"Bouncy Little Tunes": Nostalgia, Sentimentality, and Narrative in Gravity's Rainbow

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"Bouncy Little Tunes": Nostalgia, Sentimentality, and Narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow*

Keep cool, but care.

Thomas Pynchon, *V.*

This essay had its genesis in two things. One was a vaguely off-putting sense of postmodernism as ironic, hard, and cold, the other a much more definite response to *particular* postmodern novels as indeed difficult, playful, and ironic yet also, surprisingly, not at all cold and even, at times, neither especially difficult nor especially ironic. In part, then, this essay is an attempt to account for such an apparently bifurcated reading experience, and to do so by mapping it onto a binary familiar from the work of major theorists of postmodernism like Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, and Linda Hutcheon: an opposition (that is finally not quite an opposition) between postmodern irony and postmodern nostalgia. For if, roughly speaking, the postmodern novel is characterized by a certain valorized playfulness, an unplaced and unplaceable irony, it's also, at least as it appears in such theorizing, potentially *nostalgic*. And that, of course, is not a good thing. But why not?

"Nostalgia" comes, quite innocently enough, from the Greek words *nostos*, meaning a return home, and *algos*, or pain (*OED*). When the term first came into circulation, explains David Lowenthal in *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, it described a disease with physical symptoms that were the result of homesickness. As she is now conventionally understood, however, the victim of nostalgia desires escape from the exigencies of an unsatisfactory

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present, and the desire to escape, as we know from the derogatory tone of most discussions devoted to so-called escapist literature (thrillers, romances, mysteries), is less than admirable. Backward-looking and anodyne in its aims, nostalgia violates the narrative of progress Western society has not quite succeeded in relinquishing, fouling up the left's march toward liberation even as it serves the rightist agenda of Ronald Reagan (so aptly named "the Regainer" by Stuart Moulthrop) and his fellows. Nostalgia, then, is aligned with sentimentality and a degraded popular culture, and hence with genres—the formulaic romance, for instance—coded as feminine. It has also come to feature prominently in theories of postmodernism and postmodernity.[1] Whether the much-lamented ubiquity of nostalgia is, as these theorists imply, either fundamentally different in kind or degree from previous manifestations is unclear. Whether nostalgia is a threat to the subversive power of postmodern irony or the dangerous waste product of a culture of simulation is also a matter of debate. What seems more important is that, asked of a text, the question "postmodern or nostalgic?" sets up "nostalgic" as an aesthetic value undesirable because of its happy disregard for those principles of irony, self-reflexivity, and formal experimentalism by which we have come to know "the good," politically and aesthetically speaking. Like kitsch, then (at least as Matei Calinescu describes kitsch), nostalgia is problematic because it is perceived both as insufficiently mediated (that is, nostalgia doesn't know enough to be ironic about itself) and altogether too mediated (it's false, a lie, a forgery of desire).

Thus even if we agree that nostalgia *is* a problem, it is not likely to present the same problem to everybody. Or rather, there is not *one*

1. For Jean Baudrillard, as "difference" (either/or) disappears, along with the "imaginary of representation" (2), and is replaced by the logic of simulation and multiplication (and/and/and), "nostalgia assumes its full meaning": "There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity" (6–7). The "whole experience of postmodernity" is, then, "a kind of macro-nostalgia" (Chase and Shaw 15). On the other hand, according to Linda Hutcheon, "the complaint that postmodernism . . . uses history . . . in a naive and nostalgic way, just will not stand up" (19). Throughout *A Poetics of the Postmodern*, Hutcheon asserts that postmodernist fiction invokes not a nostalgic return to the past but rather a critical revisiting of that past.

nostalgia that presents *a* problem to all. After all, while the suppression of nostalgia may seem misogynist, it is the deployment of a racist and misogynist nostalgia by various fascist regimes that directly and quite rightly motivates our deep suspicion of nostalgia. This is perhaps another way of saying that there is no truly authentic nostalgia to which an unmediated access is possible. I will not, therefore, be proposing that we simply substitute a positive understanding of nostalgia for a negative one, or even that there are good nostalgias we can recuperate and bad ones we cannot (though this would take us a needed step beyond the current assumption that nostalgia is unequivocally a problem). Rather, my reading of the nostalgias Thomas Pynchon's postmodernist novel *Gravity's Rainbow* articulates for past historical moments, for past modes of seeing, constructing, and being in the world, prompts a difficult set of questions about pleasure, power, and the practice of reading. More specifically, my reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests the need to lay aside the critical duality of affirmation/critique and instead evolve a language for talking about the complex ramifications of complicity. *Gravity's Rainbow* urges that rather than persist in aligning various terms ("nostalgia," "irony") with one or the other side of an endless string of binaries (affirmation/critique, subversion/collaboration) that may be reduced, ultimately, to the banality of good/bad, we try to work through the muddle the novel names "double agency," to recognize affirmation's critiques and critique's affirmations.

We might begin by tracking down alternative frameworks for understanding nostalgia. I can't prove that Thomas Pynchon read Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1966) while writing his World War II novel, but like the writings of Norman O. Brown, *Eros* provides a revisionist account of repression and history whose relevance to *Gravity's Rainbow* is difficult to deny.[2] Early on in his reformulation of Freud, Marcuse finds hope for the development of a nonrepressive civilization in Freud's account of the " 'eternally' antagonistic"

2. See Wolfley for a consideration of Brown's presence in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

relationship between the pleasure principle and the reality principle (Marcuse 17). Since, according to Marcuse, the triumph of the reality principle over the pleasure principle is never complete or secure, the repressed pleasure principle continues to affect "in manifold ways the very reality which has superseded [it]" (16):

> According to Freud's conception the equation of freedom and happiness tabooed by the conscious is upheld by the unconscious. Its truth, although repelled by consciousness, continues to haunt the mind; it preserves the memory of past stages of individual development at which integral gratification is obtained. And the past continues to claim the future: it generates the wish that the paradise be re-created on the basis of the achievements of civilization.
>
> (18)

Thus the memory of a past happiness that the individual may or may not have actually experienced gives rise to utopic fantasy. Marcuse details the explosive force of memory:

> [T]he forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies. Regression assumes a progressive function. The rediscovered past yields critical standards which are tabooed by the present. Moreover, the restoration of memory is accompanied by the restoration of the cognitive content of phantasy. Psychoanalytic theory removes these mental faculties from the noncommittal sphere of daydreaming and fiction and recaptures their strict truths. The weight of these discoveries must eventually shatter the framework in which they were made and confined. The liberation of the past does not end in its reconciliation with the present. Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer, the orientation on the past tends toward an orientation on the future. The *recherche du temps perdu* becomes the vehicle of future liberation.
>
> (19)

Marcuse's figuration of the recovered past as a site of happiness, "integral gratification," and, somewhat paradoxically, future liberation appears suggestive in the context of a discussion about nostalgia. If the superego's insistence on a past "of bitter adjustment to a punitive present" seems more in line with modern notions of the past and history, as well as with critical norms that privilege the aesthetically difficult, does not the id's "instinctual claim on the future," based on the "memory traces" of a state free from want,

recall nostalgia's longing for escape and a "return home" (Marcuse 33)? Far from being an anodyne, sop, or pacifier, nostalgia is thus critical to Marcuse's project of liberation. Looking back, in essence, carries a political charge that activates and facilitates a visionary push into the future. In *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, James Berger suggests that the "revised nostalgia" Pynchon develops in the later *Vineland* is, in some sense, utopic, a "nostalgia for the future, for possibilities of social harmony glimpsed at crucial moments in the past but not yet realized" (171). Is this a useful way of understanding the nostalgias operating in *Gravity's Rainbow*?

Very late in *Gravity's Rainbow*, we come across Tyrone Slothrop (who passes for this postmodern novel's human hero) in a German street. Moving from a stuttering attempt to locate Slothrop ("it was in Greifswald," on the Hafenstrasse, or the Petritor), a narrator asserts: "[I]n each of these streets, some vestige of humanity, of Earth, has to remain. No matter what has been done to it, no matter what it's been used for" (693). What it's been used for, the narrator shows, is not only war, but the false comfort of a religion annexed by war: "[C]lergymen, working for the army, stood up and talked to the men who were going to die about God, death, nothingness, redemption, salvation. It really happened. It was quite common." Despite the lingering presence of corruption, however, the narrator urges that "one moment of passage, one it will hurt to lose" be found "for every street now indifferently gray with commerce, with war, with repression . . . finding it, learning to cherish what was lost, mightn't we find some way back?" (693). If, as Lyle Bland imagines, "there are layers, set very deep, layers of history analogous to layers of coal and oil in Earth's body," a "subterranean history" one might call the "*return of the repressed*," then finding "a way back" to even a vestige of Earth would seem to hold out the possibility of liberation from the corporate repression Bland himself incarnates (*Gravity's Rainbow* 589; Marcuse 16). Even a liberation from the physical fact of the street itself is a desirable prospect if, as the Argentine anarchist Squalidozzi rhapsodizes, "[b]eneath the city streets, the warrens of rooms and corridors, the fences and the networks of steel track, the [. . .] heart, in its perversity and guilt, longs for a return to that first unscribbled serenity . . . that anarchic oneness of pampas and sky. . . ." (264).

The dream of a stateless society whose fulfillment Squalidozzi and his co-conspirators seek "in the openness of the German Zone" is rooted in the vision of a land straining against the stricture of fences and streets, burdened by the material and cultural paraphernalia of capitalism (265).[3] Thus ecological renewal is aligned with a political and cultural renewal that would reverse the trend toward drawing "ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet" (264).[4] Much later, a narrator asks of an unidentified "you,"

> didn't you sneak away from camp to have a moment alone with What you felt stirring across the land . . . it was the equinox . . . green spring equal nights . . . canyons are opening up [. . .]. This is the World just before men. Too violently pitched alive in constant flow ever to be seen by men directly. They are meant only to look at it dead, in still strata, transputrefied to oil or coal. Alive, it was a threat: it was Titans, was an overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad, such a green corona about Earth's body that some spoiler *had* to be brought in before it blew the Creation apart. So we, the crippled keepers, were sent out to multiply, to have dominion. God's spoilers. Us. [. . .]
>
> [. . .] A few keep going over to the Titans every day, in their striving subcreation (how can flesh tumble and flow so, and never be any less beautiful?), into the rests of the folksong Death (empty stone rooms), out, and through, and down under the net, down down to the uprising.
>
> (720)

What is in part a wild environmental nostalgia for a green-coronaed Earth to whom men, "the crippled keepers," are utterly unknown is also a celebration of the threat posed by the buried, the subterranean, the *living*, to the death-order that holds "down the green uprising."[5] Like the anarchists' nostalgia for the "inexhaustible,

3. Pynchon's "Zone" describes the Germany that existed essentially without civilian government from the time of the Nazi surrender in May 1945 to roughly the Potsdam Conference in July and August 1945 (an event Slothrop attends in his capacity as Rocket-Man).

4. The Argentines' formulation of anarchism would offer one way of understanding, in Steven Weisenburger's formulation, the "rhizomatic ties" binding "Pynchon's haunted, and haunting, critique" of "techno-fascism" to "related movements in eco-criticism" ("Haunted History" 25).

5. See Schaub for a historicist discussion of Pynchon's "environmental dissent" ("Environmental Pynchon" 68).

fenceless" pampas, this powerful nostalgia for a past "overpeaking" contains a component of hope for the future in its characterization of man's own peculiar form of death as only "nearly as strong as [the] life" it strives to quash: there is an uprising to be reached by going down, a way out to be (perhaps) found by going back (720).[6]

But the novel's conception of power as both instrumental and ubiquitous, its paranoiac vision of a world divided into Them and Us—where They, on the one hand, are easily identified in the Western military-industrial complex and, on the other hand, have "a branch office in each of our brains"—figures resistance through escape as both imperative and hopelessly compromised (712). *Gravity's Rainbow* reminds us, time and again, through characters we'll have occasion in this essay to recall (Bianca Erdmann, Miklos Thanatz, Pirate Prentice), and more importantly here through a refusal to be clear about who's narrating what, of the extent to which nostalgia, like other modes of historical experience, affords only phantasmatic glimpses of the past in the looking-glass of the present. Thus it is crucially impossible to determine whether the environmental dissent of the Titans passage is attributable to the friendly Wicca Geli Tripping or the Nazi captain Dominus Blicero. If the latter, nostalgia-driven utopianism takes on a distinctly sinister tinge, since it is equally in the V–2 Rocket—built with the aid of slave labor from the Dora concentration camp and launched in the final stages of the London Blitz—that Blicero seeks a way of "getting back," of getting beyond death.

In fact, the Rocket (which we might call the novel's principal technological protagonist) attracts multiple explicatory narratives of return, to catalogue which would take far too much time and space.

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6. According to Graham Benton, Squalidozzi's manifesto suggests that "decentralizing *back* toward anarchism requires an extraordinary event, such as global combat, to erase centuries of bloody territorial positioning" (157). Further on, however, Benton seems to want to draw a distinction between a nostalgia that looks *back* toward anarchism and a yearning for "*openness*," claiming that anarchism is evoked in *Gravity's Rainbow* "not exclusively as a nostalgic longing for some idealized and romantic past, but as a repressed yearning awakened only through the devastation engendered by warfare" (157). I want to argue that this yearning for a better future is *instigated by* and *channeled through* a nostalgia for the past.

In this excess of narrative, the Rocket comes, in a sense, to be about narrative. For example, the Schwarzkommando's painstaking assembly of Rocket 00001 amasses the resonance of a Return, as the acquisition of parts scattered across the Zone and brought to the Heath comes to seem a "Diaspora running backwards, seeds of exile flying inward in a modest preview of gravitational collapse" (737). As both the means by which the scattered Herero, survivors of the German genocide in what is now Namibia, are brought together to form the Schwarzkommando and a metaphor for that coming together, the "Secret of the Fearful Assembly" functions, we are told, like those secrets given to the Gypsies and Kabbalists "to preserve against centrifugal History." One of the things Pynchon seems to be getting at is the importance of structuring myths, of narratives that pull discrete happenings into shapes we can comprehend. Certainly, we might see the Zone, for all the apparent chaos that roams within its ambiguous borders, as held together by a set of stories, like the "Secret of the Fearful Assembly," or Slothrop's run to Potsdam, or the story of Slothrop himself. After all, as "some believe," "fragments of Slothrop" have seeded the Zone, and "there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering" (742). Even the figuration of Rocket as false return grows out of a *causal narrative* of discontinuity. In the Blitz section of the novel, a narrator suggests that, as it is experienced nightly by the Blitz victims in Spectro's ward, forced abreaction, itself a nightmarish version of the supposedly therapeutic return to and recapitulation of traumatic events, will only end when "the Blitz stops, rockets dismantle, the entire film runs backward: faired skin back to sheet steel back to pigs to white incandescence to ore, to Earth" (139). This nostalgia for the originary finality of Earth is brought up short by the reality of these supersonic rockets: because the rockets travel faster than the speed of sound, exploding before their incoming can be heard, "each firebloom . . . is a mockery (how can it not be deliberate?) of the reversible process." The rockets, the terror they bring, are not reversible. Thus the Rocket, instrument of loss and discontinuity, also serves as a reminder of the impossibility of return, and the fatal absurdity of narrative causality. On the other hand, it is paranoia, the inability to accept discontinuity, that turns the mechanics of a supersonic explosion into a conscious mockery of the abstraction "return."

Of course, not all narrative is linear, devoted to notions of causality. This, if nothing else, twentieth-century literature has taught us, and via few more effective conduits than *Gravity's Rainbow* itself, in which revelation after revelation scatters into the "shadowless noon" of negligence (509). We never learn, for instance, why Slothrop experiences erections in tandem with V–2 explosions, perhaps because—the suspicion is irresistible—Slothrop doesn't pause, while rescuing a friend, to investigate the V–2 launching sites at Peenemünde. Nevertheless, like the inhabitants of the Zone, we find (produce?), even amid the representative hard chaos of this postmodern narrative, "shape[s] of no surprise," narrative structures reassuring in their familiarity and in the simplicity of their lines (209). In his 1991 hypertext *Victory Garden*, a fiction fascinated, like *Gravity's Rainbow*, with history and nostalgia, Stuart Moulthrop reflects, "[M]aybe history *is* different for us. Perhaps, hypermediated and postmodernized, we now live in a universe that looks suspiciously like a Garden of Forking Paths. Or perhaps the old ways of understanding our lives—struggle, question, commitment; love, loss, mourning—can't be pushed aside" ("The Place of Big Wind"). What *Gravity's Rainbow* asks us to think about is the possibility that these things—that we live in a world that does not "conform to lines of determinism or destiny" and that the "old ways of understanding our lives . . . can't be pushed aside"—might not be exclusive, even as they might, finally, be irreconcilable ("The Place of Big Wind").

Following his legendary drug-smuggling run to Potsdam, the initially quite extraordinarily paranoid Slothrop slides into antiparanoia, "where nothing is connected to anything," and begins to lose touch with the quest that has brought him to Berlin (434). Slothrop's search for the answers to the "Jamf/Imipolex mystery," a mystery that dates back to his childhood and has something to do with his unaccountable erections, follows, quite literally, the movement of Rocket 00000 toward *its* mysterious Home, while the narrative of *Gravity's Rainbow* follows, of course, both. What happens when these journeys homeward are interrupted or, worse yet, forgotten? In Berlin, Slothrop not only withdraws from a particular search after truth, but loses the capacity to structure his universe in terms of all-encompassing narrative systems like the mystery. Warns a

narrator, the revelation that only "pasteboard images now of the Listening Enemy [are] left between him and the wet sky" generates "a condition not many of us can bear for long" (434). "Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure he wouldn't, actually, rather have that *reason* . . .": what is the status of the desire for big stories? Slothrop's discomfiture reflects our yearning, as readers of the postmodern, for narratives we can live with. More specifically, when, following Slothrop's near-rape of the Dutch spy Katje Borgesius, a narrator confirms, "here's only her old residual bitterness again, and they are not, after all, to be lovers in parachutes of sunlit voile, lapsing gently, hand in hand, down to anything meadowed or calm"—and then asks, "Surprised?"—the suggestion that we, as readers, have been harboring romantic fantasies about happy endings is not only mocking, disciplinary, but in some sense also legitimating (222).

Pynchon's use of the conventions of so-called genre fiction has been variously noted, as has the novel's uncanny knack of frustrating precisely those narrative expectations that it has engineered.[7] For the most part, the use of generic narrative conventions is seen in light of their eventual contravention as a sadistic little joke whose purpose is to warn readers about (to quote just one formulation) "metanarratives and the power structures they legitimate" (Mason 169). What is surprising, in this postmodern text, is the *extent* to which, inevitable deflations aside, Pynchon not only accommodates our pleasure in generic narratives but locates in such narratives the same political potentialities we saw released by nostalgia, while forcing us to interrogate the modalities of our different reading pleasures. Like Elaine Safer, I want to think about the "nostalgia for unity" rather than, as is more usual, the randomness and chaos that circumvents that desire (157).

In a 1973 review of the novel entitled "Rocket Power," Richard Poirier rather provocatively argues: "[R]eaders who get impatient

7. This observation has become almost a commonplace of *Gravity's Rainbow* criticism. See, for example, Safer, Hite, and, more recently, Duyfhuizen, McLaughlin, Mason, and Arich. For discussions of Pynchon's borrowing from generic fiction, see Seidel and Arich. Both Lawrence Wolfley and Scott Simmon discuss, in varying degrees of detail, *Gravity's Rainbow*'s relationship to the genre film.

with this book will most likely be too exclusively literary in their responses rather than not literary enough . . . . Above all, they'll be discomfited by a novelist who posits a world in which experience is often most meaningfully assembled in ways considered alternative, often antithetical to literature, like science, or inferior to literature, like film and comic books" (177). A quick glance through the critical literature on *Gravity's Rainbow* confirms that the general topic of "science and *Gravity's Rainbow*" has received its share of critical attention, as has, to a lesser degree, *Gravity's Rainbow*'s relationship with film. What has received very little attention, however, and in fact is not mentioned at all in Poirier's catalogue of literature's inferiors, is the part played by the formulaic romance in Pynchon's novel. This is no doubt in part due to the relatively faint presence of feminist criticism in writing on *Gravity's Rainbow*. Like nostalgia, the romance represents the dark (and distinctly female) side of a popular culture whose more acceptable incarnations include, as Poirier's article suggests, the film or comic book. In fact, as Rita Felski points out, women's romantic fiction is "repeatedly cited in the critical literature as the ultimate in literary kitsch," characterized by a "wallowing in sugary romanticism and unrestrained emotion that is antithetical to the ironical and critical stance of the avant-garde" and "old-fashioned and retrogressive in its invocation of romantic . . . ideals" (118). Kitsch is "seen as regressive in a personal as well as a historical sense, catering to an infantile desire to flee from the complexities of reality into a predictable fantasy world of immediate and unobstructed gratification." As Matei Calinescu notes in *Five Faces of Modernity*, kitsch, a slippery term that can refer to inadequacies of style or taste or both, is nostalgic as it defines "the horrendous old 'curiosities' that are on sale in the increasingly numerous nostalgia shops," and in a longing for the comfort provided by a world-view modernity has left behind (236). Kitsch, sentimentality, and nostalgia are therefore the related, and in some sense interchangeable, objects of a powerful cultural critique.[8] As I have tried to show, however, in its direct invocations of

8. For the purposes of this study, I am reading sentimentality in its nonspecialized sense, as denoting an excessive or otherwise suspect emotionality, rather than in the

nostalgia (the "Titans" passage), *Gravity's Rainbow* works to recuperate the notion of escape through retrogression, such that nostalgia's return home becomes utopia's escape from the repressions of a punitive present. We've also seen how utopic nostalgia is at best the partial property of a visionary Nazi madman, at worst a mystical transposition of genocidal fantasy, and in either case fully implicated in the horrors of mass destruction. Does the language of romance similarly participate in the logic of what Pirate and his Counterforce friends call the "double agent" (543)?

Pynchon's novel is notable, among many other things, for its insistent framing of sexual liaisons in terms of love.[9] Walking out of a London tea shop with Jessica Swanlake, Roger Mexico thinks, "it is love, it is amazing" (121). Roger, whose "life had been tied to the [known, sterile] past," sees Jess as launching him into the "unpredictable . . . new life" (126). She is the "honest half of his life," half indifferent "to the death-institutions" that both control and serve Roger's "mother the War" (126). Not only, however, is this "love" and "amazing," the "very first real magic" that the statistician cannot explain away, but through love the two effect, if not a full secession from "war's state," "at least" "the beginnings of a gentle withdrawal" (121, 38, 41–42). If "war's state" is Their domain, the instrument of a corporate elect whose reach extends to "each of our brains" and whose "mission [. . .] is Bad Shit," secession would seem highly desirable (713). Hence Roger and Jessica's idyll in an abandoned house becomes invested with a political potency that has everything to do with the sentimental discourse it both encourages and depends upon. No longer entirely suspect, the escapist

generic terms of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. Although the relationship between sentimentality and the formulaic romance is one that bears a good deal more attention, it is the sentimentality, the full expression of emotion invariably rewarded in the romance narrative, that allows me to understand these terms as partially interchangeable. In some sense, of course, what matters more than the actual or imagined sentimentality of romance is that the critiques of romance, sentimentality, nostalgia, and kitsch routinely lump such terms together.

9. The possibilities (and limitations) of countercultural resistance opened by Slothrop's seemingly endless series of sexual liaisons have been treated by, among others, Patrick McHugh. I am less interested here in a countercultural politics than in what I can only call its opposite.

component of this literature acquires a new urgency, a new seriousness, and becomes not only the site for articulations of belief in the possibility of liberation but also, in some sense, the unlikely instrument of that liberation. If James Berger is correct in describing *Vineland*'s nostalgia as a "nostalgia for the future, for possibilities of social harmony glimpsed" at times of social upheaval (the sixties), the escape *Gravity's Rainbow* appears to offer at moments like these is—problematically—a fantasy of domesticity conceived as camping out and having really good sex (171).

Another version of this romantic narrative has the young Bianca Erdmann (her precise age is notoriously left unclear) tell Slothrop, "We can get away. I'm a child, I know how to hide. I can hide you too," a promise of "love [and] invisibility" that Slothrop believes because he "knows," "right here, right now, under the makeup and fancy underwear, she *exists*" (470).[10] The promise, then, achieves two things. On the one hand, it points to a time when Slothrop will have gotten away, hid successfully from Them and thus exited the Game. On the other hand, in that it grants Slothrop temporary belief in the existence of love and invisibility, Bianca's promise itself represents a brief fulfillment of utopic possibility. Like Jessica's niece Claire, who knows the "secret paths" "under the [theater] seats" occupied by military uncles, Bianca, perhaps, knows the "kids' short cuts" home and out from underneath the pressing thumb of Their military-industrial death-complex (174, 744).

As is usual in *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, such claims are qualified by the narrative contexts in which they appear. In the first instance, my reading of Bianca, if "romantic," as Bernard Duyfhuizen would have it, is also incomplete: Bianca's knowledge apparently fails both Slothrop and herself, as Slothrop leaves Bianca, perhaps to die.[11] In leaving Bianca, Slothrop not only loses a lover but leaves behind his single moment, "right here, right now," of certain belief in the existence of love, invisibility, and the child herself, "some discovery" indeed (470). In fact, however, this leave-taking is in some sense necessary, since it is the paradox of

10. For two somewhat different takes on the role played by children in *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Purdy and Kolbuszewska.

11. See Duyfhuizen's "A Suspension Forever at the Hinge of Doubt."

Marcusean nostalgia that its utopic promise is rooted in a past that is, by definition, irrecoverable and perhaps has never existed at all. This is all further complicated by the suggestion that the lost Bianca is "too much Theirs" (472). If Bianca's assurances offer the possibility of nostalgic escape through love and childhood, Bianca and Slothrop's morning of sex raises difficult questions of power in relation to these assurances.

Miklos Thanatz's very Marcusean Sado-Anarchism argues that because "the Structure" needs "our submission so that it may remain in power," needs "our lusts after dominance so that it can co-opt us into its own power game," and therefore cannot tolerate the wastage of such resources "in private sex," the establishment of "S and M [. . .] universally, at the family level" would mean the withering away of the State (737). It is through Sado-Anarchism that Thanatz justifies his seduction of the boy Ludwig. Meanwhile, the German scientist Franz Pökler suspects that They (in the person of Blicero, his boss) have sent his daughter Ilse to him in order to satisfy his "disgusting" incestuous desires and thus ensure his productive involvement with the V–2 project (420). And it is worth noting the fragility of the children we encounter in the Zone. Despite Gottfried's belief that "captive children are always freed in the moment of maximum danger" (103), Gretel's song in the pantomime Roger takes Jessica's nephews and nieces to see more accurately—if morbidly—represents the situation: "And those voices you hear, Boy and Girl of the Year, / Are of children who are learning to die" (175). War, *Gravity's Rainbow* reminds us, is a time when children disappear into concentration camps (Ilse), death (Bianca), or the "sin of profit" (Ludwig) (729). Gottfried, strapped to Rocket 00000 by his officer and lover Blicero, is only the novel's final (narratively speaking) and most puzzling child sacrifice. Given a text filled with missing and abused children, we need to ask whether incest/pedophilia is indeed liberation (and for whom?), or whether it represents a co-optation of innocence and the child that cannot be attributed purely to Them.[12] To borrow one of the many

12. It may be that the recuperation of childhood's "forbidden images and impulses" would force a concomitant reevaluation of our usual alignment of innocence with

metaphors *Gravity's Rainbow* develops for this sort of dilemma, it is not only that "the occupation" may have "interdicted the kids' short cuts along with the grown-up routes," making it "too late to get home," but that They may have turned the "secret paths" to Their own purposes, or even that we may have done so in Their name (744).

Similarly, if the possibility of unironized belief in love and the power of love to remove its victim-champions from the reach of insidious political systems legitimizes sentimental discourse, and thus aligns with a certain type of feminist project, the focalization of these narratives through Roger and Slothrop makes it difficult to see their lovers as other than the representatives and instruments of a discourse whose promise of escape disappears when they do.[13] Meanwhile, although it is Jessica who longs hopelessly for the pre-War home she can no longer remember—" to live in a world where *that* [sound and light, a storm approaching in the summer] would be the day's excitement . . ." (54)—her and Roger's retreat to a lovingly decorated "house in the stay-away zone" (41), rather than to a hotel, suggests that their affair is part of an ongoing attempt to realize a familiar domestic fantasy. "There's never much talk but touches and looks, smiles together, curses for parting. It is marginal, hungry, chilly—most times they're too paranoid to risk a fire—but it's something they want to keep, so much that to keep it they will take on more than propaganda has ever asked them for. They are in love. Fuck the war" (41–42): the domestic content of this sentimental fantasy-life thus reconciles both lovers to their work for the (other) Home Front. But it is important to remember that the

childhood, and hence the basis on which we judge things like incest and pedophilia (Marcuse 19). Nevertheless, given that this novel asks us to think about the ways in which children and childhood are used (through its depiction of Zwölfkinder, for example), both physically and otherwise (in the case of Zwölfkinder, for the purposes of a corporate state), its attitude toward pedophilia is, it seems to me, anything but comfortable.

13. It is a notable and potentially disturbing feature of Pynchon's use of the romance (at least in the instances I've discussed) that where the formulaic romance's promise of escape, however suspicious, is directed at women, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the search for escape and liberation through romance is, as Patrick McHugh reminds us in another context, performed by and for "white guys."

separate-spheres ideology of which this is a version differentially constrains the genders. We might ask (though Pynchon doesn't seem to) whether home is an object of desire for the women whose realm it has so forcibly been in quite the same way that it is an object of desire for the men who have found it possible, indeed necessary, to leave. The distinctly homeless Katje is the only woman in *Gravity's Rainbow* to make the leap to double-consciousness and enrollment in the Counterforce, an ad-hoc organization of Them-haters; significantly, the male Counterforce members respond to her with "a gruff sort of women-on-ships-is-bad-luck chill and withdrawal" (545). And even Katje, as part of the Counterforce, cannot seem to evade the sentimental narratives she has deployed to such devastating effect in the past. Her inability ever to sound anything other than the scripted "woman of the 1940s" she plays for Enzian, even when apparently free to do so, suggests that the role is playing her (661). This, and the fact that Jessica eventually deserts Roger in pursuit of a happy hausfrau life with the establishment Beaver, should alert us to both the unequal consequences of sentimental discourse for men and women and, I think, Pynchon's own failure to imagine beyond the limits of genre.

That the romance of Roger and Jessica is utterly predictable and predictably doomed, subject to the usual mysterious forces of not only destiny but cliché too, further diminishes escapism's political potential. The ferocity of the love they share in bed cannot protect them "out of bed" (12): ultimately, the War wins, and Jess joins Beaver, "every assertion the fucking War has ever made," in Germany (177). Thus the substance of this narrative, structured as it is around love and the loss of love, is nostalgic: although we meet Jess and Roger pre-loss, the long shadow of her eventual departure impinges upon their time together—"You're catching the War. It's infecting you and I don't know how to keep it away" (177)—so that loss is built into love, the present always experienced as the past of some future moment of devastation. Most damningly, the narrative and visual conventions of cinematic genres explicitly provide the prism through which we view the relationship between Jessica and Roger. Their initial encounter, "out in the neat 18th-century heart of downtown Tunbridge Wells" (38), is "what Hollywood likes to call a 'cute meet,' " complete with "flip film dialogue" (121). A falling

rocket, source of so much terror elsewhere in the novel, is transformed into a "cute, cute" accessory-to-romance, "far enough toward the city to be safe, but close and loud enough to send her [Jessica] the hundred miles between herself and the stranger" (39). Roger's assertions even of verbal inadequacy—"he loved her, past all words" (126)—take on a familiar ring. It is the way in which the text signals, red-flags, its citation, here, of the conventions of the formulaic (wartime) romance that relegates this particular romance to the dustheap. In other words, we've seen this movie before, and the text knows it.

In Slothrop's intermezzo with Katje Borgesius, we are faced once again with a narrative substantively nostalgic both in its representation of a postlapsarian Slothrop, severed from an "innocent, pre-octopus past" and mourning the disappearance of his "decent" friend Tantivy, and in its delineation of loss-inflected love (188, 209). Here, however, the excruciatingly familiar narrative—naive-but-charmingly irresistible American soldier loves and loses sophisticated-but-scarred blonde European with a Past—is complicated by the openly staged nature of the affair itself (181). In fact, that various government agencies engineer Slothrop's dramatic introduction to Katje according to the best Hollywood standards reflects suspiciously on Roger and Jessica's encounter, suggesting the ways in which even sentimental narrators might collectively form a most sinister They system. Katje's whispered, "Perhaps, after all, *we were meant to meet*" (189), is both a gesture to notions of romantic destiny and a monitory admission of her own status as "employee of the House": Katje "plays at playing" (97), so that it is never very clear whether, at points during her Riviera affair with Slothrop, she is responding to cinematic necessity, to the cues of her masters, or to some internal imperative. But can these even be separated? A rocket falls, and Jessica Swanlake swoops into Roger Mexico's vintage Jaguar: "Will she snuggle now cutely against him, ask him to protect her?" (39). Is the latter Roger's thought, given to us in free indirect discourse, or is it the narrator's "cute" intervention, a piece of narratorial faux melodrama? Perhaps, in fact, it is something of each, a moment of self-narrativization in which Roger scripts, sets, and then watches an act unfold as narrative/drama/film. Generic conventions thus become modes of experience, ways of not only

structuring the past but also mediating present experience. In attempting to quash Springer's fantasy that the Russians will do well by Klaus Närrisch, Slothrop exclaims, "This ain't the fuckin' *movies* now, come on" (527). It isn't clear, however, that the distinction Slothrop wants to insist on is useful or even valid.

And this, in turn, in a novel where cinematic projects have an eerie way of leaving the screen for the "real world," means that we can't quite dismiss the fantasy of escape as simply corrupt, a laughable failure. As *Gravity's Rainbow* amply demonstrates, nostalgia and sentimentality cannot be detached from the cinematic and literary conventions, the corporate manipulations and falsehoods, by which they are ostensibly only obscured, but as the novel also recognizes, despite, or even because of, this constitutive soiling, the promise of nostalgic or sentimental escape remains not only seductive but curiously potent. In *After the Great Divide*, which seeks, among other things, to complicate the classical understanding of the culture industry to which our negative valuations of nostalgia, kitsch, and sentimentality are mainly indebted, Andreas Huyssen suggests the need for a "theory of sensuality and fantasy," since "even false, crippled needs are needs and—as Ernst Bloch has shown—contain a kernel of human dream, hope, and concrete utopia" (158). The implied recognition that the world doesn't divide neatly into the saved and the damned, the resistant and the cooperative, and that we don't have—and most definitely need—a language for what results from the crippling of binaries like these, seems valuable in the context of a novel like *Gravity's Rainbow*. In fact, it has become more and more clear to me in writing this essay just how difficult—and important—it is to speak about complicity in a way that does not reduce the experience of inescapable compromise to one of failure and loss. In opposition to Them, Pynchon can offer only a Counterforce made up entirely of "at *least* a double agent" "permanently enslaved" by a "Firm" that knows all about its employees' extracurricular activities: in its literalizing way, *Gravity's Rainbow* gives us a term for resisting complicity, "double agent," that is thoroughly in keeping with the espionage lingo with which critical discourse is oddly saturated (543, 548). Trawling further in the novel's depths, we might try to understand the perversity of such an (im)position within the context of masochism and

the politics of submission.[14] Recent feminist discussions of female masochism such as Marianne Noble's *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* seek neither to celebrate "[masochism's] subversive resistance to the patriarchy [n]or lament its powerless manipulation by the patriarchy," but rather to foreground the way in which masochistic discourse in particular contexts enables women to "wield power through complicitous alignment with hegemonic ideologies" (11). Admittedly, even if one links the mass-market romance whose conventions *Gravity's Rainbow* so often cites to the earlier sentimental novel, Noble's analysis of the ways in which female masochism functions in nineteenth-century American sentimental fiction by women cannot simply be applied wholesale to a twentieth-century American novel written by a man.[15] It is also true that *Gravity's Rainbow*, probably in spite of itself, warns us against abstracting such a large-scale politics from masochism. Blitzed London, after all, is the poxy whore who wants it: "sending the RAF to make a terror raid against civilian Lübeck" is, we are told at one point, "the unmistakable long look that said *hurry up and fuck me*" (215). When mass destruction, via the metaphor of a come-on, can come to imply the play of sadomasochism, as it sometimes does in this novel, we have a problem. Nevertheless, given *Gravity's Rainbow*'s many masochists (Byron, Greta Erdmann, Brigadier Pudding, the Counterforce), it would seem worthwhile to consider how embracing complicity might simultaneously enable and disable resistance. What does it mean to take pleasure, like Byron the Bulb, in one's "anger and frustration" (655), or to accept, as the Counterforce must, one's role as "at *least* a double agent"?

Of course, one might read the dominant mode of Pynchon's sentimental narratives as parody, sentimentality's promises as the

14. It may seem perverse even to conceptualize sentimentality and nostalgia within the context of perversity. Nevertheless, as Roland Barthes writes in *A Lover's Discourse*, "by a reversal of values, . . . it is this sentimentality which today constitutes love's obscenity" (175).

15. Certainly, the masochistic fantasies that play such a large part in both mass-market romances and the romances of *Gravity's Rainbow* (Slothrop's rape of Katje, Greta Erdmann's masochism, Scorpia Mossmoon's fantasy of being raped by Pirate the pirate, Jessica's toned-down abduction by Roger) would support the validity of such a comparison.

self-evidently distasteful objects of a righteous satire. Postmodernist theory splits on what is essentially a question of authenticity: can the postmodern be authentically sentimental, or must sentimentality always manifest as parody? In either case, the negative valuation of the sentimental, as of the nostalgic, is clear. Here, I think, we need to consider whether the vehemence of disavowal doesn't conceal an anxiety about the seductiveness of the thing—sentimentality—being disavowed. If it is true that, as Q. D. Leavis acerbically puts it, "every self-aware person finds that he has to train himself from adolescence in withstanding" the key terms of sentimental fiction, we have to ask whether, in Rita Felski's words, the "aesthetic inadequacy that is identified as an integral feature" of the mass-market literary object is a "self-evident feature of the object itself," or whether it needs to be "linked to the critic's own training in particular techniques of cultural discrimination" (Leavis qtd. in Turner; Felski 119).

Government agent Pirate Prentice, watching Jessica Swanlake and Roger Mexico together, is "suddenly, dodderer and ass, taken by an ache in his skin, a simple love for them both that asks nothing but their safety, and that he'll always manage to describe as something else—'concern,' you know, 'fondness. . . .' " (35). Are we, like Pirate, to be trapped by our own distrust of sentimentality into misidentifying apparently sentimental moments in the text as parodic? Is love *always* "love"? And even if the answer is yes, does this absolutely militate against sincerity? For theorists like Fredric Jameson, pastiche is parody's "neutral" (and hence politically objectionable) twin.[16] But Jameson also writes, in an immensely suggestive phrase, that the "great parodist" must have a "secret sympathy" for his source (5). In a phrase cited by more than one scholar of kitsch, Hermann Broch describes kitsch as "an escape into the idyll of history, where set conventions are still valid" (qtd. in Felski 118 and Calinescu 239). If we are not always able, in

16. As it is articulated in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Jameson's parody/pastiche dichotomy reproduces other pairings discussed above: pastiche is "parody that has lost its sense of humor," that lacks "its ulterior motive," a definition whose imprecision turns what might be a formal property into a marker of the politically objectionable (5).

Gravity's Rainbow, absolutely to distinguish parody from pastiche, this may be because parody's ironic edge has been at least partially blunted *by* nostalgia, its subversive force tamed into a pastiche-like, kitschy neutrality. But mightn't we name Jameson's "secret sympathy" nostalgia? Mightn't we describe Pynchon's appropriation, however playful, of the shopworn conventions of the war romance as a form of literary nostalgia for narratives that are no longer, can no longer, be read as authentic, that are finished? Need the irony that parody, we believe, brings, only ever undermine? We might ask whether our pleasure in the sentimental is simply a vehicle for our pleasure in our consciousness of pleasure, but we might also ask whether knowingness only authorizes the pleasure we take in the sentimental (as, to some degree, it must, since reading *Gravity's Rainbow*, even for the romantic bits, bestows a cultural prestige unobtainable via *Fanning the Flame*, a mass-market romance), and thus whether the pleasure we take in self-consciousness is ultimately separable from any pleasure we might derive from the sentimental. If camp "indulge[s] in the pleasures offered by the most awful kitsch" and cultivates bad taste—"usually the bad taste of yesterday"—under "the guise of ironic connoisseurship," it yet remains almost impossible, Calinescu acknowledges, to distinguish from kitsch (230). How indeed to distinguish guilty from heroic pleasures, irony from the unironic? How, finally, to distinguish nostalgia from parody?

Kitsch, as we've seen, is nostalgic in itself and satisfies the nostalgia of others. We are thus brought back to the reader, ourselves. In a novel concerned on every level with pleasure, from Slothrop's mysterious erections, to the problematic pleasures of genocide, to the pleasure of superfluous resistance, the question of readerly pleasure must finally propose itself.[17] Patrick McHugh argues that "like the novel," "The Story of Byron the Bulb" wraps its anxiety

17. In referring to the pleasures of genocide, I refer, of course, in part to the nostalgia-driven sadism practiced by Blicero. But it seems important, although I do not have the space to deal with it adequately, to raise the specter of the Herero "Empty Ones": their "program is racial suicide. They [the Revolutionaries of the Zero] would finish the extermination the Germans began in 1904" (317). "The people will find the Center again

about the relationship between pleasure and powerlessness "in a delightful textual structure, thus reproducing [narratively] for the reader the affect it thematizes" (16). Byron, a masochistic, immortal lightbulb, articulates our paranoiac sense that not only might the things we take pleasure in (chocolate, sex, sci-fi) be bad for us, render us vulnerable to manipulation and suppression, but that we might come to enjoy being vulnerable to the brute exercise of power. How and why we experience pleasure in literary objects is quite evidently beyond the scope of this paper. However, while I would stress that we take pleasure in many different literary objects (in *Gravity's Rainbow* as in *Fanning the Flame*, in *Persuasion* as in *The Green Hat*) and for many different reasons, I would also argue that over the course of the twentieth century, certain pleasures, especially those afforded by or characteristic of mass-market literature, have come to be gendered and class-marked, and hence to seem inauthentic and politically suspicious. This is not at all to suggest (or to suggest that *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests) that we have repressed an "authentic" pleasure we ought to take in the sentimental in order to gain access to a culturally privileged yet "inauthentic" pleasure in the difficult and fragmented, nor is it to imply that all intellectuals (or at least readers of *Gravity's Rainbow*) ought to enjoy formulaic romance novels. It is, rather, to suggest that we not, in reading *Gravity's Rainbow* (and by extension other postmodern and even modernist texts), skitter away from the romantic, the sentimental, the nostalgic, and the utopic but instead take into account incorporations and transformations of these elements in postmodern contexts and confront both their seductiveness and our suspicion. If parody is, as I've argued, a nostalgic enterprise, how then do we read postmodern texts like *Gravity's Rainbow*?

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the Center, without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place . . . ." (319): just as London and V–2 are locked into what is problematically figured as a sadomasochistic relationship, here genocide has become racial suicide, a form of deadly nostalgia we might understand as the expression of a people's collective death drive, the longing for a return to the inanimate and inorganic.

Given the knowing way in which Roger and Jessica, Slothrop and Katje, Pirate and Scorpia Mossmoon accede to, if they do not in fact actively craft, the romantic narratives they inhabit, it is possible to see especially the male lovers as readers who—familiar with the outlines of these kinds of stories ("Scorpia figured as his Last Fling" [37]), helplessly, pleasurably, even nostalgically (Pirate's Fling with Scorpia is always already his Last, always already Over)—anticipate the eventual reckoning they will have to give for a few nights of pleasure. Pirate, for instance, paranoically believes that They know about and condone his doomed affair with Scorpia: "give him a bad enough wound," he imagines They imagine, "and he'll come round, round to the ways of this hard-boiled old egg of world and time-tables, cycling night to compromise night . . ." (37). And so he does. Among other things, then, *Gravity's Rainbow* asks what it would mean to talk about our guilty reading pleasures in terms of masochism. More to the point, perhaps, if the pleasure we take in the sentimental is fundamentally nostalgic, do we read the sentimentality of *Gravity's Rainbow* nostalgically? If so, is this altogether a bad thing?

What one might in fact ask is whether *reading itself* isn't nostalgic in some fundamental way. Lowenthal suggests that the appeal of nostalgia has much to do with our sense of the *pastness* of the past: history, whether willfully or not, reveals an order, an integratedness, a completedness to the past that contrasts—positively, the nostalgic would say—with the incoherence of our present. We might define nostalgia, then, as this longing for the certain shapes the past assumes as history, *as narrative*. The desire for retrospective order, pattern, and closure may receive particular fulfillment in the reading of generic narratives such as the romance novel or the mystery novel, but this doesn't preclude, surely, the possibility of finding nostalgic fulfillment in less familiar structures, narratives without conventional closure and any recognizable pattern at all—*Gravity's Rainbow*, in fact.

The raging debate over "who is better, Beethoven or Rossini," that takes place between Emil "Säure" Bummer and Gustav the composer encapsulates the debate over nostalgia and sentimental-

ity that I have been trying to engage in this essay. For Bummer, "wretched antique," Rossini means lovers getting together, isolation overcome: "[T]hrough the machineries of greed, pettiness, and the abuse of power, *love occurs*. All the shit is transmuted to gold. The walls are breached, the balconies are scaled" (440). Against Säure's game "full of light and kindness" (622), Gustav pitches liberation through the avant-gardism of Beethoven, whose submission to the "demands of history" made him one of the "architects of musical freedom" (440), and of Webern, whose tone row represents (according to Gustav) the achievement of "maximum freedom" (441). Thus we have, on the one hand, the comic opera, performing the kinds of nostalgic narratives I discussed earlier in this essay, as well as what passes for musical kitsch ("It's a *great* tune" [441]), and, on the other hand, Webern, the culmination of German abstract music, narrativeless and, worse yet, arguably tuneless.

Gustav denounces Rossini's devotees as farting, belching, "snow-topped old rascals" dreaming up "ever more ingenious plots against their children" (441) and claims to "smell mortality in every one of those bouncy little tunes" (622). Of course, neither addict can be said to win their argument, which rather dwindles into a story about Slothrop's posse of weird musical instruments.[18] Gustav's accusations reflect the kinds of anxieties—about return, about sentimentality, about reading—that I have uncovered elsewhere in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Perhaps more damaging to Bummer's case (and that of sentimentality), this novel hardly takes us to the end of a Rossini opera. As Leni Pökler's fantasy of finding an old flame rushes to institute successful revolution and a world in which "everyone is in love," it is interrupted by a phrase that has been graffitied "on the walls of the Red districts": "AN ARMY OF

18. These include the mouth harp Slothrop had lost, five hundred pages earlier, "down the toilet of the Roseland Ballroom" (623). This is the kind of narrative "coincidence" that helps us through the novel, even if it doesn't Slothrop himself, who doesn't remember his loss and hence can't recognize this restoration. In fact, one would want to make this harp, or perhaps the "Kazoo" movement of Haydn's suppressed Quartet in G-flat Minor, the figure for a resisting complicity, or complicitous resistance, were it not for the fact that it's not clear what that would mean. The drive to find meaning in this novel is almost overwhelmingly irresistible. What is the punch line of these musical jokes?

LOVERS CAN BE BEATEN" (155). In its denial, substantive and structural, of love, liberation, and all that sentimental fiction promises, this broken narrative follows a pattern that will be taken up by the novel itself. Thus instead of Rossini's "great centripetal movement" (440), *Gravity's Rainbow* gives us Tyrone Slothrop's scattering in the centrifuge of the Zone, and the Rocket suspended above "the roof of this old theatre" (760).

And yet suspension is, in a sense, the key term here. In concluding, I don't want to suggest that the novel seeks to privilege one form of resistance or narrative over another, or that it is or isn't finally optimistic about the prospects for resistance. Rather, I want to draw on my own experience of reading this novel to suggest that what it offers are local narratives of utopic possibility damaged but not finally replaced by countering narratives of corruption. The Counterforce section, insisting that while its members are "never to be at full ease, still it's not parade rest any longer," closes with a sentimental song celebrating "a moment together" and then dissolves into a "striving to be kind," all that remains, apparently, when "innocence fades" (548). *Gravity's Rainbow* itself concludes apocalyptically enough with the Rocket descending infinitely over the roof of an old theater. But even now, the narrator says, "there is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you, or to reach between your own cold legs" (760). It is in line with the Rocket's endless equivocations, its endless deferrals, that there should seem to be both time and not enough time. In the end, in this big novel, that the shit isn't transmuted to gold precisely, that liberation and love don't finally occur, that Slothrop doesn't find a way home speak not so much, perhaps, to the impossibility of such outcomes, but rather to the difficult politics of nostalgia, sentimentality, and resistance. A game "full of light and kindness" indeed.

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