



Imagining Friends and Foes: The (Re)education of Jojo Rabbit

William Skiles, Regent University, wskiles@regent.edu

Volume 12.1 (2024) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2024.601 | <http://cinej.pitt.edu>

Abstract

The film *Jojo Rabbit* is a coming-of-age story that explores the power of the imagination in constructing and deconstructing Nazi ideals. Ten-year-old Johannes (Jojo) Betzler was educated by Nazi society to imagine Hitler, the Nazis, and the “Aryans” as his friends and the Jews as his diabolical foes. Only when he meets and befriends Else, a Jewish girl hidden in his attic, is he able to break free and begin to recognize and deconstruct these imagined friends and foes. Moreover, *Jojo Rabbit* demonstrates how friendship is a context in which vice or virtue can develop (depending on the friend) by enabling transformation, training the emotions, and enslaving or setting free. The filmmakers turn the Nazi imagination upon its head: they dismantle the Nazi view of jungle animals fighting each other for survival to show that it is only by laying down hatred and animosity that we can rely on each other and survive together amid the chaos.

Keywords: *Jojo Rabbit*; Nazi Germany films; World War II films; Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*; Taika Waititi



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#) and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).



Imagining Friends and Foes: The (Re)education of Jojo Rabbit¹

William Skiles

Introduction

Jojo Rabbit is a comedy-drama set in Nazi Germany that insightfully treats historical themes, such as resistance, the ideological indoctrination of youth, and the collapse of a totalitarian state.² Yet it also explores the meaning and profound impact of friendships. It is the story of ten-year-old Johannes (Jojo) Betzler (Roman Griffin Davis), a boy who idolizes Hitler and desires to be a strong and fervent National Socialist and a productive member of the “Aryan” *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community). He lives alone with his mother Rosie after his father is off fighting the war in Italy, or so he believes. His older sister Inga had recently died of illness. In his loneliness, he talks with his imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler. The story begins in 1944, and the war is raging. It is the first day of Jojo’s participation in the *Deutsches Jungvolk in der Hitlerjugend* (German Boys of the Hitler Youth). His training and indoctrination as a young follower of Adolf Hitler is beginning in earnest, and he takes to it with enthusiasm. Jojo is a boy pressured to conform into a “good” Nazi by the expectations of society, the threats of the Gestapo, the behavior of his peers, and intruding visions of Hitler as *Führer* and friend. He thus imagines himself as an “Aryan” warrior in service of the Third Reich. The conflict in the film begins when Jojo discovers a Jewish girl named Else (Thomasin McKenzie) in his attic. His

mother Rosie (Scarlett Johansson) has been hiding her from the Nazi authorities. Rosie is not who she appears to be. Jojo and Else agree that it would be best for all concerned not to tell anyone that they have met, especially Rosie. It is the start of a relationship that will flourish into a true friendship, transforming him along the way from an aggressive and fervent Nazi to a boy able to love his Jewish neighbor.

While the film takes the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust seriously, it does not pretend to present a historically accurate portrait of Hitler or the Third Reich. The film does not mean to present the Third Reich as it was, but as it was perceived by a ten-year-old. The Nazis in the film are essentially caricatures, over-the-top figures such as Captain Klenzendorf, Fraulein Rahm, and Gestapo agent Geertz (played by Sam Rockwell, Rebel Wilson, and Stephen Merchant, respectively). Each of them behaves in ways that would not have been tolerated in Nazi society, such as their careless handling of firearms and their stream of consciousness manner of speaking. Jojo's mother Rosie is in the resistance, and yet she inexplicably dresses to impress in the latest fashion. But again, the film portrays the history of Nazi Germany as seen through the eyes of an imaginative boy. The historian James Holland is correct in arguing that the film is "not realistic, but in terms of spirit, it's absolutely on message."³

One might go so far as to say that this film works better as a fantasy of recollection about how he met an extraordinary friend, as a story told by a much older JoJo about how he met Elsa. The silliness and the ridiculous behavior and dialogue suggest that the characters are representations of JoJo's ten-year-old imagination—as if this is how he remembers them, not as they in fact were. The film bookends the story with a Beatles song, “Komm gib mir deine Hand,” (1964), to open and a David Bowie song, “Heroes,” (1977) to end, indicating that what we're seeing is not a true-to-life retelling of what happened to Jojo, but an imaginative recollection from many years later, accentuated by pop songs decades after Hitler's demise. All this suggests his relationship with Else profoundly impacted him and lasted well beyond the rolling credits. They were, after all, the only family either had left.

Central to the film is the critical engagement with the Nazi conception of friends and foes. The film presents two images the Nazis cultivated through endless propaganda: the pure and noble “Aryan” race and that of the enemy Jewish race. The writer and director Taika Waititi presented these images to the audience from the perspective of the adolescent Jojo. Hitler and the “Aryans” are Jojo's imagined friends. They are the strong, iron-willed, and capable race. The “Jews” are his imagined enemies. They are the weak, corrupt, and money-grubbing race, and they are the source of all Germany's ills. The film is essentially an exploration of Jojo's education about the realities behind the images of both these groups. Neither image is true, and

the film walks the audience through the steps along the way of Jojo's reeducation through the developments of friendships with Hitler and Else.

Waititi holds up the Nazi image of the "Jew" as the enemy for scrutiny. He reveals Europeans' common beliefs of Jews at the time and wraps the image in a comedic guise, though the audience is presumably fully aware of the horrific history the Nazi image inspired. A clear example of this dark comedic tone is when the Gestapo agent Herman Geertz questions Else (who is pretending to be Jojo's sister Inga) about Jojo's exposé on the Jews, entitled *Yoohoo Jews*. After gleefully flipping through the pages filled with Jojo's drawings of Jews presented as evil and grotesque creatures, Geertz quips, "It's funny because it's true!" The audience is left pondering the terrible consequences of the Nazi image of Jews when enough people believe it. Reflecting on the film, Waititi said, "It's poking fun at these people [the Nazis] but also trying to explain how serious this stuff is." His approach is to present a "dance between this dramatic and comedic tone," to lead the audience along a fun and comedic path only to confront them with profound truths about what hate and fear can do to us as humans living together in a pluralistic society. The point of the film is simple enough, as he said, "We need to be more tolerant and spread more love and less hate."⁴ Waititi added, "The biggest thing for [Jojo] was just to learn

that there's no real difference between people. We're all just trying to survive, and that [Else] is a good person and that he can be a good person.”⁵

The film presents Jojo as a young boy trying to figure out who he is, and he learns who he is (and who he is not) through his friendships with Hitler and Else. Jojo is a boy caught up in the Nazi struggle for survival, captured throughout the film in the imagery of animals. Will he be the hunting blonde beast or the prey on the savannah? Waititi uses friendship to reveal this jungle metaphor as nonsense. He structures the plot so that Jojo's realizations about both “Aryans” and “Jews” have an inverted relationship throughout the film, so that as he learns more about the truth of the Jews as an imagined enemy, doubts emerge about the Nazi-inspired image of the “Aryan” “master race.” The film presents a dynamic in which Jojo's trust in Hitler as an imaginary friend steadily declines throughout the film as he slowly builds a genuine friendship with Elsa. *Jojo Rabbit* explores the journey of one boy becoming an empathetic and tolerant person. Indeed, the film demonstrates how friendship is a context in which virtue or vice can develop (depending on the friend) by enabling transformation, training the emotions, and setting free or enslaving.

Friendship, then, is a kind of “school” of virtue, an idea that goes back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, in which one does not use another friend as a means to an end, or merely to enjoy the pleasures of the friendship, but one learns to actively seek the good of the friend and

treat them as an end in themselves (Aristotle 2009, pp.144-146).⁶ One becomes a better person in seeking the good of one's friend. As we turn to *Jojo Rabbit*, I will argue that Jojo's friendship with Hitler is one based on utility—that is, on Hitler's need for Jojo as an “Aryan” soldier for the Third Reich and Jojo's need for Hitler as an authority figure, model, and companion. Yet Jojo's budding friendship with Else transitions from one based on utility (Jojo's need to feel superior as an “Aryan” in relation to a Jewish girl in dire need of help) and pleasure (their growing fondness for spending time with one another) to one based on goodness in the concluding moments of the film, as Jojo finally learns to seek the good of Else as a person in her own right. Jojo's friendship with Else helps him to become a better person—a more selfless, empathetic, and tolerant young man.

However, it should be noted, the theme of Nazis becoming caring and good individuals is controversial, to be sure. Richard Brody, a film critic for *The New Yorker*, argued that the film asks the audience “to look with benign empathy at Nazis,” that the film is a genuine “Springtime for Hitler.” (Brody 2019). The critic's problem, it seems, was that the film focused on a Nazi boy's journey and asked the audience to see the possibility of redemption for him. This is an understandable concern. Yet, Waititi (who is himself Jewish) presupposes that not all Nazis were inhuman or beyond redemption, a view that is reasonable and supported by the historical record.⁷

The film shows how, through friendship, one little boy realized that he did not measure up to the Nazi “Aryan” ideal of a cold, hard, and ruthless warrior. It is a story of a boy who came to see the intolerance in his own heart. Jojo came to see that “the Jew” was not his enemy at all. Furthermore, he learned that understanding and empathy are liberating, and even transformational.

This article will explore the ways in which the filmmakers use the history of Nazi Germany to illustrate how we construct friends and foes, often unconsciously, and how these friendships influence character. Jojo’s maturation occurs not through him simply hearing words of wisdom, experiencing tragedy, or even in making new friendships with diverse people—though each of these are important in his journey. Rather Jojo’s turning points in the film are when he confronts the “Jew as enemy” and comes to see himself in time through their eyes. Jojo’s reeducation is based on his ability to open himself up in friendship to see the world from another’s perspective—and he becomes a more empathetic and loving person in the process. I will begin by discussing the unique approach of the film in the context of films on the Second World War and the Holocaust, drawing particular attention to the pitfalls of making a comedy-drama set in Nazi Germany. I will then examine how the film presents the image of the “friend,” the “good” Nazi, with particular attention to the use of images and language in undermining this image. The same approach will be applied to the film’s presentation of the image of the “Jew” as

an enemy, with a special focus on Else's role as a friend in undermining this caricature, thereby facilitating Jojo's transformation.

I. Resistance Films About Nazi Germany

Jojo Rabbit is essentially a purely fictional resistance film set in Nazi Germany. Jojo is a fervent Nazi who is cornered into helping a Jewish girl in hiding, and in doing so, lies to the Gestapo, puts his own life at risk, and enables her to survive in the end. He remains loyal to Hitler into the third act. Ultimately, he resists the Nazi regime by determining for himself who can be a friend; ultimately, he chooses Else over Hitler. Jojo learns to challenge the Nazi images of the "Aryan" and the "Jew." Historians have explored how many in the Greater German Reich may not have had the purest motives but helped Jews nonetheless (Tec 1987; Block and Drucker 1992). Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) is just one film that explores this kind of resister. Filmmakers have often chosen historical figures as their subjects to explore the nature and impact of resistance in Nazi Germany, such *The Pianist* (2002), which explores the story the musician Wladizlaw Spilman's survival in occupied Warsaw; *Rosenstraße* (2003), in which "Aryan" wives protest their Jewish husbands' incarceration and win their freedom; and the film *Valkyrie* (2008), which depicts the conspirators in the assassination plot on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944. Yet filmmakers have also chosen purely fictional characters to dramatize the

opportunities and consequences of resistance, such as *Swing Kids* (1993), about a group of teenage friends who love to listen and dance to banned American music; and *Charlotte Gray* (2001), the story of a British woman who becomes a courier for the French Resistance.

Various films have depicted the stories of children in Nazi Germany, such as the *Life is Beautiful* (1997), *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008), and *The Book Thief* (2013), just to name a few. These films typically focus on the experiences of a victim of the Nazi regime, either a Jewish person or an “outsider” of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Making the protagonist a target of the regime allows audience members to put themselves into their shoes more easily and to imagine what their experience would be like. But *Jojo Rabbit* is the only film that comes to mind that tells the story of a fanatically pro-Nazi child, the eponymous Johannes Betzler. Yet the danger for the filmmaker is that his protagonist’s pro-Nazi sympathies may make him unsympathetic and unrelatable to the audience. Waititi wrote the script and cast Roman Griffin David to portray an innocent, earnest, and resourceful boy of ten, an age the audience would be more ready and willing to grant him room to mature. In fact, this portrayal is in contrast to the character in the book upon which the film is based, *Caged Skies*. The story follows Jojo as he matures into a teenager and young adult. The filmmakers would have had a much more difficult time trying to get the audience to sympathize with a Nazi young man than with a young boy who knows nothing of the world.

Before examining how the film explores the concepts of friends and foes in Nazi Germany, it worth noting that *Jojo Rabbit* is one of the very few Academy Award winning and financially successful comedies about Nazi Germany and the Second World War. Filmmakers have had extraordinary difficulties incorporating humor in the context of the unimaginable violence and degradation the Nazi regime unleashed upon the world, but it has been done before. Roberto Benigni's aforementioned *Life is Beautiful* (1997) is one example of an Academy Award-winning film that has remarkable moments of charm and humor as it depicts a father trying to protect his son from the horrors of the Holocaust. Yet some critics have argued that the humor felt deeply incongruous with depictions of mass suffering.⁸ The same is true of *Jakob the Liar* (1999), a critical and box-office disappointment.⁹

One may legitimately contend that *Jojo Rabbit*'s comedic tone has the potential to “undermin[e] critical reflection” about the history of the Holocaust (“Facing History...”). This is a valid criticism. Yet, I would argue that *Jojo Rabbit* works as a comedy because it takes the fantastical perspective of a ten-year-old boy who, through his friendship with Else, slowly learns the foolishness and the dangers of the Nazi worldview. The entire film is presented from Jojo's point of view—even at times literally seeing the world through his own eyes (such as when he is injured by a grenade). He is in every scene and his presence informs everything the audience

sees. The audience knows what Jojo is thinking and feeling throughout the film, from pride to sadness, joy, and despair. We even see the butterflies in his stomach as he begins to develop romantic feelings for Else. Because of this narrow focus on Jojo's perspective, the audience sees his Nazi mentors' ridiculous assertions about race and Nazi aggression for what they are, as not just factually wrong but worth mocking. Thus, the comedic aspect of the film is directly related to its perspective and plot.

II. Jojo's Education and Hitler's Friendship

Fundamentally, *Jojo Rabbit* explores the reeducation of a young boy. The filmmakers use friendship as a context in which one can grow in virtue to expose and dismantle Jojo's hatred and self-centeredness. First, it is necessary to explore Jojo's education as an "Aryan" in opposition to Jews in Nazi Germany. As the Nazi regime came to power in January 1933, it coordinated ("Nazified") institutions in German society, such as the schools, universities, courts, newspapers and media companies, etc., creating a society in which young and old alike were pressured to become "good Aryan" citizens ready to serve and sacrifice for the Third Reich. Young boys and girls were taught how to be "good" Nazis, to give their lives for the good of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*. Jojo's fervent Nazi ideas portray a reality among young children at the time: young girls were taught to be good mothers, to provide for their families, to raise the next generation of Germans, and young boys were taught to be proud warriors for the German nation

(Kater 2004; Koch 2000; Rempel 1989). Toward the end of the war, when it became evident that the Russians were indeed advancing from the East, that the Allies were advancing from the West, and that Germany would fall, the Nazi government demanded the military service of not just all men but even young boys and old men. Hitler instituted the *Volkssturm* (People's Storm), or national militia, on October 18, 1944, to recruit males 16 to 60 years of age as a measure to ensure Germans kept fighting for victory (Gellately 2001; Kershaw 2012).¹⁰ Young boys like Johannes Betzler could indeed have been trained at the end of the war to use weapons such as knives and grenades in pre-military training.¹¹

Jojo is a boy who has been educated and trained by his society—the schools, Goebbels' propaganda machine, the Hitler Youth, and his wider community—to become a contributing member of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. His image of Hitler is based on the *Führer* myth perpetuated by Hitler and Nazi propaganda, which asserted that Providence had chosen Hitler to lead Germany to greatness once again. Historians have demonstrated that Hitler created a cult of personality, not just in the Nazi Party but throughout German society (Kershaw 2001). Hitler presented himself as a savior figure for Germans, a man chosen by Providence to lift Germany out of the ashes of the First World War and the chaos of the Weimar Democracy to lead

Germany once again to its day in the sun.¹² Ian Kershaw writes that this “*Führer* cult” was “the very basis of the new Germany.” (Kershaw 2000, p. 483).

Furthermore, in the absence of his father, Jojo falls under the influence of Adolf Hitler as *Führer* and friend, and this relationship informs his character. From the start, the audience understands that the protagonist has already been deeply impacted by Nazi ideology. The opening scene of the film reveals that the *Führer* myth is given vibrant life in Jojo’s mind. As if looking in a mirror, the ten-year-old Jojo, dressed in his sharp Hitler Youth uniform and getting ready for a big training weekend, earnestly recites an oath of loyalty to “*Der Führer*.” Hitler is not only Jojo’s best friend, much to the dismay of Yorkie, his best friend in real life, but Hitler is Jojo’s savior. Jojo repeats from memory,

I swear to devote all my energies, all my strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler [a figure in a Nazi uniform passes between Jojo and the audience]. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him [the same figure passes behind Jojo]. So help me God.¹³

Jojo recites the actual oath Hitler Youth boys and girls swore to Adolf Hitler (not simply to the German state), an oath similar to those sworn by soldiers, officers, and civil servants.¹⁴ The words are a verbatim translation from the German. In the Hitler Youth ceremony the children would swear the oath before the *Blutfahne* (blood banner), a Nazi flag stained with the blood of the martyrs of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 (Lewis 2019, p.73).

This opening scene reveals Jojo educated to be an “Aryan” *Übermensch* in Hitler’s image, cunning, physically strong, and courageous for the Fatherland. At first, Hitler is obscured in the scene, an unknown figure moving before and behind Jojo, encircling him. The audience cannot yet see his face as the camera is focused squarely on Jojo’s upper body and face—and yet he is soon revealed as the boy’s best friend. Hearing Jojo recite the oath, he responds with a sinister, “Yes, that’s right,” inspiring him with Nazi ideology:

Hitler: Now, Jojo Betzler, what is your mind?

Jojo: Snake mind.

Hitler: And Jojo Betzler, what is your body?

Jojo: Wolf body.

Hitler: Jojo Betzler, what is your courage?

Jojo: Panther courage.

Hitler: What is your soul?

Jojo: German soul.

Hitler: Yeah man, you’re ready.¹⁵

Hence begins a major theme in the film: the interplay of animals in dialogue and images to reveal a character’s nature and emotions, from rabbits to butterflies, cubs, lions, tigers, and more. Jojo is in a jungle, and he is learning about who he is and who others are from his best friend, Adolf Hitler.

While Jojo and Hitler are friends, there is little mutuality. Hitler is Jojo’s *Führer*, and stands above him, talking down to him, figuratively and literally, throughout the film. In this scene, Hitler reveals himself when he hears Jojo express doubts about the youth meeting, afraid

he will not do well. It is only when he lowers himself to Jojo’s level and we see his face for the first time and realize that the figure is indeed Hitler—though clearly an imagined quirkier and sillier version than the historical figure. He is a *Führer* for a ten-year-old. Hitler calls Jojo “the best-est most loyal Nazi I have ever met” and inspires him to run out of the house to the Nazi Youth camp with a fanaticism that rivals Beatlemania (hence the aforementioned opening song by the Beatles). Right from the start, Waititi emphasizes the emotional influence Hitler has on Jojo—the ability to inspire confidence based on the image of the noble German, an individual who is strong, cunning, and pure—and ready to die for Führer and Fatherland.

Even the setting of the film serves to demonstrate that Jojo has been educated and influenced by National Socialist ideology. While some reviewers have assumed that the city is Berlin, given the chaos of the war-torn town at the end of the film (Franz 2019, p.35),¹⁶ the setting is clearly not the German capital. Most obviously, the geography of the city is not identifiably Berlin—the film was shot in Prague. There are no signs, landmarks, or dialogue that indicates the film is set in Berlin. In fact, because of this apparent lack of evidence about where the film takes place, most reviewers do not specifically identify the setting, or they refer to it vaguely as “a town in Germany.”¹⁷ But the setting is important to demonstrating just how Jojo has been influenced by Hitler and Nazism. The story takes place in the town of Ost Falkenheim, a suburb of Nuremberg, a significant city in the National Socialist state. Various clues alert the

audience to the location. The badge on Jojo's Hitler Youth uniform (though only visible for a fraction of a second in the opening scene) marks him, as well as advertisement posters hidden in the background of the city square.¹⁸ The name of the town is most often presented very quickly or at a distance, and it's always in Fraktur Deutsch (Ost Falfenheim or simply Falfenheim).

As is well known, the Nazis considered Nuremberg a city of primary importance to the movement, given its long medieval history. In 1935 the Nuremberg Race Laws were promulgated there, defining who was Jewish and stripping Jews of citizenship. Furthermore, Nuremberg was where the annual Nazi Party rallies were held. Its symbolic importance to Nazism was one reason why the Allies held in the city the postwar trials of some of Nazism's most powerful leaders, including Hermann Göring, Alfred Rosenberg, and Rudolf Hess. While Berlin may have been the capital of Nazi Germany, Nuremberg was the cultural and ideological homebase of Nazism. Presumably, Jojo and Rosie would have routinely seen the pageantry and fervent devotion of the Nazi faithful. For such a young boy to recite the oath of loyalty to Hitler indicates that he has imbibed the Nazi tonic his whole life, despite Rosie's fears and gentle objections—she must, after all, keep up the image of a “good” German Frau.

The result of Jojo's formation in school and as a friend of Hitler is his indoctrination as an “Aryan” in Nazi Germany. The degree of Jojo's indoctrination is evident numerous times

throughout the film. When in conversation with his mother Rosie or his (second) best friend Yorkie, he parrots Hitler's diatribes as if channeling his hero. For example, when Rosie takes her seat at the dinner table, it is clear she is in a good mood. She is happy because the Allies have invaded Italy, and she says with a bright smile, looking at Jojo, "Things are changing. The Allies have taken Italy. France is next, and soon the war will be over."¹⁹ In response to his mother's "defeatism," Jojo exclaims, slamming his hand upon the table, "We will crush our enemies into dust! And when they are destroyed, we shall use their graves as toilets!" He acts like a ten-year-old Hitler. His mother then declares the dinner table neutral Switzerland, calming him down.

Waititi's portrayal of Hitler as friend and *Führer* reveals why Jojo idolizes him, as he commands respect but is also kind and encouraging to Jojo. But Waititi threads the needle in a manner that does not obscure history yet also clearly undermines him and his racist and militarist ideas. Hitler is a fantasy, a figment of Jojo's ten-year-old imagination. Among the various ways that Hitler has been portrayed in film, this is remarkably insightful approach to demonstrate how the youth of Nazi Germany were inspired and given direction as "Aryan" Übermünchen in the making. Indeed, this approach resolves a number of problems in portraying Hitler. One common approach is parody, perhaps best exemplified in Charlie Chaplain's depiction in *The Great Dictator* (1940). Mel Brooks took this approach as well in *The Producers* (1967 and 2005), in which Hitler is presented as a buffoon, evoking ridicule and mockery. The main problem with

this approach is that a Hitler of this kind is seemingly incapable of inspiring or leading a nation, let alone a ten-year-old boy. Thus, it can obscure history by causing the audience to question why anyone would support him.

Alternatively, the filmmakers could portray Hitler as an evil, looming presence in the film—again, a poor fit for an imaginary friend. Bryan Singer’s *Valkyrie* (2008) is a good example of this type of depiction (Skiles 2021). The dictator is seldom seen or heard, but when he is, he exudes an evil presence. Hitler is for all practical purposes beyond the reach of the ordinary German, and yet he has eyes and ears all around to identify and eradicate all opposition. The potential problem with this type of depiction is that Hitler is portrayed as almost god-like in power and reach, as if all Germans felt this looming presence and dreadfully feared the Nazi police apparatus.

A third approach is a humanizing portrayal of Hitler, one that shows his anger, hatred, and paranoia, just as much as his frailty and desire for friendship. A film that exemplifies this approach is Oliver Hirschbiegel’s *Downfall* (2004). Hitler is portrayed as a leader who is kind to his secretaries and his dog, belligerent toward his general staff, and intimate with his close friends, such as Albert Speer. Yet this kind of portrayal has been criticized for not emphasizing the evil nature of the man, as if he were just another human being (Matthews 2005). While this

kind of portrayal is more historically accurate than the previous two approaches, it is hard to imagine Jojo as friends with this kind of Hitler.

This is all to say that Waititi's distinctive depiction of Hitler suits the plot and main themes very well. Waititi is able to forge a new approach, one that does not stop with parody or verisimilitude. Rather, his depiction incorporates these elements from the perspective of a ten-year-old boy, thereby avoiding the problems in a depiction that can distort the audience's understanding of history. While Hitler may at times seem like a silly but gentle friend, the destructiveness and foolishness of his worldview are on full display. For example, after older Nazi Youth boys ridicule Jojo for refusing to kill a rabbit, for being a weak and cowardly "rabbit" himself, Hitler encourages him to show just how courageous and bold a rabbit could be. This pep talk inspired Jojo to run back to his Hitler Youth squad, grab a grenade and hurl it into the forest, only to have it bounce off a tree and blow up at his feet. As a direct result of taking Hitler's advice, Jojo is disfigured and maimed, and as such, in the worldview of National Socialism, he has become "a burden to society." Ironically, it is this incident that loosens the constraints on Jojo. As he feels himself an outsider of the "pure" "Aryan" national community, he stays home, finds Else, and opens up to her, as we will discuss in the next section. Hitler's destructiveness is not hidden but clear to see; he is finally revealed not to be a friend at all, but a threat to all Jojo holds dear.

The film makes no pretenses about the quality of Jojo's relationship with his imagined friend. Hitler is a terrible friend, one who gives atrocious advice that leads Jojo to profound suffering, whether physically or emotionally. He is a clueless friend who gives absurd advice, such as when he often offers ten-year-old Jojo cigarettes or argues that they should burn the Betzler house down and blame Winston Churchill when Jojo meets Else. In the context of the film, Hitler is a poor friend because he is imaginary, he is a caricature and simulacrum based on the impressions the real Hitler made on Jojo through Nazi film and radio broadcasts. There could be no true mutuality; Hitler could not seek the good of Jojo because the real Hitler was megalomaniacal, aggressive, and filled with hatred. Waititi's Hitler as friend is bound to the mythological, to the Nazi imagination of the "Aryan" and the "Jew." Indeed, Waititi portrays Hitler feasting on unicorns, one of the greatest mythological figures of all, as if to explain how he could propagate such patently fantastical images of friends and foes.²⁰ For example, while Jojo is scrounging and digging through trash cans for food to survive, Hitler is feasting on an enormous unicorn head (Franz 2019, p.36). Yet still, Waititi presents Hitler as an imagined friend who enables Jojo to feel a part of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, though scarred and "weak." Hitler is an imagined savior, yet one who leads Jojo to physical and emotional harm. He is an imagined hero who cowers in the end when his ideas of hatred and war come to fruition. Jojo

only comes to see Hitler for who he really is as he develops his friendship with Else, the Jewish girl hiding in his house.

III. The Imagined “Jew”

In examining the antisemitism depicted in the film, the viewer must keep in mind that Germans’ views of Jews were influenced and/or reinforced through the propagandistic speeches of Hitler, Goebbels, and other Nazi leaders, broadcast on radio across Germany, as well as wall posters strategically positioned throughout commuter and pedestrian traffic. The Nazi regime used unambiguous language to express their approach to the “Jewish menace”; they used words such as *Vernichtung* (extermination) and *Ausrottung* (annihilation) in discussions of how to resolve the “Jewish problem.” (Herf 2006, p.267). The Nazi regime maintained a constant barrage of propaganda that blamed the Jews for instigating “a war to exterminate the Germans.” (Herf 2006, p.267). The regime reached millions upon millions of Germans who could not help but be exposed to the pervasive propaganda and thereby become informed of the Nazi approach to the Jewish “enemy.” The film presents the multi-faceted nature of antisemitism in Nazi Germany. Throughout the film, Jojo is taught, and he himself regurgitates the varieties of antisemitic tropes common in the Third Reich. Antisemitism is a modern ideology that argues the racial inferiority or perniciousness of the Jewish people, often advanced through pseudo-

sciences such as eugenics and race theory (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991; Weiss 1996). Jojo parrots what he has been taught by Hitler and the Nazi regime.

Through Hitler's friendship and growing up in Nazi Germany, Jojo adopted virulent antisemitism and expresses his views throughout the film. *Jojo Rabbit* presents a wide-ranging perspective of antisemitism in Nazi Germany, in which the religious, social, economic, and racial animosity are evident. Reflecting religious and superstitious prejudice, the Jews are referred to as "demons," as having "serpents' tongues," "fangs," "horns," and "scales," and as hanging upside down as bats. They have special powers such as "mind control." In terms of social and economic prejudice, they are referred to as "weak," "money lovers," and vampires with fangs to suck people's blood dry. Using language and images drawn either by Nazi Youth leaders or Jojo himself, the film presents racial antisemitism succinctly, yet in a manner that evokes uncomfortable humor. The humor is strange because the audience recognizes just how bizarre such beliefs are, and yet the audience knows that Nazis believed these tropes and acted upon them to the degree that they actively sought the extermination of the Jewish people. These ideas go back centuries in medieval European history, they took root in European cultures, and in the twentieth century they led to genocide.

Jojo's relationship with Else—evolving from enemy to friend—is the catalyst for his reeducation and transformation. Yet the great barrier to their friendship—and indeed to Jojo's ability to express empathy—was the Nazi image of the “Jew.” This image had to be dismantled for the two to become friends, for Jojo to learn to care for her. One must keep in mind that for German “Aryans” like Jojo, the Jews became “the other,” and because of this, their fates were of little concern to them. The historian Peter Fritzsche argues that in Nazi Germany there was a “general silence” about the suffering and fate of the Jews (Fritzsche 2008, p.119). He argues that the fate of the Jews lay beyond the Germans' “limits on empathy” because “they simply could not imagine being Jewish. (Fritzsche 2008, p.119)” But, having been severely injured, Jojo begins to feel like an outsider in his own national community, providing a starting point for his reeducation. He can begin to imagine what it means to be Jewish, to be excluded. *Jojo Rabbit* shows how one boy was able to break down the Nazi image of the “Jew,” enabling him to desire the good for Else, to see her as a true friend.

Jojo's reformation begins in the context of multiple confrontations with Else as she presents him with the truth about Jews in Nazi Germany, thereby exposing Nazi falsehoods. The first challenge to Jojo's Nazi worldview occurs shortly after he meets Else and they work out an agreement not to tell his mother or anyone else that he has found her in the secret hideaway in his sister Inge's old room. In accordance with his training, he asserts his Aryan supremacy and

strength, though ironically feeling an outsider to the national community as a “cripple.” He tries to intimidate Else into subservience. This scene demonstrates the intensity of his ideological beliefs, as well as her effectiveness in confronting the obvious incongruity of Nazi ideology with reality. He walks toward her, with the camera directly in front of him, moving backward, as the audience senses the strength of his emotion and his desire to dominate. The dialogue reads as follows:

Jojo: You are weak [pause] like an eyelash. I am born of Aryan ancestry. My blood is the color of a pure red rose, and my eyes are blue...

[Else quickly grabs and turns him around, with her arm immobilizing him against her chest and her hand over his mouth, preventing him from screaming for help.]

Else: [Taunts] Break free! Break free! There are no weak Jews. I am descended from those who wrestle angels and kill giants. We were chosen by God. You were chosen by pathetic little men who can't seem to form a full mustache.

[She throws him down on the bed.]

Else: Stronger race, huh?²¹

Throughout these confrontations in the film, Jojo realizes that Jews are not weak but could be quite strong—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.²² Moreover, he realizes that he himself, a blond-haired, blue-eyed “Aryan,” is quite weak and incapable of wrestling with a Jewish girl.

The lesson Jojo is learning is that the Nazi system for understanding the world is flawed—it does not allow for the exceptions Jojo is experiencing first-hand.

Jojo undergoes a slow process of reeducation, not only what is true and false, but also a reeducation of his emotions. At the start of the film, Jojo is quick to show anger, arrogance, and intolerance—with Hitler as his model. But through his friendship with Else he learns empathy, humility, and understanding. Perhaps the most powerful example of this in the film follows when Rosie is exposed as a resister, captured by the Gestapo, and executed in the public square—all happening offstage. Anyone discovered distributing anti-Nazi materials could be arrested and quickly executed.²³ Jojo grieves but quickly seeks to take vengeance on the “enemy” he deems responsible for his mother’s death. It is at this moment that Jojo’s indoctrination about what a “good Nazi” should do informs his choices. “The Jew,” as he has been taught, is the source of all evil in Germany, the cause of all ills. Thus, Jojo seeks to take vengeance on the only Jewish person he knows, Else.

So, Jojo enters Inge’s room and finds her there writing at the desk. With a knife in his hand, Jojo walks up to Elsa as she begins to walk toward him, and he stabs her in the upper right chest. Jojo does not say anything to Elsa before or after he stabs her, and Elsa does not say a word to Jojo either. She is the stronger, more mature, and more self-aware person, and yet she seems to let him hurt her, not seriously, but still harm her. Perhaps Else wanted to see what Jojo

would really do. Jojo appears to want to kill her, yet he is physically too weak. It is important to point out here that Else had already overpowered Jojo earlier in the film. She knows her strength, and she knows his limitations. The look on her face in this scene reveals deep concern—she knows that something has happened, something terrible that has deeply affected Jojo and will most certainly affect her. But she does not seem fearful of Jojo himself. It seems that Elsa makes herself vulnerable so that Jojo can express his deepest pain. What is most striking about this scene is that after Jojo tries to kill Else—which he genuinely seems to wish to do—Else comforts him, still without words, by simply being present with him, putting her arm around him. She demonstrates her love for him and he allows her to show this affection. Their friendship develops mutuality at this point, as Jojo and Else sit side by side at the top-floor window, looking out into the stars, and begin to talking of their dreams after the war when it is all over.

This process of re-education does not happen quickly or painlessly for Jojo. While he may no longer view Else as a “Jewish enemy” after this scene, he still views her as someone he can manipulate to serve his own interests. He has not yet grown up. The last scene in the film directly reveals that Jojo “the Rabbit” still sees Else as “the Jew,” as one to be manipulated for his gain—a friend and companion now that his mother has died. He is not yet ready to base his friendship purely on what is good for Else. At the end of the film, the Americans have swept

through Ost Falkenheim. The war is over for Jojo and Else. The scene reveals Jojo lying to Else, saying that Hitler and the Nazis have won the war: she must stay in hiding. She must stay with him in the house—seemingly forever. He seems unable to countenance the idea of a life after the war without Else. And so he tells her this lie to manipulate her into staying with him. She is crushed, realizing that her hope of freedom in Germany is gone.

Yet Jojo's transformation comes only when he recognizes his own story in Else's story; he learns empathy and how to seek the good of his friend. As Jojo walks away from her hideaway after lying to Else, with tears streaming down his face, he catches a glimpse of his "exposé" on the Jews, *Yoo-hoo Jews*, which he had been working on throughout the film. As he flips through the pages, he sees all the pictures he has drawn, the images of Jews with horns, of Jews being tormented. But he notices that Else has drawn in the book as well. The last image is a drawing of a boy, Jojo, standing and looking at a giant rabbit sitting in a large birdcage. This image alters Jojo's perspective. It is the moment that his perception changes from seeing her as "a Jew," into a person with feelings. Seeing the image allows Jojo to perceive himself in Else. He was also treated as a thing, a "Jojo Rabbit," as the Hitler Youth boys tauntingly called him earlier in the film. They caged him with that word, "rabbit," degrading him and limiting his prospects for the future. While their experiences are by no means commensurate, Jojo had been doing the same thing to Else but to a greater degree, keeping her caged in her hideaway as "the Jew,"

literally, even when the war had been won and she could be free. He begins to understand that she has a right to freedom from the cage just as he does, and so he tells her the truth. He finally learns to see her as a person, as one deserving of her own life and freedom. And this education profoundly changes him as a character. He has learned to be empathetic and caring, seeking the good of his friend.

Indeed, Jojo must see the cage to leave it; he must learn of his deficiencies to grow and mature. Of all the animals shown throughout the film, not one of them is depicted in a cage—except for “Jojo Rabbit” at the very end. The creature that seems to underscore Jojo’s trajectory in the film is not the lion the Nazis wish him to be or the rabbit the boys condemn him as, but the butterfly, a creature which, with its beautiful and fluttering wings, defies the very notion of a cage. Butterflies adorn Jojo’s bedroom walls, and they flutter inside his stomach as he develops feelings for Else. A butterfly leads Jojo to his mother’s body hanging from the gallows. As the butterfly cannot help but to fly and dance, the first thing Jojo and Else do upon their newfound freedom is dance. While Else is literally free from the hideaway, Jojo is free from the shackles of Nazi ideology that put her there in the first place.

Jojo Rabbit is a meditation on the transformation that is possible through the cultivation of understanding and friendship between two people—and even within a society. Indeed, this possibility of transformation seems to be at the root of various criticisms of the film and its ethical perspective, that Nazis can be transformed and become caring and empathetic people. Whatever one’s view on the matter, the possibilities and avenues for such profound transformation are worth thinking about. In this manner, the film explores the potential of friendship as a context in which one can grow in virtue, that true friendship seeks the good of the other, and this kind of friendship can be revolutionary for the individual. Through his friendship with Else, Jojo journeys from being a dyed-in-the-wool racist, one convinced of his own superiority over Jews and others deemed “unworthy,” to a boy not only capable of stepping out of his own shoes and into the shoes of another, but one willing to see himself as other see him. He matures from a physically weak but healthy Hitler Youth to a physically scarred but emotionally healthy boy—at least it is clear he is on his way.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. (2009). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Block, G., and Drucker, M. (1992). *Rescuers: Portraits of moral courage in the Holocaust*. Holmes & Meier.

- Brody, R. (2019, October 22). Springtime for Nazis: How the Satire of Jojo Rabbit Backfires. *The New Yorker*. Accessed January 13, 2022.
- Burleigh, M., & Wippermann, W. (1991). *The racial state: Germany 1933-1945*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, C. (2024). 'I'm massively into swastikas': Jojo Rabbit as a counter-protest to Trump-era nationalist extremism. *Holocaust Studies*, 1-21.
- Dumbach, A. and Newborn, J. (2019). *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose 3rd ed.* One World.
- Facing History and Ourselves (2019, November 21). What's Wrong with Jojo Rabbit?. Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://www.facinghistory.org/ideas-week/whats-wrong-jojo-rabbit>.
- Franz, B. (2019). Jojo Rabbit. *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 49(2), 34-36. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/flm.2019.0028>.
- Fritzsche, P. (2008). *Life and death in the Third Reich*. Harvard University Press.
- Graham, A. (2019, October 30) Review: 'Jojo Rabbit' a jubilant comic farce that takes aim at hatred. *The Detroit News*. accessed at: <https://eu.detroitnews.com/story/entertainment/movies/2019/10/30/review-jojo-rabbit-jubilant-comic-farce-takes-aim-hatred/2497376001/>
- Gellately, R. (2001). *Backing Hitler: consent and coercion in Nazi Germany*. OUP.
- Herf, J. (2006). *The Jewish enemy: Nazi propaganda during World War II and the holocaust*. Belknap Press.
- Kalloli, A. T., & Tyagi, S. (2022). Retelling Through the Eyes of Innocents: A Study of Jojo Rabbit and The Boy in the Striped Pajamas. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 10(2), 192-200.
- Kater, MH (2004). *Hitler Youth*. Harvard University Press.
- Kershaw, I. (2012). *The end: The defiance and destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-1945*. Penguin.

Kershaw, I. (2001). *The "Hitler myth": Image and reality in the Third Reich*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Kershaw, I. (2000). *Hitler: 1889-1936, Hubris*. W.W. Norton.

Koch, H. W. (2000). *The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development 1922-1945*. Cooper Square Press.

Lepage, J. D. G. (2009). *Hitler Youth, 1922-1945: An Illustrated History*. McFarland.

Lewis, BR (2019). *Hitler Youth: The Hitlerjugend in War and Peace 1933–45*. Amber Books Ltd.

Loughrey, C. (2019, December 30). Jojo Rabbit Review. *Independent* (UK). Accessed at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/jojo-rabbit-review-taika-waititi-nazi-hitler-comedy-cast-director-scarlett-johansson-a9264151.html>.

Matthews, J. (2005, February 18). Review of Downfall. *New York Daily News*.

Rempel, G. (1989). *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Scholl, I. (2012). *The White Rose: Munich 1942-1943*. Wesleyan University Press.

Skiles, W. S. (2021). Refraining the Sacred: Valkyrie and the Basis of Resistance. *Journal of Religion and Film*, 25(2), 1-38. <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.25.02.004>.

Tec, N. (1987). *When light pierced the darkness: Christian rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland*. Oxford University Press.

Vendrell, J. S. (2023). Jojo Rabbit, or On Education: Taika Waititi's Take on Childhood, Democracy, and Hope. *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 15(1), 59-73.

Weiss, J. (1996). *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany*. Ivan R. Dee.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ [Editor's Note: There have been a rise in academic interest in *Jojo Rabbit* and its message recently see Franz (2019), Vendrell (2023) and Davis (2024).
- ² *Jojo Rabbit* is a very loose adaptation of Christine Leunens' novel *Caging Skies* (London: John Murry, 2004).
- ³ See James Holland, "WW2 Historian James Holland Breaks Down World War 2 Movies," Penguin Books UK, <https://youtu.be/NrRTFMaL0LE>, accessed December 11, 2021. Holland contends that the film gets a 1 or 2 out of 10 for historical accuracy, but a 9 of 10 for capturing the spirit of the time, adding, that he loved the film and "thought it was brilliant."
- ⁴ Taika Waititi, "Inside *Jojo Rabbit*" documentary, *Jojo Rabbit*, directed by Taika Waititi, featuring Roman Griffin Davis, Taika Waititi, Scarlett Johansson, Sam Rockwell, etc., (20th Century Fox, 2018), Digital Film (20th Century Fox, 2020).
- ⁵ Taika Waititi, "Inside *Jojo Rabbit*."
- ⁶ Aristotle argued that the best and most long-lasting form of friendship is one based on desiring the good of the other, as opposed to a friendship based on utility (what a friend can do for the individual) or pleasure (the enjoyment of being together), as utility and common interests change in time. For Aristotle, the best kind of friendship was one in which the individual was not turned in upon himself in selfishness, thinking what the friend can do for him, or the pleasure he could have in the friendship, but one in which the individual was turned outward, toward the other, in love, seeking the good of his friend.
- ⁷ Brody's concern seems to be that Waititi's message will encourage people to have sympathy for Trump and Trump supporters. See Brody, "Springtime for Nazis."
- ⁸ See, for example, Tom Dawson's review for the BBC, in which he states, "And while comedy here does capture something of the absurdity of the death camps, ultimately Benigni's sentimental fantasy diminishes the suffering of Holocaust victims, with the self-consciously 'beautiful' shot of a mound of corpses the most glaring of several directorial misjudgments." Tom Dawson, "La Vita è Bella (Life is Beautiful)," June 6, 2002 (Updated), accessed January 19, 2022, [BBC - Films - review - La Vita è Bella \(Life is Beautiful\)](#). Likewise, Charles Taylor, writing for Salon, concludes, "Roberto Benigni's comic fable about one family's struggle to survive in a Nazi

concentration camp is in offensively poor taste.” Charles Taylor, “Review for Life is Beautiful,” on Rottentomatoes.com, accessed January 19, 2022, [Life Is Beautiful - Movie Reviews \(rottentomatoes.com\)](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/life-is-beautiful).

⁹ The film has a score of 29% on the critical aggregator Rottentomatoes.com, and it earned \$4,956,401 gross worldwide on a budget of \$45,000,000, according to IMDB. See “Jakob the Liar,” Internet Movie Database, accessed January 21, 2022, [Jakob the Liar \(1999\) - IMDb](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108052/).

¹⁰ Rempel argues that “These children [of the *Volkssturm*] were expected to conduct sabotage and assassination behind enemy lines, wreaking havoc on occupation troops and Allied collaborators.” Rempel, *Hitler’s Children*, 233.

¹¹ See Lewis’ *Hitler Youth* for numerous archival photographs of young boys Jojo’s age receiving indoctrination and firearms training.

¹² See, for example, *Triumph des Willens (The Triumph of the Will)*, the Nazi-sponsored film by Leni Riefenstahl, which presents the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi Party rally for the wider German public. Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens = Triumph of the Will* (Chicago: International Historic Films, 1981).

¹³ *Jojo Rabbit*, Digital Film, 01:20. *Jojo Rabbit* is not the only recent film to open with a recitation of an oath to Adolf Hitler. Bryan Singer’s *Valkyrie* (2005) began with a chilling recitation of the oath. See the author’s article on the film Skiles (2021).

¹⁴ Jojo’s oath is verbatim from the oath Lepage records in *Hitler Youth, 1922-1945: An Illustrated History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 85.

¹⁵ *Jojo Rabbit*, Digital Film, 01:35.

¹⁶ See for example, Kristopher Jenson, “Berlin bust: *Jojo Rabbit* loses its satirical footing,” C-Ville, October 30, 2021, accessed December 30, 2021, [C-VILLE Weekly | Berlin bust: Jojo Rabbit loses its satirical footing](https://www.cville.com/news/berlin-bust-jojo-rabbit-loses-its-satirical-footing); Franz not only asserts the setting is Berlin, but comments on the wonderful “Rhineland setting,” apparently confusing German geography as the Rhineland is in western Germany, far from Berlin and Brandenburg.

¹⁷ See for example, Clarisse Loughrey, “*Jojo Rabbit* Review,” Independent (UK), December 30, 2019, accessed December 30, 2021, [Jojo Rabbit review: Taika Waititi’s Nazi-era comedy is daring, tender and sharp | The Independent | The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/taika-waititi-s-nazi-era-comedy-is-daring-tender-and-sharp-9000000.html); Adam Graham, “Review: ‘*Jojo Rabbit*’ a jubilant comic farce that takes aim at hatred,” The Detroit News, October 30, 2019, accessed December 30, 2021,

[Review: 'Jojo Rabbit' a jubilant comic farce that takes aim at hatred \(detroitnews.com\)](#); Matthew Lickona, "Jojo Rabbit," *The San Diego Reader*, November 1, 2019, accessed December 30, 2021, [Jojo Rabbit | San Diego Reader](#); and Brody, "Springtime for Nazis.

¹⁸ The first scene shows a very brief shot of Jojo's Hitler Youth Troup badge, which reveals his Troup number was 443.

¹⁹ *Jojo Rabbit*, Digital Film, 40:00.

²⁰ At one point, Hitler cuts short his conversation with Jojo and says, "Oh, got to go! We're having unicorn for dinner at my place tonight." See 29:30.

²¹ *Jojo Rabbit*, Digital Film, 39:00

²² One might quibble with her assertion that the Jews are descended from "those who wrestle angels," given that the passage she is referring to (Genesis 32:22-32) speaks of Jacob actually wrestling with a man who Jacob identifies as a theophany of God. It is at this point in the Bible that God changes Jacob's name to Israel, literally, "one who wrestles with God."

²³ Perhaps the most famous cases involved the members of the White Rose, a student group based in Munich, led by brother and sister, Hans and Sophie Scholl. The members wrote, printed, and distributed thousands of copies of six leaflets in Munich, even mailing them throughout Nazi Germany, informing Germans of Nazi war crimes and calling for resistance to the regime. The Hans and Sophie Scholl were discovered on February 18, 1943, distributing their sixth and last leaflet at the University of Munich, and they were executed four days later by guillotine, along with Christoph Probst, another key member. See for example, Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose* (Oxford: One World, 2006); and Inge Scholl, *The White Rose: Munich 1942-1943*, translated by Arthur Schultz (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).