

# "His Kipling Period": Bakhtinian Reflections on Annotation, Heteroglossia and Terrorism in the Pynchon Trade

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Upperclassman: Do you like Kipling?

Coed: I don't know, I've never kiplled.

While not a dismal science, annotation is at best an inexact one—especially when applied to a text as polymathically perverse as *Gravity's Rainbow*. Like other readers, annotators are burdened by their own plots, their "terministic screens," as Kenneth Burke would have it, as well as by the chimeric nature of their archaeologies: the haphazardly attained, hermetical cultural literacy of another human being. One is not surprised that information not tending directly to support the annotator's thesis occasionally slips through the cracks or that the annotator might stop looking when he or she seems to have found an adequate source. This notwithstanding, while most of us expect readings of literary works (even those readings which can be said to have motivated the annotator's undertaking) to change or be disputed over time, we maintain a faith sweet to behold in the accuracy of verifiable annotations: the abortifacient properties of pennyroyal in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the intertextual and biographical resonances of the given name of Humbert's nymphet Dolores, the color of Wehrmacht undershirts versus that of SS undershirts in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Since the annotation can be verified, it must have been, goes the reasoning. Why bother to check it out again?

A more significant social-critical problem, annotation as terrorism, is implied in the accuracy problem sketched above. The annotator's desire to nail down a fact, a source, a meaning has the ripple effect of establishing two Authoritative discourses—I am using the phrase in its Bakhtinian sense of the "fully complete" utterance which "demands our unconditional allegiance" (343)—where none should be. First, in demonstrating how the verifiabiles interlock neatly to support the novelist's overarching design, the annotator must work from the premise that the novel is a single monologic phrase, fully under the author's control. Without this assumption, any assemblage of unearthed facts loses its value except as a curiosity, at best an insight into the collector's particular mania. Some of us collect string, some tinfoil; the

string collector sees string everywhere, the tinfoil collector tinfoil. Because of this premise, the annotator's project effectively imposes on the novel what, from a Bakhtinian perspective, it cannot have: fully self-sufficient singleness of meaning. Second, the annotation performs as an executive arm of that Authority, closing off, via the power invested in it by its promise of accuracy, the way into "interanimating relationships with new [ideological] contexts"—the life-giving "*struggle*" among competing verbal formulations and the self—opened by the fundamental condition of the novel: heteroglossia (346).

With a novel so cacophonous and sprawling as *Gravity's Rainbow*, a tangled economy is at work. Steven Weisenburger's description of the genesis of *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* illustrates the process by which the reader's "basic" desire for security, for a coherent experience—"the simple when and where of story events"—culminates in the erection of multiple, but mutually supporting Authorities—"source study, encyclopedia, handbook, motif index, dictionary, explicator, gazetteer, and list of textual errors." Despite Weisenburger's commendable intention not to close but to "open the reading in new and unsuspected ways" (2), his annotations tend toward establishing a single totalizing reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*, as Bernard Duyfhuizen has pointed out.<sup>1</sup> Totalization, as I have suggested, results from the desire for order on at least three levels, authorial, critical and readerly, working on and spurred into action by the dangerous freedom offered by the dialogic text. As *Vineland's* Frenesi Gates, analyzing her response to *CHiPs* reruns, understands, the impulse toward freedom is bound up in a sadomasochistic eroticizing of the man in uniform.

A remote but no less interesting ripple of this effect is the arousal of a sort of widespread terrorizing of readers everywhere, such as may be seen particularly and problematically in the Pynchon industry, especially in the nailing down of *Gravity's Rainbow*. What casual reader dare navigate that text without the assurance of friendly cops along the way that there is a destination that can be found by sticking to the safe main streets? What professional reader does not itch to contribute at least one nail, one brick to the monolith, any monolith, so long as it competes for the tourist trade at destination's end?

What follows arises from just such a dialectic. I begin with a helpful correction of an unverified verifiable in Weisenburger's generally useful *Companion*—as one inky drudge with aspirations to Authority to another. After establishing the "correct" referent of a single elliptical statement in *GR* and comparing the readings generated by competing annotations, I will show how expansively dialogism operates within and without the boundaries of the text and how one might satisfy the felt

need for authority in such a way as to foreground and amplify the struggles opened by the text.

The passage in question introduces Pirate Prentice's waking-dream intervention with the giant Adenoid. If Weisenburger is correct about *GR*'s "web of narrative inferences" (7), it should link itself to a network of on-going critical analyses of the wages of empire, not only in *GR*, but in "Under the Rose," *V.*, and *Mason & Dixon* as well. But, by introducing competing contradictory modes of discourse, the passage does more than simply confirm the narrative's intelligible monologic design. Weisenburger offers annotations for the two phrases I have italicized:

In 1935 he had his first episode *outside* any condition of known sleep—it was *during his Kipling Period, beastly Fuzzy-Wuzzies as far as eye could see, dracunculiasis and Oriental sore* rampant among the troops, no beer for a month, wireless being jammed by other Powers who would be masters of these horrid blacks, God knows why, and all folklore broken down, *no Cary Grant larking in and out slipping elephant medicine in the punchbowls* out here. (13; first emphasis Pynchon's)

I will begin with the error of verification in Weisenburger's annotation of the second phrase since it bears on the limits placed on competing discourses introduced by the first. Weisenburger writes:

A reference to the 1952 Ben Hecht and Howard Hawks comedy *Monkey Business*, in which Cary Grant, as chemist Barnaby Fulton, develops a marvelous elixir, a kind of psychedelic. When they accidentally ingest it, Barnaby and his co-workers regress to a zany, playful childhood. (21)

Though Pynchon's narrative relish for psychedelics, zany childhoods and kooky chemists is evident in *GR* and elsewhere, settling on *Monkey Business* as the source of the reference raises more problems than it solves. First is the dating of the movie. Although there is one other anachronistic reference to film in *GR*—Blodgett Waxwing's twenty-seven viewings, as of early 1945, of the 1955 *Return of Jack Slade* (GR 247)—pointed out by Edward Mendelson (184) and adequately rationalized by Weisenburger (131), there is no adequate explanation, other than sloppiness, for this textually prior anachronism. In the Waxwing instance, it is *GR*'s narrator qua narrator who makes the anachronistic gesture, perhaps for the very reason Weisenburger outlines. For whatever reason, though, this particular narrative voice has well established itself by this point in the novel as walking larger

cultural and historical fields than do the characters whose adventures it relates. By contrast, in the Prentice instance, the narrative voice has slipped into at least partial identification with Prentice's own consciousness. When *GR*'s narrative voice slips into partial identification with a character's consciousness—what the handbooks style “limited omniscience”—it does not ordinarily possess uncharacteristic information or insight. In 1944, Prentice could not articulate the experiences of his Kipling period via allusion to a film released ten years later; neither can the narrative voice when the consciousnesses are linked.<sup>2</sup>

A second problem is that, even had Pynchon inexplicably chosen to ignore the above narrative principle, *Monkey Business* does not fit the tenor of the passage well enough to justify the choice. Prentice/the narrator laments the absence of Cary Grant in relation to Prentice's participation in the exercise of British imperialism, not screwball science. And Barnaby Fulton does not slip elephant medicine into a punchbowl anywhere in the movie—as Weisenburger notes, the ingestion is accidental—nor do the characters ever refer to the youth elixir as “elephant medicine.”

The clear allusion in this passage is to the 1939 film *Gunga Din*, based ever so loosely on the Kipling ballad of the same name, directed by George Stevens and starring Sam Jaffe as the eponymous Fuzzy-Wuzzy, Cary Grant and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., as the kooky kolonial-service kut-ups who come to admire him, and Joan Fontaine as Grant's rival for Fairbanks's attentions. The screenplay by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur reworks the elements of amorous and professional rivalry treated in *The Front Page*, moving the action out of the newsroom and into nineteenth-century India. In an early scene which establishes just what fun those military blokes enforcing England's colonial rule could be, Grant's character sneaks into Fairbanks and Fontaine's engagement party and slips nothing less than elephant medicine into the punch, knocking his buddy and the rest of the garrison for a loop.

The scene is tangential to the central “you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din” action-adventure plot, in which Gunga Din gives the last full measure battling the Thuggee cult (or freedom fighters, depending on whose side you're on—but that's the point, isn't it?); but it does contribute to establishing the notion of Anglo-imperialism as Not Such a Bad Thing After All, certainly preferable to the German alternative looming in 1939, as well as propagandistically enforcing American sympathies with our Lovable Cousins Across the Water.<sup>3</sup> That dracunculiasis and Oriental sore, as well as the weighty philosophical issues attendant upon “the white man's burden”—the exercise by might

and for no clear reason of mastery over races one's own styles "horrid" —do not infect the *Gunga Din* representation of Anglo-imperialism provides a more likely cause for Prentice's rue in this passage than do the academic hijinks of *Monkey Business*.

Given Prentice's wistful characterization of his Kipling period as absent the fun and frolic of *Gunga Din*, it becomes clear that Prentice is recollecting not, as Weisenburger's interpretive annotation of the first phrase suggests, "his reading some of the author's books, like *The Jungle Books* (1894–96), *The Captains Courageous* (1897), or *Kim* (1901)" (21), but rather his actual and not-much-fun involvement in the colonial enterprises so thoroughly romanticized by Kipling in poems like "Gunga Din" (1890), "Danny Deever" (1890) and "The White Man's Burden" (1899). Prentice need not have served in India in 1935 (though, a career officer, he could have been posted there anytime until 1947), but *GR* makes clear in the Adenoid adventure which the passage introduces that Prentice has, at least from 1935 until the novel's present, served in maintaining England's rule over that two-fifths of the globe populated largely by "big greasy nose[d]" (13), dark-skinned people. Given his age and background, Prentice may indeed have read Kipling as a schoolboy, but he is no literary bystander. Rather, the passage marks this dangerously likeable character as part of colonialism's executive arm just as he is, for at least two-thirds of the narrative, part of the terroristic pursuit of Slothrop.

Here is where the authority of the "correct" referent works to undermine Authority. The Weisenburger annotation effectively closes off the passage by marking it as monologic character description driven by a characteristically arcane Pynchonesque pop culture allusion. One's job as reader is to admire the master's facility at making hours of afternoon-matinee TV-watching pay off. But establish the authoritative text for Prentice's Kipling period, and the number of competing, destabilizing discourses opened by this brief passage multiplies provocatively. The passage still functions structurally as a bit of character description, but, like Prentice, the reader is forced to take in, unmasked by folklore, a babble of ideologies—all of them, fascinatingly enough for our purposes, taking stands about Authority, terror, monologism. The first voice is, as I have sketched above, the Stevens film in its context as anti-Fascist/pro-Anglo-American imperialist propaganda.

In the film, Fascism is figured in the dictatorial leader of the bloodthirsty, terrorist Thuggee cult. "Kill for the love of killing! Kill for the sake of killing! Kill! Kill! Kill!" he is wont to opine. The movie imputes imperialist motives to the band, who want to spread their Kali-worshipping ideology beyond the borders of India and into the world,

glossing over entirely the eruption of the cult as a revolt against Britain's prior invasion of the subcontinent. By contrast, the "good natured" (Petri 80) violence of Anglo-American imperialism emerges as life-loving (if property-damaging) tolerance for one's fellow man, especially for those cute little brown guys who, like Gunga Din, admire and wish to emulate our good-natured selves. The frame for this fun is the maintenance of empire, as the movie makes clear by mirroring in its opening slapstick scene (in which the boys punch out a dozen or so spray-painted extras and destroy a native public house over a fraudulent treasure map) the dead-serious penultimate scene: the regiment wipes out the Thuggee cult, represented by hundreds of spray-painted extras, preserving empire and protecting Good Natives Everywhere.

But it is only a short step from "War is fun!"—the implied motto of Din's garrison—to "Kill! Kill! Kill!" as Franz Hoellering, reviewing *Gunga Din* for *The Nation*, pointed out:

If [*Gunga Din*] had been made by a German or an Italian company and had shown Italian soldiers killing Abyssinians or Japanese invaders murdering Chinese peasants, the government-controlled fascist producers could have used the script by our versatile twins Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur without changing one line or one action. . . . Three Black Shirts could not indulge in an orgy of brutality with more gusto than do the three Khaki Shirts . . . who dash laughingly across the screen killing right and left. (158–59)

Thus the film brings into *GR* two competing discourses on empire tied up in filmic representations of mayhem, with film itself as a competing—immediate, emotional, personality-driven (it is Cary Grant Prentice misses, not Sergeant MacChesney)—mode of discourse with the novel. Whispering also on the edges of the passage are contemporary discourses on race and skin color, from Fascist mechanics of racial purity, to the Pynchon narrator's meditations on "shit 'n' Shinola," to the film's paternalistic preference for "the stupid Hindu who falls for the 'regimentals' of India's oppressors" (Hoellering 159). Finally, though *Gunga Din* the movie effectively excludes any Indian voice from its filmic representation, its being in the world made an opening for that competing discourse: the film was banned as offensive in Bombay (Petri 84).

By a curious trick—or "bad joke," as Hoellering has it (159)—*Gunga Din*, which has pushed Kipling's actual poem to its uttermost margins (except for the sentimental-tragic<sup>4</sup> invoking of its title character in the closing scenes), returns poet and poem to its center in the last scene,

in which “Rudyard Kipling” appears, writes his poem and allows it to be read at Gunga Din’s funeral. The joke is seconded by *GR*, which invokes the movie by figuring Prentice’s past as his Kipling period while not naming the movie with which Prentice wishes to replace actual experience. At this point two more oppositional discursive strains enter uninvited into the passage: the poem proper and the wartime refurbishment of Kipling, particularly as evidenced in Faber and Faber’s 1941 release of *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse Made by T. S. Eliot*.

The poem is best dealt with first, since it is recited in full in the movie—is essentially its last word. Despite its folksy meter and dialect, “Gunga Din” comes closer to returning to the Kipling period that Prentice would and Stevens did repress. Beyond all that larking about lies the moral equivalent of Oriental sore. The poem cheerfully admits that good-guy imperialism expresses itself through the terroristic exercise of authority: “Then we wopped ‘im ‘cause ‘e couldn’t serve us all” (29); “I’ve belted you an’ flayed you” (83). At the same time, it exhibits that casual racism which masquerades as affection—“An’ for all ‘is dirty ‘ide / ‘E was white, clear white, inside” (44–45)<sup>5</sup>—and which allows the whole enterprise to distinguish itself from imperialism of the bad-guy variety: “Kill! Kill for the love of killing!” What the poem does repress is any political context for the fighting, which the narrative enters and exits in medias res. The implication is that “the fight” (53) (and behind the fight, empire) is a natural condition, like “Injia’s sunny clime,” “Where the ‘eat would make your bloomin’ eyebrows crawl” (7, 26)—perhaps even a product of that clime, since even in Hell, “Where it’s always double drill and no canteen” (77), the fight goes on, must go on, “God knows why” (GR 13)—with terrorism a necessary, if regrettable, byproduct.

Judging from Eliot’s introduction to *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse*, Kipling’s literary reputation, always problematic given public perception of his work as more journalistic than literary, more occasional than enduring, had further waned by 1941 as a result of increasing discomfort with his illiberal politics. Eliot is so scrupulous in offering counter-readings of Kipling’s life and verse in the context of contemporary geopolitics as effectively to establish a counter-voice to his own. Thus, Eliot admits that Kipling’s anti-democratic leanings mark him as a Tory but argues that “a critical attitude toward ‘democracy,’” far from implying “a friendly attitude towards fascism,” correctly sees Fascism as “the extreme degradation of democracy” (32). One suspects that only Eliot could make so nice a distinction. That Kipling was not just anti-democratic but a booster for imperialism, Eliot also admits, but, as did Stevens, only while carefully marking the boundaries between the good-guy and bad-guy varieties. Kipling “simply . . . believed the

British Empire to be a good thing [and] that the British have a greater aptitude for ruling than other people" because they are more "kindly, incorruptible and un-self-seeking" than other races (33). This belief Eliot approves in 1941, going so far as to assert that patriotic nationalism is a "proper theme for verse" (28)—rather an unusual statement from the man who, eight years earlier, in the Harvard lectures collected as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, had defined poetry as the "pure" alternative to such compromised social discourses as theology, politics, economics, sociology, concluding that the poet should not write poetry "defined in terms of something else" (147). *The Use of Poetry* makes no accommodation for verse—neither as a legitimately discursive branch of poetry nor as, in its own right, a worthwhile subject of criticism. But by 1941, not only does Eliot approve the political definition of Kipling's verse; he agrees with Kipling's belief in the superiority of British imperialism: "For too many people, an Empire has become something to apologise for . . . and patriotism itself is expected to be inarticulate" (28).

In these multiple conflicting voices, the passage concerning Prentice's Kipling period opens itself (and *GR*'s critique of empire) to struggle among competing verbal formulations. Stevens can represent imperialism without its ugly side effects, but cannot do without a reason for the good guys to be in India in the first place—versions of the idea that Anglo-American imperialism is created by the Other's inability to save itself from its own worst impulses have been advanced in imperialism's defense in the United States since at least 1898—so he invents the threat of the Thuggee cult. Kipling feels no need to defend British presence in India—older by about a century than American imperialism, it has the character of a natural phenomenon—but is willing to admit that there are real human costs. Eliot wants to return the political, in a timely patriotic reissue of patriotic verse, but raise the whole to a literary level safely above the fray. As a national treasure—whose position among the class of great versifiers "is not only high, but unique" (40)—Kipling is as indicative of British superiority as Shakespeare and Dryden. Pynchon's liberalism would require that both passage and novel be read politically as negative critiques of empire, but the novel's (indeed, the oeuvre's) emphasis on larking about, both as a compositional technique and as the endorsed form of rebellion against Authority, leans the whole close enough to the Stevens version of *Gunga Din* to undermine, at least temporarily, the negative critique. Weisenburger's misidentification of the movie alluded to is symptomatic: the sheer weight of monkey business in *GR* combines with the text's characteristic allusive reticence to lead the annotator to assume it is all just *Monkey Business*.



Complicating the effect of the novel's emphasis on larking about is yet another discursive mode: the literary. Here we return in some ways to Eliot,<sup>6</sup> in the shape of the modernist rejection of direct political discourse in the literary novel. Despite other violence it may do to the modernist aesthetic, *GR*—like the bulk of Pynchon's oeuvre, with the possible and limited exception of *Vineland*—refuses to engage its political subject directly, cloaking it instead by casting it some three decades in the past (dating from *GR*'s publication) and adopting throughout an indirect mode of discourse. What political critique does emerge in the accretion of plot incidents is a diffuse distaste for oppressive Authority in any form—extending even to authoritative political utterance by the narrative voice. In effect, the ideology of this novel places it in a Bakhtinian pickle. Opposed for aesthetic and ideological reasons to the overt political statement, yet committed for aesthetic and ideological reasons to allusive and rhetorical richness, *GR* is unable or unwilling to mount a consistent single, central voice against which the multiple alternative discourses may struggle. A conservative reading of the text's commentary on empire, comparable to Stevens's propagandistic rereading of "Gunga Din" (empire is fun, as long as it's not Fascist) and to Prentice's attempt to reread his own Kipling period through Stevens's film, is possible. It does not matter that *GR*'s delineations of Fascist terrorism include Anglo-American as well as Nazi varieties.<sup>7</sup>

I began by arguing that the annotation of so rich a text as *GR* must be accompanied by a reflexive application of Bakhtin's principles of dialogism. Finding the referent for a phrase cannot be an end in itself any more than finding a phone number is. Second, the referent opens the text not simply to one competing or assenting utterance but, potentially, to all utterances in some way attached to it. The better analogy is not a single phone number but a party line or, for the youngsters, an internet chatroom. Third, while *GR*'s generally left, anti-imperialist tendencies are not countered by every competing utterance introduced by an allusive passage (of which the Kipling-period passage is only one among many), and are, indeed, bolstered by the political contexts of its 1973 publication, the text's extension of its rejection of Authority even to its narrative voice, and its commitment to a modernist aesthetic of detachment effectively neutralize the central narrative voice. According to Bakhtin, the dialogizing foreground requires some background—"the works . . . in their entirety, taken as utterances of their *author*" (349)—against which to operate. Without even taking into account the dialogic action implicit in characters' language and the novel's pastiche of discursive modes, but simply considering the gross quantity of allusion, quotation, parody and lore

embedded phrase by phrase in *GR*, it is difficult to say where in the novel one might find an utterance that can be taken purely as that of the author.<sup>8</sup> The “author” of *GR* is better at hiding than even Thomas Pynchon for the simple reason that the “author” is a man without qualities.

Well, almost. One final set of discursive struggles opened by the Kipling-period passage points to an enwrapping heterosexual discourse which extends palpably if invisibly to Pynchon’s works in their entirety. The discourse is invisible for the same reason the discourse of empire is invisible in Kipling’s poem. Heterosexuality is as natural for the author of these works as Anglo-imperialism was for Kipling. Heterosexual monologism in *GR* and elsewhere determines one quality of the author as well as indicating the generational limits of Pynchon’s liberalism.

In my brief account of the plot of *Gunga Din*, I implied that the relation between the Grant and Fairbanks characters was homoerotic. Though that might surprise Hecht and MacArthur, one need hardly be Leslie Fiedler, T. E. Lawrence, Thomas Pynchon or The Village People to read even the most *Boys’ Life*-ish representation of sweaty boys’ fun as preferable to and endangered by unconscious, un-fun female sexuality.<sup>9</sup> The boys’ fun of *Gunga Din*, like most of the boys’ fun of *GR*, is specifically marked as penile/projectile: punching, shooting, bursting through windows and doors, accompanied by booze in bottles rather than lemonade in cups. The Grant character explicitly identifies the fiancée as his rival and laments the loss of his buddy in terms of lost fun. The Fontaine character and her subplot recede, and Fairbanks returns to the masculine fold only when the opportunity arises to engage in some homosocial real fun.

As if extrapolating from *Gunga Din*, *GR* more specifically marks colonialism as homoerotic boys’ fun—geopolitical dominance as reified homosexual desire—and intimates that the outcome of this desire is sterility or death. The primary point of this linkage in the text is, of course, Weissmann/Blicero, whose iconized desire is the penile/projectile Rocket 00000. That desire and its outcome are literalized in Weissmann’s dalliance with the Herero boy Enzian during the crushed Herero uprising of 1922 (99–101)—presaged in the sterile (pre-Fascist) orgies recounted in chapter 9 of *V*.—as well as in the final disposition of Gottfried, but these are only the most obvious threads in a text whose warp is the cartoon chase after the Jamf-colonized Slothropian penis—the object of desire of every masculine “Power who would be master” in the novel. That the boys’ club’s homosexual project is occasionally sidelined by the boy Slothrop’s club’s frankly heterosexual one returns us to the scene from *Gunga Din* alluded to in Prentice’s reverie, in which the Fairbanks character, sidelined by his engagement

to Fontaine, is punished by and retrieved into the men's club via the elephant medicine.

Surrounding and competing with larky boys' fun are homosexual figures of a more sinister-comic cast. *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *GR* all give us versions of Nazi-drag faggots, while *Vineland's* fascistic Brock Vond, in a textbook illustration of triangulated desire, buggers semi-desiring Weed Atman via shared intercourse with Frenesi Gates. While popular writers of Pynchon's generation often code the villain, whether individual or institutional, as homosexual, and *GR* may simply be lampooning popular pornographic or propagandistic staples, the novel's overall negative treatment of overt homosexuality is not balanced by its ambivalent endorsement of some types of boys' fun over others.<sup>10</sup> Could Pynchon be working out some larger discourse on imperialism or authority as the product of reciprocal desire between colonized and colonizer? Examples of the willing, often sexual, subjugation of the colonized/preterite abound in Pynchon's oeuvre and are colored homosexual more often than not. In *Vineland*, Vond advances a theory of reciprocity which Prairie's final scene does not entirely contradict.<sup>11</sup> *Mason & Dixon* has an air of inevitability in the narrative's treatment of reciprocal desire between oppressor and oppressed, with the laying down of the line of Authority across the continent and the boys' fun attendant on that penetrative act marking *M&D* as an Ur-narrative of Americans' complicit desire to dominate and be dominated. Is the endlessly recursive novel, such as *GR*, a literary form of domination actuated by a similarly reciprocal desire?

Duyfhuizen closed his 1989 review essay with a call for book-length examinations of *GR* via various contemporary theoretical lenses, among them Bakhtinian theory (88). More than a decade later, the Bakhtinian slot remains open. I suspect that is partly because the book-length treatment imposes its own monologic terror on the text—thus is antithetical to good practice of Bakhtin's theory of the novel—and partly because, as my scrutiny of one 75-word passage illustrates, a dialogic reading of the whole of *GR* threatens to expand to infinity with no promise of any certitude gained about the novel. If untheorized annotation erects over the text an authority of Kinbotean proportions (speaking of homoerotic colonization as an expression of reciprocal desire), a thoroughgoing tracing of competing discourses, while not imposing monologism on an inherently dialogic form, risks reducing the text to a set of more or less equivalent, competing erections.

Perhaps the latter is Not Such a Bad Thing After All. In following the tendencies of the dialogues opened in the Kipling passage, I have been led to some disquieting questions about the limits of *GR's* presumptively left (at least anti-authoritarian) politics. Those questions

may best be addressed by extensive preliminary inquiry into the novel's politics to establish a baseline—to find a pure authorial utterance, if any—followed by a careful plotting of the curve of that politics across the oeuvre. Such an inquiry might reveal as much about the politics of the Pynchon trade as about the works themselves. This would require viewing the oeuvre as operating in dialogic relation with itself and its criticism, a willingness to risk self-contradiction, bafflement, perhaps even incoherence. Bakhtin's work was above all risky, anti-authoritarian in the extreme, and opposed to terrorism in all its forms. It offers us not so much a mechanism for managing complex forms as the means to reject mastery, security, colonial management as values. Imagine: How might such a turn away from the ideology of authority, from monologic criticism, shape Pynchon studies, or literary criticism and scholarship in general, in the twenty-first century?

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Duyfhuizen's review essay addresses the problem of totalizing readings in the bulk of *GR* criticism and points out that the annotations in *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* of necessity serve Weisenburger's particular reading.

<sup>2</sup>Here the Bakhtinian reader must walk a fine line. In his comments on the highly dialogic *Crime and Punishment* sprinkled throughout *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin grants that Dostoevsky (or any novelist, for that matter) exercises authority over the process and methods of composition of the text via the "higher stylistic unity," even attempts to extend that authority over the heterogenous discourses the novel forces its author to include (as when the novelist sequesters discordant utterances in the "character zone"). It is rather in the materials brought into the zone of the work by the choice of method that both heteroglossia and polyphony occur (see especially 260–63).

<sup>3</sup>The propaganda value of *Gunga Din* as "'the sort of production that swells national pride'" was noted in its generally positive reviews (qtd. in Petri 81); see in particular, Eileen Creelman, "The New Movies: A Smashing Good Melodrama at the Music Hall" (*New York Sun* 27 Jan. 1939). In his largely uncritical survey of Stevens's films, Bruce Petri notes that "Filmed as it was during increasing displays of dictatorial power by Hitler and Mussolini, most recently the Austrian Anschluss of March 13, 1938, *Gunga Din* becomes a powerfully oblique appeal to the American people to stave off the demonic acquisitiveness of fascism" (81), and reports on the director and principal players' self-conscious declarations of independence and spirit of friendly American rivalric camaraderie during filming.

<sup>4</sup>As opposed to *Gunga Din*'s earlier, sentimental-comic turns.

<sup>5</sup>Din's "whiteness" is qualified twice in the poem. In the lines just quoted, he is "white inside / *When 'e went to tend the wounded under fire*" (45-46; emphasis added). That is, Din achieves whiteness only when he serves white interests against those of his people. The bhisti's final translation to whiteness occurs as he loses his life carrying the injured speaker "To where a dooli lay / An' a bullet come an' drilled the beggar clean" (70-71). However, in the unsegregated vision of Hell with which the poem closes, one finds Din still, so to speak, in the service industry, "Givin' drink to poor damned souls" (79). By contrast, in the poem's opening verse, Din is merely "whiter" than his fellows: "Of all them blackfaced crew / The finest man I knew" (10-11).

<sup>6</sup>With the exception of two allusions to his poetry (GR 35, 121; see Weisenburger 34, 77), T. S. Eliot himself does not appear in *GR*, an omission I find curious given his literal presence in England at the time and the number of popular and high-art celebrities who do appear in the novel. Perhaps, as with Kipling striding to the podium in Stevens's movie and thus into *GR* by the back door, Eliot too is lurking just around the corner.

<sup>7</sup>Compare the case of Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *Ox-Bow Incident* (1940; film, dir. William A. Wellman, 1943). That far less dialogically rich meditation on Americans' propensity for mob violence and American labor's willing subjection to the interests of capital was consistently read by reviewers as an allegory of German Fascism despite Clark's many published assertions that he was delineating an essentially American characteristic. The U.S. government read *Ox-Bow* as anti-Nazi rather than anti-capitalist propaganda: an Armed Services edition (#1134) was available for Slothrop's everywhere by early 1941.

<sup>8</sup>This complex is further complicated if we accept Joseph Tabbi's assertion that Prentice functions as an author figure (98).

<sup>9</sup>The 1920s cartoon which supplied my epigraph subtly reinforces this threat of female sexuality. The cartoon can have arisen only in response to women's invasion of college campuses during the first decades of the twentieth century. The upperclassman can be read as challenging the coed's qualifications to enter the heretofore masculine world of the university by testing her literacy in and liking for boys' books and barracks ballads (that is, the patriarchal canon). Besides showing her (feminine) ignorance, the coed, as women do when they intrude into a man's world, responds by interpreting his question as sexual, interjecting a note of heterosexuality into the homosexual sphere of the college campus.

<sup>10</sup>Reviewing the top ten bestsellers of the year before *GR* was published, Gore Vidal noted about *The Eiger Sanction* and *The Winds of War*:

Since kikes and niggers can no longer be shown as bad people, only commies (pre-Nixon) and fags are certain to arouse the loathing of all decent fiction addicts. . . . Mr. Wouk perpetuates the myth that the SS were all fags. This is now an article of faith with many uneducated

Americans on the ground that to be a fag is the worst thing that could befall anyone next to falling into the hands of a fag sadist. (9, 15)

*GR* may simply be lampooning pop fiction's reliance on the fag villain, but, again, the narrative's emphasis on larky neutrality obscures any authorial position contrary to the popular ideology.

<sup>11</sup>"Brock Vond's genius was to have seen in the activities of the sixties left not threats to order but unacknowledged desires for it" (269). The three generations of Gates women seem to experience a common sexual response to men in uniform. But whether the women are cast as vectors for homosexual dominance or simply function as women in a pattern of heterosexual patriarchal dominance is open to discussion.

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