

Pynchon's Alternative Ethics of Writing in *V.*: The Problem of Authorship in the "Confessions of Fausto Maijstral"

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I wondered if the disassembly of the Bad Priest might not go on, and on, into evening. Surely her arms and breasts could be detached; the skin of her legs be peeled away to reveal some intricate understructure of silver openwork. Perhaps the trunk itself contained other wonders: intestines of parti-coloured silk, gay balloon-lungs, a rococo heart. But the sirens started up then. The children dispersed bearing away their new-found treasures, and the abdominal wound made by the bayonet was doing its work. I lay prone under a hostile sky looking down for moments more at what the children had left; suffering Christ foreshortened on the bare skull, one eye and one socket, staring up at me: a dark hole for the mouth, stumps at the bottoms of the legs. And the blood which had formed a black sash across the waist, flowing down both sides from the navel.

I went down into the cellar to kneel by her. (V 343)

With its scene of the disassembly of the Bad Priest on Malta during the Second World War, Fausto Maijstral's confession draws Herbert Stencil—who "has stayed off Malta," where "[h]is father died" (V 303), but who now suspects the Bad Priest is another incarnation of V. —to the Mediterranean island to settle the mystery of V. Fausto, however, does not share Stencil's compulsion to reconstruct the totality of V. figures. While Stencil collects and repeats various narratives told by several people in order to construct what he believes to be the one true story of V., Fausto finds Stencil's procedure obsessional and V. fictional. Denying that he might have had a vision after the shock of his wife, Elena's, death, Fausto confirms the death of the Bad Priest and criticizes Stencil's paranoiac tendency to imagine plots: "'You always look inside first, don't you, to find what's missing. What gap a "vision" could possibly fill. I was all gap then, and there was too wide a field to choose from'" (445). If, as Fausto claims, V. was indeed dismembered and died in 1943 on Malta, then not only would Stencil's pursuit of V. in 1956 be pointless; more seriously, Stencil would lose the very reason to sustain himself. Since his principle in searching for V. is "Approach and avoid," V. must always be "there to track down" so Stencil can maintain a "sense of animateness" thanks to his desire to reconstruct

"the V.-jigsaw" (55). Thus, disturbed by the possibility of V.'s death, Stencil (characteristically referring to himself in the third person) asks Fausto during their final conversation, "'Is it really his own extermination he's after?'" (451).

This late Maltese episode demonstrates how susceptible Stencil is to the changing conditions of V. figures in his attempt to narrativize his quest for V. As Fausto suggests, V. is most likely "an obsession after all" (448). Not that Fausto's own account, contra Stencil, is wholly reliable. On the contrary, as Donald Brown points out in his superb analysis of Fausto's confession, Fausto's discourse can also be regarded as "an example of narrative's incapacity . . . to provide an account of experience that would be 'authentic' in a phenomenological sense" (67). Though claiming that he administered the last sacrament to the dying (wo)man in the cellar of a bombed-out ruin, Fausto neither remembers the exact location of the cellar nor can identify the children he claims to have witnessed attacking the priest. Simply put, he has no supporting evidence of the death of the Bad Priest. So any careful reader would question the authenticity of Fausto's discourse as well: if Stencil's story of Lady V. is a product of his paranoia, Fausto's account of her death is equally problematic because of his inability to provide any supporting evidence, material or referential. Still, if Walter Benjamin is right in saying that the scene of death calls one's attention "not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual" (166), then Fausto, supposedly the only witness to the death of V., would be better qualified than Stencil to tell the story of V. In other words, even though his account of the Bad Priest or V. is very limited, Fausto, most informed on the problem of writing in V., should be regarded as the character closest to the authorship of V. Thus, in spite of, or rather, because of his inability to prove the death of the Bad Priest, Fausto's confession deserves special attention.

Fausto's writing is the novel's only text presented as un-"Stencilized" (228) and is thus clearly distinguished from the rest of the V. narratives: a typed document written for his only daughter, Paola, Fausto's confession is shown to Stencil as it was written by Fausto himself. As David Seed points out, "For the first time [Stencil] is presented with a ready-made text, whereas all the three earlier [historical] chapters have undergone a process of 'Stencilizing'" (99). While Seed is not clear about the rest of the historical chapters, I would like to suggest that not only all the historical chapters except Fausto's confession but also all the novel's present sections can, and should, be considered Stencilized. For, as Mark W. Redfield argues, "Stencil, who is always (wrongly) 'quoting' a prior narrative and who in his quest for

V. figures the production of V., thus puts quotation marks around the novel."¹ Theoretically, therefore, every single word in Pynchon's narrative can be regarded as undergoing "the effects of being 'Stencilized'" (Redfield 161), except for Fausto's confession. This is not to say that Fausto is somehow privileged in the narrative of V., nor that he is the representative of Pynchon's voice.² Rather, the fact that Fausto's discourse is distinguished from the Stencilized voices underlines that Fausto is presented as a character totally indifferent to Stencil's plot of Lady V. So the following argument is conducted on the premise that the text of V. is all Stencilized, with the single exception of Fausto's confession, which alone is immune to Stencil's consciousness or the effects of V.

While critics have long discussed the relation between Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane in order to consider Pynchon's sense of Western rationality and its counterpart, schlemielhood, the present essay concerns itself with differences between Stencil's discourse and Fausto's in order to analyze the narratological structure of the novel and, by extension, Pynchon's ethics of writing.³ If Stencil represents a writer's desire to narrativize history and, thus, can be taken as a stand-in for the third-person narrator of modernist narrative convention,⁴ then Fausto problematizes the categorical imperatives of such a convention and thereby poses the question of authorship in the practice of writing. Unlike Stencil's text, which seeks causal connections in the history of V. figures, Fausto's writing circumvents the rhetorical strategy that constitutes "the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with 'reason'" (V 306), and, in so doing, undermines not only the authenticity of narrative content but also the legitimacy of the act of writing itself. Counteracting the Stencilian desire for the historical biography of Lady V., Fausto suspends Stencil's accountability for the totality of V. figures and thereby brings to the fore the alternative ethics of writing in Pynchon's novel. (We might want to say that Pynchon textualizes Fausto's narrative along with Stencil's story of V. in order to propose a sort of anti-Derridean thesis that *there is always the outside [of the] text* to which we should attend.⁵) The present essay attests Pynchon's ethical awareness that there is always another way of relating historical facts; that there are always other historical experiences; that there is always another history possible. History as such would be, without this ethical awareness, a collective illusion of our past experiences that totalizes, as in Stencil's narrative, other perceptive possibilities under the capitalized heading of, say, Modern History.

In fact, Fausto's apologia is easily distinguished from a traditional religious narrative as well as from a historical one. Unlike, for example,

St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which depict his spiritual odyssey from lost faith to its recovery, Fausto's confession is not a straight outpouring of his heart in avowal of sin and praise of the grandeur of God. Also, instead of Augustine's unconditional acclaim of truth in the presence of God, Fausto expresses a strange aloofness from God: though promising to "answer to no tribunal but God" for his failure to rescue the Bad Priest when (s)he was attacked by the children, Fausto adds that "God at this moment is far away," without apologizing further for his "sin of omission" (345). This remark suggests that he presupposes the divine presence neither as his addressee nor as the authorial ground on which to support his account. Taken as a religious narrative, therefore, Fausto's confession is a faulty text, irresponsible not just for his past behavior toward the helpless (wo)man but also for his ongoing practice of writing.

How, then, can Fausto prove the reality of his account? Or, how can he establish his authorship in writing an apologia without God's affirmation? Before going further in this direction, however, it must be noted that Fausto's confession is a kind of theory of writing in which he divides his personality into four stages according to his linguistic awareness: Fausto I, a romantic poet "slated to be the priest" (306); Fausto II, "a dual man" (309), a colonized subject torn between Maltese mindlessness and English intellectualism; Fausto III, barely articulate and "closest . . . to non-humanity" (306-07), and, most important, a witness to the disassembly of the Bad Priest; Fausto IV, the present writer of the "Confessions." Each stage has its unique authorial system, except for Fausto III, who, with his journal hardly decipherable, constitutes a demarcation in the formation of Fausto's verbal selves. The writings of Fausto I and II are clearly distinguishable from that of Fausto IV in that they speak of/to God, though in different manners. So let us consider Fausto's early texts first and then contrast them with his present writing.

The high-spirited young poet Fausto I saw himself in the vanguard of "a grand School of Anglo-Maltese Poetry—the Generation of '37" before the war. Since he felt "a sure wind of Greatness flowing over [his] shoulders like an invisible cape" (305), poetic composition was for Fausto I a means to communicate with the divine presence. Consider, for example, the following passage, full of biblical allusions, from his journal:⁶

"Oh, God is here, you know, in the crimson carpets of sulla each spring, in the blood-orange groves, in the sweet pods of my carob tree, the St.-John's-bread of this dear island. His fingers raked the ravines; His breath

keeps the rain clouds from over us, His voice once guided the shipwrecked St. Paul to bless our Malta." (308)

Fausto I sees in Nature signs of the divine presence in the world after the Creation. While God Himself is invisible, there is ample evidence everywhere of His being in the world. So the fact that Fausto I cannot see God directly does not lead him to skepticism: rather, as he writes, guided by the hand of Nature, he retraces what God has created in this world and, in so doing, acquires a sense of unity with God. For him, the work of art proves his communion with God and, therefore, counts as part of the Creation. Like that of Romantic poets, Fausto I's authorship is established on the theological notion of "the figure of the artist as Author and Creator" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 52).

In contrast, for Fausto II, born with the coming of the Second World War and with the birth of his unplanned daughter, Paola, the reality of the living world is harsh. Seeing a discrepancy between his Maltese innocence and English shrewdness,⁷ as well as between the assaulted Malta and the divine promise, he retreats "into religious abstraction" and "also into poetry," where the divine sense of communion is apparently superseded by what Fausto IV calls the "island-wide sense of communion":

No sleep, little food; but no complaints. Are we not, Maltese, English and the few Americans, one? There is, we are taught, a communion of saints in heaven. So perhaps on earth, also in this Purgatory, a communion: not of gods or heroes, merely men expiating sins they are unaware of, caught somehow all at once within the reaches of a sea uncrossable and guarded by instruments of death. Here on our dear tiny prison plot, our Malta. (315)

The strength and unity of men command respect here, and the sense of the divine presence is now mediated remotely through the Sisyphean labor of home defence. In Fausto's discourse, God can maintain His transcendence only by keeping away from human war, while men expiate in the absence of God the sins they have committed unawares. As Maurice Blanchot puts it in discussing the postromantic belief system, "every negation of God (that is to say, affirmation of the absence of God) is still always a discourse that speaks of and to God in God's absence" (253). Thus, Fausto still relies on the divine presence as an authorial ground on which to construct his writing. That is, the divine presence in the discourse of Fausto II is substituted for by that of man, the negative reflection of the presence of God Himself, as a

supporting ground of Fausto's writing at this period. This quasi-theological notion of author as man establishes authorship in Fausto's wartime journals.

In the "Confessions," however, these theological and quasi-theological notions of authorship are put into question. The fact that the writings of Fausto I and II are put into quotation marks (literally, or virtually—by being blocked) suggests that Fausto now considers his former writings no longer valid by themselves but in need of commentaries when being re-presented. Indeed, his purpose in citing these writings in the "Confessions" is not to re-mark his past in his present self but to renounce it: for Fausto IV, writing is a process in which "all the successive identities taken on and rejected by the writer as a function of linear time are treated as separate characters" (306). Yet at the same time, since the "Confessions" are written without a proper authorization, divine or whatever, the reality of Fausto's present writing appears instead to be supported by the cited journals. In other words, not the legitimacy of the cited texts but that of Fausto's present writing is more problematic. This impression is strengthened when Fausto stresses the dubiousness of man's memory and the arbitrariness of his created past:

Now memory is a traitor: gilding, altering. The word is, in sad fact, meaningless, based as it is on the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous. A man has no more right to set forth any self-memory as truth than to say "Maratt is a sour-mouthed University cynic" or "Dnubietna is a liberal and madman." (307)

Accordingly, a problem arises when Fausto represents the scene of the disassembly of the Bad Priest, for the only witness, Fausto III, traumatized by hearing of Elena's death and then by seeing the disassembly, recorded "nothing but gibberish" in his journal "for weeks after" (306). The scene is represented by Fausto IV without any supportive reference or any material evidence. (The only material evidence that proves the disassembly of the Bad Priest is "an ivory comb [in the shape of f]ive crucified Limeys" [443; cf. 342], which Paola, presumably among the Maltese children attacking the helpless priest, apparently took from the dying [wo]man, though Fausto does not realize the comb's significance. I will return to this ivory comb below.) The authorship of Fausto IV is seriously undermined in his efforts to represent this referentially unsupportable event.

How, then, can Fausto, without any defensible citations, not only represent the scene irrecoverably lost in his treacherous memory but also justify his act of writing it? How can he establish the authenticity

of his account? There is, indeed, no way for Fausto to prove the reality of his account: as I have already argued, he can neither locate the cellar where he administered the last sacrament to the Bad Priest nor identify the children who attacked the priest. As Stencil suspects, the scene might have been merely a vision. Still, the “indecipherable entries” (345) left in the journal of Fausto III testify that something happened to Fausto then which must be told regardless of his accountability, because, as Alec McHoul and David Wills rightly say, “the practice of writing is tied closely to the events which constitute its conditions of possibility, which give rise to it” (180). Thus, what is at stake in the “Confessions” is not Fausto’s ability to represent the scene, which is evidentially unsupportable, but the relation between writing and its context, between the writer’s practice, which records his experiences, and the interpretive possibility to assess the significance of his writing. In a word, the problem of contextuality comes before that of authenticity in Fausto’s writing. The “Confessions” pose this question of the contextual or co-textual possibility of individual experience.

What are the Faustian experiences, then? How are they different from those of Stencil in Pynchon’s novel? Can each character possibly share the experiences of the other? Or, to put it differently, what are Pynchon’s ethics of writing such antithetical narratives as Stencil’s and Fausto’s under the same heading? Is *V.* self-contradictory or multi-perspectival, that is, differential in its way of narrativizing itself? What are the effects of presenting incompatible stories within the single book? And can we possibly either confirm or negate the reality of Lady *V.* after reading Fausto’s confession?

To answer these questions, let us consider the function of Stencil, who, by virtue of his name,⁸ serves as a template for printing on Pynchon’s “white Paper”—a Lockean metaphor for the human mind on which is “imprinted” a “variety of ideas” by “sensation” and “reflection,” two essential (external and internal) operations of the empirical subject (Locke 104–06 and *passim*). Stencil transforms his personality into those of others, when narrating, and, in so doing, censors their stories not in order to see from their points of view but “[t]o keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person” (*V.* 62). Just as the Lockean subject is always and everywhere bound to the empiricist grid of human knowledge in conceiving a variety of ideas, so is Stencil bound to the textual system of *V.* in telling the stories of *V.* figures: not only does he speak the language of censorship by Stencilizing the other persons’ stories, but he himself is always censored or imprinted as the third-person narrator in the text so as to speak the language of *V.* As Judith Butler puts it in her theory of the performative, although the subject of censorship “enters the normativity

of language, the subject exists only as a grammatical fiction prior to that very entrance" (135).

In fact, Stencil is not the first Pynchon character who "refer[s] to himself in the third person" (V 62). In "Entropy," Callisto refers to himself in the third person when dictating his autobiographical narrative to his "part French and part Annamese" girlfriend, Aubade, in his apartment, "a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the vagaries of the weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder" (84, 83-84). Like Stencil, Callisto is a pseudo-third-person narrator who seeks order over chaos. However, when not dictating his memoir, Callisto refers to himself in the first person. Thus Pynchon mocks modernist third-person narrative through Callisto's act of storytelling, which stops short of completion; for at the end of the story, Aubade, having served as Callisto's amanuensis, suddenly smashes out a window which separates Callisto's "[h]ermetically sealed" inside from the chaotic outside, thereby breaking down the symbolic order "it had taken [Callisto] seven years to weave together" (83). Callisto's failure to complete his narrative because of Aubade's subversive action indicates Pynchon's critique of the modernist narrative of the third person, which is not only dictatorial and colonizing but also solipsistic to such an extent that it, willingly or unwillingly, rushes toward resolution "into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion" (98).

By contrast, Pynchon's presentation of Stencil as a third-person narrator in the modernist fashion is more invisible. Since Stencil's language, always and everywhere articulated in the third person, is coextensive with that of the novel, we can hardly "tell when Stencil stops or starts narrating, even though what he retells undergoes 'considerable change' in being 'Stencilized' [V 228]." To further cite Redfield's careful and exquisite analysis of Stencil's "vision and 'revision,'" Stencil "figures the embodiment of figuration; the spatial and temporal axes of his quest are on one level no more than metaphors for narrative" (156). Despite Stencil's "compulsive yarning" (V 388) of the borrowed stories, therefore, the narrative of V. never introduces multilateral perspectives into the text: rather, it reinforces the monolithic, as well as solitary, nature of the third-person narrative, as it consolidates Stencil's identity as "He Who Looks for V." (226).

For this reason, Stencil's desire to "accumulat[e] . . . meanings around the letter 'V'" may be seen to simulate "the book's design," which would determine and then overdetermine categories of the narrative voices Stencil ventriloquizes with the single, preconceived meaning that serves as "both an analgesic for existential emptiness and a threat to Stencil's sense of personal freedom and the distinctness that

girds his sanity" (Schaub 16). This totalitarian tendency in the operation of the language of V., which usurps Stencil's voice so as to censor the narrative contents, would certainly disturb most of us literary critics, whose vocation is, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's words, to "[unravel] the text to make visible the assignment of subject-positions" (241). An early Pynchon critic concerned with this problem of the censorship language that totalizes our perspectives is Tony Tanner, who argues,

Pynchon's point [in evoking systematically the styles of previous writers as he deals with different episodes in different times and places] seems to be to remind the reader that there is no one writable "truth" about history and experience, only a series of versions: it always comes to us "stenciled." In such a way he can indicate that he is well aware of the ambiguities of his own position, constructing another fiction and at the same time underlining the fallacies involved in all formal plottings and organizations of space. (CW 172)

It is true that Pynchon apparently exploits the Stencilian language of censorship not to substantialize but to foreground the story of Lady V. as an arbitrary, as well as artificial, construction. Trapped in what Tanner calls the ambiguities of his own position, Pynchon can be seen as trying not to commit himself much to a certain operation of the censorship language by using Stencil as a grammatical scapegoat, a third-person narrator whose act of narrative is condemned to fail.⁹

But against this view, I want to argue that Pynchon's stance is in fact more affirmative in proposing an alternative ethics of writing, or, to put it in Faustian terms, an ethics of writing during "an interregnum" (V 307). By these words I want to propose an ethics according to which one writes conscientiously and responsibly by answering to a call not authorizing but interrupting, or even interrogating, one's work; for ethical representations are possible only conditionally when one is alerted to the possibility of other histories as well as to the limits of a specifically constructed history. As Lawrence Buell puts it, "truth, authenticity, or historical facticity is concealed within, by, or behind discourses resistant, opaque, or elliptical" (10). So the difference Pynchon creates in his language between what he wants to say and yet is unable to say, and what he actually makes Stencil say should not be regarded as the sign of ambiguities that indicates the limits of Pynchon's writing. Rather, it encourages us to take notice, affirmatively rather than cynically or pessimistically, of a third language in the novel: the language of Fausto Maijstral.

As a chapter in V., Fausto's confession constitutes part of the story of Lady V. but originates outside Stencil's consciousness: Fausto's

writing is first presented to Paola and then, through Stencil's reading it, to the readers of the novel. Unlike other historical chapters in *V.*, which are more or less revised and edited by Stencil and, therefore, translated into the Stencilian language of *V.*, the "Confessions" remain as they were written by Fausto even after being incorporated into the textual system of *V.* Thus Fausto's confession should be considered to be written outside the economy of the *V.* system and thereby to constitute a breach in that system. (Recall that Fausto "'was all gap then, and there was too wide a field to choose from'" when he witnessed the dismemberment of the Bad Priest.) Fausto's writing introduces a deep and unbridgeable semantic lacuna into Stencil's story of Lady *V.*

Though undermining its own legitimacy, this otherness of Fausto's account in relation to the Stencilian language of *V.* demonstrates that our traditional notion of authorship as the writer's ownership, both intellectual and commercial, of his or her writing no longer works in the "Confessions." For Fausto understands that such a notion of authorship binds the writing to the writer and the writer to the writing, as in Stencil's narrative of *V.*, and also prescribes the author-centered relation between the writer and the reader in which the writer is reduced to a kind of writing machine sending authorial messages, most likely via a narrator like Stencil presented as the third person, and the reader is reduced to an objective model designed to decode those messages in a predetermined way following the narrator's guidance.¹⁰ Instead, what is at stake in Fausto's confession is its possibility to be circulated among readers without any prescription so as to widen the range of its future readership. Only from this perspective can Fausto's sense of writing during an interregnum—the sense of writing in the absence of authority, or of writing when being interrogated about the legitimacy of the act of writing itself—be rightly understood. The confession is Fausto's testimony of his capacity to continue writing in order to extend his work toward the outside of the prescribed system of traditional author-reader relations even at the expense of his own accountability.

As he rewrites the notion of authorship, Fausto radically revises the notion of history as well. "The old cyclic idea of history had taught only the rim, to which princes and serfs alike were lashed; that wheel was oriented vertical; one rose and fell" (*V.* 338). In contrast, the Faustian notion of history is figured as a new "Fortune's wheel," which is "dead-level, its own rim only that of the sea's horizon" (338, 339). The center holding the spokes of this horizontal wheel in place is neither a single, transcendental consciousness nor the authorial presence; it is occupied by the children of Malta:

These recording angels never wrote anything down. It was more, if you will, a “group awareness.” They merely watched, passive: you’d see them like sentinels at the top of a rubble pile any sunset; or peering round the corner of the street, squatting on the steps, loping in pairs, arms flung round each other’s shoulders, across a vacant lot, going apparently nowhere. (339)

When history is recorded as/in a group awareness, its authorization is beyond any individual writer’s ability: the writer is no more than part of that group awareness. Thus his or her writing has to be circulated among other people in order to be reinscribed as/in a group awareness. For this reason, the “Confessions” are addressed not to God but to Paola and, through Paola, to Stencil and, through Stencil without being Stencilized, to the readers of *V*. Even though the legitimacy, in the traditional sense, of Fausto’s confession remains problematic, its reinscription as/in a group awareness is enacted and reenacted as it is circulated among future readers.¹¹

For Fausto, therefore, historical experience is not a collective illusion, as Stencil seems to suppose it. Fausto’s purpose, unlike Stencil’s, is not to confirm that “Events seem to be ordered into an ominous logic” (449). Rather, he finds that “[t]he facts are history” because “[t]he facts call up emotional responses” (305), through which we can share history with others not by reifying the monolithic Stencilian logic of history but by reinscribing our individual experiences as/in a group awareness. As past events can never be reexperienced as they were experienced the first time, there can be, for Fausto, no transcendental logic of historical events as such that will guarantee the actuality of original experience. Nor can Fausto accept the notion of the authorized historian who, as R. G. Collingwood supposed, “*already* knows of his own experience that it is *true*” (256; emphasis added). Instead, individual experiences can be circulated among and even shared by those who have not directly experienced the original events when these experiences are translated into a group awareness. Even though these experiences are varied—since they are a representation of a representation—and therefore not authentic in the traditional sense, they are still worth being well thought about, well discussed and well worked on. For only through them can we turn to the voices of others and also take their experiences seriously as part of our own.¹²

Can we, then, reenact the reality of Lady *V*. as/in our group awareness? Is there any intersection of the Stencilian view of Lady *V*. and the Faustian experience of the death of the Bad Priest? Is an ethical representation of *V*. possible? One moment for considering these questions is the scene of Paola’s return to Pappy Hod, the husband she

married, perhaps just “to get to America” (V 14), then deserted. Pappy—a naive, romantic sailor who really loves Paola—returned to his navy service and sailed for the Mediterranean a week after she left him. Paola herself comes back to Malta with Stencil and Profane. So the different tracks of this separated couple recross on Paola’s home island. On board Pappy’s ship in drydock, where it is being repaired, Paola meets her husband for the first time since she left him, and promises to return to him: “I will sit home in Norfolk, faithful, and spin. Spin a yarn for your coming-home present” (443). Then, Paola confirms her words most romantically by handing Pappy, as a token of her promise, “an ivory comb. Five crucified Limeys,” which readers know she (most likely she, though Fausto did not register her presence) took from the dying Bad Priest.

Critics have analyzed this scene as one of redemption in the otherwise dehumanizing landscape of the story of Lady V. For example, Robert D. Newman argues that “[i]n entrusting the ivory comb to Pappy Hod, Paola assumes the role of the White Goddess unifying the marriage bond once more and offering her comforting spirit to a disjointed husband and, through him, to a disjointed world” (WG 184). Also Brown, seeing Paola as “represent[ing] Pynchon’s generation,” refers to this scene, though hastily, as a moment hinting that Paola—a “hybrid, nomad, multicultural ‘anti-V.’”—“will find a voice in which to tell her own ‘yarn’” (71).¹³ In fact, this scene of Paola’s return is a testing place where we can rewrite the significance of the ivory comb and, by extension, that of V. from a symbol of dehumanizing idealism to a promise of non-egoistic, everlasting love. We can believe in this romantic transformation of the V. object only if we can assume that Paola’s story, which is given no room in the novel, is really spun, elsewhere, outside the text, as the alternative to Stencil’s version of Lady V.¹⁴ Testing our nerve to bear the absence of the author-ized plot, the scene, as it is circulated among us, the readers of *V.*, extends the (con)textuality of Pynchon’s novel and, in so doing, refers to an outside text or another text outside the text of *V.* where the Stencilian V. and the Faustian Bad Priest might finally overlap.

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Notes

¹Some critics claim that the novel’s epilogue is not Stenciled either. For example, Molly Hite sees “no framing devices around this final section” and concludes that “nothing even hints that its narrator is ‘really’ a character” (62). Also, finding that “the narrative frames of V.’s Maltese episodes are not based upon Stencil’s impersonations,” Dwight Eddins suggests that the last historical

episode “gains its autonomy, and authority, from being designated an ‘Epilogue’ to the entire novel and from being narrated—presumably—by Pynchon himself” (87). While these critics both stress the autonomy of the narrative voice in the final episode, I would rather problematize their desire for the transcendental voice in Pynchon’s narrative, a desire which, as we shall see, is harshly criticized in the novel.

²William Plater rightly suggests that “[i]t would be a mistake to regard Fausto as a stand-in for Pynchon, but it would be a greater mistake not to recognize Pynchon’s closed world in Fausto’s room” (8).

³A number of critics have discussed the bipolar relation between Stencil and Profane: see, for example, Hanjo Berrsessem (53–54); Peter Cooper (210); Theodore Kharpertian (58–84); Frank McConnell (164–69); Melvyn New; Robert D. Newman (U, esp. 34–42); Seed (71–116); Joseph Slade (31–106); and Tony Tanner (TP 40–55). On the other hand, few critics have paid attention to the relation between Stencil and Fausto. Slade makes one of few substantive analyses of this relation, which, however, is rather problematic because of his underestimation of Fausto as “reflect[ing] on little else than the self and its preservation and alterations over the course of time” (35). Plater’s argument is more precise and suggestive: “While Fausto is not the only storyteller in Pynchon’s world, he is the only one who self-consciously talks about his craft” (8).

⁴Stencil, “the century’s child” (V 52), has been said to embody allegorically a witness to the history of the twentieth century, or what Deborah Madsen calls “some kind of V-metaphysic, the *weltanschauung* of the twentieth century and modernity’s link with the past” (30).

⁵While his (in)famous postulate in *Of Grammatology* that “*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (158) sounds not only historically and socially autistic but also, as Lawrence Buell puts it, “ethically myopic” (9), Derrida has increasingly engaged social, political and ethical issues in recent years: see, for example, his *Specters of Marx* and (Borradori’s) *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*.

⁶See Victoria Price for the details of biblical allusions in Pynchon’s work.

⁷Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the British had “campaign[ed] to impose English as the language of Maltese culture,” until “[i]n 1934, Malta was declared to have two official languages: English and Maltese” (Serracino Inglott 39). See Serracino Inglott for more on the question of Fausto’s bilingualism.

⁸According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), “Stencil” refers to “A thin sheet of metal, cardboard, etc., in which one or more holes have been cut, of such shape that when a brush charged with pigment is passed over the back of the sheet, a desired pattern, letter, or figure is produced on the surface upon which the sheet is laid.”

⁹In a typescript of *V.* acquired in 2001 by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, Stencil consistently refers to himself in the first person. Interestingly, Profane also tells a personal story in this draft, though it is rendered in the third person (see Herman and Krafft). These facts suggest that, having started out to write *V.* as a modernist narrative like those of Faulkner, in which several characters frequently tell their stories, Pynchon changed his mind in the course of revising to recharacterize Stencil as one who refers to himself only in the third person, so as to undermine the modernist finesse of the third-person narrative and, at the same time, to put his work one step ahead of modernist fiction.

¹⁰See Roman Jakobson's structuralist model of linguistic communication (66), to which I am indebted here.

¹¹In *Mason & Dixon*, Wicks Cherrycoke describes history as "a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common" (349). According to this Cherrycokean notion, elaborated by Ethelmer LeSpark, history "'needs . . . to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev'ry Radius, Masters of Disguise to provide her the Costume, Toilette, and Bearing, and Speech nimble enough to keep her beyond the Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government'" (350).

¹²To be ethical, subjectivity has to be put in the place of the other. As Emmanuel Levinas writes, "The responsibility for another, an unlimited responsibility which the strict book-keeping of the free and non-free does not measure, requires subjectivity as an irreplaceable hostage" (124). Whose hostage, then, is Fausto? Pynchon's, Malta's or, most likely, that of writing itself?

¹³Among other critics who have referred to this scene are Cooper (78), John Dugdale (105) and Kharpertian (70). While Cooper regards Paola's return as "suggest[ing] the redemptive possibilities of love," Dugdale finds Paola "existing 'on the lonely promontory between two worlds' ([V] 331), the product of 'a terrible misalliance' ([V] 314)."

¹⁴As the daughter of Fausto Majstral, Paola embodies another linguistic awareness that may follow after that of Fausto IV. If Fausto's critique of the Stencilian language of censorship is made on the very edge of that same linguistic mode, then Paola, born "'[b]y accident'" (341), is placed outside the totalitarian landscape of the censorship language. If Fausto's anticensorious language is possible only as an extension of the very object of its critique, Paola lives immune to that language. Yet this does not mean that she is, like Fausto III, inarticulate or non-human(e). In fact, she is counted as one among only a few humane characters in the novel. What distinguishes her use of language, especially written language, from that of others is that she "live[s] proper nouns. Persons, places. No things" (51). Thus Paola is immune to the world of abstraction (unlike the proper-noun-banding phonies of the Whole Sick Crew)

as well as that of material possession, a fact which apparently promises the redemptive possibility of her tale—which, however, can never be unfolded in Pynchon's story.

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