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GOETHE'S POLITICS AND POLITICAL USES: NAZI AND ANTI-NAZI READINGS OF *DES EPIMENIDES ERWACHEN*

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This article examines the first leaflet produced by the anti-Nazi White Rose group in 1942, focusing on its use of a quotation from Goethe's festival play Des Epimenides Erwachen. *I begin by exploring the appropriation of Goethe by the Nazi Regime, in particular the instrumentalisation of his works during wartime. In contrast, I then consider how the White Rose use their chosen Goethe passage to send an anti-war message and to incite passive resistance, reclaiming Goethe for an anti-Nazi agenda. Finally, I consider the passage's political significance in Goethe's own context ca. 1813, which was characteristically ambivalent, reflecting the lack of a singular political, nationalist narrative at the time of the Wars of Liberation.*

Keywords: Goethe, *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, *Epimenides Awakes*, White Rose, War, National Socialism, Resistance, Inner Emigration

Introduction: Goethe, his Politics, and German Cultural Narratives

While most readers of this journal are familiar with Goethe, I imagine that far fewer are familiar with his play, *Des Epimenides Erwachen* (*Epimenides Awakes*). This article aims to explore the White Rose's choice of Goethe, and this particular text, in more detail, by considering what both he and this text might have meant to the members of the White Rose group at the time of their protest activity. After showing how Nazi interpretations had used both Goethe and this text to celebrate ideas of German militarism, I show how the White Rose's use of this text clawed it (and Goethe) back for their own agenda of humanist pacifism. Finally, by considering *Des Epimenides Erwachen*'s place within Goethe's works, I argue that it appealed to the White Rose because of its unusually overt political engagement, which encouraged a message of participation rather than avoidance.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) was already seen during his lifetime as Germany's 'national' poet, with 'Germany' understood as a *Kulturnation* rather than a unified political entity. Goethe's legacy was first shaped in the 1800s, but his image was repeatedly remoulded to fit the needs of the twentieth century in line with shifting cultural narratives. While the Weimar Republic highlighted his reputation as a Liberal and cosmopolitan, the National Socialist regime stressed an opposite view. Since 1945, the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Berlin Republic have all prized different sides of Goethe's life and works in line with their own cultural and ideological narratives.[1] Always, though, there has been a tension at the heart of Goethe reception. This tension comes about when scholars try to reconcile Goethe's reputation as a primarily *literary* figure who transcended politics, with his role as a long-serving court official in the absolutist Duchy of Weimar. Regarding many of the controversial political issues of his day, such as the emerging concept of 'human rights,' the position of Jews in German society, and the fitting punishment for women who committed infanticide, his actions and writings (both private and public) were inconsistent.[2] However in German culture and *Germanistik* since 1945 and particularly ca. 1999, the prevailing image of Goethe and his times has been one of eighteenth-century Liberalism, tolerance and Enlightenment. This picture is highly selective, though, as multiple studies have shown.[3]

Goethe's ambivalence on many central political topics, combined with the sheer volume of his writings, make him ripe for appropriation by almost any political agenda. All it takes to get the Goethe you want is to quote selectively, stressing certain texts or facts from his life at the expense of others. This, of course, is poor scholarly practice, but it has immense cultural and political uses given Goethe's importance in German cultural history, and has led to the creation of different Goethes for different times.

Goethe under National Socialism

A recent study by W. Daniel Wilson into the appropriation of Goethe under National Socialism has focussed on the role of the Weimar-based Goethe-*Gesellschaft* (Goethe

[1] On Goethe's reception in Germany up to 1982, see Karl Robert Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland. Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers*, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 1980, 1989). For a focus on Goethe's reception in the GDR, see Anna Artwinska, *Poetry in the Service of Politics: The Case of Adam Mickiewicz in Communist Poland and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in East Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015). For reflections on Goethe's reception ca. 1999, on the 250th anniversary of his birth and ten years after Germany's reunification, see *Why Weimar? Questioning the Legacy of Weimar from Goethe to 1999*, ed. by Peter M. Daly, Hans Werner Frischkopf, Trudis E. Goldsmith-Reber and Horst Richter (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

[2] See W. Daniel Wilson, 'Goethe and the Political World', in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. by Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 207–18.

[3] See W. Daniel Wilson, 'Skeletons in Goethe's Closet', in *Unwrapping Goethe's Weimar: Essays in Cultural Studies and Local Knowledge*, ed. by Burkhard Henke, Susanne Kord and Simon Richter (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2000), pp. 295–309; and *Das Goethe-Tabu: Protest und Menschenrechte im klassichen Weimar* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999).

Society).[4] Wilson shows how Goethe was 'rehabilitated' into the service of National Socialism, after scholars under the Weimar Republic had stressed his Liberal, tolerant and humanist side. Founded in 1885, to survive the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* of the 1930s the Goethe-*Gesellschaft* had to shake off its reputation as a centre of 'Jewish' intellectualism. Goethe's reputation as a cosmopolitan (therefore, in the Nazi view, a betrayer of his nation), also had to be modified.

Wilson traces the changes instituted by the society throughout this period regarding the removal of its Jewish membership[5] and the image of Goethe that it presented. The annual *Jahrbuch* was changed in 1936 to a *Viermonatsschrift*, the more readily to adapt the discussion of Goethe to the nation's changing political circumstances. There was also a change in the journal's target audience, from the academic towards the more general reader.[6] These impulses in the Goethe-*Gesellschaft* affected the discussion and image of Goethe throughout German society in the Nazi period. Speaking of the years 1933–39, Wilson summarises: 'In Deutschland war Goethe als Vertreter des "besseren Deutschlands" spärlich vertreten. Es war vielmehr der nationalistische, antisemitische, kriegerische, kurz: der "Deutsche Goethe", der spätestens 1936–1937 von der Goethe-Gesellschaft in Weimar durchgesetzt und vom Regime nachdrücklich propagiert wurde.'[7]

What did this re-branding of Goethe look like in practice? In an article for the first issue of 1936 called 'Goethe und sein Volk', the *völkisch* writer Adolf Bartels tackled Goethe's reputation as someone with ambivalent or even negative feelings on the subject of German patriotism. He addresses several of Goethe's unpatriotic expressions, arguing that despite these comments (which 'bleib[en] trotzdem schmerzlich'),[8] Goethe was a nationalist thinker of whom the National Socialists could be proud. For example, his lack of support for parliamentarianism is positively singled out: 'wir Nationalsozialisten von heute geben ihm da voll recht'.[9] His reputation for cosmopolitanism is also dismissed as a rumour incited by Jews.[10] The article closes with a verse from the final chorus of *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, which Bartels describes as 'so etwas wie die wahrliche deutsche

[4] W. Daniel Wilson, *Der Faustische Pakt: Goethe und die Goethe-Gesellschaft im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2018).

[5] Probably for financial reasons, the society was relatively late to officially bar all its existing Jewish members, doing so only after the November pogroms of 1938 (Wilson, *Faustische*, p. 187). However, it had accepted no new Jewish members since 1933, when the Berlin local group also removed its Jews from their committee posts (Wilson, *Faustische*, pp. 50–54).

[6] At different points during the Nazi years, the Goethe-*Gesellschaft* stressed their organisation's identity as either academic or popular, in order to circumvent regulations from the Nazi cultural offices.

[7] 'The image of Goethe as representative of 'the better Germany' was a rare sight during this time. Rather, by 1936/37 at the latest, it was the image of the nationalist, anti-Semitic, war-loving Goethe—in short, the 'German Goethe'—which came to dominate, and was propagated by the regime.' (My translation). Wilson, *Faustische*, p. 221.

[8] 'Still remain painful' (my translation). Adolf Bartels, 'Goethe und sein Volk', *Goethe: Viermonatsschrift der Goethe-Gesellschaft,* 1 (1936), 229–34 (p. 231); cf. discussion by Wilson, *Faustische*, pp. 131–33. All pre-1971 editions of *Goethe: Viermonatsschrift der Goethe-Gesellschaft* (henceforward *Goethe*) have been digitized and are available through the online repository *DigiZeitschriften* http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/toc/?PID=PPN503543292 [accessed 7 April 2021].

[9] 'We National Socialists of today fully agree with him on this point.' Bartels, p. 232.

[10] Bartels, 'Goethe und sein Volk', p. 231.

Nationalhymne.'[11] A similar 1939 article by historian Heinrich Ritter von Srbik on 'Goethe und das Reich' (Goethe and the Reich) recasts Goethe's ambivalence regarding the project of German nationalism as a life-long 'Sehnsucht nach dem einigenden, des Rechts waltenden starken Herrscher […], der das Reich erneuern soll.'[12] In these examples, then, Goethe is made to appear as a Hitler fan before Hitler existed.

After the outbreak of war in September 1939, Goethe and his works were mobilised like never before. Due to paper shortages, from 1941 only essential publishing and those periodicals which were considered to be of influence in the 'national struggle for survival' were allowed to continue.[13] The Goethe-*Gesellschaft* and its journal, then edited by its vice-president Professor Hans Wahl, seem to have largely accepted their wartime mission. Their discussions of works by Goethe and his contemporaries were intended to boost morale, stressing Germany's destiny as a great nation and drawing continuities between its past and the Nazi present.

Given that war had been one of the only contemporary issues that Goethe had consistently opposed, however, enlisting his works in support of the war required some very selective quotation. Wahl set a group of students in Jena to work, scouring Goethe's writings for passages that could be used for propaganda purposes.[14] In 1941, Professor Erich Weniger gave a talk called 'Goethe und die Generale' (Goethe and the Generals) which explored Goethe's relationship to the Prussian generals in the 1813 Wars of Liberation. He gave this talk for the society's local group meetings in Berlin, Weimar, and Potsdam, and in his role as *Nationalsozialistischer Führungsoffizier*, he even presented it to the *Oberkommando* of the *Wehrmacht*.[15] The journal's 1941 annual report recalls that Weniger's talk was received in Weimar 'unter starkem Beifall', and summarises his findings as follows:

> Die Ergebnisse seiner Untersuchungen zeigen nicht nur einen neuen Goethe, sondern auch die preußischen Generale seiner Zeit in neuem Lichte und beseitigen den Trennungstrich, den das oft leichtfertig angewandte Wort von Gegensatz zwischen Weimar und Potsdam so unselig in unsere Geschichte und in das gesamte deutsche Volk getragen hat.[16]

The talk's achievement seems to have been its removal of the dividing line between eighteenth century militarism (Potsdam) and its literary culture (Weimar), revealing Goethe as an icon of both.

As German morale declined after the rise in Allied bombing raids in 1942, and victory seemed increasingly unlikely, the journal's articles began to tone down

[11] 'Something like the true German National hymn.' (My translation). Bartels, 'Goethe und sein Volk', p. 234.

[12] 'A longing for the strong, unifying, law-giving ruler, who will renew the Reich' (my translation). Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, 'Goethe und sein Reich', *Goethe*, 4 (1939), 211–32 (p. 214).

[13] See Wilson, *Faustische*, p. 203.

[14] See Wilson, *Faustische*, pp. 231–32.

[15] Wilson, *Faustische*, p. 220.

[16] 'The results of his study show not only a new Goethe, but also reveal the Prussian generals of his time in a new light. His study rejects the division which has so deplorably crept into our history and into the whole German nation through the careless opposition of Weimar and Potsdam' (my translation). 'Mittelungen', *Goethe*, 5 (1940): 218–21, (p. 218).

their militarism somewhat.[17] But in a local Thuringen newspaper, Wahl still stressed 'die gewaltige geistige Gestalt des deutschen Goethe, der die ganze Welt zur Ehrfurcht vor deutschem Wesen zwingt und auch heute mitten im Kriege die Deutschzugewandten der Erde im Glauben an Deutschland festhält.'[18] Though still nationalist in its tone, Wahl's consideration of the global view of Goethe here also seems to anticipate the possibility of the Nazis' defeat, suggesting the idea of Goethe's works as a contrast to, or compensation for, the horrors that the Nazis had unleashed on the world.

The First White Rose Flyer: Pitting Goethe against National Socialism

It is not certain who put together the first pamphlet authored by the anti-Nazi group *Die Weiße Rose*, but Hinrich Siefken suggests it was Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell.[19] Siefken dates the first pamphlet to June/July 1942, as it refers to the English bombing of Cologne which took place at the end of May. It was the first of four flyers produced before Scholl and Schmorell left for the Eastern Front on 23 July, where they were stationed near Gschatsk. Since both were medical students, they were put to work in a field hospital there as part of their compulsory medical training. Schmorell was a Russian native speaker, and during this time he learned of the horrific treatment the Russians had suffered under the Nazi invasion by speaking to local people.[20]

This was neither Scholl's nor Schmorell's first experience of military life, however. Schmorell had been present at the invasion of Austria, serving as part of a cavalry brigade in 1938. Scholl had spent two months with a student company in France in early 1940. Both young men's lives had been dominated by compulsory military service, and both had despised the regime for years, despite some short-lived childhood enthusiasm. When not serving or studying medicine, they attended philosophy lectures, read extensively, and were both highly creative people. Schmorell made sculptures, while Scholl wrote articles for an illegal magazine that he produced with his friends.[21] Both came from middle-class, educated backgrounds, and Scholl attended literary evenings hosted by the Schmorells and others.

The White Rose leaflets took shape within this bourgeois, educated context, and they were 'expected to be read not so much by the man in the street as by selected individuals who were likely to be sympathetic.'[22] The first pamphlet has a particularly complicated style, with long sentences and complicated syntax. In contrast to propagandistic writing, these pamphlets were not meant to be an easy read. Rather, they 'needed decoding.'[23] By requiring a higher level of interpretation, these flyers

[17] See Wilson, *Faustische*, p. 225.

[18] 'The mighty intellectual form of the German Goethe, who inspires awe for the German character across the whole world, and even today, in the midst of war, is an anchor of faith in Germany for all those on Earth who look to the Germans' (my translation). Hans Wahl, *Allgemeine Thüringsche Landeszeitung* "*Deutschland*", 17 June 1942; cited by Wilson, *Faustische*, p. 227.

[19] Hinrich Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 20.

[20] Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, pp. 143–44.

[21] See Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, p. 134 and p. 143.

[22] Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, p. 6.

demanded the reader's participation in the kind of philosophical and intellectual enquiry that the Nazi regime had worked hard to suppress. Furthermore, by targeting educated, academic circles, they hoped to win over a section of the population that had so far been largely compliant with the Nazi regime.[24]

The first flyer's opening line reminds the German reader that they belong to a *Kulturvolk*, but have allowed themselves to be led by 'einer verantwortungslosen und dunklen Trieben ergebenen Herrscherclique'.[25] How has this been possible? The fact that the Germans as a whole have accepted their rule without offering resistance is presented as a betrayal of their own humanity and innermost being. The pamphlet attempts to awaken its reader's consciousness of how, 'in seinem tiefsten Wesen', every German under Nazism is 'korrumpiert und zerfallen'.[26] For, the pamphlet asks, 'ist es nicht so, dass sich jeder ehrliche Deutsche heute seiner Regierung schämt?'.[27] The text presents at best, inner emigration, or at worst, spiritual deadness, as the common lot of the educated German population under Hitler, and by awakening the reader's conscience, it hopes to stir him or her into a position of passive resistance.[28]

The text draws on Goethe and Schiller as representatives of an original, 'true' German *Kulturnation* that has been temporarily led astray by the Nazi regime. They were not the first to use Goethe and Schiller for this purpose, of course. Hans Carossa's speech at the Goethe-*Gesellschaft*'s annual conference in 1938, entitled 'Wirkungen Goethes auf die Gegenwart' had already made a powerful case for Goethe's works as sources of spiritual solace and comfort to the oppressed individual under Nazism.[29] But the White Rose flyer does more than look to Goethe for comfort or nostalgia, or as a haven for inner emigration.[30] It uses Goethe to incite resistance by citing quotations that conflicted with the dominant Nazi interpretations of Goethe's works.

[23] Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, p. 7.

[24] See Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[25] 'Flugblätter der Weißen Rose I', https://www.weisse-rose-stiftung.de/widerstandsgruppe-weisse-rose/flugblaetter/i-flugblatt-der-weissen-rose/ [accessed 1 November 2022]. '[A]n irresponsible clique of rulers driven by their darkest urges' (cited in Alexandra Lloyd, *Defying Hitler: The White Rose Pamphlets* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022), p. 91); henceforth cited with the page number.

[26] '[I]n their innermost being' … 'corrupted and degraded' (p. 91).

[27] 'Is it not so that in the present day every honourable German is ashamed of their government?' (p. 91).

[28] The third flyer gives more details as to the intended forms of passive resistance.

[29] 'Gibt es Genien, die uns vor inneren Zerstörungen schützen und unser Bewusstsein vor dem Zerflattern bewahren, so gehören Goethe und der mit ihm verbundene Schiller zu den stärksten von ihnen.' ('If there are any spirits who protect us from inner destruction, and prevent the disintegration of our conscience, then Goethe and his associate Schiller are surely the strongest among them', my translation). Hans Carossa,'Wirkungen Goethes in der Gegenwart', *Goethe*, 3 (1938): 115–28 (p. 121).

[30] For a discussion of Carossa's speech at the meeting of the Goethe-*Gesellschaft* as an example of inner emigration, see Uwe-K Ketelsen, 'Hans Carossa, die 30er Jahre und Goethe', in *Goethe im Exil: Deutsch-Amerikansiche Perspektiven*, ed. by Gert Sauermeister (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002), pp. 245–65; and Holger Dainat, '"Ruhe, nichts als Ruhe, Präsident bleiben wie bisher." Julius Petersen, Anton Kippenberg und die Goethe-Gesellschaft', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 84:3 (2015), 223–38 (pp. 234–36).

First, the pamphlet tells the reader that Goethe once compared the Germans with another 'tragic people', the Jews: 'Goethe spricht von den Deutschen als einem tragischen Volke, gleich dem der Juden und Griechen […]'.[31] Though Siefken explains this with reference to a conversation between Goethe and Friedrich von Müller in 1808, that conversation makes no reference to Greeks, and it is likely that the White Rose's attribution to Goethe here is mistaken.[32] Whether or not it is an accurate Goethe quotation, what matters is that it presents Goethe as sympathetic to Jews. In truth, Goethe was at best ambivalent regarding the status of Jews in German society, and he expressed anti-Semitic views at various times.[33] This quotation has been chosen selectively, then, in order to undermine the anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime. The text goes on to appeal to the German reader 'als Mitglied der christlichen und abendländischen Kultur',[34] again stressing the Enlightenment, humanist values of tolerance that Goethe had been associated with under the Weimar Republic (in contradiction with his anti-Semitic impulses, it must be acknowledged).[35] The reader is urged not to wait for someone else to take action, but to take matters into her own hands with the warning, 'ein jedes Volk diejenige Regiereung verdient, die es erträgt!'.[36] After this comes a quotation by Schiller,[37] followed by a passage from Goethe's play, *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, the same play that was cited by the *völkisch* writer Bartels in his essay, 'Goethe und sein Volk', mentioned above.

The Excerpt from *Des Epimenides Erwachen* in White Rose Flyer I

Des Epimenides Erwachen was frequently drawn upon in Nazi readings of Goethe because of the context in which it originated. Goethe wrote it to celebrate the victory of the Sixth Coalition over Napoleon in 1813, which heralded an end to the French occupation of the German-speaking lands. Although this was an international coalition, led by Prussian, Austrian, Russian and Swedish forces, a Prussian-led initiative described the 1813–15 conflicts with Napoleon as Germany's 'Wars of Liberation' (*Befreiungskriege*): a name that eventually stuck.[38] This period entered cultural memory as a milestone in the history of German nationalism, associated with strong anti-French sentiment, even though it was perceived at the time in more local, regional, or international terms, rather

[31] 'Goethe speaks of the Germans as a tragic people, much like the Jews or the Greeks' (p. 92).

[32] Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, p. 34; c.f. Karin Schutjer, *Goethe and Judaism: The Troubled Inheritance of Modern Literature* (Evanston, I.L.: Northwestern University Press, 2015), p. 98. Many thanks to W. Daniel Wilson for his advice and inquiries regarding this quotation.

[33] For a more thorough exploration of Goethe's responses to Jews and Judaism, see Schutjer, *Goethe and Judaism*.

[34] '[A]s a member of Christian and Western culture' (p. 92).

[35] See Wilson, 'Goethe and the Political World', p. 215.

[36] '[E]very people deserves the government it is prepared to tolerate' (p. 92).

[37] See Kevin Hilliard's contribution to this special issue.

[38] See Jürgen Wilke, 'Der nationale Aufbruch der Befreiungskriege als Kommunikationsereignis', in *Volk — Nation — Vaterland*, ed. by Ulrich Herrmann (Hamburg: Meiner 1996), pp. 353–68.

than as a uniquely 'German' victory.[39] Goethe's play was commissioned in May 1813 as a *Festspiel*, or festival drama, to be performed on the occasion of King Frederick William II of Prussia's expected return to Berlin from the wars in July.[40]

In his play, Goethe transformed the little-known Greek legend of Epimenides, a seer on the island of Crete, into an allegory about the destruction of war and the restoration of peace, mapping it loosely onto the events of the Wars of Liberation. While Epimenides sleeps, a dangerous army in Roman dress sets out on a campaign, and the Demons of War, Deceit and Oppression ('Unterdrückung') bring destruction to civilisation, symbolised on stage by a temple. The Demon of Oppression even manages to capture the female allegorical figures of Love and Faith, and bind them in heavy chains.

At the play's midpoint, which is the passage quoted by the White Rose Flyer, a third female figure appears. Representing Hope, she is dressed for war and armed with a spear. She defeats the Demon of Oppression, and frees Love and Faith from their chains. She then promises to restore freedom, a word which she calls out three times to form the emotional climax of the play. Epimenides wakes up, and the army that had set out before now returns in contemporary military dress, representing the nations who took part in the recent campaign against Napoleon. This victorious army of liberators is greeted by the women they left behind, and Epimenides is re-united with his own wife and children. Order is thus restored to the patriarchal family (a symbol of the nation as a whole),[41] and peace and stability are returned to civilisation.

The White Rose's chosen passage from Act II scene 4 of *Des Epimenides Erwachen* is, therefore, a climactic moment in the play which forms the midpoint in the plot arc: destruction has come before, and restoration comes afterwards. The figure of Hope, assisted by spirits, has just freed Love and Faith from their chains. Good spirits (*Genien*) now hand crowns to Faith, Love and Hope, encouraging them to bring back peace and order to civilisation in the following lines:

> Genien:
> Doch was dem Abgrund kühn entstiegen,
> Kann durch ein ehernes Geschick
> Den halben Weltkreis übersiegen,

[39] See Ute Planert, *Der Mythos vom Befreiungskrieg: Frankreichs Krieg und der deutsche Süden: Alltag, Wahrnehmung, Deutung, 1792–1841* (Paderborn: Schönighausen, 2007); and Katherine Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Culture, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era* (Boston, M.A.: Brill, 2005).

[40] The production was delayed by a couple of years, but was finally performed for the first time in Berlin on 30 and 31 March 1815, to mark the anniversary of the battle of Paris.

[41] See Karen Hagemann, 'A Valorous *Volk* Family: The Nation, the Military, and the Gender Order in Prussia in the Time of the Anti-Napoleonic Wars, 1806–15', trans. by Pamela Selwyn, in *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and the Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall, (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp. 179–205. For a reading of gender tropes in *Des Epimenides Erwachen*, see Patricia Anne Simpson, 'Visions of the Nation: Goethe, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, and Ernst Moritz Arndt', in *The Enlightened Eye: Goethe and Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 127–62.

Zum Abgrund muß es doch zurück.
Schon droht ein ungeheures Bangen,
Vergebens wird er wiederstehn!
Und alle, die noch an ihm hangen,
Sie müssen mit zugrunde gehen.[42]

The parallels with Germany's situation in 1942 must have been obvious to Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell. The citation's context within the pamphlet suggests a comparison between Hitler and Napoleon, who also lost his hold on the German lands when he invaded Russia. The implication is that Hitler's regime will soon take the same course, and that though they had conquered half the world, the Nazi conquerors must soon return 'to the abyss'. Hans Scholl had already cited this stanza in a letter to his parents in January 1941, remarking that the English would do well to note this quotation as a morale booster in their struggle against Nazi Germany.[43]

Hope then speaks the following stanza, and soon after these words, Epimenides awakes, triggering the final actions of the play and the restoration of peace:

Hoffnung:
Nun begegne ich meinen Braven,
Die sich in der Nacht versammelt,
Um zu schweigen, nicht zu schlafen,
Und das schöne Wort der Freiheit
Wird gelispelt und gestammelt,
Bis in ungewohnter Neuheit
Wir an unsrer Tempel Stufen
Wieder neu entzückt es rufen:
(Mit Überzeugung, laut.)
Freiheit!
(Gemäßigter.)
Freiheit!
(Von allen Enden Echo.)
Freiheit![44]

[42] 'Spirits / What burst forth bold from the abyss / Could with a brazen mastery / Claim victory of half the globe — / Yet now back to the void it must. / A monstrous fear already looms, And all resistance will be vain! / The ones who still cling on to it / Will perish with its name' (p. 94).

[43] Hans Scholl, 'Ein Gedicht von Goethe aus dem Parmenides[!], das sich die Engländer hinter die Ohren schreiben können', Hans Scholl, Letter to his parents, 17 January 1942, cited by Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, p. 144. 'A poem by Goethe from Parmenides which the English can write behind their ears' (my translation).

[44] 'Hope / And now I'll meet my brave of heart, / Who gather in the midst of night, / To share a silence, keep awake. / They stutter, stammer, on and on / That fair enchanting word: Freedom, / Till on our temple's steps anew / So youthful and so unfamiliar / We call its name, a joyful clamour: / (*With conviction, loud:*) Freedom! / (*More moderately:*) / Freedom! / (*Echoing from all sides:*) Freedom!' (pp. 94–95).

In the context of the White Rose pamphlet, then, this citation instils hope in the reader that the Nazi tyranny will — *must* — soon come to an end.[45] Now, it suggests, is the time for action in the form of passive resistance, as those who support the regime will soon perish with them.

The concept of freedom was vital to the White Rose as a group. It was the last word written by Sophie Scholl (on the back of her letter of indictment), and spoken by Hans Scholl, immediately before his execution. It was also among the slogans painted by Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and Willi Graf on walls in the centre of Munich during February 1943.[46] We can understand the leaflet's celebration of freedom in two senses, both internal and external. It is the German's 'innermost being' that has been most successfully captured by the Nazis, who have locked 'jeden einzelnen in ein geistiges Gefängnis',[47] just as Love and Faith were enslaved by the Demon of Oppression in Goethe's play until Hope set them free. But although individual hope and faith was fundamental to the White Rose activists, as their fearlessness in the face of death makes clear, it was not only an inner freedom that they fought for, in the sense of 'inner emigration' suggested by Carossa's 'Wirkungen Goethes in der Gegenwart'. Their project militated, albeit passively and intellectually, for freedom in the external, political sense: for democracy.

Though the contemporary report written for the Gestapo by Munich professor Richard Harder dismissed their flyers as mere 'Schreibtischprodukte',[48] Scholl and Schmorell were far from solely concerned with philosophical and literary matters. They were practical men with a wealth of experience behind them, despite their youth. Scholl had already been arrested by the Gestapo in 1937, at the age of nineteen, for organising activities for a non-Nazi youth group. In a letter from 1942, he referred to himself as a socialist, but was too young to have participated actively in any political alternative to Nazism.[49] Despite the sophisticated level of literary and philosophical understanding needed to 'decode' them, and the bourgeois milieu in which they were circulated, these were still political propaganda texts intended to effectively mobilise the reader. In this first pamphlet, Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell struck at the heart of middle-class, educated culture by reclaiming its greatest representatives, Schiller and Goethe, for an anti-Nazi agenda.

Conclusion: Why *Des Epimenides Erwachen*?

It is striking that Scholl and Schmorell should have chosen to use this Goethe text over any other. Though it had been singled out by Nazi, nationalist readers of

[45] In the context of the pamphlet, this point would also have resonated with the Schiller quotation discussing the Spartan state, which lasted for a thousand years. See Kevin Hilliard's discussion of this issue in the present volume.

[46] See the website of the Weiße Rose Stiftung e.V. [White Rose Foundation] https://www.weisse-rose-stiftung.de/widerstandsgruppe-weisse-rose/wandanschriften-der-weissen-rose/ [accessed 10 May 2021].

[47] '[E]very single one of us into a mental cage' (p. 92).

[48] Harder's assessment of the flyers, written 17 February 1943, is included in 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), pp. 47–53 (p. 53).

[49] See Siefken, *Die Weiße Rose und ihre Flugblätter*, p. 141.

Goethe (see example of Adolf Bartels' reading above), it was still an obscure text. It appealed to Nazi readers because of its association with Germany's *Befreiungskriege*, and its closing patriotic verses, which refer to the German people chauvinistically as 'das edelste Geschlecht'.[50] Nazi readers could interpret 'Geschlecht' in racial terms here, implying the 'Aryan' race, although this concept would not have featured in Goethe's own understanding of the term. But the play's overall message is fundamentally *against* war and violence, and the allegorical figures of War and Oppression appear as *demons* in the play. I suggest that it was this anti-war message, completely overlooked by the frequent Nazi interpretations of the play, that appealed to Alexander Schmorell and Hans Scholl. Because the play was less well known than Goethe's other works, readers of the White Rose pamphlet might have been curious to read it, and would therefore have seen for themselves that the play as a whole is *against* war. By reclaiming *Des Epimenides Erwachen* for their anti-war agenda, and presenting Goethe as sympathetic to Jews in this pamphlet, they sought to claw him back from the hands of the Nazis, and to restore him as a representative of the 'true', German *Kulturnation*.[51]

Having considered first the Nazis' and then the White Rose's use of Goethe for their contrasting political aims, I would like to briefly consider what this passage from the play meant in Goethe's own time, with a view to further understanding why Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell chose this text above any other from Goethe's vast body of works.

How would Goethe's contemporary audiences have interpreted *Des Epimenides Erwachen* politically? Marinus Pütz has read the seduction of Love and Faith by the Demon of Oppression (Act I, Scene XIV) as an attack on all those who had too readily embraced Napoleon's rule, perhaps including Goethe himself.[52] Might this allusion also have appealed to Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, considering the parallels they suggested between Hitler and Napoleon? On the other hand, Pütz also queries the meaning of 'Freedom' in Goethe's text, suggesting that it would not be accurate to interpret it in a political, democratic sense in Goethe's context, as the White Rose may have intended it in their pamphlet. He explains: 'Nicht der politische Freiheitsbegriff der Nationalbewegung kommt hier zum Ausdruck, sondern ein apolitischer, individueller Freiheitsbegriff. Die erreichte Freiheit ist als wiedergewonnener Status quo […] zu begreifen.'[53] Here, Pütz stresses

[50] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, 14 vols, V, *Dramatische Dichtungen III*, ed. by Liselotte Blumenthal and Eberhard Haufe (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), p. 398.

[51] The Scholl family motto serves as another case in point here. Taken from Goethe's 1777 Singspiel *Lila*, the line 'Allen Gewalten zum Trutz [or: Trotz] sich erhalten' was also frequently cited in Nazi contexts to encourage Germany's defiance of the foreign or (supposedly) Jewish powers set against them. That the Scholls maintained this as their family motto, despite its use by Nazis, further suggests their determination to preserve Goethe as their own. Thanks again to W. Dan Wilson for bringing this to my attention.

[52] Marinus Pütz, 'Goethes "Des Epimenides Erwachen" — politisch betrachtet'. *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 113 (1996): 287–90 (p. 288).

[53] 'The term "freedom" here is not the political concept of the national movement, but rather an apolitical, individual freedom. Once attained, "freedom" here is understood as a return to the status quo' (my translation). Pütz, 'Goethes "Des Epimenides Erwachen"', p. 289.

Goethe's loyalty to monarchism and his opposition to the republican, nationalist movement. 'Freedom' was the slogan of those who hoped to form a united, democratic German republic in the wake of Napoleon, but it was also a rallying cry for those who had opposed the revolution and who hoped for a return of the ruler's 'Freiheiten' under the older, absolutist forms of government.[54] The passage's vague language would have appealed to members in the audience of both political persuasions, then — no doubt why this moment in contemporary performances was received with rapturous applause.[55] Rather than trying to determine Goethe's own views from this passage, then, perhaps we could read the play's ambivalence towards the idea of a German nationalist movement in 1813 as reflective of wider public discourse at the time, which was certainly not as unanimous on the subject of political nationalism as the 'Mythos der Befreiungskriege' would have us believe.[56] Even if Pütz is correct, though, and the play's celebration of 'Freiheit!' was intended by Goethe in an anti-democratic sense, the passage would still have resonated with the White Rose's concept of the inner freedoms, such as faith and conscience.

Finally, perhaps Scholl and Schmorell chose to cite *Des Epimenides Erwachen* because it was a rare moment in Goethe's oeuvre when the two sides of Goethe — Goethe the writer and Goethe the statesman — came together to participate in a historic moment of national significance. Despite the play's classical story and allegorical framing, and despite its ambivalent response to the issue of political (state) nationalism, it is a clear celebration of a moment in time and a mood of (cultural) national awakening. Scholl and Schmorell did not choose this Goethe quotation to hark back to an Enlightened, peaceful, humanist, German utopia, free from the concerns of politics. Rather, choosing this passage might have reminded readers that Germany had witnessed stark political divisions before, and that when it came down to it, even Goethe had participated in his own political moment. In other words, a sympathy with Goethe as a representative of a lost, 'true' German culture is no excuse to bury your head in the sand. In contrast to the example of Hans Carossa who turned to Goethe as an escape from political reality, and as a locus for inner emigration, the first White Rose leaflet implies that if even Goethe can get his hands dirty, so can you.

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[54] See Christof Dipper, 'Der Freiheitsbegriff im 19. Jahrhundert', *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhardt Koselleck, 8 vols, II, 3rd ed., (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), pp. 488–538, especially pp. 503–8.

[55] Goethe, *Werke*, p. 720, note 38; and pp. 724–28, note 42.

[56] See Planert, *Der Mythos vom Befreiungskrieg*; and Leighton S. James, *Witnessing the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in German Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

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