

Unreadable Stares: Imperial Narratives and the Colonial Gaze in *Gravity's Rainbow*

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The colonial situation—that is, the relation, especially the power dynamics, between the colonizer and the colonized—plays an important part in much of Pynchon's writing. In the early short story "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," an Ojibwa Indian, brought like a prize of conquest to Washington, DC, erupts into a traditional homicidal psychosis of his tribe, exposing as empty and powerless the capital-crowd cocktail-party conversation which seeks to define and control him. In *V.*, Foppl's siege party seeks to conjure up the ecstasy of power associated with von Trotha's 1904 genocidal campaign against the Hereros; and British explorer Hugh Godolphin, like Conrad's Marlow, recognizes the connection between the process of mapping and naming unknown spaces and the imperial desire to know and thus control the world. "A Journey into the Mind of Watts" and *Vineland* both suggest that potentially dissident sections of the United States are metaphorical third-world countries and are brought under control through imperial processes. And, of course, *Mason & Dixon* focuses on the ways institutionalized ideologies, epistemologies and discourses seek to possess a continent and control its people.

The two most significant colonial situations in *Gravity's Rainbow* are those in Kirghizstan, where the Soviet Union asserted control by encouraging Russian immigration, disrupting nomadic herding routes and imposing the New Turkic Alphabet, a written language for a previously preliterate people, and in South-West Africa, where German settlers appropriated land from the indigenous Hereros, stole or destroyed their sacred cattle and killed or made prisoner thousands of people in a blatant extermination campaign. Javaid Qazi, Steven Weisenburger and others have identified a variety of sources of information Pynchon used in composing the Kirghizstan and South-West Africa sections of the novel, but Pynchon's narrator goes beyond the informational to absorb, critique and use the discourses of these sources. In fact, the novel's focus on the sources' discourse is a vital part of its treatment of the colonial situation. In both the Kirghizstan section and the sections dealing with South-West Africa, the narrator uses and parodies the colonial discourse, and reverses the discourse to allow the colonized to gaze upon and articulate the colonizer,

demonstrating in the process, however, that the imperial enterprise has so thoroughly coopted the colonized that they see themselves through the epistemological frame of the colonial discourse.

I will examine three of Pynchon's sources: Stephen Graham's *Through Russian Central Asia*, a 1916 travel narrative; W. P. Steenkamp's *Is the South-West African Herero Committing Race Suicide?*, a 1944 anthropological examination of the Herero tribe; and Mircea Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return*, a 1949 philosophical-theological study of the ontology and epistemology of "archaic" peoples. And I will use two texts that theorize the rhetoric of colonial discourse, especially travel writing—David Spurr's *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*—to analyze how Pynchon's narrator uses and self-referentially enters into dialogue with colonial discourse. Colonial discourse serves the needs of and, in fact, makes possible the imperial narrative—the story of the colonizer's encounter with the colonized. More specifically, imperial narratives represent the story of the colonizer (presumably superior by virtue of nature, knowledge, technology or power) gazing on the colonized. As Spurr and Pratt argue, colonial discourse is founded on the right to gaze: in the act of observing is implied the process of ordering, naming, understanding and controlling.

Spurr identifies twelve tropes or rhetorical strategies at work in colonial discourse which seek to confirm and reinforce the power dynamics of the colonial situation. Five of these are relevant to *Gravity's Rainbow's* use and critique of its sources' discourses. Briefly, these strategies are *negation*, representing the colonized landscape as empty and thus available for filling, ordering and infusing with meaning by the colonizer; *debasement*, representing the faults of the colonized society and culture as products of individual faults of the colonized people—a strategy connected to the process of defending civilization or the civilized self from threats to order by repudiating these threats as Other;¹ *idealization*, representing the colonized as utopian to define the colonizer's faults by comparison; *aestheticization*, representing the colonized as being ordered and made meaningful by means of the colonizer's narrative practice, and thus removing the colonized from political and historical contexts; and *resistance*, a practice of the colonized in which mimicry of colonial discourse foregrounds language—rather than nature, knowledge, technology or power—as the foundation of authority in the colonial situation.

In *Through Russian Central Asia*, Graham, a British travel writer, narrates his journey across central Asia to explore the Russian policy toward the land and the indigenous people for lessons on how Great

Britain might deal with its subject lands and peoples. Justifying Russian expansion into central Asia, he argues, “Russia has access to the empty heart of Asia. The old world is hollow at the core, and Russia has access to that great, wide hollowness, stands at the door of it and stares into the great emptiness” (70). This strategy of negation works with a parallel strategy of debasement by which Graham seeks to define the indigenous people of this empty wilderness as Other, completely dissociated from the presumably civilized and somehow more human Europeans. Graham overtly admits such definition as his goal when he speaks of the purpose of travel writers: “we help our fellow-countrymen to see themselves as quite distinctive. Our minds certainly are confused by the writings and sayings of those stay-at-home folk who imagine that difference of nationality is only difference of speech and customs, and perhaps of dress, not understanding that first of all it is difference of soul and difference in destiny” (266). In this negation, the dismissal of the colonized’s destiny is connected to the denial of their historical and sociopolitical contexts. And in emphasizing the differences between the colonized Other and his readers back home in England, Graham attempts to define strict borders between the two.

We see this strategy at work throughout Graham’s book. He says of Islamic people, “[t]hey are apart, they are scarcely human beings in our Western sense of the term, and are negligible” (39). Of the Kirghiz he writes, “In these wild places of the world . . . there is no civilisation and no pretension on the part of man to be more than an animal himself” (85). His most severe judgments are reserved for the Chinese. “They are a devilish people. At first glance they seem artless and childlike, but you can never be sure what they are up to; they are secret and mysterious” (170–71). Graham reports as fact that after the 1906 earthquake, a secret Chinese city was discovered underneath San Francisco, where were found many missing white people who apparently had been abducted. At one rest stop, a Chinese man offers Graham his bed. Graham writes, “His humility was touching—especially in contrast to my own instinctive loathing of a bed on which Chinese had lain. Fortunately, I did not feel tired” (176). He later tells us that rather than sleep in inns and hostels, most Englishmen carry their own tents: “In that way they avoid the unpleasantness of sleeping in a room full of Chinese” (183).

In discussing debasement, Spurr draws on Kristeva’s theory of abjection, the idea that the self must maintain boundaries against the temptation of the return to lack of difference. We desire what is Other, outside our boundaries, so we must repress this desire through the maintenance of strict boundaries. Desire is implied in the practice of tourism, the desire to experience something other than the familiar. The

maintenance of boundaries is manifested in the fear of contamination by the Other that Graham displays. Indeed, his overall conclusion, the lesson to be learned from Russian activities in central Asia, is for Great Britain to stop immigration and maintain national purity. "The nature of our Empire is elementary and its task is to keep pure" (264).

Graham's discourse and rhetorical strategies are foregrounded, examined and played with in *Gravity's Rainbow's* long flashback to Tchitcherine in central Asia. The section begins with Tchitcherine as master of the colonial gaze. Indeed, his observations of the wolves in the street, the buildings with the false second stories, and the soldiers playing preference (338) are all Graham's. But for Tchitcherine, the emptiness that needs to be filled is not geographical, but the silences of Seven Rivers country, emphasizing Tchitcherine's role in bringing a colonizing written language to a hitherto oral culture, and the role of discourse in creating and maintaining colonial authority. But as the chapter continues, the narrator subverts the authority of both the gaze and the discourse.

The colonial gaze is first made ambiguous in the schoolhouse where the NTA is being taught. The Russians should be in command here. It is they, "Educated Native Speaker" Džaqyp Qulan knows, who observe him and "gaug[e] day-to-day [. . .] his degree of restlessness" (340). But when Tchitcherine enters the classroom, it is he who is subject to "unreadable stares" (339). Brooding on his own situation and his rivalry with his half-brother Enzian, Tchitcherine reflects (or imagines) that Džaqyp Qulan occasionally gives him "a certain look? Didn't the look say, 'Nothing you do, nothing he does, will help you in your mortality?'" (341). Here the colonized person apparently claims the right to gaze on the colonizer, although it is uncertain whether the gaze and its interpretation come from Džaqyp Qulan or are projected onto him by Tchitcherine in his own paranoia. But the very fact of the ambiguity undercuts the authority of the colonial gaze and the colonial power.

This ambiguity is continued, and then the gaze is reversed, in the narrator's presentation of Chinese opium addict Chu Piang. Chu Piang

is a living monument to the success of British trade policy back during the last century. This classic hustle is still famous, even today, for the cold purity of its execution: bring opium from India, introduce it into China—howdy Fong, this here's opium, opium, this is Fong—ah, so, me eatee!—no-ho-ho, Fong, you smokee, *smokee*, see? pretty soon Fong's coming back for more and more, so you create an inelastic demand for the shit. (346)

This complex passage combines the relatively straight discourse of Pynchon's narrator, the racist discourse of the colonizing power (degrading and mocking the colonized's language) and the colonized's mimicry of that racist discourse (resisting and calling into question the power of the colonizing discourse through parody).²

Then the gaze is unambiguously reversed. British tourists come "to look at" Chu Piang, but this looking is made problematic twice, first because the tour guide's pointer "indicates items of interest [. . .] much faster than eyes can really follow" (346), and second when it is not Chu Piang but the British tourists themselves who are described: "Chu Piang is also watching them" (347). One of the things he sees is "the women lifting their skirts away from where horrid Asian critters are seething microscopically across the old floorboards" (346). This fear of contamination is connected, as we have seen, with the strategy of debasement by which the colonizers seek to form and maintain strict boundaries between themselves and the Other. This paradox—the tourists' desire to experience the Other while simultaneously protecting themselves from contamination by the Other—is parodied as the narrator goes on to describe the tourists riding across central Asia in a huge enclosed sleigh that replicates the comfortable social systems of home, a replication that threatens to break down only at the toilets, "hot insides poised here so terribly above the breakneck passage of crystalline ice and snow" (347).³ The British anus as locus for what is inside breaking boundaries to go outside parallels the toilet as locus for breaking boundaries between the inside of the sleigh and the central Asian outside, and more grandly, between the social, cultural and epistemological systems of the imperial power and those of the subject peoples.

Interestingly, however, after this reversal of the gaze, in which the tourists become part of Chu Piang's opium dreams and in which the rhetorical basis for the colonizer's boundary-building is exposed, the narrator returns the gaze to the colonizer's point of view and essentially forces us to see through the colonizer's eyes: "Chu, from some recess within the filthy rags and shreds that hang from his unwholesome yellow body, produces a repulsive black gob of the foul-smelling substance" (347). This description, reminiscent of Graham, participates in the strategy of debasement, complete with the suggestion that Chu Piang has drawn the opium from inside his body, implying the breach of the boundary between inside and out. By bringing us back to the colonial gaze, the narrator seems to argue that the exposure of the colonial authority has done nothing to change that authority: Chu Piang is still a monument to the success of British policy in China. We are left wondering whence the power of colonial discourse derives.

This ambiguity in the colonial situation, which seems to undercut the strict colonizer/colonized division and opposition supported by the rhetoric of imperial travel writing, is common, according to Pratt, in the contact zone, “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Pratt finds at work in travel writing many of the same rhetorical strategies Spurr discusses—especially negation and aestheticization—and argues that these strategies and the narratives they support contribute to what she calls the anticonquest, “a utopian, innocent vision of European global authority” (39). As we have seen, one way of achieving this innocence is Graham’s method of separating and maintaining distance between himself and the landscape and people he describes. Pratt discusses two other interconnected methods used when, as in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the rhetorical distance breaks down, and colonizer and colonized interact more intimately. One is a strategy of reciprocity, wherein the colonizer-colonized relation is naturalized and equalized by means of exchange—exchange of information, goods, services or any combination of the three. The reciprocity trope also idealizes the large-scale commercial relation between Europe and the colony implied in the personal encounter (80–81). The second method is a specific kind of reciprocity: the trope of transracial love. That relationship tends to be narrated within a set of conventions including an Edenic interlude followed by the colonizer’s reabsorption into Europe and the colonized lover’s early death. Such narratives tend to romanticize and mystify both the exploitive sexual relationship and the exploitive political and commercial relations between countries (95–97).⁴

In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, especially in the central Asia chapter, Pynchon’s narrator uses these colonial-narrative strategies but exposes their concealed ideological purpose, again by reversing the colonial gaze. For example, when Tchitcherine enters the schoolhouse, “Džaqyp Qulan looks up [. . .] about to ask for a cigarette which is already out of Tchitcherine’s pocket and on route” (340). From Tchitcherine’s point of view, we might imagine, this exchange suggests a generous abrogation of his power, serving the appearance of equilibrium: note that Džaqyp Qulan is allowed to ask for the cigarette instead of being made to wait for it to be offered; and note that Tchitcherine anticipates and meets Džaqyp Qulan’s desire before he even has the chance to articulate it. The resulting image is of Tchitcherine as genial colleague, with no overt power imbalance. But the novel, having reversed the colonial gaze, gives us not Tchitcherine’s point of view during this exchange but Džaqyp Qulan’s: “He smiles thank you. He’d better. He’s

not sure of Tchitcherine's intentions, much less the Russian's friendship" (340). This segues into the story of his father's murder, and the murder of thousands of other indigenous peoples, at the hands of the colonizing Russians. The image of equality fostered by exchange is exploded here by Džaqqp Qulan's foregrounded awareness of his subaltern relation to Tchitcherine and of the large-scale inequality in power between his people and the Russians.

We see a similar unmasking of the rhetoric of empire a few pages later in the transracial love story of Tchitcherine's father and Enzian's mother. This scene fits in, in a sense, with others in the novel—Roger and Jessica early on, Tchitcherine and Geli Tripping near the end—in which two lovers, through their love, effect a quiet, temporary separation from the systems of control around them. When old Tchitcherine goes AWOL from loading coal, "it was power he walked away from, the feeling of too much meaningless power, flowing wrong . . . he could smell Death in it" (351). Ashore, he finds Enzian's mother, and they form their peaceful, autonomous community of two:

The man and woman stayed in bed and drank kari, which is brewed from potatoes, peas, and sugar, and in Herero means "the drink of death." It was nearly Christmas, and he gave her a medal he had won in some gunnery exercise long ago on the Baltic. By the time he left, they had learned each other's names and a few words in the respective languages—afraid, happy, sleep, love . . . the beginnings of a new tongue, a pidgin which they were perhaps the only two speakers of in the world. (351)

Of course, this separate community cannot last: "he went back. His future was with the Baltic fleet, it was something neither he nor the girl questioned" (351). The picture here is of a refuge founded on love from the ideology of control: the nameless man and woman suggesting a prelapsarian Adam and Eve; the presentation of a Christmas gift; the creation of an ad hoc language separate from the official discourses of power. Their eventual separation is presented as based on his sense of duty and her noble and uncomplaining sacrifice. These narrative elements all map onto Pratt's analysis of the conventions of the transracial love affair.

However, Pynchon's narrator exposes and undercuts the romanticism of the transracial love affair in general and of this particular story: "The girl may have stood on some promontory watching the gray ironclads dissolve one by one in the South Atlantic mist, but even if you'd like a few bars of *Madame Butterfly* about here, she was more probably out hustling, or asleep" (351). The suggestion that she was out hustling makes us consider how the transracial affair is constructed

differently from the points of view of the European man and the African woman. The romantic take on the story seems to be old Tchitcherine's. Indeed, having returned to his ship, he turns the woman into a sailor's yarn: "He was already describing her as a sultry native wench. It is the oldest sea story. As he told it he was no longer Tchitcherine, but a single-faced crowd before and after, all lost but not all unlucky" (351). The narrator emphasizes that the encounter is constructed in the already-established clichés and conventions of the transracial love story. From the implied point of view of Enzian's mother, the encounter is one of sexual reciprocity: thus the exchange of the gunnery medal for sex; thus the hustling for a new customer after the fleet leaves. Revealing the imperial exploitation behind the rhetoric of romanticism suggests that old Tchitcherine never really escapes the power relations of the ideology of control but merely functions within them in a different way temporarily. He should have recognized the continuity: on ship he fears the smell of Death; on shore, with his native wench, he tastes death, kari, the drink of death. There is no escape for Enzian's mother either: in accordance with the conventions of the transracial love affair, she dies young, but not without her name, her relationship with Tchitcherine, and the birth of their son having been set down in the official German colonial records (351-52).

In this chapter, then, by foregrounding the rhetoric of colonial discourse and reversing the colonial gaze, Pynchon's narrator exposes the workings of colonial power. But troublingly, rather than empowering the colonized, as one might suppose, this process repeatedly leaves the existing power relation between colonizer and colonized intact as the characters, like Enzian's father and mother, are absorbed back into officially established and maintained language systems and the power relations they imply.

The difficulty of escaping the discourse, epistemology and power relations of colonial Europe is further emphasized in the narrator's presentation of the Zone-Hereros. In *Is the South-West African Herero Committing Race Suicide?*, Steenkamp writes sympathetically about the Hereros, exploring how European, especially German, colonization has affected them. He argues that colonization disrupted traditional tribal practices and beliefs in a variety of ways; this disruption, along with the 1904 extermination campaign, resulted not only in many thousands of Herero deaths but also in a declining birth rate, owing in part to a resolution to commit tribal suicide. To make this case, Steenkamp uses the rhetorical strategy of idealization. Over and over, he writes of the pre-European Herero culture as Edenic. Before the European discovery of South-West Africa, the only dates of any importance were the creation of the world and the birth of Christ (1). Several European

expeditions failed to discover the rumored Herero homeland because “the grim protecting angel of Hereroland [drought] unsheathed her fiery sword” (3), an allusion to the guardian of Eden (ironically) after Adam and Eve’s expulsion. The eventual European discoverer of the Hereros found their life “healthy” and “simple” (3); but after the Hereros encountered Europeans, they “soon fell for temptation” (21). Reversing Graham’s fear of contamination, Steenkamp repeatedly asserts that the Europeans have infected the Hereros. He mentions several times that many diseases, especially sexually transmitted diseases, were unknown to the Hereros until Europeans introduced them. He quotes with approval a Herero’s claim that the oppressive practices of the German colonizers “began that poverty of blood which was inherited by the children” (12). According to Steenkamp, the tribe was further diluted as young people “acquired the bad traits of civilisation and the craving for dress, trinkets and other refinery” (21). He contrasts the current state of Herero life with “their former carefree tribal existence” (23).

The rhetorical strategy here is designed to critique European colonial practices by valorizing the Herero past, but this strategy is undercut in several ways. First, certain facts from the tribal past, such as “the mutual atrocities committed in intertribal warfare” (5), call into question Steenkamp’s claim for a carefree pre-European existence. Second, after explaining several times that adolescent sex was practically unknown among the Hereros until the Germans disrupted the tribal structure, Steenkamp describes traditional abortion practices used when young women became pregnant by young men from an inappropriate *Eanda* (inheritance group within the tribe) (24). Third, in his conclusion Steenkamp reveals himself to be concerned about the contamination of Herero tribal life less for the sake of the Hereros than for the possible effects of contamination on the European colonizers:

The native is the servant of the white man in South Africa. If he is infected it will be a miracle if his master’s household will not in turn be infected through him. This is fast becoming the case too with the Herero. His tribal life has been destroyed for good. In the future he will more and more become the servant of the white man—the men as houseboys and the women as dairy labourers. It is a known fact that the Herero woman has not her equal to work with dairy cattle. . . . And no liquid, not even water, is so susceptible to infection by bacilli of diphtheria, typhoid, tuberculosis, etc., as milk. She is also becoming the nursemaid to the white child. Further comment as to the possibilities of infection through her by venereal and other diseases, is superfluous. It is the duty therefore of the white man even though it be only for the sake of self-preservation, to do his utmost

to combat venereal disease with the native in general and the Herero in particular. (37-38)

In a fascinating strategy Steenkamp here re-reverses the trope: the Europeans, who earlier had been responsible for contaminating the presumably prelapsarian Hereros, are now threatened by contamination from the Hereros. Steenkamp reveals that his strategy of idealization is intended to make the Hereros, or an idea of the Hereros, useful to Europeans.

Pynchon's narrator uses Steenkamp as a source most obviously in the first chapter on the Zone-Hereros, where the focus alternates between the narrative present in the Erdschweinhöhle and the Hereros' German colonial past in South-West Africa. In a focalization strategy similar to that employed in the Kirghizstan section, the narrator first makes the reader see "the Ovatjimba, the poorest of the Hereros," through the colonial gaze: "You were likely to come across them at night, their fires flaring bravely against the wind, out of rifle range from the iron tracks: there seemed no other force than that to give them locus out in that emptiness" (315). But as the section begins to discuss the Hereros' apparent resolution to commit tribal suicide, the focalization shifts among three kinds of discourse: first, a straight colonial discourse à la Steenkamp ("Some of the more rational men of medicine attributed the Herero birth decline to a deficiency of Vitamin E in the diet—others to poor chances of fertilization given the peculiarly long and narrow uterus of the Herero female" [317]); second, a merged colonial discourse and mimicry of that discourse ("Perhaps we weren't as fair as we might have been, perhaps we did take their cattle and their lands away . . . and then the work-camps of course, the barbed wire and the stockades. . . . Perhaps they feel it is a world they no longer want to live in. Typical of them, though, giving up, crawling away to die . . . why won't they even negotiate?" [317-18]); third, a parody of the colonial discourse ("How provoking, to watch one's subject population dwindling like this, year after year. What's a colony without its dusky natives? Where's the fun if they're all going to die off?" [317]). This time, when the narrator returns us to the colonial gaze, he returns the colonized, the Hereros, to it as well. He says of the tribal suicide, "to the Europeans [. . .] what they were witnessing among these Hereros was a mystery potent as that of the elephant graveyard, or the lemmings rushing into the sea"; but then he says of the faction within the Zone-Hereros which has revived the goal of tribal suicide, "Though they don't admit it, the Empty Ones now exiled in the Zone, Europeanized in language and thought, split off from the old tribal unity, have found the why of it just as mysterious" (318).

The power of colonial discourse and the success of the imperial enterprise derive from the ability of language to bore into the brain, to penetrate and transform the epistemological structures with which we know the world, to construct the windows through which our encounters with the world are mediated. Thus in central Asia, even after the authority of colonial discourse in general and the NTA in particular is exposed as rhetorical, the discourse still has power (as in the case of the "kill-the-police-commissioner signs" [355]) to the point that the colonized need it and see themselves through it, and "Džaqyp Qulan hears the ghost of his own lynched father with a scratchy pen in the night, practicing As and Bs" (356).

All this becomes especially important in considering one of the climactic events of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the launching of the 00001 rocket, presumably with Enzian inside as a sacrifice. Enzian, as we saw above, sees the flaw in the Empty Ones' program, that they are trying to recreate a tribal worldview they are too Europeanized to share. He does not see that his own goal for the Zone-Hereros has likewise been constructed through colonial discourse. Many critics have argued that Enzian's plan to sacrifice himself in the 00001 can be understood through Mircea Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return*.⁵ Eliade examines the beliefs and practices of primitive or archaic peoples, whose lives, he writes, are structured around "the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others": "the archaic man . . . acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man" (5). A sacrifice is the recreation of an act performed by a god at the beginning of time and, Eliade says, "takes place at the same primordial mythical moment; in other words, every sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it" (35). This kind of repetition makes possible a transition from ordinary, history-bound time to sacred, ahistorical time: "he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place" (35).

Eliade's colonial discourse is different from Graham's and Steenkamp's in being more wide-ranging. In discussing primitive or archaic peoples, Eliade means not only the non-Western, colonized peoples of his own time but also the early ancestors of Western and non-Western peoples alike. His distinction between primitive and modern man is based on an attitude toward time: "the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms, whereas the latter insists that he is connected only with History" (xiii-xiv). While primitive societies have a knowledge of sacred history via myth, this is so different from the modern conception of chronological, linear history that it is "impossible that what we today

call a 'historical consciousness' should develop" (xiv). So although the object of his study is broader, Eliade nevertheless uses colonial rhetoric much as the other writers do. Like Steenkamp, he idealizes primitive peoples, showing them in the purity of their theological beliefs, to distinguish between them and the presumably civilized position from which and to which he writes. Also, in coming to universal conclusions about the practices of wide-ranging groups of people, he aestheticizes the primitive peoples, separating them from their distinct historical, geographical and sociocultural contexts. When specific groups are brought in, it is to validate the general conclusions. His entire theory of sacred and profane history suggests that primitive peoples are to be valued because they do not have a specific history or sociocultural destiny, as modern societies do. Implied throughout is the anthropologist-philosopher's right to gaze on primitive peoples and bring meaning to their experiences and actions.

Enzian's plan for the Zone-Hereros has clearly been thought through Eliade's ideas and discourse. The narrator, focalized through Enzian, says,

What Enzian wants to create will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to the other nations, will wither away inside this new one. The Erdschweinhöhle will not be bound, like the Rocket, to time. The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place. . . . (318-19)

Like the Empty Ones' program, Enzian's plan is subverted because he thinks through the colonial mind, articulates his thoughts unself-consciously with colonial discourse, and sees himself and his people through colonial eyes.

Colonial discourse, like the many other specialized discourses that fill *Gravity's Rainbow*, operates in a subtle and complex way. The narrator's uses of colonial discourse seek to disrupt the colonial situation and reveal colonial authority as based on a clever abuse of rhetoric combined with the raw power to back it up. But this potentially liberating conclusion is itself subverted by the exploration of the real power of rhetoric to shape the way the eye sees and the mind thinks. The colonized peoples of *Gravity's Rainbow*, like the failed Counterforce, are too implicated in the epistemologies of the power elite to articulate or enact an effective opposition.

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Notes

¹Spurr is clearly influenced here by the seminal work of Edward Said.

²See Homi Bhabha on the potential of mimicry to disrupt the authority of colonial discourse.

³This paradox of tourism and, by extension, colonialism can be connected to Lawrence Wolfley's now classic analysis of the presence of Norman O. Brown's concept of repression in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Wolfley argues that the novel diagnoses contemporary Western culture as a movement toward death founded on the guilt caused by repressing desires. In the novel this theme is developed in the simultaneous desire for and fear of blackness, shit and death. It is connected to colonialism most clearly when the narrator tells us,

Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit. [. . .] Christian Europe was always death [. . .] death and repression. Out and down in the colonies, life can be indulged, life and sensuality in all its forms, with no harm done to the Metropolis, nothing to soil those cathedrals, white marble statues, noble thoughts. (317)

⁴Pratt cites as typical the transracial love affair narrated in John Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796). She sees the conventions of the genre delineated here as well as their implications: "It is easy to see transracial love plots as imaginings in which European supremacy is guaranteed by affective and social bonding; in which sex replaces slavery as the way others are seen to belong to the white man; in which romantic love rather than filial servitude or force guarantees the willful submission of the colonized" (97). Another example of Pynchon's subverting the romanticism of a transracial love affair occurs in chapter 9 of *V.*, when the protagonist of Mondaugen's fever dreams (presumably Foppl) tells of his relationship with the Herero woman Sarah.

⁵Among them Mark Siegel, Thomas Schaub, Antonio Márquez, Thomas Moore and (although he does not cite Eliade) Joseph Slade.

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