

(RE)VISIONS OF GENOCIDE:
NARRATIVES OF GENOCIDE IN THOMAS PYNCHON'S *V.* AND *GRAVITY'S*
RAINBOW

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A German History of Genocide: Thomas Pynchon's Construction of History in *V*.

In 1981, D.M. Thomas published *The White Hotel*, a novel whose main character, Lisa Erdman, is a victim of the Babi Yar massacre in Ukraine. Upon publication Thomas' novel was thrust into the national spotlight under allegations of pseudo-plagiarism. In the *Times Literary Supplement*, "letter writer D. A. Kenrick called readers attention to the rather pronounced debt ... *The White Hotel* owed to Anatoli Kuznetsov's 'document in the form of a novel,' *Babi Yar*," and questions Thomas' choice of subject, asking whether "[an] author of a fiction [should] choose as his proper subject events which are not only outside his own experience but also, evidently, beyond his own resources of imaginative re-creation" (Young 53 – 54). James E. Young, in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, explicates the issue, pointing to the "resemblances" between the two narratives. Young concludes that Thomas was motivated, as was Kuznetsov—who "based [his own novel] upon the remembrances of the Babi Yar survivor Dina Pronicheva"—by the belief that "[he had] neither the right nor the requisite experience to imagine such suffering" (55). The controversy surrounding the novel and Young's response to it raise important questions about the literary (re)production of narratives of genocide. Thomas, although motivated by a desire to preserve historical authenticity, was criticized for his appropriation of survivor experience. Thomas' experience suggests a common belief that a literary representation of genocide should not appropriate testimony, as this lessens the truth claim made in the testimony itself. I cite the *White Hotel* incident in order to make an analogy to another work of literary reproduction of testimony. In his 1963 novel *V*,

Thomas Pynchon uses direct testimony, from both victims and independent witnesses, to construct a narrative of the genocide of the Herero in German South-West Africa.¹ Further, in this narrative he traces a historical lineage of genocide within Germany, through the image of the Holocaust.²

As it turns out, Pynchon's use of the Herero uprising in German South-West Africa was entirely by chance. In a 1969 letter to Thomas F. Hirsch, a graduate student researching the Bondelswaartz uprising,³ Pynchon describes his discovery of the Herero material; he "was looking for a report on Malta [to use for other chapters of *V.*] and happened to find the Bondelswaartz one right next to it" (Seed 240). Pynchon's relatively early discovery and subsequent narrativization of the Herero genocide is all the more

¹ The Herero genocide was the consequence of a colonial rebellion in German South-West Africa. When native Herero tribes resisted the illegal colonial appropriation of land and cattle, Germany sent troops to quell the insurgency. In 1904, German general Lothar von Trotha issued his infamous extermination order. The subsequent genocide decreased the native Herero population from 80,000 to 20,000. For a more in-depth treatment of the Herero genocide, see Jon Bridgman's *Revolt of the Hereros* (1981), Horst Drechsler's *Let Us Die Fighting* (1980), and Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald's republication of the official British report, *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany, Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book* (2003).

² I have chosen to employ the term "Holocaust" throughout this paper to refer to the Nazi genocide of World War II. In doing so, I refer to both the six million European Jews and the other victims of the Nazi genocide. I recognize that such use is problematic. However, I agree with Gary Weissman, who notes that the term "Holocaust" "suggests not only the Jewish genocide but its Americanization" (26). As such, I use "Holocaust" rather than "Shoah" to reference the Americanized definition of the event. For a more thorough unpacking of the terminology of the Nazi genocide, see Weissman's introduction to *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* and Peter Novick's chapter "No Bigotry No Sanction" in *The Holocaust in American Life*.

³ A note on spelling: Primary and secondary sources accept "Herero" as the common spelling, with "Hereros" being the plural. However, there is far less agreement on the spelling of "Bondelswaartz." The British *Blue Book* and Drechsler give "Bondelswartz" as the correct spelling, while the Union of South Africa official reports give "Bondelzwarts." Pynchon himself gives "Bondelswaartz" or simply "Bondel." I have chosen to use Pynchon's spelling in my paper as it is the most frequently cited. In addition, the Bondelswaartz are themselves members of the Nama tribe.

remarkable in light of the historical scholarship on the event available up to that point. Jon Bridgman and Leslie J. Worley outline the critical response to the Herero genocide in their chapter, “Genocide of the Hereros,” in *Century of Genocide*, stating that “the decimation of the Hereros was largely ignored by most of Europe and the world” (32). That it was ignored is not to say that “Europe and the [rest of] the world” were ignorant of the Herero uprising, or, in fact, the German military response to it. In fact, as Medardus Brehl points out in “The Drama Was Played Out on the Dark Stage of the Sandveldt’: The Extermination of the Herero and Nama in German (Popular) Literature,” “The ‘Herero Uprising’ of 1904 was a regular subject of discussion [in early twentieth century German culture] ... [A] variety of [publications] ... sought to take the Herero uprising as their subject and attempted to deal with the motivations, the social and political context, the entanglements and the consequences” (100 – 101). Brehl notes that “these publications, largely forgotten nowadays, ... were exceptionally popular and, in some cases, ran to numerous editions within a few years” (101), the most notable of which, *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Sudwest* (Peter Moor’s Journey to the South-West), was published not only in Germany, but in Great Britain and the United States as well (104). Brehl finds that interest in the Herero rebellion in popular culture did not begin to decline until the 1940s, although such interest did not (and could not) address the genocidal implications of the German response to the Rebellion. It would be more precise, then, to state that the Herero genocide was only “largely ignored” after the onset of World War II.

The genocide was also relegated to a historical non-event as a result of the political climate of South-West Africa after World War I. Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald describe the creation and silencing of an official history of German atrocities in South-West Africa. In 1918, the British colonial government in South Africa published a *Blue Book*, titled *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany*, which documented, through both German colonial record and eye-witness testimony, the causes of and the German response to the Herero and Nama uprisings of 1904 – 1908. The report was published largely to prevent Germany from reclaiming colonial property following the armistice after World War I, and, in Silvester’s words, it succeeded in “scuttl[ing] any attempt by Germany to retain control over Namibia” (xix). In response to the *Blue Book*, the German government published their own *White Book* in 1919, which argued that the information in the *Blue Book* was unfounded, as the testimony came from the native population rather than the colonists. Thus the *White Book* asserts that, “[in the *Blue Book*] as only a few *White* witnesses were examined in the matter of the Herero uprising,” and as the native witnesses were untrustworthy sources, “the atrocities did not take place” (qtd. in Silvester xx – xix).

In addition, the *White Book* criticizes the *Blue Book*’s authenticity, as it was produced as a work of wartime propaganda. Horst Drechsler, in one of the earliest and most important studies of the Herero genocide in the post-war era, claims that although “[the *Blue Book*] provided the first uncolored account of German colonial domination in South West Africa ... [,] its origin ... made it easy ... to dismiss as mere propaganda” (10).

However, British propaganda in the early part of the century was not as subjective as the term might imply. Michael Sanders and Philip Taylor, in their study of British propaganda, note that “the British approach [during the World War I era] ... was to present a ‘generally cautious and academic [text], seeking to present a mass of evidently factual material without recourse to emotional overstatement” (qtd. in Silvester xxiii). In light of this, and when compared with the small amount of other primary accounts written in the early part of the century, the consensus of historians, including Drechsler and Silvester, is that the *Blue Book*, regardless of the political impetus of its creation, “is a largely reliable account that comes much closer to the real situation than all preceding German accounts put together” (Drechsler 10).

Colonial hegemony and racial superiority, rather than genocide, have dominated the narrative of South-West Africa given and accepted in Western culture well into the post-war years. This narrative was constructed through popular cultural artifacts, such as *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Sudwest*, a 1906 German novel (later published in a 1908 English translation) written from the perspective of a young German soldier fighting against the Herero. While Frenssen describes the extermination of the Herero, he makes no mention of von Trotha’s extermination order, a point made clear in the introduction to the *Blue Book* chapter, “How the Hereros Were Exterminated”: “In ‘Peter Moor[‘s Journey to South-West Africa,’ ... little of the actual horrors and butcheries which took place is conveyed” (111). Some critics note the anti-war overtones of Gustav Frenssen’s novel, including its translator Margaret May Ward, who dedicates her translation to the

“cause of peace” largely because she believes Frenssen’s novel shows the “hardships and horrors and unnecessary cruelties of [war]” (*preface*). However, the *Blue Book* quotes liberally from Frenssen, arguing that “[Peter Moor’s Journey to South-West Africa], when read in conjunction with the evidence [in the *Blue Book*], help[s] to create a picture of merciless inhumanity and calculated ferocity which is well-nigh unbelievable” (111). The hyperbolic conclusion of the *Blue Book*’s author aside, current readings of Frenssen’s novel expose similar themes. Marcus Brehl argues that “the message of the novel is that the threat posed by the ‘existential other’ can be conquered and the class war can be replaced by race war ... [leading to the necessary] extermination of the ‘existential other’ ... [a process by which] civilization [gains] a foothold on the previously dark and barren Africa” (106).

Frenssen’s novel ends with the murder of a native—murder because the native was captured by the German troops and questioned before being killed. After answering the German soldiers’ questions, the prisoner is ordered to leave; as he is running away, a soldier shoots him in the back. This display of casual violence is followed by a discussion on the German military presence in South West Africa, undergirded by the German belief in a superior cultural position. The German lieutenant, reflecting the history of colonial power, justifies the murder, commenting, “He can’t raise a gun to us anymore” (232). Later, the lieutenant notes that “these blacks have deserved death before God and man, not because they have murdered two hundred farmers, but because they have built no houses and dug no wells” (233). This justification, as Brehl notes, founds the civilizing

goal of German colonialism. It is on this note that the novel ends: “there were not a few [soldiers] who like [South-West Africa] better and better the more they learned to know it, and who seriously intended to stay and become farmers. If even a half of those carried out their intention, about five hundred [former soldiers] would remain in the country” (237). Although Peter Moor leaves South-West Africa bound for Germany, he leaves a colony filled with perpetrators of genocide, who continually reiterate the racial dichotomy that continued in Namibia well into the 1970s.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that any historical narrative is made through the “differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others” (25). The *Blue Book* makes clear the intertwining nature of history and narrative in its discussion of *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Sudwest*. While Frenssen’s novel is based in fact, on interviews he conducted with soldiers returning from South-West Africa, Frenssen emplots these facts in his narrative to present one perspective of the history of the war—that of a European racial superiority. Frenssen’s novel effectively silences the genocidal atrocities of the Herero war—first by justifying the soldier’s actions and then by leaving out specific details of soldiers’ actions against the civilian Herero population. Of course, Trouillot reminds us that any historical narrative is imbued with silences. The act of silencing itself is “an active and transitive process ... [of which] mentions and silences are ... dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis” (48). Thus, the politically motivated attempts to address the history of the Herero war in both the British *Blue Book* and the German *White Book* present two different perspectives of the same history, the

first solely from a victim standpoint and the latter presenting only the perpetrator's perspective. While we might privilege the *Blue Book's* narrative as closer to "objective historical fact," we must recognize that it too actively "silences" a historical perspective—that of the German colonist.

Ultimately, unlike the popularity of the literature of German (and, more generally, European) colonialism in South-West Africa, which continued to be published into the inter-war years, and which largely reinforced the German position of cultural and racial superiority, the historiography of this event, represented by the *Blue Book*, was actively silenced. Having served its purpose to keep South-West Africa out of the hands of the Germans following the conclusion of World War I, the *Blue Book* "became an embarrassment" to *all* European colonial forces—including Germany, which, as Drechsler notes, shortly after the armistice, "joined forces to oppress the Africans" (10)—and was removed from public record by the South West African Assembly. On July 29, 1926, a resolution was passed which defined the *Blue Book* as "merely ... an instrument of war" and declared that "the time has come to ... remove and destroy all copies of this *Blue Book* found in official files and public libraries of [South-West Africa, as well as] ... in official files[,] ... public libraries [in Britain and Germany] ... and in the official bookstore mentioned on the title page" (Drechsler 10). The only source presenting the native perspective of German colonization and genocide was officially removed from general knowledge in the goal of a unified European presence in South-West Africa. It is

a wonder then that Pynchon was able to find a remaining copy of the *Blue Book* in the Seattle public library.

Pynchon's Appropriation of the *Blue Book*

Pynchon offhandedly acknowledges the *Blue Book* in his letter to Thomas F. Hirsch. In a post-script to his letter, Pynchon remarks, "For *V*. I also used a British propaganda pamphlet printed around 1917, whose name I've long forgotten. [It's] good for an anti-German review of the 1903 – 7 events, as well as some pretty frightening atrocity pictures" (Seed 243). As a large part of "Mondaugen's Story" comes directly from this pamphlet, Pynchon seems to give it short shrift in his letter, almost appearing to disregard it as mere propaganda. However, as I will show, Pynchon's use of the *Blue Book* material in *V*. far extends such a brief acknowledgement. Through representation of the Herero testimony in *V*., Pynchon parallels both the *Blue Book's* authors' and Silvester's own purpose for (re)publishing the account. That is, by a conscious effort to historicize his chapter, Pynchon performs a double duty. On the one hand, "Mondaugen's Story" testifies to the Herero genocide, a shocking violent encounter that, certainly in the early 1960s and only slightly less-so today, has been stricken from Western historical record. On the other, Pynchon illustrates a refined examination of the history of genocide in the twentieth century, one that genocide scholarship has only recently begun to address. As Jeremy Silvester notes, "Genocides do not take place in a vacuum. Genocides take place within a historical context, with a definite trajectory. Thus the intent to commit genocide is predicated upon a belief in the attainability of such a goal. A goal which

becomes evident in the light of previous examples” (xxxiii). In *V.*, Pynchon outlines the historical context by which the twentieth century can be understood, as Samuel Totten et al. declare it, “a century of genocide.”

In his introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon discusses his use of primary source material in his fiction. In his story “Under the Rose,” later re-written as chapter three of *V.*, Pynchon notes that “Karl Baedeker[‘s] ... guide to Egypt for 1899 was the major ‘source’ for the story” (17). By his own admission, Pynchon “loot[ed] the Baedeker ... all the details of a time and place [he] had never been to, right down to the names of the diplomatic corps” (17). Pynchon alludes that such “looting” might be considered “literary theft” or at least severe “derivation,” but concedes that he at least “indirectly ... credit[s] Baedeker” as a source in both versions of “Under the Rose” (17). Although Pynchon notes that “[copying directly from sources] is a lousy way to go about writing a story ... [as the author begins] with something abstract ... and only then [goes] on to try to develop plot and characters” (17 – 18), he persists in using this method with the Herero historical material in the “Mondaugen’s Story” chapter of *V.*, although never crediting his sources at all. As Pynchon’s discussion and his adaptation of “Under the Rose” perhaps make clear, the whole of *V.*, most explicitly in the Stencil chapters, is rooted in historical fact.

The narrative of *V.* is split between Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil. Profane’s narrative, centered on New York City, takes place almost entirely in 1956. Stencil’s narrative, on the other hand, flits about through (incongruent) historical episodes, which take place in 1898 Egypt, 1918 France, 1899 Florence, 1904 and 1922 South-West

Africa, and WWII Malta. The Profane and Stencil chapters ultimately converge, forming a V-shaped narrative. Stencil, who is called “the century’s child” (48), is a historian of sorts, hunting for any traces of V. and is building a “dossier” about the woman, mostly from “inference” (164). Richard Patteson calls Stencil’s search “a quest for both knowledge and a kind of pattern or connection” in which there is an interplay between “the attempt to ... create form and the overwhelming tendency towards formlessness in the universe” (20). Stencil, then, through his assembly of the V. archive, attempts to fit historical events into a self-created narrative. And although he speaks of the “lousiness” of such an undertaking, Pynchon “loots” the *Blue Book* to a greater extent than even the Baedeker for “Mondaugen’s Story.”

“Mondaugen’s Story” is one of many historical narratives that Stencil appropriates into his own V. narrative. Within V., the “Mondaugen’s Story” chapter exists as Stencil’s retelling of Kurt Mondaugen’s first person narrative. Generally, the chapter is narrated in the third person from Mondaugen’s point of view, with historical information narrated through secondary characters like van Wijk, a civil servant, and Foppl, a wealthy farmer, but it is Stencil who is ostensibly the narrative voice of “Mondaugen’s Story.” Thus, “Mondaugen’s Story” cannot be considered Mondaugen’s actual story as, in Stencil’s retelling, it has “undergone considerable change” from its original form. This is explicitly stated in the lead-in to chapter nine: “Mondaugen yarned ... about youthful days in South-West Africa. Stencil listened attentively. Yet ... when Stencil retold it, the yarn had undergone considerable change: had become ... Stencilized” (246). Pynchon stresses

the unreliability of this narrative, as Eigenvalue, listening to Stencil's retelling, interrupts to question its veracity: "I only think it strange that [Mondaugen] should remember an unremarkable conversation, let alone in that much detail, thirty-four years later. A conversation meaning nothing to Mondaugen and everything to Stencil" (269). The conversation to which Eigenvalue refers regards Vera Meroving—the chapter's incarnation of V., and Eigenvalue's interruption has often been cited as a reason to doubt Stencil's version of the events of the chapter.⁴ However, contextually, and as Eigenvalue's interruption makes clear, the most likely "Stencilizations" concern the Vera Meroving sections of "Mondaugen's Story." As I am largely interested in Pynchon's use of historical sources in order to document the Herero genocide, the unreliability of the Stencil narrative, as compared with Mondaugen's own, is a peripheral concern. Instead, I am more interested in the narrative that Pynchon, through both narrators, tells about the Herero genocide—a narrative that explicitly cites historical testimony focalized through characters within it.

Pynchon's historical intent in "Mondaugen's Story" changed over the course of writing *V*. In the editing process of *V*., Pynchon apparently modified his use of historical materials in "Mondaugen's Story." Luc Herman and John M. Krafft have recently published their comparisons of a 1962 typescript draft of *V*. held by the Harry Ransom

⁴ Shawn Smith, in *Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, David Seed in *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*, and Richard Patteson, in his chapter "What Stencil Knew: Structure and Certitude in Pynchon's *V*." in Richard Pearce's *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, more fully trace the implications of Stencil's unreliable narration on Pynchon's historical intent.

Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin and the final, published novel. Taking the typescript copy alongside correspondence between Pynchon and his editor, Corlies Smith, Herman and Krafft discover some major changes made to the text, largest among them a re-writing of “Mondaugen’s Story” “from the ground up” (“V. at the Harry Ransom Center” 13). Herman and Krafft more fully explicate the changes to “Mondaugen’s Story” in a separate paper, “From the Ground Up: The Evolution of the South-West Africa Chapter in Pynchon’s V.” Herman and Krafft note that both Pynchon and Smith had early concerns about the chapter. For his part, Smith worried about the integration of the chapter with the greater narrative of the novel and advised that “[Mondaugen’s Munich] flashback should connect more directly with the chapter’s main action” (265). Elsewhere, Smith asked Pynchon to “clarify the link between the novel’s events set in 1956, mostly in New York, and the first historical chapter, set in Egypt” (265). The typescript version of the story includes a longer, although historically inaccurate, version of the 1922 Bondelswaartz rebellion, as well as a longer flashback to Munich involving Vera Meroving. Moreover, Herman and Krafft’s research implies that the *Blue Book* was not used at all as a historical source in the typescript, as the Herero genocide is only briefly mentioned, while von Trotha and his extermination order are mentioned not at all. Stencil, too, is absent from the typescript version, indicating, perhaps, that Pynchon intended a more reliable narrative.

Herman and Krafft suggest that, by “Stencilizing” the chapter, Pynchon brings the chapter in line with the rest of the novel, but the addition of Stencil to the reworked

chapter begs the question of Pynchon's historical intent. It is clear that Pynchon always intended to include the Herero Rebellion in his narrative. However, in a March 24, 1962 letter, Pynchon "calls the chapter a 'bitch' ... [because] he has doubts concerning his method of presenting the native rebellion that provides the background (and briefly even the foreground) to the story [and] ... misgivings about the relevance of the chapter to the plot of the novel as a whole. Yet he 'like[s] it too much to want to cut it'" ("From the Ground Up" 265). Pynchon addresses the chapter's relevance through the "expansion of Vera Meroving, the chapter's main version of the novel's title figure" and his methods of historical representation by "[writing] the 1904–7 African genocide in much greater and more sordid detail than in the chapter's original version, where it is only briefly touched on" (265). One change he made to the revised version to "keep it historical and 'realistic'" (267) was to replace the altered names and dates with quotes and summaries from the *Blue Book* and another official 1923 Union of South Africa report, *The Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Rebellion of the Bondelzwarts*. Herman and Krafft argue that, with these alterations in place, the revised version of "Mondaugen's Story" changes from "a conventionally told story about politics and science, in which almost as many pages were devoted to the episode with [Zandfontein—the equivalent to Van Wijk] as to the events at Foppl's farm," to a story that "while carefully grounded in the historical data of the 1922 Bondelswaartz rebellion in the region, ... takes off from the facts so as to picture and investigate German colonial violence as a foreshadowing of the unspeakable events of the Second World War" (286).

While I agree that “Mondaugen’s Story” presents a historical narrative of German genocide in the twentieth century, I would not go so far as to claim that Pynchon “takes off from the facts,” as such a statement overlooks the continuous quotes from the *Blue Book*, which undergird the entirety of the chapter. The event upon which the revised chapter hinges is not Mondaugen’s Munich flashback but the Herero genocide. As neither the genocide itself nor von Trotha are mentioned in the typescript, it seems entirely possible that what started as a meditation on the political and human consequences of European colonialism in Africa—itsself an idea repeated throughout the Stencil chapters, from the British in Egypt (Chapter III), to the political situation in Florence, 1898 (Chapter V), both informed by the Fashoda crisis, to the Valleta chapters encompassing history from 1587 to post-World War II (Chapters XI, XVI, and the Epilogue)—became instead an investigation into the motivation for genocide only when Pynchon found the *Blue Book*. It is from the *Blue Book* material, mediated through Foppl and through Mondaugen’s dreams, that Pynchon reproduces the history of the Herero rebellion and genocide.

Just as in chapter three (the rewritten “Under the Rose”), in “Mondaugen’s Story,” Pynchon copies, word for word, material from his historical sources. While I don’t wish to become bogged down in annotation, I would briefly compare a few passages from *V.* to the historical sources in order to present the scope of Pynchon’s citation. There are many sections copied verbatim from both reports. Chapter III, article 55 of the Bondelswaartz report, which discusses the origin of the rebellion, states, “[Abraham] Morris ... appears

to have crossed the river above Haibmund in the middle of April with six other men, some women and children—some rifles and a quantity of some stock [sic]” (53). The typescript of *V.* relays this information through a character named Zandfontein and describes the history of the fictional Kraaihoek rather than the Bondelswaartz. In the typescript, Pynchon also replaces Abraham Morris with the fictional “messianic rebel . . . Jehovah Buekes” (“From the Ground Up” 266). In the revised chapter, Zandfontein is replaced by van Wijk. While the name van Wijk may be of Pynchon’s own creation, there is strong evidence to suggest that the name, at least, implies a further dialogue with Pynchon’s sources. In the *Blue Book* van Wijk is the surname of a family of Rehoboth Bastard witnesses who testify to the atrocities they witnessed. Justin Pittas-Giroux finds another historical explanation of van Wijk: “[van Wijk is] the name of one of the first tribal chiefs to sign ‘protection’ agreements with the European settlers in 1885” (qtd. in “From the Ground Up” 268). Van Wijk, “a minor extremity of the Administration in Windhoek” (247), asks Mondaugen, “Do you know what happened yesterday? Get worried. Abraham Morris has crossed the Orange [river ... with] six men, some women and children, rifles, stock [sic]” (249). The odd grammar of the report is repeated in *V.*, an obvious indication of Pynchon’s “derivation.”

The revised version centers the narrative more firmly within the actual text of the official report. As van Wijk makes clear, even when Pynchon invents “facts” in his revised version, he makes such inventions more contextually sound. Thus, while in both versions, the information about the uprising comes from a telephone call the official

receives, the revised chapter moves the location to the textually relevant “Guruchas” (250) and quotes much more liberally from the report. Article 58 of the report mentions a similar call:

The superintendent on the 29th April [sic] telephoned the news to the magistrate of Warmbad ... and, on the 5th May [sic] sent Sergeant van Niekerk and Native Constable Gert Kraai to arrest Morris ... Van Niekerk [under instructions, declared] that if Morris was willing to go to Warmbad peacefully he would not effect the arrest ... [Morris refused the offer.] Van Niekerk then placed his hand on Morris’ shoulder in token of arrest ... Threatening actions, gestures and words followed [by both the Sergeant and Morris’ Bondelswaartz companions] and there seems no doubt that Van Niekerk ... warned the people that force would be used against them. Native witnesses aver that the phrase used against them was ‘die lood van die Goevernement sal nou op jull smelt.’ (*Literal Translation: ‘The Government’s lead will now melt upon you’*)... At any rate it is clear that the Bondelswaartz believed that the Government had ... declared war on them. (54)

In the revised chapter, Pynchon condenses this account but changes neither the narrative nor sentence structure at all:

That was the location superintendent at Guruchas. Apparently they caught up with Morris, and a Sergeant van Niekerk tried an hour ago to get him to

come in to Warmbad peacefully. Morris refused, van Niekerk placed his hand on Morris's shoulder in token of arrest. According to the Bondel version—which you may be sure has already spread to the Portuguese frontier—the Sergeant then proclaimed 'Die lood van die Goevernement sal nou op julle smelt.' The lead of the Government shall now melt upon you. Poetic, wouldn't you say? The Bondels with Morris took it as a declaration of war. (250 – 251)

As a member of the colonial administration, van Wijk is the perfect cipher for the information from the report. In effect, van Wijk parrots true testimony from “the Administrator and the Secretary of the ... territory [and other] civil officials,” part of the 124 witnesses that provided information about the uprising (*The Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Rebellion of the Bondelzwarts* 41). Van Wijk's attitude towards the Bondelswaartz rebellion, with regard to the larger role of the colonial administrator, mirrors his narrative function in Pynchon's text. “History,” he tells Mondaugen, “... is made at night. The European civil servant normally sleeps at night. What waits in his IN basket to confront him at nine in the morning is history. He doesn't fight it, he tries to coexist with it” (251). Van Wijk's job is not to “prevent” rebellion, but to deal with the resultant action, just as narratively, van Wijk exists in order to vocalize the history important to the story itself. This is analogous to method of historical reproduction Pynchon uses in the revised Mondaugen chapter. Pynchon uses historical sources to represent problems that the characters must “coexist with” rather than actively

take part in. In this way, the history does nothing to move the narrative along. Instead, it exists only as a background necessary for the interpretation of the narrative from the post-war perspective of the characters within the text of *V.*—Stencil, Eigenvalue, and Mondaugen in 1956—as well as the readers themselves.

In light of these connections, it is important to examine Pynchon’s historical intent in the narrative. Pynchon emplots his historical sources (themselves already emplotted according to their own authors) within his narrative and, in many aspects, *as* the narrative itself. Historian Hayden White suggests that “emplotment ... [provides] the ‘meaning’ of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been told” (7). Drawing on Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, White identifies “four different modes of emplotment: Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire,” but notes that these “are not the sole possible ones” or even particularly effective modes when applied to more complex literature (7 – 8). What I find most useful in White is that all historical narratives are given meaning only through their production *as* recognizable narratives. Thus, through his explicit use of historical sources, Pynchon creates a narrative of genocide that, as White indicates, is given “meaning” only to the extent that we identify it as a genocide narrative. However, as Shawn Smith points out in *Pynchon and History*, Pynchon presents historical fact in a manner that is largely “anti-structural” (13); that is, the inclusive narrative of *V.* operates through what Smith calls “textual violence—... the imaginative collision between what is real and the distortion of reality [and] the torturing of time and space in narrative” (11).

The rupture of linear history and the truth claim it offers leads the reader to doubt the very structures Pynchon puts in place.

This is most obvious in the Stencil chapters. Stencil is Pynchon's historicist in *V.*, but his main purpose in the narrative seems to be to criticize the presumed objectivity of historiography. Smith notes that Stencil "attempt[s] to explain and represent the past definitively, but fail[s] because [his] chimerical and protean conception of *V.* is at odds with his pseudo-scientific methodology" (20). In the historical chapters, Stencil attempts to form a narrative explaining the history of *V.*, but to do so, must often resort to "Stencilizing" his facts to create his narrative, thus alluding to White's concept of the subjectivity of historical narratives. Smith suggests that "Mondaugen's Story" is emplotted in the trope of the Gothic romance, but recognizes that such a reading "derealizes an overtly historical series of events ... [which, thus, returns] not to the past as it was, but instead to Stencil's fantastic revisioning of it" (46). Smith's reading gets at the difficulty of narrativizing historical events. Smith suggests that the Gothic sensibility is that of an "unnatural power by which the past disrupts the present" (37). For Smith, the genocide of the Herero becomes the "unnatural" monster which returns in 1922. By "Stencilizing" his narrative as a Gothic romance, Stencil conflates the native rebellions and the German response to them as consequences of an "unnatural monster." In Smith's interesting reading, genocide becomes "derealized" as a historical event, which proves problematic to a historical interpretation of the text. Pynchon directly asserts that the history of the Bondelswaartz uprising must be taken alongside the earlier history of the

Herero genocide. However, the German genocide in the early part of the century cannot be disengaged from the Nazi genocide, even if its description must be evaluated through Stencil's "veil of irrationality, dread, and barbarism" (46). I would like to make clear that I am not suggesting that we accept Stencil's narratives as objective. However, I would like to consider the implications of Pynchon's presentation of the subjectivity of Stencil's history when taken with Pynchon's own focus on primary sources. While acknowledging that Pynchon suggests that Stencil emplots "Mondaugen's Story" as a Gothic romance, it is necessary to examine more closely the direct connections Pynchon makes between both the Herero and Bondelswaartz rebellions and the Herero genocide and the Holocaust for the alternate emplotments they make available.

It is van Wijk who first draws parallels between the Bondelswaartz rebellion and earlier Herero uprising of 1904. Van Wijk tells Mondaugen that the Bondelswaartz rebellion "will be a blood bath" and tells him, "You weren't here in 1904. But ask Foppl. He remembers. Tell him the days of von Trotha are back again" (251). Van Wijk's comments foreshadow the significance that 1904 takes on over the course of Mondaugen's narrative. Foppl is one of the "Germans who'd been landowners before [the German defeat and subsequent loss of their colonial possessions in World War I]" and, like the other German colonists, has been "allowed by the [British-backed] government of the Cape to keep [his] citizenship, property and native workers" and "continue on" with life (248). South-West Africa continues, untouched by the progression of (Western) history. For Foppl and van Wijk, 1904 is both a memory and a promise to be repeated.

This collapses the present and the past; as a result, the historic event serves not only as a memory but as a guide to the actions of the present, hints at the intersection of the Herero genocide and the Holocaust.

To Mondaugen, as well as to the majority of Pynchon's audience, the significance of 1904 is a mystery, and at first, the connections to the Holocaust are vague at best. Van Wijk implies the violence of 1904 through Foppl's actions at his villa, which certainly also foreshadow the casualness to which the German colonists disposed of natives. Like van Wijk, Foppl exists in Pynchon's narrative largely to present the historical sources as dialogue. From Herman and Krafft, we know that before Pynchon's revision "from the ground up," "Mondaugen's Story" was centered not around the 1904 genocide but on Mondaugen in Munich. In a footnote, they observe that "the Foppl of the typescript does not inspire Mondaugen's dreams" (283). The expansion of the Foppl character corresponds, perhaps, to the additional information Pynchon found in the *Blue Book*. Shortly after arriving at Foppl's villa, Mondaugen comes across a grotesque scene of colonial violence. While Foppl is sjamboking a naked Bondel, whose back is cut down to "white vertebra that winked ... from one long opening," Mondaugen "remember[s] to ask Foppl about 1904 and 'the days of von Trotha'" (259). Foppl begins "[to yarn] about the past—first ... as they both stood watching [the Bondel] ... continue to die; later at riotous feasting, on watch or patrol, to ragtime accompaniment in the grand ballroom; even up in the turret, as deliberate interruption to [Mondaugen's] experiment" (259 – 260). This montage of storytelling implies a long and complex tale. As Mondaugen participates in

Foppl's siege party, he slowly learns the history of 1904. Although the line between dream and oral history is blurred in "Mondaugen's Story," it is through Foppl's "sick" stories that Mondaugen understands the Herero genocide. The reader experiences much the epistemological indoctrination as "Mondaugen's Story" unfolds and Foppl's testimony is revealed.

Foppl, who "had first come to Südwestafrika as a young army recruit" (265), gives direct testimony to his role in the genocide. He tells Mondaugen, "You'd find [Hereros] wounded, or sick, by the side of the road ... but you didn't want to waste the ammunition ... Some you bayoneted, others you hanged" (265). Foppl's description of the "procedure" for hanging comes directly from the *Blue Book*. Daniel Esma Dixon, a European transport driver during the Herero rebellion, testified, under oath, that "the hanging of natives was a daily occurrence ... The Germans did not worry about rope. They used ordinary fencing wire, and the unfortunate native was hoisted up by the neck and allowed to die of slow strangulation" (120). Compare this to Foppl's description: "Procedure was simple: one led the fellow or woman to the nearest tree, stood him on an ammunition box, fashioned a noose of rope (failing that, telegraph or fencing wire), slipped it around his neck, ran the rope through a fork in the tree and secured it to the trunk, kicked the box away. It was slow strangulation" (265).

Foppl's re-creation of 1904 situates the Bondelswaartz in place of the Hereros, thus requiring him to punish them. This punishment is not only for the Bondelswaartz rebellion but for the Herero Rebellion as well. "[The Bondelswaartz] have defied the

Government,” he says as he sjamboks a slave. “They’ve rebelled, they have sinned. General von Trotha will have to come back to punish [them] all. He’ll have to bring the soldiers with the beards and the bright eyes, and his artillery that speaks with a loud voice ... And until then love me as your parent, because I am von Trotha’s arm, and the agent of his will” (259). Foppl refers to the colonial “father figure.” The *Blue Book* explains that “under the German system there grew up the custom of *Väterliche Züchtigung*, or parental chastisement. The German master was regarded as being *in loco parentis* to the childlike native, and could thrash him whenever he wished and for any reason whatsoever without risk of punishment for assault” (204). However, Foppl’s speech to the Bondel he is “thrashing” to death also reflects, at least syntactically, von Trotha’s infamous extermination order. In a footnote discussing von Trotha’s order to “kill every one of [the Herero] ... and take no prisoners” (108), Jeremy Silvester offers the translation of the Otijherero language message that accompanied the order: “I am the great General of the Germans. I am sending a word to you Hereros ... You have stolen, killed, and owe white people ... You Hereros must now leave this land it belongs to the Germans. If you do not do this I shall remove you with the big gun. A person in German land shall be killed by the gun ... I will chase [women and the sick] after their chiefs or I will kill them with the gun” (108). While Foppl seems the epitome of colonial excess here, and indeed, is, like so many of Pynchon’s villains, an obvious symbol of the extremes of European violence on their subalterns, the historical evidence that Pynchon draws from proves its veracity. Even if the reader does not yet recognize the historical implications of von Trotha, or

even trust the facts that Pynchon embeds within the text, Foppl's desire to "re-create" 1904—in which the German army and civilian population contrive to exterminate a people—registers as an implicit allusion to the Holocaust.

Foppl, in his "compulsion somehow to re-create the Deutsch-Südwestafrika of nearly twenty years ago, in word and perhaps in deed" (259 – 260), might be easy to dismiss as a violent psychotic, but Mondaugen's dreams suggest otherwise. These dreams provide the largest assembly of information on the Herero genocide. As the narrator notes, the "dreams of a voyeur can never be his own" (276). In the third section of "Mondaugen's Story," Mondaugen dreams what is likely Foppl's history as a soldier during and immediately following the Herero genocide. Mondaugen is uncertain "whether Foppl himself might ... have come in to tell [these] tales" while Mondaugen was sleeping (278), but the tales themselves come almost verbatim from the *Blue Book*. Foppl's previous testimony to Mondaugen, when placed alongside his dreams, suggests that Foppl and the German soldier of the dreams are the same. However, it is important that the German soldier of the dream be anonymous. The dreams of the German soldier point to a wide-scale social and political inculcation that made possible the horrific violence, a culture in which every German could be a Foppl (including Mondaugen). Thus, the anonymity of the dream soldier, who is known in most Pynchon criticism as Firelily's rider, implies that this character is only one of many, one whose actions are not the result of some deep-seated psychosis, but rather, as Hannah Arendt would famously say about Eichmann, the result of a more banal form of evil. This is not to suggest that the

violence done to the Hereros and Bondels is itself banal; the atrocities witnessed in the *Blue Book* are as shocking as any recounted in Holocaust witness narratives. In one of the most telling examples, itself a direct quote from the *Blue Book*, “returning from the Waterberg with von Trotha and his staff, [Foppl’s outfit] came upon an old woman digging wild onions at the side of the road. A trooper named Konig jumped down off his horse and shot her dead: but before he pulled the trigger he put the muzzle against her forehead and said, ‘I am going to kill you.’ She looked up and said, ‘I thank you’” (*V.* 286, Silvester 116). This story, witnessed by Firelily’s rider in *V.* and by Manuel Timbu, a Rehoboth Bastard groom, in the *Blue Book*, testifies to both the violence of the Germans against the civilian population and that population’s complete acceptance of it. In both the official testimony and Pynchon’s representation of it, while Konig may do the actual killing, others witnessed it and were thus implicated as perpetrators themselves.

By focalizing testimony through both a specific and anonymous German perspective, Pynchon attempts to explain the motives behind participation in genocidal atrocities. This desire is likely based on the current events of his writing. *V.* was published in 1963, and likely written in the period between 1959 and 1962, a time when the Holocaust was not as culturally relevant a sign (of genocide, of World War II) as it is today. Peter Novick notes that “the Holocaust wasn’t talked about very much in the United States through the end of the 1950s” (127). Novick finds this silence a result of “ideological retooling” in which the Soviet Union moved from ally to foe. Novick, following the lead of Hannah Arendt, places one mode of this transition as the

deployment of totalitarianism as a unifying focus of historical thought. Lumping together Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Union under the guise of totalitarianism allowed the American populace to direct their “abhorrence felt toward Nazism onto the new Soviet enemy” (86), but such a move “marginalizes the Holocaust ... [by] defin[ing] the victims of Nazism in political rather than ethnic terms” (87). Even Arendt, who, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, discusses in detail the Nazi use of anti-Semitism, focuses mainly on the way racism was used politically. Thus, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Nazi use of anti-Semitic propaganda is paralleled with Bolshevik concerns with class origins. In addition, Novick notes that in the “first postwar years, much more than nowadays, the Holocaust was historicized—thought about as a terrible feature of the period that had ended with the defeat of Nazi Germany” (110). Saul Friedlander suggests that historical narratives of the Holocaust before 1960 were emplotted within the framework of “Catastrophe and Redemption” or “Catastrophe and Heroism,” in which the post-Holocaust history of Jews was interpreted as the “redemptive birth of a Jewish State” (*Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* 43 – 44). Thus, the Holocaust, to the larger American public, was tied to the Cold War, while, for the American Jewish public, it was largely read in relation to Zionism.

It was not until the 1960s that the Holocaust became a cultural and historical event in the American mind with the capture, trial, and execution of Adolf Eichmann.

Eichmann’s trial “was the first time that what we now call the Holocaust was presented to the American public as an entity in its own right” (Novick 133). Pynchon’s letters to

Corlies Smith indicate that between April and May 1962, he finished his revised chapter (Herman 261). Adolf Eichmann was captured in May 1960, went to trial April 11, 1961, and was executed on May 31, 1962. As such, his trial, and its subsequent publicity overlap Pynchon's writing quite neatly.⁵ I would argue that Foppl directly corresponds to Adolph Eichmann, and there are parallels between Eichmann's testimony and Foppl's own explanations of his motives. In a correlation, that, even if only coincidence, is still Pynchonian in its essence, Foppl "testifies" to Mondaugen about his participation in the Herero genocide in 1922, eighteen years after the fact. Eichmann is put on trial in 1961, and testifies to his participation in the Holocaust. In 1943, eighteen years before his trial, the official Nazi policy of genocide, established at the Wannsee Conference, was in full force. "Mondaugen's Story" offers an emplotment of German colonial history consistent with the widespread interest in the Holocaust in 1962. "Mondaugen's Story" is then a working out of the issues raised by Eichmann's trial. It seems likely that Pynchon revised the Herero material to focus on the genocide after he found the *Blue Book*; in the wake of Eichmann's trial, the character of Foppl, and, by proxy, Firelily's rider, was revised to resemble Eichmann. The Foppl / Firelily's rider narrative covers the 1904 rebellion and its aftereffects, including the concentration camps at Lüderitzbucht. Through his storytelling, which is reiterated in Mondaugen's dreams, Foppl offers testimony to the atrocities committed on behalf of German colonial policy under von Trotha. In the first

⁵⁵ Eichmann makes an appearance in another 1963 novel that investigates perpetrator guilt. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Mother Night*, protagonist Howard W. Campbell, Jr. deals with the consequences of his participation in the Nazi party during World War II in his role as American Spy; over the course of the novel, Campbell winds up in an Israeli jail with Eichmann. A further study of the intersections between *Mother Night* and *V.* would prove illuminating to the conceptual context of the Holocaust in the 1960s.

dream, Firelily's rider mentions many of the atrocities witnessed in the *Blue Book*—“sleeping and lame burned en masse in their pontoks,” “babies tossed in the air and caught on bayonets,” and “girls approached with organ at the ready, their [eyes] filming over in anticipated pleasure or possibly only an anticipated five more minutes of life, only to be shot through the head first and then ravished” (Silvester 116 – 117, V. 286 – 287). The second dream, in which the soldier is forced to “move consignments of Hottentot prisoners” (284), comes from chapter nineteen of the *Blue Book*. The final dream, of the Shark Island concentration camp, comes from chapter twenty. And although these dreams are taken from historical record, within them, the German soldier narrating the dream explains the process by which he is able to do these horrific things. It is in this perpetrator testimony that Foppl's connections to Eichmann become apparent. Both Foppl and Eichmann base their actions on the law of their leaders. For Foppl, von Trotha “taught [the soldiers] not to fear ... [to] forget all the rote-lessons you'd had to learn about the value and dignity of human life” (273). Elsewhere, in one of Mondaugen's dreams, Firelily's rider, Foppl's proxy, addresses the bureaucratic compulsion to participate:

[There was so much rot spoken about their inferior kultur-position and out herrenschafft—but that was for the Kaiser and the businessmen at home; no one, not even [von Trotha] believed it out here. They may have been as civilized as we, I'm not an anthropologist, you can't compare anyway—they were an agricultural, pastoral people ... No one is sure who fired first.

It's an old dispute: who knows, who cares? The flint had been struck, and we were needed, and we came. (276)

Here Foppl's feelings about his participation in the genocide are particularly telling. The racial positions of power are unimportant. Instead, Foppl is concerned with his role as a soldier, loyal to Germany's interests rather than hatred of the "othered" native. Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, notes that one of the cornerstones of Eichmann's defense, like that of the defendants in the earlier Nuremberg trials, was that he was following orders. However, she claims that "there was more involved [for Eichmann] ... than the question of the soldier's carrying out orders that are clearly criminal in nature" (135). In his defense, Eichmann declared that "he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts" (135), but that this had changed when faced with participation in the Final Solution. Arendt alleges that Eichmann "distorted" Kant's principals in order justify his actions, believing that he must "act as if the principle of [his] actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land" (136). Elsewhere, Arendt notes that "Eichmann tried a number of times to explain that during the Third Reich 'the Führer's words had the force of law'" (148) and that he was filled with "genuine, 'boundless and immoderate admiration for Hitler'" (149), going so far as to disobey orders from his direct superior, Himmler, that countermanded Hitler's mandate of the Final Solution. Eichmann testifies to a change in his perception of his participation in events, where he begins to justify perpetrating genocide through a revision of his own moral precepts.

Foppl originally seems to be filled with a “boundless and immoderate admiration” for von Trotha, even going so far as to kiss his portrait (273), and he bases his actions in the Herero Rebellion on what he learns from von Trotha. However, in the dreams, von Trotha disappears from the narrative, and Foppl’s finds a Zen-like peace to his murders, which henceforth are “different from the official language of von Trotha’s orders and directives, different from the sense of function and the delightful, powerless languor that are both part of following a military order that’s filtered like spring rain down countless levels before reaching you; different from colonial policy, international finagling, hope of advancement within the army or enrichment out of it” (287). This too reflects Eichmann’s testimony. Arendt notes that “Eichmann insisted time and again on the ‘different personal attitude’ toward death when ‘dead people were seen everywhere,’ and when everyone looked forward to his own death with indifference” (106). Eichmann relates this “atmosphere of violent death” to the threat against his own life: “we did not care if we died today or only tomorrow, and there were times when we cursed the morning that found us still alive” (qtd. in Arendt 106). Firelily’s rider mirrors this sentiment: “it had only to do with the destroyer and the destroyed, and the act which united them” (287). Thus, the “atmosphere of death” allows the act of murder to occur—“I’m going to kill you”—with the acceptance of the victim—“I thank you.” In this way, both perpetrator and victim are bound together. The shift from military opponent to victim foreshadows another shift. For Firelily’s rider, when the act of murder takes on a signifying action, just as the death of one victim in a genocide signifies the death of the people as a whole, the

“luxury of being able to see [victims] as individuals” must be abandoned (292). When Firelily’s rider is “mustered out” of the army, he becomes a supervisor at a concentration camp. In this position, he finds that “the blacks [matter] even less. [He doesn’t] recognize their being there in the same way [he] once had” (289). Instead, the Herero become a “collection”—raw data. Firelily’s rider knows “from statistics that twelve to fifteen of them died per day” but is “unable to wonder which twelve to fifteen” (291). Pynchon, here, traces the movement from warfare to genocide and offers a corollary to Arendt’s investigation on the “banality of evil.”

From the Herero Genocide to the Holocaust

Regardless of whether or not, as I have suggested, Foppl is Eichmann’s narrative proxy, it is clear that “Mondaugen’s Story” is grounded in the historical archive. However, as Pynchon never cites his sources for “Mondaugen’s Story” (even to the indirect extent that he does chapter III), the Mondaugen chapter raises issues surrounding fiction of genocide. One issue with creating a fictional account of any atrocity is the likelihood that such accounts will not be taken at face value. Of course, this is just as true of any historical narrative. Trouillot suggests that the difference between a work of history and a work of fiction is that the former “renews a claim to truth” (6). A fictional work makes no such claim, and, as Pynchon’s typescript makes clear, Pynchon himself is not necessarily concerned with historical truth as such. Pynchon’s historical intent is difficult to place. We have, of course, Pynchon’s admission of his penchant for “literary theft” or “being derivative” (in his introduction to *Slow Learner*). We also have his

concept of the historical implications of the Herero genocide: “When I wrote *V.*, I was thinking of the 1904 campaign as a sort of dress rehearsal for what later happened to the Jews in the ‘30’s and ‘40’s” (Seed 240). Pynchon acknowledges that this interpretation is “hardly profound ... [as] it must occur to anybody who gets into it even as superficially as [he does in *V.*]” (Seed 240). But to draw these comparisons clearly, Pynchon must ensure that the reader believe the history of the chapter; that is, that the Mondaugen story imply a truth claim in some way.

It is to this end that the chapter is interrupted by what I will call the historical voice—a separate narrator who offers a historical analysis of the Herero genocide. Pynchon attempts to resolve the myriad voices of “Mondaugen’s Story” through the locus of the grotesque dream state—that is, by allowing history to become fluid and unconscious. In this way, as the members of the “Siege Party” attempt to *re*-create 1904, Mondaugen *re*-lives 1904 within his dreams, none of which are actually his. However, even this tactic cannot account for the omniscient voice which interrupts the narrative to give the history of the Herero Genocide. Long before Foppl’s explanation of the Herero genocide is made clear, Mondaugen meets Vera Meroving, who asks him to view a Bondel executed by hanging, a murder which, it is implied, is Foppl’s work. Mondaugen replies, “No, no” (264), at which point, within the same sentence, the narrative launches into an encyclopedic summary of the Herero war, superficially connected to the image of the hanged man:

It had been a popular form of killing during the Great Rebellion of 1904 – 07, when the Hereros and Hottentots, who usually fought one another, staged a simultaneous but uncoordinated rising against an incompetent German administration. General Lothar von Trotha ... was brought in to deal with the Hereros. In August 1904, [German General Lothar] von Trotha issued his “Vernichtungs Befehl,” whereby German forces were ordered to exterminate systematically every Herero man, woman and child they could find. He was about 80 percent successful. Out of the estimated 80,000 Hereros living in the territory in 1904, an official German census taken seven years later set the Herero population at only 15,130, this being a decrease of 64,870 ... von Trotha ... is reckoned to have done away with about 60,000 people. This is only 1 percent of six million, but still pretty good. (264 – 265)

The reference to the Holocaust makes it clear that this passage is not Mondaugen’s narrative voice (within the passage). It is also unlikely that it is the voice of Mondaugen the storyteller, who could have made this information available at other more likely occasions. One way to read this voice, as do Herman and Krafft, is that Stencil, as the narrator, gives the historical background to Eigenvalue; thus, the “cynicism” inherent in “1 percent of six million” is the result of a historical “hindsight” from Stencil’s perspective in 1956 (“From the Ground Up” 285). However, out of the seven major Stencil chapters, none gives such an explicit description of history that is not mediated

through another character. Even in “Mondaugen’s Story” itself, this is the only occurrence of such a voice. Too, as Novick suggests, 1956 might be too early to account for such an interpretation from one who was not a Holocaust survivor. In this instance, we perhaps see the “bitch” of the chapter.

Certainly, we have in “Mondaugen’s Story” an attempt to give the mindset of a perpetrator of genocide. To preserve the authenticity of his narrative, which Pynchon has made possible through his method of mediating the history of the Herero genocide through the characters within the narrative, the characters must only advocate those aspects of the history to which they would have realistically subscribed. As such, neither Foppl, whose nostalgia for 1904 allows no such critique of German colonial policy, nor Mondaugen, who, in spite of his ignorance of the events of 1904, is still a “violent young [man ... who finds] the idea of defeat [and subsequent removal of German colonial possessions in South-West Africa] hateful” (248), can fully address topic from a victim perspective. However, it is almost equally unlikely that Stencil—who espouses no such interest in anything other than V. herself at any other time—would, in 1956, interpret the issue of the Holocaust in such an explicit manner. Taken with Pynchon’s letter, it seems likely that the cynical voice which interrupts is not Stencil, but Pynchon himself. This passage presents the turn upon which a revised historical interpretation of “Mondaugen’s Story” must depend.

Trouillot reminds us that “at some point, historically specific groups of humans must decide if a particular narrative belongs to history or fiction” (8). As I have pointed

out, Pynchon, while appropriating historical source material to found his narratives, is generally indifferent to the degree to which his material is taken as such. This is made clear in his alteration of dates, names, and events in the typescript version of “Mondaugen’s Story.” However, in his narrative aside, Pynchon not only lays bare the facts of the history of 1904—a history that other characters have only alluded to before this—but also clearly states *how* the reader should interpret the chapter from that point on. Thus, the greater historical framework of German colonial policy in 1904, namely that “German forces were ordered to exterminate systematically every Herero man, woman and child they could find” (264), establishes events of the Foppl sections as truth, even without citing, as Pynchon does elsewhere with Baedeker, his source material. Further, Pynchon’s aside demands that we read the story in-line with the history of the Holocaust. Through his explicit comparison of the Herero genocide and the Holocaust, Pynchon makes clear two assertions. The first is that the Herero genocide was horrifically effective, killing “80 percent” of the Herero people. The second assertion Pynchon implicitly makes is that the Herero genocide was a smaller version of the Holocaust, “only 1 percent of six million”—what he calls in his letter to Hirsch a “dress rehearsal.” Pynchon’s conclusion is by no means as facile as he makes it out to be. By this, and through the testimony he chooses for his narrative, Pynchon contends that the bureaucratic and cultural frameworks which made the Holocaust possible were already in place by 1904. In many ways, *V.* anticipates current scholarship on the Herero genocide. Silvester believes the (re)publication of the *Blue Book* will “provoke debate in relation to

three specific areas of academic and popular interest as it raises questions about genocide, comparative colonialism and the relationship between violence and memory” (xxxii).

Key to this idea is Silvester’s notion, frequently addressed in scholarship today, that “the Namibian genocide can only be fully understood in the context of the phenomena of genocide as a whole and that the genocides committed in the course of the twentieth century, after 1904, need to be dealt with in the context of preceding genocides” (xxxii).

Benjamin Madley, scholar in the Yale Genocide Studies Program, traces the connection between the Herero genocide and the Holocaust. In “From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe,” Madley argues that “genocidal rhetoric, annihilation war, and the use of concentration camps [in South West Africa] were transmitted across time and [directly] adopted [by the Nazi government]” (430). Jurgen Zimmerer, whom Madley references as a “historian ... on the case [of drawing parallels between colonial and Nazi genocide]” (429) and Joachim Zeller, mention the link between South West Africa and the Holocaust in the forward to their 2003 *Genocide in German South-West Africa*.

Andrew Zimmerman also makes mention of this link in his study *Anthropology and Anti-Humanism in Imperial Germany*. Most recently, a 90 minute documentary, *From Herero to Hitler*, which will trace the same connections between the South-West African colonial government and the Nazi government is currently in production, with Madley serving as historical consultant. Notable about all these works are their publication dates: Silvester (2003), Madley (2005), Zimmerer (2003, English translation 2008), Zimmerman (2001),

and the 2009 film. The current revival of the study of the history of the Herero genocide is interesting, if only for the fact that Pynchon made clear these connections, beginning with the South West African chapter of 1963's *V*. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that even with the recent increase of scholarship, Pynchon's prescient historical narrative has escaped any notice.

Pynchon's intent in "Mondaugen's Story" is both testimonial and epistemological. On the one hand, Pynchon attempts, just as his primary source, the *Blue Book*, does, to bring the Herero genocide into the historical canon of the twentieth century. However, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot points out, "Historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power" (55), a power that necessarily actively selects "producers," "themes," "evidence," and "procedures" (53), and actively silences others. It is this power that Pynchon accesses when he employs the traumatic sign of the Holocaust—the "six million" Jews murdered. By accessing this trauma, Pynchon insures that the narrative of "Mondaugen's Story" be understood not (only) within the context of colonial oppression but within the context of the extermination of the European Jews. This strategy permeates the Herero material with greater significance, as this genocide is shown to be the progenitor of the Holocaust. Thus, the history of the Herero genocide is immediately recognizable through the known history of the Holocaust. In insisting on a linear narrative of German genocide, Pynchon also makes available a historical narrative in which the Herero genocide is part of history of the Holocaust. This conflation of genocides is also epistemological to the extent that it

claims an understanding of the Holocaust itself through this material. It is no coincidence that Pynchon placed this chapter in the middle of his novel dealing with what Smith calls the “dehumanizing systems” of modern history. In a sense, it is the Holocaust that is central to the text, although only briefly alluded to. Pynchon attempts to testify to the Herero genocide through the narrative of the Holocaust.

However, Pynchon’s use of the *Blue Book* complicates the intent of the testimonies that Pynchon accesses. As previously noted, the *Blue Book* presents a largely native, and certainly non-German, perspective on the Herero genocide. We would do well to ask, then, how Pynchon’s appropriation of political testimony—both victim and bystander—affects the cultural and political weight of those sources when reproduced as perpetrator testimony. The *Blue Book* collects witness testimony from Herero victims, Cape Bastards who worked in non-military positions in the German government, and British colonial subjects from South Africa. On the one hand, the *Blue Book* cites these witnesses to “prove how the Germans waged their war, and how von Trotha’s extermination order was given effect to” (121). This is certainly one of Pynchon’s goals as well. In the discussion of *The White Hotel* which opened this section, I pointed to the tension between testimonial fact and its literary appropriation. Young writes that “by interweaving into fictional narrative the words of actual witnesses, ... novelists ... thus create the texture of fact, suffusing the surrounding text with the privilege and authority of witness” (60). Thus, the aim of appropriating historical fact is to suggest that the narrative might also be factual, thus reinforcing the truth claim made by the narrative.

Although his facts are not cited, Pynchon alludes to them with his deployment of ubiquitous Holocaust terminology, assuring the reader of their authenticity.

On the other hand, Pynchon takes legal witness testimony and recontextualizes it to suit his narrative purposes. It is interesting that Pynchon's revised chapter brings the text more in-line with historical fact, generally through large-scale quoting from his primary sources. We should be happy that Pynchon made these changes, even though by changing the format of his chapter, he changed the perspective from which the information is relayed to the reader. Herman and Krafft suggest that this is because "Pynchon wanted to show that his European characters could not or would not entertain [a native perspective]" (266). Although I agree with Herman and Krafft's position, it does not change the fact that "Mondaugen's Story" is nothing *but* native perspective re-focalized through Foppl / Mondaugen. As I have suggested, this is done in direct relation to Eichmann's testimony. However, this also reflects the construction of the *Blue Book* itself. Although the *Blue Book* is an archive of native perspective, this perspective is always mediated through its British authors, who, as we have already seen, had political motives for its production.

Herman and Krafft are correct in their conclusion that native perspectives are absent from the text. This is important as it never places the reader in a position of the victim. Instead, the reader must imagine himself as either the perpetrator, through Foppl, or at least, as a third-party witness, as Mondaugen. The only Bondelswaartz or Hereros we see are the victims of violence, both in 1922 and 1904. Indeed, if we read the guests

of Foppl's villa as "a League of Nations" (254), then the natives are those who are nationless. We might then read the party as a microcosm of World War II. Foppl "recreates 1904" so completely that, by the end of the party, all of his Bondelswaartz servants have been killed. Mondaugen leaves the party disgusted. He meets a Bondel on the road. Who gives him news of the rebellion: "Many Bondels dead, baases dead van Wijk dead. My woman, younkers dead" (304). "Mondaugen's Story" concludes: "Soon as they trotted along the Bondel began to sing, in a small voice which was lost before it reached the nearest Ganna bush. The song was in Hottentot dialect, and Mondaugen couldn't understand it" (304). The Bondel's "small voice," when taken with his statement, implies a truth about genocide in general, and the Holocaust specifically; although we who did not survive the experience can learn the facts of what happened, we will never understand the experience. As Elie Wiesel writes, "Only those who lived [in Auschwitz or Treblinka] know what these names mean" (xi). Thus, Pynchon's conclusion, perhaps, says more about his strategies than first apparent. By removing native perspective, Pynchon suggests, as does Wiesel, that only those who have experienced the trauma of genocide can truly understand it.

(Re)visions of the Herero Genocide in *Gravity's Rainbow*

While *V.* reproduces the cultural impact of the Eichmann trial on the American cultural psyche through the conflation of the Herero and Jewish genocides, *Gravity's Rainbow* proves a revision of Pynchon's own sense of the Holocaust narrative. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon offers a post-genocide narrative concerned with the

reconstitution of victims as political and social subjects. Just as “Mondaugen’s Story” in *V.* seemingly alludes to the historical event of the Eichmann trial, the Herero narrative in *Gravity’s Rainbow* reflects a further revision of the cultural significance of the Holocaust in the late 1960s. During this time, the Holocaust became more firmly bound to the (Jewish) American conception of the state of Israel. Peter Novick notes that “the Six Day War [of 1967] was certainly important [to the creation of our current conception of the Holocaust because] the fears of a renewed Holocaust on the eve of that war left their mark on American Jewish consciousness[;] also important was the way the image of Jews as military heroes worked to efface the stereotype of weak and passive victims, which ... had previously inhibited Jewish discussion of the Holocaust” (149). Novick notes, as does Saul Friedlander, that Israeli military successes played a role in (re)creating a narrative of “Holocaust and Redemption” through which the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and perhaps more importantly Jews who were not but could have been victims, might regain political and social selfhood through the creation and continued protection of the Jewish state (150). Pynchon’s narrative of the Zone-Hereros, his parallel to the victims of the Holocaust, reflects, however incompletely, an attempt to revise the narrative of victimization outlined in “Mondaugen’s Story” and create a new narrative of redemption and return. A comparison of the Herero narratives in *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* explicates the tension between the passive acceptance of the nameless victim and the active resistance of those demanding subjectivity that is always at play in narratives of genocide. While in *V.*, the Herero and Bondelswaartz natives are literally

voiceless, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon grants them the agency to testify. Further, by way of intertextual conversation with *V.*, Pynchon addresses the Holocaust and keeps it a central image in his novel. However, Pynchon's view of the historical representation of genocide is no longer one of chronological development. Instead, genocide is represented in the novel as a repetitive historical event, connected not linearly, but through an archetypal historical narrative.

To a large extent, *Gravity's Rainbow* is concerned with the juxtaposition of machination and death, as the signification of the Rocket⁶—the V-1 “buzz bomb,” the V-2, the 00000 model V-2, and the final, implied nuclear missile—makes clear. *Gravity's Rainbow* begins with an incoming rocket “screaming ... across the sky” (3) and ends with a descent, “the falling tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound, [reaching] its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of [an] old theater, the last delta-t” (775). Lawrence Wolfley describes *Gravity's Rainbow* as “the etiology of the Cold War and the nuclear balance of terror” (102); Kathleen Fitzpatrick concurs with Wolfley, arguing that “the true ‘present’ of [*Gravity's Rainbow*] may in fact be ‘the future-shocked American landscape of the 1960s and 1970s ... [and thus] *Gravity's Rainbow* is less about the events of the past than about the ways in which we read those past events in the present” (96). In his review of Pynchon's 2006 novel *Against the Day*, critic Louis Menand suggests that opposition is the unifying theme which runs throughout *all* of Pynchon's novels: “[In *Against the Day*, Pynchon] was

⁶ The capitalized use of “Rocket” refers to the rocket as sign of the intersection of technology and death rather than the specific V-2 rockets fired at England.

apparently thinking what he usually thinks, which is that modern history is a war between utopianism and totalitarianism, counterculture and hegemony, anarchism and corporatism, nature and techne, Eros and the death drive, slaves and masters, entropy and order, and that the only reasonably good place to be in such a world, given that you cannot be outside of it, is between the extremes.” To be more precise then, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon investigates the connections between the inhuman mechanical functions of modernity and those participating in or dehumanized by them.

Pynchon ties the obvious mechanical death of the Rocket—both in World War II and in the (present) cold war of 1973—to another industry of death during World War II: the Holocaust. In his paper “War as Background in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” Kachig Tololyan argues that as “*Gravity’s Rainbow* does not stress the most atypical or abhorrent aspects of Nazi German ... [by making] the genocide of the Jews central ... it is the Rocket, and not the Holocaust, that is central to his vision of World War II” (52). Tololyan emphasizes that while Germany’s creation of the Rocket is “an embodiment of the extreme tendencies of technological societies,” all Western societies “share certain values ... [such as] their willingness to focus all human and material resources on an object such as the Rocket” (52). While he provides a useful read of the Rocket’s function in the novel, Tololyan disregards the extent to which Pynchon binds the Rocket and the Holocaust together. Although the Rocket becomes the most obvious expression of technological annihilation, the Holocaust is still a central theme of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, albeit one founded much more on implication. Pynchon’s World War II revolves around

the collapse of the two extremes of modern society: bureaucratic genocide and technological mass death. The Herero exist in the narrative to realize a corporal expression of this twining.

In *V.*, Pynchon draws an explicit link between the Herero genocide and the Holocaust: though the genocide, which was “80 percent successful” (264), was “only 1 percent of six million, [it was] still pretty good” (265). “Six million” obviously refers to the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust, and, elsewhere in *V.*, Pynchon emphasizes this implication with Esther’s invocation of the Holocaust to refute the morality of abortion: “I guess on the rare occasions you bathe you wouldn’t mind using Nazi soap made from one of those six million Jews” (393). The Herero genocide echoes the Holocaust, which in turn is a reflection of the Herero genocide; however, the Herero genocide also is echoed in the 1922 Bondelswaartz Rebellion in which the Herero genocide is textually conflated with the destructive power of modern warfare. Firelily’s rider addresses the historical continuum traced in *V.*:

It seemed then that something had at last been brought to consummation ... [that] if it were parable (which he doubted) ... probably went to illustrate the progress of appetite or evolution of indulgence, both in a direction he found unpleasant to contemplate. If a season like the Great Rebellion [or Herero genocide] ever came to him again, he feared, it could never be in that same personal, random array of picaresque acts he was to

recall and celebrate in later years at best furious and nostalgic; but rather with a logic that chilled the comfortable perversity of the heart, that substituted capability for character, deliberate scheme for political epiphany; and for ...the sjambok, the dances of death between Warmbad and Keetmanshoop, ... the black corpse impaled on a thorn tree in a river swollen with sudden rain, for these the dearest canvases in his soul's gallery, it was to substitute the bleak, abstracted ..., the engineering design for a world he knew with numb leeriness nothing could now keep from becoming reality, a world whose full despair he ... couldn't even find adequate parables for, but a design whose first fumbling sketches he thought must have been done the year after Jacob Marengo died, on that terrible coast, where the beach ... was actually littered each morning with a score of identical female corpses, ... where, finally, humanity was reduced ... out of a confrontation the young of one's contemporaries ... had yet to make ..., humanity was reduced to a nervous, disquieted ... Popular Front against deceptively unpolitical and apparently minor enemies, enemies that would be with him to his grave. (296 – 297)

I quote at length to draw attention to both the larger implications of technology and death and also to the specific ways in which these address the Holocaust. The world that Firelily's rider foresees is one based on "engineering design" in which calculation replaces emotion and the abstract replaces the specific. It is within this world that "finally

... the young of [Firelily's rider's] contemporaries" will "reduce" humanity through the Holocaust. This is prescient indeed. Benjamin Madley traces the connections between the Herero genocide and the Holocaust and notes that "probably fewer than 40,000 Germans visited or lived in German South-West Africa prior to the rise of the Third Reich[;] it is therefore remarkable that out of a country of 80 million, so many prominent Nazis had direct personal connections to Wilhelmine Namibia," among them Hermann Göring, whose father Henrich Göring was *Reichskommissar* [head colonial administrator] (450). The historical connections of the two genocides are represented by the intertextual character of *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. The Hereros genocide is an important plot point in "Mondaugen's Story," and Pynchon reuses the Herero material as the basis for the Zone-Hereros in *Gravity's Rainbow*. While Pynchon's narrative strategy for describing the Hereros changes from one novel to the next, his depictions of German officials continues much in the same way, implying that the German mindset did not change from one genocide to the next. Both Weissmann and Mondaugen return as characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and their intertextual continuity provides a basis for interpreting, as Madley does, the intersections between German colonial and Nazi policy. Weissmann foreshadows this connection in his allusion to his participation in the Nazi party in *V.* when he asks if Mondaugen has ever heard of the "National Socialist German Worker's Party [or] Adolph Hitler?" (261). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Weissmann has become an SS officer overseeing the development of the Rocket, as well as the sado-masochistic mentor of Enzian, leader of the Zone-Herero. Mondaugen is a rocket engineer working for

Weissmann. Although “Weissmann was one of the people who had driven Mondaugen, finally, away to live in the bush [in 1922 South-West Africa],” Mondaugen and Weissmann “have found a rapprochement . . . among the rockets . . . because of some deeper connection which had always been there” (415). Mondaugen and Weissmann’s return links the German histories of genocide as well as that genocide to the Rocket itself.

It is interesting that Firelily’s rider envisions the Holocaust not during the casual military violence of the “Great Rebellion” but just after, during his time as a concentration camp official in Lüderitzbucht [Shark Island]. It is while working in the camp that his perception of the victims changes; the victims become statistical data—“logical” and “abstract”—rather than “individuals” (292). The concentration camp is the most tangible signifier of the Holocaust, but as Madley notes, the origin of the camp does not lie in Nazi Germany. In fact, the British in South Africa used concentration camps, themselves copied from Spanish camps in Cuba, to hold Boer prisoners in the late 1800s. However, the British and Spanish camps were for internment purposes only. In South-West Africa, there were “two variants of [concentration] camps [which] were then adopted, again refined, and deployed on a massive scale by the Nazis. Officially blurred together under the term *Konzentrationslager*, von Trotha’s [South-West Africa] camps were unofficially divided into two categories: camps geared simply to kill, and camps where prisoners were worked under conditions that routinely led to death” (Madley 446). The camp itself is a site of the interstice between inhuman mechanical death and human life, and as such, is no less “an embodiment of the extremes of a technological society”

than the Rocket. Hannah Arendt suggests an analogy between the two in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* when she concludes, “A victory of the concentration-camp system would mean the same inexorable doom for human beings as the use of the hydrogen bomb would mean the doom of the human race” (443).

Arendt finds her descriptions of the concentration camp in industrial terms. She describes the camp as a place where “murder is as impersonal as the squashing of a gnat. Some may die as the result of *systematic* torture or starvation, or because the camp is overcrowded and *superfluous human material must be liquidated*. Conversely, it may happen that due to a *shortage* of new human *shipments* the danger arises that the camps become depopulated and the order is now given to reduce death at any price” (my emphasis 443). Arendt’s “human material” echoes the “scores of identical female bodies” in Firelily’s rider’s testimony in *V*. While Firelily’s rider overtly links the Herero genocide to the Holocaust, his description of the dehumanizing factor at play suggests a link between genocide and the technological industry responsible for the creation of the Rocket. Firelily’s rider states that the “first fumbling sketches” of the Holocaust “must have been done the year after Jacob Marengo died.” Jacob Marengo was a Nama leader in the Nama Rebellion. He was killed on September 20, 1907. By 1908, the Herero and Nama populations of South-West Africa had been subdued and the last of the concentration camps were closed. The events after the culmination of the Herero genocide seem unlikely to represent a “fumbling sketch” of the Holocaust. The implications become clearer if we look at the events occurring in Europe and the United

States. 1908 was the beginning of the European buildup of arms leading to World War I. Perhaps more importantly, in 1908, Henry Ford introduced the Model-T Ford, ushering in a period of mechanical advancement—reflected in the advent of modern warfare of World War I—as well as the process of this advancement: the modern factory and assembly line. This development, more than any other, set the stage for both the invention of the Rocket and the horror of the Final Solution.

Paul Fussell, in his oft-cited *The Great War and Modern Memory*, routinely returns to *Gravity's Rainbow* to highlight his conclusions about the literary legacy of the Great War. Citing Alfred Kazin, Fussell posits that “it is the business of *Gravity's Rainbow* to enact [Kazin's] conclusion [that] war may be the ultimate purpose of technological society” (320). For Fussell, this is one of many ironies of the Great War; technological advances made warfare so terrible that it was unimaginable. This irony is evident in the centrality of the Rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The Rocket was first and foremost a scientific endeavor rather than a military one. As rocket engineer Franz Pökler states early in the research stage, “We'll all use [the rocket], someday, to leave the Earth. To transcend ... Someday ... they won't have to kill. Borders won't mean anything. We'll all have outer space” (406). Pökler here reflects a pre-modern war naiveté excised by modern war, as the old World War I saying “Never such innocence again” suggests. While *Gravity's Rainbow* thoroughly investigates the juxtaposition of technology and death, this concern is foreshadowed in *V*. While the colonial German administration resorted to nineteenth century means to carry out their extermination order—the sjambok,

the rifle, the bayonet, the gibbet—the Union of South Africa in 1922 applied thoroughly modern means to arrive at the same deadly result:

Over the horizon from the direction of the Union came two bi-planes ...
Now the bi-planes could be heard: a snarling, intermittent sound. They swooped in a dive toward the Bondelswaartz position: the sun caught suddenly the three canisters dropped from each ... They seemed to take a century to fall ... but soon ... there bloomed at least six explosions ... The cordon [of Union soldiers] moved rapidly ... killing the still-active and wounded, sending bullets into corpses, into women and children. (300 – 301)

Pynchon emphasizes the correlation between the 1904 genocide and modern war; Foppl, the ex-colonial soldier and participant in the genocide becomes “so excited” by the prospect of witnessing the bombing “that he slopped wine on the roof,” while the planes “[re]mind Mondaugen] ... of the two streaks of blood” from Foppl’s murder of a Bondel (300). The conflated images of blood, wine, and plane rather heavily insure that the 1904 genocide is interpreted as complicit with the technology of war.

In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the site of the concentration camp as genocidal space is again conflated with methods of technological production in the depiction of the Dora concentration camp. Dora was connected to the Mittelwerk at Nordhausen, an underground factory housing the production line of the V-2 rocket, and provided slave

labor to aid in the construction of the rockets. Dora began as a sub-camp of Buchenwald, but by 1944 had become a concentration camp in its own right. There were no extermination sites at Dora; instead, the inmates worked in dangerous, unsanitary conditions until they died. Dora then, like Lüderitzbucht in South-West Africa, falls under Madley's second category of camps. In his online collocation of V-2 information, Paul Grigorieff notes the human "cost" of the Mittelwerk: "of the 60,000+ detainees employed in and around the Mittelbau complex over a 20-month period, 26,500 did not survive ... [French historian and Dora survivor Andre] Sellier attributes 15,500 of these deaths to the camps or to 'transports,' and 11,000 to the period in April, 1945 when the camps were evacuated by the SS in the face of the American advance." In this instance, the concentration camp and the rocket are bound together, the former making the production of the latter possible. Hitler and the Nazi administrators seemed aware of this; in order to expedite the production of the V-2, Hans Kammler was put in charge of the Mittelwerk. His previous position was chief engineer for the construction of concentration and extermination camps, including gas chambers and crematoria.

The Centrality of the Holocaust in *Gravity's Rainbow*

Although Tololyan claims that "the Rocket, and not the Holocaust, ... is central to [Pynchon's] vision of World War II," it seems clear that the Holocaust, and more generally, genocide, is a central concern in both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is through the conflation of genocide as technological process and the Rocket as technological apex that the Holocaust becomes central to the novel. To be sure, even if Pynchon had not

made clear the centrality of the Holocaust in his novel, readers of *Gravity's Rainbow* would still likely expect to encounter the Holocaust, if only because of the cultural associations that the novel's setting in immediate post-war Germany evokes. It is true that explicit references to the Holocaust are limited, allowing Tololyan to make his claim. However, readers do explicitly encounter the Holocaust in *Gravity's Rainbow*, although not through the traditional image of the six million Jewish victims stated in *V*. Pynchon's foremost revision to the narrative of genocide offered in *V*. is the radical shift in who is defined as a victim of Nazi genocide. In doing so, Pynchon addresses what would, by the late 1970s, become subject of great debate in American culture. Peter Novick outlines this debate in his discussion of the difficulty that President Carter's Commission on the Holocaust faced in defining the term "Holocaust;" the definition changed from one specific to the six million Jews killed to "eleven million innocent victims exterminated—six million of them Jews" (218). The five million other victims of the Holocaust is a number survivor and famed Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal "invented" in order to highlight the "friends who suffered with [the Jews], whose families share common graves" (qtd. in Novick 215). Elie Wiesel, the chairman of the commission and then as now the most well-known survivor in America, was offended by this change and argued that "any attempt to dilute or deny [the] reality [of a Jewish essence of the Holocaust] would be to falsify it in the name of misguided universalism" (qtd. in Novick 218). Wiesel denies any "universalism" as "misguided," in part out of worry that focus on other victims might occlude the Jewish victims. Thus, Wiesel worries that "in a couple years,

they won't even speak of the six. They will speak only of eleven million" (qtd. in Novick 226). Ultimately, Wiesel bolstered his claim for the "priority of Jewish victimhood" through the appointment of survivors to the Holocaust Memorial Council insuring that "Carter's 'eleven million' never became operational doctrine at the [Holocaust] museum" and leaving the question, "Are the 'other millions' victims of *the Holocaust*, or in *addition to the Holocaust*?", unanswered by both Wiesel and the museum (220). While the crux of this debate involves the semantics of the term Holocaust as a description of the Nazi genocide, it points to a shift in the way Holocaust narratives and the Holocaust itself was (re)presented and received in American culture in the 1970s.

Although *V.* ties the Herero genocide solely to the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, *Gravity's Rainbow* makes a claim for the inclusion of all victims. The explicit descriptions of the German genocide in the novel involve not Jewish victims but victims from the "other five million." We are given "a Jehovah's Witness ... just out of Ravensbrück after being in since '36 (or '37, he can't remember)" (694) and the "slave laborers" (294), "foreign prisoners" (435), and "homosexual prison-camp inmates" (678) of Dora. While it doesn't inter any Jewish prisoners, Dora is unmistakably a German concentration camp, "surrounded by barbed wire and bright hooded lights" with "a huge refuse dump that always smoldered day and night" that is called the "treasure pile" because it is filled with "dolls, dresses, shoes, old bottles, [and] magazines with pictures" (415). Later, Nazi engineer Pökler "sees" but ignores "the starved bodies, ... the shuffling thousands in their striped uniforms" going to work at the Mittelwerk from Dora. Thus,

Pynchon's Holocaust narrative uses traditional imagery to evoke previous historical knowledge of the Holocaust, while interrogating the uniquely Jewish definition of the Holocaust. In doing so, Pynchon represents the Holocaust as a universal experience. By adhering to common representative signs of the Holocaust—the “striped uniforms,” the “starved bodies”—Pynchon suggests an equality of suffering; that is, he implies an equal condition among victims.

Saul Friedlander argues in his introduction to *Probing the Limits of Representation* that “the extermination of the Jews in Europe is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event. But [it is] an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an ‘event at the limits’” (3). Friedlander suggests that what places the Holocaust at the limits of representation is “the very fact that it is the most radical form of genocide encountered in history: the willful, systematic, industrially organized, largely successful attempt totally to exterminate an entire human group within twentieth-century Western society” (3). While Friedlander agrees that the Holocaust can be represented, he posits that its very extremity complicates any representation. Gary Weissman attributes this to “the deep disparity between the event and its depiction ... [reminding] us that neither words nor images can fully convey what it was like in the ghettos and the camps” (208). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is through Pökler that the reader finally experiences Dora; Pökler enters Dora to look for his wife and daughter who have been prisoners for years. For Pökler, as for perhaps many Germans, “he may have felt that he ought to look, finally. He was not prepared. He

did not know. Had the data, yes, but did not know with senses or heart ...” (439).

Weissman investigates the claim that “an authentic relation to the Holocaust lies in being a witness to the horror suffered by the Jewish victims” (210). Weissman argues that such an emphasis on “equating the Holocaust with its horror is problematic” as it offers “a reductive view of the Holocaust, ... which fails to acknowledge tremendous varieties of experience, emotion, and understanding among victims” (211). Pynchon’s vision of Dora is one of the most horrifying in the novel. When Pökler finally enters Dora, he has a visceral reaction.

The odors of shit, death, sweat, sickness, mildew, piss, the breathing of Dora, wrapped him as he crept in staring at the naked corpses being carried out now that America was so close, to be stacked in front of the crematoriums, the men’s penises hanging, their toes clustering white and round as pearls ... each face so perfect, so individual, the lips stretched back into death-grins, a whole silent audience caught at the punch line of the joke ... and the living, stacked ten to a straw mattress, the weakly crying, coughing, losers ... Pökler vomited. He cried some. (440)

The visceral horror of Dora abstracts its victims. Like the Hereros of “Mondaugen’s Story” in *V.*, the victims of Dora are unable to witness for themselves. They are literally a “silent audience” for Pökler. And while Pökler finds “on every pallet, in every cell, that the faces are ones he knows after all,” he is “impoten[t],” unable to do anything (440). Pökler eventually sits with “a random woman ... for half an hour holding her bone hand”

before he leaves. Pynchon never identifies the victims of Dora, save through Pökler's description of "foreign workers." In doing so, Pynchon pointedly opposes a definition of the Holocaust reduced to conventional narratives of Jewish suffering. However, he implies that horror is necessary to the epistemological task of representing the Holocaust. While Pökler "has the data," to fully know the Holocaust he must know with his "senses or heart." It is through the experience of horror that the true lesson of the Holocaust can become known. What Weissman really questions is not the evocation of horror, but the employment of this evocation as the motive for the narrative. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this visceral horror contrasts with the otherwise implied horrors of the Holocaust found elsewhere in the novel in a way that rather than reducing the Holocaust to one unimaginable horror, allows a more complete description to be made. Pynchon reveals that even when such horror is, and must be, known, it cannot lead to more than the acceptance of this knowledge. Pökler's "impotence" in the face of the horror of the concentration camp proves the problematic reception of any representation of genocide.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the term Holocaust is never used to define the Nazi genocide; the only textual use of "holocaust" alludes, quite literally, to the nuclear bombing of Japan, where a "shiny opera hat of Japanese silk ... reflects the coming holocaust" (71). However, this seemingly literal use of holocaust (through the image of its Japanese reflection) resonates with the Holocaust (a term in wide use by 1973) and reinforces the link between technological systems and genocide. There is a further doubling of the term, as the hat's owner is about to participate in a genocide. The scene in

which this use occurs says much about Pynchon's revised conception of the history of genocide. During Slothrop's trip down the Roxbury toilet, he meets Crouchfield, "the *only* ... westward man," and his "little pard Whappo," the hat's owner, who expect to be involved in "a [bloody as hell] shootout" with the only Indian (71). Crouchfield's brief story also models the narrative structure of all subsequent representations of genocide in the novel. Pynchon clarifies that Crouchfield is not the "'archetypical' westwardman ... [T]here was only one. There was only one Indian who ever fought him. Only one fight, one victory, one loss" (69). Crouchfield's story emphasizes what Pynchon describes in his letter to Hirsch: "the number done on the Herero head by the Germans is the same number done on the American Indian head by our own colonists and what [was done] on the Buddhist head in Vietnam" (241). In Pynchon's 1969 letter, the "number being done" on the respective heads of each subaltern culture is "the imposition of a culture valuing analysis and differentiation on a culture valuing unity and integration" (241). In the dichotomy Pynchon sets up in his letter, there is only one westwardman—the colonist—who violently inflicts the native with his beliefs. "The number done"—by colonizers on natives, by Western on non-Western thought, and by those in power (the Elect) on their subalterns (the Preterite)—is one in the same. Genocide, Pynchon argues, is one facet of this unequal power distribution. In the (re)vision of history offered in *Gravity's Rainbow*, these narratives do not exist linearly as they do in *V.*; rather, they are reiterations of the same story, of which there is only one.

The term genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1943 as a response to the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust. Lemkin hoped to create a legal framework with which to try genocide as a crime, and he was responsible for writing the first draft of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted in 1948. Article 2 of the resolution defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” While this definition clearly explicates the violent means to genocide, it compromises Lemkin’s own legal definition of genocide explained in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. In it Lemkin argues that “generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (qtd. in Shaw 19). Mass killings then are only one aspect of genocide; genocides are “effected through a synchronized attack on different aspects of life of the captive people”—“in the political field,” “the social field,” “the cultural field,” “the economic field,” “the biological field,” and “the field of physical existence” (qtd. in Shaw 19).

Although he defines genocide in *V.*—for both the Herero and the six million of the Holocaust—as physical extermination, Pynchon’s conception of genocide in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is largely attuned to Lemkin’s broader 1944 definition. As Crouchfield proves, violence is still writ large in Pynchon’s genocide narrative, but no less dangerous is the destruction of culture. Through various examples, Pynchon argues that there is only one genocide—the Western (Christian) annihilation through biopolitical means of the non-West. To this effect, Pynchon builds a concordance of genocides. The first explicit genocide narrative in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not of people, but of the dodoes of Mauritius. On the island of Mauritius in the seventeenth century, Frans Van der Groov “lost thirteen years ... systematically killing off the native dodoes for reasons he could not explain” (110). In his “systematic killing,” Van der Groov discovers something akin to Firelily’s rider in *V.* Firelily’s rider has an epiphany about genocide: “It had only to do with the destroyer and the destroyed, and the act which united them” (287). Van der Groov reaches this unity as he waits for a dodo egg to hatch, “ready to ... destroy the infant ... within its first minute of amazed vision ... Each hour he sighted down the barrel. It was then, if ever, he might have seen how the weapon made an axis potent as Earth’s own between himself and this victim ... There they were, the silent egg and the crazy Dutchman, and the hookgun that linked them forever” (111). All of Pynchon’s representations of genocide can be distilled into the connection between destroyer and destroyed. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this connection is mediated by a weapon. Van der Groov, it is true, “could not know ... that he was helping exterminate a race”

(112); he kills them only because he sees them as a “perversion”—of God’s creation itself. It is those who have lived through World War II who would “mak[e] sure [Van der Groov] understood just how guilty he was” and who would “teach him about genocide” (554).

The genocide of the dodos is followed by the 1916 Kirghiz uprising against Imperial Russian forces: “100 fleeing Kirghiz [were] massacred[;] ... Russian settlers ... surrounded and killed the darker refugees with shovels, pitchforks, old rifles, any weapon to hand. [It was] a common occurrence in Semirechie then ... [Russian settlers] hunted Sarts, Kazahks, Kirghiz, and Dungans that terrible summer like wild game ... Thousands of restless natives bit the dust ... Colors of skin, ways of dressing became reasonable cause to jail or beat or kill” (345). Pynchon begins this passage by noting the similarity between Kyrgyzstan and the “Wild West” (343). And like the Indians before them, the Kirghiz are not just being hunted; their cultural traditions are being destroyed. Russian diplomat Tchitcherine is sent to the Kirghiz after the rebellion was put down to “give the tribesmen ... an alphabet” (343). However, “Tchitcherine understands [while watching a Kirghiz ajtys—an improvisational singing duel] ... that soon someone will come out and begin to write [some of the traditional songs] down in the New Turkish Alphabet he helped frame ... and this is how they will be lost” (362). Although the Russian presence in central Asia is not traditionally seen as a genocide, Pynchon suggests that, in keeping with Lemkin’s definition of genocide as “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at

the destruction of essential foundations of the life of the national group,” any plan which overlays Western ideals on a non-Western society threatens the destruction of that group.

The Argentine epic poem *Martín Fierro* provides another iteration of Pynchon’s genocide narrative. The titular Fierro is a gaucho on the estancia. “Then the army comes and conscripts him. Takes him out to the frontier to kill Indians. It is the period of General Roca’s campaign to open the pampas by exterminating the people who live there: turning the villages into labor camps, bringing more of the country under the control of Buenos Aires” (393). After being forced to participate in this “extermination,” Fierro “flees” to the wilderness “to live with the Indians” (393). Again, *Martín Fierro* echoes the American Wild West, confirming Slothrop’s dream of Crouchfield. The plot of *Martín Fierro* also shares a great deal with the Herero genocide, especially within the narrative of “*Mondaugen’s Story*.” In fact, filmmaker Gerhardt von Göll, who wants to shoot *Martín Fierro*, also shot a British propaganda film about fictional Schwarzkommando units in Germany. Of course, the Schwarzkommando are real, and von Göll “is convinced that his film has somehow brought them into being” (394). Von Göll’s assertion that “what [he] can do for the Schwarzkommando [he] can do for [the Argentine’s] dream of pampas and sky” ties the two together, evoking a return “to the way it was before the continents drifted apart ... back to Gondwanaland ... when Río de la Plata was just opposite South-West Africa ... and the Mesozoic refugees took the ferry not to Montevideo, but to Lüderitzbucht,” which we know from *V.* housed the Shark Island concentration camp (394). While this method of employment fits every genocide

into a colonial narrative, through Pynchon's present (in 1973) conception of Western history, it also emplots it in such a way that these genocides are implicated in the language and structure of the Holocaust, where the killing is "systematic" and occurs at the site of the "labor camp."

Certainly, there are glimpses enough of the Holocaust to assure the reader that Pynchon is not oblivious to the plight of the European Jews. Descriptions of Jews in *Gravity's Rainbow* emphasize the "dehumanizing" strategy of anti-Semitism in Germany. Katje Borgesius, working undercover in Weissmann's rocket detachment, is "credited with smelling out at least three crypto-Jewish families" (99), although, to balance this, she also rescues "three Jewish families [by sending them] east" (107). For Katje, "Jews are [a truer currency] ... every bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars" (107). Leni Pökler evokes the German attitude which allowed the Holocaust, as she remembers singing "the charming anti-Semitic street refrain" of the interwar period about killing Walter Rathenau (166); Leni also provides a German foil for the "othered" Jew, as her "fair skin, her look of innocence" is contrasted with a "Jewess's darker coloring, her rawness" as they fuck (159). Other examples are more abstract. Just before the war, German actress Margherita Erdmann "[gets] the idea that she [is] part Jewish ... [and is] terrified of being 'found out' [by the Gestapo]" (482). In order to cure this fantasy, she moves to the badly-punned town of Bad Karma. There her symptoms manifest and Margherita begins murdering Jewish children, the result of a fantasy in which she is "Israel ... the Shekhinah" who "wander[s] all the Diaspora looking for strayed children

[to bring back to their people]” (486). But her fallacy is shown to be as false as her “heavy Yiddish dialect” when she calls her chosen victim a “little piece of Jewish shit” (486). Upon returning to Bad Karma after the war, Margherita is frightened by a woman she meets whose smile reflects “all the malaise of a Europe dead and gone” (466). It’s here that the significance of Pynchon’s pun becomes apparent. “The hidden machinery” of the war is becomes apparent in Margherita’s history. She, like other characters, turns to masochism in order to mediate her trauma.⁷ Another scene evokes the Holocaust through the conflation of images. Slothrop, “feeding a fire from the hair of a blonde doll with lapis lazuli eyes ... on one of the main arterioles of the ... [German] retreat ... [near a rocket unit that] had found corporate death,” discovers that the doll’s hair is human hair from “a Russian Jewess” (286). Hear, the conflation of symbols—war, rocket, and the “[horrible] smell of [human hair] burning” (286)—implies the Holocaust. This conflated image is juxtaposed with the Herero; in the preceding paragraph, the narrator mentions Slothrop’s meeting with Enzian and their “discussion on top of the freight car,” although textually, we will not see this meeting for another four pages.

The Hereros are most strongly linked to the Jews though the concept of being “passed over.” Those “passed over” are defined as the Preterite, over whom the Elect exerts constant power. Being “passed over” alludes to the Biblical Angel of Death in “Exodus” that killed the firstborn of Egypt. The Herero echo the Passover narrative in the

⁷ See Joseph Slade’s “Religion, Psychology, Sex, and Love in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” in Charles Clerc’s *Approaches to Gravity’s Rainbow* for a more thorough investigation of Sado-Masochistic acts in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

retelling of their history: “though the murders in blue came down again and again, each time, somehow, Enzian was passed over” (327). The Herero use the phrase “Mba-kayere” (“I am passed over”) as “a mantra for times that threaten to be bad” (368) later compared to “a mezuzah” (573). While being “passed over” implies survival, it also implies the risk of victimhood, and the promise of destruction to others. William Slothrop, Tyrone Slothrop’s forefather, in his tract *On Preterition*, defines “the Preterite [as] the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation ... without whom there’d be no elect” (565). The paradox of the victim is inherent in the dual meaning: those passed over are no longer true victims of violence, for those victims are all dead. However, the passed over are still Preterite, stripped of all political and social rights. Genocides occur at the border of the Elect and the Preterite, made possible only by the division of the two groups. This is the same argument that Foucault makes in *The History of Sexuality*: “If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, ... it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (137). Foucault’s concept of *bio-power* “[brings] life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculation” (143) as power is exercised over political life. When this political life is eliminated, a human life ceases to be protected by the laws and rights of the nation. Thus, as Hannah Arendt argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “a condition of complete rightlessness was created *before* the right to live was challenged [through extermination]” (my emphasis 296). It is this “complete rightlessness” that Arendt calls “the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human” (300). Giorgio Agamben returns to

the image of “bare life” in his read of the *Homo Sacer*—the life outside political life. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler names this “naked” life “derealized” or “the unreal.” Following Arendt and Agamben, she outlines the path by which genocide may occur. The victim, the body violently stripped of political rights and citizenship, becomes the victim of greater violence because, as Butler notes, “Those who are unreal have ... already suffered the violence of derealization...If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated” (33). Arendt, Agamben, and Butler each note that a life stripped of its rights is “precarious” in that the violence done to it occurs outside the juridical framework of law. Pynchon recognizes this facet of the Passover story and presents a revised take. In the Passover narrative, the Lord exercises power over life and race through destruction. “At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead” (NIV Exodus 12:29 – 30). The Lord, acting as the sovereign, kills so that “[the Egyptians and the Pharaoh] will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel” (Exodus 11:7). The Egyptians may be killed precisely because they are not Israelites. While in the Passover narrative, those “passed over” by the Angel of Death are not survivors in a strict sense, in order to survive, they had to participate in the Passover ceremony, requiring that they

mark “the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses” with the blood of the Passover lamb. “The blood [is] a sign ... ; and when [the Lord] see[s] the blood, [he] will pass over [those inside]. No destructive plague will touch [them] when [the Lord] strike[s] Egypt” (Exodus 12:7 – 13). The ceremony itself is an indication of the precariousness of even Israelite life, as it is only through the reproduction of social custom that the human becomes the Israelite, the blood on the door a “sign” of social membership. Pynchon’s appropriation of the Passover narrative implies that, rather than simply surviving, those passed over were done so for a purpose. The Israelites were passed over because they were the chosen people of the Lord. The Hereros believe “that [they] have been passed over by von Trotha’s army so they [they] would find the Aggregate” (573)—aggregate being both the testing stage code name for the V-2 rocket and a term representing the Diasporic context of the Zone-Herero community. The Rocket comes to represent for the Herero “how contingent ... how at the mercy of small things” both the machinery of the rocket and the people themselves can be (368). However, the Herero narrative is not as simple as that. The Herero are not certain about why they have been passed over, and their search for the rocket ultimately can be read as their search for a return to knowledge.

Subjectivity through Testimony

The Herero genocide is the principal case with which Pynchon finds his collocation of genocide narratives. However, while “Mondaugen’s Story” in *V.* was

largely assembled from witness testimony, the Herero material in *Gravity's Rainbow* moves away from the primary sources to create a genocide narrative that illuminates not the problems of the past but of the present. As I have discussed at length elsewhere, Pynchon's use of primary sources in *V.* is problematic as it cites witness testimony, some from Herero and Nama survivors, focalized through the perpetrators. Thus, "Mondaugen's Story" effectively silences the testimony of the victims even as it reproduces it. Considering Pynchon's goal to elucidate the colonial denial of native voices, this is an understandable narrative decision. However, both politically and epistemologically, this problematizes the issue of literary representation of genocide. In a February 18, 1975 lecture, Chinua Achebe pointed to the problem of colonial representation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; in particular, Achebe focused on Conrad's use of "Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor" and asked "whether a novel which celebrates [the dehumanization of Africa and Africans], which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art" (258). In *V.*, Pynchon uses the Herero genocide in order to make a greater claim about the linear progression of genocidal acts. Thus, the Herero and Nama prefigure the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust in a way that evacuates them of their witnessing voice. Like the Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, the Herero and Nama victims are background only. We can read this as Pynchon's conscious representation of colonial racism, but in a work that seeks to witness this tragedy, that seems a bit beside the point. This argument is analogous to arguments made about Stephen Spielberg's *Schindler's*

List. Frank Rich, in his 1994 *New York Times* opinion piece “Extras in the Shadows,” famously suggested that “[the] emotional power [of *Schindler’s List*] is muted by the anonymity of the film’s Jews ... [whose] souls are skin-deep ... They blur into abstraction, becoming another depersonalized statistic of mass death.” Rich’s argument is equivalent to Achebe’s; Conrad’s dehumanization of the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* is the result of the colonial, racial dialectic governing all imperial acts, just as is Spielberg’s dehumanization of the Jewish victims in *Schindler’s List*. The dehumanization of the victim in fictionalized genocide narratives is dangerous because it mimics the process by which the genocide is able to occur. In addition, by relegating the victims to the narrative background, the author appears to evoke, as Weissman might argue, the horror of the event, while at the same time evacuating it of any authentic meaning as a representation of genocide.

In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we are given the history of the Herero genocide from the perspective of survivors and second-generation survivors brought “back to the Metropolis [by Rhenish missionaries] as specimens of a possibly doomed race,” “taken back to Germany as servants, by soldiers who went to put down the [Herero uprising],” or brought “as part of a scheme ... for setting up black juntas ... for the eventual takeover of British and French colonies in black Africa” (314). While taken to Germany under various colonial contexts, the Herero do not define themselves as German subjects. Instead, they are “a people now, Zone-Hereros, in exile for two generations from South-West Africa” (314), named Schwarzkommando (black troops) by both the German and

British armies. From this perspective two generations on, the Herero are still trying to overcome the trauma of that genocide, specifically through testimony and the revision of their own historical narrative. The Zone-Hereros, usually through their leader Enzian, testify first-hand to the genocide of 1904. Enzian tells Slothrop, “I think we [exist], but only in a statistical way ... the slightest shift in the probabilities and we’re gone—schnapp! like that” (367). For Enzian, this “statistical” existence is the result of surviving genocide. Enzian goes on to explain the genocide to Slothrop:

Forty years ago, in Südwest, we were nearly exterminated. There was no reason. Can you understand that? *No reason*. We couldn’t find comfort in the Will of God Theory. These were Germans with names and service records, men in blue uniforms who killed clumsily and not without guilt. Search-and-destroy missions, every day. It went on for two years. The orders came down from a human being, a scrupulous butcher named von Trotha. The thumb of mercy never touched his scales. (367 – 368)

Enzian tells Slothrop the Zone-Herero mantra, “Mba-kayere,” and explains that “to those of us who survived von Trotha, it also means we have learned to stand outside our history and watch it, without feeling too much” (368). Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub investigate the intersection of testimony, trauma, and history in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Laub posits that “the traumatic event ... took place outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality,

sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after” (69). Enzian’s testimony to Slothrop reflects this impossibility of history. The Hereros who survived “stand outside [their] history” in order to function. Enzian’s testimony also points to the impossibility of understanding the traumatic event. As he says, “there was no reason” for the genocide. Enzian pleads with Slothrop for understanding, but he himself can “find no way to account for his own survival” (328).

Cathy Caruth investigates the possibility of a history of trauma in “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” her read of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*. In Freud’s account, “Moses created the Jews,” but, unlike in the Biblical account, Moses was an Egyptian rather than an Israelite (Caruth 183). Freud’s account of the Exodus narrative has the Egyptian Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt in order to preserve his own monotheistic god. Thus, as Caruth notes, “it is not so much the return to a freedom of the past, as a departure into a newly established future” (184). Freud goes on to claim that after being led out of Egypt, the Israelites “murdered [Moses] in a rebellion; repressed the deed; and in the passing of two generations, assimilated his god to a volcano god named Yahweh, and assimilated the liberating acts of Moses to the acts of another man, the priest of Yahweh (also named Moses)” (184). Caruth explains that “the captivity and return, while the beginning of the history of the Jews, is precisely available to them only through the experience of a trauma” (185). For Freud, it is this trauma that is both repressed and reiterated which leads to the founding of Jewish history.

Caruth interrogates the linkages between history and trauma and concludes that a history of trauma “can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (187). Thus, the trauma “is not experienced as it occurs, [but] is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (187). While the Zone-Hereros find in the Rocket a connection to traditional Herero history (before the trauma occurred), we can also see that the Rocket is firmly connected to the machinery of death that aided the shattering of Herero history. Their focus on the Rocket, as SS troops during the war and later as nationless Zone-Hereros, is a historical repetition of the very same forces that caused the trauma. Freud denies the conventional employment of Jewish history as one of exile and return in favor of one which reiterates trauma. This is analogous to the Hereros’ own belief in return, which is ultimately denied them as a result of their own trauma.

Caruth also notes that “the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others” (188). In this, Caruth suggests a psychoanalytical counterpoint to White’s notion of historical employment. Freud, in “attempt[ing] to explain the Nazi persecution of Jews [during and after 1934]” (182), arrives at a concept of Jewish history founded on the reiteration of a single traumatic event. Thus, “the murder of Moses ... is in fact a repetition of an earlier murder in the history of mankind, the murder of the primal father by his rebellious sons,” just as “[interpreting] the death of Christ as the atonement for an original sin ... is [a belated and unconscious remembrance] of the murder of Moses” (187). Each reiteration of the trauma takes the same narrative form and is subject to the same historical interpretation as the

previous history, even when those traumas are bound in the unconscious. Freud's read here is similar to Pynchon's own representations of historical narratives of genocide, each a reiteration of the same formal narrative trope—the murder of the native by the Westwardman. Pynchon's narratives suggest that this murder is always repressed in the perpetrators in order to perpetuate the myth of Western (Christian) enlightenment. The victims find it harder to repress the trauma, but are still forced to repeat it. It is no different for the Zone-Herero. Enzian and the Zone-Herero seek to return to tribal history, but are unable to escape their own historical reiteration of the trauma of genocide represented in both the Rocket and race suicide.

For Enzian and the Hereros, the quest for the 00000 Rocket is a way to reclaim history. As Enzian's testimony to Slothrop implies, the 1904 genocide fragmented and disrupted the Herero concept of history, placing them outside of it. Of course, Pynchon asserts that it is the "Christian sickness" (325) brought by the Rhenish missionaries that first disrupted the circular history of the Herero culture. However, while the shift from a circular to linear mode of historical employment obviously disrupted Herero culture, possibly to the point of destruction, and as such can be understood as an act of genocide, the immediate trauma of the 1904 extermination of the Herero people allows no movement at all on either a circular or linear system; it offers only an ever-repeating narrative. Enzian believes the 00000 Rocket "is the key that will bring [the Zone-Hereros] back, restore [them] to [their] Earth and to [their] freedom" (534). For Enzian, this restoration goes back to South-West Africa and Herero tradition. He seeks a return to

the “Center without time ... where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place” (323). In the Rocket, the Herero find a symbolic connection with Herero tradition, represented in the mandala insignia they wear.⁸ Andreas, another Zone-Herero, again explains to Slothrop:

In our villages the women lived in huts on the northern half of [a] circle, the men on the south. The village itself was a mandala ... And in the center ... is the pen where we kept the sacred cattle. The souls of ancestors. All the same here ... The four fins of the Rocket made a cross, another mandala ... Each opposite pair of vanes worked together, and moved in opposite senses. Opposites together. You can see how we might feel it speak to us, even if we don't set one up on its fins and worship it. But it was waiting for us when we came north to Germany so long ago [...] even confused and uprooted as we were then, we *knew* that our destiny was tied up in its own. That we had been passed over by von Trotha's army so that we could find the Aggregate. (573)

The Zone-Herero quest to find the 00000, and failing that to rebuild the 00001, becomes the process by which the Hereros may effect a return. Thus, the process of “assembly” of the 00001 is the process of the Herero themselves: “a Diaspora running backwards, seeds

⁸ Steven Weisenburger, in “The End of History? Thomas Pynchon and the Uses of the Past” in Richard Pearce's *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, notes that Pynchon's sources for information on Herero traditions and culture were likely F.W. Kolbe's *An English Herero Dictionary* (1886) and I. Irle's *Die Herero* (1906)

of exile flying inward in a modest preview of gravitational collapse” (752). The image of the Diaspora in reverse again links the Herero to the Jews who survived the Holocaust. As Friedlander and Novick note, one representation of the Holocaust in the 1970s was that of “Holocaust and redemption.” The Hereros too seek to find redemption from the ashes of their genocide.

The Final Zero: Herero Self-genocide and the End of History

Enzian’s desire for a return mediated by the rocket is not the only reiteration of the Herero genocide: “inside the Schwarzkommando there are forces ... who have opted for sterility and death” (321). Here, Pynchon bases his narrative on historical fact. He notes that “a generation earlier, the declining number of live Herero births was a topic of medical interest throughout southern Africa” (321). Pynchon’s source is a 1944 pamphlet by W.P. Steenkamp titled *Is the South-West African Herero Committing Race Suicide?*. Steenkamp seeks to disprove the “widespread belief [in South-West Africa] that the declining birthrate amongst the Herero is due to a nation-wide determination for committing national or race suicide” (8). This belief hinges upon the fact that “as a race [the Herero] could not reconcile themselves to the idea of subjection to Germany and thus loss of independence” (8). Steenkamp points to many causes of the declining birthrate, from the prevalence of gonorrhoea to the length of the cervix in Herero women to alcoholism and abortion, but claims that these are all individual causes rather than facets of a “determination for race suicide.” Pynchon, in his letter to Thomas F. Hirsch, counters

that he “find[s the idea of race suicide] perfectly plausible, maybe not as a conscious conspiracy, but in terms of how a perhaps not completely Westernized people might respond” (Seed 242). It should be said that Pynchon’s description of the medical interest in the Herero decline as a direct colonial anxiety is straight out of Steenkamp’s pamphlet. Pynchon’s narrator asks, “What’s a colony without its dusky natives? ... Just a big hunk of desert, no more maids, no field-hands, no laborers for the construction or the mining” (321). Steenkamp claims, “The native is the servant of the white man in South Africa ... In the future, he will more and more become the servant of the white man—the men as houseboys and the women as dairy laborers” (37). But for Pynchon, “colonies are much, much more” (322). They are a place of indulgence, “where [a man] can fall on his slender prey roaring as loud as he feels like, and guzzle her blood with open joy” (322).

Pynchon’s colonies imply a violence inherent in Western culture. Perhaps because they may freely indulge in the violent conquest of the colonies, the “white Afrikaner” after “look[ing] at [the Hereros’] faces ... lined beyond the thorn fences, and ... [know] beyond logical proof: there *was* a tribal mind at work out here, and it had chosen to commit suicide” (322). For these Herero, Pynchon explains this “determination for race suicide” as the logical choice between the traditional tribal system of thought and the Western (Christian) system: “It was a simple choice for the Hereros, between two kinds of death: tribal death, or Christian death. Tribal death made sense” (322). “Tribal death” in South-West Africa suggests that the Herero were unable to come to terms with German cultural and imperial domination.

While Pynchon suggests in his letter to Hirsch that “tribal death” need not be a “conscious conspiracy,” for the Zone-Hereros, the act of race suicide is both conscious and political. Naming themselves “the Empty Ones,” they “guarantee a day when the last Zone-Herero will die, a final zero to a collective history fully lived” (323). Race suicide in this case is a doubling of the trauma of the 1904 genocide, pointing first to the act itself and again to the subsequent act of “tribal death.” Thus, “[the Empty Ones] mean to carry on what began among the old Hereros after the 1904 rebellion failed. They want a negative birth rate. The program is racial suicide. *They would finish the extermination the Germans began in 1904*” (my emphasis 321). This information is given through the narrator rather than a Herero, which complicates a clear reading of Herero goals, though it is clear that the Empty Ones consciously reiterate the act of “tribal death.” However, the syntax suggests, in accordance with Pynchon’s historical sources, that this death was the result not of the genocide, but of the “failed 1904 rebellion.” Whether the Empty Ones recognize this as a continuation of the 1904 genocide is less so. In fact, though “tribal death made sense” to the “old Hereros” back in South-West Africa, “the Empty Ones now exiled in the Zone, Europeanized in language and thought, split from the old tribal unity, have found the why of it ... mysterious” (322). Pynchon here argues for the incompatibility and even incomprehensibility of the two systems of history—tribal/circular and Western/linear. Unfortunately for the Zone-Herero, they are already assimilated into linear history, and are forced to participate in it. The Empty Ones apply a linearity to their method of self-genocide lacking in the tribal version of race suicide;

they are consciously counting down to zero. As victims of genocide, they are, as Enzian states, “outside” history in the general sense, but the history they are outside of and the history in which they are firmly implicated, is the Western logic of chronologic, linear time. Returning to Caruth’s assertion that trauma leads to a continual repetition of that trauma, Herero race suicide is a historical expression of the trauma of the 1904 genocide. Thus, both race suicide and the Rocket amount to different iterations of the same narrative. As Enzian states, “The Eternal Center can easily be seen as the Final Zero. Names and methods vary, but the movement to stillness is the same” (323).

While both narratives of the Herero future address the genocide through a reiteration of trauma, they both portend a shift within narratives of genocide beginning in the 1970s. Enzian notes that the Rocket, and if not that, something, “is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and our freedom” (534). The Empty Ones also couch their talk of suicide in “freedom.” Joseph Ombindi, the leader of the Empty Ones, declares, “Suicide is a freedom that even the lowest enjoy” (746). Enzian’s statement can be read as a return to the Eternal Center of tribal history, but it just as easily can represent a return to self, a restoration of the human. In 1948, the same year as the resolution on genocide, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, ... shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.” As

Joseph R. Slaughter notes, the UDHR addresses both “the world that the law imagines, or images, in principle and the one that it addresses in fact” (3). Thus, Article 1 of the UDRH states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood,” even as the preamble belies this claim by asserting the need “to secure [the] universal and effective recognition and observance.” Slaughter, citing John Humphrey, first director of the United Nations Human Rights Division, calls this “the tension ... between what everyone knows and what everyone should know” (3). Arendt points to this tension in her discussion of human rights in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declarations of such general rights provided. Actually the opposite is the case. It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man. (300)

While everyone “knows” what these rights are, this does not mean that they are effected in the real world. Slaughter reads the discourse of human rights against the *Bildungsroman*, which he loosely defines as “the didactic story of an individual who is socialized in the process of learning for oneself what everyone else (including the reader) presumably already knows” (3). Both human rights discourse and the *Bildungsroman* are

narratives of the socialization of a subject from individual to a member of society: the human being imbued with socio-political rights. Too, “both ... articulate visions of human personality development that valorize a process of narrative self-(re)formation as the proper mode of citizen-subjectivation” (268). Thus, the *Bildungsroman* is the mode by which the “derealized” victim might regain subjectivity and agency.

Laub suggests that “there is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus come to *know* one’s story ... One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life” (78). While Laub is concerned with the therapeutic effects of witnessing, he presents an interesting corollary between “telling,” “knowing,” and “living life.” Testimony is necessary to evacuate the hidden trauma thus “know” yourself. It is only in this way that the victim might fully “live.” In this way, testimony creates a complete subject. If this testimony is “[in]adequate, the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues” (78). In both Enzian’s return to the Eternal Center and the Empty Ones’ Final Zero there is an attempt to move from the position of victim—“naked life”—to one of social completeness. Thus, Joseph Ombindi finds suicide not only a method of gaining freedom but a sign that this freedom has been attained. Both the Eternal Center and the Final Zero seek to “(re)form” the Zone-Hereros, to return them to a pre-colonial Tribal unity. Ultimately this is impossible for the Herero, who have been “infected” by the “Christian sickness” (325). Tribal unity is something the Empty Ones have “really only heard about [and] can’t ... believe in” (325). The socialization promised by the *Bildungsroman* and by human rights discourse is predicated

upon a socialization to Western culture. Arendt reflects this privileging of Western culture when she divides naked life and political life into the “savage” and the “civilized,” leaving no room for the rights of tribal society. It is notable that the Zone-Hereros, though a “people,” do not attempt a physical return to South-West. They instead attempt to regain subjectivity through a reiteration of their trauma.

The Hereros assume that it is their “real Destiny, to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it’s all squeezed to the last drop,” but they assumed that “this holy Text had to be the Rocket ... [their] Torah” (529). However, the Rocket has only “seduced [them] while the real Text persisted, somewhere else, in its darkness, [their] darkness” (529). Enzian discovers that the real Text is much larger than the Rocket, bigger than the war itself; it is brought about “by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques” where only “the human elite [who have] no right at all to be where they are” understand the “needs ... of different Technologies” (530). The Text is then the workings of the elite upon the preterite, a dichotomy of power that founds all colonial relationships, as well as those leading to genocide. The Herero ultimately fade out of the novel without making much progress. Enzian’s discovery that the real Text is one by which the Elect bring their techniques to bear on the Preterite is largely the argument made in Pynchon’s collocation of genocide narratives, but such a reading denies redemption for the Preterite.

The Implications of Pynchon's Narratives of Genocide

Gravity's Rainbow ends in Los Angeles in an alternate present underscored by fear of nuclear attack, where Richard Nixon is Richard M. Zhlub, “night manager of the Orpheus Theater” (769). This conclusion suggests that the action of the novel has been a film within the novel. It is more interesting that the novel moves from past to the present, in which the Rocket is perhaps even more a threat than during World War II. By ending in the present, Pynchon makes clear that the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* was always situated there. Thus, all historical narratives in the novel are, as Fitzpatrick notes, “read through the present.” Shawn Smith, citing Joseph Slade, proposes that the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* is a Vietnam veteran and, as such, “is his *narrator's* attempt to ... establish a line of continuity between World War II and the Vietnam War” in opposition to Pynchon's own historical method of fragmentation (59 – 60). But whether Vietnam vet or Pynchon himself, both see the past genocides as reiterations of the (1973) present war in Vietnam. What is clear about each narrative of genocide is that they all deny the possibility of redemption or return. As Pynchon's Father Rapier, Devil's Advocate, argues:

Once the technical means of control have reached a certain size, ... the chances of freedom are over for good ... It is possible that They will not die ... Death has been the source of Their power ... We have to carry on under the possibility that we die *only* because They want us to: because

They need our terror for Their survival ... It must change radically the nature of our faith. To ask that we keep faith in Their mortality, faith that They also cry, and have fear, and feel pain, faith They are only pretending Death is Their servant ... To believe that each of Them *will* personally die is also to believe that Their system will die—that some chance of renewal, some dialectic is still operating in History. To affirm Their mortality is to affirm return. (548 – 549)

The narratives of genocide in *Gravity's Rainbow* suggest that genocide is the natural outcome of any encounter between the West and non-West.

While Pynchon scholars are quick to point out Pynchon's use of fragmented history in order to emphasize the postmodern, post-historical teleology of nuclear war;⁹ his focus on the intersections of industry and the individual;¹⁰ his use of film in *Gravity's Rainbow*;¹¹ and even his evocation of the colonial dichotomy of power,¹² rarely do they more than note the issue of genocide in his novels. I have made a case for the centrality

⁹ See Shawn Smith's *Pynchon and History: Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* and Gary Thompson's "Pynchonian Pastiche" in Niran Abbas' *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*.

¹⁰ See Kachig Tololyan's "War as Background in *Gravity's Rainbow*" in Charles Clerc's *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow* and Kathleen Fitzpatrick's "The Clockwork Eye: Technology, Woman, and the Decay of the Modern in Thomas Pynchon's *V.*" in Niran Abbas' *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*.

¹¹ See Scott Simmon's "Beyond the Theater of War: *Gravity's Rainbow* as Film" in Richard Pearce's *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*.

¹² Most critics gloss this point in summaries of the Herero narrative in *V.* or *Gravity's Rainbow*. See David Seed's chapter on *Gravity's Rainbow* in *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*. For a deeper reading of colonialism in Pynchon, see Michael Harris' "Pynchon's Postcoloniality" in Niran Abbas' *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*.

of genocide in both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is clear that the Herero serve as more than simply a reiteration of Western violence upon the non-West. While this is certainly one aspect of both novels, the continual references to the Holocaust suggest a more specific purpose. Pynchon's narratives of genocide exist not as a linear progression of history leading to the Holocaust. Instead, they are a collection of narratives read not through an archetype of the past—the Westwardman—but through the ever-altering representation of the Holocaust in American culture. Thus, current representations of the Holocaust inform readings of the Holocaust just as Pynchon means his genocide narratives to in turn inform the readers. Both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* should be considered novels of genocide, and thus read alongside other novels of the Holocaust and the Herero genocide. Only in this way can the context of genocide in the novels be fully understood. And while the Rocket is less and less a cause for alarm in our current historical moment, genocide continues to threaten Preterite cultures around the world. Pynchon shows that the Rocket is a false text for the Herero. While Pynchon's genocide narratives deny redemption, a focus on these narratives allows for a more complete understanding of *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*.

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