

Pynchon's Two Tchitcherines

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In Part 3 of Gravity's Rainbow, during a factual introduction of Tchitcherine where at last identifying details are given the reader about this character, Pynchon states, "He is no relation at all to the Tchitcherine who dealt the Rapallo Treaty with Walter Rathenau" (338). This Tchitcherine (Georgi) also participated in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, where he briefly met Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway wrote up the encounter for the Toronto Daily Star and the article was subsequently reprinted in a collection of his journalism called By-Line (1967). John Stark has speculated (Pynchon's Fictions, 107) that an intelligence report mentioning a Russian major in charge of captured rocket materials may have given Pynchon the idea of Tchitcherine. Equally well, Hemingway's report or any other reading Pynchon was doing about inter-bellum Germany may have given him the name. Georgi was a diplomat par excellence who had survived the Russian revolution and who, according to Hemingway, had a cold brain and a weakness for uniforms. Pynchon's Vaslav Tchitcherine is identified as having a "mythical half-brother" in Enzian before he is contrasted with the diplomat, which entangles the reader in conflicting levels of reality. Vaslav Tchitcherine seems a historical figure because of his contrast with his namesake and because of his participation in a historical process (the enforced introduction of an alphabet into Central Asia). The duplication of names momentarily adds yet another pair to the doublings which occur throughout Gravity's Rainbow and adds exactly the same kind of uncertainty as Joyce creates when he introduces a dentist called Marcus J. Bloom into Ulysses. Both duplications are traps to the unwary reader: he might jump to conclusions about the historical identity of Pynchon's Vaslav, or about Leopold Bloom's relation to the dentist. R. M. Adams has discussed this use of names in Ulysses (Surface and Symbol (1962), 234-42) and notes that Joyce pointlessly reintroduces characters from his earlier fiction. Pynchon does the same thing when Yrjö, the nineteenth-century pretender to an Eastern European throne who used to inhabit the

abandoned mansion in "The Secret Integration," grotesquely reappears in the memory of Mrs. Quoad. Mrs. Quoad, whose exotic candies almost destroy Slothrop's palate forever, thinks back to the time when Yrjö touched her in the gardens at Bournemouth to cure her of the King's Evil (119). This time Pynchon adds the detail of his being involved in the maneuverings over Bessarabia in 1878, when it was returned to Russia. In "The Secret Integration," Yrjö is a safely remote dream-like figure who exists within the boys' imagination. In Gravity's Rainbow, however, Pynchon undermines the reader's secure sense of reading an enclosed and autonomous fiction, then assaults his credulity by having Mrs. Quoad suffer a disease around 1900 which is associated with the seventeenth century. Anachronism gives way to the same kind of uncertainty about character as his two Tchitcherines create, since Yrjö is related to a historical event (the Congress of Berlin). But then Bessarabia to Bournemouth to Mingeborough are fantastic jumps for a character to make and reflect a playful tendency on Pynchon's part to unsettle his reader's certainty about the status of his characters.

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