



---

German  
Historical  
Institute  
London

---

# German Historical Institute London Bulletin

Review of Alexandra Lloyd, *Defying Hitler: The White Rose Pamphlets*

by Hildegard Kronawitter

*German Historical Institute London Bulletin*  
Vol. XLV, No. 1 (May 2023), 134–40

ISSN 0269-8552

ALEXANDRA LLOYD, *Defying Hitler: The White Rose Pamphlets* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022), 160 pp. ISBN 978 1 851 24583 3. £15.00

Alexandra Lloyd, a researcher in German and cultural studies, has produced a comprehensive book on the German resistance group known as the White Rose. She describes the actions of this student initiative knowledgeably and evocatively, placing it in the historical context of National Socialism and the Second World War. She accurately outlines the key facts relating to the group's resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, vividly introduces its protagonists, and presents and explains the main statements made in its pamphlets. The latter were the White Rose's primary medium of resistance. They rightfully take up a prominent place in the book, with all six of them published here in English translation. In a separate chapter on 'The Legacy of the White Rose Today', Lloyd traces the development of the memory culture surrounding the group and the various forms it now takes. Unlike with other resistance groups, this culture began to form immediately after the end of the war in 1945, and in Germany it has been shaped by changing attitudes to recent history.

The book is published by the Bodleian Library, which has already called considerable public attention to the White Rose through its 2018 exhibition 'The White Rose: Reading, Writing, Resistance'. This presented literature on the group published since 1945 alongside books that had been particularly influential on the circle of friends who made up its membership.

*Defying Hitler* is partly a product of the extensive 'White Rose Project' which Alexandra Lloyd launched at the University of Oxford in 2018–19 in her capacity as lecturer in German studies, and now leads. During this project Lloyd worked with students to translate the White Rose pamphlets into English and has also organized exhibitions and events on the group's resistance activities. The new translations were published alongside facsimiles of the German originals and in-depth accompanying texts in a 2019 book called *The White Rose: Reading, Writing, Resistance*, edited by Lloyd herself.<sup>1</sup> The volume under review

Trans. by Jozef van der Voort (GHIL)

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Lloyd (ed.), *The White Rose: Reading, Writing, Resistance* (Oxford, 2019).

here is thus part of a wider effort to communicate the history of the White Rose to English-speaking audiences.

Lloyd's expertise allows her to explain in detail the events that led to the death sentences handed down to the group members just a few days after their arrest, which were swiftly carried out. The pamphlets circulated by White Rose members were particularly contentious because the group's resistance activities and arrests coincided with increasing concern among the wider population over news of the desperate situation on the Soviet front on the one hand, and mounting repression on the part of the Nazi dictatorship on the other. The regime sought to strengthen the loyalty of its followers in view of recent military developments, especially so after it was announced that the last units of the sixth army had surrendered in Stalingrad. The city had been contested for several months, with heavy losses, but the fighting came to an end on 2 February 1943. When the news became public, parts of the population saw the writing on the wall and understood that the war was no longer winnable. In response, the sixth White Rose pamphlet, written in early February, printed in 3,000 copies, and distributed until 18 February, began with the dramatic words: 'Our people look on deeply shaken at the defeat of our men at Stalingrad.' It unmistakably singled out Hitler as the main culprit for the 'death and ruin' of 330,000 German soldiers, adding that his 'day of reckoning' had come (p. 119).

The Nazi regime evidently felt compelled to quickly stage a spectacular show trial of the Scholl siblings and Christoph Probst in Munich in order to prevent resistance ideas from spreading further through the population. The four-day interval between arrest and trial was unusually short even by the standards of legal proceedings at the time. As a general rule, ninety-nine days should also have elapsed between sentencing and execution; however, in this case the death sentences were passed on 22 February and carried out on the same day. Documents reveal that politicians had informally agreed in advance that the death penalty should be applied. Newspapers published reports on the trial and executions the very next day.

Alexandra Lloyd skilfully embeds these events into the wider political context and connects them to the parlous state of the German war effort in February 1943. She describes the propaganda coup of

the Sportpalast speech on 18 February 1943, in which Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels eloquently declared a 'total war' before an audience of 14,000 selected party loyalists—a war that needed to be 'more total' than any that had been fought before in order to be brief and victorious (pp. 1–2). Goebbels's two-hour speech secured the loyalty of the Nazi fanatics assembled in the Sportpalast and was broadcast to millions over the radio. Excerpts were subsequently published in state-controlled newspapers.

A whole chapter is dedicated to the key figures in the White Rose: Sophie and Hans Scholl, Christoph Probst, Alexander Schmorell, Willi Graf, and Professor Kurt Huber. Lloyd provides biographical sketches of each of these figures and shows what brought them together in resistance. She also makes clear that this core group received plenty of help in distributing their pamphlets from their wider circle of friends, which meant that the leaflets made it to Ulm, Saarbrücken, Freiburg, Hamburg, Berlin, and Stuttgart. Interestingly, Lloyd introduces her readers to the little-known Hans K. Leipelt, who continued the group's resistance activities after February 1943. He worked together with his friend Marie-Luise Jahn to carry White Rose pamphlets to Hamburg, where they were copied out and distributed among other friends. The two were arrested in October 1943 and, at his third trial before the People's Court, Leipelt was sentenced to death on 12 October 1944. He was then executed on 29 January 1945. Marie-Luise Jahn was sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment and was freed by the Americans at the end of April 1945.

Lloyd also considers the difficult question of what motivated Kurt Huber and his young comrades to engage in their acts of resistance. Where did their courage come from? The students had grown up 'in a state which ruthlessly gags all freedom of expression', as they put it in their sixth pamphlet (p. 119). With the exception of Willi Graf, they had all been exposed to indoctrination in the Hitler Youth, but they still gradually came to adopt a critical attitude towards the National Socialist dictatorship and its criminal methods of waging war. Lloyd points to how the young members of the group had been shaped by their upbringing, emphasizing their love of reading from an early age and their intense discussions of literature. They got to know each other through their shared interests in literature, philosophy, music,

nature, and sport. Lloyd argues that they had a clear understanding of the crimes committed by the dictatorship and wanted to put an end to them, along with the hopeless war. Each of the 'White Rose pamphlets' (only the first four carry this name) shows that the group counted on the discernment and responsibility of every person in society and therefore appealed to them to act, calling for sabotage and non-cooperation.

Lloyd also mentions that Hans Scholl explained the choice of the name 'White Rose pamphlets' during his interrogation by the Gestapo. According to the records of his interview, on 20 February 1943 he said that 'for the pamphlets to be effective propaganda the name would need to sound good and suggest that there was something of a manifesto behind it' (p. 14)—a remark that reveals a certain instinct for politics. The name 'White Rose' was meant to indicate to the readers of the first four pamphlets that they had been written by a bigger group. In reality, however, they were written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell in the summer of 1942, before being copied 100 times each and posted to people who might help to disseminate them.

As combat medics in training, Scholl, Schmorell, and Willi Graf, who also joined the White Rose, were required to provide medical support during the university holidays. They were thus sent to the Soviet front, near Moscow, for three months on 23 July 1942, along with other friends from the Munich Medical Company. Scholl and Schmorell resumed their resistance activities on their return to Munich, this time with firm and active support from Sophie Scholl and Willi Graf. Professor Kurt Huber joined the group at the end of December 1942. The individual comrades now established links beyond Munich, for instance, with friends in Ulm, Saarbrücken, Freiburg, Stuttgart, and Chemnitz, in order to persuade them to join the resistance. Their next action was designed to make the oppressors believe that there was a large-scale resistance movement across Germany.

The fifth pamphlet, this time entitled 'An Appeal to all Germans!' (p. 115), was published in early January 1943. Thanks to the group's expanded circle and increased financial support, 10,000 copies were produced. A new duplicating machine allowed pamphlets to be copied in greater quantities, and all of the group members helped to buy

master sheets for the duplicator, paper, and stamps. In order to distribute the pamphlets, the group copied thousands of addresses from books in the library of the Deutsches Museum in Munich. In January 1943 Sophie Scholl, Willi Graf, and Alexander Schmorell undertook extremely perilous trips to cities such as Ulm, Saarbrücken, Stuttgart, and Vienna in order to give copies of the pamphlets to friends for onward distribution, or to post them themselves. The costs were shared, and Eugen Grimminger, a Stuttgart-based friend of Hans and Sophie's father Robert Scholl, also provided a substantial sum of money.

The fifth pamphlet is written more clearly than its predecessors and dispenses with the quotations from world literature used in previous pamphlets. The words 'Hitler cannot win the war; he can only prolong it!' (p. 115) are emphasized with letterspacing in the first paragraph. The pamphlet is an ardent appeal to end the dictatorship and war before it is too late. It also sketches out ideas for a political order after the collapse, asserting that the Germany of the future must be federalist and that the ground must be prepared for cooperation between the peoples of Europe. 'Every nation, every person has a right to the goods of the world!', the authors state, before demanding what are now well-established civil liberties, along with protection from the 'despotism of criminal and violent states'. These liberties are 'the foundations of the new Europe', they add (p. 117). Once again, the authors condemn the murder of the Jewish population, a subject that they had already forcefully addressed in the second pamphlet, which laments the murder of Polish Jews: 'Here, we see the most horrific crime against human dignity, a crime unparalleled in all of human history' (p. 98).

The sixth pamphlet is addressed to students in Munich and demands 'true scholarship and real freedom of the mind' on their behalf (p. 120), before calling to the youth of Germany to finally rise up, 'smite [their] tormentors, and found a new intellectual Europe' (p. 121). It refers to the fierce student protests against Gauleiter Paul Giesler on 13 January 1943 after he made lewd jibes about female students during a mass gathering and emphasized their domestic role. Professor Kurt Huber wrote the initial draft of this pamphlet, which had originally contained positive statements about the Wehrmacht.

These were removed by Scholl and Schmorell, as we learn from their interview records. The pamphlet was copied around 3,000 times and distributed (or in some cases physically strewn) throughout Munich from 9 February onwards. The Scholls were arrested while handing out copies in the city's Ludwig Maximilian University on 18 February 1943. The sixth pamphlet proved particularly effective thanks to its use by the British Royal Air Force, which added a preface and air-dropped millions of copies over northern Germany in the summer of 1943. It had reached the UK and the USA via Norway.

Lloyd provides the most important details about each pamphlet as well as Christoph Probst's draft of a seventh text, written in late January 1943, which condemns the murder of Jewish people and the military fiasco in Stalingrad. The draft was discovered during Hans Scholl's arrest and sealed Probst's fate, since it provided evidence that he was actively involved in the White Rose.

The politically sensitive nature of the pamphlets is made clear by the excellent English translations, which are published in full here. Pleasingly there are also facsimiles of the German originals, which make the historical context tangible. Typed out on a mechanical typewriter with used ribbons, resulting in uneven lettering, they are simple sheets of A4 paper that were sent by post, copied, and distributed under mortal peril. Their historical resonance remains significant even today. The pamphlets are appeals to personal responsibility and the courage to take action, even at great personal risk; they call for readers to speak out against a criminal dictatorship and a murderous war. This contrasts with the simplicity of the plea at the end of each pamphlet: 'Please duplicate and redistribute!' (p. 113). The pamphlets' basic demand for freedom seems more urgent to us today than at any time in the previous decades.

*Defying Hitler* thus offers many useful lessons to readers, as Alexandra Lloyd demonstrates with impressive clarity why the history of the White Rose is so moving and resonant for us today. She has deliberately chosen not to write a work of academic history, aiming instead to introduce a broad British audience to the German resistance and to persecution under National Socialism. With her 2019 publication *The White Rose: Reading, Writing, Resistance*, she has already contributed to the small body of English-language literature on the group.

## BOOK REVIEWS

For that reason, I very much hope that this book finds a wide readership—and so, in the spirit of the pamphlets themselves: Please read and recommend to others!

HILDEGARD KRONAWITTER has a degree in economics and a Ph.D. in economic and social history, and is the Chair of the White Rose Foundation. Based in Munich, the foundation manages the White Rose Museum in the main building of the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, organizes travelling exhibitions on the White Rose, and works with educational institutions on projects to raise historical awareness.