PYNCHON NOTES

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In response to manifest reader interests and needs, the current issue of Pynchon Notes both adopts a modified format and shifts to a greater emphasis on criticism. Pynchon Notes will retain all its former functions and capacities. We therefore continue to welcome notes and queries, news of conferences and papers, of work in progress, circulating manuscripts and forthcoming works, and bibliographic information about recent and only recently discovered works, as well as references to Pynchon of all sorts and scales, and from any source. We have no wish to abandon the gathering and dispersing of such news and information, which was one of our primary purposes in launching Pynchon Notes, and appears to remain one of the most valued services it renders. But the response to our previous modest ventures into publishing criticism has indicated to us that our other primary purpose, that of providing a forum for criticism and critical exchange, answers a felt need. We hear that a certain well-known critical journal sometimes has as many as twenty-five essays on Pynchon under consideration at one time. Our experience, too, suggests that there is an abundance of material on Pynchon available. We hope that the appearance of plenty is not deceptive, and that our optimism will not prove to have been ill-founded or premature. We trust that enough fine criticism will continue to come to us to justify and sustain a small Pynchon journal.

There is assuredly work waiting to be done. For instance, Robert Alter, patrolling the borders of haute bourgeois culture, has recently had at Pynchon once again, this time for not being Stendhal or Robert Penn Warren ("The American Political Novel," New York Times Book Review, 10 Aug. 1980, 3, 26-27). Pynchon, bundled in with Coover, Doctorow and Vonnegut, is said to be the author of works of an "astonishing degree of puerility," of "adolescent outbursts," of "phantasmagoria of an apocalyptic cast," given to "sexual and scatological imaginings . . . [which direct] us more toward the psychology of the writer than to any political referent, expressing an ultimately infantile fantasy of a brutal, threat-
ening father, based on paranoid fear and resentment."
What the novel should do, we are told, is what it
does best: depict character as it encounters politics.
Such prominently displayed peevishness can be ignored,
but to debate various possible refutations of it would
be more useful and more satisfying, especially if the
debate were to focus on the repressed reasons for the
professional and ideological paranoia displayed by the
likes of Alter.

_Pynchon Notes_ solicits any and all thoughtful
criticism of Pynchon's work; we want to avoid lapsing
into idolatry. We welcome dialogue, debate and con-
troversy.

JMK, KT
The *Chymische Hochzeit* of Thomas Pynchon

N. F. George

Gravity's Rainbow exploits concepts of entropy and paranoia familiar to Pynchon's readers, but the labyrinthine novel takes its particular character from a matrix of "correspondences." In this variant of the doctrine that unity resides in multiplicity, apparently disparate items reveal their fundamental oneness by signals obvious only to an informed initiate. Pynchon has updated this Renaissance hermetism by using Jung's alchemical theory 1 in a context of modern organic synthesis, and has further enriched the allusive maze by offering a choice of three possible cosmologies to "explain" the universe of the novel. Two of these are immediately accessible in the conflict between Pointsman and Mexico: the Pavlovian psychologist is clearly a figure of either/or determinism and the statistician represents a post-quantum era in which no completely deterministic system can be said to exist. 2 The third possibility is embedded in the fabric of the novel, providing a hidden alternative to the classic dilemma; it is an elaboration of the theory of synchronicity 3 developed by Jung and the physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Synchronicity is acausal; events are connected only by "meaningful coincidence" and the timeline has no linear dimension. A system of this kind is essential in the alchemical universe, since there, too, events are ordered only by similitude and never by temporal succession. This is the universe of Gravity's Rainbow in which "things only happen," the world where "A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable." 4

Jung drew precise analogies between the alchemical process and the psychic struggle for wholeness, but did not hope that this interpretation of alchemy would be accepted in the modern world where "we know too much about the real nature of chemical combination" (MC, p. 467). Pynchon accepts the challenge: Gravity's Rainbow can be read as a concerted effort to objectify psychic parameters. The novel is a set of field observations made by some mad naturalist whose specialty is the synchronous universe. With perverse virtuosity, Pynchon turns directly to modern ideas of
chemical combination for his alchemical opus. The "chemical wedding" celebrated over and again in *Gravity's Rainbow* is based on phenomena common to modern organic synthesis. Organic compounds are peculiarly appropriate to the purpose, since their uniqueness is a function of structure rather than substance; that is, the number and kind of atoms making up an organic molecule do not in themselves determine its properties and individual character. The organic compound may be said to derive its "selfhood" from the spatial configuration of atoms in its constituent molecules. As a consequence, the atoms lose identity, becoming mere building-blocks vulnerable to forces of external control. This anonymous malleability allies the atoms in question to alchemical "prime matter," the lowly stuff subjected to rearrangement in the transmutation process. Prime matter is understood to be excremental, black, despised—the "Preterition" of Pynchon's novel. In the same way, an alchemist imposing torment upon prime matter is like "The Firm," Pynchon's metaphor for all forces of external control.

According to Jung, the alchemist projected onto matter the psychic drama of individuation: the substance he sought to create was, unknown to him, the goal of a recapitulation of "the whole history of man's knowledge of nature" (PA, p. 245). The language of alchemy is therefore a set of signals from the unconscious: its stresses on sexual union of warring opposites, on torture, death and putrefaction followed by transfigured resurrection are all code-messages from the depths of the psyche. Jung pictured the individuation process as a struggle to free Nous (intellec-
tion, the god Anthropos) from Physis (dark, undifferen-
tiated Nature, the unconscious); from this analogy he derives both Christian and pagan versions of the alchemical experience (PA, pp. 301-308). Writing in a different vein, Pynchon follows this model but inverts it: *Gravity's Rainbow* is an ever-cycling saga of efforts to free Physis from Nous. For Pynchon as for Jung, the Philosopher's Stone is a material god-
image, but the gods differ greatly. Pynchon's "Firm" is a warped Ego, bent on destruction of all things "natural." His Preterition is Physis, the jumbled aggregate of life-process reduced to underground anonymity by forces of control. The alchemical coding
serves to shorten otherwise cumbersome messages delivered in the novel, and to provide a major structuring device consonant with demands of a synchronous universe.

The four sections of Gravity's Rainbow indicate alchemical structure. "Beyond the Zero" examines every species of transition point, and therefore the metaphysics of transmutation. Here, Tyrone Slothrop undergoes psychic and material transitions involved in birth and infant ego-development. The second section catapults him into young manhood and initiates the long painful process of individuation. The third section, "In the Zone," is an elaborate presentation of alchemical circulatio, the cycle of trials by fire that will, properly managed, produce the Stone, or psychically perfected individual. The final "Counter-force" is Pynchon's revolutionary manifesto, preaching the supremacy of Physis. On these assumptions, Slothrop's search for Rocket 00000 is a search for the Self; however, this assertion will be acceptable only after considerable analysis of Pynchon's technique. In particular, the alchemical analogies and coding devices will be apparent only if studied on a micro-level initially.

The network built up around drug, dye and plastics technology provides relatively easy access to Pynchon's alchemy. Explicit references are available, for example, in the Weimar seance and its companion-piece, the story of Kekulé's dream. During the seance, Generaldirektor Smaragd interrogates a spirit identified as Walter Rathenau, "prophet and architect of the cartelized state" (164). Smaragd is associated with IG Farben, the gigantic drug and dye cartel that furnishes Pynchon with a highly appropriate metaphor for The Firm; this provides one immediate interconnection, but the essential parts of Rathenau's message to Smaragd are conveyed by coding devices of greater subtlety. One of Pynchon's favorites, the use of code-names, is pivotal here: for example, the Generaldirektor's name refers to the Tabula Smaragdina, establishing the alchemical theme. Another code-name is Oneirine, derived from the Greek oneiros, meaning "dream" or the dream-god. This prefigures the most famous dream in the history of chemistry, the dream of Kekulé that provided a crucial element in organic structural theory.
Code-names are perhaps the surface-level of Pynchon's cryptography, an element relatively easy to decipher. These serve important purposes in Gravity's Rainbow, but other devices, more opaque and more extensively employed, convey the substance of the novel. Rathenau refers to mauve, "the first new color on Earth, leaping to Earth's light from its grave miles and aeons below" (166). Clues in the message make it plain that mauve was the first dye synthesized from coal-tar, and also indicate that coal-tar was somehow elevated by the discovery of mauve. Coal-tar, "Earth's excrement, purged out for the ennoblement of shining steel. Passed over" (166), has been transfigured into mauve. So much is evident from the text; application of alchemical coding will yield a deeper layer. Prior to the discovery of mauve, coal-tar was a waste residue, a mere nuisance left over from distillation and coking processes. With the commercial success of mauve, coal-tar itself became a valuable raw material and an object of further research. Alchemically, coal-tar was originally terra damnata, the intractable and unusable waste fraction remaining after any laboratory manipulation. But alchemy is cyclical; the end is the beginning, and the advent of mauve apotheosized coal-tar from rejected waste to prime matter. Mauve is a figure of the Philosopher's Stone, a god-image risen transformed from death and decay. But this is only one level of alchemical coding; the informed initiate will not terminate a search for correspondences at this point. Consider mauve; it is not merely a representation of the Stone, since the cycle is eternal. Therefore, mauve itself is a transition point, the end of one thing and the beginning of another. The key-code here is Oneirine, with its evocation of Kekulé's dream:

Kekulé claimed that the idea of treating benzene as a hexagonal "ring" of carbon-to-carbon bonds with a hydrogen atom at each vertex-point was inspired by his dream of a great serpent biting its own tail. For Pynchon this becomes the "cosmic Serpent, in the violet splendor of its scales" (411), dreamed so that others might be seduced by its physical beauty, and begin to think of it as a blueprint, a basis for new compounds, new arrangements, so that there would be a
field of aromatic chemistry to ally itself with secular power, and find new methods of synthesis, so there would be a German dye industry to become the IG. . . . (412)

The passage is one of many with overtones of the "paranoid" theme. Taken as written, it suggests that the chain of coincidence initiated by Kekulé's dream is a monstrous plot with the establishment of IG Farben as its end. And so, in a deterministic universe, it would be, if only because the series would come about "by necessity." The absence of anything resembling causal connection, however, suggests an alternative. Under the rubric of synchronicity, these things "only happen." Indeed, there is a plethora of hidden and contradictory detail that may serve to confirm the synchronous view. Kekulé's serpent is Ouroboros, long known as a symbol of the cosmos and assimilated into Jung's system as a figure of the mandala, emblem of psychic wholeness. The "violet scales" of Pynchon's serpent are an evocation of mauve, and affirmation that both serpent and dye are instances of the Philosopher's Stone. (In alchemical literature the rubedo, defined as reddening or turning purple, is the color change that announces achievement of the goal.)

A more esoteric, because completely concealed, coincidence also informs the saga of mauve: it was discovered by accident when William Perkin set out to synthesize quinine and produced the dye instead. The dye, then, is connected to drugs other than Oneirine. Furthermore, drugs themselves are dualistic: they may cause addiction, and this is an example of evil control, but they also alleviate pain and assist in the cure of illness. Nothing is ever single valued in the synchronous world; each element or event generates its own opposite, a mechanism essential to maintain the cyclical dynamics.

The serpent is menaced by forces "whose only aim is to violate the Cycle" (412), since entropy is the companion of paranoia. There are, however, defenders in the wings. Rathenau refers to coal-tar as "passed over"; this is a signpost of rejection, but it is also a prayer of thanksgiving, an earnest of another cycle yet to come. Enzian and his Herero tribe, the remnants "passed over" when Germans tried to eliminate their
race in southwest Africa, are now wandering over German territory in search of Rocket 00001. Earth-centered, heavy with mandala-magic, recognizing the aardvark as totem and blood-brother (315), these Hereros were the poorest and most lowly of all tribes; like coal-tar, they were terra damnata, and like coal-tar they are prime matter. The key to their transfiguration is Enzian. He is a hybrid, born of the brief meeting between doomed lovers, the Herero woman who would succumb to the death-marches in Südwes, and the Russian sailor who would find his fate in the flames of the Japanese war. Enzian's name, bestowed by his German lover Weissmann (Blicero), identifies him with "Rilke's mountainside gentian of Nordic colors" (101). Both homosexual past and biracial origin are important symbols of duality; a third is supplied by the Nordic colors, yellow and blue. These are colors of the solificatio, a distinctly pagan celebration of the mystical union between solar fire and dark earth (PA, pp. 79-80). Enzian is the blue flower, a "child of nature" who personifies the Rebis or Hermaphrodite, dual-natured fruit of the chemical wedding. He is also sol niger, the black or underground sun, the Saturnian "sacred lead of the wise" which is black only on the surface but the very stuff of the Stone beneath (Aion, p. 139). Blicero is the obvious White King, the Antichrist of a dying Piscean era; when Enzian rides to his own death (if he does) in Rocket 00001 (if it exists) the Aquarian era of Nature's Black Christ will begin (maybe). Whether this will happen—whether it can happen—is a central question of Gravity's Rainbow.

The alchemist did not see himself as violating Nature's laws, but as using them in particular and sacred ways to accelerate the process of "perfecting" base metals into gold. Or so he claimed: the enemies of alchemy were quick to perceive an element of rationalization. Pynchon agrees that all tinkering with Nature is fundamentally evil, but it does not follow that all Nature is fundamentally good. Entropy itself is "natural," and only intervention from without will stave off its destructive course. The advantage of organic systems is that they are not closed, and can therefore hold off the increase of entropy; the disadvantage is that they are vulnerable to their own de-
generative processes. In deterministic or quantum-statistical worlds, the organism plays out a drama that is either wholly or mainly established in advance. Contemplation of these circumstances leads to the "plot" theory. But the world of synchronicity is hardly more comfortable, since any meaning at all is discerned only at the price of constant decoding, associated with constant worry that the message has been misread. Like the would-be adept of alchemy, the citizen of a synchronous world is forced into a process of continual selection from a set of infinite possibilities, under the threat of severe penalties if any choice is wrong. In general, the problem of ordering one's knowledge under acausality is solvable only in a Heraclitean mode: change is "explained" by itself. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the mechanism of change is opposition between the synthetic and the natural. The (synthetic) rocket screams across the sky, followed at once by its counter-image, the "progressive knotting into" (3) of organic aggregation.

The central tension of *Gravity's Rainbow* is not achieved by simplistic contrast between ordering process as such and some "disordered" or formless opposite; instead, the battle occurs on common ground, where difference stems from the method rather than the fact of structuring. Synthetics, as Rathenau told Smaragd, are "structures favoring death" (167). All such, developed and preserved by imposition of force from without, are antithetical to other structures which belong to nature. Pynchon establishes this distinction early in the novel, with a multi-purpose hymn to banana fragrance:

the fragile, musaceous odor of Breakfast: flowery, permeating, surprising, more than the color of winter sunlight, taking over not so much through any brute pungency or volume as by the high intricacy to the weaving of its molecules, sharing the conjurator's secret by which--though it is not often Death is told so clearly to fuck off--the living genetic chains prove even labyrinthine enough to preserve some human face down ten or twenty generations... so the same assertion-through-structure allows this
war morning's banana fragrance to meander, repossess, prevail (10).

The banana is not, as one may be tempted to believe, a mere puerility of popular Freudianism; it is the "natural" antithesis of the rocket, an epitome of the battle of life against death. There is a hidden chemical code: bananas owe their distinctive odor to a substance known as an "aromatic" compound, and therefore this passage includes the first hint of an elaborate network to follow. Kekulé dreamed the great serpent "so that there would be a field of aromatic chemistry to ally itself with secular power": by definition, an aromatic compound is one that contains at least one benzene ring. The mysterious plastic Imipolex G, in addition to some more exotic qualities, has a straightforward chemical identity: it is an aromatic heterocyclic polymer (249), a polymerized indole (297) or polyimide (576). These specifications, too, carry their cryptic message.

As an aromatic, Imipolex G is not merely a relative of benzene and bananas. Aromatic compounds were so-named because those first identified had distinctive odors. The characteristic aroma might be a truly excremental stink or a rich perfume: feces and orange blossoms alike owe their smell to aromatics. In the alchemical analogue, consummation of the mystical wedding is accompanied by a transition from what Jung calls "the characteristic stench of the underworld" to the sweetness of the Holy Ghost (MC, p. 492). The fact that Imipolex G is an indole is also significant, since indole has a stercorous reek when impure but is sweet and flowery once purified;\(^8\) consequently, it replicates the odor change of the mysterium conjugationis and illustrates the Great Work as essentially a process of purification. However, purity and impurity are themselves a unity, "names for parts that ought to be inseparable," and Pynchon exploits this paradox by using Imipolex G as the source of an aroma that permeates the final, quintessential orgy of Greta Erdmann (488). This scene is one of many that reproduce the chemical wedding as a microcosm of the larger canvas of the novel, and deserves some study.

Greta is the all-purpose Earth Goddess, a melange of Isis, Demeter, Cybele, a shadowy complex of Nordic
deities, and many others. As such, she is a sum of archetypal motifs, the statement of everything involving primitive conceptions of "Mother" nature. "Shekinah, queen, daughter, bride, and mother of God" (478), she is also corrupt, the fallen image of mythic greatness. Her Asgard palace, for example, has been downgraded to a "drafty, crenelated deformity overlooking a cold little lake in the Bavarian Alps" (474), and she reproduces the Cybele-Atys legend by a ghastly device: nightwanderings in search of young Jewish boys to mutilate (478). Her further degradation is specifically attributable to machinations of The Firm: in "real" life she is a forgotten queen of pornographic films, the shadow-love of generations of men she has never seen. Her sexual response is blunted: only excess of masochistic fury remains (445). In her final frenzied surrender to a congeries of plastics connoisseurs (487) she personifies the surrender of Earth itself to modern technology, an unholy caricature of the mysterium coniunctionis. The blasphemy might seem to stem from the fact that the sacred chemical wedding has been transmogrified into a gang-bang, but this is not the case, since alchemical tradition allows the female principle to appear either as Holy Virgin or as meretrix, the whore who represents a "chaotic" maternal state (MC, p. 302).

In that final orgy, Greta perceives the running stream of "something very deep, black and viscous" (487) that feeds the chemical factory in which the scene is set; she is conscious of freedom to do whatever she wishes, of the presence of "plastic serpents" and great billowing curtains of styrene or vinyl that gleam with every color, flaring like northern lights. As the sexual immolation proceeds, she and her partners are closed about by plastic "in ghost white." She herself is dressed in a costume of Imipolex, the "material of the future," and is wholly enthralled by its appeal to the senses:

I can't describe its perfume, or how it felt—the luxury. The moment it touched them it brought my nipples up swollen and begging to be bitten. I wanted to feel it against my cunt. Nothing I ever wore, before or since, aroused me quite as much as Imipolex (488).
After an uncountable number of men and indescribable ecstasies imposed by the plastic, Greta finds herself outside the factory, naked, in a scene of desolation covered by "some tarry kind of waste." The cycle is complete.

One feature of the alchemical color sequence in this passage deserves comment: the multicolored flare is a figure of the cauda pavionis (peacock's tail) that accompanies flowery fragrance as herald of consummation of the mystical union. Pynchon follows this tradition precisely, but takes certain liberties with others in the lexicon of color change. For Pynchon, white is the color of death, the bleaching external force symbolizing The Firm. Traditional alchemy uses white as the symbol of completion of the "little work," usually said to mean production of a Stone that will transmute to silver rather than to gold. It is conceivable that the schema of Gravity's Rainbow takes this into account by equating this secondary Stone with the "structures favoring death" produced by forces of control. In traditional alchemy, black is the color of terra dammata and of the nigredo, a phase of torment experienced by prime matter during the manipulations of the Work. Pynchon uses a similar set of correspondences. Black is the color of rejection, and the color of hope.

Greta (Mother Earth) acts out a travesty of the wedding not because she accepts many men but because she really accepts none. Free to do whatever she likes, she chooses the synthetic luxury of Imipolex over flesh and blood sensation. The real blasphemy of this union is that it is not natural. One may ask whether there are any who can resist the temptations of Imipolex G, and if so, what these creatures are like. A revealing passage deals with such questions when Slothrop meets Mario Schweitar. Schweitar is associated with the firm that makes Imipolex. (It carries the unfortunate name of Psychochemie AG, sad evidence that Pynchon's confidence in the clarity of his own code sometimes falters.) A deliberate anachronism opens the confrontation: Schweitar offers to sell Slothrop some LSD, which the latter takes for pounds, shillings and pence (260). This is one of the devices used to indicate that synchronicity is opera-
tive; the most blatant, and perhaps the most significant of such applications has Laszlo Jamf conditioning infant Tyrone's erections in 1920 with the odor of Imipolex G, a compound Jamf does not develop until 1939. When Slothrop asks for information about Imipolex, Schweitar is curt:

That stuff. Forget it. It's not even our line. You ever try to develop a polymer when there's nothing but indole people around? With our giant parent to the north sending in ultimatums every day? Imipolex G is the company albatross, Yank. They have vice-presidents whose only job is to observe the ritual of going out every Sunday to spit on old Jamf's grave. You haven't spent much time with the indole crowd. They're very elitist. They see themselves at the end of a long European dialectic, generations of blighted grain, ergotism, witches on broomsticks, community orgies, cantons lost up there in folds of mountain that haven't known an unhallucinated day in the last 500 years--keepers of a tradition, aristocrats--(261)

An informed initiate will set about decoding this complex message with delight. Indole is a fundamental group in many organic compounds, particularly compounds yielding drugs. Imipolex G is an indole, which greatly enhances its capacity for interconnection. Ergot, for example, is an indole. It is also derived from a fungus named Claviceps purpurea; the "purple" refers to the purplish-brown color of the plant, which appears as "blight" on rye and other grasses. Since ergot is purple, it links up with mauve and the violet-scaled Ouroboros. Ergot is also the basic source of LSD, a synthetic hallucinogen, whereas other indole alkaloids are the pharmacologically-active elements in the "natural" hallucinogenic substances found in mushrooms like Amanita muscaria or the Psilocybe species. The indole group appears twice in the constituent molecule of indigo, a "natural" dye, and the chain of correspondence may also be extended to include the fact that all indoles have a characteristic blue color useful in chemical analysis.
Through blue, indole is connected to Enzian, the gentian; this relationship is even more firmly established if one knows that the order Gentianales produces more than 300 indole alkaloids. Indigo is a natural dye, and thus in some sense the counter-image of mauve, the synthetic. To summarize: Indole has correspondence networks linking it with the synthetics LSD and mauve; mauve is a link to Ouroboros and therefore an ambiguous transition point; Ouroboros creates bonds with the benzene ring, which is a constituent of Imipolex G, another synthetic. But Imipolex G is also an indole, linked by that fact to the "natural" products ergot, indigo and the hallucinogens of the "magic mushroom." Enzian, who is both blue and natural, has correspondences with all indoles thanks to his color, but only with some indoles thanks to his naturalness. This is a fair illustration of the paranoiac potential of correspondences, but in this particular case it is possible to do better.

It seems that current research has established a relationship between production of melanin, the pigment responsible for skin color, and the presence of a naturally-occurring indole polymer. Some authorities also suggest that abnormal melanin distribution is a characteristic of schizophrenia, and that there is a high correlation between schizoid manifestations and the presence of a condition known as malvaria. Malvarians excrete a urinary substance that stains violet with the appropriate reagent in chromatography. Since schizophrenia is often called "split personality," and since a split personality is an ideal representation of the hermaphrodite, it is possible to construct several new mazes on the Enzian-black-indole theme. Some may argue that Pynchon uses "polymer" as a synonym for "synthetic," and could not, therefore, use this scheme (since the polymer involved is natural); close inspection indicates that this is probably incorrect, since the term used to refer to synthetic process is always "polymerized," implying application of external force.

Schweitar, clearly on the side of The Firm, ticks off his enemies. The indole crowd includes witches, ergot, hallucinated cantons up in the mountains, an ancient aristocracy—in short, the ancient aristocracy
of *Physis*. Nature is a mistress of magic, of complex, unforced structuring that The Firm can only caricature. The "giant parent to the north" might be IG Farben, but it is much more likely to be the pantheon of Nordic gods whose figures stalk through Jung's work. North is the direction of the unconscious: the Herero women lived on the north side of mandala-villages in Südwest (563) because this was the direction of breath and soul, while the men lived south, in the zone of fire and activity. The message, deciphered, reads: Imipolex G is a travesty of the Stone because it is not natural.

Imipolex G is "the first plastic that is actually erectile" (699). Pynchon offers a choice among three enabling mechanisms, and here provides the ultimate key to his pattern of competing cosmologies. The first suggests a close-set network of wires, a coordinate system allowing very precise control from point to point: this is Pointsman's strict determinism. The second suggests a beam-scanning device that would maintain complete control on the surface of the plastic, but would leave a "Region of Uncertainty" at some unspecified level of the interior: this is the quantum-statistical approach of Mexico and modern physics. The third, "alternatively," would employ "the projection, onto the Surface, of an electronic 'image,' analogous to a motion picture. This would require a minimum of three projectors, and perhaps more" (700). This "alternative" is synchronicity. The elegant pseudo-equation that follows is not designed to enhance the appeal of the system, since it is a reaffirmation of the fact that organic systems do succumb to entropy, eventually.

One may ask whether anything does survive in *Gravity's Rainbow*: the answer is a qualified yes, hinging on the definition of "survival." Perhaps the most delightful illustration of the possibility is provided by Tchitcherine, half-brother to Enzian and a "mad scavenger[... ]who is more metal than anything else" (337). His name appears to be a transliteration of the Russian form of "cicerone," allowing for a difference of opinion about the propriety of substituting "i" for "o". Since he is very definitely an all-purpose divinity, an agglomeration of
Hermes-Thoth and others, the term fits: Hermes was the god who guided the souls of the dead to Hades. A member in good standing of Preterition, Tchitcherine consorts with wretched "sub rosa enemies of order, counterrevolutionary odds and ends of humanity" (346) because Mercury/Hermes is also god of thieves. As Thoth/Hermes, Tchitcherine spends a riotous season on a committee charged with delivering a New Turkic Alphabet to unlettered tribes of Central Asia, since Thoth/Hermes is the god of letters. Notably, he displays extreme instability on the job, dashing off on wild rides with a Kirghiz sidekick (342) or sharing a leprous pipe of opium with the lazy degenerate Chu Piang (347). He is "a giant supermolecule with so many open bonds available at any given time" that his pharmacology "can't necessarily be calculated" in advance (346). And he is almost literally made of metal, with steel teeth, a silver plate in his skull, and gold wirework in his right knee joint (337). Tchitcherine is both the "spirit Mercurius" which Jung discusses in great detail (AS, pp. 193-250), and alchemical mercury.

In the language of alchemy, mercury is the "volatile" that must be "fixed" if the work is to succeed. Its associated elements are air and water, a detail corroborated by the fact that Tchitcherine reports to the Central Aero and Hydrodynamics Institute (337). Mercury was often equated with the unicorn since both are "uncatchable." Tchitcherine's romance with young witch Geli Tripping is a replication of the alchemical coagulatio, the fixing of the volatile. Even burdened with one of Pynchon's more poisonous puns ("gaily tripping") the debonair witch-girl is an appealing figure, as well she might be: she is the legendary virgin who catches the unicorn, namely Tchitcherine. The homologue appears in Edinger's Ego and Archetype, where the full Jungian correspondence between unicorn and mercury is explored. Geli agrees with Edinger's lunar deity even to the detail of her ability to tame birds of the night (291). Insofar as anything can be "certain" in a novel dedicated to uncertainty and illusion, Tchitcherine and Geli find happiness together, a lot unique among Pynchon's pairs of star-crossed lovers. While this
may be a form of Haight-Ashbury sentimentality, with prizes for the champion flower children, it is far more likely to be an instance of the survival of nature myths that have escaped the corrupting influence of intellection and control. This conclusion is supported by the similar fate dealt out to Tyrone Slothrop: as Tchitcherine is the volatile which must be fixed, Slothrop is the fixed which must be rendered volatile.

Slothrop, the all-American boob and anti-hero, starts life in a thoroughly excremental fashion by being flushed down the toilet of the Roseland Ballroom, and ends it (if he does) in changed but perhaps equally parlous condition. One could expect little more of a man whose mother is named after a drug ("Nalline" is a morphine analogue used to monitor heroin dosage), and who counts Plasticman among his heroes. He snorts, slurps, guzzles and grunts his way through myriad chase and bedroom scenes, and tries to preserve avidya (ignorant innocence) by running around in a pig costume. He meets Enzian and Tchitcherine, but seems to achieve no more than accentuation of his normal unease as a result. His encounter with an electronic version of the hermaphrodite (Zwitter) produces bumpkin poesy instead of enlightenment (314). But--like it or not, Slothrop is the hero. Our last glimpse of Tyrone all in one piece shows him "crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural . . ." (626). Freed from invidious forces of intellection and control by his long circulatio in the Zone, Slothrop attenuates, perhaps scattering out among the "gray and preterite souls" of his fellow Humility (742). In short, Tyrone achieves immortality--of a kind. It is constrained by the frailty of racial memory; even Seaman Bodine, one of the few who kept an image of the integral Slothrop alive, falters (740). Yet in some sense the all-too-solid flesh of Slothrop has been made pure spirit, and the fixed has been made volatile.

In this preliminary study it will not be possible to consider the full significance of Slothrop's search, nor can we reconstruct the network of alchemical correspondences that surrounds rocket images. Almost certainly, even the title of the novel conceals references that go beyond the evocation of a rocket trajectory,
since Jung wrote "Our psychic prehistory is in truth the spirit of gravity," and deplored the hubris that drives men to seek a chimerical footing on the rainbow bridge meant only for gods (PA, pp. 62 and 60). Pynchon has regularly been compared to James Joyce. To the extent that his conscious hermetism makes heavy demands on his readers, the comparison holds; but whether Pynchon's work, like that of Joyce, will stimulate critics to fulfill these demands is unresolved. Quite apparently, the exegesis of Pynchon requires familiarity with an extra-literary dimension, an esoteric (for most humanists) domain of science and technology. However, the Jungian corpus can serve as model and guide for a significant portion of Gravity's Rainbow, and may provide clues to other aspects of the Pynchonian universe of discourse.

Kenyon College

Notes


2 This system is "indeterminate" only on the microphysical level of particle events.


5 Julius Ruska, Tabula Smaragdina: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur (Heidelberg:

Discussions of mandala-symbolism are found throughout Jung's work. Identification of mandala and Ouroboros, PA, p. 126.


LSD was identified as a synthetic hallucinogen in 1943, but did not come into common use until the sixties. Since Gravity's Rainbow is ostensibly an account of events taking place in 1945, Schweitar's offer is premature. Jamf is Slothrop's "I," or ego-image; his mixed career as psychologist and chemist provides another alchemical clue.


Hoffer and Osmond, Hallucinogens, pp. 102-103.

Professor Francis B. Randall informs me that linguistic chicanery may be replaced by historical verity: Tchitcherine is apparently modelled in part
on Georgi Chicherin, successor to Trotsky as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930, and (along with Walter Rathenau) one of the architects of the Rappallo Treaty of 1922. Professor Randall will, I am sure, join me in urging other political historians to complete this particular web of "meaningful coincidence."


16 Jung identifies the pig with avidya, "ignorance or unconsciousness," in PA, p. 96.
Gravitational Entropy in *Gravity's Rainbow*

T. S. Tillotson

"In our description of nature the aim is not to disclose the essence of the phenomena, but only to track down, so far as possible, relations among the manifold aspects of our experience [with the phenomena]."

--Neils Bohr, 1934

Numerous writers have set out to explicate the concept of entropy as it figures in the fiction of Thomas Pynchon, referring to thermodynamics and information theory. But these are by no means the only fields where entropy is presented in modern science with definitive mathematical rigor. The critics appear never to have heard of gravitational entropy. Expounded in 1971 by S. W. Hawking, the Second Law of Black Hole Dynamics extends the power, simplicity, and solidly grounded truth of universal entropy to the realm of modern gravitational theory, an area of great scientific importance and widespread philosophical significance. [A technical overview of this subject including specific references to gravitational entropy can be found in Misner, Thorne, and Wheeler, *Gravitation* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973).]

In addition to providing a better basis than information theory or thermodynamics for describing and understanding Pynchon's use of entropy in *GR*, gravitational theory can shed light on many other puzzling elements of the novel. For example, Lawrence Kappel suggests that Slothrop may have slipped across the event horizon of a black hole, thereby becoming invisible to those remaining outside and approaching the naked singularity where (by Mondaugen's Law) Slothrop's personal density, along with his very space and time, will vanish. ["Psychic Geography in *Gravity's Rainbow*" *Contemporary Literature* XXI, No. 2 (1980), 225-51.]

I believe that the matter of gravitation in *GR* warrants a more thorough treatment than is possible within the limits of space in the present issue of

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* All rights reserved by the author.
ynchon Notes, and I intend to submit a more substantial article for a future issue. Every black hole is surrounded by a literally invisible rainbow shell at the Schwarzschild radius (where $r = 2M$). It must be more than mere coincidence (heh, heh) that the title of Gravity's Rainbow reads as a symbol for this light-shrouded null horizon of our universal destiny, and holds the promise of illumination to be gained through some steps taken (perhaps even unknowingly) across unseen thresholds of no return.

Lake Mills, Wisconsin
A Brief Further Remark on "Pynchon's Anti-Quests"

Bernard Duyfhuizen

"Pointsman has blundered. Hasn't even the Tennysonian comfort of saying 'someone' has blundered." (GR, 270)

"The Schwarzgerät is no Grail, Ace, that's not what the G in Imipolex G stands for. And you are no knightly hero." (GR, 364)

Conspicuous by its absence, Tennyson's Idylls of the King has seemingly been ignored by critics concerned with the theme of quest and anti-quest in Pynchon's writing. And yet, the section of the Idylls devoted to the Holy Grail offers a supreme example of the anti-quest. Only Galahad achieves the quest, but his solipsistic vision destroys the remainder of the Round Table. The failed quest in Tennyson is intricately tied to what we would call today "the themes of entropy" which permeate the Idylls. Tennyson's famous poem not only documents the impossibility of the quest within a corrupt and decaying society; it also documents the disintegration of Victorian England's structure of moral order by the advances in nineteenth-century science and technology: as Pynchon puts it, "the fall of a crystal palace" (GR, 3).

Moreover, the Idylls documents the entropy of a literary genre, one that can no longer support the fantasy of a chivalric order; Don Quixote made the same statement nearly three centuries before, but for Tennyson the stakes were much higher. Moreover, it is not inconsequential that Tennyson wrote his Idylls during the great flowering of the novel, when literature firmly committed itself to showing the dark underside of society. Pynchon follows in both of these traditions: the novelist's commitment and the decline of quest literature. It is within the dialectic between these two traditions that the meanings of Pynchon's anti-quests are to be found.

University of Tulsa
A Point Beyond Degree Zero: A Rebuttal to Khachig Tololyan's "Remarks" in Pynchon Notes 3

Mark Siegel

A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before—so what's one more time?

With the varieties of stances and perspectives available to literary critics, someone can disagree with virtually anything said about a work of literature. The value of the disagreement lies not so much in terms of who's right or wrong, since this is often a matter of perspective, but in whether or not anyone learns anything about the work being debated.

Therefore, I would have expected some critical screaming from people anxious to emphasize different aspects of Pynchon's writing, for instance his "postmodernist" qualities. (I take this to mean the ways in which his writing seems to be a reaction against the kind of literature practiced by Eliot, Pound, Faulkner, and other "modernists.") I'm not sure if Pynchon's first section title in Gravity's Rainbow, "Beyond the Zero," is a conscious reference to his going beyond Roland Barthes' description of postmodernist fiction's program of style-as-content in Writing Degree Zero. In any case, it might be very constructive to argue about the degree to which Pynchon does or does not display postmodernist tendencies. My own strategy, chosen largely because it seems simpler, is to emphasize the ways in which Pynchon is like the more familiar modernist writers (many of whom employed the quest pattern) before discussing ways in which he is different from them (by employing the anti-quest pattern, for instance). But any critical approach is valuable if it helps to illuminate the work and discussion of the work.

What bothers me about Professor Tololyan's remarks is that they seem to arise from misreading my article, and seem to involve more posturing than real position.

In his "Remarks" on my brief piece "Pynchon's Anti-Heroes" (both appearing in PN 3), Professor Tololyan accuses me of practicing "moral pragmatism." Since I'm an American Jew, this is likely true. But he
argues that my simple observations were written "as though [I had] forgotten the essential use to which a writer puts his characters: they do not suffer for themselves, but for us, the readers, and in so far as our instruction is concerned, their failures are every bit as relevant as their successes might be. . . ."

Well, I don't see how this statement involves less "moral pragmatism" than my own thesis, since it is still talking about the concept of "constructive use." And while a postmodernist might disagree that the characters suffer for the reader, I certainly have never maintained that they don't." The last paragraph of my mini-article is devoted to this notion, and I would have thought that the statement I have quoted above would be perfectly obvious, in the context of my article, to anyone sophisticated enough to read Pynchon (an assumption I made about the readers of Pynchon Notes).

It seems to me that Pynchon provides a third, intermediary level of character-appreciation; as I argued in Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in Gravity's Rainbow, I believe the construction of that novel implies a narrative consciousness that is overtly manipulating and interpreting the characters and their actions in order to make sense out of our modern world. I'm not sure that Pynchon believes in the efficacy of "moral pragmatism," but it seems to me that his narrator's attempt to discover meaning in the patterns of action in the novel is but one of a number of signs that he is at least considering the viability of moral pragmatism as an approach to life. (Again, the postmodernist might claim he is exposing the bankruptcy of that posture. There's no space now to argue that point, but I'd like to take it up in the future.) Pynchon's narrator often seems to be playing chess with himself throughout the novel, and as the players drop off the board one by one, he scrambles for a stalemate with the few white pawns left. As I said before, Pynchon, far more than most writers, uses his characters and his narrative voice to insist on the highly symbolic nature of his characters and the strongly ritualistic nature of their actions.

Under his (2), Professor Tölölyan accuses me of underestimating the difficulty and complexity of
meaning in the greatest quest narratives of the past. I don't and haven't. The sentence to which he refers, "Pynchon ... may be indicating that the basic re-
quirements for a successful quest have been denied
modern man ... ", says nothing at all about other
works of literature, or about other authors, or about
other historical periods: It is, quite simply, a
remark about Pynchon's perception of our contemporary
situation.

The reason my "moves" from character to reader and
from quest to anti-quest are so abrupt is that I
condensed forty pages into five to suit the format of
PN. Obviously this entailed a good deal of oversim-
plification on nearly every point I had to make, and
Professor Tölölyan was well aware of this when he
wrote his response. (I don't mind being shot at, but
by my own men? ...)

It is not too late, I hope, though it may be insig-
nificant, to clarify these points. If I really have
confused anyone, I'm truly sorry, since I honestly
meant to help. If anyone wishes to offer further
arguments or clarifications, publicly or privately,
I'm always grateful for constructive advice.

University of Wyoming
Hit and Miss

John M. Krafft


David Cowart's Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion is so fluent, informative and obviously correct in many of its demonstrations that one may scarcely mind that explicating allusions is perhaps not of the most immediate critical relevance to Pynchon's postmodern texts. As a timely and necessary "counterweight to the numerous studies of Pynchon's use of science" (the importance of which use Cowart admits to having formerly underrated, though indeed most of those studies of it can hardly be underrated), Cowart examines Pynchon's use of painting, film, music and literature. He divides both Pynchon's artistic development and the criticism which mirrors it roughly into two phases: an early pessimistic or nihilistic phase in which Pynchon and his critics were concerned largely with entropy and decline, and a later, more optimistic, melioristic, speculative phase. Cowart "seeks to augment and consolidate" the latter trend in Pynchon criticism. Toward that end, he elaborates a dichotomy similar to the nihilistic/melioristic one in order to characterize Pynchon's deployment of allusions to the various arts. He asserts that Pynchon's allusions to the arts (as well as to the sciences) form patterns which "adumbrate an antinomy between the entropic, voidward drift implicit in a materialist view of things, and the possibilities for transcendence implicit in a spiritual view." Pynchon "limns a nihilist world picture with allusions from painting and film, and a more speculative one with allusions from music and literature. The two-dimensional pictorial arts furnish emblems of life's appalling insubstantiality . . . [and teach their viewers that] life masks a void." By contrast, "musical references seem
always to hint at the extra dimensions of experience that we miss because of the narrow range of frequencies--physical or spiritual--to which we are attuned. . . . Music in Pynchon . . . is associated with rich new possibilities beyond our normal powers of observation. . . . The majority of the literary allusions abet and extend the almost mystical tendency observed in the musical allusions." Cowart's thesis is attractively if suspiciously neat. But the first part of his argument's emphasis on nihilism is unconvincing and has a disproportionate influence on the study as a whole. The thesis also promises more than the study can ultimately deliver.

The argument's weakness results from Cowart's possibly inadvertent treatment throughout his study of the nihilist world picture as more credible, more weighty, more serious than the more speculative one. One may entertain, may need to entertain a speculative, spiritual view of life and possibility, but the void is the "brutal," "final truth to which one who takes the broadest and longest view inevitably comes." Accordingly, "Pynchon argues life's substantial inferiority to its own aesthetic projections." This claim is made specifically in regard to the filmic devices, imagery and allusions in Gravity's Rainbow, but informs Cowart's treatment of pictorial allusions in V. and The Crying of Lot 49 as well. It is true that many of Pynchon's characters entertain, arrive at, even cultivate such a belief or a kindred vision of life as colorful and diverse, but ultimately, appallingly in-substantial, or have a vision of "the voidward drift of all life into a wholly inanimate condition." We may doubt, however, whether Pynchon himself endorses such "nihilistic truth" about "the void that mocks all human ideals and aspirations." He obviously takes the idea of life's insubstantiality quite seriously in his fictions. But he also portrays the hazards, the often terrible ravages of too single-mindedly embracing, whether in sorrow or in joy, such a nihilist vision of life. If Cowart manages to "augment and consolidate" the critical trend he seeks to, he does so almost in spite of himself. For to treat the materialistic/nihilistic vision as Pynchon's fundamental truth is to render somewhat meretricious the spiritual or mystical vision, whatever nice things one may say
about it, and to deprive of authenticity Pynchon's portrayal of expanded perceptual, emotional, spiritual and political possibilities. What is wanted, however, is not to choose a world view to ascribe to Pynchon, but to appreciate his novels as artistic juxtapositions, clashes or possibly syntheses of disparate world views.

Despite the dubiety of the general argument underlying them, Cowart's detailed analyses of allusions to painting and film in Pynchon's novels are often insightful and informative. Cowart demonstrates how, in V., "Botticelli's Birth of Venus functions as a kind of cultural touchstone by which readers may gauge the awful significance of another, more apocalyptic birth, that of V. herself." He argues that in The Crying of Lot 49, the "solipsistic theme" of Remédios Varo's Bordando el Manto Terrestre "complements that of Pynchon's novel." He makes a persuasive case for an influence on the novel's imagery and theme of Varo's iconography, including "an evidently necromantic post horn," and perhaps also of information about her life. The wide-ranging chapter on film in Gravity's Rainbow explores the manifold ways films and extra-cinematic (though not necessarily extra-textual) reality, dreams and waking life, films and dreams complement, interpenetrate and cross-fertilize one another. Cowart discusses such actual films as King Kong and such imagined ones as Alpdrücken and "the phony Schwarzkommando footage." He examines a number of both ontological and epistemological problems and possibilities or difficulties and opportunities raised by the film-reality-dream interrelationships. (Even so, the fact that the "real life" at issue here is obviously artificial—doubly so, presented as it is in a novel which imitates a film—adds another layer to the complexity, and ought to add another step to the analysis.) He discusses, too, the novel's ostensibly being a movie and, in particular, the significance of the filmlike structure and status of its ending. Valuable as so much of his discussion is, Cowart may be too engrossed in Pynchon's undermining of the distinction between film and reality to take sufficient account of Pynchon's occasional undermining of his own undermining by reminding us, for example, that film is a "pornography[y] of flight." Cowart also
continues his denigration (imputed to Pynchon) of reality as illusory, insubstantial, superficial, "cosmetics for the void." Perhaps he means to denigrate only a complacent, superficial, positivist, so-called common sense view of reality. However that may be, to denigrate reality wholesale is, willy-nilly, to devalue the cinematic art Cowart characterizes as its imitation or counterfeit. That fact may account for his seemingly defensive insistence at times that film is "respectable as a mode of reality," and that it "is not to be patronized as life's two-dimensional imitation." But at his best, when responding more directly to the novel, rather than attempting to make it illustrate the more dubious part of his thesis, Cowart is more judicious: "Pynchon uses film as a critique of life, insisting that the one is not more or less real than the other."

"The words with which Pynchon describes the film [Alpdrücken] imply that it is an interface between two realms of being, neither of which is illusory." And it may be well to emphasize that the chapter on film in Gravity's Rainbow offers much insight and much sensitive analysis, not just of the novel's specifically cinematic allusions, motifs and devices, but also of their attendant and broader psycho-analytic, mythic, cultural and socio-historical significances.

Cowart's penultimate chapter on musical allusions is his best. Its first half especially is a triumph of meticulous explication. Cowart argues that Pynchon's allusions to classical rather than to popular music "reveal the most coherent and finely wrought pattern . . . [indeed] reveal Pynchon's artistry most impressively." He examines how, in "Under the Rose," Puccini's Manon Lescaut serves as "the story's central thematic thread, the chief referent for Porpentine's character and the story's action." In the Egypt episode of V. into which the presumably earlier "Under the Rose" was transmuted, the opera, though referred to only briefly twice, "resonates with [Pynchon's] own theme and characterization, and foreshadows subsequent developments in the novel." These allusions, as well as Pynchon's travesty of Stravinsky's Le Sacre du Printemps, which Cowart also discusses, "support ironic variations on the theme of love and death" in V. In his discussions of Pynchon's other two novels,
Cowart deals more with composers and music theory than with individual compositions. He shows that music—even Muzak on the one hand, and silence on the other—offers to those suffering from atrophied, habit-dulled or repressed senses and spirits the possibility of new or renewed perception of "extra dimensions of experience." The work of electronic composers like Stockhausen, mentioned in The Crying of Lot 49, "complements Pynchon's theme. For, in a sense, his heroine also attempts 'a breakthrough to some new scale of pitches.'" Similarly, the twelve-tone music of Anton Webern is invoked in Gravity's Rainbow "to suggest the extra, unexpected possibilities all around one," "the spectra that we normally fail to perceive." Cowart examines the various thematic implications of the on-going controversy in Gravity's Rainbow over the relative merits of traditional and serial music. He also considers those allusions which identify Slothrop with Orpheus, and the increasing thematic prominence of music's subversive potential.

After his best chapter, Cowart's final chapter on language and literature comes as an anti-climax. The symmetry of his thesis requires such a section; but the chapter seems strung together and tacked on, and the structural integrity of the study as a whole suffers from its inclusion. Whereas the previous chapters are reasonably coherent, though apt to sprawl, this last one consists of much mere cataloging of literary allusions and influences, and of a rather arbitrary, if not haphazard sequence of brief discussions of Pynchon's allusions and probable debts to several Jacobean and Caroline playwrights and to Poe, Forster, Dodgson, Parina, Rilke and Jung, as well as discussions of Pynchon's theory and use of metaphor, his "devotion to the quest plot," and his use of a variety of other literary devices. The chapter hardly does justice to the vast and complex subject of Pynchon's specifically literary practices and allusions. Yet Cowart's discussions in this chapter are, as far as they go (some are actually quite detailed), competent and informative. For the sake of its overall unity, however, The Art of Allusion might better have been devoted entirely to Pynchon's allusions to the non-literary arts. That subject is surely broad and fertile enough to justify an independent study, and Cowart is surely master enough of
that more restricted subject to have given us a per-
haps even more expansive study of it. One misses, for 
example, in the present book, the work he has published 
on "Cinematic Auguries of the Third Reich in Gravity's 
Rainbow," which would not have seemed out of place. 
And Pynchon's copious allusions to Wagner, which 
Cowart has also attended to briefly elsewhere, probably 
deserve more than passing mention here. But notwith-
standing its flaws--its dubious thesis, its anti-cli-
mactic structure and, possibly, its omissions--there 
is much to appreciate and enjoy in The Art of Allusion. 
Besides being a master of many arts, Cowart is an un-
commonly diligent student of Pynchon's works, capable 
of comprehending and elucidating many far-flung and 
complex elements of Pynchon's texts.

... ...

Generally more science-oriented, but also containing 
chapters on film and literature, Pynchon's Fictions: 
Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information by 
John O. Stark might complement Cowart's study neatly, 
were Stark's book not so relentlessly inconsequential. 
Stark assembles a wide array of information on various 
subjects, most of it obvious to readers of Pynchon or 
already familiar to readers of Pynchon criticism, but 
fails to elucidate Pynchon's work in terms of it. 
(For all his concern about information, he is often 
careless about names, dates, incidents, and characters.) 
He rarely analyzes Pynchon's texts at length or in 
depth. His prose is flaccid. According to Stark's 
grand schema--probably an afterthought, since Stark 
never recurs to it explicitly after his introduction-- 
Pynchon's work can be understood if visualized as 
three concentric circles: "The inner circle, the tex-
ture, represents Pynchon's description of unmediated 
everyday reality. That is, in the elements of his 
fiction he presents the confusion that vexes people 
who have no ordering principle to make details fit 
together, to help them discover meanings." The second 
circle represents the information Pynchon borrows from 
science and technology, psychology, history, religion 
and film, as well as Pynchon's references to the 
methods of organizing information employed by each of 
these disciplines. "Explaining both information from 
and theories about each of these disciplines," Stark
claims, "goes a long way toward illuminating Pynchon's work," though one couldn't prove that by Stark. "However, all of these disciplines fail to organize satisfactorily the enormous amount of information available to contemporary people. Although this task is probably hopeless, Pynchon's literature can be understood as an effort to work towards its accomplishment." Thus, the third circle represents Pynchon's own "literary uses of information," "his literary allusions and his analysis of the nature of literature." Stark's ultimate revelation is that literary fictions provide a more comprehensive means of organizing experience, events and information than do such other fictions as science and technology, psychology, history, religion and film. That does not come as much of a surprise.

Stark's first chapter actually has little to do with "Pynchon's description of unmediated, everyday reality," or with "the confusion that vexes people who have no ordering principle to make details fit together, to help them discover meanings." Instead, it exhibits the confusion that vexes people who have a naively realistic bias. It "shows how the elements of Pynchon's fictions, by disputing common sense and flouting the conventions of realistic fiction, produce chaos" in the mind of at least one reader. For page after page after page, Stark engages in awe-struck chit-chat about non-realistic plots, characters and settings, about multi-layered texts and unconventional structures, about thematic emphasis on literary, epistemological and metaphysical problems, about authorial erudition, mixed genres, ambiguous tone and sophisticated handling of points of view, about imagery and symbols, and about style. It takes Stark nearly forty pages to realize or to admit that literary fictions are fictive and that other ways of understanding reality are also fictive. He asserts that "Pynchon concentrates on the process of organizing data, not on unorganized data or the result of such organizing;" but such a useful observation is all but lost in the welter of all Stark's astonishment at discovering, and all his unnecessary labor to explain that literary fictions are constructed by authors, and often have narrators with points of view. Stark appropriately stresses the need many of Pynchon's characters feel for ways to organize experience and information, and
thereby to discover and/or create meaning. He under-
stands that one can choose among numerous possible
literary and non-literary ways to organize data.
"Pynchon dramatizes these choices, partly by shaping
his narratives so as to incorporate them, and partly
by having his characters choose." The five middle
chapters of Stark's study are devoted to a survey of
non-literary data and non-literary fictions or non-
literary methods of organizing data in Pynchon's works.

In those five chapters, Stark compiles considerable
information, much of it simply gleaned from Pynchon's
texts (and from previous criticism) for the avowed
purpose of showing how Pynchon uses individual bits
of data. He also discusses the various methods his
selected disciplines employ to organize and synthesize
information, with the aim of showing how Pynchon
adopts these disciplines' methodologies for his own
purposes. "Science and Technology" touches on the
topics of rocketry, plastics and drugs, of causal,
statistical and less orthodox epistemologies, of syn-
thesis and control, and of thermodynamics. It also
discusses cybernetics and its definition, organization
and use of information, and considers mathematics as a
subject and a source of imagery. "Psychology" breezily
covers paranoia, aggression, anality, sexuality, love
and death, as well as Freudianism, gestalt psychology,
Jungianism and behaviourism. "History" contains thumb-
nail histories of Malta, the Hereros, rocketry and
Thurn and Taxis. Here Stark argues that, whereas the
histories of science and communications are important
in Pynchon's works and to an understanding of them,
social, economic and political histories as such are
less prominent and less important. He contends that
Pynchon subordinates the latter kinds of history to,
for example, an ahistorical analysis and representa-
tion of the suffering of individuals. Stark's claim
that "historical events in [Pynchon's] novels rarely
seem to have political causes," apparently derives
from his having a quite restricted notion of politics.
Stark rightly includes history or historiography among
the data-ordering disciplines. He attempts to deal
with questions of methodology, with premises about the
existence and nature of time, with the historiographi-
cal implications of theories of memory, and with vari-
ous theories of the movement and motive force of his-
tory. On these last points, his impulse is laudable, but his effort is erratic and his achievement scant. "Religion" touches lightly on intimations of revelation, eschews mythic interpretation as simplistic, contrasts the world views of the Puritans and the Hereros, discusses the occult tradition, vitalism, nineteenth-century German nature philosophy and the Tarot, and concludes with a breathless explication of William Slothrop's hymn. "The Film" discusses Pynchon's probable debt to From Caligari to Hitler, mentions some of the cinematic techniques Pynchon adapts for literary purposes, and considers some of the relations of cinematic techniques, technology, aesthetics, ontology and epistemology to Gravity's Rainbow. Regrettably, we gain very little from all this. Stark hardly ever discusses a subject thoroughly, either on its own terms or on Pynchon's. Rarely does he enlighten, instruct, demonstrate, argue, persuade or even entertain. He achieves only a few, isolated, modest insights. The five chapters are not redeemed by novelty or daring or grace or convenience. They do not enhance our understanding or appreciation of Pynchon's works.

Alas, things get worse in the inept final chapter, "Literature." Stark apparently has a peculiarly elementary sense of what literature is, or else has an odd notion of his readers' sense of what literature is. He lets us know, for instance, that "[Pynchon's] books, even the very long Gravity's Rainbow, are literary organizations of information." He seems to think of literature as a place to put things, mostly non-literary information, which retain their autonomous non-literary character. Of course, Pynchon's works also contain some literary information: German folk literature, Faust motifs, and even more allusions to Rilke than the reviewer said. Although raw literary information is less important to Pynchon than is raw non-literary information, literature as an information-organizing discipline is more significant and more comprehensive than are the non-literary disciplines. Stark boldly asserts that Pynchon "continually demonstrates that a sophisticated work of literature does not communicate a predetermined non-literary meaning from its beginning throughout its entire length." Rather, he suggests, "it creates and conveys meaning
gradually." All the "pieces" of Pynchon's works are united, not by any non-literary meaning, but by the literary quality of partial self-reflectiveness, by Pynchon's "putting his materials together in patterns [in the absence of an imposed non-literary meaning]," and by Pynchon's "perpetual concern with language." Stark's attitude toward this last concern reveals the depth of his penetration. Language itself, he feels, is unproblematic. If it were not, "Pynchon could not use it so effectively." The troubles that characters in V. and The Crying of Lot 49 experience with language, they create for themselves "by their slovenly use of language." In Gravity's Rainbow, language is wonderfully efficacious, and that's that. Stark also seems to believe that his definition of a literary fiction as one that demonstrates the necessity of fictions, reflects on itself, creates its order by making patterns, and assimilates non-literary fictions is highly original. Even if we needed to be persuaded of the truth and usefulness of such axioms, Stark's peculiar efforts would hardly answer.

It is difficult to conceive of the intended audience --non-academic, undergraduate or specialized-- for Pynchon's Fictions. Stark does not try to be non-academic. His presentation is not just simplified for the general reader. He is neither merely innocent nor radically innocent--bent on refreshing our jaded senses or on compelling us to re-examine what we take for granted. He is not somewhere out in left field; he doesn't seem to know quite where the park is. Pynchon remains pretty much where Stark found him; criticism and Stark's readers, however, may experience a bit of a setback.

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Notes and Queries

Don Larsson would like to draw people's attention to J. Hoberman's article, "Bad Movies" (Film Comment, July-August 1980, 7-12). Hoberman mentions one film—Bride of the Monster—with Pynchonian overtones: Bela Lugosi struggles with a rubber octopus; the film ends with an atomic mushroom cloud. Hoberman's comments on the relation of bad movies to surrealism are provocative in terms of Pynchon's use of mass culture.

T. S. Tillotson passes along "another offering for the annotated bibliography project so admirably begun by Javaid Qazi [in PN 2]:"


This is an outstanding reference work on herbalism, originally published in 1931. It agrees with much (but not all) of the herbalistic lore presented in Gravity's Rainbow. Consider a brief portion of the entry under "Mandrake": "The plant was fabled to grow under the gallows of murderers, and it was believed to be death to dig up the root, which was said to utter a shriek . . . which none might hear and live. . . . he who would dig up a plant of Mandrake should tie a dog to it for that purpose, who drawing it out would certainly perish."
Bibliography

YNCHON REPRINTS:


UTICISM:


See pp. 3-4 above.


Mentions Gravity's Rainbow.


Discusses the hypotactic style of Gravity's Rainbow.

A response to Robert Alter's "The American Political Novel."


Mentions Gravity's Rainbow.


Mentions The Crying of Lot 49.


Mentions Pynchon.


Swigger, Ronald T. "Fictional Encyclopedicism and the Cognitive Value of Literature." Comparative Literature Studies, 12, No. 4 (1975), 351-66.

(353, 363)

Mentions Pynchon.


FORTHCOMING WORKS:


IRCULATING MANUSCRIPTS:

Contributors

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