

Gravity's Rainbow: Pynchon's Holocaust Allegory

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Much critical exegesis of *Gravity's Rainbow* ultimately registers the cultural and social shifts dramatized by Pynchon's novel in American terms. European history is measured by its impact on American culture. This is a consensual reading vindicated by the destination of the final V-2 rocket, the Orpheus movie theatre in Los Angeles. There is too much Pynchon criticism to summarise here, but two examples will indicate this Americanist critical tendency.

For Dale Carter, Pynchon represents the way the conclusion of the Second World War allows a transformation from imperialism to totalitarianism. Military violence and territorial conflicts give way to ideological battle and the Cold War. The manipulation of reality and illusion becomes the new way of exercising geo-political power. Thanks to the Potsdam Conference, around which Tyrone Slothrop skulks, nation states may have turned into superpowers in which national boundaries are unclear, but the cultural paradigm that mystifies state, political and economic force is identified as American or, more specifically, Hollywood.

David Seed is equally specific in targeting an American cause motivating a postwar ideology. Seed traces the American military-industrial complex to the "Rocket-cartel" which results from the transition from wartime to postwar corporate activity and its incorporation of multinational political power. The American military-industrial complex is related back to the German multinational IG Farben. The implication of the German firm in the Holocaust, through its manufacture of Zyklon B and through the Buna Werke concentration camp/factory on the outskirts of Auschwitz, would demand ideological work (mystification) to disguise the human cost of what eventually came to be American interests. While Seed does not relate the problems of historical representation foregrounded by this novel to the unacceptability of American interests, he does imply that the problem of historicizing the Holocaust, as it appears in this novel, lies in other (American, Cold War) historical narratives' subsuming it: "Pynchon scrupulously avoids exploiting such [Holocaust] details and concentrates instead on IG as a *process*, a steady relentless agglomeration of power" (192). Developing Seed's argument, it is possible to historicize the Holocaust, differentiate it from this larger

unfolding of events of which it is a putative part, and, what is more, dislocate it (at least momentarily) from the ideologies that attend and rewrite the evolution of American history. This calls for a deliberate and strategic de-Americanisation of the text, a resistance to, but not denial of, the reality of the way Holocaust memory has been appropriated for ideological ends—allowing a critical space in which to privilege rather than marginalize European experiences.

The concept of allegory might provide this space. Pynchon's critics have often described the sense of historical indeterminacy caused by problems of historical representation in allegorical terms. Without explaining the complexity of the concept, Paul Fussell describes Brigadier Pudding's sadomasochistic rituals as an "allegory" (219) of his experiences during the First World War. Only through allegory can the articulation of "military memory" be "freed from all puritan lexical constraint and allowed to take place with a full appropriate obscenity" (213). Pudding has difficulty remembering and narrating the fate of his medical officer, Pointsman senior, who

caught a bit of shrapnel in the thigh at Polygon Wood, lay silent for seven hours before they, without a word before, in that mud, that terrible smell, in, yes Polygon Wood . . . or was that—who was the ginger-haired chap who slept with his hat on? ahhh, come back. Now Polygon Wood . . . but it's fluttering away. Fallen trees, dead, smooth gray, swirlinggrainoftreelikefrozensmoke . . . ginger . . . thunder . . . no use, no bleeding use, it's gone, another gone, another, oh dear . . . (GR 76)

Although Pudding cannot place these memory fragments in a linear narrative of cause and effect, a leitmotif emerges that seems to be the one ordering principle of these memories and their narration: mud and shit. "The mud of Flanders gathered into the curd-clumped, mildly jellied textures of human shit, piled, duckboarded, trenched and shell-pocked leagues of shit in all directions, not even the poor blackened stump of a tree" (79). Mud, or shit, literally covers the scene of death—the actual, historic moment of death—that Pudding cannot recall. We do not know whether Pointsman lives or dies. Figurally, mud and shit stand in for this moment of death. An operative of the Firm, the son of Pointsman, arranges sadomasochistic sessions in which Pudding participates with another of the Firm's agents, Katje Borgesius; the sight of her as dominatrix makes Pudding think "[o]f the night we first met'" (233). Death has been reconfigured as female. Through this figure coherent narratives of previously unrepresentable death start to emerge. Coprophagy seems to be the ultimate memory prompt. Pudding's ingestion of Katje's feces allows the incorporation of

memories of things previously forgotten. Its smell "is the smell of Passchendaele, of the Salient. Mixed with the mud, and the putrefaction of corpses, it was the sovereign smell of their first meeting, and her emblem" (235). Death has now been reconfigured as fecal and female—the abject female.

What, then, is allegorical about this scene? As Bainard Cowan observes:

Allegory has arisen at such moments in history when a people has found itself in a crisis of identity, its members seeing themselves as inheritors of a past tradition of such authority that the tradition is identified with their very name as a people, yet on the other hand finding much of that tradition morally or factually unacceptable. (11)

Military justifications of war, or rather the transcendent authorities to which these discourses refer, are no longer tenable. The traditions or founding narratives of society, implied in and authorizing all its interpretive activities, are no longer relevant in light of historical change—in this case, war. With no legitimizing tradition, history, or rather the attempt to render it in language, becomes meaningless (Madsen 3). Allegory therefore describes

a radically fallen world in which language has become an equivocal medium that expresses the opaque nature of signs as they appear to a degenerated spiritual understanding. So through its language, allegory attempts to establish interpretive principles which make possible the comprehension of realities that cannot be apprehended literally. (4–5)

In its interpretive activities, allegory, in light of historical change, also describes necessary ideological work: the rationalisation of reality. So, at the Firm's insistence, Pudding reinterprets his experiences figurally or allegorically. A coherent narrative emerges from language previously as opaque as mud and shit. Pudding's act of narration confirms the appropriation of his memories.

Pynchon's narrator represents the ideological ends to which these memories are put. The recuperation of memory under the auspices of the Firm suggests the desire for continuity between the memory of the First World War and that of the Second. Whatever Pointsman junior's personal motivation for participating in this scheme, recuperated memories of the first are potentially available as templates for remembering the second. The sense of historical continuity between the first and second wars hides the real nature of war.

The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War. It provides raw material to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world. Best of all, mass death's a stimulus to just ordinary folks, little fellows, to try 'n' grab a piece of that Pie while they're still here to gobble it up. The true war is a celebration of markets. Organic markets, carefully styled "black" by the professionals, spring up everywhere. Scrip, Sterling, Reichsmarks continue to move, severe as classical ballet, inside their antiseptic marble chambers. But out here, down here among the people, the truer currencies come into being. So, Jews are negotiable. Every bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars. (GR 105)

As Pudding's dominatrix, Katje is deployed in the allegorisation of history. She serves the Firm thus in return for refuge from her occupied country and the fate that awaits her there, since the Firm has also used her as a spy, which entailed her participation in similar sadomasochistic scenes with the rocket-battery commander Blicero. These scenes are similar in that they self-consciously dramatize and reconfigure the history of war, occupation and genocide taking place in the outside world: "In a conquered country, one's own occupied country, it's better, she believes, to enter into some formal, rationalized version of what, outside, proceeds without form or decent limit day and night, the summary executions, the roustings, beatings, subterfuge, paranoia, shame" (96). Her performance of allegory connects the two wars and literally dramatizes the reasons for the construction of a continuous sense of History that masks the reality of war. As Seed notes, this reality is the connection of IG Farben, the Holocaust and, eventually, the American military-industrial complex. The circulation and reproduction of capital is a seemingly natural and unstoppable dynamic that transgresses all social boundaries—eventually in the extreme form of warfare. The Holocaust, inextricable from Germany's contribution to war, entails the expendability of Jews as well as other ethnic, religious, sexual and political victims. So, it is not just an economic narrative that underlies the orthodox and popular sense of History. Under the economic one is a narrative of genocide that does not seem to stain the antiseptic institutions and transactions of money. A sense of historical continuity from 1914 to 1945 is created to mystify the unacceptable economic determinants of war, and the even more unacceptable, genocidal cost or byproduct of reproducing capital.

For Deborah Madsen, allegory can be read as revealing the operations of power, in particular, the cultural configurations and reconfigurations of power. The naturalization of power relations relies

on the suppression of alternative versions of reality, alternative historical narratives. As Madsen puts it:

The preterite are kept in a preterite condition of ignorance by the oppressive power of signifiers that are manipulated by "Them." The hermeneutic potential of the sign is rigorously circumscribed by the interpretive hegemony of "Them": alternative possibilities for meaning are "blocked," prohibited or invalidated. (20)

The sense of collective history to which Pudding and Katje contribute is responsible for dehistoricising the preterite as Holocaust and war victims. Where preterite histories do emerge, they are implicated in historical revisionism at the hands of the elect, Them, or those who have power. So, for Madsen, allegory asks the necessary questions "what it is that can be known and how this knowledge is made possible" (5). In other words, the master narratives inferred by allegory can be seen both as keys to unlocking power relations and as a means of their rationalization.

As Pynchon's allegories begin to reveal the operations of power and histories of the elect if not the preterite, the master narratives referred to for authorisation and legitimation become untenable from the point of view of preterite historicism. Identified in a critical discourse such as Madsen's, the very nature of master narratives becomes unacceptable. More precisely, the identification of a totalising logic attributed to such narratives makes them unsuitable for the rehistoricisation of preterite histories. Not only would such a rehistoricisation be implicated in the same exclusive and powerful historicism that made rehistoricisation necessary in the first place; preterite histories might emerge in elect terms and, predicated upon master narratives for their legitimation, prove just as exclusive as the histories they attempt to rewrite.

Ultimately, allegory seems adequate to the task of describing the postmodern condition, given the pronounced cultural consensus surrounding the untenability of the very nature of pretexts/master narratives (Madsen 12). Madsen sees a perceived absence of master narratives as open to exploitation by the cultural (re)configurations of power (20). If both the dominant discourses and a critical identification of them share claims to transcendence, there is no longer any interpretive guide by which to write against the cultural orthodoxy. In particular and in historiographical terms, there is no privileged point of view from which to write history against the grain because there is little sense of what to write against. It becomes impossible to distinguish orthodox histories from the matrix of "competing cultural discourses" (15). Madsen concludes that the subversive potential of allegory can lie

only in its identification of both the operations of power and the traces of preterite history left behind by these operations. In these trace histories is "the absence that makes present the desire for absolute meaning" (20).¹

Perhaps, though, a modification of this concept of allegory is needed. If all we can find are traces and present absences, is not the investment in this concept of allegory simply hegemonic? Cultural orthodoxy relies on the manipulation of unorthodox historicist desires around such fragments. The histories that result can then be appropriated back into a totalizing version of History in which the experiences of the preterite are marginalised. This is not to say, by way of opposing this appropriation, there is any such thing as pure unmediated history, but a greater source of discontinuity could be located between preterite histories and the narratives that suppress them.²

The experiences of Tyrone Slothrop shortly after his entry into the Zone of postwar Europe, particularly his entry into the Mittelwerke rocket factory in his quest for rocket technology, provide the key to recognizing the differences between preterite and elect versions of history. This site of technology has also become a site of tourism, at least for the civilians, bureaucrats and military personnel "[t]rying to get it all out before the Russians come to take over" (GR 295). The war becomes something to consume rather than memorialize or at least commemorate. In fact, for those who want something a little off the well-beaten tourist track, there is always the promise of a genuine encounter with a more authentic war experience:

The visitor who is willing to spend extravagant sums is rarely disappointed. Micro [the tour guide] knows the secret doors to rock passages that lead through to Dora, the prison camp next to the Mittelwerke. Each member of the party is given his own electric lantern. There is hurried, basic instruction on what to do in case of any encounter with the dead. "Remember they were always on the defensive here. When the Americans liberated Dora, the prisoners who were still alive went on a rampage after the material—they looted, they ate and drank themselves sick. For others, Death came like the American Army, and liberated them spiritually. So they're apt to be on a spiritual rampage now. Guard your thoughts. Use the natural balance of your mind against them. They'll be coming at you off-balance, remember." (296)

For "prison camp" read "concentration camp," and, by inference, the labor Dora fed to the Mittelwerke was slave labor. Dora and the Mittelwerke can be seen as part of a wider genocidal process. Having

articulated what Pynchon's narrator euphemizes, we can now translate the "spiritual rampage" of these "prisoners." Since visiting the scene of labor, imprisonment, death and liberation can upset the mental balance of the tourists (despite Micro's advice to "use the natural balance of your mind against" the prisoners, the narrator observes soon afterward that "what you thought was a balanced mind is little help" [297]), we can surmise that the phrase "spiritual rampage" may refer to memory. The dead cannot remember themselves, so these visitors remember on their behalf. It is not the dead that rampage but memories of them, evoked by a sense of place. Memory is on the rampage, inducing mental imbalance, disrupting the visitors' historical imagination of the shocking events that occurred at Dora—the shocking, unprecedented conditions of life, work and death in Dora and, more generally, during the Holocaust. The visitors' shock is, of course, a secondary shock or trauma. Dora's prisoners felt the first. Nevertheless, those who participate in a collective memory shared with witnesses of the Holocaust are still subject to reverberations of what those witnesses felt. The shock of remembering disrupts attempts to place memories of these witnesses in an appropriative discourse.

The difficulties Pudding had in remembering his own shocking experiences of war can be explained in light of Slothrop's encounter with Holocaust memory. In fact, the memories of shocking or traumatic events and their aftermath are rendered susceptible to appropriation, as in Pudding's rehearsals of memory. Kali Tal argues that in the formation of collective memories of traumatic events in history, it is trauma that facilitates an inevitable misinterpretation of the past (16–19). Personal experience, memory and testimony of traumatic events are obfuscated by a public version of history shared by those who did not witness them. In fact, the collection of memory would not be possible without this transformation of personal into public history. With particular reference to Holocaust memory, Tal writes that the personal narratives (testimony) of witnesses that are the necessary basis of collective memory reveal their limitations in the face of what they describe. More precisely, if narrativity is not disrupted by the shock of what it attempts to describe, language ultimately fails to translate traumatic experiences for those who have not experienced them. For readers of trauma narratives who have not shared the same traumatic experiences as their authors, signifying practices take place in the realm of normalcy, as opposed to the realm of the unprecedented from where trauma originates. For Tal it is the consequent gap between signifier and signified in narratives of trauma that facilitates their insertion into a collective memory and makes them susceptible to the inevitable revision of their intended meanings that takes place there. For witnesses testify

not in a vacuum but in a specific matrix of cultural, social, political and historical contexts that determines the reception of their testimony and the ways testimony will be appropriated. In the face of appropriation, survivors struggle to retain control over the meanings of their memories. "The winner of this battle over meaning will determine the manner in which the experience is to be codified" (18-19). It is through the process of giving, receiving and appropriating testimony that collective memories are formed in which witnesses and non-witnesses can remember the same events, even though they experience them differently.

This is not to say that the traumatic nature of such preterite histories of the First World War and the Holocaust just facilitates the obfuscation of witnesses' memories. What causes obfuscation is also likely to cause the disruption of obfuscation, hence Slothrop's inability to consume all he would see at Dora. What is more, it is the shock or trauma associated with the Holocaust that dissociates it from other historical events. Trauma differentiates the memories of its survivors from the collective memory that seeks to appropriate them. Obviously, the Holocaust is not the only traumatic event in history. Pudding's initial narrative of the First World War reveals the shocking and fragmented impact this experience has on his memory and ability to narrate what is remembered. Trauma, though, is a source of differentiation between some experiences lived by the preterite and the revisionist History imposed by the elect. If allegory describes the cultural (re)configurations of power and the historical revision involved therein, as well as the traces of preterite histories left by the operations of power, what is needed is a conceptualization of allegory that can draw out a sense of traumatic historical difference.

Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory encompasses this trauma and the reverberations it sends through memory and narrated memory, and the resulting sense of historical difference. By way of a preface to his version of allegory, it is worth noting Benjamin's perceptiveness about the notion of shock. In his commentary on Baudelaire, Benjamin relies heavily on Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), in which consciousness is defined as a protective shield against stimuli of the outside world (Benjamin, I 157). Shocking stimuli are modified before they can be permitted into consciousness. If this process is successful, traumatization is limited, and what is permitted into consciousness is not necessarily experienced as it was initially perceived and lived, but rather as a modified version. Consciousness destroys the memory of traumatic experience, leaving only traces of such memory (171-73). Triggered by later associative stimuli, these memories may return from unconsciousness in what Benjamin, borrowing from Proust, describes

as “involuntary” memory (157). Whilst Benjamin admired Baudelaire for his attempt to embrace shocking experience rather than forget it, this model needs developing to draw out the disruptiveness to memory and the narration of memory caused by greater traumas that threaten to penetrate the protective shield of consciousness.

According to Cathy Caruth, trauma can be generally understood as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event [is] . . . often delayed, uncontrolled [and] repetitive” (11). The unprecedented nature of the event precludes its immediate understanding and cognitive assimilation, accounting for a temporal lag in its re-presentation to memory. Often triggered by connotative or associative events in the present, memories return, bringing with them the shock associated with the unprecedented, primary event. The belated affectiveness of trauma disrupts attempts to re-witness the event through remembering and narrating what is remembered. The memories necessitate a working through until such time as meanings can be conferred on them that were originally unavailable. Such a model of trauma is prefigured by Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.³ For the sufferer of trauma, translating traumatic memory into narrative is not simply a matter of locating displaced or belated time segments and inserting them into a linear continuity. Meaning is conferred on the traumatic event in a secondary context. This is not a simple delay in understanding, but a reconstruction of the past, which is inextricable from the present. The complex of temporalities past and present guarantees an inability to restore the primal scene of trauma to memory and narrative intact and unmediated. Historical representation will be always incomplete, and lost originary moments of history never totally available.

To return to allegory itself, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin renders the distance opened up between discourses and the pretexts that authorize and legitimize their meanings in terms of fallen language versus Edenic language. Benjamin sees the Fall as the catastrophic initiation of a secular, profane history. However, this catastrophe is beyond total representation. “Words,” Benjamin says, “have become fragmented, they possess, in addition to their more or less hidden, symbolic aspect, an obvious profane meaning” (OGTD 36). In other words, language refers to two places at the same time: the sacred and the profane. The profane partial meanings generated by fallen language are echoes of a full Edenic and infinite knowledge of history. Through Biblical rhetoric Benjamin seems to be offering a way of describing the impact of catastrophic or traumatic historical events on language. In fact, not only does Benjamin’s version of the Fall describe the relation between trauma and language; the resort to

Biblical figures might itself be symptomatic of an inability on Benjamin's part to fully know historical trauma. Allegorical language refers to two places at the same time; one is the location of finite knowledge, the other that of infinite knowledge. It could also be argued that this language refers to two times in the same place. In terms of traumatic events, allegory refers to a complete historical narrative or chronology of these events, but can know only traces of them. Only fragments of the time of trauma are admitted to consciousness as memory. Allegory is, in effect, testimony to the impact of trauma on witnessing and memory.

A closer inspection of one of Pynchon's other infrequent references to the Holocaust will argue allegory's potential registration of trauma. His wife and daughter sent to "re-education" camps (that is, concentration camps), engineer Franz Pökler contributes to German rocket technology (at Peenemünde rocket camp and at the Mittelwerke) in return for seeing his daughter, Ilse, once a year. However, the powers that be may send him substitutes, whom he is yet unable to dismiss because of his inability to remember his own daughter and calculate how she would have changed over the years. One year's Ilse reveals (or has been instructed to say) that she is interned in Dora, only yards from the Mittelwerke. By committing what he thinks is incest, or at least fantasising about it, Pökler convinces himself of the authenticity of the daughter sent to him (GR 420-21). Incest is a means of establishing her (otherwise unconvincing) historical identity. Incest inscribes her body with not only a familial but also a Holocaust history that his real daughter would have suffered. By pandering to Pökler's incestuous desires, the state merely preempts and incorporates his desires to historically locate his family, assigning him a "specific perversity" "in the State's oversize paper brain." Then again, such master narratives of powerful operations are difficult to prove: "no real chain of events could have been established for sure," and Pökler's supposed role in these events is only a "hunch" (421). Historical evidence of the preterite (daughter and wife) real proves no less indeterminate than that of the operations of power.

As the reward for completing an engineering task—installing the Impolex G fitting in rocket 00000—Pökler is issued a pass to rendezvous with Ilse. Instead he goes searching for her (and her mother) in Dora, in an attempt to free himself from his complicity in an elect version of historical reality. But in Dora, he cannot identify daughter or wife. The corpses he does find become familiar in their potential to be daughter or wife (433). The Holocaust histories of these bodies resonate with a potential family history. However, Pökler cannot fully historicize these bodies (to determine their histories) because this

process is interrupted by the shock of seeing them. Although he had “[h]ad the data” as to his wife and daughter’s whereabouts—and even about the concentration camps more generally—“[h]e was not prepared” for what he saw:

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. (432)

Pökler cannot understand what he sees; he does not get the fatal joke they share. He cannot assimilate the perversity of the scene to produce historical knowledge from it, to determine the identities of his wife and daughter.

Although he wants to historicize these bodies—he “cannot, then, let them return to that silence” (433)—his method of historical interpretation relies on an inadequate pretext. Referring empirical data to the discourses of bureaucratic and scientific Nazism, and therefore to the transcendent authorities these discourses claim, does not make sense of this scene. “All his vacuums, his labyrinths, had been the other side of this. While he lived, and drew marks on paper, this invisible kingdom had kept on, in the darkness outside . . . all this time” (432–33). Explained by no pretext, these bodies are reduced to allegorical figures whose historicization has been curtailed. Indeed, they do possess that hieroglyphic quality Benjamin attributes to allegorical language, which, opaque to meaning, draws attention to its own unreadable, gratuitous and excessive materiality. It is the shocking aspect of this scene, though, that ultimately makes it unreadable. We do not sense a disruption of time, in which past events can no longer be remembered in any kind of chronological order or linear fashion, as in Pudding’s attempt to recall the fate of his medical officer. Allegory, though, describes how a chronology of bureaucratic and scientific events, which up till now Pökler has found an acceptable version of reality, cannot explain and rationalize the fate of Jews. Their bodies belong to a different chronology, or time. This is the traumatic time of the Jewish experience, of which Pökler can witness the aftermath but which he cannot imagine or historicize.

The recognition of allegory may still seem a frustrated mode of interpretation. The history of the preterite still seems untold. However, reconceptualized to register trauma and its temporality, allegory can

reveal the differences constituted by some preterite experiences rather than just the absence of such histories. In this case it is the trauma of witnessing the aftermath of the Holocaust—a trauma originally suffered by its victims (the preterite) with a far greater intensity—that differentiates Holocaust history. This is not to argue that witnessing the Holocaust first hand (as its victim) is less traumatic than witnessing its aftermath. Trauma does, though, seem to structure isomorphic patterns of memory. In effect, there is a transmission of trauma through collective memory shared by those who experienced the Holocaust and those who witness it vicariously. Dominick LaCapra might term the transmission of trauma “transference.” LaCapra defines transference as the way “problems and processes active in the texts or artefacts we study are repeated in displaced and often disguised or distorted form in our very accounts of them” (111). Although trauma makes the memories of its witnesses susceptible to appropriation, the transmission of trauma to those who seek to remember on the witnesses’ behalf potentially disrupts the consequent obfuscation of memory. For this obfuscation takes place on a narrative level. Where Pynchon dramatizes how the Holocaust is recalled only to be subsumed in an official History which rationalizes or mystifies the evolution of the American military-industrial complex, the allegorical recognition of trauma allows a disruption to take place. Allegory recognizes the transmission of trauma from Holocaust memory to the narratives (and agents) that rewrite it. If Holocaust revisionism depends on the resolute conclusion of such narratives, trauma disrupts this process. Therefore, where Holocaust history and memory are recalled only for their suppression, allegory can render this erasure incomplete.

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Notes

¹In the historicist desire unleashed by her concept of allegory, Madsen differs from Craig Owens’s concept of postmodern allegory, which draws on De Man. For De Man, allegory describes the failure of all language to signify. Given this rather existential universalisation of allegory, the historical circumstances that generate allegory and to which allegory ultimately refers, and the ways allegory admits knowledge (or lack of it) of these circumstances lose their specificity. What is more, the endless supplementation required by allegory—allegory’s need to be supplemented by more allegories—endlessly defers meaning and runs the risk of exhausting interpretation. In opposition to this concept of allegory, Madsen’s strategy is to make tangible the absence of preterite histories, and the methods by which they have been made absent.

²Pynchon adds to the difficulties of differentiation when, in a 1968 letter to Thomas F. Hirsch (rpt. in Seed 240–43), he links the genocide of the Herero tribe of South-West Africa by German imperial forces to the genocide of Jews in the 1930s and '40s. The history of the Hereros, as represented in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is too long to be detailed here. It is sufficient to say that the search by the Hereros displaced from Africa for their historical origins has become confused with a search for V-2 rocket technology and the various discourses of fascism attached to the rocket. It is unclear whether Pynchon is registering the difficulty of historicizing the Holocaust, as in its implication in an ideologically loaded historical continuity, or whether he has finally succumbed to the impossibility of historical discontinuity. However, whatever his authorial intentions, it is possible to motivate the allegories identifiable in *Gravity's Rainbow* to register not just the absence of preterite histories but the presence of their discontinuity.

³Referring to Freud's "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), his account of the "Wolf Man" case (1918) and *Studies on Hysteria* (with Breuer [1895]), Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis broadly define the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as follows: "It is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of such unassimilated experience. . . . Deferred revision is occasioned by events and situations, or by an organic maturation, which allow the subject to gain access to a new level of meaning and to rework his earlier experiences" (112).

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