

Gravity's Rainbow:
The Original Soundtrack

J. O. Tate

In his essay "Gravity's Encyclopedia," Edward Mendelson has laid down instructions and suggestions that are among the most useful in all comment on Pynchon:

Although the genre that now includes Gravity's Rainbow is demonstrably the most important single genre in Western literature of the Renaissance and after, it has never previously been identified. Gravity's Rainbow is an encyclopedic narrative, and its companions in this most exclusive of literary categories are Dante's Commedia, Rabelais's five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes's Don Quixote, Goethe's Faust, Melville's Moby-Dick, and Joyce's Ulysses.¹

The resistant reader might reflect that Mendelson ignores here fundamental distinctions of genre, such as that between poetry and prose; and that Northrop Frye's well-known scheme does identify that encyclopedic mode as Menippean satire, or anatomy. Mendelson excludes Tristram Shandy and Gulliver's Travels from his canon, but Frye would identify them--and Gravity's Rainbow--as anatomies. The interruption of a prose text by verse interludes--which occurs again and again in Gravity's Rainbow--is a defining characteristic, according to Frye.²

But this collision of theory is not nearly so important as the dove-tailing of application. Mendelson goes on to point out that

All encyclopedic narratives include a full account of at least one technology or science. . . . An encyclopedic narrative normally also includes an account of an art outside the realm of written fiction: the carved bas-reliefs in the Purgatorio, the puppetry of Don Quixote, the Greek tragedy in Faust, whale-painting in Moby-Dick, the musical echoes in Ulysses's

4

"Sirens," film and opera in Gravity's Rainbow.³

I hasten to emphasize that film and opera have music in common: melodrama. Usually, the experience of film includes the "background music," but we remember most the plot, the characters, the scenes. An opera works inside out--or outside in: we remember best the "foreground music," this or that aria or concerted piece. Hearing the obvious, we can say that in the modern environment the citizen in his home, at work, in his car, in a restaurant, on the street, is surrounded by "background music," Muzak, AM and FM, Sony Walkmans, etc. Through their musical association, in Gravity's Rainbow film and opera are united: the "low" and the "high" are artfully confused. And because film experience extends to cartoons--an animated cartoon is a film--comic books make their entrée. Similarly, the parodistic music of cartoons is associated with that of which it is a travesty. By extension, radio soap operas are "acoustic movies." The "aural interface," the totalitarian background noise of civilization, is represented in the text--or on the tape--of that "acoustic collage," Gravity's Rainbow. Because of his "setting" and "plot," Pynchon obliges himself to translate ("carry over") the popular culture of the Second World War into German terms. The literary text of Gravity's Rainbow becomes a Gesamtkunstwerk of Wagnerian ambition, association, and accomplishment. Yet this "film"--a magnum opus, sometimes literally an opera--savages what it celebrates by way of parodistic reduction, popular misapprehension, commercial exploitation and Nazi association. Wagner's melos becomes Looney Tunes and Merry Melodies.

We do not have to look far for an example of Pynchon's syncretistic, eclectic method of attack. Novelistic plot, operatic form, and anatomistic procedure coalesce on page 19: the map, which is associated not just with stars, but with patterns of stars, is explicitly connected to the catalogue of Don Giovanni's conquests mentioned on page 270. The "background music" we are meant to think of is Leporello's aria from Act I of Mozart's Don Giovanni. The map of Slothrop's assignments is congruent with

the Poisson distribution pattern of V-2 strikes. Pynchon fuses history and war with science and opera, and those with sex and death; the whole book can be extrapolated from this aperture.

We must admit that a "catalogue aria" is appropriate for inclusion in an "encyclopedic narrative" which is, among other things, a catalogue of catalogues. That list of lists must include films as well as operas; but we must remember the omnipresence of music stated and implied.

That the rhetoric and much of the substance of Gravity's Rainbow are explicitly inspired by the movies, Pynchon makes perfectly clear. Movies are a form as well as a subject, so we find the giant Adenoid, a travesty of horror movies, because "it's all theatre."⁴ Pynchon doesn't mean drama; he means a movie-house. We are sitting in the Bijou when we hold Gravity's Rainbow in our hands. "Slothrop is the character juvenile tonight" (437). On this page "light-values" are mentioned, as the description is that of a photograph or movie scene. On page 522, we have popcorn at the movies. There is a Busby Berkeley scene (594). The narrator appeals to "aficionados of the chase scene" (637), because "it is a movie!" (691). The movie under the rug (745), "tasteless [, . . .] will never be completed," because this book or movie seems endless, and because the k.a.m.p. movie called History seems endless too, as well as tasteless. And we keep reading, because we are all "old fans who've always been at the movies" (760). Yes, indeed; and if we had not always been at the movies, how would we recognize a "classic gangster head-move" (530)?

Our impression must be that Pynchon can deal with any subject in terms of film. American racism is conjured in terms of Hollywood's more painful absurdities, as follows: "Ooga-booga! Gwine jump on dis drum hyah! Tell de res' ob de trahb in de village, yowzah!" (656). Any buff could cite a hundred examples of such howlers in any number of Tarzan movies, Crash Corrigan serials, etc. Pynchon strikes this note again when he puns on the title of A Day at the Races and the embarrassing "Who Dat Man?" episode

0

(619). Within Gravity's Rainbow this connects with Enzian and the Herero tribe, von Trotha's massacre in 1904, and so on. But though the subject seems to be race, it manages also to be movies.

The movies also lend form to Gravity's Rainbow as a German subject, as an index to the growth of a modern art-form and to the rise of Nazism. Indeed, Gravity's Rainbow can be seen as a gloss on From Caligari to Hitler. Certainly the characters include a German actress and a German director. And Pynchon connects such things as a "movie set" and a "stark Expressionist white/black" mise-en-scène (393) with the growth of the German petrochemical industry, and even Leibnitz and the calculus. Furthermore, the image of erotic stimulation that begets a child connects the movies (German ones, this time) with the whole massive evocation of what we may call the Tristan und Isolde theme, which I will explore more fully below.

Truly, "all of us [are] watching some wry news-reel . . ." (150), and in the end, in the theater, following the insulting bouncing ball and doing as we are told, we are annihilated in a movie house by the super-weapon that was so often the subject of newsreels. So we have been at the movies a long time. I remember (in Pynchon's monumental home-movie) W. C. Fields, Cary Grant, Shirley Temple, Dennis Morgan, Lassie, Greta Garbo, Maria Montez, Jon Hall, Groucho Marx, Bob Steele, Johnny Mack Brown, King Kong, Don Ameche, Oliver Hardy, Errol Flynn, Mickey Rooney as Andy Hardy, Marlene Dietrich, Brigitte Helm, Pluto, Asta Nielsen, George Raft, Henry Fonda, John Wayne, Clark Gable, Basil Rathbone, S. Z. ("Cuddles") Sakall, Porky Pig, Dumbo, Bela Lugosi, Henry Wilcoxon, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Audie Murphy, James Mason, Bugs Bunny, James Cagney, Bette Davis, Margaret Dumont, Dick Powell, Carmen Miranda, William Bendix, Arthur Kennedy, Sam Jaffee, Fay Wray, Robert Armstrong, Margaret O'Brien, Norma Shearer, and Tom Mix. To that extent, Gravity's Rainbow is a long, strung-out night at the Late Show and the Late Late Show. But surely this show, like everything in it, is Too Late.⁵

That is one sort of popular culture (a man has a right to be ashamed that he has a clear mental image of all those faces), and we will not have to look far for related references to producers and directors, American and German. They are, I think, evil geniuses, or invisible manipulators: Cecil B. DeMille, Merian C. Cooper, Busby Berkeley again, and Pynchon's own Osbie Feel (who writes a movie for Rathbone, Sakall, and the Midget from Tod Browning's Freaks). Of movies themselves there are at least Going My Way, The Return of Jack Slade, King Kong throughout, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, The Bride of Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Gunga Din, Dracula (passim), covert allusions to To Hell and Back, the aforementioned A Day at the Races (is not the "opera of Balkan Intrigue" Duck Soup?), and more than one allusion to Manhattan Melodrama, starring Clark Gable, which John Dillinger watched at the Biograph Theatre in Chicago before he was shot by Melvin Purvis. Turning to the German side of things, we have Lang, Pabst, and Lubitsch together (112), the Ufa studios again and again. "Neubabelsberg" is the German Hollywood, a new Babel, as "Zwölfkinder" is a Nazi Disneyland. We should not omit Nibelungen, Die Frau Im Mond, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Der Mude Tod, Metropolis, Klein-Rogge, Stinnes, the fictional von GÖTT (an Eisenstein in Mexico, as it were, on 388), and the ubiquitous Doktor Mabuse. The fiction we are considering is as parasitic as it is paracinematic.⁶

Turning from the movies to the comics, we have the "batman, a Corporal Wayne" (11), who is Bruce Wayne, no doubt, the alias of Batman. Alfred Appel does not need to strain, as he does in his Nabokov's Dark Cinema, to construe this as a condescension to John Wayne--that Wayne is not hard to find elsewhere in Gravity's Rainbow. There are Captain Midnight, Hop Harrigan and Tank Tinker, Zorro, the Green Hornet, Superman, Submariner, Plasticman, the Lone Ranger, Jimmy, Krypton, and the Daily Planet. Some of these are radio stars, movie subjects, and cartoon characters. The German reference in this context is to Wilhelm Busch, the influential satirical cartoonist, whose work both developed cartooning and influenced the Surrealists.

Pop fiction--often "translated" on film or on the radio--is mostly represented by grand myths of conspiracy: Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu tales (with Nayland Smith, and hence "dacoits"), Eugene Sue and his interminable melodramas, Sherlock Holmes, Dracula again, the Stuart N. Lake version of Wyatt Earp, Phillip Marlowe, and Pynchon's rehearsal of an old trick: the word "gunsel" (435 and 517). Dashiell Hammett used that word in The Maltese Falcon in order to prove that critics don't read carefully, for it does not mean "gunman," as it seems to in context in both The Maltese Falcon and Gravity's Rainbow; rather it is an old word meaning "a boy used for immoral purposes." The boy Wilmer really was a gunsel, then, with Caspar Gutman and Joel Cairo around--but not the way most readers thought.

Or we turn on the radio: Stella Dallas, Helen Trent, Mary Noble--Backstage Wife, the soaps; and music, music everywhere: George Formby, Falkman and His Apache Band, "Dancing in the Dark," Lecuona's "Siboney," Bob Eberle and "Tangerine," a tango by Juan D'Ariengo, the Andrews Sisters, Carmen Miranda, Sinatra, Irving Berlin, Gene Krupa, Hoagy Carmichael, Bing Crosby, Guy Lombardo, Nelson Eddy, Sandy MacPherson at the Organ, "Love in Bloom" (Jack Benny's theme song), Dick Powell and "in the Shadows Let Me Come and Sing to You" (from Goldiggers of 1933), Stephen Collins Foster, Spike Jones, Roland Peachey and His Orchestra, "There, I've Said It Again," Primo Scala's Accordion Band. Under the apple tree sits a girl "with anyone else but Slothrop" (744). That's a fine joke and a good measure of annihilation; but it is also an allusion to the Andrews Sisters' greatest hit. I do not need to say anything about the instruments of the Preterite, the kazoo and harmonica, for these are Pynchon's best-known signatures. Otherwise, one should note the use of musical terms: rallentando, crotchet, grace note, crescendo, thirds; "birds whistle arpeggios" (371); a capella; the thumb harp made of German materials (a kalimba); spiccato, détaché, and "breath pauses" (Luftpausen). Needless to say, the text is continually interrupted by songs Pynchon has made up, some but not all of which are parodies of the popular music of forty years ago.

And one finds many musical instruments and artifacts: the Frank Bridge variations (59) (Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge, Op. 10 by Benjamin Britten) are "local color" played on the radio and an introduction to "bridge music" (222). Frank bridge variations sound throughout Gravity's Rainbow. Orchestras abound, as do clarinets, bassoons, ukeleles, a Bösendorfer Imperial concert grand piano (437, 439, 441), a Victrola, a Tannoy radio, a Wittmaier harpsichord (533), harmoniums, conservatory windows, minor-keyed lieder (646), horns, violins, and, in the catalogue of refugees (549-51), "deathless piano performances punched on Vorsetzer rolls" (550). The image of the Vorsetzer--a robot pianist--connects with all the mechanical images throughout Pynchon's work. The author perhaps implies that the "deathless performances" are not so immortal after all, as there are no names mentioned.

Of so-called classical music itself, and composers, there is an abundance: Purcell, "Bach riffs," Carl Orff, Kurt Weill, Brahms, an allusion to the salmonella that killed Tchaikovsky after he finished his sixth symphony (702), and three great composers of the Second Viennese School, Schönberg, Berg, and Webern. The expressionism of these last is quite apposite to the world of Gravity's Rainbow. Berg's Wozzeck is a similarly bleak vision of human life--as was the relentless play of Büchner on which the opera is based--but I am thinking here in terms of music. Webern, that strange genius, was shot by an American GI in occupied suburban Vienna: a historical fact that Pynchon borrowed, although it reads like something he must have invented. And Schönberg's exploration of tone-rows and serial music is the dead end of German music, a symbol of the abstraction that drove a culture to destruction. Yes, Gravity's Rainbow is a kind of addendum to Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus, for Pynchon too makes of musical history a register of values. He does not believe in "progress." In technological terms, progress means more advanced ways of killing. In musical terms, it means music so arcane that it sounds like not-music. In political and social terms, it means Gemeinschaft becoming Gesellschaft: the growth of corporations, and their hand-

10
maiden, the corporate state; the elephantiasis of capitalism, mass politics, dictatorship, the big lie. (Pynchon follows Weber, who in turn follows Tönnies in his Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft of 1887.) And just as the V-2 is the literal progenitor of the nuclear-tipped weapons that we live among now, so the history of Germany foreshadows our own "progress." Pynchon thus writes about contemporary America without necessarily mentioning it.

Music, as much as social forms, history, and technology, is a measure of where we are. And Pynchon scores a number of points by reference to music alone. The word Erwartung (101) means anticipation or yearning, and here has to do with both perverted sexuality and the Rocket. It is the quiver of anxiety--of Isolde waiting for Tristan at the beginning of Act II of Wagner's opera. Love and death are telescoped within the rocket, as Tristan and Isolde found release in death, and Weissman/Blicero mounts the ultimate orgasm for Gottfried. Isolde sings Mild und Leise at the end of Act III to the same sexual strains to which she had embraced the live Tristan in Act II. And Erwartung and "anticipation," the romantic frisson of desire suspended tantalizingly, are cited in reference to the Rocket (424, 517). It remains only to add that Arnold Schönberg's Erwartung, the expressionist monodrama of a woman waiting for or looking for or dreaming of her lover, completed the Wagnerian gesture towards perfect Liebestod in the dissolution of tonality. But Pynchon has created in the sadistic homosexual rocket-ride an even more powerful and powerfully sick image. This image, as we have seen, is compounded as much of Musik as it is of anything else. Music and history flow together--in the world and in Gravity's Rainbow.

There is no avoiding the music. The horrifying Rocket ride is not only the ultimate orgasm--the most perfect love-death, the most powerful bugging, not only of Gottfried by Blicero, but of the Earth by man--it is also a travesty of the Ride of the Valkyries. There is no avoiding the most exasperating of all German personalities, Richard Wagner, whose hand is everywhere in Gravity's Rainbow (for the same reasons that we feel his presence in Doktor Faustus--though, to be sure, in the figure of Adrian Leverkühn we also

perceive the silhouettes of Schönberg, Richard Strauss, and Hans Pfitzner). Leaving Wagner's musical genius aside, we can feel the animating presence of some of his other attributes such as his anti-Semitism, and his status as a Nazi cult figure, who had, indeed, anticipated the worst vulgarities of the Nazis by erecting his own monument to himself. I refer not to his music, but to Bayreuth, and the suffocating atmosphere that endures there to this day. Like that old wooden pile, the Festspielhaus, nineteenth century Romanticism is still with us, festering away--and nowhere more so than in Gravity's Rainbow.

The rot of Romanticism casts a pretty light; or rather, I should say, the collapse of the romantic ego makes a pleasing sound. Wagner is not the only romantic composer, and not the greatest one; he is simply the most systematically romantic. Systems: in seeing to the construction of the Festspielhaus, he in effect routinized his own charisma--to use Weber's terminology which Pynchon follows about the Rocket. But we can look elsewhere for other kinds of music, before it is time to deal completely with Wagner and his place in Gravity's Rainbow.

Some of this other music, like some of the music for the songs that interrupt Pynchon's obscene musical comedy-tragedy, is made up. Yes, one would love to hear the great Josef Joachim (friend of Brahms and Schumann, and one of the greatest of nineteenth century violinists) play the cadenza of the "long-suppressed Rossini violin concerto (op. posth.)" (684). The only trouble is that there is, of course, no such thing as a violin concerto by Rossini, posthumous or otherwise. And of course there is no suppressed "Kazoo" quartet from Haydn's Op. 76 (711-12). Pynchon is thinking of the music called the Kaisermarsch, and the village idiots are insulting things German. The point is that anatomizing things fictional is more fun than listing real things; but now we will turn to some real music.

J. B. Steane has written that one of his favorite recordings that was never made is Tito Schipa's rendering of Alfredo's graceful aria from the beginning of Act II of La Traviata, "Dei mei bollenti spiriti,"

because Schipa would have been perfect for the job; and Pynchon is indicating that a Rossini violin concerto is something sorely to be missed (although a paragon of German classicism like Joachim would not have been perfect for the job--Paganini or Sarasate would have).⁷ Who would disagree? Does Gravity's Rainbow tell us that Rossini is Pynchon's favorite composer? He is at least the counterfoil, in his bubbling comic gift, to all kinds of lumpish German signifying. But this brings us to the subject of opera itself, for Rossini and Wagner are not the only, though they are the most important, operatic composers in Gravity's Rainbow. Verdi references include Rigoletto (132), The Requiem for Alessandro Manzoni (through the latter's novel I Promessi Sposi, mentioned on page 386: the Libera Me was composed on the death of Rossini, but the whole was dedicated to the memory of Manzoni), Il Trovatore on the same page, and La Forza del Destino (595). The name "Eddie Pensiero" (640) reminds me of Verdi's first popular success, the chorus Va, pensiero from Nabucco. But the fourth line of the Duke of Mantua's famous aria "La donna è mobile" in Act IV of Rigoletto is "e di pensiero." "Good-natured and penetrable disguises, as at a masked ball. It is a transvestism of caring . . ." (742). This passage evokes Un Ballo in Maschera (which Verdi should have named Una Vendetta in Domino)--the transvestism referring to the pants role of Oscar, and the homosexual proclivities of the Swedish king who inspired the libretto. The singing duel between races (387) reminds one of such scenes in I Lombardi, La Forza del Destino, and Otello. And of course the phrases "[v]endettas, jeweled gauntlets, subtle poisons" (582) are operatic in several ways.

Puccini, whose specialty was to prick the Schadenfreud of his audiences with scenes of passive suffering, is also represented. La Bohème is cited in connection with bohemian German Communists and otherwise (132, 155). Madama Butterfly, whose eponymous heroine is a delicate victim of American imperialism, is with us on page 351. And we are reminded of the use of Manon Lescaut in V.

Other operatic allusions include Don Giovanni (cited above), Lehar's The Merry Widow, and Wolf-

Ferrari's Secrets of Suzanne (477), Spohr and Spontini (622), Offenbach (584), the aforementioned Wozzeck (465), Gilbert and Sullivan (538). The "queen of the night" (649) may be construed to be the character of the same name in The Magic Flute. Generally speaking, operatic references are both background music and analogous actions. In the Italian melodramas, love and death are entwined, and heroes and heroines are killed on schedule as the conductor beats time.⁸

But it is the "Sublime Rossini" (376), most famous for his comedies, who dominates these mostly Italian references. No composer, of course, excepting perhaps only Offenbach, is less sublime than Rossini. That is what is so "sublime" about him. By contrast, those metaphysical Germans, Beethoven and Wagner, are all too sublime! In the spirit of invention, Pynchon not only concocts a violin concerto for Rossini, but also stages the imaginary "L'Inutil Precauzione" (a suggestive title in this context) at the Casino Hermann Goering (204). This nonexistent comedy is mentioned in the text of The Barber of Seville. We are also aware of Rossini's effervescent music: the overtures to William Tell (262), La Gazza Ladra (273), L'Italiana in Algeri (440), the tarantella from Tancredi (204, 441). We step on the Rue Rossini (253, 257). Why is Rossini worth all this devotion? He is the perfect entertainer, and his significance needs no explanation, for it is all explicitly stated in the debate between Säure Bummer and Gustav Schlabone (440-41). This is foreshadowed by the parenthetical remark about the inferiority of Beethoven's overtures, "statements of intention" (273). Säure Bummer's eloquence on page 440 needs only to be read to be appreciated. But the same argument was rendered in fiction even better by James M. Cain in Serenade, and to the same conclusion.

Cain did not put a political slant on the comparison of Beethoven with Rossini; his characters speak in terms of drama, of overtures and their functions as curtain-raisers. Säure says, "The point is [. . .] a person feels good listening to Rossini. All you feel like listening to Beethoven is going out and invading Poland. Ode to Joy indeed. The man didn't even have a sense of humor!" (440). The qualities of intellect and will that are so magnificent in the best

of Beethoven attach themselves to other German qualities that are uncomfortably familiar. If we are uncomfortable, surely Wagner is somewhere around.

And so he is. Gustav praises Beethoven for his "progressivism"--he was a link from Bach to Wagner to "modern" music and its "polymorphous perversity," a democracy of all the notes. Where could music go after Webern, he asks--implying that it was no accident the man was shot, but a necessity of history. Germany's disaster he of course calls a Götterdämmerung (441). We even find a "Götterdämmerung of the mucous membranes" (559), not to mention a "Götterdämmerung mentality" (163). The movie Nibelungen connects Wagner with the cinematic mode, as the Ring des Nibelungen itself is connected with science--the Dream of Kekulé, the Benzene Ring (410). These associations snowball, amassing the text that embodies this wonderful German progress, Wissenschaft, heilige Deutsche Kunst! The static test of the rocket engine (161) is preceded by the Wagnerian images of the waterfall and the rainbow (that is, the Rainbow Bridge from Das Rheingold, and Pynchon does not omit Miss Rheingold of 1946 [381]). The swans on page 502 have waddled out of Lohengrin ("What time does the next swan leave?") and Parsifal. The "rare or fabled bird" on page 676 is the Wood Bird from Siegfried; also from Siegfried is Faffner (665), and there is Sigmund himself (457). "If you cannot sing Siegfried at least you can carry a spear" (103). Wotan (72), the Wütende Heer (75), Valkyrie (151), Brunhilde (200), Das Wütend Reich (394), all allude to Wagner as well as to ancient Nordic legends. Midsummer Eve (379) is St. John's Day and Hans Sachs' name day, as David remembers in Die Meistersinger (361). Attila (578, 717) is Etzel in the Nibelungenlied (and the protagonist of Verdi's Attila). We are so surrounded by Wagner that even "Tyrone Guthrie's accustomed murk" (148) reminds us of Wieland Wagner's own stage settings. The "Hitler Youth Glee Club" (736) sends us back to the Wandervögel (162, 670) who in turn are reminiscent of the Minnesingers and Walther von der Vogelweide, in the form of Nazi Boy Scouts. Ludwig II (394, 750), the mad King of Bavaria, was Wagner's admirer and patron; the "Spanish dancer" (750) was the mistress of his

father, Ludwig I. She was the legendary courtesan Lola Montez, who was not Spanish, having been born in Ireland and buried in Brooklyn. This is a covert movie reference--to the romantic masterpiece of Max Ophüls, Lola Montès. Ludwig I with his love, and Ludwig II with his castles and grottoes, were together perfect exemplars of what Pynchon calls "Tannhäuserism" (299). Ludwig II did build his own "Nymphenburg" (750), and Lola Montez, who it seems was swived by every worthy in Europe, was a real-life Venus.

"Wagner" (324, 450): Gravity's Rainbow is a series of "Wagnerian soirées" (315), complete with "Wagnerian opera costumes" (365). The Raketemensch wears a Wagnerian helmet (366); the glasses of an SS man are "like Wagnerian shields" (416). The Hoard of the Nibelungen (419) is there at Zwölfkinder, the anachronistic Nazi travesty of Disneyland, where the "fanged mouths of dragons" evoke Faffner. Slothrop is the Fisher King in the last paragraph of page 447, and therefore Amfortas in Parsifal, as well as a denizen of the Waste Land called the Zone. Otto's explanation of the Mother Conspiracy ends with the strains of Tristan und Isolde (505). The Wagnerian-sounding Schweinhelldfest boasts Siegfried's hammer-and-forge (568-69). Franz van der Groov, Katje's ancestor, the slaughterer of dodos, is a kind of Flying Dutchman.

Wagnerian allusions are more than operatic, German, and historical; they are also parodistic and even cinematic. William Zakariassen, writing in the March, 1970 High Fidelity (67,ff), seems to have anticipated Pynchon's matter and method in his article on musical parody, "The Siegfried Waltz?" He not only cites the all-but-forgotten Siegfried-Walzer of Josef Klein, the Nibelungenmarsch of Gottfried Sontag, and the Tannhäuser-Parodie of H. Carl Binder, but also connects these parodies of Wagner with the Second World War and the movies:

The funny faces of our adversaries in World War II inspired a series of movie cartoons lampooning the Axis--naturally the incidental music was transmogrified Wagner. Everyone from Tom and Jerry to Bugs Bunny warbled, barked, meowed, or quacked unholy arrangements of the Bayreuth

master. But it was a non-Wagnerian Disney soundtrack of 1947 which initiated the unique career of a master parodist. Der Führer's Face, with its spoof of a Brauhaus band complete with nasal vocalist, made a star of Spike Jones, who managed even to upstage the onscreen antics of Donald Duck.

Zakariassen goes on to cite other works of the "deceptively lowbrow" Jones, whom he calls "the Furtwängler of musical humor." He also makes tantalizing reference to Ginastera's Overture to the Creole Faust, which raises the musical prospect of Pynchon's South American characters and fantasies.

But we have not yet dealt with the most important function that Wagner serves in Gravity's Rainbow, though we are aware of what in V. was called "the Tristan-and-Iseult theme, indeed, according to some, the single melody, banal and exasperating, of all Romanticism since the Middle Ages."⁹ Wagner did not invent this theme, needless to say, but within the musico-operatic world of Gravity's Rainbow, his is the greatest exemplar of the myth. As Wagner's oeuvre is very much all of a piece, a continuous progression, it is in another form that most references summon the love-death cult, but still in a Wagnerian context. The "submontane Venus" (88) anticipates a wealth of allusions, in the context of which even such a minor aside as "malachite nymphs and satyrs paralyzed in chase, evergreen" (194) seems to anticipate the full blown swellings of Tannhäuser throughout Gravity's Rainbow, as well as raise the image of the Grecian Urn. When "Tannhäuserism" is explained to us, we should not fail to notice that this plainly implies that the Mittelwerke in Nordhausen is the Venusberg we know from Wagner's opera (299). Pynchon does not bother to make the pun on Mount of Venus, mons veneris; in this book, he doesn't need to (Wagner himself had to change his title from Der Venusberg to Tannhäuser because of ribald comments). The parodic passage that turns the minions of Venus into lab technicians is a scene straight out of the opera:

No, wait, by golly here comes a delegation of girls in tight pink lab coats reaching just to

the tops of bare thighs, tripping up the tunnel on stylish gold wedgies "Ah, so reizend ist!" too many to hug at once, "Hübsch, was?" now now ladies one at a time, they are giggling and reaching to drape around his neck lush garlands of silvery B nuts and flange fittings, scarlet resistors and bright-yellow capacitors strung like little sausages, scraps of gasketry, miles of aluminum shavings as curly-bouncy 'n' bright as Shirley Temple's head--hey Hogan ya can keep yer hula girls--and where are they taking him here? into an empty Stollen, where they all commence a fabulous orgy, which goes on for days and days, full of poppies, play, singing, and carrying on. (304)

The opening scene of the opera, of course; and there is a musical accompaniment too--Pynchon doesn't need to bring it up--the "Venusberg music" which is a bridge from the Overture to Act I. We also notice here the juxtaposition of German Romanticism with German science, and the whole with a Hollywood chorus line. In this passage, the method and even the organization of Gravity's Rainbow are plain to see: Wagner, opera, sex, death, technology, movies, vulgar music--all there at once. "Sounds of carousing, of voices distinctly unbalanced, come welling up, reverberating off of the concrete" (305). Change the concrete Stollen to an opera house stage, and you have a good description of the beginning of Act I of Tannhäuser.

So Slothrop is something like "Tannhäuser, the Singing Nincompoop," but "where is the Pope whose staff's gonna bloom for you?" (364). The answer is, nowhere. And the wrong word causes the mountain to close again behind this preposterous and doomed Minnesinger (377). Franz Pökler, the rocket engineer, has worked at Nordhausen; hence he too has been under the mountain, and his dream associates the Venusberg/Mittelwerke with Zwölfkinder, "a city of elves producing toy moon-rockets" (431). The elves have their own significance, as we shall see. But as for Slothrop, "The Pope's staff is always going to remain barren, like Slothrop's own unflowering cock" (470). The lines of iambic pentameter are spoken by Slothrop-as-Tannhäuser, his sonnet of his own lost state (532).

The Pope has no power in the Zone anyway, and Pirate Prentice cannot help Slothrop. "His orders are terse and clear, like those of the others, agents of the Pope, Pope got religion, go out 'n' find that minnesinger, he's a good guy after all" (619). Even the road to Happyville is "under the mountain," though it is not Slothrop who gets to travel there (645).¹⁰

One of the real obscurities connected with the Tannhäuser allusions is "Lisaura," who is quite well defined when we first hear of her (364). She is not an Elizabeth exactly, as Joseph W. Slade has it in his book on Pynchon. The Lady Lisaura of Mantua (also on 393 and 533 in reference to Greta Erdmann) was simply eliminated from the Tannhäuser legend when Wagner composed his synthetic libretto. She was affianced to Tannhäuser, the story goes, and when he, advised by the philosopher Hilario (a good name for a Pynchon character, though you will not find him in Gravity's Rainbow; however, there is the character Hilarius in The Crying of Lot 49), went off to seek out Venus, she killed herself. Wagner's personal and composite libretto for Tannhäuser contains elements from E. T. A. Hoffman (Die Bergwerke zu Falun), Fouqué, Tieck, and Bechstein, as well as the Deutsche Mythologie (1835) of Jacob Grimm. And before Wagner addressed it, Brentano had worked on the Tannhäuser legend for Carl Maria von Weber, as Ernest Newman tells us.

Wagner's Tannhäuser is a story of the conflict of the spirit and the flesh, with twisted Christian elements. Wagner always has it both ways. The plain implication of the ending (the news of the blossoming of the Pope's staff) is that the dead Tannhäuser has been redeemed. In the world of Gravity's Rainbow, there is no redemption, not even any force for good, except isolated and feeble human will (such as the Counterforce). Because of this, a certain unimportant part of the opera is continually conjured up, and it is as much a musical joke as a literary one; and either way it is a demonic jest, a sneer at any sort of faith or optimism. I am referring to Wolfram's Song to the Evening Star, O du, mein holder Abendstern. The music to this little soliloquy is very famous, and not just as an operatic aria: I mean that everyone who has ever been on an elevator has heard the melody. It is

perfect for renditions à la Muzak, for that is just what it sounds like, a remarkable little specimen of musical banality, polished to a certain gloss. Its self-regarding "prettiness" and mushy solemnity cry out for the attentions of Spike Jones, or the relief of, say, just about anything by Rossini. In fact, Pynchon's virtuoso exploitation of Tannhäuser not only evokes Franz Liszt's staggering transcription of Wagner's overture, but also reminds us, with its perverse associations, of Aubrey Beardsley's Under the Hill. And so Pynchon will do the Spike Jones job, in a literary sense, on this scene again and again.

He never does so specifically, but like a painter taking advantage of complementary colors, he can evoke with precision, without nominating his reference.¹¹ The Song to the Evening Star from Tannhäuser is the background music for a number of multifaceted references that have mostly to do, I would say, with Innocence. We have already looked at the stars on the map (19). The Abendstern is also Venus, natürlich. And the Christmas star. "[T]he Star's awful radiance" (58) shines over a world at war; there's no use praying to it. The Star of Advent (128) presages not only the birth of Christ, but also the Massacre of the Innocents (128-36), the symbol of governmental conspiracy to kill, yet also a cultural symbol of goodness, and therefore a lie in these latter days of slaughter. Herod (135) is still running things. There are even Christmas bugs, wretched survivors like the rest of us--Pynchon tells a story omitted from the Synoptic Gospels (173-74). At one point, Slothrop is too impatient to wait for "the first star" (253). Enzian's people have a "Herod Myth" about him: during the massacres, he was "passed over" (323). The Hereros wonder: "[T]his must be a different star, a northern star. There is no comfort. [. . .] [H]ave we been passed over, or have we been chosen for something even more terrible?" (328). "Pass over": it now means to be passed over, not by the murdering agents of Herod, or by the plague, but by the Rocket itself. One of Slothrop's "Wishes on Evening Stars for This Period" is "Let that only be a meteor falling" (553). Paranoid perhaps, but not unreasonable under the circumstances. Perhaps Pynchon's best joke is

that if V. was V-1, then G.R. (I have emphasized the "Teutonic arc" [443]) is V-2. You will find more stars on pages 562, 567, 635, and star-wishing on page 685. Perhaps the key star images are on pages 759-60, where the masses are seen wishing on a star that is not a star at all, but a "bright angel of death," the Rocket in re-entry--not a promise of mercy, but the vehicle of annihilation. Not a star anyone would wish on, except by terrible mistake. And with all of Pynchon's cartoon and Disney references, I suppose that we should think of the cozy tune (from the Disney Pinochio) that for years introduced the Disney show on television:

"When you wish upon a star,
Makes no diff'rence who you are . . ." etc.

And everyone knows the nursery rhyme, "Star light, star bright." But I am suggesting that these telescoped images of Jesus, the Childermass, the chumminess of commercialized Xmas, which merge with the threat of the Rocket and its obscene payload, are ultimately derived from a minor scene in Tannhäuser. In the story of William Slothrop and the pigs and On Preterition (554-56), we would guess that stars must show up, and they do. But the Evening Star with all its associations of comfort and security is literally exploded in Gravity's Rainbow--on the last page, on the reader's head.

So Wagner has reached far into the heart of our study, and he reaches by personal extension even farther. The original legends of Tannhäuser did not associate the hero with the Singing Contest at the Wartburg, but Wagner did, for obvious reasons. This Sangerkrieg or Kriegspiel fuses the Tannhäuser figure with that of Heinrich von der Ofterdingen, and in Gravity's Rainbow we cannot fail to notice the singing duels on pages 356, 387, and 610. These I presume to be inspired by Wagner in Tannhäuser and Die Meistersinger, as well as by the traditional operatic brindisi or chanson a boire. Other Wagnerian properties are more German than specifically Wagnerian. But let us look at something that is indirectly Wagnerian, and musical.

The many references to Hänsel and Gretel, in the musical context I have been trying to establish, should remind us of Engelbert Humperdinck before we think of the Brothers Grimm. Humperdinck's little masterpiece of composition, for which the libretto was a children's play written by his sister, is associated by tradition (and for no other reason) with Christmas. In that sense, with its happy ending, it is another "Starwish"; the siblings spend most of the opera whistling in the dark, as it were. The innocent are saved. (Wagner himself engaged Humperdinck to be the musical tutor to his son Siegfried, after Humperdinck had proved himself by service to the master, such as helping copy the orchestral parts to Parsifal.) It has been said that the most perfect Wagnerian music-drama is Hänsel und Gretel, with its glowing counterpoint and its fulfillment of Wagner's strictures. And it is perhaps worth adding that later in life Humperdinck wrote a larger, darker Märchenoper, Die Königskinder, that did not end cozily at all--in that sense it was more Grimm, and in its great scope and tragic end, Humperdinck consummated his own Gravity's Rainbow.

For on the German side of things, Gravity's Rainbow is very much a Märchenoper. It is as "spooky as an old northern fairy tale" (54). The Brothers Grimm (74) haunt the periphery; we will find gremlins (151), and a "deep pool in the forest" (152); the violence of the war has liberated trolls and dryads (367). Slothrop's sexual encounter with Greta Erdmann features a Black Forest elves' whip (396). At Zwölfkinder we see a goat, a bridge, and a troll (398). Pökler fears his mysterious daughter is a changeling out of some Märchen (417), and they see at Zwölfkinder in addition "fairy-tales, legends [. . .] the elf king and his queen [. . .] a splendid retinue of dwarves and sprites" (419). We have already noted the association of elves and rockets (431). Metamorphoses such as that from "toad to prince, prince to fabulous monster" (660) cannot be unexpected, for we are looking at "illustrations for children" (759).

The Brothers Grimm did not invent the Märchen und Sagen (97); they were tapping the mythology of a people. The mythological world of romantic opera

similarly gains much of its power from primordial images. Perhaps the most fundamental such symbol in German music is the Forest, from the Wolf's Glen scene in Der Freischütz through Wagner (via Liszt's Wild Jagd and "hunting horn" passages in Schumann and Brahms) to the exquisite evocation of the forest in Humperdinck's version of an old tale. The many allusions to the story of Hänsel and Gretel summon all these legends and their demonic association, and give them a modern twist.

So the Oven is there on every page from 94 through 99, the "Oven-game," the "Oven-state" (102), the "Oven" again (103), the "Oven-game" again (106), and towards the end this threat: "The Oven we fattened you for will glow" (751). Here the fires in the witch's oven are associated with the combustion chamber of the V-2, but more broadly considered, these references point toward other ovens, for after Auschwitz, the connotations of the word oven have been forever altered. The dense cluster of allusions from pages 94 to 107 makes the reader reconstrue the old fairy tale in new and terrible ways: the fattening goose, the strayed children, the wood-wife in the edible house, the captivity, crumbs and sugar smears, u.s.w. Hänsel and Gretel (174) will always be "alone in the forest" (176), the "true forest" (239) where the demons include Maxwell's. In the Zone it is the Evil Hour (374-75), and the witches, such as Geli Tripping, will celebrate their Walpurgisnacht (after Goethe, Mendelssohn, Gounod) on the Brocken. Agents of Evil, as well as the mediocre and uncaring, assist in the Slaughter of the Preterite, which is only another form of the Massacre of the Innocents.

And this is the monstrous film that we have watched and listened to--not read, where Götterdämmerung and Weisse Sandwüste von Neumexiko (482) exist side by side. The fictitious German Western yokes by violence together two different channels of allusion and unites them on film. Its title also points to the Proving Grounds at White Sands, New Mexico, where, after the War, captured V-2's were brought for study and testing. This film is, in effect, a miniature of Gravity's Rainbow, itself a film on paper with the effect of

Alpdrücken. And in the tradition of movies like the Old Karloff/Lugosi The Black Cat, bits and pieces of nineteenth century music are continually conjured. (The Black Cat, being a parable about the slaughter of the First World War and the consequent dissolution of the Hapsburg Empire, is not about what it seems to be about, either.) Kazoos and harmonicas and inane popular tunes interrupt but do not contradict the "tissue of irrelevance" that is Gravity's Rainbow, for its logic (in which the Japanese Ensign talks like John Wayne) is as much that of a Bugs Bunny cartoon as it is of the sober reasoning of Max Weber, the abstract beauties of the calculus, the cosmic imperialism of Wernher von Braun, or the angelic summonings of Rilke.

Dowling College

Notes

¹ Edward Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia," in Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 161.

² William Vesterman has discussed the issue of song in his "Pynchon's Poetry," in Mindful Pleasures, 101-12.

³ Mendelson, 164.

⁴ Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973), 3.

⁵ Chapter 3 of David Cowart's Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1980), entitled "Making the Unreal Reel: Film in Gravity's Rainbow," is a worthy discussion emphasizing specifics such as King Kong and the larger subject of film itself. See also Mack Smith's "The Paracinematic Reality of Gravity's Rainbow," Pynchon Notes, 9 (1982), 17-37.

⁶ David Cowart has gone deep into the relationships of the German film industry and the V-2, both historically and fictionally, in his essay "Cinematic Auguries of the Third Reich in Gravity's Rainbow," Literature/Film Quarterly, 6, No. 4 (1978), 364-70. I would add that this Germanic and cinematic background is partly shared by Brock Brower's novel The Late Great Creature (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

⁷ J. B. Steane, The Grand Tradition: Seventy Years of Singing on Record, 1900-1970 (New York: Scribner's, 1974), 581.

A rich exposition of "Music in Pynchon" can be found in Chapter 4 of David Cowart's Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion. Cowart shows us the young Pynchon learning music with friends. When he hears Madama Butterfly, he appropriates it for V. The "Catalogue Aria" from Don Giovanni turns up in both V. and Gravity's Rainbow, as well as "Entropy" and "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna." The young Pynchon becomes a Wagner fan as well as a jazz buff. Expanding on Manon Lescaut and The Rite of Spring in V., on Bartok, Vivaldi, and Stockhausen in The Crying of Lot 49 (not to mention "the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto") as well as on "Bird" Parker, etc., Cowart gives us a valuable survey.

⁹ Thomas Pynchon, V. (Rpt. New York: Bantam, 1964), 385.

¹⁰ David Cowart gives a different interpretation in his note, "Pynchon's Use of the Tannhäuser-Legend in Gravity's Rainbow," Notes on Contemporary Literature, 9, No. 3 (1979), 2-3.

¹¹ Edward Mendelson identifies "The Book" as "Pavlov's second series of 'Lectures on Conditioned Reflexes,' Conditioned Reflexes and Psychiatry (1941)" in his essay "Gravity's Encyclopedia," cited above, 182. My identification of Wolfram's O du, mein holder Abendstern is a similar--accurate--shot in the dark.