

The Chymische Hochzeit of Thomas Pynchon

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Gravity's Rainbow exploits concepts of entropy and paranoia familiar to Pynchon's readers, but the labyrinthine novel takes its particular character from a matrix of "correspondences." In this variant of the doctrine that unity resides in multiplicity, apparently disparate items reveal their fundamental oneness by signals obvious only to an informed initiate. Pynchon has updated this Renaissance hermetism by using Jung's alchemical theory¹ in a context of modern organic synthesis, and has further enriched the allusive maze by offering a choice of three possible cosmologies to "explain" the universe of the novel. Two of these are immediately accessible in the conflict between Pointsman and Mexico: the Pavlovian psychologist is clearly a figure of either/or determinism and the statistician represents a post-quantum era in which no completely deterministic system can be said to exist.² The third possibility is embedded in the fabric of the novel, providing a hidden alternative to the classic dilemma; it is an elaboration of the theory of synchronicity,³ developed by Jung and the physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Synchronicity is acausal; events are connected only by "meaningful coincidence" and the timeline has no linear dimension. A system of this kind is essential in the alchemical universe, since there, too, events are ordered only by similitude and never by temporal succession. This is the universe of Gravity's Rainbow in which "things only happen," the world where "A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable."⁴

Jung drew precise analogies between the alchemical process and the psychic struggle for wholeness, but did not hope that this interpretation of alchemy would be accepted in the modern world where "we know too much about the real nature of chemical combination" (MC, p. 467). Pynchon accepts the challenge: Gravity's Rainbow can be read as a concerted effort to objectify psychic parameters. The novel is a set of field observations made by some mad naturalist whose specialty is the synchronous universe. With perverse virtuosity, Pynchon turns directly to modern ideas of

chemical combination for his alchemical opus. The "chemical wedding" celebrated over and again in Gravity's Rainbow is based on phenomena common to modern organic synthesis. Organic compounds are peculiarly appropriate to the purpose, since their uniqueness is a function of structure rather than substance; that is, the number and kind of atoms making up an organic molecule do not in themselves determine its properties and individual character. The organic compound may be said to derive its "selfhood" from the spatial configuration of atoms in its constituent molecules. As a consequence, the atoms lose identity, becoming mere building-blocks vulnerable to forces of external control. This anonymous malleability allies the atoms in question to alchemical "prime matter," the lowly stuff subjected to rearrangement in the transmutation process. Prime matter is understood to be excremental, black, despised--the "Preterition" of Pynchon's novel. In the same way, an alchemist imposing torment upon prime matter is like "The Firm," Pynchon's metaphor for all forces of external control.

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

serves to shorten otherwise cumbrous messages delivered in the novel, and to provide a major structuring device consonant with demands of a synchronous universe.

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

The network built up around drug, dye and plastics technology provides relatively easy access to Pynchon's alchemy. Explicit references are available, for example, in the Weimar seance and its companion-piece, the story of Kekulé's dream. During the seance, Generaldirektor Smaragd interrogates a spirit identified as Walter Rathenau, "prophet and architect of the cartelized state" (164). Smaragd is associated with IG Farben, the gigantic drug and dye cartel that furnishes Pynchon with a highly appropriate metaphor for The Firm; this provides one immediate interconnection, but the essential parts of Rathenau's message to Smaragd are conveyed by coding devices of greater subtlety. One of Pynchon's favorites, the use of code-names, is pivotal here: for example, the Generaldirektor's name refers to the Tabula Smaragdina, establishing the alchemical theme.⁵ Another code-name is Oneirine, derived from the Greek oneiros, meaning "dream" or the dream-god. This prefigures the most famous dream in the history of chemistry, the dream of Kekulé that provided a crucial element in organic structural theory.

Code-names are perhaps the surface-level of Pynchon's cryptography, an element relatively easy to decipher. These serve important purposes in Gravity's Rainbow, but other devices, more opaque and more extensively employed, convey the substance of the novel. Rathenau refers to mauve, "the first new color on Earth, leaping to Earth's light from its grave miles and aeons below" (166). Clues in the message make it plain that mauve was the first dye synthesized from coal-tar, and also indicate that coal-tar was somehow elevated by the discovery of mauve. Coal-tar, "Earth's excrement, purged out for the ennoblement of shining steel. Passed over" (166), has been transfigured into mauve. So much is evident from the text; application of alchemical coding will yield a deeper layer. Prior to the discovery of mauve, coal-tar was a waste residue, a mere nuisance left over from distillation and coking processes. With the commercial success of mauve, coal-tar itself became a valuable raw material and an object of further research. Alchemically, coal-tar was originally terra damnata, the intractable and unusable waste fraction remaining after any laboratory manipulation. But alchemy is cyclical; the end is the beginning, and the advent of mauve apotheosized coal-tar from rejected waste to prime matter. Mauve is a figure of the Philosopher's Stone, a god-image risen transformed from death and decay. But this is only one level of alchemical coding; the informed initiate will not terminate a search for correspondences at this point. Consider mauve; it is not merely a representation of the Stone, since the cycle is eternal. Therefore, mauve itself is a transition point, the end of one thing and the beginning of another. The key-code here is Oneirine, with its evocation of Kekulé's dream:

Kekulé claimed that the idea of treating benzene as a hexagonal "ring" of carbon-to-carbon bonds with a hydrogen atom at each vertex-point was inspired by his dream of a great serpent biting its own tail. For Pynchon this becomes the "cosmic Serpent, in the violet splendor of its scales" (411), dreamed so that

others might be seduced by its physical beauty, and begin to think of it as a blueprint, a basis for new compounds, new arrangements, so that there would be a

field of aromatic chemistry to ally itself with secular power, and find new methods of synthesis, so there would be a German dye industry to become the IG. . . . (412)

The passage is one of many with overtones of the "paranoid" theme. Taken as written, it suggests that the chain of coincidence initiated by Kekulé's dream is a monstrous plot with the establishment of IG Farben as its end. And so, in a deterministic universe, it would be, if only because the series would come about "by necessity." The absence of anything resembling causal connection, however, suggests an alternative. Under the rubric of synchronicity, these things "only happen." Indeed, there is a plethora of hidden and contradictory detail that may serve to confirm the synchronous view. Kekulé's serpent is Ouroboros, long known as a symbol of the cosmos and assimilated into Jung's system as a figure of the mandala, emblem of psychic wholeness.⁶ The "violet scales" of Pynchon's serpent are an evocation of mauve, and affirmation that both serpent and dye are instances of the Philosopher's Stone. (In alchemical literature the rubedo, defined as reddening or turning purple, is the color change that announces achievement of the goal.) A more esoteric, because completely concealed, coincidence also informs the saga of mauve: it was discovered by accident when William Perkin set out to synthesize quinine and produced the dye instead. The dye, then, is connected to drugs other than Oneirine. Furthermore, drugs themselves are dualistic: they may cause addiction, and this is an example of evil control, but they also alleviate pain and assist in the cure of illness. Nothing is ever single valued in the synchronous world; each element or event generates its own opposite, a mechanism essential to maintain the cyclical dynamics.

The serpent is menaced by forces "whose only aim is to violate the Cycle" (412), since entropy is the companion of paranoia. There are, however, defenders in the wings. Rathenau refers to coal-tar as "passed over"; this is a signpost of rejection, but it is also a prayer of thanksgiving, an earnest of another cycle yet to come. Enzian and his Herero tribe, the remnants "passed over" when Germans tried to eliminate their

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

The alchemist did not see himself as violating Nature's laws, but as using them in particular and sacred ways to accelerate the process of "perfecting" base metals into gold. Or so he claimed: the enemies of alchemy were quick to perceive an element of rationalization. Pynchon agrees that all tinkering with Nature is fundamentally evil, but it does not follow that all Nature is fundamentally good. Entropy itself is "natural," and only intervention from without will stave off its destructive course. The advantage of organic systems is that they are not closed, and can therefore hold off the increase of entropy; the disadvantage is that they are vulnerable to their own de-

generative processes. In deterministic or quantum-statistical worlds, the organism plays out a drama that is either wholly or mainly established in advance. Contemplation of these circumstances leads to the "plot" theory. But the world of synchronicity is hardly more comfortable, since any meaning at all is discerned only at the price of constant decoding, associated with constant worry that the message has been misread. Like the would-be adept of alchemy, the citizen of a synchronous world is forced into a process of continual selection from a set of infinite possibilities, under the threat of severe penalties if any choice is wrong. In general, the problem of ordering one's knowledge under acausality is solvable only in a Heraclitean mode: change is "explained" by itself. In Gravity's Rainbow, the mechanism of change is opposition between the synthetic and the natural. The (synthetic) rocket screams across the sky, followed at once by its counter-image, the "progressive knottling into--" (3) of organic aggregation.

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

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

war morning's banana fragrance to meander,
repossess, prevail (10).

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

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

Greta is the all-purpose Earth Goddess, a melange of Isis, Demeter, Cybele, a shadowy complex of Nordic

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

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

I can't describe its perfume, or how it felt-- the luxury. The moment it touched them it brought my nipples up swollen and begging to be bitten. I wanted to feel it against my cunt. Nothing I ever wore, before or since, aroused me quite as much as Imipolex (488).

After an uncountable number of men and indescribable ecstasies imposed by the plastic, Greta finds herself outside the factory, naked, in a scene of desolation covered by "some tarry kind of waste." The cycle is complete.

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

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

tive; the most blatant, and perhaps the most significant of such applications has Laszlo Jamf conditioning infant Tyrone's erections in 1920 with the odor of Imipolex G, a compound Jamf does not develop until 1939.⁹ When Slothrop asks for information about Imipolex, Schweitar is curt:

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

An informed initiate will set about decoding this complex message with delight. Indole is a fundamental group in many organic compounds, particularly compounds yielding drugs. Imipolex G is an indole, which greatly enhances its capacity for interconnection. Ergot, for example, is an indole. It is also derived from a fungus named Claviceps purpurea; the "purple" refers to the purplish-brown color of the plant, which appears as "blight" on rye and other grasses. Since ergot is purple, it links up with mauve and the violet-scaled Ouroboros. Ergot is also the basic source of LSD, a synthetic hallucinogen, whereas other indole alkaloids are the pharmacologically-active elements in the "natural" hallucinogenic substances found in mushrooms like Amanita muscaria or the Psilocybe species. The indole group appears twice in the constituent molecule of indigo, a "natural" dye, and the chain of correspondence may also be extended to include the fact that all indoles have a characteristic blue color useful in chemical analysis.

Through blue, indole is connected to Enzian, the gentian; this relationship is even more firmly established if one knows that the order Gentianales produces more than 300 indole alkaloids.¹⁰ Indigo is a natural dye, and thus in some sense the counter-image of mauve, the synthetic. To summarize: Indole has correspondence networks linking it with the synthetics LSD and mauve; mauve is a link to Ouroboros and therefore an ambiguous transition point; Ouroboros creates bonds with the benzene ring, which is a constituent of Imipolex G, another synthetic. But Imipolex G is also an indole, linked by that fact to the "natural" products ergot, indigo and the hallucinogens of the "magic mushroom."¹¹ Enzian, who is both blue and natural, has correspondences with all indoles thanks to his color, but only with some indoles thanks to his naturalness. This is a fair illustration of the paranoiac potential of correspondences, but in this particular case it is possible to do better.

It seems that current research has established a relationship between production of melanin, the pigment responsible for skin color, and the presence of a naturally-occurring indole polymer.¹² Some authorities also suggest that abnormal melanin distribution is a characteristic of schizophrenia, and that there is a high correlation between schizoid manifestations, and the presence of a condition known as malvaria.¹³ Malvarians excrete a urinary substance that stains violet with the appropriate reagent in chromatography. Since schizophrenia is often called "split personality," and since a split personality is an ideal representation of the hermaphrodite, it is possible to construct several new mazes on the Enzian-black-indole theme. Some may argue that Pynchon uses "polymer" as a synonym for "synthetic," and could not, therefore, use this scheme (since the polymer involved is natural); close inspection indicates that this is probably incorrect, since the term used to refer to synthetic process is always "polymerized," implying application of external force.

Schweitar, clearly on the side of The Firm, ticks off his enemies. The indole crowd includes witches, ergot, hallucinated cantons up in the mountains, an ancient aristocracy--in short, the ancient aristocracy

of Physis. Nature is a mistress of magic, of complex, unforced structuring that The Firm can only caricature. The "giant parent to the north" might be IG Farben, but it is much more likely to be the pantheon of Nordic gods whose figures stalk through Jung's work. North is the direction of the unconscious: the Herero women lived on the north side of mandala-villages in Südwest (563) because this was the direction of breath and soul, while the men lived south, in the zone of fire and activity. The message, deciphered, reads: Impiplex G is a travesty of the Stone because it is not natural.

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

One may ask whether anything does survive in Gravity's Rainbow: the answer is a qualified yes, hinging on the definition of "survival." Perhaps the most delightful illustration of the possibility is provided by Tchitcherine, half-brother to Enzian and a "mad scavenger [. . .] who is more metal than anything else" (337). His name appears to be a transliteration of the Russian form of "cicerone," allowing for a difference of opinion about the propriety of substituting "i" for "o".¹⁴ Since he is very definitely an all-purpose divinity, an agglomeration of

Hermes-Thoth and others, the term fits: Hermes was the god who guided the souls of the dead to Hades. A member in good standing of Preterition, Tchitcherine consorts with wretched "sub rosa enemies of order, counterrevolutionary odds and ends of humanity" (346) because Mercury/Hermes is also god of thieves. As Thoth/Hermes, Tchitcherine spends a riotous season on a committee charged with delivering a New Turkic Alphabet to unlettered tribes of Central Asia, since Thoth/Hermes is the god of letters. Notably, he displays extreme instability on the job, dashing off on wild rides with a Kirghiz sidekick (342) or sharing a leprous pipe of opium with the lazy degenerate Chu Piang (347). He is "a giant supermolecule with so many open bonds available at any given time" that his pharmacology "can't necessarily be calculated" in advance (346). And he is almost literally made of metal, with steel teeth, a silver plate in his skull, and gold wirework in his right knee joint (337). Tchitcherine is both the "spirit Mercurius" which Jung discusses in great detail (AS, pp. 193-250), and alchemical mercury.

In the language of alchemy, mercury is the "volatile" that must be "fixed" if the work is to succeed. Its associated elements are air and water, a detail corroborated by the fact that Tchitcherine reports to the Central Aero and Hydrodynamics Institute (337). Mercury was often equated with the unicorn since both are "uncatchable." Tchitcherine's romance with young witch Geli Tripping is a replication of the alchemical coagulatio, the fixing of the volatile. Even burdened with one of Pynchon's more poisonous puns ("gaily tripping") the debonair witch-girl is an appealing figure, as well she might be: she is the legendary virgin who catches the unicorn, namely Tchitcherine. The homologue appears in Edinger's Ego and Archetype,¹⁵ where the full Jungian correspondence between unicorn and mercury is explored. Geli agrees with Edinger's lunar deity even to the detail of her ability to tame birds of the night (291). Insofar as anything can be "certain" in a novel dedicated to uncertainty and illusion, Tchitcherine and Geli find happiness together, a lot unique among Pynchon's pairs of star-crossed lovers. While this

may be a form of Haight-Ashbury sentimentality, with prizes for the champion flower children, it is far more likely to be an instance of the survival of nature myths that have escaped the corrupting influence of intellection and control. This conclusion is supported by the similar fate dealt out to Tyrone Slothrop: as Tchitcherine is the volatile which must be fixed, Slothrop is the fixed which must be rendered volatile.

Slothrop, the all-American boob and anti-hero, starts life in a thoroughly excremental fashion by being flushed down the toilet of the Roseland Ballroom, and ends it (if he does) in changed but perhaps equally parlous condition. One could expect little more of a man whose mother is named after a drug ("Nalline" is a morphine analogue used to monitor heroin dosage), and who counts Plasticman among his heroes. He snorts, slurps, guzzles and grunts his way through myriad chase and bedroom scenes, and tries to preserve avidya (ignorant innocence) by running around in a pig costume.¹⁶ He meets Enzian and Tchitcherine, but seems to achieve no more than accentuation of his normal unease as a result. His encounter with an electronic version of the hermaphrodite (Zwitter) produces bumpkin poesy instead of enlightenment (314). But--like it or not, Slothrop is the hero. Our last glimpse of Tyrone all in one piece shows him "crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural . . ." (626). Freed from invidious forces of intellection and control by his long circulatio in the Zone, Slothrop attenuates, perhaps scattering out among the "gray and preterite souls" of his fellow Humility (742). In short, Tyrone achieves immortality--of a kind. It is constrained by the frailty of racial memory; even Seaman Bodine, one of the few who kept an image of the integral Slothrop alive, falters (740). Yet in some sense the all-too-solid flesh of Slothrop has been made pure spirit, and the fixed has been made volatile.

In this preliminary study it will not be possible to consider the full significance of Slothrop's search, nor can we reconstruct the network of alchemical correspondences that surrounds rocket images. Almost certainly, even the title of the novel conceals references that go beyond the evocation of a rocket trajectory,

since Jung wrote "Our psychic prehistory is in truth the spirit of gravity," and deplored the hubris that drives men to seek a chimerical footing on the rainbow bridge meant only for gods (PA, pp. 62 and 60). Pynchon has regularly been compared to James Joyce. To the extent that his conscious hermetism makes heavy demands on his readers, the comparison holds; but whether Pynchon's work, like that of Joyce, will stimulate critics to fulfill these demands is unresolved. Quite apparently, the exegesis of Pynchon requires familiarity with an extra-literary dimension, an esoteric (for most humanists) domain of science and technology. However, the Jungian corpus can serve as model and guide for a significant portion of Gravity's Rainbow, and may provide clues to other aspects of the Pynchonian universe of discourse.

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Notes

- ¹ See the following volumes of C. G. Jung's Collected Works, hereafter abbreviated as shown: IX, Part 2, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, 2nd. ed. (Princeton, 1968). Abbreviated as Aion. XII, Psychology and Alchemy, 2nd. ed. (Princeton, 1968). Abbreviated as PA. XIII, Alchemical Studies (Princeton, 1968). Abbreviated as AS. XIV, Myterium Coniunctionis, 2nd. ed. (Princeton, 1970). Abbreviated as MC.

² This system is "indeterminate" only on the micro-physical level of particle events.

³ C. G. Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," in C. G. Jung, Collected Works, VIII, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche (Princeton, 1960), pp. 419-519. There is a second ed., 1969.

⁴ Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 30. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

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

Institut für Geschichte der Naturwissenschaft, 1926). For the text of the Tabula and a brief commentary in English, see H. M. E. De Jong, Michael Maier's 'Atalanta fugiens' (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 57-60.

⁶ Discussions of mandala-symbolism are found throughout Jung's work. Identification of mandala and Ouroboros, PA, p. 126.

⁷ E. J. Holmyard, "Dyestuffs in the nineteenth century," in A History of Technology, V (Charles Singer, ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 270-271.

⁸ W. C. Sumpter and F. M. Miller, The Chemistry of Heterocyclic Compounds, VIII (A. Weissberger, ed.; New York: Interscience, 1954), p. 1.

⁹ LSD was identified as a synthetic hallucinogen in 1943, but did not come into common use until the sixties. Since Gravity's Rainbow is ostensibly an account of events taking place in 1945, Schweitar's offer is premature. Jamf is Slothrop's "I," or ego-image; his mixed career as psychologist and chemist provides another alchemical clue.

¹⁰ K. Mothes, "Introductory remarks," in The Chemistry of Natural Products, IV (New York: Plenum Press, 1967), p. 116.

¹¹ See A. Hoffer and H. Osmond, The Hallucinogens (New York: Academic Press, 1967), pp. 480-481, for summary of the view that hallucinogenic mushrooms were the source of a primitive idea of God. John M. Allegro, The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross (New York: Doubleday, 1970), uses a similar idea.

¹² Research continues; see current issues of Chemical Abstracts. Early work is cited in Chemistry of Heterocyclic Compounds, XXV (W. J. Houlihan, ed.; New York: Interscience, 1972), Pt. I, p. 6.

¹³ Hoffer and Osmond, Hallucinogens, pp. 102-103.

¹⁴ Professor Francis B. Randall informs me that linguistic chicanery may be replaced by historical verity: Tchitcherine is apparently modelled in part

on Georgi Chicherin, successor to Trotskii as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930, and (along with Walter Rathenau) one of the architects of the Rappallo Treaty of 1922. Professor Randall will, I am sure, join me in urging other political historians to complete this particular web of "meaningful coincidence."

¹⁵ Edward F. Edinger, Ego and Archetype (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 280-281. First published 1972.

¹⁶ Jung identifies the pig with avidya, "ignorance or unconsciousness," in PA, p. 96.