

***Gravity's Rainbow* as Metaphoric Narrative: Film, Fairy Tale and Fantasy in Pynchon's Germany**

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It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors.

—Jorge Luis Borges, "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal"

What, then, is Truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"

Since the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow* (hereafter *GR*) in 1973, critics have debated the overall message or unitary meaning (the doctrine, if you will) of the narrative, many attempting, especially very early on, to isolate one particular motivation or worldview as the dominant one.¹ Since the early 1980s, however, a near consensus has emerged that *GR* is polyphonic: that is, that the many voices or paradigms in the narrative cannot be reduced to, or even subordinated by, one voice or ideology. One of the consequences of this consensus is a tendency in current Pynchon studies to treat the novel as what Edward Mendelson has termed an "encyclopedic narrative," or as what Charles Clerc calls "a liberal education" (19), a repository of knowledge, albeit in code, open to elucidation and clarification. While Mendelson's and Clerc's terms are not universally espoused by other Pynchon critics, the sheer range and depth of reference in *GR* make the hunting down and explication of details a natural, even a necessary and welcome activity.

There is a problem, however, with the principle and the politics, though not with most of the practices, of the microanalytic interpretive approach. When a critic focuses on, say, science in *GR*, it is almost impossible for him/her to avoid treating the narrative as if it were primarily a meditation on science and scientific metaphors, thus defining the novel in terms of genre as well as its governing theme.² Each topic becomes, moreover, in the light of this strategy, a means of revealing what appears to be static information available to us in the text. The cost: *GR* is robbed of its specific, imaginative, radically polyphonic,

metaphoric aesthetic when rendered as a repository of information. Even though this kind of analysis is developed in response to the perceived resistance of *GR* to macroanalysis, the assumption that the text can be rendered explicable at the microlevel implies that it can be understood in terms of one of the worldviews expressed or referred to in the narrative. But if *GR* is metaphoric, and if it does not have a single, isolable vision, then its constituent parts are no more readily available for unitary analysis than the whole is.

The reading of *GR* I put forward here and elsewhere,³ namely, that it should be understood as a distinct kind of experimental fiction that can be termed “metaphoric narrative,” is most readily intelligible in this context as an attempt both to interpret the narrative as a whole (macro-reading) and to offer the outline of an interpretive methodology that can support and guide that interpretation (microreadings). More specifically, *GR* is a labyrinth of intertwining, often ready-made metaphors that cluster around various thematic concerns but never lose their status as metaphors to become doctrines. This means that the ambiguities of the narrative are not explicable in terms of only one of the worldviews or attitudes that are empirically present in the text and/or offered as ontological or epistemological propositions: the polyphony of *GR* cannot be reduced to one voice. My interpretive strategy, then, is to analyze the way certain metaphors play through *GR* and to indicate some of their complex and conflicting implications.

The three intertwining metaphors I will discuss—life as a movie, Hänsel and Gretel, and “colonies [as] outhouses of the European soul” (317)—have in common both the Germanness of primary vehicles (German films, a German fairy tale, a German colony) and the concern with important issues of paranoia, control and racism. I am not suggesting that they constitute its keys. My intention is neither to reveal some governing master code of the text nor to assert that the metaphors I have chosen are necessarily the most important ones. It is, rather, to exemplify a metaphor-oriented reading as well as to demonstrate that *GR* is most intelligible if read as a metaphoric narrative.

In my view, then, the deep structure of *GR* consists of a large number of metaphor-themes or metaphor-motifs which resonate, ramify and intersect throughout the novel, suggesting analogical connections between apparently disparate themes and ostensibly opposed characters, and indicating the ways different realities collide and proliferate. The first prominent metaphor-theme to which I want to draw attention is that modern version of “all the world’s a stage”: “life is a movie.”

The language of film is frequently introduced into *GR*. Syntagmatic situations in *GR* are strategically narrated 1) from the camera's viewpoint, 2) as if they were taken from a movie script, 3) in terms of stereotypical cinematic conventions or 4) with reference to well-known movies, movie stars and directors. Although it is possible that these techniques are simply stylistic devices which indicate, almost incidentally, the extent to which the language and conventions of the cinema have become part of noncinematic reality, such a reading is necessarily partial and, on its own, trivial.

Many critics have written about film in *GR* (see, for example, Clerc, FGR; Cowart, AA 38–62; Siegel 29–32), but they tend to restrict themselves to relatively straightforward, though informative and insightful, analyses of the above-mentioned strategy 4. They identify and analyze the primarily American and German films used in *GR* as reference points; they examine the psychological impact certain types of movies have on the realities of some of the characters, especially Tyrone Slothrop and Franz Pöckler; and they discuss, to some extent, the influence cinema has had on culture and perception generally. These studies are thorough and intelligent, but they do not address the deep structure, the metaphorical level, of *GR*. They do not take into account the complexities, convolutions and ambiguities of the play of the cinematic metaphor.

No doubt strategy 4 does demonstrate the extent to which cinema has influenced many characters in *GR*. Slothrop, the most extreme example, identifies with and longs to emulate the heroes of American gangster movies, Westerns and cartoons. In fact, once in the Zone and divested (literally) of his identity, he learns to adapt to the constantly changing and potentially alienating situation by adopting a series of appropriate and, importantly, ready-made cinematic roles. Further, Slothrop is often able to deal with his new environment only by acting as if he were in a movie or a cartoon. For example, unable to accept the poverty and desolation of Berlin, Slothrop sees it as a movie-set:

Someone here is cleverly allowing for parallax, scaling, shadows all going the right way and lengthening with the day—but no, Säure can't be real, no more than these dark-clothed extras waiting in queues for some hypothetical tram, some two slices of sausage (sure, sure), the dozen half-naked kids racing in and out of this burned tenement so amazingly detailed —They sure must have the budget, all right. Look at this desolation, all built then hammered back into pieces, ranging body-size down to powder (please order by Gauge Number), as that well-remembered fragrance Noon in Berlin, essence of human decay, is puffed on the set by a hand, lying big as a flabby horse up some alley, pumping its giant atomizer. . . . (374)

As Slothrop starts to live his life as if it were a movie, he comes to perceive himself as a fictional character. He is eventually unable to sustain a continuous, unified self separate from the roles he plays. For example, when dressed as a German cartoon hero, he is able to act as if he were invincible because he really believes at the crucial moment that he *is* Rocketman:

Slothrop frees his arms from the cape, lets a lean grey Porsche whir by, then charges out, the red of its taillights flashing along his downstream leg, headlights of a fast-coming Army truck now hitting the upstream one and touching the grotto of one eyeball to blue jigsaw. He swings sideways as he runs, screaming, "Hauptstufe!" which is the Rocketman war-cry, raises both arms and the sea-green fan of the cape's silk lining, hears brakes go on, keeps running, hits the center mall in a roll, scampering into the bushes as the truck skids past and stops. [. . .] The southbound half of the Avus is slower tonight, and he can jog across easy[. . .] Hey! Leaps broad highways in a single bound! (380)

The image conjured up here is startling not only for its cartoon-like character but also because at this moment, for this moment, Slothrop really adopts the identity, not to mention the mythographic fate, of Rocketman, and he never totally reintegrates as Slothrop.

Although Slothrop is haunted from time to time by his old self, once the external supports for his identity—clothes, name, job, family, friends, country—disappear, his personality becomes a kind of *tabula rasa*. None of his experiences in the Zone are imprinted indelibly, or even for very long, on his memory. For example, shortly after Katje and Slothrop part company, it is revealed that he will soon forget her: "it will be months yet before he runs into [an advertising image of . . .] a girl named Helen Riickert: a blonde with a Dutch surname who will remind him dimly of someone" (381). In fact, he lives entirely in the present, which means that, although he is, perhaps enviably, able to participate in any and every adventure that presents itself, he is not committed to anything at all.

Slothrop's quest to find out who or what he really is reveals that he is a "medium" (622) for various or multiple personalities; that the self is, at least in his case, very plastic, even fragile; and that there is no absolute distinction between fiction and reality. Put differently, the play of the life-as-movie metaphor in *GR* undermines traditional conceptions of self and reality. Slothrop believes he can enter into the various realities he encounters and participate in them with impunity because they do not seem to be quite real, but it turns out that he can never return to his old reality (the original movie, the original script) because

he can no longer sustain his old role. One implication is that this former role/self, Tyrone Slothrop, was as much a fiction—though an elaborated, integrated, long-term and undetermined one—as the selves he adopts during the narrative.

One way of interpreting the Slothrop story is that his quest is not a failure at all. In fact, although many of Slothrop's friends want to save him, it is implied more than once, albeit ironically, that his very disintegration may constitute a kind of salvation or transcendence. For example, near the end of *GR*, Slothrop is referred to as "one plucked albatross" (712). In context, this can be understood as a lament for Slothrop's scattering, but in Buddhist thought, the albatrosses of self and of memory stand in the way of salvation, and it is only when they have been eliminated that one can be fully present to the world. *GR* is not a religious treatise, of course, but it contains several indications that Slothrop achieves, from time to time, complete peace of mind:

[A]fter a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural. . . . (626)

To go back to the metaphor, the Slothrop story implies that living as if life were a movie in which one can adopt and discard identities at will, or at least as circumstances seem to demand, may constitute a realistic life-strategy, one which almost incidentally leads to a kind of salvation. This reading reveals only some of the possible implications of life as a movie, however. I turn now to a brief commentary on some of the other issues this metaphor coordinates.

Pynchon's use of cinematic techniques allows him not only to establish mood very quickly or to achieve particular visual effects but also to show how cinematic conventions have penetrated life, literally altering our perception, our behavior and the scripts we live by. A sentence such as "Springer with the classic gangster head-move gestures [Slothrop] up to the bridge" (530) captures a whole scene for us, both visually and in terms of mood. Springer, movie director, and Slothrop, avid movie consumer, are living out in real life a classic gangster-movie sequence. Both are quite aware that they are imitating the movies; but, equally, their practices enact an acknowledgement that once one has seen a gangster movie, it is inevitable that one's experience be colored, if not determined, by it. If reality cannot resist the impact of art, is the real then no less constructed, in terms of its conventions, its experiences and even its objects, than a movie?

An extreme and literal version of this implication is embodied in *GR* in the character of the megalomaniac director Gerhardt von Göll (der Springer). During the war, von Göll makes at least one propaganda film for the Allies, forged footage of a (fictitious) black German Commando at a “counterfeit rocket-firing site” (113) in Holland. When he finds out later that there really is a Schwarzkommando, composed of German South-West Africans, von Göll concludes that his “images, somehow, have been chosen for incarnation” (388). He believes, then, that his movies can dictate reality, that the images he produces will become real, that, in short, he is a kind of god. In fact, in his view, it is only a matter of time until reality will be indistinguishable from cinema (527). For von Göll, life as a movie is not a metaphor but a literal justification for his sense of self-importance and his mad desire for power.

This last point opens up another level of discussion. If von Göll feels comfortable with the idea that life really is, or will be, a movie, it is only because he thinks he can have some measure of control over it. From the point of view of a director, a literal reading of the life-as-movie metaphor suggests that the medium of reality is plastic, that it is open to subjective construction, or at least intervention and manipulation. For an actor (the person being directed), however, this metaphor, taken as an ontological proposition, implies that reality is entirely determined, or determinable, and that free will or individual control is a fiction. That is, it raises paranoid questions: “Who or what is directing my actions?” “Who wrote this script?” “What is my role, and how important is it?” “Can I change my lines?” It addresses, then, though in very contemporary terms, some of the concerns that have dominated European philosophy for centuries and that take the overt form of paranoia in *GR*.

Like the Hänsel-and-Gretel metaphor I discuss below, life as a movie is one of the metaphors that cluster around a centralizing thematic concern with control. Some version of the questions “how can I gain/regain/retain control of my life, and who/what is trying to control/stop me?” troubles every major character in *GR*. It is interesting, usually alarming and sometimes ironic that this pervasive paranoia apparently has in each case a basis in fact. That is, each character is the victim of a number of intersecting and apparently all-powerful systems, institutions and, occasionally, genuine conspiracies. In the world of *GR*, then, paranoia is an appropriate existential response to modernity not only in wartime but also in times of so-called peace.

GR contains numerous references to and discussions of different kinds of paranoia—“operational paranoia” (25), for example. One of the most provocative suggestions in the text is that paranoia is intrinsically akin to the religious impulse because it posits a system of

relations going beyond and controlling the individual. The implication, moreover, is that it is easier to live with paranoia than with its opposite, anti-paranoia:

If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long. [. . .]

Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that *reason*. . . . (434)

GR as a whole undermines the binary logic of this paranoia/anti-paranoia opposition, and many of the quests in the novel attempt to transcend it. Nevertheless, most of the characters in *GR* are trying to find ways of living in between these two almost equally paralysing extremes of contemporary experience.

The Dutch woman Katje Borgesius, for example, is corrupted by her desire to live within a familiar pattern (a directed microscript) in the midst of chaos:

In a conquered country, one's own occupied country, it's better, she believes, to enter into some formal, rationalized version of what, outside, proceeds without form or decent limit day and night, the summary executions, the roustings, beatings, subterfuge, paranoia, shame . . . though it is never discussed among them openly, it would seem Katje, Gottfried, and Captain Blicero have agreed that this Northern and ancient form, one they all know and are comfortable with—the strayed children, the wood-wife in the edible house, the captivity, the fattening, the Oven—shall be their preserving routine, their shelter, against what outside none of them can bear—the War, the absolute rule of chance, their own pitiable contingency here, in its midst. . . . (96)

During the Nazi Occupation of Holland, Captain Blicero, the most dominant power figure in *GR*, enlists the double agent Katje and the German soldier Gottfried to reenact with him a version of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale “Hänsel and Gretel” in the form of an ongoing sadomasochistic and pornographic game. Gottfried plays Hänsel, being fattened for the oven; Katje plays Gretel, destined to destroy the witch and rescue her brother; and Blicero plays the wicked witch, who, in this version of the tale, uses the children both sexually and otherwise.

Although Katje eventually “quits the game for good” (104), she is haunted throughout *GR* by her sense that she is “corruption and ashes” (94) and a child of the oven. Since she cannot bring herself to betray Blicero and does not even think of rescuing Gottfried, who continues

the game to its sinister ending, she never has the satisfaction of having fulfilled her heroic role. In Blicero's rewriting of this script, the witch wins when Gottfried perishes in the oven—Katje having already gone back, alone, to the forest. That is, Katje is set adrift in a world of chaotic exigencies, where she falls prey—though again “voluntarily”—to another wicked witch of *GR*, Edward Pointsman.

The Hänsel and Gretel theme is explicit in only three contexts in *GR*: the fairy tale provides Blicero with a script for his sadomasochistic game (94ff.); Roger Mexico takes his girlfriend, Jessica, and her family to a Christmas pantomime version (174–75); and in *Zwölfkinder*, where Pökler and his daughter, Ilse, meet for a few days every August, there are models of the fairy tale's main characters (398). It becomes, however, a universally significant metaphor-motif in the narrative. Children in particular are almost always victims, not only of war but also of life as a whole: “Mothers and fathers are conditioned into deliberately dying in certain preferred ways: giving themselves cancer and heart attacks, getting into motor accidents, going off to fight in the War—leaving their children alone in the forest” (176). In the world of *GR*, the different children all have some kind of narrative equivalence, partly by way of their physical resemblance, partly because of their shared fates of parental abandonment and, even more strongly, through the difficulty they have in distinguishing between loving parents and wicked witches.

More specifically, Katje, Gottfried, Ilse and Bianca are interconnected by virtue of a series of doublings throughout *GR*. Katje and Gottfried are nearly identical:

[H]is face [. . .] is so close to what she's been seeing all her life in mirrors, her own studied mannequin's stare, that she catches her breath, feels for a moment the speeded percussion of her heart, before turning just such a stare toward Blicero. He is delighted. “Perhaps,” he tells her, “I will cut your hair.” He smiles at Gottfried. “Perhaps I'll have him grow his.” (95)

Bianca Erdmann and Ilse are constantly equated: Greta Erdmann conceived Bianca during the filming of the movie *Alpdrücken*; Pökler believes Ilse was conceived the night he first saw the movie. To complete the circle, Greta sees Bianca “clearly yes very clearly in Gottfried, the young pet and protégé of Captain Blicero.” In fact, “it's possible, now and then, for Greta to see Bianca in other children, ghostly as a double exposure” (484). This idea of interchangeability is further emphasized, of course, by the possibility that the Ilse whom Pökler meets each August is not necessarily always the same child. In any case, in the scripts available to them, these children are always

cast as victims, with none of the aesthetic and psychological satisfactions of the normal fairy-tale fantasy of eventual power-reversal—the children escape, kill the witch, confront or punish the bad (step)parent, and so on.

This babes-in-the-wood motif is not reserved solely for children. The pathos of the trope resonates throughout the novel and sets the tone for some of its more lyrical passages, especially those concerning Pökler's desperate need for his wife Leni's strength, without which he, like Katje, falls prey to Blicero's games, and Roger's quite justified fear that Jessica will leave him alone in an essentially meaningless and random world. This familiar fairy tale, then, lends *GR* a number of images which occur over and over: the wicked witch, embodied in Blicero, Pointsman, Marvy and Greta; the children lost in the forest; and, perhaps most important, the oven, which inevitably reminds us of the ovens of Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald and the other death camps.

The clarity and optimism of the familiar fairy tale, however, in which the children escape, sharply contrast with the harsh reality of *GR*. In the world of the narrative, it is often impossible, paranoid suspicions notwithstanding, to identify the obstacles to one's reaching a happy ending. Roger—like Leni, and like the characters who form the Counterforce in part 4 of the novel—attempts to defy a vaguely defined Them who have taken Jessica away from him; but there is no one person clearly to blame. In other words, for whatever reason, be it indifference, ignorance or weakness, Gretel cannot, in the world of *GR*, kill the wicked witch. The happy ending of the fairy tale is both literally and metaphorically reversed, then, and its simplicity is problematized by the hard-headedness of *GR*.

Blicero is clearly the wicked witch of *GR*, "the Zone's worst specter" (666). It is he who, in the absence of many explicit references to Hitler (the generally acknowledged wicked witch of the Second World War), embodies the madness of Nazi Germany. He coordinates the production of the V-2 rockets used against the Allies and later even commands a rocket-firing battery. As a production manager, he is implicated in the abuse of concentration-camp prisoners, and his Oven game with Katje and Gottfried resonates disturbingly with the Holocaust. His history is one of colonial violence and exploitation, and his relations with other people are characterized by psychological manipulation and sadistic sexual fantasies. His Nazi identity is entirely consistent, if not in scope then certainly in kind, with his sadomasochistic past. Besides being the most seductive of the wicked-witch figures, Blicero is also the most extreme embodiment in *GR* of the colonial mind.

Colonies as outhouses of the European soul is the most graphic of the many metaphors revolving around the theme of colonialism/racism in *GR*, where racism, colonialism, sadomasochism, excretion and death are inextricably interrelated, either analogically or explicitly:

Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit. [. . .] Christian Europe was always death [. . .] death and repression. Out and down in the colonies, life can be indulged, life and sensuality in all its forms, with no harm done to the Metropolis, nothing to soil those cathedrals, white marble statues, noble thoughts. . . . No word ever gets back. The silences down here are vast enough to absorb all behavior, no matter how dirty, how animal it gets. . . . (317)

By this account, the European soul has been sanitized, its brutal, animalistic side civilized by culture, religion and bureaucracy. In the colonies, it seems possible to indulge whatever secret perversions one has repressed, partly because one is far from home and partly because one discovers those perverse propensities when actually exercising the inevitably corrupting power of the colonizer facing the otherness of the (usually dark-skinned) subjugated native population.

The relation of colonizer and colonized in *GR* is complex. The European colonizer, who needs and wants some measure of cooperation and friendship, controls the native population not only by force but also by inducements such as religion, wealth, education, trust, and so forth, as we see in the psychologically complicated relation between Blicero and Enzian (at this stage, a postcolonial relation). At the same time, as long as the colonizer is in the position of power, this relation can never be equal. Furthermore, the deeply rooted racism of the colonizer is constantly reinforced not only by the difference (and deference) of another culture but also by the colonizer's knowledge that he will surely be destroyed one day.

The colonist in *GR* unleashes his repressed desires onto the natives of the colony because, in their difference, their fascinating yet horrifying blackness, they symbolize for him his own psychological and physical nature—his dirtiness and his continuous decay and impending death. At the same time, blackness renders the natives irreducibly Other and threatening to the cleanliness and dominance of European society. Racism in *GR* is deeply rooted in this fear of otherness, which becomes a fear of blackness—itself a metaphor in the world of the text—a fear complicated by its hidden and forbidden fascination.

The metaphor "Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul" occurs in so many words only once in the novel, but the analogous,

sometimes subconscious connections among death, racism, sadism and excrement are made many times. One of the most explicit statements about these deep psychological and metaphorical linkages is Edwin Treacle's Freudian critique of the movie *King Kong*, which functions in *GR* as a ludicrous version of the dominance-submission motif: "He had not meant to offend sensibilities, only to show [. . .] that [. . .] feelings about blackness were tied to feelings about shit, and feelings about shit to feelings about putrefaction and death" (276). King Kong is the "black scapeape" who has to be annihilated, more because of his otherness than because he would hurt Fay Wray: "'you know, he did love her, folks'" (275).

The most extreme of the many forms racism takes in *GR* is the labelling of otherness, of difference, as Evil. The blackness of King Kong, like the blackness of the African native, is easy to scapegoat, especially when it symbolizes, in the subconscious continent of the purity-conscious European mind, a part of the human that must be annihilated (or flushed away). The most overtly brutal character in the text, the thug-like American officer Major Marvy, Slothrop's arch-enemy, wants "nigger submissiveness" (606) not only in his sexual encounters but in all his relations. The reader is not encouraged to have any sympathy for Marvy, who seems to receive his just desserts when Pointsman's agents, mistaking him for Slothrop, castrate him. With this exception, however, many characters who exhibit racism, like Tchitcherine, are not thereby necessarily marked as villains.

Tchitcherine, in need of a scapegoat for his alienation and unhappiness, chooses to believe that his career and his life have been unsuccessful because his father fathered an illegitimate Herero child while AWOL in South-West Africa from the Russian Navy (349): this is his script. His strange quest to find his half-brother, Enzian, whom he has never met, with the aim of killing him is an attempt to annihilate the impurity in his, or at least in his father's, past. By the time Tchitcherine meets Enzian, he is under the love-spell of Geli Tripping, and it does not even occur to him that this black man with whom he has a brief encounter is the half-brother he has hated for so long. He never realizes the opportunity he has missed, and we never know whether in a different mood or at an earlier stage of the narrative he would have carried out his murderous intention. It is clear that Tchitcherine's racism is deeply symbolic. He is free of it at the moment of the encounter, but, should life once more become difficult and unsatisfying, it would most likely resurface. Yet Tchitcherine is not coded negatively. Geli's love for him indicates that he must be, by and large, a good man; and he does not exhibit the sadism of the more villainous Marvy and Blicero. The point of the Tchitcherine story, then, is to illustrate on an individual

level the way the complex phenomenon of racism operates among quite ordinary and even well-meaning people.

Slothrop also exhibits—in a sodium-amytal-induced hallucination/fantasy—a deeply racist tendency which never overtly affects his conscious behavior. His strange journey into the underworld of the toilet in the Roseland Ballroom (64ff.) is nonetheless significant, as it gives substance quite explicitly to the metaphorical connections between colonialism and excrement that resonate throughout the narrative. Specifically, while trying to retrieve his mouth organ, which in this hallucination has fallen into the toilet bowl, Slothrop, anxious lest the black shoeshine boy rape him, escapes into the sewer.⁴ The juxtaposition of the detailed and fascinated description of the excrement Slothrop encounters and the possible (tantalizing) sadism of the normally deferential black man reveals a deep linkage in Slothrop's mind connecting blacks, sadomasochism and human wastes. The doctors studying Slothrop interpret this fantasy as manifesting a simple racism which will translate directly into concrete hostile actions. What they fail to understand is that this hallucination is in part a masochistic fantasy of submission and punishment, not simply a nightmare (later, Slothrop fantasizes that he is Fay Wray [688–89]), and that, in any case, a latent prejudice is not always and necessarily kinetic. We should not be surprised, then, that toward the end of the book Slothrop, disgusted with the rabid racism exhibited by Major Marvy (560–61), warns the Schwarzkommando of the impending raid on their camp and so saves them.

Slothrop's apparently masochistic, though largely subconscious, fascination with blackness is only a very mild version of Brigadier Pudding's desire for pain and humiliation. Like the colonist, Pudding, a senile veteran of the First World War, can only satisfy his need for "something real" (a need expressed by many other characters, including Gottfried, who believes he finally experiences "something real" [754] when he is put into the Rocket) in a scripted sadomasochistic relation, as here, with Katje in the role of *Domina Nocturna*:

[H]e lies humped on the floor at her feet, his withered ass elevated for the cane, bound by nothing but his need for pain, for something real, something pure. They have taken him so far from his simple nerves. They have stuffed paper illusions and military euphemisms between him and this truth, this rare decency, this moment at her scrupulous feet . . . no it's not guilt here, not so much as amazement—that he could have listened to so many years of ministers, scientists, doctors each with his specialized lies to tell, when she was here all the time, sure in her ownership of his failing body, his true body: undisguised by uniform, uncluttered by drugs to keep

from him her communiqués of vertigo, nausea, and pain. . . . Above all, pain. The clearest poetry, the endearment of greatest worth. . . . (234–35)

The ritual Katje and Pudding enact several times a week culminates, if he is lucky, in his eating her excrement as she produces it. While it is Domina Nocturna who actually subjugates and humiliates Pudding, it is at this point the image of an African that excites him: “he’s thinking, he’s sorry, he can’t help it, thinking of a Negro’s penis, [. . .] but it will not be denied, the image of a brute African who will make him behave” (235). Excrement, blackness and sadomasochism are explicitly linked in Pudding’s mind as he tries to escape the barrenness of his bureaucratic world.

The metaphors the characters in *GR* live by are part of a historical legacy they inherit, whether willingly or not. As I suggested earlier, Slothrop’s disassembly may well afford the narrative’s only possible (if extremely limited) escape from this legacy. Though the three linked metaphors I discuss do not constitute the keys to *GR*, my selection of them is hardly arbitrary. Life as a movie raises complicated issues which affect and undermine traditional conceptions of self and identity, especially in the realities of Slothrop, Pöckler, Greta and von Göll. The Hänsel-and-Gretel metaphor-motif, drawing on a familiar story/script, reveals analogous relations among the novel’s many babes in the wood. At the same time, this motif provides a contrast, in its simplicity, with the merciless narrative of the twentieth century which Pynchon’s text engages. Colonies as outhouses of the European soul coordinates the metaphoric relations among sadomasochism, racism, excrement and death in the lives of apparently quite disparate characters, such as Blicero, Pudding, Tchitcherine and Slothrop.

GR is irreverent and nondoctrinal to the extent that no single worldview, idea or thinker it refers to epitomizes a position or argument we can attribute to Pynchon himself. However, the text is doctrinal to the extent that it is committed to a particular type of textual strategy which consistently confirms (in both aesthetic and political terms) the metaphoric-paradigmatic, nonobjectivist and labyrinthine quality of every aspect of the reality of *GR*.

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Notes

¹Many critics have read *GR* in terms of apocalyptic nihilism, privileging the worldview represented by Blicero/Weissmann, the villain of *GR*, whose apocalyptic vision haunts the novel. See, for example, Josephine Hendin. Such readings tend to ignore the ways “Death is told so clearly to fuck off” (*GR* 10).

Mark Siegel, whose interpretation of *GR* is sophisticated and complicated, argues against such negative readings; but the central concept in his *Creative Paranoia* is "psychic unity," which, in its own way, implies that there is an isolable vision or doctrine to be discovered.

²Science is the subject of many studies, and, in some of them, entropy has been seen (incorrectly, in my view) as the controlling concept guiding Pynchon's work. For arguments that Pynchon's work is essentially entropic, see Alan Friedman, Charles Harris and John May. Siegel and David Cowart both argue, as do I, that Pynchon's use of scientific concepts is metaphoric rather than doctrinal. Siegel says, "When Pynchon uses science for metaphor, it remains science, but with the full knowledge that science is, after all, a hypothetical construction of reality involving metaphor" (82). Cowart much more simply suggests that science is the "junior partner" in Pynchon's fiction-making enterprise (132).

³See my *Interpreting Radical Metaphor* for a detailed elucidation of the notions of metaphor and narrative that underpin this essay. In particular, I outline and discuss the contemporary and antifoundational notion of metaphor, as opposed to the more conventional and binary literal/figurative concept, that guides my idea of metaphoric narrative.

⁴David Thorburn comments that the effect of imputing to Slothrop these racist tendencies seems inconsistent with his character, and that Pynchon thereby reduces Slothrop to a mere symbol of American prejudices. I mention this because it is in complete contrast to my own reading of this scene, which, whatever its source may be, is a brilliant exploration of largely subconscious prejudices and desires.

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