

## Encountering the Other at Home: Representations of Dora in Pynchon and Mirbach

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One of the many obscure passages in part 4 of *Gravity's Rainbow* mentions an unnamed "spokesman for the Counterforce" who confesses "in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*" (738) how he "tasted [his] first blood" (739) in a complex tunnel system. In his attempt to explain this reference, Terry Reilly has identified the interviewee as speaking from the perspective of a sixteenth-century Catholic soldier engaged in the bloody liberation of the city of Münster from the Anabaptist occupation (Reilly 723). Reilly's detailed analysis dismisses, however, various more contemporary clues in the passage, such as the railway lines running through the tunnels and, of course, the *Wall Street Journal*; likewise, he does not elaborate on the allusions to Christianity or to the final assembly of Rocket 00001. Taking a cue from precisely these latter hints, one may equally well assume that the blood-drinking spokesman is a member of the Schwarzkommando. Toward the end of his statement, the spokesman extemporizes:

We drank the blood of our enemies. That's why you see Gnostics so hunted. The sacrament of the Eucharist is really drinking the blood of the enemy. The Grail, the Sangraal, is the bloody vehicle. Why else guard it so sacredly? Why should the black honor-guard ride half a continent, half a splintering Empire, stone night and winter day, if it's only for the touch of sweet lips on a humble bowl? No, it's mortal sin they're carrying: to swallow the enemy, down into the slick juicery to be taken in by all the cells. (GR 739)

While the description of black blood-drinkers or man-eaters ties in with well-known racial stereotypes held in the West, the subway-tunnel setting seems to displace the act of cannibalism from the African homeland (where the stereotype insists on situating it) to what one imagines is the West. At the same time, the tunnels are reminiscent of the Mittelwerke, where V-2 production began in late 1943, which fact leads to the following question: do the crimes committed in the neighboring concentration camp, Dora, connect in any way with the practice of cannibalism mentioned by the spokesman?

We answer this question at the end, after considering other instances of the encounter, at home, with the Other of German culture. The textual basis for this long detour is provided by Pynchon, whose novels *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* can be read as prime literary sources for the relocation of this encounter to Germany, and by Willy Mirbach, whose nonfiction report of his experiences as a concentration camp guard helps specify the issue. Both Pynchon's novel and Mirbach's account show that encountering the Other at home has a potential for subversion, one that derives specifically from the displacement of cultural practices associated primarily with foreign locations.

The first of these practices is wearing uniforms to impress and intimidate Others, be they Hereros before the First World War, the citizens of occupied countries during the Second World War or prisoners in the concentration camps at home. A short historical sketch will show how the original function of this practice—that of demonstrating superiority by terrifying the enemy—assumed a self-defeating quality for Germans in South-West Africa and later, around V-E Day, for those wearing uniforms in the concentration camps. The second practice is tattooing, which demonstrates the permeability of the absolute distinction, drawn by the Nazis, between the master race and other, allegedly inferior races. By killing concentration camp prisoners to get at their exotically tattooed skins, SS camp officials seemed to reinforce the racial stereotype in order to disavow the blood-type tattoos in their own armpits. These armpit tattoos might, in fact, betray them to the Allies. Interestingly, in Mirbach's case, the guard was forcefully confronted with this threat by Johnny Nicholas, the single black Dora prisoner.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, descriptions of the Mittelwerke and of Dora vary in their degree of historical accuracy. For example, the scene in which the rocket engineer Franz Pökler leaves the underground factory and enters the camp precincts on the eve of the camp's liberation (432–33) indubitably belongs to the more authentic ones.<sup>1</sup> Other scenes have little if anything to do, at first sight, with the site's reality. Among these is "Micro" Graham's special guided tour of the Mittelwerke. "Oily Micro [. . .] knows the secret doors to rock passages that lead through to Dora, the prison camp next to the Mittelwerke." He directs visitors' attention to "popular attraction[s]" such as an "elegant Raumwaffe spacesuit wardrobe" and "to dioramas on the theme 'The Promise of Space Travel.'" Step by step, the underground site transforms into the notorious "Rocket-City," at least for those visitors who get separated from "the ribbon clerks back on the Tour, in the numbered Stollen." Before they do, however, they pass "[t]he compartment the Schwarzkommando were quartered in," where the

record of the Schwarzkommando's journey north to Germany "is no longer an amusing travelogue of native savages taking on ways of the 21st century" (296–97). "*Black rocket troops? What bizarre shit,*" Slothrop has wondered just a few pages earlier, on the train to Nordhausen, after meeting Enzian (288). The Schwarzkommando's presence in the underground factory appears to be the result of the "hallucinations of a novelist," as Andreas Selmecci and Dag Henrichsen put it (7).<sup>2</sup>

The idea of Africans in Germany is not as farfetched as it first appears, however. "Hereros in Germany?" Selmecci and Henrichsen query (26) before they corroborate Pirate Prentice's "hard intelligence that there were indeed in Germany real Africans, Hereros, ex-colonials from South-West Africa" (GR 74). As early as 1896, a handful of Hottentots and Hereros were sent to Berlin-Treptow, where anthropologists measured and scrutinized them before the Africans were exhibited in a large-scale colonial exhibition. "It goes without saying that the Hereros had not sent every Tom, Dick and Harry but the son of a tribal chief and other notabilities," Selmecci and Henrichsen observe (26). Tom, Dick, Harry and other less prominent Africans followed later: volunteers from Deutsch-Ostafrika, for instance, who had come to Germany together with their colonial officers and whom the Treaty of Versailles subsequently prevented from returning home, forcing them to eke out their living in Germany as "dockers, circus negroes, in coffee-roasting firms or jimmy bands." Like their nobler tribesmen, they became the subject of an anthropological investigation, and after 1933 the data were collected in the *Farbigen-Kartothek des Rassepolitischen Amtes* (colored people index at the Office of Racial Politics) (29). Thus the historical sources and official records of imperial and Nazi Germany reveal a continuity in the power relation between German colonizers and Black African colonials. But what remains concealed are the positional shifts, the new accents and the subversive potential that inhere in this type of encounter—an encounter which comes back home, returns from the German colonies in Africa to Germany itself.

A juxtaposition of details from Herman Melville's first novel, *Typee*, and events from the period of German imperialism in Africa helps illustrate this subversion. According to Geoffrey Sanborn, "*Typee* is a book about the terror of savagery, understood as the strategic and ceaseless ornamentation of one's self with signs." Examples of this strategic ornamentation are the Typees' practice of tattooing and the name Typee itself. The Typees cunningly foreclose what the tattooing and the name actually stand for, and enforce this effect through a masquerade: "The truly terrifying fact about these 'savages' . . . is that

although they repeatedly suggest to the colonialist that the names and places he has assigned to them are false, they do so 'in the mocking spirit of mask and image'" (Sanborn 116).<sup>3</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, the Hereros similarly frightened German and, after the First World War, white South-African colonizers with an apparently strategic ornamentation of themselves with signs. But in contrast to the Typees, who used signs of their own making and culture, the Hereros decorated themselves with the signs and symbols of the colonizers. They put on the Reich uniforms of the intruders ("*die Kleider des Feindes anziehen*" [Selmeci 35ff.]). Indeed, this mimicry of *Truppenspiele* was no longer the innocent imitation of the colonizers' customs, but an "appropriation of power," a "violent usurpation of its [German] attributes" (52) for the purpose of instigating rebellion. It also included the adaptation of the German military hierarchy: from bottom to top, there were "'oloitnanta,' 'ooverloitnanta,' 'ohauptmana,' 'omajora,' 'ofeldmarsala'" (Selmeci 96). Another was the usurpation of the names and titles of German elites: "they called themselves 'S.(eine) M.(ajestät) [His Majesty] der Gouverneur von Deimling,' 'Staatssekretär Heichler,' 'Oberstleutnant Leutwein' or 'Adjutant Schmetterling von Preußen'" ; one troop even had its "'Kaiser' (Eduard Maharero)" (97).

While this rendition of German names and insignia mocked and even frightened the Germans, it still took place abroad in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, and not in the colonizers' own native country. By the same token, as much as it offended the colonizers' habits and customs, it did not prevent them from committing savageries in the name of the alleged superiority of their own race and culture. Indeed, the mockery did not change the German image of the Hereros, but it did change their treatment of them. After the first uprising in 1904, Lothar von Trotha issued his "'Vernichtungs Befehl [sic],' whereby the German forces were ordered to exterminate systematically every Herero man, woman and child they could find" (V 245). And those who survived the genocide were interned on small offshore islands, prototypes of Dora, as Pynchon has Mondaugen observe in the "Stencilized" (228) version of his "Story" in *V*:

The barren islets off Lüderitzbucht were natural concentration camps. Walking among huddled forms in the evening, distributing blankets, food and occasional kisses from the sjambok, you felt like the father colonial policy wanted you to be when it spoke of Väterliche Züchtigung; fatherly chastisement, an inalienable right. (267)

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon relocates the colonial encounter between Hereros and Germans, bringing it back to Europe, filtering its

representation through the voice of “the BBC’s eloquent Myron Grunton,” who, like Pirate Prentice, is a member of the Allied team involved in Operation Black Wing. Grunton announces:

“Germany once treated its Africans like a stern but loving stepfather, chastising them when necessary, often with death. Remember? But that was far away in Südwest, and since then a generation has gone by. Now the Herero lives in his stepfather’s house. Perhaps you, listening, have seen him. Now he stays up past the curfews, and watches his stepfather while he sleeps, invisible, protected by the night which is his own colour. What are they all thinking? Where are the Hereros tonight? What are they *doing*, this instant, your dark, secret children?” (GR 74-75)

Remarkably, Pynchon draws on the aura of the SS, the boomerang effect of their attire at the time around V-E Day, and the general atmosphere in Germany in mid-1945 by associating them with the Schwarzkommando. Thus Enzian’s troops engage in rather involuntary *Truppenspiele* on German soil, wearing “pieces [. . .] of old Wehrmacht and SS uniform” (361). Since they are dressed like that, “nobody knows how to feel about the local Schwarzkommando. Some see only the ragged pieces of SS uniform, and respond to that one way or another.” One way or another: what first appears as variety in spectators’ reactions to the uniform (a still prevailing intimidation by it, or the more up-to-date realization that it has lost its terrifying force) soon bears deadly consequences. “Last week in Hamburg, two Schwarzkommando were shot. Others were badly beaten” (327). Pynchon leaves open whether the target of the attack was the black-skinned Herero or the black-clad presumptive SS. Both could be said to suffer the fatal consequences of their appearance—an instance of the same kind of ambivalence that will play an important role in our final reflections on cannibalism. At the same time, the incident demonstrates how the SS terror, founded as it was in part on the intimidating aura of their uniforms, gained a new dimension for any German at home in the spring of 1945.

In the summer of 1944, *Luftwaffensoldat* (air force soldier) Willy Mirbach received special marching orders. Because of his age, he was mustered out of army front service and sent on an altogether different mission: “None of us could find out where it had come from,” he writes in his memoirs, “but all of a sudden the word ‘KZ’ turned up. . . . We were to become guards in a concentration camp, replacing the SS there” (27). Mirbach’s guard duty began in Ellrich and Harzungen, both subcamps of Mittelbau-Dora, continued in another subcamp,

Rottleberode, and ended with the evacuation of that camp on the notorious death marches toward KZ Oranienburg. Mirbach's account of his journey from one camp to the next, written after his return to his hometown of Geldern and published with his consent after his death, is so far the only book-length Dora memoir that was written not by an ex-prisoner but by someone whose position and degree of involvement must be located somewhere between those of a mere bystander (he was evidently more than that) and an active perpetrator. In his *Bericht* (report), Mirbach relates how he became an eye-witness to the atrocities committed by the SS, depicting himself as torn all the while between obedience to his orders on the one hand and pity for the worn-out, emaciated internees on the other. More obtrusively, however, his testimony presents him as caught up in the dilemma described above: that the order to replace the SS for guard duty implies the threat of being mistaken for "real" dyed-in-the-wool SS. Still, within the approximately three months that he spent in camp Harzungen, he came "to the conclusion that the SS planned to sneak out of the KZ scheme, according to the maxim 'Den Letzten beißen die Hunde' [literally, 'late-comers go to the dogs'; idiomatically, 'devil take the hindmost']." One of Mirbach's comrades "suggested that in the light of the approaching end we would be the scapegoats" (55).

Subsequent events seemed to confirm Mirbach's dark forebodings:

A couple of days later we received the order to appear before the medical assistant. We assumed we would be in for another vaccination. Wide of the mark! As it turned out, they wanted to take a blood sample in order to blood-type us. Things became serious indeed, for now it was evident what they had in mind. Get a tattoo with your blood type, and you would be indistinguishable from the SS, except for the uniforms. We were still wearing our old air force uniforms, but soon we received notice that SS uniforms had been ordered for us too, and that we would receive them shortly. (56)

Indeed, he was provided with the give-away insignia on the next stopover of his journey: in Rottleberode, Mirbach must finally change his clothes. The description of his new attire strikingly echoes that of the Schwarzkommando's *Truppenspieler* outfit in *Gravity's Rainbow*. "What we got," Mirbach writes,

was a hodgepodge of garments. The tunic was greenish grey with conspicuous SS runes on its tab. In addition, we wore tight trousers that had to be tied up at the ankles and spats made of sailcloth, which we soon

called "retreat gaiters." The headgear was a visor cap of the mountain troops type. Last but not least, we got a green loden coat that came from Italian booty stocks. (131-32)

The meaning of this rite of passage and its dire implications for Mirbach can be explicated with reference to the above sketch of encounters with the racial Other. For Mirbach the SS garb is imbued with the significance of terror—now, however, as a token of threat to its wearer. By that token, the coat is alienated, estranged and expropriated from its wearer, and thus figures as a Third Reich version of the *Kaiserreich* uniforms the Hereros in South-West Africa appropriated to intimidate their German colonizers. In double contrast to the masquerade in Hereroland, however, the garb is now put on again *in Germany* by a German, which in turn implies a decisive change in the discursive positioning of Mirbach. Obviously, the signification of the uniform can be powerfully used against him by one who stands close enough to share the knowledge about its meaning as latent threat to Mirbach yet is free of any active engagement or even complicity in the SS savageries. Given the special circumstances of Mirbach's assignment, those who fill the role of the guard's antagonists are the ordinary camp prisoners.

The issue of the uniform had a happy ending for Mirbach. When still a regular soldier, he had snatched a second air force uniform from a clothing store; and although he could not be sure he could keep it hidden during his odyssey through the camps and the ensuing evacuation marches, nor foresee whether there would be an opportunity to put it on in time, in the end he managed to substitute it for the SS attire and wore the less conspicuous outfit when American troops took him P.O.W. (56, 132, 208). He also avoided tattooing, the other insignium he had feared would give him away. What he did not elude, however, was a situation in which tattooing was tied to the encounter with the Other at home. Shortly before Christmas, 1944, still in Rottleberode, Mirbach bruised his chest and consulted a doctor, himself a prisoner, in the camp's medical barracks. "All of a sudden," he reports, "someone taps me on the shoulder, and when I turn around, I see a young negro grinning at me, baring his snow-white teeth. 'You no go bust by it,' he says with carefree laughter. This is how I met 'Jumbo,' a dyed-in-the-wool negro" ("einen waschechten Neger," as the German original has it) (112).

Mirbach's description of his first meeting with the black-skinned medical assistant implicitly conveys a lot about his attitude toward representatives of other, distinctly non-Aryan races. His interlocutor's real name was not Jumbo (a German equivalent of Jim Crow), but

Johnny, as his official registration card in Dora indicates and as a number of survivors later remembered more correctly.<sup>4</sup> More trustworthy seems Mirbach's characterization of Johnny as "very popular among his fellows, always in a good mood and indeed a true joker who, with rolling eyes and terrifying grimaces, would dance real nigger dances" (113). Other sources unanimously confirm this impression, while some of them also point to the selfishness that apparently characterized the only Dora internee of black skin-color, a native Haitian. Thus even his American biographers observe in their otherwise highly eulogistic study that Jean-Marcel Nicholas (his correct full name) was not simply "the grinning magician who distilled from the horror all around [for his patients at Dora] the elixir of their survival" (McCann 355) by incessantly boosting their morale. Irreconcilable with this trait was "the lusty, dynamic, self-aggrandizing, egoistical Johnny" who initially regarded the sick inmates "as mere pawns in the lethal game of trying to stay alive" (357).

Another trait of Nicholas's was his cunning in front of German authorities. For instance, camp officials took him at his word and registered him as a U.S. citizen (the only one in the Dora camps) and—like Mirbach—fell for his fable of belonging to an Allied aircraft unit (Mirbach 112). His biographers add a number of similar instances, bolstering them with at times dubious evidence, like a conversation in *Catch-22* style, impossible to authenticate, in which Nicholas outsmarts custody camp leader Moeser (McCann 188–98), or his trickstering with a senior Wehrmacht officer in a train car in Paris, when Nicholas taps the other's "medal-bedecked tunic" and inquires from the flabbergasted German in which campaigns he had won them (22–23). Since Nicholas had not finished his medical studies before he came to Dora, his assignment to the hospital barracks must also be seen in this light: Johnny Nicholas "had connived his way into the dispensary," his biographers conclude before they rejoice in "how adroitly he'd outwitted the minions of the 'master race'" (357).

Weeks after their first encounter in the hospital barracks, Mirbach, the guard with a predilection for racial stereotypes, and Nicholas, the archetype, according to his romanticizing biographers, of many a German's "black nemesis" (52), meet for a second time. The German escorts the medical assistant back to the camp after he had been summoned to the guards' barracks to treat an ailing officer. Nicholas asks Mirbach to make a detour and smoke a cigarette; on the guard's initial refusal, "Jumbo is offended and keeps on babbling: 'Me no run away, me shot dead when SS catch me, but me wanna live until the few weeks of war are over'" (Mirbach 146). Astounded by this detailed knowledge of the course of the war, Mirbach changes his mind, and



Nicholas passes him a cigarette, asking the guard for a light. They smoke, and

Jumbo argues that now I must certainly believe that he won't try to escape. When I reply that I don't get what he means, he explains it to me. The moment I lit the match I was briefly blinded by the flame, he says, and a deft hook to the chin would have sufficed to send me into the small rivulet nearby. (147)

This momentary change in the power position prefigures another such situation, in which the subversive implications of a cultural encounter in Nazi Germany come to the fore. "Shortly before we arrive in the camp," Mirbach continues, "he suddenly inquires about my blood type. Since I don't respond immediately, he says: 'You next week all get tattooed by me with blood type, then you all SS.'" Nicholas then subtly presses Mirbach into a give-and-take: "'But you no tattooed,'" he declares, in an obvious attempt to trade his good will for flabbergasted Mirbach's cooperation (147).

A unique instance in the preserved eye-witness accounts of the Dora camps, this incident requires some historical background to grasp the wider implications of the issue of tattooing in the Third Reich. An "ambiguous practice" (Oettermann 109), tattooing was, on the one hand, a token of membership in the SS in-group. On the other, the stereotype still held that tattoos were insignia of those the Nazi system sought to eradicate: the out-groups of criminals, bums, pimps and other, more exotic classes of the master race's inferiors. As a result, any attempt to disavow the connection tattooing created between self-declared arch-Germans and their Other so as to confirm the absolute difference between civilized Self and uncivilized, barbaric and savage Other was bound to be subverted.

The deliberate killing of concentration camp prisoners to get at their tattooed skin also illustrates this bind. The practice occurred, for example, in Dora's initial main camp, Buchenwald, as the French internee Edouard Laval reports: "It is true that tattooed prisoners were killed and that their skin was subsequently tanned. I myself saw 200. To preserve the vividness of the tattoos, they flayed these people right after the execution, before their bodies stiffened and got cold" (KZ Dok. 171). Allied liberators corroborate Laval's testimony:

It was the wife of one of the SS officers [Ilse Koch] who launched that fashion. . . . After the tanning of the skins these were made into "keepsakes": lampshades, wall hangings, book covers, etc. First Lieutenant Walter F. Emmos discovered about forty examples of this kind of "artistry."

And we ourselves saw six of these in the camp commandant's headquarters, among them one lampshade. (KZ Dok. 171)<sup>5</sup>

The aesthetic veneration of the tattooed victims' skins turns them into more or less beautiful examples of the exotic, the non-German. But while the tattooed skins figure here as exhibits of pure otherness, tattoos in the armpits of the skimmers reveal that the claim of a total difference cannot possibly be upheld. Thus tattooing instantiates, like the German uniforms, the undermining potential inherent in the encounter with the Other at home.

Cannibalism, finally, is a third instance subverting the allegedly firm distinction between superior Germans and their inferior enemies drawn by the former. We ask again whether the crimes committed in the concentration camp Dora connect in one way or another with the practice of cannibalism. The question derives from three observations about the interview given by the Counterforce spokesman to the *Wall Street Journal*: that the complex subway tunnels mentioned have their analogue in the Mittelwerke, that the spokesman declares himself to have committed an act of cannibalism, and that he is associated with the Schwarzkommando.

We conjecture the spokesman's connection with the Schwarzkommando from the question "Why should the *black* honor-guard ride half a continent[?]" because we have seen that blackness itself oscillates between two meanings. It is unclear, for example, whether the two Schwarzkommando killed in Hamburg were targeted because they were literally black—black-skinned—or because they were dressed in black SS uniforms. Likewise, our analysis of blackness as a highly ambiguous issue, requiring a literal and a figurative understanding, can be related to another passage in Pynchon's novel itself, Tchitcherine's reflections on the transcript of Slothrop's latest "sodium amytal session": "Black runs all through the transcript: the recurring color black. [. . . Slothrop] coupled 'schwarz' with some strange nouns[. . .] Blackwoman, Blackrocket, Blackdream" (GR 390–91). Is it possible to add "black honor-guard" to this list, and associate not only the Schwarzkommando with it but also the white-skinned but black-clad *Schutzstaffel*?

Some clues lead in that direction. It is a matter of historical record that the *Waffen-SS* as well as the *Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler"* (literally, the body guard division "Adolf Hitler") had ridden "half a continent," conquering foreign countries "stone night and winter day," before their German Empire splintered again. What is presumably less known is that the conquest of other countries was accompanied by a quest for the Grail. Influenced by the writings of Otto Rahn, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler elaborated an occultist scheme streamlining the Teutonic

legend of Percival for the so-called aryosophic ideology of Nazism. He founded the "Schwarzer Orden," the Black Order of the SS, and sent it on expeditions to foreign countries and other continents, such as South America, in pursuit of the Grail. The context in which Pynchon's phrase about the black honor-guard is embedded can be analyzed accordingly. As we have seen, the spokesman-narrator speculates about the chalice that presumably contained the blood of Christ:

The sacrament of the Eucharist is really drinking the blood of the enemy. The Grail, the Sangraal, is the bloody vehicle. Why else guard it so sacredly? Why should the black honor-guard ride half a continent, half a splintering Empire, stone night and winter day, if it's only for the touch of sweet lips on a humble bowl?

Taken at face value, the intimated drink from the Grail would necessarily lead to a dead end at this point because the Nazi Black Order never succeeded in finding the Grail. But Pynchon does not discuss the issue on this level alone, as becomes evident when he invokes the sacrament of the Eucharist, the practice not of the literal but of the symbolic incorporation of Christ's body and blood. This practice entails contradictory elements for the Christian believer. "No," the spokesman continues, still with reference to the black honor-guard, but now reformulating their quest in the light of Roman Catholic doctrine, "it's mortal sin they're carrying: to swallow the enemy, down into the slick juicery to be taken in by all the cells. Your officially defined 'mortal sin,' that is. A sin against you" (GR 739). In the act of Holy Communion, Catholics may be felt to commit what their canon condemns as mortal sin, because of the "potential for cannibalism in the sacrament of the Eucharist" (Kilgour 15). We do not mean to equate Roman Catholicism and SS Aryan ideology; the whole idea of Himmler's Black Order was to vie with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and, in that sense, the black honor-guard's drink from the Grail is, again, "really drinking the blood of the enemy." But a sample of Dora representations suggests the same contradiction as that in the Eucharist in the way they present relations among the SS, its concentration camps around Nordhausen, the prisoners interned there and the issue of cannibalism.

A taboo not only for Catholics but also for the Nazis, the actual practice of cannibalism—unlike that of tattooing—does not seem to have occurred among the Dora SS. Cases among prisoners, however, were known—for instance, that of a Russian internee in subcamp Ellrich. After camp authorities caught the Russian in the act, camp commander Otto Brinkmann forced him to repeat it for him and other SS. "One of the SS men points to the private parts [of a corpse],"

writes another Ellrich prisoner, Edgard vande Castelee, from Antwerp. “Yes, says the Russian, and without difficulty he cuts off the testicles. Does he wish pepper and salt? They get it for him from the camp kitchen, together with a piece of bread. The man begins to eat.” Assuming vande Castelee’s own imprisonment vouches for the factual accuracy of what he describes, and accepting the authenticity of how he does it, it is interesting to observe that his narrativization of the incident includes the reflection that “[t]he curiosity of the SS is insatiable” (Vande Castelee 110–11). If the SS camp leaders themselves refrained from actual cannibalism, vande Castelee’s first-hand representation of Dora nevertheless uses the term “insatiable”—a term extraordinarily charged with symbolism in this context—to measure the equally horrifying behavior of precisely these SS.

If the SS feast their eyes on the spectacle of prisoners eating dead fellow prisoners, this is not yet tantamount to what Pynchon might be construed to see as the symbolic cannibalism of the Eucharist. To become truly homologous takes more than metaphorical insatiability. In other words, vande Castelee’s memoir still lacks an agent who, like the Catholic communicant, can be identified as the symbolic cannibal. Other representations by former prisoners fill the gap the Belgian leaves, pinpointing the symbolic cannibal by shifting the focus from individual SS men to the de-individualized system of an SS-ruled concentration camp. Exploring the camp’s conspicuous name as well as its initial location inside the Mittelwerke tunnels, Yves Béon describes how prisoners “disappear into the mouth of the cave, methodically swallowed by Dora,” the “insatiable man eater” (4, 12). Likewise, Guido Zembsch-Schreve, from the Netherlands, depicts Dora as “a Moloch that had consumed over twenty thousand prisoners in a single year” and an “ogre need[ing] constant feeding with replacements” (146, 143). Maurice de la Pintièrre, like Béon an ex-prisoner from France, entitled his collection of drawings *Dora, la mangeuse d’hommes*, dedicating it “à la grande masse des obscurs . . . dont Dora, la ‘mangeuse d’hommes,’ a bu le sang jusqu’à la dernière goutte.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus the crimes committed in concentration camp Dora and its subcamps connect in one way or another with the practice of cannibalism as presented by the Counterforce/Schwarzkommando spokesman. They do so literally, as an act committed by at least one inmate shows, and figuratively. As to the latter, Dora’s symbolic incorporation of its prisoners—down into its slick juicery—is a notable topic in the representations of those like vande Castelee, Béon and de la Pintièrre whom Dora spared. Pynchon anthropomorphizes the camp in a similar way: with more than twenty thousand dead prisoners to its account, Dora has developed a severe case of bad breath when finally

a civilian, Franz Pökler, enters its precincts and smells “[t]he odors of shit, death, sweat, sickness, mildew, piss, the breathing of Dora” (GR 432).

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Evidence of the authenticity of Pökler’s observation of “naked corpses [. . .] stacked in front of the crematoriums” and of “the living, stacked ten to a straw mattress” (GR 432) is provided by the eye-witness account of one of the American liberators of the camp, Sergeant Ragene Farris of the 329th Medical Battalion:

The strongly nazified town of Nordhausen fell before air-armor and night attack on 11 April. Our S-2, Captain Johnson, brought the news that we were needed to evacuate patients from a concentration camp in one of the large factory areas of the city [that is, from subcamp Boelcke Kaserne, not the Dora main camp]. Lying among the multitudes of dead were reported to be a few living “beings,” and with quick medical attention, some might be saved. (Hoegh and Doyle 329–30)

<sup>2</sup>Translations from German sources are ours.

<sup>3</sup>Sanborn cites Homi Bhabha (121) here.

<sup>4</sup>See the facsimile of his registration card in McCann (unpaginated) and the references in Sellier (223, 224–25).

<sup>5</sup>Examples of this kind of “artistry” were also discovered in the Dora subcamp Ellrich: “a picture, measuring 20 centimeters in breadth and 15 in height, representing a sailing ship” made of “tattooed human skin” (Bornemann 221).

<sup>6</sup>“To the great mass of the obscure . . . whose blood Dora, the ‘Man-Eater,’ has drunk down to the last drop.” The dedication appears in the (unpaginated) *Avant-Propos*.

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