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Notes for *Gravity's Rainbow*

Steven Weisenburger

To open *Gravity's Rainbow* is to step within a vast, satirically leveling flux of languages. Part 3 of the novel represents it as a "Zone," a skeptical field where the pre-War hierarchy of discourse has been pulverized. Certainly that condition is characteristic of the novel as a whole, and it thus represents a remarkable challenge to narrative stylistics. Mikhail Bakhtin, who has emerged since his death in 1975 as one of the most engaging theorists of narrative art, described that multi-languaged power of the genre, the "heteroglossia" of novels, as a primary defining characteristic. He argued that by incorporating into their fictions a plenitude of voices, each embodying a particular time and place (Bakhtin called it the "chronotope" of a discourse), novelists create radically decentered, open-ended artworks.

To Bakhtin, however, the analysis of how languages are deployed in novels could be complete only if the field of novelistic "discourse" itself was broadened. His most compelling work argues for an expansion of narrative stylistics to include such extra-literary "languages" as slang, underworld cant, songs, games, folk-genres, and material culture, to name only a few of his interests. Long before semioticians staked their claim to the territory, Bakhtin had shown that the formal counterpointing of sign-systems is present everywhere in novels; characteristically the closed, orthodox, privileged language of a culture can be seen pitted against its others, the open, unsanctioned, and "low" languages. These low (preterite) forms for organizing experience are always destined to stand in ironic relation to orthodox epistemologies: they parody what is commonly accepted; they give the reigning episteme an oftentimes raucous transfusion by means of laughter.

If initially this seems a highfown theoretical position, Bakhtin also showed the pragmatics of it. Throughout his best studies—of Dostoevski and Rabelais—Bakhtin grounded theory on careful attention
to details. In particular he was meticulous about documenting the folk-origins out of which narrative discourse could be shown to have intentionally grown.

But exactly there is the difficulty: for the modes of popular discourse common to folk-genres are often orally transmitted, and therefore undocumented or, if recorded at all, likely to be found in the most unconventional locations. Consider the situation in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Documenting Pynchon's many borrowings from the poetry, say, of Rilke or Dickinson, even documenting his deployment of Pavlovian terminology, or the recollections of an actual General Dornberger as they shape the fictional character of Franz Pökler--these are problems for a conventional scholarship. But what of the welter of extra-literary discourses, the German underworld cant, the folk-tales, superstitions, songs, and games, circa 1945? Scholarship quite appropriately wanders into an open field.

Several years ago I began a project whose aim was to produce a complete set of annotations to the American texts of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The model, in matters of format, was Gifford and Seidman's companion to *Ulysses*, *Notes for Joyce*. One of my purposes was to gather evidence for a discussion of chronology and structure in *Gravity's Rainbow*; another was to begin the analysis of Pynchon's narrative by carefully documenting its literary and extra-literary debts, especially its great assemblage of "preterite" languages. The attention to structuring evidence produced some remarkable discoveries I plan to make available soon, in a larger context. The documentation of Pynchon's sources is also complete, and the following notes represent a small portion of that work.

Completing the annotations has required a wide-open method. What Thom's *Directory* was to James Joyce and the composition of *Ulysses*, newspapers and magazines were, I discovered, to Thomas Pynchon and *Gravity's Rainbow*. One also listens to recordings of songs, for the verbal echoes; watches films, for the snippets of imagery and dialogue; consults advertisements and brand-name packaging, for similar echoes.

This selection of notes represents a rather conventional range of sources. They disclose, for
example, the importance in Gravity's Rainbow of Jakob Grimm's magisterial work of nineteenth-century philology, Teutonic Mythology, four volumes with which Pynchon was on intimate terms. Grimm's work contributed so much to the narrative—etymologies, myth, folk customs, even the name of that enigmatic "pig-hero," Plechazunga—that this selection can provide only some of the choicest examples. But others of the notes included here show similar patterns of borrowing. Pynchon went to Baedeker's guide-books for place names, local color, and Germanic myth; to the London Times, a vast source of historical detail and material culture, circa 1945; to Life magazine, for the same lode of detail buried there; and to studies in folklore and black magic, for such things as references to children's games, bogeys, riddles about getting home, and grotesque magical devices.

In this sampling, notes are arranged by page/line number references to the Viking edition of Gravity's Rainbow, with the Bantam page numbers given in parentheses. Bibliographical citations are to the most readily available editions of the source-texts.

30/12 (34), "Dominus Blicero"—Pynchon's source is Jakob Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, tr. James Steven Stalleybrass (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 849-50. Blicero is one of the many Germanic nicknames for Death. Grimm traces its etymology from bleich (pale) and bleckend (grinning), and it is from these that he derives others of Death's nicknames, such as Der Bliker (the "Grinning Death") and Der Bleicher ("The Bleacher," for what he does to bones). Dominus, the Latin for "Lord," recalls the appellation accorded to Roman emperors, as well as to Christ.

55/36-37 (64), "Kyprinos Orient"—advertised in tiny, front-page notices in the London Times as "A delightful, fragrant cigarette with a rich, satisfying flavour" (see the edition of 8 May 1945, p. 1). Generally the British prefer cigarettes made from Virginia tobaccos, but like Ian Fleming's character James Bond, Pointsman smokes a Near Eastern blend. Kyprinos Orient are from the island of Cyprus. There
is more. Kyprinos is the Greek for "of Cyprus," and as Robert Graves reminds us in The White Goddess, another of Pynchon's main sources, "the Cyprus was sacred to Hercules . . . and the word cypress is derived from Cyprus, which was called after Cyprian Aphrodite, his mother." In fact Aphrodite was frequently called "the Cyprian Venus," and so it is appropriate that Pointsman smokes this brand because, as we soon see in the novel, it was "the submontane Venus" (88/10[101]) of Pavlovian research that had called to him, as though he were a Tannhauser, out of traditional medicine and into the passageways of neurophysiology and behaviorism. For Graves's comments, see The White Goddess (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 140.

73/23, 27 (84), "the Lord of the Sea . . . Bert"--the source is Grimm's etymological somersaults in Teutonic Mythology, pp. 272-82. The goddess Bertha, associated with the masculine figure Berchtold, or Bert, appears in Germanic myths as: (1) "the promoter of navigation among men" and thus a "Lord of the Sea"; (2) a white god, for "behrt or brecht signifies bright, light, white"; (3) a being whose attendant host consisted of the souls of children, which explains why the constable suggests the name of Bert to the man-child, Reg Le Froyd; and (4), a figure whose festival occurs near the Winter Solstice, December 21, which is also the date of this episode in Gravity's Rainbow. Note that Le Froyd's suicidal leap into the sea corresponds with later references to the Gadarene Swine and the rush of lemmings into the seas (i.e. GR, 555/24-28 [647]).

108/12-13 (125), "ic heb du liever . . . goude ghewracht"--the source once more is Grimm, p. 213. He translates the lyric: "I hold you dearer than a boar-swine/ All were it of fine gold y-wrought." The lines derive from a Middle Dutch poem, Lantslot ende Sandrin, verse 374, where the gentle knight Lancelot makes this declaration of (evidently tender) love to his lady. As Grimm explains, the Norse god Freyr (also called Fró, Frigg), a god of peace and love, often appeared with a boar in attendance. At Yuletide, "atonement boars" were offered up to Freyr in antici-
pation of a year's fruitfulness. Grimm comments that, owing to his wholly creative and generative power, the god was enormously popular in pre-Christian Europe.

114/12-13 (132-33), "on the order of the old woman's arrangement for getting her pig home over the stile"--the allusion is to an ancient folktale. The best version of it can be found in W. A. Clouston's Popular Tales and Fictions: Their Migrations and Transformations, Vol. 1 (London: William Blackwood, 1887), pp. 295-96. Stith Thompson's Motif Index of Folk Literature, Vol. 5 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1936) lists some variants on p. 546. In Clouston it is "The Old Woman and the Crooked Sixpence," a story classed with types of cumulative stories, such as "The House that Jack Built." The old woman of the tale finds a crooked coin and buys a pig, but the pig balks at the stile on their way home. She asks a dog to bite the pig, but the dog refuses. So she asks a stick to hit the dog, to make it bite the pig, but the stick also refuses. So she turns to fire (to burn the stick), water (to douse the fire), an ox (to lap up the water), a butcher (to slaughter the ox), a rope (to hang the butcher), a rat (to gnaw the rope), and a cat (to eat the rat). They all decline, in turn. But when the cat asks for a bowl of milk from a nearby cow, and the cow gives the milk after being given hay, the old woman then has milk for the cat, that eats the rat, that chews the rope... and so on until the dog bites the pig and the pig jumps over the stile.

What is more interesting, Clouston then traces this and its family of tales to a sacred hymn in the Talmud. The hymn also has ten intermediary steps, just as there are ten steps between the straw for the cow (a gift, sustenance) and the pig's leaping over the stile (obedience, home). The motif of ten and of regression is noteworthy throughout Gravity's Rainbow: the launch countdown runs backward from ten, and Pynchon will eventually link it to the ten-stage order of creation in Kabbalistic myths; then there are the ten generations separating Tyrone Slothrop from his Puritan ancestor, William, even, I suppose, the ten holes of Slothrop's Hohner harmonica. The main point in this context is Slothrop's desire to return home,
and his being lost in a search for the formula, the catalyst in a chain reaction which can bring him back.

129/8-16 (150), *even a German macronic ...* attributed to Heinrich Suso ... Alpha es et O"--the word "macronic" is a misprint; it should be "macaronic," the term for any lyric composed from several languages. The details for this interlude of singing derive from a story entitled "Macaronic Carols" which appeared in the London Times of Friday, 22 December 1944, p. 6. The Times writer takes Suso's carol, "In dulci jubilo," as an example of the genre. He comments: "No simpler or more persuasive demonstration of the unity of Christendom (even at the very time of the Reformation) and the universality of Latin could well be found than this example of macaronic verse, in which the vernacular and Latin are arranged so closely as to preserve the syntax of both tongues. There is argument over whether carols have popular or clerical origin. The conclusion of the argument, according to Richard Leighton Greene in The Early English Carol, is that while the carol is not pure folk song, i.e. a product of communal growth and oral transmission, it is popular in its use of familiar phrases, and the Latin tags do not take it beyond the reach of the illiterate men who heard them constantly in church." The Times also provides a translation of this particular carol: "In sweet jubilation/ Let us our homage sing/ Our hearts' joy/ Reclines in the manger/ And shines like the sun/ In his mother's lap/ Alpha he is, and Omega." The Times article does not mention the other two composers Pynchon mentions here, Tallis and Purcell, but Greene's The Early English Carol (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), to which Pynchon may have also turned, does provide brief biographies.

133/3-4 (155), "children have unfolded last year's toys and found reincarnated Spam tins"--Spam is of course the canned meat product, and the source for this otherwise curious detail is a story entitled "Toys from Spam Tins" in the London Times of 9 December 1944, p. 2: "Months of painstaking, spare-time effort by men and women in barrage units and anti-aircraft batteries in Greater London have been largely respon-
sible for the production of over 6,000 toys for Abbey District Entertainments, which intends to distribute the toys at children's parties and among hospitals, clinics, and day care nurseries in eight London boroughs at Christmas. These toy "railway engines, lorries, tanks, dolls, and animals" were made from the tins of Spam and sardines.

133/14-15 (155), "the Radio Doctor asking What are Piles?"— the "Radio Doctor" was a regular, five-minute weekly feature of the BBC Home Service Programme. Pynchon's source here and throughout Gravity's Rainbow, whenever the BBC comes up, is the programming schedules printed in each day's London Times. At 6:25 p.m. on December 14th, 1944, for example, the Radio Doctor answered the question, "What are boils?" The Piles are Pynchon's flourish; the Radio Doctor does not appear to have taken them up.

134/40-135/1 (157), "Mr. Noel Coward ... packing them into the Duchess for the fourth year"— the play is Coward's Blithe Spirit, and the same edition of the Times which supplies the macaronic carol also proclaims "The Fourth Year" for Coward's comedy, which played at the city's Duchess Theatre, on Catharine Street.

147/39-40 (172), "tales of Jenny Greenteeth waiting out in the fens to drown him"— the likeliest source is Katharine Briggs's Faeries in English Tradition and Folklore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 46-47. She mentions Jenny Greenteeth as a bogey often invoked by adults to scare children away from danger: "Lesser spirits with whom the young were threatened a short time ago, were perhaps nursery creations, invented by careful mothers to frighten their children away from danger. One of these was Jenny Greenteeth, who lurked in stagnant pools, grown over with weeds." The danger was that a child might step out onto the weeds, mistaking them for grass, and so fall into deep water and drown.

206/24-25 (240), "the Old Norse Rune ... Old High German name for it is sigil"— the source for Sir Stephen's etymology here is, again, Grimm: "the sun
was likened to a wheel of fire," represented by a circle with an axis-point in the center—a mandala in other words. Ancient Goths used this rune to designate the Sun. Later, Grimm explains, "the Norse rune for S was named sōl, sun," which is also the Anglo-Saxon and Old High German sigil or sugil (p. 620). This breakdown, from mandala to sigmoid line, is implicit in Grimm’s discussion but nevertheless an emphasis of Pynchon’s.

221/13 (257), "A rain witch"—Grimm remarks that "In Germany witches were commonly called . . . wetterhexe, wetterkätzze," that is, weather-witches or weather-cats. A common belief was that they were responsible for whimsically calling down rain-squalls (see Teutonic Mythology, p. 1088). Thus we have Katje, the wetterkätzze, who has in fact spent a good many moments idly watching the rain, earlier in the novel.

232/35 (270), "Domina Nocturna . . . shining mother"—again the source is Grimm, who discusses the diabolical "night-riding" that witches are famous for: "nignt-women in the service of Dame Holda rove through the air on appointed nights, mounted on beasts; her they obey . . . these night-women, shining mothers, dominae nocturnae . . . were originally demonic elvish beings, who appeared in women’s shape and did men kindnesses" (Teutonic Mythology, p. 1056). Grimm does not spell out what those "kindnesses" were, but he does mention that, like the Valkyries, the dominae nocturnae were thought to hover over battlefields to snatch off the souls of the slain. In this scene, Katje appears to Brigadier Pudding as just such a white goddess, a "shining mother" in her destructive aspect.

258/26-27 (300), "Ultra, Lichtspiel, and Sträggeli"—Pynchon derived the names of these three fictional Zürich nightclubs from Grimm, who notes that "at some places in Switzerland the Sträggeli goes about on the Ember-Night, Wednesday before Christmas, afflicting girls that have not finished their day's spinning" (Teutonic Mythology, p. 934). The word Sträggeli, he explains, means simply "spectre" or "play-of-light"
or Lichtspiel; Ultra, then, appears in this context as a reference to the "very high frequency" light waves in any spectrum.

330/9-12 (384), "Your kraut witch, for example, has six toes on each foot and no hair at all on her cunt... up on the Brocken here"— the descriptive details of this scene derive from a May 28, 1945 story in Life magazine, pp. 122-24. Pictures show the Brocken, a hotel and radio-tower perched atop the mountain peak. The murals are inside the transmitting tower, and photos in Life show the witches riding black rams and looking just as Pynchon describes them. The caption to one picture reads: "GI who is inspecting mural found one witch with six toes."

527/36-37 (615), "mythical Rügen"— as Baedeker explains, this large island in the Baltic Sea was initially inhabited by an ancient Germanic tribe, the Rugii, then by Slavonic people who "resisted the influences of Christianity and civilization down to the middle of the 14th century." Rügen earns Pynchon's epithet because, as we see below, its place names are the residue of myth from the ancient Slavs. For Baedeker's discussion, see Northern Germany, 14th ed. (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1904), pp. 201-06; the quotation here is from p. 204.

528/9-10 (615), "the Stubbenkammer, the King's Seat, and... Cape Arkona"— Frau Gnahr has headed her vessel westward, and so these landmarks slide by on the left or port side. These geographical details stem from Baedeker (pp. 206-07), according to whom the island is dotted with mounds and altars used in the ancient Slavonic sacrificial rites. The Stubbenkammer is a set of rock-steps set in the chalk cliffs; further west is the Königstuhl or "King's Seat," a chalk precipice rising 400 feet above the Baltic; last appears Cape Arkona, the island's northernmost point of land, and site of a temple "consisting of a circular intrenchment 20-40 ft. high, and containing the temple of their four-headed idol Swantewit."

528/13-15 (615), "Svetovid... Triglav... Porevit... Rugevit"— the sources here are
Baedeker's Northern Germany and Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, p. 201. Grimm sees the Slavonic god Svetovid or Swantewit as the equivalent of the Germanic god Tiw, a god of war like the Roman Mars. The Saxon rune for Tiw, interestingly, was an arrow pointing (rocketlike) straight up. The other names listed in this passage are variants, or nicknames, for Svetovid.

528/19 (615), "the Wissow Klinken"—again the source is Baedeker: "a series of chalk cliffs resembling those of the Stubbenkammer," is how he describes these coastal features (Northern Germany, p. 206). Klinken is the German for "latches" or "latch-keys," which is why this white promontory might be said to metaphorically probe "the wards of Slothrop's heart" (528/20-21 [615]).

567/25 (661), "Himmel and Hölle"—or "Heaven and Hell," is a popular German version of hopscotch. For earlier references to children's games in Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon is indebted to Iona and Peter Opie's study, Children's Games in Street and Playground (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), which would have steered him to Reinhard Peesch's Das Berliner Kinder- spiel der Gegenwart, or "Berlin Children's Games of the Present" (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957). Peesch describes Himmel und Hölle (pp. 22-28) as follows: the playing space is chalked out on the ground in the form of a cross, with ten squares in all; children begin from a zero area called Erde (Earth), and as they hop through the numbered squares, each required move becomes more difficult, square nine, or Hölle (Hell) being the worst; the tenth square, Himmel (Heaven), is also known as "Home" to the children. The overall image is a striking one, given the prevalence of crosses and of the number ten in Gravity's Rainbow.

567/31 (661), "Laterne, Laterne, Sonne, Mond, und Sterne"—this is the call of a catcher in a game of German hide-and-seek; the source once more is Peesch (pp. 42-43), although the Opies also mention the contest rules in their book (pp. 173-74). The catcher is called Die Sonne (The Sun), and he must catch the
other children who are called the Stars (Sterne), then bring them to a holding area, which is usually a lantern post (die Laterne). The Moon (die Mond) is a player granted the privilege of releasing the captives by invading the holding area and pulling them out.

567/34 (661), "Plechazunga, the Pig-Hero"—created from a page of etymological digressions in Grimm's Teutonic Mythology: "The lightning's flash, which we name blitz, was expressed in our older speech both by the simple pih . . . and by plechazunga . . . derived from plechazan, a frequentive of plechen. A Prussian folk-tale has an expressive phrase for the lightning: 'He with the blue whip chases the devil,' i.e. the giants; for a blue flame was held especially sacred." In a footnote at the bottom of the page, Grimm adds: "While writing plechazan, I remember pleckan (pateri, nudari, bleak), MHG blecken, blacte . . . which, when used of the sky, means: the clouds open, heaven opens, as we will say of forked lightning" (178). Simply put, plechazunga belongs to a complex of Germanic words associated with Thor (Donar, Thunar), whose weapon was the lightning. The "Pig-Hero" business is entirely Pynchon's, but it is noteworthy that other evidence in this episode of the novel fixes its date as August 2, 1945, a "Thor's Day."

592/25-26 (690), "Sandy MacPherson at the Organ"—the BBC programming schedules in the London Times are the source. Sandy MacPherson also appears in Part 1 (13/39-40 [15]). According to the Times, he played on Sunday, August 5, 1945, at 10:15 p.m., and at no other in the weeks immediately preceding or following August 5—which fixes the time of this fictional scene with remarkable accuracy.

625/17 (728), "a mandrake root"—the source is Grimm's discussion of the Alraun or mandrake root in Teutonic Mythology, pp. 1202-03. Compare Pynchon's description of the magical procedure with this, in Grimm: "If a hereditary thief that has preserved his chastity gets hung, and drops water or seed from him, there grows up under the gallows the broad-leaved yellow-flowered mandrake. If dug up, she groans and
shrieks so dismally, that the digger would die thereof. He must therefore stop his ears with cotton or wax, and go before sunrise on a Friday, and take with him a black dog that has not a white hair on him; make three crosses over the mandrake, and dig round her till the root holds by thin fibres only; these he must tie with a string to the dog's tail, hold up a piece of bread before him, and run away. The dog rushes after the bread, wrenches up the root, and falls dead, pierced by her agonizing wail. The root is then taken up, washed with red wine, wrapt in silk red and white, laid in a casket, bathed every Friday, and clothed in a new little white smock every new-moon. When questioned, she reveals future and secret things touching welfare and increase, makes rich, removes all enemies, brings blessings upon wedlock, and every piece of coin put to her overnight is found doubled in the morning, but she must not be overloaded. When her owner dies, she goes to the youngest son, provided he puts a piece of bread and a coin in his father's coffin."

733/26 (855), "Stretchfoot"— from the German Streckefuss, a nickname commonly applied to Dominus Blicero. Grimm explains: "Death is called the pale Streckefuss or Streckebein (leg-stretcher) ... because he stretches out the limbs of the dying" (Teutonic Mythology, p. 853).

750/33 (876), "the Hand of Glory"— a grotesque superstition that derives from A. E. Waite's Book of Black Magic and of Pacts (London: 1898; rpt. Chicago: de Laurence Co., 1940). The reason why burglars, or "second-story men," would employ such a device to "light their way into your home" (750/33-34[876]) will be apparent from Waite's discussion: "the Hand of Glory is indifferently the right or left hand of a criminal who has been gibbeted. The sorcerer obtains it as he can, and in the days of Tyburn Tree such requisites might have cost nothing beyond the personal risk of the adventure; it is indispensable, however, that it should be wrapped in a piece of winding sheet, and this suggests that the criminal must have been previously cut down with a view to interment. Thus enclosed, the hand must be well squeezed so as to
force out any blood which may possibly remain in the member, after which it must be placed in an earthen vessel, together with some zimort, saltpetre, common salt, and pepper-corns, all pounded. It should remain in this vessel for fifteen days, and when extracted it should be exposed to the heat of the sun during the time of the dog-star until it is extremely desiccated. If solar warmth be insufficient, it may be placed in a furnace heated with bracken and vervain. The object is to extract all the grease from the member, and therefrom, in combination with virgin wax and sesame from Lapland, to compose a species of candle. Wheresoever this frightful object is lighted, the spectators will be deprived of all motion, and the sorcerer can do what he will. It is possible to destroy its influence by anointing the threshold of the door, or other places through which entrance may be gained to a house, with an unguent composed of the gall of a black cat, grease from a white fowl, and the blood of a screech owl. This should also be confectied in the dog-days" (pp. 276-77). Note the color-scheme in the counterspell: black-white-red. It is common to both alchemy and black magic; these colors are the three coordinates of Pynchon's color-symbolism for Gravity's Rainbow.

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Gravity's Rainbow: A Folkloristic Reading

Mark E. Workman

In order to lead lives of personal meaning and value, the victims of economic exploitation and military oppression in *Gravity's Rainbow* must strive to band together into groups whose languages and structures have not been dictated to them by the purveyors of technology and the strategists of war. Similarly, in order to read *Gravity's Rainbow* in a meaningful way, its would-be interpreters must liberate themselves from some of the conventional constraints governing their reading behavior, thus enabling themselves to enter into a fresh dialogue with the novel. What I would like to suggest, therefore, is that for both characters and readers a "folk consciousness" must come to supplant what may be termed, following the language of the novel, a "firm consciousness." The rewards of the former and the ill-effects of the latter--within and without the novel--will be explored in this essay.

*Gravity's Rainbow* chronicles a time when what we think of as "knowledge" and what we think of as "reality" have become unmoored from one another, and "beliefs" have become imposed dogmas rather than felt convictions. The imposition of these dogmas and the maintenance of an outmoded manner of perceiving the world are in the hands of often corrupt magnates of war, science, and enterprise, those who promulgate conflicts for profit and mechanize men for greater efficiency. "The War, the Empire," says the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "will expedite [..] barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The War does not appear to want a folk-consciousness, not even of the sort the Germans have engineered, ein Volk ein Führer--it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity."¹

"The War does not appear to want a folk-consciousness." For a folk-consciousness is predicated upon the existence of a group of people bound together by
something more than received dogma, and who relate to one another not in strictly utilitarian, denotative ways, but one whose very communality is defined and made possible by the mutual production of and participation in shared connotative meanings and forms of expression. While a folk group is traditional, it is also dynamic. Because it is by its nature relatively small in size, its members may interact with great frequency. Thus, the symbolic content and formal properties of the rituals through which this interaction is conducted and membership displayed are subject to continual reinterpretation and redesign. Ironically, despite its common association with the status quo, therefore, it is the folk or "unofficial" culture of a people which often is more viable and organic than the comparatively static, permanently inscribed "official" culture.

There is a further irony here as well. Folklore typically goes unrecorded; it is registered in the hearts and minds of those who share it, and rendering it anew comes naturally. Official culture, on the other hand—whether it be in the form of literature, or laws, or creeds, or formulae—must be inscribed at least in part because it is so easily forgotten. It follows that it is from folklore that we derive our primary identities and not, as is commonly believed, from official culture, its profundity notwithstanding. It is for this reason, according to Milan Kundera, that totalitarian regimes accomplish their objective of conformity by obliterating the memories—particularly the folk heritages—of their citizens.² Destroying the living connective tissue of the past creates a vacuum which may be filled with the official dehumanizing ideology of the future.

Fortunately, it is not always easy to destroy a folk group. However, folk groups are not always easy to forge either, and they are susceptible to an evolutionary pressure through which they may be transformed into something quite different from their original nature. In other words, not all communalities are folk groups. It is often the case that a number of people share an affiliation, but fail to progress to a point at which that affiliation becomes the basis for further group activity. In Gravity's Rainbow, for
example, the engineers with whom Franz Pökler labors at Peenemünde to produce the rocket seem never to merge into anything other than a loose assemblage of isolated individuals, each of whom returns to his own monastic cell and private fantasies at the end of the day. At the other end of the spectrum are those groups whose traditions become so established as to be inflexible, whose size grows to the point where remote bureaucracies come to govern them, or which generally lose their intimacy and dynamism. Such has been the fate of many sectarian movements throughout history, as those counterforces which survive initial, likely ephemerality gradually are reshaped into the very kinds of societies which generated their existence in the first place. What was fresh all too often grows stale; what begins as a folk group all too often calcifies into a firm.

This dialectic between folk- and firm-consciousness is operative throughout Gravity's Rainbow, and Pynchon presents an array of characters who occupy every conceivable position between and even beyond these polar alternatives. Potential folk groups abound: the preterite DP's, on the move all over the Zone, seeking new seeds around which they might crystallize; Pointsman and his fellow worshipers of the Book, too intellectually preoccupied, too emotionally avid ever to commune with one another instead of individually resurrecting Pavlov, their mentor safely in the grave. A cruel, calculated parody of genuine communitas is erected out of the culture of childhood, that most unselfconscious of ages: "In a corporate State, a place must be made for innocence, and its many uses. In developing an official version of innocence, the culture of childhood has proven invaluable. Games, fairy-tales, legends from history, all the paraphernalia of make-believe can be adapted and even embodied in a physical place" (419). Zwölfkinder, an amusement park, is thus constructed to provide children and their parents with an artificial sanctuary from the chaos of war; they are allowed brief annual visits so that their productivity as pawns of technology and enterprise may be extended through therapeutic, albeit defunct, rituals.
Occasionally, folk-potential is realized as an aggregate of individuals is melded into a greater whole, however fleetingly. Pirate Prentice and his cronies assemble each morning for what has become a traditional breakfast, satisfying the needs of soul as well as stomach. Like the "living genetic chain" of the "musaceous" molecules of the bananas, the linkage of men is organic, and for the moment capable of denying the presence of death lingering outside the door. Roger and Jessica, too, achieve a state of intense, albeit fragile, communion. Already scientifically inclined toward recognition of the space between zero and one, Roger realizes that he and Jessica have begun to meet somewhere between their formerly neatly bounded selves: "I'm no longer sure which of all the words, images, dreams or ghosts are 'yours' and which are 'mine.' It's past sorting out. We're both being someone new now, someone incredible. . ." (177).

One of the most striking examples of the spirit which is the essence of folk groups and which so many of the characters in Gravity's Rainbow are in quest of is manifested by the Kirghiz tribesmen. These unlettered nomads are encountered by Colonel Vaslav Tchitcherine when he journeys out into the Central Asian steppes to disseminate the New Turkic Alphabet. "He had come to give the tribesmen out here, this far out, an alphabet: it was purely speech, gesture, touch among them, not even an Arabic script to replace" (338). Tchitcherine comes upon the Kirghiz during the performance of an "ajtys" or singing-duel. A young boy and girl trade improvised verses in time to the rhythm of stringed instruments in "a mocking well-I-sort-of-like-you-even-if-there's-one-or-two-weird-things-about-you-for-instance--kind of game" (356). At times the mockery assumes a biting edge, and the emotions of the singers and their friends and families are in danger of overflowing the boundaries of the game. But the spirit of play prevails, and the contest ends in a reaffirmation of its own power to ritually unite, as the girl sings:

Did I hear you mention a marriage?
Here there has been a marriage--
This warm circle of song,
Boisterous, loud as any marriage. . . .(357)
Tchitcherine recognizes that he is witnessing a folk performance; he also "understands, abruptly, that soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down in the New Turkic Alphabet he helped frame... and this is how they will be lost" (357). This is ironic, for Tchitcherine himself promptly proceeds to transcribe—in stenography, no less—the moving performance of an Agyn, a wandering singer of the steppes. When the withered but radiant bard begins to pluck his dombra, the Kirghiz revelers settle into silence to await what is for them a reenactment of the central truth of their lives, the huminous presence of the Kirghiz Light:

For I tell you that I have seen it
In a place which is older than darkness,
Where even Allah cannot reach.
As you see, my beard is an ice-field,
I walk with a stick to support me,
But this light must change us to children.

And now I cannot walk far,
For a baby must learn to walk.
And my words are reaching your ears
As the meaningless sounds of a baby.
For the Kirghiz Light took my eyes,
Now I sense all Earth like a baby. (358)

At the conclusion of the song, Tchitcherine says to his traveling companion, "'Got it. Let's ride, comrade!'" (359). Of course, he has not "got it" at all, for what "it" is cannot be captured in print: while it is manifested in lyrics, it transcends its medium of expression. What Tchitcherine fails to transcribe is an attitude towards life—a sense of the past in the present, a sense of the vitality of the surroundings, a sense of the immediacy of the community—to all of which the Kirghiz, the folk, sense of self is inextricably bound.

The plight of the unsuspecting Kirghiz tribesmen is the danger, in this increasingly mobile, instrumental, rationalized universe, facing all such groups which are of human (or animal) rather than corporate or mechanical composition: they are mortal, and thus have at best but a brief hold on life. The dodoses, who exist in a kind of pacifistic "society" on the
distant island of Mauritius, have the ill-fortune not to correspond to the prevailing Christian concept of beauty; since they also lack the capacity for speech (like the pre-literate Kirghiz, they do not possess the proper currency of communication), there is "no chance of co-opting them in to what their round and flaxen invaders were calling Salvation" (110), and hence they are exterminated. Because they do possess such a potentially compromising language, some members of the Schwarzkommando, the Empty Ones led by Josef Ombindi, choose instead to extinguish themselves rather than suffer assimilation into a way of life alien to their pre-technological folk philosophy. For them, not living is an alternative more attractive than living without dignity and integrity.

A comparable decision is made by the Counterforce, that group of disaffected individuals who band together and venture into the Zone in order to locate, and presumably save, the man whose exploitation they have facilitated. In seeking Slothrop, they seek as well to restore some of the humanity and worth which has been stripped from their lives. And although they never do find Slothrop (who in any case appears to be beyond retrieval), they do, in a sense, find each other: "Could it be," Prentice ruminates, "there's something about ad hoc arrangements, like the present mission, that must bring you in touch with the people you need to be with? that more formal arrangements tend, by their nature, to separation, to loneliness?" (620).

Ad hoc versus formal; contact versus separation; spontaneity versus rigidity. Here, again (from the point of view elaborated in this essay), is the essential issue, variously phrased, of Gravity's Rainbow: the opposition between an ethical life grounded in a compassionate, vigorous, albeit ultimately ephemeral community—best exemplified by the folk group—and the exploitation of this universal need by those who stand to profit from the desperate acts of lonely women and men. Thus it is that Slothrop, motivated by longing in a hostile world, enters into transient, depraved, solipsistic affairs with Katje and Margherita Erdmann and Bianca; and that Jessica and Pökler and numerous others, lacking the anarchic bravura of Squalidozzi
and Leni and frightened by the responsibility and—
even worse—the unpredictability of love, allow
themselves to be seduced by the insidious regularity
and familiarity of life in a Firm. In a world where
what is best does not last long and what is worst is
often preserved (through inscription) longer than it
should be, it is, according to Pynchon, only those who
are willing to risk the moment for whom the moment
will be worth experiencing.

This opposition between folk- and firm-consciousness
is enacted within the text; it is also carried on "out-
side" the text as readers attempt to pin down this
protean novel with a variety of strategic holds.
First-time readers of Gravity's Rainbow almost always
testify to their frustration with the book as it fails
to conform to their expectations: their conventional
questions—questions about characters, plot, the
reality of the setting, narrative voice—are not
easily answered. Nor would it necessarily be pro-
ductive to answer them. For while Gravity's Rainbow
is admittedly tough going, the difficulty here resides
perhaps more with the reader than with the novel. In
the fascinating interview cited earlier, Milan Kundera
commends novels such as Don Quixote and Gravity's
Rainbow which defy in this manner the irresponsible,
even stupid, reader. In his bluntly stated opinion,

The stupidity of people comes from having an
answer for everything. The wisdom of the novel
comes from having a question for everything. . . .
The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend
the world as a question. There is wisdom and
tolerance in that attitude. In a world built
on sacrosanct certainties the novel is dead. . . .
all over the world people nowadays prefer to
judge rather than understand, to answer rather
than ask, so that the voice of the novel can
hardly be heard over the noisy foolishness of
human certainties. 3

There might seem to be a substantial gap between the
apparently harmless expectation of readers on the one
hand and "the noisy foolishness of human certainties"
on the other; on the contrary, there is only continuity.
Expectations are formed as recognizable patterns of
behavior emerge during the course of repeated interactions among a group of people. In the case of small, folk groups these patterns are called traditions. As noted earlier, traditions are subject to revision, since members of small groups interact on a regular basis: whenever they do so, and whenever they perform for one another, they are in fact modifying their traditions, however slightly and subtly, because every traditional performance is not merely a re-duplication of an ideal, prerecorded script, but also a re-creation of a shared construct.

With the expansion of groups and accompanying decline in the frequency of interaction of their members, artistic constructs are no longer shared equally, but are instead unevenly distributed, and traditions are transformed into codified laws. In more concrete terms, this means that selected individuals are granted privileged status as encoders and decoders of art, while others do the best they can to admire and understand aesthetic products according to the rules for their "proper" evaluation and interpretation. Practically speaking, readers are taught to ask certain kinds of questions, the responses to which are perceived as "knowledge." Outside the realm of literature this same process of preordained thinking leads to the production of "truth." And when this truth becomes non-negotiable because the society which upholds it has grown too bulky or arrested in its development, then this truth becomes "the noisy foolishness of human certainties." Such proclamations often have little to do with the rhythms of life as it is lived in neighborhoods, playgrounds, pubs, and homes, and indeed wherever a dialogue of many voices yields a rich and reflective tapestry of expression.

In just this way, Gravity's Rainbow invites its readers to entertain new perspectives, to try out new voices to add to its own. In Barthes' formulation, it is a "text," "structured but decentered, without closure" and thus "experienced only in an activity, a production." This reenactment ("rewriting") is carried on throughout (and sometimes beyond) one's repeated engagements with the novel. It occurs in an obvious way as the reader processes, with Slothrop, the variations of the passage "You never did the
Kenosha Kid" (60-61, 70-71); less obviously, but more relentlessly, as the reader attempts to define and locate the 00000 rocket, or work through the ramifications of the title of the novel (reminiscent of Joyce's similarly provocative title *Finnegans Wake*); or simply in the way in which he tries to get a handle on the myriad and shifting relationships between characters. The temptation, always, is to think in reductive terms. The more difficult task is to acknowledge our own "paranoia" (our predilection for pattern over chaos), and maintain a self-reflexive, critical awareness as it shapes and is reshaped by the patterns of the novel. What emerges then for the reader, as for the characters within the novel, is yet another pattern: "a moiré, a new world of flowing shadows, interferences. . . ." (395)

As it is precisely defined, of course, this emergent discourse is not folklore. Nevertheless, it is dependent upon openness to folk-consciousness as I have employed that term in this essay: a willingness, essentially, to fashion a new, more vital, and more intimate language sensitive to the unique requirements of the situation. That this language may further be appropriated as the basis for actual folk groups outside (but continuous with) the novel is evidenced by the ongoing exchange of "Zone jokes," the playing of kazoos, and the sharing of bananas by several classes of students who have participated in the experience of reading *Gravity's Rainbow* together. At best, they leave the novel and the class only after having created something akin to the achievement of Old Tchitcherine and the solemn Herero girl: "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). This language, shared however briefly by the most fortunate characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a language worth knowing.

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Notes

1 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973), 130-31. All further references to this text are incorporated into the body of the essay. Bracketed ellipses are mine.

2 Kundera's position is expressed throughout his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (New York: Penguin, 1981), and stated more explicitly in an interview of the author by Philip Roth at the conclusion of that novel.

3 Kundera, 237.


6 For a more extensive theoretical discussion of the relationship between folklore and literature, see my essay "Reading: A Folkloristic Activity," *motif: international newsletter of research in folklore and literature*, 5 (1983), 1, 4-5.
The Prismatic Character in
Gravity's Rainbow

Carol F. Richer

In order to begin a meaningful discussion of characterization in Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, it is first necessary for the critical reader to confront the major changes in the novel form which have emerged during the last two decades. Since the early sixties, traditional expectations about what Gerald Graff calls "the narrative method of the realistic novel" have been challenged by a new type of fiction, commonly called the anti-novel or the postmodern novel, which represents, in part, a protest against the established conventions of the novelist's art, as well as a departure from the nineteenth-century emphasis upon the depiction of a recognizable external reality. Consequently, if the reader persists in using the conventions of the nineteenth-century realistic novel (which Linda Hutcheon rightly suggests have threatened to become a genre definition rather than a period description) to judge, structure, systematize, and otherwise pigeonhole Gravity's Rainbow, then the critic will, as many have done, simply toss the book into the heap of unreadable experiments. For there is little doubt that, as George Levine notes,

Pynchon's novels disorient. They offer us a world we think we recognize, assimilate it to worlds that seem unreal, imply coherences and significances we can't quite hold on to. Invariably, as the surreal takes on the immediacy of experience, they make us feel the inadequacy of conventional modes of analysis, of causal explanatory logic.

Therefore, if the "traditional conventions" no longer apply to contemporary literature in general and to Pynchon's novels in particular, it is up to us, as critics working in the latter part of the twentieth century, to propose, articulate, and establish a new critical vocabulary for discussing postmodernist fiction.
This point is particularly crucial when one attempts to understand Pynchon's use of characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Many critics have initiated their analyses of the novel with tentative statements about Pynchon's characterizations. In almost all cases, Pynchon has been castigated for his inability to create "believable" characters and, as Levine and Leverenz point out, he has been termed "sophomorically obscene, mechanically cold, incapable of creating real characters." Moreover, David Leverenz himself "gave up on Slothrop, idled over sexy little girls, giggled at the toilet bowls and Giant Adenoids, and wondered why [the characters] didn't seem ... well, complex, richly human and all that." In yet another assessment of Pynchon's characterizations in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Speer Morgan remarks: "Most of the characters are involved in such weird obsessions or jerking about in such frequent scenes of slapstick in what seems like speedy old film sequences that they have little capacity for dimension or pathos or the other usual requirements for full-blooded novelistic characters."

Unfortunately, these critics are relying upon the nineteenth-century's definition of character, best articulated, retrospectively, by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). In his chapter on "People," Forster writes:

We may divide characters into flat and round. ... The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. ... Flat people are not in themselves as big achievements as round ones, and they are best when they are comic.

Furthermore, as Forster explains, each flat character represents a certain fixed idea, whereas the round character can be "fully known":

In daily life we never understand each other; neither complete clairvoyance nor complete confessional exists. We know each other approximately by external signs, and these serve well enough as a basis for society and even for intimacy. But people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader ... their inner
as well as their outer life can be exposed.
(Forster, 32)

Thus, Forster has given us one set of criteria by which to measure novelistic characters. These criteria are based, however, upon an outdated world-view, which was being challenged by the work of writers like Joyce, whose _Ulysses_ appeared five years before Forster wrote _Aspects_. Like most Victorians and Edwardians, Forster and others assumed that man had an inner nature, an identity which was knowable and could therefore be exposed upon the printed page. In addition, it was assumed that the external world, society, and cultural forces could also be realistically presented by the astute and sensitive writer. The artist, then, could create full and rounded characters simply by illustrating the interaction between two epistemologically secure entities—man's inner self and his external environment. The postmodernist writers, among whom I include Pynchon, have questioned the validity of this basic assumption and, in so doing, have rejected the traditional realistic concept of character. I submit that my term for the postmodernist conception of character—the prismatic character—goes much further toward clarifying our current novelists' vision of twentieth-century man and his predicament, as well as their actual novelistic practice.

Postmodernist novelists like Barth, Gass, Hawkes, Gaddis, Bartheleme, and Pynchon reject the nineteenth-century notion of a knowable and describable "reality." In fact, Barth has stated: "If it is impossible and hopeless to make language accurately describe reality, why not let what language creates be reality?" Consequently, in the postmodern world-view, man is alienated—isolated from the self, cut off from the social environment, and separated from even the hypothesis of a god. Obviously, the traditional terms—round and flat—previously used to describe novelistic characters are no longer applicable to the postmodernist view which sees man as an ontologically and epistemologically insecure being. It is in response to these radical insecurities that postmodernists forge the prismatic character. The prismatic character displays a number of opposing, contradictory, and refractory faces, any or all of which can be
colored by the interaction of at least three levels of perception: (1) the situation as each individual character in the novel perceives it; (2) the point of view of the subjective narrator; and (3) the particular angle of vision of each individual reader. This does not mean, however, as many critics have suggested, that the characters simply don a series of masks throughout the narrative. Such an explanation does not go far enough in analyzing the postmodernist writer's concept of characterization because it assumes a "covering up" or obfuscation of some essential self: if one puts on a mask, one obscures the recognizable face beneath the disguise. Furthermore, if a character assumes a number of masks, there is an implied sense of procession or linearity: one wears one mask at one time, and another mask at another time. The prismatic character, on the other hand, has no core or identifiable inner self; his meaning is constructed or diffused by a number of concurrent levels of perception. Moreover, unlike Joyce's characters in Ulysses or Finnegans Wake, who are protean and metamorphose from one level of being to another, the prismatic character is all of his variegated faces simultaneously, any of which can be seen at any given time depending upon the various angles of perception operating within and without the text.

For the purposes of this limited study, I will apply the theory of the prismatic character to Pynchon's protagonist in Gravity's Rainbow, Tyrone Slothrop. During the course of the narrative, Slothrop may be viewed from numerous perspectives: he pursues a quest and refuses to; he is victim and victimizer; a literal figure and a metaphorical one; finally, both the redeemer and the false prophet. Although these various descriptions of Slothrop may at first appear to be contradictory, one finds upon following Slothrop through his many escapades that he can fulfill these roles simultaneously because he lacks a core self, a fixed identity in the nineteenth-century sense. Thus, Slothrop assumes all of these faces but is fully defined by none of them: not one of his various personae is capable of sustaining him in the modern world. The entropic force of Pynchon's world-view inevitably shatters Slothrop's prismatic
personality, diffusing him finally beyond the visible spectrum of human perception. The reader/critic literally loses sight of Slothrop by the conclusion of the novel.

In Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon postulates a world comprised of innumerable systems of order—governments, corporations, schools, psychological theories, etc. However, not one of these ordering mechanisms can encompass a totality or, more importantly, give meaning to experience. Thus, within Pynchon's fiction, there is a perpetual tension between chaos and order, complexity and simplicity, chance and control; it is a tension which he imbues with the entropic disorder characteristic of all closed thermodynamic systems. In this environment of increasing entropy, the manifestation of "identity" is only a reflection of the human being's reaction to the despotism of the numerous systems of order imposed upon the individual. Slothrop, therefore, is not and cannot be a character caught up in the process of "becoming" or of "finding himself," in the way that a nineteenth-century bildungsroman hero would be. Rather, Pynchon's protagonist must respond and react according to whatever system of order is imposed upon him at any given moment. In this textual representation of the twentieth century, there is no single totalizing apotheosis of order from which to generate a personal identity. Thus, any number of Slothrop's polychromatic faces are brought to light in response to his perceptions of any given order at any given moment, are limited in range only by the extent of his experiences, and can shift and scatter into new formations as his experiences expand.

Moreover, Pynchon's narrator can, like a film director, manipulate and impose a structure upon the "events" of the novel so that at any one moment the reader is not sure of the level of action, and never knows with certainty how he should interpret isolated incidents. The reader must also decide whether the events unfolding upon the page comprise an account of a film, a dream, a hallucinatory experience, or an "actual" occurrence. Within these various and arbitrary levels of perception exists Tyrone Slothrop, who sets out upon a quest to discover the Schwarzgerät and
Impolex G, a mysterious substance which the chemist and behaviorist Laszlo Jamf may have used in an experiment upon the infant Slothrop and which will perhaps explain Slothrop's alleged sexual response to the V-2 rocket. Even before his quest quite gets underway, at the Casino Herman Goering where he has just rescued Katje from the giant octopus, Slothrop begins to suspect that his present "mission" is a hoax perpetrated by "Them," and, indeed, to suspect the duplicity of his whole situation:

So it is here, grouped on the beach with strangers, that voices begin to take on a touch of metal, each word a hard-edged clap, and the light, though as bright as before, is less able to illuminate... it's a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia, filtering in.  

Regardless of this perceived threat, Slothrop takes Katje to bed and wakes to hear that someone is stealing his clothes and papers. Without his "identity" papers (and having just been stripped of his only friend, Tantivy), Slothrop is left completely identity-less and soon realizes that he and all things, even the objects in the gaming room into which he has just wandered, have no inherent structure or meaning: "Shortly, unpleasantly so, it will come to him that everything in this room is really being used for something different. Meaning things to Them it has never meant to us. Never. Two orders of being, looking identical... but, but..."(202, emphasis added).

With the chilling realization that he is being manipulated, Slothrop flees the Casino, and the quest continues to Nice, Zürich, the Mittelwerk, Berlin--throughout the Zone, where Slothrop discovers that "nowhere is everywhere." In the postwar chaos of the Zone, Slothrop confronts both his past and his present simultaneously, and recognizes that he is no more than a series of past identities. The individual ego is regulated by sources outside the self. For Slothrop, the questions shift and become: "what is real in this world, and how should I respond to it?" rather than "who am I?:"
Crosses, swastikas, Zone-mandalas, how can they not speak to Slothrop? He's sat in Säure Dummer's kitchen, the air streaming with kif moires, reading soup recipes and finding in every bone and cabbage leaf paraphrases of himself . . . news flashes, names of wheel-horses that will pay him off enough for a certain getaway. . . . He used to pick and shovel at the spring roads of Berkshire, April afternoons he's lost, "Chapter 81 work," they called it, following the scraper that clears the winter crystal attack-from-within, its white necropolizing . . . picking up rusted beer cans, rubbers yellow with preterite seed, Kleenex wadded to brain shapes hiding preterite snot, preterite tears, newspapers, broken glass, pieces of automobile, days when in superstition and fright he could make it all fit, seeing clearly in each an entry in a record, a history: his own, his winter's, his country's . . . (625-26)

For Slothrop the quest has become anti-climactic in the face of this intimation of preterite meaning. His experience in the Zone has stripped him of the need to order experience, and he succumbs to the entropic social processes which have enveloped him. The quest has always been a non-quest because, as Slothrop discovers, the objective is, and always has been, devoid of meaning. The "secret" of Slothrop's self does not exist. Thus, although Slothrop's perceptions tell him at one time that he is searching for "something," and the narrator manipulates the reader's angle of vision so that he believes in the validity of Slothrop's quest, the entire mission is also a farce and always has been. The only truth is that neither Slothrop nor the reader can ever be sure of what he sees, because the converse is always possible: x and its opposite are both equally valid and, therefore, neither is capable of sustaining belief or faith.

Whereas, depending on one's angle of vision, Slothrop may be seen as either the questor or the non-questor, he also can be viewed as both the victim and the victimizer. The reader and the narrator must sympathize with the infant Slothrop who was subjected to:
Unconditioned stimulus = stroking penis with antiseptic cotton swab.
Unconditioned response = hardon.
Conditioned stimulus = x.
Conditioned response = hardon whenever x is present, stroking is no longer necessary, all you need is that x.

Uh, x? well, what's x? Why, it's the famous "Mystery Stimulus." (84)

Unaware of even the concept of "self," the infant Slothrop cannot defend himself against systems he does not yet recognize. At some time during the course of the narrative, however, the reader realizes that Pynchon uses Slothrop's pre-cognitive predicament as a metaphor for the inescapable contemporary human plight: one is never fully aware of the multiple manifestations of the "mystery stimulus" which perpetually condition and regulate one's responses. In Gravity's Rainbow, the "mystery stimulus" may be constituted by the "entropies of lovable but scatter-brained Mother Nature" (324) as well as be applied by human manipulators: "power and control, though their effects are everywhere, do not emanate from a center, an originating seat of power..." "They" are inescapable, as the adult Slothrop will learn when he arrives in Cuxhaven:

Good Evening Tyrone Slothrop We Have Been Waiting For You. Of Course We Are Here. You Didn't Think We Had Just Faded Away, No, No Tyrone, We Must Hurt You Again If You Are Going To Be That Stupid, Hurt You Again And Again Yes Tyrone You Are So Hopeless So Stupid And Doomed. Are You Really Supposed To Find Anything? What If It Is Death Tyrone? (602)

Slothrop is perpetually the victim, just as, in Pynchon's view, twentieth-century men and women are endlessly cozened by the numerous systems of order programming the individual psyche, none of which are able to encompass the totality they promise. The apotheosis of order is illusory. Slothrop discovers that "even those responses which seem instinctual are partly a hype administered by a fearful system" (Plater, 209). How does one assert one's own limited power in
such a world? One victimizes those who have even less power. Slothrop is a victimizer as well as a victim. It is Jessica who poses the question to Roger Mexico: "'Roger ... what about the girls?' That was all she said. But it brought Roger wide awake" (87). Roger, in turn, poses the question to Pointsman: "'What if Slothrop's—not even consciously—making them [the rockets] fall where they do?'" (87), but it is never satisfactorily resolved. The possibility of Slothrop's culpability remains for the reader to evaluate. Jessica, however, is convinced of Slothrop's responsibility: "Now [Roger] wants to go rescue Slothrop, another rocket-creature, a vampire whose sex life actually fed on the terror of that Rocket Blitz—ugh, creepy, creepy. They ought to lock him up, not set him free" (629).

In his relationship with Bianca, Slothrop himself realizes that he is only using her, even in the intensity of orgasm:

[. . .] she starts to come, and so does he, their own flood taking him up then out of his expectancy, out the eye at tower's summit and into her with a singular detonation of touch. Announcing the void, what could it be but the kingly voice of the Aggregat itself?[. . .]

But her arms about his neck are shifting now, apprehensive. For good reason. Sure he'll stay for a while, but eventually he'll go, and for this he is to be counted, after all, among the Zone's lost. (470)

Because Slothrop is not able to make love a facet of his experience, both the narrator and the reader lose sympathy for him. Both Slothrop and Bianca are among the Zone's lost. Thus, "Slothrop's orgasm with Bianca comes in the shape of a rocket; like a rocket it explodes, destroys, ends" (Levine, 114). Victimized by a system he partially recognizes but does not understand, Slothrop victimizes those who trust and try to love him, much as Benny Profane does in Pynchon's earlier novel V. Slothrop is both the victim and the victimizer—his prismatic personality revolves in the light of external events and the multiple levels of perception.
In addition, Slothrop is simultaneously a literal figure and a metaphorical one. The narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* makes Slothrop a historical figure by giving him a recognizable past:

In 1931, the year of the Great Aspinwall Hotel Fire, young Tyrone was visiting his aunt and uncle in Lenox. It was in April, but for a second or two as he was coming awake in a strange room and the racket of big and little cousins' feet down the stairs, he thought of winter, because so often he'd been wakened like this, at this hour of sleep, by Pop, or Hogan. (28-29)

But the historical Slothrop is lost in the chaos of the Zone, where past lives and fixed positions no longer have any relevance. The Zone represents "an interval between histories, a figurative zero point where new alignments of time and space are possible" (Plater, 61). The face of the historical Slothrop is consequently darkened, and a new facet of his prismatic persona is illuminated. The literal Slothrop is also the mythical Rocketman:

But then another message caught his eye:

ROCKETMAN WAS HERE [ . . ]

Past Slothropes, say averaging one a day, ten thousand of them, some more powerful than others, had been going over every sundown to the furious host. They were the fifth-columnists, well inside his head, waiting the moment to deliver him to the four other divisions outside, closing in. (624)

In response, Slothrop draws his symbol, which, he realizes later, represents the A-4 rocket, seen from below. The entropic forces impinging upon and generated within Slothrop's being are beginning to crack the fragile prism of his psyche. When it finally shatters, Slothrop will lose his bodily substance completely and will fade from the spectrum of human perception.

Slothrop has innumerable other faces which may be perceived by the reader, depending upon his particular
angle of vision. The final double-element of his prismatic persona which I will explore here is the face of the redeemer with its converse manifestation, the false prophet. Slothrop's Calvinist past implicates him in a mission to reorder existing reality. When viewed in the light of his victimization by the mega-cartel and his ensuing quest for the "mystery stimulus," Slothrop "offers the promise of becoming a representational character, a post-war Everyman" (Plater, 98). In various ways, he tries to "save" Katje, Margherita Erdmann, Bianca, Ludwig's lemming, and other individual characters he meets during the course of his quest. Moreover, by trying to escape the established terrors of the mega-cartel, he sets a precedent which appears to be heroic—perhaps he will lead the way to a new order. However, his potential as a redeemer is soon obscured by the immutable darkness of the Zone. Slothrop is revealed as the false prophet when he realizes that he has nothing to profess. In the midst of the Zone, Slothrop finds only his personal Brennschuss point—"a point in space[,] where burning must end, never launched, never to fall" (302). In his moment of revelation, he achieves timelessness, finding himself

lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection where the judges have come to set up a gibbet for a common criminal who is to be hanged at noon. (625)

Although the vision of the cross suggests a union of God and the earth, the fact that Slothrop assumes the form of the cross himself undercuts the beatific vision and intimates his preoccupation with his private dilemma. Later, Slothrop sees

a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural . . . (626)

The redeemer is revealed as the false prophet whose only mandala is the rocket, the harbinger of death and destruction which promises "No return, no salvation, no Cycle" (413).
Pig Bodine, Slothrop's last disciple, is the final person to view him as "any sort of integral creature" (740). Bodine gives Slothrop the undershirt he had dipped in John Dillinger's blood, another veil of Turin, as an emblem of grace: "'Yeah, what we need isn't right reasons, but just that grace" (741). However, even Bodine cannot sustain the vision of a shattered and dispersing Slothrop. He begins to let him go: "In certain rushes now, when he sees white network being cast all directions on his field of vision, he understands it as an emblem of pain or death" (741). Slothrop's prismatic persona arches vaguely toward the infra-red and the ultra-violet--the peripheral diffusions of the visible spectrum--and ultimately disappears. The narrator drops the subject of Slothrop, except to report various conjectural opinions as to his destiny:

There is also the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly—perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, his time's assembly—and there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn't. The plan went wrong. He is being broken down instead, and scattered. (738)

Regardless of the various interpretations of Slothrop's fate, he no longer exists at the end of the novel. Moreover, Slothrop clearly does not conform to our traditional concept of character. Rather, with Slothrop, Pynchon illustrates a revolutionary and strictly postmodernist conception of twentieth-century man—the prismatic character. Instead of donning a series of masks with which to confront the world, the prismatic persona is inherently capable of bringing to light any number of contradictory "faces," depending upon his perception of the external world at any given moment. These various faces, moreover, do not obscure an essential self because, as Pynchon suggests, that inner self is either unknowable or nonexistent.
Notes


Pynchon's Textual Revisions of *The Crying of Lot 49*

David Seed

There has been considerable speculation about whether Pynchon's story "Under the Rose" was written before *V.* or simply extracted from the manuscript, published separately, and then extensively revised as Chapter 3 of the novel. David Cowart has put forward evidence for the latter hypothesis, although the question will not be answered definitely until the manuscript of *V.* comes to light.

Similar questions exist about the relation of the manuscript of *The Crying of Lot 49* to its "satellite" pieces. Before it was published, two excerpts appeared in print, one in *Esquire* in December 1965, and the other in *Cavalier* for March 1966. A publisher's note at the end of the *Esquire* excerpt suggests that Pynchon had already placed the novel with J. B. Lippincott and also that the manuscript was complete. There are a number of quite striking differences between the two published sections and the first edition of the novel, which indicate that an earlier text—probably of the whole novel—existed, and that Pynchon carried out fairly extensive revisions as the novel was going to press. It is not clear why excerpts appeared before the novel itself. Pynchon's former college friend Jules Siegel has suggested that Pynchon was short of money; alternatively it may have been at the initiative of Pynchon's agent, Candida Donadio. Whatever the reason, the textual differences shed a fascinating light on Pynchon's compositional methods and on his scrupulous care over the smallest details of phrasing.

A number of printing and grammatical errors are corrected. Thus when Oedipa sees her lawyer Roseman and has to stave off sexual advances, she is described as "insulted," but in the novel as "insulated"—an important difference, although both would make sense because the early sections of the novel deal with the progressive peeling away of Oedipa's layers of insulation. Unnecessary commas are removed, as are a
number of hyphens and speech-marks, thus making the punctuation less obtrusive. Words are replaced by their corresponding numbers and song titles taken out of italics. Some capitals (e.g. "Whiskey Sours") are also removed.

So far the changes have been quite minor, a matter of cleaning of the text. But in view of the complex syntax Pynchon was to use in Gravity's Rainbow, it is interesting to note that he several times replaced finite verbs with participles, sometimes with the effect of lengthening sentences. Thus, the text of the drunken seduction scene with Metzger originally reads:

\[ \text{[he] settled for nodding and smiling, a drunken largeness to the gestures that called up as much exaggeration in the way Oedipa would scowl back. She grew more and more certain. . . .} \]

In the novel Pynchon cut out the long cumbersome phrase indicated, so that the passage reads:

\[ \text{[he] settled for nodding and smiling. Oedipa would scowl back, growing more and more certain. . . .} \]

For one thing, the excluded phrase draws unnecessary attention to the growing drunkenness; for another, it distractingly suggests a comic equivalence between Metzger's behaviour and Oedipa's, whereas the scene actually shows a growing nervous edge to her reactions. The participle helps to show that this is a gradual and constant process.

Several of Pynchon's revisions tighten up his meaning either in adding clarification or in cutting out unnecessarily explicit details. Thus two clear indications of Mucho's feeling disappear, one phrase ("Awful for him; God" [E, 296]) concluding Oedipa's memory of his broadcasting activities. Two other significant changes affect the presentation of Mucho, this time from the Cavalier excerpt, "The Shrink Flips," from chapter 5 (pp. 132-45 of the novel). As Mucho is reporting on Dr. Hilarius' breakdown, he presses his cough button but only smiles. In the novel, Pynchon added an important nudge to the reader: "How could they hear a smile?" (L, 139). By this stage in the
novel Oedipal has become anxiously preoccupied with discrepancies—in her information sources or, as here, in the information media. The added sentence alerts the reader to yet another of these discrepancies and looks forward to the revelation that Mucho is high on drugs. At this point the main revisions from the Cavalier passage occur. Mucho tries to explain his addiction to LSD as follows:

"Because you hear and see things, smell them, taste even like you never could. Because the world is so abundant. No end to it, baby. You're an antenna"..."

In the novel Pynchon shifted 'even" to the less awkward position before "smell them." The next two sentences distract us from Mucho's central idiom of communication; LSD has in effect transformed him into a medium (in the non-psychic sense by), as he thinks, granting him access to a transcendental realm. The statement "the world is so abundant" sounds flat and adds virtually nothing. Although Pynchon retained it (and the next sentence) in the Lippincott, Bantam and Cape editions of the novel, both sentences disappear in the Picador reprint of 1979. Later in their conversation Pynchon added a gesture ("Flipping her hair a couple times, furious" [L, 144]) to make Oedipa's reaction to Mucho's escapism absolutely clear.

Two other changes should be noted here, this time in the description of San Narciso which opens Chapter 2. Indicating the characteristically abstract nature of its layout, Pynchon points out that its areas are "all overlaid with access roads to various freeways" (E, 296). In the novel the sentence concludes "to its own freeway" (L, 24), an important detail because it tightens up the impression of San Narciso as a self-contained system and thus looks forward to the analogy of a printed circuit which follows this passage. Later, in the descriptive list of buildings, Pynchon added the phrase "escrow services" (L, 25), again a strategic addition because it reminds the reader of Oedipa's own legal obligation (to execute Inverarity's will), just as the preceding phrase ("auto lots") both glances at the title and harks back to Mucho's former job.
There are three quite major changes made in passages from Chapter 1. During Oedipa's retrospective account of Mucho's job as a car salesman, the following sentence occurs:

He could have given us definitive monographs on Myths, Images, Aspects of the Used-Car Salesman, but that would have required a sense of humor. (E, 172)

Apart from thoroughly overhauling the punctuation and phrasing of the paragraph in which this sentence occurs, Pynchon cut out the sentence itself, perhaps because it makes unnecessarily explicit one of Mucho's embarrassments about his job. "Definitive monographs" also sounds rather too intellectual for Oedipa, and indeed several of Pynchon's revisions seem directed towards increasing the colloquial flow of the text. Similarly when Mucho is describing an argument with his director, Punch, about what is sexually admissible over the radio, Punch is quoted thus:

"He came back with his stock line, 'At KCUF, no matter how short the skirts of our listeners get, or how tight the trousers, babies still come by stork.' So I muttered 'fink,' and fled." (E, 172)

For the novel Pynchon cut out the long sentence. This is again an improvement because his emphasis is primarily on the media's interference with the "message" and not on any social reasons why this should occur. The media's treatment of sexuality would thus be essentially a side-issue.

The long paragraph which concludes Chapter 1 received the main revisions, particularly in its opening and concluding lines. In Esquire the paragraph begins:

As things developed, she was to find out a lot. Hardly anything about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but all manner of revelations about what remained: their Republic. It had somehow, before this, stayed away, there had hung the sense of buffering... (E, 173)

These lines are revised as follows:
As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering. . . . (L, 20)

The changes remove the banal ending of the first sentence and give "revelations" its correct prominence at the head of the paragraph. Pynchon thus introduces the series of gestures towards a quasi-religious other dimension; at the same time, his revisions keep open and ambiguous exactly what is being revealed. "Their Republic" prematurely hints that America itself is the object of revelation, whereas this possibility correctly belongs much later in the novel. The phrase which in the novel begins "but about what" also improves on the earlier text because the syntax contrasts the familiar ("what remained") with the unfamiliar ("yet had somehow . . . stayed away"). Towards the end of the paragraph we encounter more major changes. Summing up his Rapunzel-image Pynchon comments:

Yet: what did she so desire escape from? Not Kinneret, certainly, nor that "prison of the self" people ran endlessly off at the mouth about. For such a captive maiden . . . soon realizes that . . . magic [is] visited on her from outside and for no reason—her blank innocence doesn't merit it. (E, 173)

Pynchon deleted the opening "yet" which awkwardly suggested a contrast, and cut out the whole of the second sentence. The latter ends awkwardly but also makes it too explicit that the narrative focus is not on Oedipa's psychology; she is rather presented as at the mercy of forces or as a focus for varied information. The deletion helps to keep the narrative enigmatic in its contrasts between cosy interiors (house, Kinneret, tower) and a threatening outside. The concluding clause also disappears in the novel, perhaps because the notion of deserts is irrelevant to the action and because Pynchon has already in effect demonstrated Oedipa's "blank innocence."

These are the major differences between the published excerpts from The Crying of Lot 49 and the
first edition of the novel. There are, however, other differences to note, as in the following passage from Chapter 6:

... [she] raised her head as if to sniff the air. She became conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on--knew as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky how these tracks ran on into others, and others, and others, knew they laced, deepened, authenticated the great American night, so wide and now so suddenly intense for her.

These lines should correspond exactly with page 179 of the novel, but they do not. In line with the revisions noted earlier, Pynchon replaced most of the finite verbs with present participles ("becoming," "knowing," etc.). He cut out the flat repetition of "and others," the epithet "American" (unnecessary since Pynchon has indicated the U.S.A. in other ways), and revised the concluding phrase into the more concise "the great night around her." Where then does this passage occur? It is one of two quotations which appear in Richard Poirier's review of the novel in The New York Times Book Review. Poirier also quotes from the account of Mucho's spell as a car salesman, and the small differences between his quotation, the Esquire text and the Lippincott edition suggest that three versions of The Crying of Lot 49 exist: an early manuscript, probably of the whole novel, which is represented in the Esquire and Cavalier excerpts; an intermediary text which was partly revised (it has changed words into numbers, for instance, but retained other details cut out later); and the Lippincott text which may have undergone subsequent minor revisions from edition to edition. Oscar Handlin, who also reviewed the Lippincott edition, suggests that uncorrected copies of the galley-proofs were sent out for review. This would explain discrepancies between reviewers' quotations and the published text. A retrieval of this review copy would shed even more light on Pynchon's method of working, and would no doubt clarify many aspects of the novel.

Liverpool University
Notes


2 "He felt that he had rushed through The Crying of Lot 49 in order to get the money." ("Who is Thomas Pynchon ... and Why Did He Take Off with My Wife?" Playboy, 24, No. 3 [March, 1977], 172).

3 "The World (This One), The Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity," Esquire, 64 (December, 1965), 303, emphasis added. Hereafter cited as E.


7 In a letter of June 6, 1983. Richard Poirier does not answer enquiries on this subject.
More On Pynchon On Record

Laurence Daw

Pynchon, so fond of the kazoo, has had some small effect on the contemporary music scene. The nature of this effect has been analyzed by Steven Moore in "Pynchon On Record" (Pynchon Notes, 10 [1982], 56-57). However, in documenting various groups of musicians who have been influenced directly or indirectly by Pynchon, Moore has neglected one group: The Insect Trust.

Their record-album Hoboken Saturday Night was released in 1970 by ATCO (Atlantic Recording Company). It features a song called "The Eyes of a New York Woman," and lists the song's composers as Thomas Pynchon and Jeff Ogden, lyrics from Thomas Pynchon's novel V. The lyrics to this song are, of course, actually first sung by Benny Profane when he, Angel, and Geronimo are trying to pick up some girls (Thomas Pynchon, V. [1963; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1979], 127). When he sings his despairing song, all the girls can say is: "It doesn't have any beat!" (128). The song is as follows:

The eyes of a New York woman
Are the twilit side of the moon,
Nobody knows what goes on back there
Where it's always late afternoon.

Under the lights of Broadway,
Far from the lights of home,
With a smile as sweet as a candy cane
And a heart all plated with chrome.

Do they ever see the wandering bums
And the boys with no place to go,
And the drifter who cried for an ugly girl
That he left in Buffalo?

Dead as the leaves in Union Square,
Dead as the graveyard sea,
The eyes of a New York woman
Are never going to cry for me.
Are never going to cry for me.
The Insect Trust uses exactly the same lyrics as those given in Pynchon's V. The song is sung by a woman, however, in a clear but haunting voice which follows a blues style. She is accompanied by a soft electric guitar, also in the blues style, and the percussion and bass lines of the piece are unobtrusive and underplayed. The most startling and beautiful thing about the piece, however, is its use of a descant recorder solo. This acoustic part is played in a virtuoso fashion and follows a jazz/blues style, something rather difficult to achieve on a Renaissance instrument. The whole piece is moody and lazy, just like a hot Hoboken Saturday night, lost, perhaps, in the streets with the Whole Sick Crew.

The University of Western Ontario
Of Rockets and Sprockets, History and Mystery, Philology and Technology

Beverly Lyon Clark


The essays collected here, all previously unpublished, provide a multitude of contexts for interpreting Gravity's Rainbow. The contexts include history, science, technology, film, religion, psychology, metaphoric systems generally, philosophy, language, comedy. Despite the variety of approaches, though, the essays touch on a common theme: the necessary tensions between the System and anti-systems -- between Newtonian and quantum physics, between straight and freak, between determinism and free will. The essays, generally persuasive readings of Gravity's Rainbow, often cover ground that has been covered elsewhere. And it might have been better to cover more new ground (more on that later). But the virtue of the volume is that it is a convenient compendium of these diverse contexts for Gravity's Rainbow.

Charles Clerc opens with an introduction that places Gravity's Rainbow in the history of the novel. And he briefly discusses such novelistic elements as character, voice, and tone -- and how Pynchon violates our expectations.

Khachig Tölölyan's fine essay, situating Gravity's Rainbow in history, includes a chart of dates and places in the book and historical background on World War II. He touches on some of the same details as Steven Weisenburger in a 1979 essay in Twentieth Century Literature, but is less concerned with finding sources and more concerned with providing a historical backdrop to help the reader to appreciate the epic qualities of Gravity's Rainbow. My one quibble is that I had trouble figuring out Tölölyan's aim; he doesn't make it explicit. Instead, he addresses such issues as why Pynchon downplays our usual associations with the war - Hitler and the Holocaust -- to focus on the creation of the military-industrial complex, "the real disease of our century" (56).
Alan J. Friedman provides an eminently readable account of the history of science and technology since Newton, expanding on ideas in his 1974 essay in Contemporary Literature by demonstrating how Pynchon incorporates three stages in the history of science: Newtonian mechanistic physics and the clockwork universe, nineteenth-century statistical physics and entropy, and twentieth-century quantum physics and uncertainty. Friedman also discusses the functions of scientific metaphors, including the interrogation of reality through presenting fantastical details that turn out to be factual, such as "a chemist devising the structure of benzene from a dream of a snake"(97).

Charles Clerc discusses the impact of film on Gravity's Rainbow, including cinematic techniques and metaphors, the power of the film industry, and the interpenetration of illusion and reality. His catalogue of film references covers much of the same ground as Scott Simmon's 1978 essay in Literature/Film Quarterly.

Joseph W. Slade presents a rich consideration of religion, psychology, sex, love, expanding on ideas in his 1977 essay in Critique. He touches on Calvinism, Weber, the power of language, imperialism, thermodynamics, Freud, Marcuse, Jung. He suggests that, for Pynchon, the desacralization of nature may be followed by technological remystification: though technology may be suspect, a tool of rationalization, its uncertainty restores a sacred sense of mystery and paradox. Slothrop fails as a messiah, yet characters do achieve "minor illuminations, limited victories, small mercies," compassionate moments of love (192).

Raymond M. Olderman explores the interactions between what he calls straight and freak in Gravity's Rainbow. The straight world view is that of the System, while freaks, trapped in the System, want Out. Olderman also notes that since reality ultimately eludes any system, all systems—art, politics, science—are metaphoric. But since metaphors are constantly literalized and Systematized, freaks must seek revelation, a new consciousness, continuously. Olderman's argument is sound, yet I would have appreciated more conceptual clarity: sometimes his freaks seem to be
opposed to the straights, outside the System, and sometimes, as inside-outsiders, they are themselves between inside and outside.

James W. Earl examines Pynchon's portrayal of free will and determinism, of rational and intuitive knowledge, of dissolution as a "solitary return into freedom" (244). His discussion is generally sensible, but he occasionally oversimplifies, as when he classifies Blicero as simply behavioristic, mechanistic.

Charles Russell explores the paradoxes of language, and meaning systems generally, which can rigidify perspectives but also overcome rigidification; words both point to the thing named and intervene between us and the thing. He situates Gravity's Rainbow in the context of self-reflexive, self-deconstructive postmodernism, in the Counterforce to the literary System.

Roger B. Henkle provides an illuminating study of the uses of comedy in Gravity's Rainbow, likewise situating the book in a literary context. Comedy allows a "balance between Pynchon's seriousness about paranoia and the control mechanisms of modern corporate existence, and the objectivity he must have, as an artist, in order not to be victimized by his own material" (274). The Zone, in fact, becomes a kind of green world. And early in Gravity's Rainbow, comic metaphor discharges the tensions of rigid ordering; later, comic improvisation becomes an ordering gesture in response to manic disorder. Occasionally Henkle misinterprets details: he implies, for instance, that the Hereros all participate in the cult of the Empty Ones, and thus he ignores the distinction between Enzian and Ombindi. Still, such lapses do not nullify Henkle's thought-provoking comments on comedy.

Each essay thus offers a useful context for Gravity's Rainbow. But not the only contexts. And now I'll play the reviewer's game of what-else-could-have-been-included.

One omission—and here I get on my soapbox—is the lack of a feminist perspective. When I first glanced through the table of contents, I thought, "Oh. No women critics." And that lack is symptomatic of a
larger lack. True, some of the included critics touch on feminist concerns. Olderman, for instance, identifies the System with Patriarchy and notes how men characters are more identified with the System and how women can be agents of change (and he also uses the least sexist language). Yet more can be done. Early feminist critics like Catherine Stimpson and Marjorie Kaufman have noted that Pynchon portrays some sympathetic women characters, such as Geli and Leni (curiously—significantly—I find Leni more positive than Slade and Henkle do), though the women tend to fulfill stereotypic roles. And the System Pynchon wants to overcome is clearly patriarchal. But in addition, might Pynchon be in a position analogous to that of many women authors? In countering patriarchal plots (both literary and conspiratorial), does Pynchon, like many women authors, attempt new forms that the literary establishment is reluctant to accept? Or does Pynchon attempt forms that are acceptable because they are postmodernist, tending toward self-reflexiveness rather than alternate plot lines (Russell's catalogue of postmodernists significantly includes no women)? . . . Does Pynchon, like many women authors, stress the importance of non-logical connections? Or are women writers more likely to stress enabling, human connections, rather than threatening, paranoid ones?

I know, I know. That's another book, not this one. And this one is not significantly worse than most other books in omitting a feminist perspective. In fact, it's a fine book, providing lots of helpful perspectives. I've waited this long. I can keep waiting. But not too long.

Wheaton College
A Practical Duplicity
Catherine Ingraham


Peter Cooper's book is a thorough, although somewhat redundant, treatment of familiar critical themes both announced by and implicit in Pynchon's works: entropy, inanimacy, mechanization, paranoia, waste, science, epistemology and so forth. These themes are not simple, and Cooper's renewed examination of them (through some six chapters) is not altogether wasteful. However, I believe the real, and inadvertent, contribution of _Signs and Symptoms_ to literary discussions on Pynchon's works lies not in these chapters, but rather in the prologue to these chapters, i.e. in Cooper's initial comments on "Pynchon's Literary Context." Through its assumptions, this section crystallizes the manner in which Pynchon criticism regularly succumbs to a practical duplicity—talking about how Pynchon's works implicitly unfix interpretive authority while covertly advancing fixed interpretive viewpoints. The _idée fixe_ of Cooper's study is "realism." From a perception of realism that depends on recalling and reconstituting—in my opinion, erroneously—an earlier epoch of American literature as clear and accessible, Cooper celebrates the ambiguity, uncertainty and apocalyptic messages of Pynchon's works. This is a "practical" duplicity because it allows criticism to comment—at great length—on the erosion of meaning in Pynchon's texts while standing within a safe framework of meaning, untouched, it seems, by the ruptures it notices.

In his prologue (pages 1-44), Cooper divides contemporary American authors into two groups: the "neorealists" and the "counterrealists." This division is made with Pynchon's "permission"—his sanction of "imperfect, but necessary, interpretive systems" (S&S, 1). "Neorealists," like Bellow and Updike, are those who "inherit, extend, or modify traditions of realism and naturalism" (S&S, 1). "Counterrealists," like
Vonnegut, Burroughs and Pynchon, "consciously react against [these] traditions" (S&S, 1). According to Cooper, neorealists "show their characters as trying to reach a tenable mode of being with themselves, with others, and with their civilization" (S&S, 2). Counterrealists, on the other hand, portray human beings as "flat, insubstantial figure[s] adrift in an alien world" (S&S, 3). Pynchon's creation of alien worlds, and alienated characters, explains for Cooper the apparent "insignificance of the individual," the "preexisting forces" that shape reality (S&S, 3), and the "malevolent" plots that threaten humanity (S&S, 3) in Pynchon's works. Cooper later comments that "the mass and gravity of Pynchon's plots . . . add to the reader's sense of uncertainty in an alien world" (S&S, 178). And, at the end of the book, Cooper concludes that "in place of revelation, Pynchon gives the Ellipses of Uncertainty" (S&S, 222). The sense in which flat characters, massive plots, uncertainty and the lack of revelation dovetail in Cooper's "counterrealist" interpretive system is not surprising--indeed, we have seen this same configuration emerging in Pynchon criticism many times before. Predictably, Cooper's argument is that the critic is haunted by the same uncertainty that plagues Pynchon's characters, and that this uncertainty itself reflects the contemporary problem of knowing, finding meaning, and defining reality. "It is only fitting," Cooper claims, "that the reader should come to mimic the characters in this novel [Gravity's Rainbow] about the problems of reading signs, imperfect metaphors, and dubious texts" (S&S, 176).

Most critics would agree with the intent, and possibly the substance, of Cooper's distinction between neorealism and counterrealism. And yet I think we should be suspicious of any distinction that produces phrases like "Ellipses of Uncertainty"--conclusive inconclusions. (I wonder, also, what we are meant to understand by the capitalization of "Ellipses" and "Uncertainty." ) While, in a certain sense, Cooper might be said to be mimicking not Pynchon's characters, but Pynchon himself by arriving at such "models of the world" (S&S, 1), I think most of Signs and Symptoms is a theoretical flirtation with Pynchon's works that
relies on very tenuous adversarial positions such as "fleshy" and "flat," "clear" and "ambiguous," "real" and "fictional." The function of these positions is to protect Cooper from having to offer, finally, any interpretation of the peculiar events in Pynchon's works.

My overall impression is that Cooper is a "neo-realistic" caught in a "counterrealistic" world, that is, a world where "realism" is in serious question as a literary concept. He seems to believe, for example, that criticism deserves revelation as a reward for careful reading. And, when revelation is withheld, it is characteristic of this critical position to connect the resulting textual ambiguity with the imminence of social apocalypse. This latter tendency is especially interesting. Cooper discusses in his third chapter on "Pynchon's Solutions" the possibilities for a "counterforce" to apocalypse. He touches briefly on the essay "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts" as an example of how the people of Watts fail to win a long-term solution to the violence that surrounds them— as Cooper says: "the rioting changed little and re-solved nothing" (S&S, 96). In fact, Pynchon seems to propose an extremely interesting solution to violence in this essay. The black inhabitants of Watts begin to see the riot "less as chaos and more as art" (New York Times Magazine [12 June 1966], 84). In other words, these inhabitants recast social violence as a "renaissance" of culture. This is more than the "self-expression or therapeutic release" (S&S, 96) that Cooper calls it. It is an effective, and political, counterforce via the act of interpretation. It is precisely these subtle chances for interpretation offered by Pynchon's characters that Cooper seems to miss, or eclipse by his own certainty that Pynchon's books are about a generalized "incomprehensibility" of the modern world. Had he taken his comment about "mimicry" seriously, Cooper may not have settled the question of Pynchon's "solutions" so easily.

I sympathize with Cooper's theoretical impulses. I even sympathize, to a degree, with the need to differentiate Pynchon from other contemporary American authors. But I am rather appalled by the lack of risk Cooper takes in Signs and Symptoms. I am not sure,
after reading it, whether Cooper avoids giving us, for example, an account of Slothrop's sodium amytal dream ("scanning the criticism," Cooper states wearily, "one finds a wide assortment of loosely related assertions as to why Tyrone Slothrop was given sodium amytal" [S&S, 177]) because to do so is to risk an "insubstantiality" that is an occupational hazard of criticism, or because he really believes there is no point in this kind of reading. In the former case, I see the large problem of making Pynchon characters "figures" for the reader without taking them at all seriously. In the latter case, I see Cooper proposing an approach to Pynchon that is doomed to reiterate fallacious, and dead-end, theoretical positions.

Johns Hopkins University
Notes

To the Editors:

It's an honor to be contradicted by so careful a Joycean as Brook Thomas ["What's the Point? On Comparing Joyce and Pynchon," Pynchon Notes, 11 (1983)]. If I may reply briefly to his final point: I'm sorry if my sentence about the failure of characters from Lot 49 to reappear in Gravity's Rainbow gave Mr. Thomas any trouble. Everyone knows that Bloody Chic-litz appears in all three books—and the sentence of mine that immediately follows the one quoted by Mr. Thomas says very plainly that "Elements of V. are carefully fitted into both the later books; but nothing that first appears in Pynchon's second book reappears in his third." This is certainly a significant point. Pynchon could easily have found a place for Dr. Hilarius (he of Buchenwald) in Gravity's Rainbow, had he wanted to; he had no difficulty finding places for Mondauken, Pig Bodine, et al. But he chose not to include Hilarius, nor any of the other characters introduced in Lot 49 who might have gone into the later book with almost equal appropriateness. And this choice makes a clear differentiation between V. and Lot 49. (By the way, what all this has to do with the stated subject of Mr. Thomas's paper, a comparison of Joyce and Pynchon, strikes me as a bit unclear.)

One further point about Ulysses and Gravity's Rainbow and their different relations to the world outside the books themselves. Both these books include prophecies of events occurring after the date of the fictional events they describe, and in each case the author seems to have prophesied events he considered especially important. Pynchon prophesies the formation of the postwar social order and the start of the nuclear war that may yet occur. Joyce prophesies the writing of Ulysses. Crawford, for example, tells Stephen to write "something with a bite in it," and to "Put us all into it"; Molly thinks about writing a book of "the works of Master Poldy." One event that Joyce does not bother to
prophesy is the Great War of 1914-1918—rather a curious omission for a "kind of encyclopedia" dated 1914-1921.

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... ...

In his excellent essay, "War as Background in Gravity’s Rainbow," Khachig Tololyan suggests that the firing of the 00000 takes place "in April (Elliot’s cruelest month) or just before V-E day, May 8, 1945" (Approaches to Gravity’s Rainbow, ed. Charles Clerc, Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1983, 40). I believe that this date can be pinned down more precisely. April can be eliminated first; Enzian tells Katje that the Schwarzkommando "have someone [meaning Thanatz] who was with Blicero in May. Just before the end" (GR, 663). The firing must have been "the end," since Thanatz has had no word of Blicero "since the noon on the Heath when 00000 was fired" (667). Thanatz later recalls "the last firing, the unremem bered night-hours to Hamburg" (672), and his escape from Hamburg in a plane. According to the 1945 World Almanac (one of Pynchon’s standard sources), Hamburg was occupied by the British on May 3. It is reasonable to assume that Thanatz’ flight occurs the previous day, May 2, leaving the well-concealed but particularly appropriate date of May 1, or May Day, for the firing. This means that the 00000 is, among other things, a Maypole, that time-honored phallic symbol of renewed fertility. It is also a Beltane fire, a Raketen-Stadt version of those ceremonial bonfires traditionally kindled on the first of May, whose long history, says The Golden Bough, contains clear evidence of human sacrifice. The Druids’ victims sometimes were encased in giant figures made of wicker-work; then they were burned alive in Beltane fires. Gottfried within the rocket takes their place, as first offering in this new fire-festival.

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Bibliography

We would like to remind our readers that they are invited to contribute bibliographic information about bibliographies, dissertations, books, chapters, essays, articles, reviews, interviews, translations, newspaper and magazine stories, fragments, oddments, stray comments, conference papers, and anything else of the sort which seems significant, interesting, or otherwise valuable and worthy of wider publicity with specific reference to Pynchon. We also welcome news of work in progress, circulating manuscripts, and forthcoming works.

CRITICISM AND COMMENT:


"V. seems to have been heavily influenced by Gaddis. . . ."


Compares Gaddis with Heller and Pynchon.


"Ancient Evenings rivals Gravity's Rainbow as an exercise in what has to be called a monumental sado-anarchism, and one aspect of Mailer's phantasmagoria may be its need to challenge Pynchon precisely where he is strongest. Paranoia, in both these American amalgams of Prometheus and Narcissus, becomes a climate."


Mentions Pynchon.


Crews, Frederick C. "They're Mannerists, Not Moralists." Book Week Paperback Issue, 10 Jan. 1965, 5, 27. (5, 27)

Briefly discusses V.

Cullen, Robert J. "Pynchon at the MLA Convention." Pynchon Notes, 11 (1983), 3-5.


Mentions Pynchon.


Pynchon is "innovative," like Beckett, Barth, and Borges, for example, but not, apparently, a member of "an international avant-garde," including Pinget, Barthelme, and Coover.


"When I try to draw a map of modern American fiction, I find that the two poles are represented by Philip Roth and Thomas Pynchon."


Quotes Berthoff on GR.

Kadragic, Alma. "Robert Coover." Interview. *Shantih*, 2, No. 2 (1972), 57-60. (60) Pynchon is one of the writers by whom Coover is "very impressed" and "always intrigued."


"One reason Trollopians are ashamed of their addiction is that when you talk about Trollope you can't . . . even congratulate yourself for
getting through him, as you're entitled to do if you've accomplished . . . Pynchon."

Mentions Pynchon.

Mentions Pynchon's display of "the chaotic artificiality of all order."

LeClair, Thomas. "An Ear to America." Rev. of JR. Commonweal, 16 Jan 1976, 54-55. (54)
Mentions the rumor that Gaddis was "Thomas Pynchon as a young man."

Mentions GR.

Mentions GR.

Pynchon and his works mentioned in questions to and remarks by Gardner, Bartheleme, Rosellen Brown, Federman, Gass, Irving, Katz, and McElroy.

Describes V.'s (and other novels') debts to The Confidence-Man.

Quotes Aldridge on Pynchon.


Mentions Pynchon, usually in lists.

Miers, Paul. Rev. of Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid. MLN, 94, No. 5 (1979), 1214-18. (1215)

"If you think of Thomas Pynchon as the Melville of our culture—the one who pursues the dark, albeit comic, conceit of science—then Hofstadter is our Emerson, describing the ordinary acts of nature as being most visionary and strange."


Calvino "said that the American literary 'experimenters' he admires, because they too venture into fable and allegory, are Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut Jr."


Newman, Robert D. "Pynchon's Use of Carob in V." Notes on Contemporary Literature, 11, No. 3 (1981), 11.


JR "is perhaps one of those American novels
which, like The Recognitions and Giles Goat-Boy and maybe even V. (though not Gravity's Rainbow) bids for the category of Unreadable Masterpiece."


Mentions Pynchon's alleged "comic-strip concept of character."


Reports diverse rumors of Pynchon's presence in the LA area.


At times, "JR seems derivative of Thomas Pynchon's V. and Gravity's Rainbow. But it is more likely that Pynchon was influenced by Gaddis' earlier Recognitions."


1971, xxiii.
Mentions Pynchon among writers not treated.

Mentions Pynchon.

Steiner regrets the omission of works by Nabokov, O'Hara and Purdy from this anthology, especially given the inclusion of "Low-lands."

----------. "Crossed Lines." Rev. of JR. New Yorker, 26 Jan. 1976, 106-09. (109)
"Gravity's Rainbow ran some two hundred and fifty pages the wrong side of mastery."


Ranks Gaddis with Pynchon; also, "my hunch is that Pynchon was influenced by Gaddis's novel."


Mentions V.

Mentions Pynchon.

Contributors

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His purpose in that work is to provide detailed notes on Pynchon's sources in GR. The essay published here is based on the MS.

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