

Grab-bagging in *Gravity's Rainbow*: Incidental (Further) Notes and Sources

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In spite of Douglas Fowler, Steven Weisenburger, and others' painstaking efforts to unearth layer upon layer of textual fossils, *Gravity's Rainbow* as postmodern "tale of the tribe" and inexhaustible "grab-bag" of cultural allusions (to borrow from Pound) is still worth foraging in. If, with Robert Scholes in *Textual Power* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985), we hold that "reading is actually based upon a knowledge of the codes that were operative in the composition of any given text and the historical situation in which it was composed" (21), Pynchon's novel has not yet been "read" in its entirety. This total readerly reconstruction of any text may very well be a futile and impossible undertaking, and, like Stencil in *V.* and Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*, we may all be on a fool's errand. But then, textual exegesis is also one way of finding and ordering the scattered pieces of our own cultural identity and history. Needless to say, it is fun too, and maybe even a scholarly form of "mindless pleasure." (Page references below are to the Viking/Penguin edition of *Gravity's Rainbow*.)

53.1 "what I really need is [. . .] one of your fine Foxes": Although Kevin Spectro's term for his deranged patients is a bad pun (to cure a patient is something quite different from curing a fox's skin; cf. 47.34), it also recalls the Duke's night-hunt for Jutta's little boy, his fox, that ends in cannibalism in John Hawkes's nightmarish novel about Germany, *The Cannibal* (1949).

94.24 She recalls his teeth before any other feature, teeth were to benefit most directly from the Oven: Given his intertextual dialogue with Poe, particularly in *V.* (cf. Hanjo Berressem's analysis in *Pynchon Notes* 10), Pynchon's use of Blicero's teeth as a symbol of transgressive sexuality and the challenging of powerful taboos may have been inspired by the central image of teeth in Poe's story "Berenice." Anticipating Freud's interpretation of teeth (in dreams) as a symbol of sexual desire, Poe's first person narrator, Egeus, describes the fetishization of his female cousin Berenice's teeth as displaced (incestuous) sexual desire. Poe's story climaxes with an evocation of necrophilia and incest as Egeus violates the body of his

supposedly dead cousin by breaking out all her teeth. Blicero's teeth similarly denote the transgression of a basic taboo conflated with perverse sexuality in his sado-masochistic staging of the "Hansel and Gretel" oven game, which gestures towards, and was probably supposed to end in, cannibalism of his lovers: "teeth were to benefit most directly from the Oven."

135.14 Lower in the sky the flying bombs are out too, roaring like the Adversary: Popular Puritan cosmology equated the roaring of the wind with the devil. The belief is recreated, for instance, by Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown," where the "black mass of cloud" that "was sweeping swiftly northward" and emitting devilish noises troubles the protagonist's nighttime journey through the woods.

155.3 a slice of Berlin life, another Ufa masterpiece: Siegfried Kracauer gives a detailed account of various Berlin slice-of-life films produced in the late 1920s in chapter 15 of *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1947). Pynchon might have remembered the following passage: "In 1925, standing amid the whirling traffic of the Ufa Palast am Zoo, [Carl Mayer, director of *Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City* (1927)] conceived the idea of a City Symphony" (182).

155.5 there is no Revolution, not even in the Kinos, no German October: The allusion is to Sergej Eisenstein's epic about the Bolshevik revolution, *October* (1927). Eisenstein's film, or a similar production with obvious Communist propagandistic intent, would have been unlikely fare in the late stages of the disintegrating Weimar republic.

292.24 "I even have a mustache, here, don't I? Just like that Ernest Hemingway": When Geli questions Slothrop's identity as war correspondent Ian Scuffling, he tries to gloss over the apparent contradictions in his appearance by aligning himself with Hemingway, whose taste for self-dramatization made him assume the role of war hero as he covered the Allied liberation of France as a war correspondent. Thus, for instance, Hemingway reported (in *Collier's*) on his role in the liberation of Paris and the breaching of the Siegfried Line. As biographer Kenneth S. Lynn relates (*Hemingway* [New York: Ballantine, 1987]), Hemingway later even had to defend himself against charges that he had violated the Geneva Convention: "The specific charges against him were that in Rambouillet he had removed the correspondent's insignia from his uniform, had assumed command of Free French partisans who addressed him as Captain or Colonel, had helped to defend the town and had persistently conducted patrols in the area" (518). For Slothrop/Ian Scuffling, "that Ernest Hemingway" thus becomes the example of a war correspondent in disguise who may even be mistaken for a combatant but is still only a reporter.

293.12 "I posed once for a rocket insignia": The witch, riding the A4 with her "obsolete broom over her shoulder," can be found in a photograph in Ernst Klee and Otto Merk, *The Birth of the Missile: The Secrets of Peenemünde* (New York: Dutton, 1965, 38). The photo, with the caption "teamwork," shows Dr. Thiel's propulsion specialists in front of an experimental rocket No. 3. Almost out of the picture and cut off in the middle, the witch painted on the fuselage is clearly visible.

Another painted insignia, of a black-stockinged, half-naked woman (Birth 33), bears out the nexus between erotic fantasies and technology/rocket-power that Pynchon thematizes again and again. It also reminds us that fictional Pökler's dream of escape to the moon must have been widely shared in the real German rocket community. This photo's legend explains that "the 'Woman in the Moon' was the emblem painted on the successful Test Vehicle 4." The emblem was inspired, of course, by Fritz Lang's *Die Frau im Mond* [*The Woman on the Moon*] (1929), which also introduced the countdown from 10 to 1 (cf. GR 753.5).

297.15 there is the dark stain, miraculously still wet: Charismatic Enzian's semen stain on the wall of the Mittelwerke recalls the legendary inkstain on the wall of Martin Luther's garret-room in Wartburg castle, which remained as a visible sign of Luther's struggle with the devil. Enzian is to the Zone Hereros what Luther is to Protestants, even if the hagiographic traces are of a more preterite sort in Enzian's case.

412.35 "the old refrain, 'I lost my heart in Heidelberg'": Possibly inspired by the popular refrain from Sigmund Romberg's light opera *The Student Prince*, which was also made into a sentimental and tear-jerking movie by Ernst Lubitsch, *Alt Heidelberg* (1923). Romberg's musical was instrumental in projecting a sentimentalized image of Germany for generations of Americans.

412.36 "the people are warm and wonderful—when they're not dueling": Pynchon's Heidelberg as romantic and the student body as preoccupied with (drinking and) dueling is probably inspired by Mark Twain's vivid and expansive account of that town in the first volume of *A Tramp Abroad* (New York: Harper, 1907). Twain incredulously notes that "the students fight duels . . . two days in every week during seven and a half or eight months in every year. This custom has continued in Germany two hundred and fifty years" (31). Especially chapters 5–7 convey a striking sense of the "barbarity" and gratuitous violence of the student duels. (See also GR 718.24, Geli Tripping's "Let the university boys duel.")

580.15 scrawled C—H on his chalkboard and wrote, in enormous letters, Si—N: In spite of and in addition to the chemical correctness of the formula, Jamf's Nietzschean call to break out of the "bourgeois" preoccupation with the covalent bond, to shift from organic to inorganic chemistry, also involves a metaphysical shift beyond morality to—SIN. In characteristic fashion, Pynchon literalizes the shift and the chemical symbol. Note that this project is the same as Blicero's Rilkean romanticism and quest for transcendence in death. In addition, a metaphorical trajectory similar to the C—H to Si—N substitution is mapped out earlier in the same section when Jamf tries to formulate a "predator" (or even National Socialist) chemistry, exalting the ionic (electron-capturing) over the covalent (electron-sharing) bond (577.14ff.). Yet, after all, the two chemo-symbolical matrices cannot be integrated, since C—H and Si—N are both covalent bonds.

622.14 the old Hohner Slothrop found: This is the harmonica that went down the toilet in the Roseland ballroom (62.41ff.), as the narrator points out. But more important, like the kazoo, the (blues-) harmonica is a kind of "preterite" and subversive instrument in the novel (cf. 745.14), as Weisenburger (*A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* [Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988]) has argued convincingly. Yet, like the kazoo—which has the same threading as the light bulb socket and thus seems co-opted by the "Phoebus" light bulb cartel—the harmonica's symbolic stature is ambiguous at best. Pynchon must have known that the harmonica was the "cartelized" instrument if ever there was one, since the German firm Hohner had an absolute monopoly of the market. But on a more sinister and paranoid note, the president of Standard Oil of New Jersey, deeply implicated in IG Farben's cartel plots, also promoted trade with Germany in the 1930s by arranging various barter deals between the Nazis and the US, including "the shipment to the U.S. of enough harmonicas to provide two for every boy in the country" (Richard Sasuly, *IG Farben* [New York: Boni and Gaer, 1947] 149). Hohner harmonicas thus become yet another piece in the IG Farben puzzle. Moreover, in much the same way that Slothrop's sexual escapades seem to be structured by Jamf's conditioning of Infant Tyrone, other rebellious gestures, such as Slothrop's love for the harmonica, seem similarly determined by "them." The (Hohner) harmonica thus provides one more image of the co-optation of potentially liberatory impulses. (See also Squalidozzi's hiding in a harmonica factory, 384.34, and the Schwarzkommando's harmonica, 562.7.)

700.33 subdeb cuties each a \$65 fine and worth every penny: In a report from occupied Germany, *Life* correspondent Percy Knauth headlined relations between German women and American GIs as "The

\$65 question," and explained that "sixty-five dollars is the fine for fraternizing" (*Life*, 2 July 1945, 26). He gave an example of how some of the German women "try to make it as difficult as possible for the soldiers to behave." The magazine mentioned the \$65 fine again in another report three weeks later (23 July 1945, 35).

741.13 "there's half my graduating class from Great Lakes": Not surprisingly, Seaman Bodine finds comrades from the Great Lakes Naval Training Center (before March 1944, Great Lakes Training Station) in Chicago. A million men, nearly a third of the total American naval force in the Second World War, went through basic and specialized training courses at the installation in Waukegan, forty miles north of the Windy City.

752.38 never get into it far enough to start talking about God, apple-cheeked lovable white-haired eccentric gabbing from the vantage of his Laureate: Einstein is clearly the larger-than-life eccentric scientist figure with a direct line to God alluded to here. In this passage Pointsman realizes that he really is no Einstein. Einstein received the Nobel prize in 1921 (interestingly enough, not primarily for his theory of relativity). As champion of the principle of relativity, Einstein is the antithesis of Pointsman with his rigid determinism.

754.29 It was in the room when he fell asleep so long ago, so deep in sweet paralyzed childhood: As Gottfried is about to be launched in the rocket, wrapped in the Imipolex G shroud, his consciousness merges with Slothrop's. Gottfried thus dimly remembers Slothrop's conditioning at the hands of Laszlo Jamf, dreams Infant Tyrone's primal dream.

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