurde: "Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt."'[46] Graf referred to the performance in his last letter, smuggled out of Stadelheim Prison by the chaplain on the day of his execution.[47] Hans Scholl had a comparable

religious context of compositions by J.S. Bach (Erik Levi, *Mozart and the Nazis: How the Third Reich abused a Cultural Icon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 18) and the reclaiming of Handel as Händel (Dennis, *Inhumanities*, pp. 25–26).

[40] Gebhardt, *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 108.

[41] Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 39.

[42] Shrimpton, *Conscience before Conformity*, pp. 84–85.

[43] *Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl: Briefe*, p. 251. '[M]usic softens the heart; by resolving its confusions and relaxing its tensions, it enables the mind, which has previously knocked in vain on the locked portals of the soul, to operate within it', *At the Heart of the White Rose*, p. 208. In this piece, Sophie Scholl goes on to explain that she is not referring to *all* music, since she herself has encountered relatively little in terms of scope and diversity.

[44] 'For reasons of prestige'. Gebhardt, *Die Weiße Rose,* p. 138.

[45] Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 182.

[46] 'It sounded like a Credo when towards the end the words 'I know that my redeemer liveth' were sung in an aria.' Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 179.

[47] Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 200. See Dennis, *Inhumanities*, p. 26 on the Nazi appropriation of Handel's *Messiah* as a 'German' work.

experience with a performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* on Good Friday 1940.[48]

Even during the three-month tour of duty that Willi Graf, Hans Scholl, and Alexander Schmorell spent on the Eastern Front in the summer of 1942, music played an important role and their letters and diaries from this period contain many references to music and singing.[49] They heard Russian songs sung by local people and made an effort to contribute to the music themselves: 'die Mädchen singen zur Gitarre, wir versuchen die Bässe zu summen. Es ist schön so […]'.[50] Hans Scholl even set up a choir with some of the prisoners of war and local Russian women.[51] Their journey back to Munich in November 1942 was likewise dominated by music: there was much singing and Alexander Schmorell played the balalaika.[52]

The examples of the White Rose members' engagement with the arts and culture outlined above stem overwhelmingly from what we might term 'high culture'. This overview cannot hope to be exhaustive, and further research may illuminate greater diversity in the cultural interests of the White Rose. The programming of concerts they attended was necessarily controlled by institutions even if, as Pamela M. Potter has argued, there was not a consistent or total 'Nazification' of music and musical culture in the Third Reich;[53] in reading and discussion they had far greater freedom to go beyond what was proscribed by the state through their access to banned books.[54] Dumbach and Newborn suggest that, in contrast to the Hamburg cell of the White Rose, the Munich members were not 'aficionados of American swing and jazz'.[55] Willi Graf's diary entries from 1942 and 1943 record a number of visits to the cinema to see popular films. There is further research to be done to provide a more inclusive picture of the influences of all forms of culture on the group.

The White Rose and the Uses of Culture

At the opening of the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture) on 15 November 1933, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels declared: 'Revolutionen beschränken sich niemals auf das rein politische Gebiet; sie greifen von da über

[48] H. Scholl, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 36.

[49] On their experiences at the Front in the summer and autumn of 1942, see Hinrich Siefken, '"Die Weiße Rose" and Russia', *German Life and Letters*, 47 (1994), 14–43. See also Chaussy and Ueberschär, '*Es lebe die Freiheit!*', p. 10; Detlef Bald, '*Die Weiße Rose*': *Von der Front in den Widerstand* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003).

[50] 'The girls sing with the guitar, we try to hum the bass line. It's nice like this […]'. Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 51. See also entries on 30 August 1942 (p. 52) and 1 September 1942 (p. 53).

[51] H. Scholl, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 110.

[52] Graf, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 71.

[53] Pamela M. Potter, 'Music in the Third Reich: The Complex Task of "Germanization"', in *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change*, ed. by Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 85–110.

[54] The act of banning books did not automatically remove them from circulation. For example, Robert Scholl (1891–1973), Hans and Sophie Scholl's father, kept several banned books in the family home. See Dumbach and Newborn, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose*, p. 33.

[55] Dumbach and Newborn, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose*, p. 118.

auf alle anderen Bezirke menschlichen Zusammenlebens. Wirtschaft und Kultur, Wissenschaft und Kunst bleiben davon nicht verschont.'[56] As we have seen, it is deeply ironic that the members of the White Rose ended up doing precisely what he advocated in terms of their engagement with politics and culture. While the Nazis' process of *Gleichschaltung* and institutional control of the arts and cultural institutions aimed at limiting individuals' worldview, the members of the White Rose were engaging with culture enthusiastically and critically. Indeed, culture became a central part of their act of political resistance in the pamphlets. The pamphlets include a number of direct quotations from literary, theological, and philosophical texts, and they bear the traces of other influences, most notably of the writer and translator Theodor Haecker (1879–1945) whom they knew personally and whose work they encountered at clandestine readings.[57]

The first pamphlet appeals to German readers as a 'Kulturvolk'.[58] This term can be compared and contrasted with the concept of the 'Volksgemeischaft', which the historian Lisa Pine translates as 'national community' so as to capture 'the concept of national cohesion and homogeneity sought by the Nazi regime'.[59] The White Rose pamphlets initially appeal to non-persecuted Germans' sense of identity as a 'cultured' or 'civilized' nation, bound together by a common cultural history as the 'Land der Dichter und Denker' [nation of poets and philosophers], rather than by racial ideology or mindless adherence to a particular political dogma.[60] The idea of a 'Kulturvolk' can be used in a similarly exclusive sense, but if the use of 'Kultur' is in some sense foundational of the 'Volk' or 'Nation', then it has to be possible to engage with and interpret precisely the contents of that culture as approved by the regime. The White Rose members' engagement with culture was in many ways an act of resistance in itself. The fact that the book burnings were instigated by university students[61] contains a two-fold irony: first, that the White Rose members were themselves students and would be hard to imagine burning books; second, the use of culture by the White Rose serves to demonstrate that 'dangerous' ideas are present in the books which not only remained unburned, but which were valorized by the Nazis, writers like Goethe and Schiller.

On a practical level, the White Rose students' appreciation of the arts was an important part of how they found each other in a context in which individuals had to carefully navigate each other, connecting with people they were sufficiently confident would prove like-minded. It also facilitated the forming and deepening of

[56] Joseph Goebbels, Speech, 15 November 1933. 'Revolutions are never limited to the purely political. They reach into every area of human interaction. Science and art do not remain unaffected' cited in Dennis, *Inhumanities*, p. 50.

[57] See Helena M. Tomko's article in the present issue.

[58] 'Flugblätter der Weißen Rose I', <https://www.weisse-rose-stiftung.de/widerstandsgruppe-weisse-rose/flugblaetter/i-flugblatt-der-weissen-rose/> [accessed 1 November 2022].

[59] Lisa Pine, *Hitler's 'National Community': Society and Culture in Nazi Germany* 2nd edn (London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 2.

[60] The White Rose use precisely this phrase in their second pamphlet, while pouring scorn on those who praise Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle, 1925). 'Flugblätter der Weißen Rose II', <https://www.weisse-rose-stiftung.de/widerstandsgruppe-weisse-rose/flugblaetter/ii-flugblatt-der-weissen-rose/> [accessed 1 November 2022].

[61] See Guenter Lewy, *Harmful and Undesirable: Book Censorship in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 7–9.

friendships, through common interests and leisure activities. Their individual and collective decision to mount resistance and, no doubt, their confidence in their activities, were further supported by the opportunities to exchange ideas, and to debate and dissent, that clandestine reading evenings and time spent with mentors such as Haecker and the writer-publisher Carl Muth (1867–1944) provided. This also applies to their relationship with Kurt Huber, who became actively involved in the White Rose resistance, most likely in late 1942.[62] Huber's research interests were broad and wide-ranging, from German philosophy to folk song, vocal theory, and baroque composition.

The White Rose members' engagement with culture and the arts undoubtedly provided an outlet through which to escape their reality, and — more importantly — to carve out spaces for independent thought and enquiry. Hinrich Siefken has observed that a great deal of their reading was a mode of 'searching for a way out of the chaos'.[63] Moll suggests that for Sophie Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, their interest in, and practice of, music and art constituted 'eine Art Gegenwelt zum Nationalsozialismus',[64] and for Schmorell specifically, it was a way in which to escape his 'uniformierten, militarisierten Umwelt'.[65] It is striking, too, that the logistics of the resistance activities were also intertwined with those working in the field of art and culture: the book-seller Josef Söhngen hid incriminating material when necessary; and the leaflets themselves were produced in the studio of architect Manfred Eickemeyer[66] who had lent the studio to the artist Wilhelm Geyer who in turn permitted the students to use it.

The extent to which the White Rose was 'political' has been contested within the group's complex post-war reception. As scholars have demonstrated, the resistance circle has been repeatedly presented as 'überwiegend unpolitisch'.[67] Joanne Sayner has argued that '[a] focus on an idealized explanation of their behaviour has been used to distance their actions from political interpretation'.[68] Richard Hanser writes that those who questioned the impact the group actually had sought to dismiss them as 'impractical idealists'.[69] Indeed, even as the pamphlets were being written, their political impact was being downplayed. A Gestapo report commissioned in February 1943 and written by a professor at the University of Munich attempted to identify the authors of the pamphlets from a philological analysis of their contents. In his report, Richard Harder, a colleague of Huber's at the university in Munich, opines that the pamphlets are highly academic in style, and

[62] For an overview of Kurt Huber's life and work, see Lloyd, *Defying Hitler*, pp. 75–79; and Siefken, 'Kurt Huber', in *Die Weiße Rose*, pp. 110–19.

[63] Siefken, 'Die Weiße Rose and Russia', p. 29.

[64] 'A kind of alternative world to National Socialism', Moll, 'Eine biographische Einführung', p. 173.

[65] 'Uniformed, military environment', ibid, p. 173.

[66] Both Söhngen and Eickemeyer stood trial for their involvement in the White Rose in July 1943.

[67] Gebhardt, *Die Weiße Rose*, p. 178.

[68] Joanne Sayner, *Women without a Past?: German Autobiographical Writings and Fascism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 79. See also Johannes Tuchel, 'Vorwort', in Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, *Gesammelte Briefe,* pp. 7–15 (p. 8); and Moll, 'Eine biographische Einführung', p. 12.

[69] Hanser, *A Noble Treason*, p. 285.

concludes that the resistance writing 'will (und kann) in breiteren Kreisen der Soldaten oder Arbeiter keinen Widerhall finden'.[70]

The White Rose members' serious engagement with a range of artistic and cultural influences and experiences contributed to their ability to recognize and act upon their convictions. This special issue of *Oxford German Studies* — 'The White Rose and the Uses of Culture' — examines in detail the cultural influences within the White Rose resistance pamphlets.[71] The majority of the articles were first presented at a colloquium at the University of Oxford on 7 May 2021 which aimed to explore the resistance pamphlets in detail from different scholarly perspectives and to use this as a way to consider the role of culture in times of crisis more generally.[72] The colloquium was organized as part of the White Rose Project, a research and engagement initiative at the University of Oxford founded on 12 October 2018, the 75th anniversary of Willi Graf's execution. In the project's first year, a group of fifteen undergraduates at the University of Oxford undertook a collaborative translation into English of the White Rose pamphlets, published in *Defying Hitler: The White Rose Pamphlets* (Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022).[73] The cover image of this special issue was created by a former student member of the White Rose Project, too. The oil on canvas by Alexander Kahn depicts Sophie Scholl, Christoph Probst, Hans Scholl, and Willi Graf working on the production of one of the pamphlets. The shadows of Alexander Schmorell and Kurt Huber are visible in the foreground. As Kahn writes, 'Though the six members of the White Rose movement are present, this is not a painting of a real moment; it is a symbol.'[74]

Each of the articles focuses in detail on the quotations in, and/or the textual influences on, the six printed pamphlets of the White Rose resistance.[75] In some cases, the White Rose quoted directly from existing texts; in other cases, the pamphlets bear the traces of their reading and the influences of writers and thinkers in their circle in Munich. Each article sets out the original context, author, and use of the text within the pamphlets, and in many cases, this gives rise to a discussion of

[70] '[W]ill not (and cannot) meet with a positive response among soldiers and workers', cited in Chaussy and Ueberschär, '*Es lebe die Freiheit!*', p. 53. See also the articles by Daniel Lloyd and Constanze Güthenke in the present issue.

[71] My co-editor, Karolina Watroba, and I would like to thank Bodleian Library Publishing for permission to quote from the English translation of the resistance pamphlets published in Alexandra Lloyd, *Defying Hitler: The White Rose Pamphlets* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022); Dr Hildegard Kronawitter and the Weiße Rose Stiftung in Munich for their continued support of the Oxford White Rose Project; the editorial team at *Oxford German Studies*; and the contributors to this special issue.

[72] The colloquium was generously supported by The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities and All Souls College, Oxford.

[73] The volume outlines the history of the White Rose through a detailed introduction and biographical sketches, and excerpts from their writings including the resistance pamphlets. The translations were previously published as a parallel text alongside the original German in *The White Rose: Reading, Writing, Resistance*, ed. by Alexandra Lloyd (Oxford: Taylor Institution Library, 2019).

[74] Alexander Kahn, 'Oil on Canvas' <http://whiteroseproject.seh.ox.ac.uk/index.php/creative-translations/> [accessed 15 January 2023]. Image used with grateful thanks.

[75] The authors within the special issue use multiple translations for the term 'Flugblatt', including 'pamphlet', 'leaflet', and 'flyer'.

the ways in which the original texts were co-opted by National Socialism, and the approach of the White Rose in 'reclaiming' or 'repurposing' them. The striking use of intertexts in the pamphlets raises questions about the ways in which artistic works and intellectual movements are battled over, and how, in the process of being repurposed, texts can be subject to new interpretations. The White Rose pamphlets reclaim writers like Goethe and Schiller that had been co-opted by Nazism for its cause; at the same time, they read Laozi and Aristotle through a Western and Christian lens that is shown not always to sit easily with the original contexts of the texts. The articles also reflect at times on the scholarly interpretations of the texts used by the White Rose and in doing so raise questions about the very structures of research and enquiry in which we ourselves as academics operate. An enduring question is 'why' the authors of the White Rose pamphlets chose to include quotations at all, and why they chose those they did. This again raises questions about the group's self-understanding as political resisters, and their expectations in terms of the reach and impact their resistance writings might have had.

What emerges above all from the articles in this special issue is the idea that the White Rose members were living out and advocating for a critical awareness and cultural engagement that went beyond the Nazi worldview. They were, in Siefken's words, 'finding their way'[76] and the pamphlets demand that others do the same. There is a strong emphasis in the articles on participatory reception. Ellen Pilsworth ('Goethe's Politics and Political Uses: Nazi and Anti-Nazi Readings of *Des Epimenides Erwachen*') argues that the pamphlets 'demanded the reader's participation in the kind of philosophical and intellectual enquiry that the Nazi regime had worked hard to suppress'. Kevin Hilliard ('Sparta and the *Abendland*: The Quotations from Friedrich Schiller and Theodor Körner in the Leaflets of the *Weiße Rose*') builds on Hinrich Siefken's work on the pamphlets and explores the idea that they invite 'an active "thinking along" with the texts, perhaps even a "thinking beyond" them'. In a similar way, Joanna Raisbeck ('The Politics of Romanticism: Novalis and the White Rose') argues for a reading of the pamphlet authors' deployment of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) as 'active reception', reworking the original text in a way that demands readerly engagement with it. Lea Cantor ('*Laozi* Through the Lens of the White Rose: Resonance or Dissonance?') examines the use of the classical Chinese text, the *Laozi*, in the pamphlets, and explores not only the function of the original, but also considers the complexity of interpreting the use of a text that itself has been subject to varied interpretations.

Just as the pamphlet authors seem to have been drawn to the perceived anti-authoritarianism of the *Laozi*, they responded to the non-conformist discourse offered by figures such as Theodor Haecker. Helena M. Tomko ('Why Theodor Haecker Spoke to the White Rose') shows how we can find other cultural resonances beyond the quotations in the pamphlets that root them within a particular 'interpretative community'. This is important for a consideration of not only what the pamphlets say, but the position from which they speak and the assumed audience to whom their words are addressed. In addition to tracing the use to which the pamphlet authors put classical and biblical quotations, both Constanze

[76] Siefken, 'Introduction', in *Die Weiße Rose*, pp. 1–11 (p. 10).

Güthenke ('Philology and Responsibility: The *Weiße Rose* Pamphlets and Classical Quotations') and Daniel Lloyd ('"Christliche und abendländische Kultur"? Readings of Augustine and Ecclesiastes in the White Rose Pamphlets') explore the response of the philologist Richard Harder to the pamphlets in the analysis he produced for the Gestapo in early 1943. Harder's *Schriftgutachten* (written report) provides the unique perspective of a contemporary reader's response to the pamphlets, albeit one that was written in the service of the Gestapo. It raises questions about the responsibilities of scholars and the uses to which cultural literacy may ultimately be put. Finally, Karolina Watroba's discussion of Erich Auerbach, Józef Czapski and Azar Nafisi ('Culture in Times of Crisis: Auerbach, Czapski, Nafisi') broadens the focus from the White Rose to the role of culture in times of political and social upheaval, exploring how the cultivation of individual intellectual reflection and artistic sensibility might serve to undermine the goals of their respective totalitarian regimes.

The White Rose members maintained a passionate belief in the freedom of the individual and social responsibility and transformed that into action. Indeed, 'freedom' is an idea that recurs repeatedly in their writings and beyond. Hans Scholl's last words before he was executed were 'Es lebe die Freiheit!' ['Long live freedom!'] and Sophie Scholl wrote the word 'Freiheit' on the copy of the court's indictment given to her on 21 February 1943 and which she left behind in her cell. It was one of the words graffitied onto walls in Munich by Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and Willi Graf in early 1943. It appears eighteen times in the printed pamphlets written by Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and Kurt Huber. The White Rose members' concept of freedom has many shades of meaning, but surely one is the freedom to *think* and act upon that critical engagement.

Notes on Contributor

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