A Glimpse of the Grotesque Realism in *Gravity's Rainbow*

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Abstract

This paper aims to use the grotesque realism as the reading strategy to cast a new/different light on the appreciation of *Gravity's Rainbow*, a masterpiece claimed as one of the greatest historical novels of our time and the most important literary text since *Ulysses*.[1] The grotesque is the literary expression of the carnival spirit, which celebrates the second truth of the people. The use of grotesque realism through the grotesque images is to produce a grand reversal of the hierarchical/vertical order with the carnival spirit. The essence of the carnival spirit exemplified in the grotesque realism represents most democratically the human spirit in fighting for genuine freedom. Due to the vastness of *Gravity's Rainbow*, only one episode—the Adenoid—is chosen for discussion through the speculum of the grotesque realism.

Key words: grotesque, grotesque realism, the carnival, carnival spirit

一窺《引力之虹》之荒誕寫實

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摘要

本文旨從「荒誕寫實」之洞見「一窺」《引力之虹》之新人性化之宏觀視野。「荒誕」實為 「嘉年華精神」 文學性之表現，而「荒誕寫實」則是藉由「荒誕意象」極其誇張且突兀地彰顯出人生/性百態之「荒誕性」，迫使讀者置身於荒謬怪誕錯綜複雜之情節時，頓悟（後）現代生活中種種困/窘境，並隨著小說情節之發展，與書中人物共謀脫困之對策。限於篇幅，本文僅能探討一個情節--「腺狀腫怪」，期拋磚引玉，吸引更多讀者閱讀《引力之虹》之興趣與共鳴。

關鍵字：荒誕、荒誕寫實、荒誕意象、嘉年華、嘉年華精神

1. Introduction

Pynchon is difficult, and *Gravity's Rainbow* is especially difficult to read. Providing only pieces, the reader has to give up the conventional/habitual way of reading a novel through linear cause-effect process—(s)he has to collect the pieces and re-construct the mysterious object of quest. *Gravity's Rainbow* is at once a mindfully topsy-turvy world and one of mindless randomness; it's a world "including middles" with an infinite "middle" regions "between the hyperbolic extremes of an absolute, externally imposed order and total chaos" (Hite 13-46). A text profuse with the pluralization of the rhetoric of postmodernism—multiple, heterogeneous, different, hybrid, discontinuous, antitotalizing, uncertain—*Gravity's Rainbow* offers an exemplary experience in (post)modern reading, especially from the perspective of the grotesque realism (Hutchen 58-59, 66).

Grotesque realism is the term conditionally used by Mikhail Bakthin, the Russian literary theorist, for convenient discussion of Francois Rabelais's works. It is set in contrast to the Socialit Realism at the time, which is everything that grotesque realism is not. Through the analysis of Rabelais's work, Bakhtin was trying to make sense of his world under the Stalin's rule; likewise, Pynchon in writing *Gravity's Rianbow* was trying to figure out the value of being a human being during the World War II. Though four centries apart, Rabelais and Pynchon belong to the same type of person, the carnival man in Bakhtin's sense.

Viewed from the speculum of grotesque realism, *Gravity's Rainbow,* overflowing with bodily "grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" grotesque images, "degradation" and "debasement" of various kinds, and festively carnivalesque laughter—all ostentatious features of grotesque realism—plus a feat of literary genres, can be highly appreciated with the carnival spirit. Naturally, it challenges the reader's patience and intelligence in many ways: 760 pages with 400-odd characters involved with the numerous barely discernible plots which touch and intersect, or diverge and separate; numerous well-informed technological references inserted to demonstrate how technology has created its own kind of people (servants) with their own kind of consciousness (or lack of it); a whole range of knowledge of contemporary "specialized" expertise--from mathematics, chemistry and ballistics, to classical music theory, film and comic strips; a prevailing sense of the degree to which modern life has

been bureaucratized and turned into an impersonal routine; subversive disruption of conventional forms of analysis, revealing the way language and fragments can be used to recover meaning in a destitute world (Chambers 124). However, despite the encyclopedic erudition, Pynchon's main concern is in the humanistic condition and values of existence.

To "gain the novel," the reader has to "make" the novel with the scattered pieces, for "bits and pieces replace lines," and "characters shape their present and past very slowly, obliquely" (Karl 447). To focus on our interest here, with all the groteque images, the Pynchonian world reflects "*a phenomenon in tranformation, an as yet unfinished metaporphosis*, of death and birth, growth and becoming"—this would eventually be the experience of reading *Gravity's Rainbow* (Bakhtin 24, *Italic* added).

Although *Gravity's Rainbow* is set near the end of World War II, Pynchon shows that, with or without war, the "warring men"/"They" will continue to develop newer and more abstract ways to subdue nature and her mysteries. Thus along with following the path of the V-2 rocket, "the Holy Grail" in *Gravity's Rainbow*, into Berlin, London, and Japan, *Gravity's Rainbow* leads us into marketplace, into plastics, into electronics, into all areas of mechanical production, into language, and into the body, even into the dream/the unconscious, laying bare the "movement . . . from death to death-transfigured."[2] Knowing that we must not turn our faces away from either the evil around us or the freak in ourselves, Pynchon makes us all look at his grotesque world. Though some of the novel's scenes are lyrical and beautiful, and some funny, many are shocking, eerie, gross, or purely grotesque. Precisely because Pynchon is the kind of "responsible" writer, he is willing to use "grotesque language" to reflect and respond to the destruction he describes. In the end, however, Pynchon's book suggests that he has his own "grotesque vision" of what is responsible and necessary (Chambers 127).

In the act of reading, the reader is sharing the protagonist's quest, which "becomes an allegory of reading as well as of the human condition in general," keeping "pushing aside gause after wavy gauze but there's always still the one, the impenetrable" (Berressem 132; *GR* 359). In fact, the essence of the grotesque is no more than this—the unfinishedness/incompleteness.

2. The Grotesque

To know the essence of grotesque realism, we need to be familiar with the grotesque as an art form. Chronologically, not a phenomenon solely of the twentieth century, nor even of modern civilization, the history of the grotesque as an artistic mode in the West can at least be traced far back to the early Christian period of Roman culture, "where there evolved a style of combining human, animal and vegetable elements, intricately interwoven, in one painting" (Thomson 12). It is not until around 1500 that murals containing grotesque pictures first came to light in the course of excavations in Rome. Thus, as a common word in art criticism, grotesque (meaning "like rocky caves" in Latin) refers originally to this particular kind of decorating used in architectural grottoes, to the fantastic interweaving of human and vegetable forms in baroque decoration,[3] and then to any extravagant and incongruous embellishment (Gray 131). Etymologically, from *grotte* (Ital. "caves," thus by extension "excavations") came the adjective *grottesco* and the noun *la grottesca*, denoting the kind of painting discussed above. The word *crotesque* occurred in French as early as 1532, and was used in English as well before being replaced around 1640 by grotesque.

Generally, due to the co-presence of the laughable and something which is incompatible with the laughable, the grotesque art form tends to connvey the notion of simultaneously laughable and horrifying or disgusting. Responding to the grotesque is essentially "a clash between incompatible reactions--laughter on the one hand and horror or disgust on the other" (Thomson 2). Since horror and delight are both present, one's response to the grotesque is likely to be confused, "a mirthful reaction to the utter incongruity between the appalling substance of the proposal and the reasonable, sober manner in which it is put" (Thomson 5). Therefore, the effect of the grotesque, both comic and monstrous, is at once emotional and intellectual.

The extension of the word "grotesque" to literature and to non-artistic things took place in France as early as the sixteenth-century (Rabelais uses it with reference to parts of the body), but in England and Germany only in the eighteenth century. With this extension, grotesque took on a broader meaning. In particular its association with caricature--a topic much discussed by eighteenth-century aestheticians--led to what the German critic Wolfgang Kayser calls a loss of substance in the word, meaning the suppression of the horrifying or eerie qualities of the grotesque and a corresponding

over-emphasis on the ridiculous and bizarre. Arthur Clayborough, in his book *The Grotesque in English Literature* (1965), also notes this development:

> The word grotesque thus comes to be applied in a more general fashion during the Age of Reason--and of Neo-Classicism--when the characteristics of the grotesque style of art--extravagance, fantasy, individual taste, and the rejection of 'the natural conditions of organization'--are the object of ridicule and disapproval. The more general sense . . . which it has developed by the early eighteenth century is therefore that of 'ridiculous, distorted, unnatural' (adj.); 'an absurdity, a distortion of nature' (noun). (6)

The pejorative connotations of the grotesque persisted, alongside the original technique meaning of a particular type of painting, into the nineteenth century and indeed to a large extent into the twentieth. Thus, the grotesque is often treated in terms of ludicrous exaggeration.

However, there were several writers who emphasized the serious and powerfully unsettling nature of the grotesque. In "Grotesque Renaissance," a chapter in *The Stones of Venice*, John Ruskin distinguishes between "noble" or "true" grotesque and "ignoble" or "false" grotesque, the former being associated with the realization of man's tragic and imperfect nature, the latter with willful frivolity.[4] Yet, it need be pointed out that despite the moralistic overtones of Ruskin's analysis, his work is noteworthy for the stress he places on the playful or sportive element in the grotesque. All grotesque art is for him "partly a product of a specially strong urge to *play, invent, manipulate*--to experiment" (Thomson 15). As we shall see, Thomas Pynchon's sense of the grotesque is very much in the similar vein.

The use of the grotesque continued, but it was not until the appearance in 1957 of the book by Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, that the grotesque became the object of considerable aesthetic analysis and critical evaluation. While previous ages had seen in it "merely the principle of disharmony run wild, or relegated it to the cruder species of the comic," the present tendency regards the grotesque "as a fundamentally ambivalent thing, as a violent clash of opposites, and hence, in some of its forms at least, as an appropriate expression of the problematical nature of existence" (Thomson 11). Thus, it is no wonder that the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to flourish "in societies and eras marked by strife, radical change or disorientation" (Thomson 11).

Among the numerous modern efforts to define the nature of the grotesque, the most notable are those of Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin as well as John Ruskin.

Though Kayser and Bakhtin in most respects differ from Ruskin as much as they do from each other, both retain that the central concept of the grotesque as play. For the former, the grotesque is, among other things, "a game with the absurd," while the latter locates the grotesque in the spirit of carnival, which "distorts and defuses all that is terrible by the peoples' triumphant laughter" (Mc Elroy 2). For Ruskin, the source of the terror of the grotesque "is not a specific situation but the human condition itself, not the sudden, selfish, and contemptible fear of immediate danger, but the fear which arises out of the contemplation of great powers in destructive operation, and generally from the perception of the presence of death" (Mc Elroy 3). To all of them, the function of the grotesque is to transform the world from what we "know" it to what we "fear" it might be by distorting or exaggerating the surface of reality in order to tell a qualitative truth about it. "Once the world of the familiar surfaces has been transformed into the world of grotesque possibilities, events abound that can only be called magical, and almost invariably they centre around victimisation and efficacy" (Mc Elroy 5-6).

In regard to the nature of the grotesque, Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin disagree completely and the centre of the disagreement is the relation of its comic and fearsome sides (Mc Elroy 14). Kayser, based on "an apparent existentistial bias," views the grotesque "a game with the absurd," depicting "an alien, estranged, inexplicable world in which comedy has little essential function;" while Bakhtin, "beginning with a Marxist bias," considers the grotesque "the peoples' triumphant laughter dethroning the shibboleths of the "official" world view and substituting in their place the carnival spirit of abundance and renewal, thus defeating fear" (Mc Eloy 14). Bakhtin opines that fear is "the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter," for only "laughter, folk laughter grounded in the abundance of life, the indomitableness of the collective human animal, and endless renewal through birth even in the very presence of death" can truly overcome cosmic terror (Mc Eloy 15).

It is no accident that the word "grotesque" came into currency at exactly the time when rationalism and empiricism were assuming an increasingly important role in Western man's address to the world. "For the modern, the grotesque is by nature something exceptional, something set apart or aberrant, and in its most extreme forms, situated in the realm of fantasy, dream, or halluciation—in the realm, that is, of unreality;" grotesque "differentiates that which we want to have separate from our sense of reality, but still powerfully experience as real" (Mc Elroy 6).

In the art of the grotesque, the balance between the fearsome and the playful does

not depend upon the subject matter but upon the artist's attitude and the response he seems to be encouraging in the reader or viewer. The fear of death and horrors of madness are serious things, but subject to play—an earnest, even exalted play, or a ludicrous burlesque that surbodiantes the serious. As most subjects that can be handled conventionally can be rendered grotesque, it is "the degree of play involved in creating the grotesque" that "controls the balance between the droll and the fearsome in the finished work of art" (Mc Elroy 14).

In practice, the grotesque can be expressed in various ways, "all the absolute antithesis of the harmony, order, dignity, and serenity that, since the time of classical Greece, have constituted for the West the ideal (or idealized) concept of beauty." An aberration inducing fascination, the grotesque, which might be ugly or ludicrous, "lures us even as it repels, fascinates us with our own irrational dreads, and refuses to let us altogether dismiss the game even after we have played it" (Mc Elroy 16).

In a nutshell, grotesque art, even more than most art, is synthetic, synthesizing "magic, animalism, and play fused in the presence of an intuition of the world as monstrous" (Mc Elroy 16). The nature of a particular grotesque art work is governed by the balance of its constituent elements, with play being the most variable. Consequently, the world of the grotesque may be entered whimsically, or it may be entered "with urgency and concern, though still in a spirit of heightened artistic play" (Mc Elroy 16).

Literature of the modern grotesque usually focuses on the unequal struggle between the self and a hostile environment, and the most common theme is about dominance and sumission (Mc Elroy 17). The individual is often persecuted by a patently insane world capable of overwhelming him by means beyond the limits of physical possibility. And this is why *Gravity's Rainbow* provides such a perfect text for the application of the grotesque.

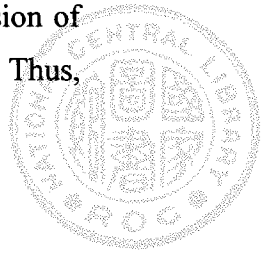
In depicting a vindictive, persecuting world, the grotesque can function simply as a radical satire, a caricature of the real world accessible to the senses; or, it can be used as "a heightening device by which the conflict between self and other is intensified by expanding it to magical proportions." Often, the individual is under attack from the magical (thus irresistible), the physical (mutilation, torture, or transformation), and the psychological (being cowed)—all render him grotesque in uncanny, bizarre, and often magical ways (Mc Elroy 17-18). This is almost exactly what is happening to the main characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*

At its most effective, the modern grotesque serves not only to satirise and to heighten, but also to expose. The rationalisations of everyday life are stripped away to bare the substratum of terror, the lowest common denominator of the modern grotesque, which underlies the seemingly mundane. In negating the logic of a reasonable world, the modern fictive grotesque world "substitutes a more forceful anti-logic, an internally consistent, imaginatively persuasive unreasonableness by which the conventional function of reason is subverted" (Mc Elroy 27). With normal perspectives set askew, all the rest follows with a zany dream-logic of its own. Finally, it is worth pointing out that besides "an assault upon the idea of a rational world," the modern grotesque is also "an assault upon the reader himself, upon his sensibilities, upon his ideals, upon his feeling of living in a friendly, familiar world or his desire to live in one" (Mc Elroy 27). Thus, the grotesqueness is an experience for all. However, despite the earnest attack, there is always "an element of play, a laughing through clenched teeth, a sense of the book as grim joke," serving it up to the reader (Mc Elroy 28).

The grotesqueness of *Gravity's Rainbow* is multiple in its theme, form/structure, characters, and language. Pynchone uses language to create a grotesque world in which the reversal often occurs. The linguistic and contextual grotesque makes explicit the fragmented and unfinished sentences and characters as well as the postmodern condition of "the multiplicity of realities." Reading *Gravity's Rainbow*, the reader is asked to "participate in the beset and bewildered consciousness" experienced by the characters," and to "pass through a bewildering variety of genres, behavioural modes, and types of discourse"—all of these surely have much to do with the grotesque realism (Tanner 76-77).

3. The Grotesque Realism

To Bakhtin, the grotesque, the expression in literature of the carnival spirit, incorporates the primary values of incompleteness, becoming, ambiguity, indefinability, non-canonicalism--indeed, all that "jolts us out of our normal expectations and epistemological complacency" (Clark & Holquist 312). The specific type of imagery inherent in the culture of folk humor in all its forms and manifestations has been defined by Bakhtin conditionally as grotesque realism, which is "a point-by-point inversion of categories used in the thirties to define Socialist Realism" (Bakhtin xvii). Thus,



through the grotesque images, groteque realism presents a different reality congenial to the populace.

The grotesque images, "entirely different from ready-made completed being, remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of'classic' aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed" (Bakhtin 25). Copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment—all these in their material aspects are the main elements in the system of grotesque images; they are contrary to the classic images of "the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development" (Bakhtin 25). Paradoxically, degradation—"the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract"--is the essential principle of grotesque realism (Bakhtin 19). And the purpose is "to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life" to counter the Absolute, whatever form it maybe (Bakhtin 62).

Of all the grotesque images, the "grotesque body," especially "the very material bodily lower stratum," illustrates most fully the qualities of grotesque realism (Bakhtin 1968, 62). To be brief, Bakhtin views the body as an ever-growing entity with all kinds of loopholes for possible transit/mingling.

> Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, trangresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. . . . The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth. . . . This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body. (Bakhtin 26)

The grotesque body, being unfinished and open, is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects; being cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements; it is "an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout" (Bakhtin 27). Consequently, the bodily level of food, drink, digestion, and sexual life, especially the erotic sphere, is celebrated; and the use of the bodily lower stratum is to fulfill its "unifying, degrading, uncrowning, and simultaneously regenerating functions" (Bakhtin 23).

Bakhtin's refusal to homogenize the surface of the body or to deny its lust to mingle with other bodies is more than a defiant stand against the prevailing idealism of his day or a sally against the puritanism of Stalinist society. The body is a common metaphor for the state, and xenophobic societies in controlling the behavior of their citizens and keeping them from outside contacts often stress the idea of keeping the body pure. As a result, the orifices are to be carefully guarded to prevent unlawful intrusions; inside becomes good and outside evil.

Finally, what the grotesque, the literary expression of the carnival spirit, wants to achieve is to make it possible "to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things" (Bakhtin 34). [6] Thus, the attitude of grotesque realism is always "positive," its principle "victorious," and its final result "abundance, increase" (Bakhtin 62).

4.The Grotesque Body—The Adenoid

Of all the numerous grotesque images in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Adenoid appears very early and its grotesqueness is conspicuous right away. A product of Lord Blatherard Osmo's dream, the Adenoid--an ever-growing and devouring (of human beings) monster--exemplifies perfectly Bakhin's idea of "the gay carnival monster," and it is related to Pirate Prentice, the dream surrogate—another example of the grotesque (Bakhtin 335).

Pirate, the first character appearing in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is known/useful to "Them" by his special talent as "a fantasist-surrogate, able to get inside the fantasies of others: being able, actually, to take over the burden of *managing* them" (*GR* 12). He had known instinctively for sometime that certain episodes he dreamed could not be his own. And he feared that despite his great effort to hide his strange talent, sooner or later "he would be abducted by an organization of dacoits or Sicilians, and used for unspeakable purposes" (*GR* 13). Indeed, it doesn't take long before "They" discover Pirate's unique talent. At first "They" cannot yet find the usefulness of Pirate's extraordinary talent, but "They" are patient and "committed to the Long Run as They are" (*GR* 14). Then, Pirate's talent is soon put to full use to save the whole Europe.

> At last, one proper Sherlock Holmes London evening, the unmistakable smell of gas came to Pirate from a dark street lamp, and out of the fog ahead

> materialized a giant organlike form. Carefully, black-shod step by step, Pirate approached the thing. It began to slide forward to meet him, over the cobblestones slow as a snail, leaving behind some slime brightness of street-wake that could not have been from fog. In the space between them was a crossover point, which Pirate, being a bit faster, reached first. He reeled back, in horror, back past the point--but such recognitions are not reversible. *It was a giant Adenoid.* At least as big as St. Paul's, and growing hour by hour. London, perhaps all England, was in mortal peril! (*GR* 14)

Apparently, Pirate has vicariously experienced an important person's dream about a disgusting and gigantic "lymphatic monster" (*GR* 15). The VIP turns out to be Lord Blatherard Osmo, who at the time occupied an important post at the Foreign Office and was suffering severely from the hideous Adenoid—a pure product of his dream. Not only has the Adenoid once blocked Osmo's "distinguished pharynx," but it is still plaguing on him untile the entire fate of the Europe is in peril: "Each morning Lord Baltherad Osmo must put on his bowler, and take his briefcase out to the Adenoid to make his daily *demarche*. It is taking up so much of his time he's begun to neglect Novi Pazar, and F.O. is worried. F.O. finally decided to go to the Firm [Them] for help. The Firm knew just the man" (*GR* 15, 16). Thus, Pirate is sent to deal with Osmo's obsessive dream.

> Lord Blatherard Osmo proceeds to get *assimilated* by his own growing Adenoid, some horrible transformation of cell plasma it is quite beyond Edwardian medicine to explain . . . before long, tophats are littering the squares of Mayfair, cheap perfume hanging ownerless in the pub lights of the East End as the Adenoid continues on its rampage, not swallowing up its victims at random, no, the fiendish Adenoid has a *master plan*, it's choosing only certian personalitied useful to it--there is a new election, a new preterition abroad in England here that throws the Home Office into hysterical and painful episodes of indecision . . . no one knows *what* to do . . . . Teams come down from the Cavendish Laboratory, to string the Heath with huge magnets, electric-arc terminals, black iron control panels full of gauges and cranks, the Army shows up in full battle gear with bombs full of the latest deadly gas--the Adenoid is blasted, electric-shocked, poisoned, changes color and shape here and there, yellow fat-nodes appear high over the trees . . . before the flash-power cameras of the Press, a hideous green pseudopod

> crawls toward the cordon of troops and suddenly sshhlop! wipes out an entire observation post with a deluge of some disgusting orange mucus in which the unfortunate men are *digested*--not screaming but actually laughing, *enjoying* themselves . . . . (*GR* 15)

This is quite a carnival/grotesque scene as almosat all the major elements of the grotesque are there—gigantic/ever-growing/digusting monster, swallowing up laughing people, a new preterition, debasing and decrowing the advanced science, carnival laughter, etc. The grotesque scenario continues, which is quoted here in length because Pynchon's language loses its glamour and gist once paraphrased:

> Pirate/Osmo's mission is to establish liaison with the Adenoid. The situation is now stable, the Adenoid occupies all of St. James's the historic buildings are no more, Government offices have been relocated, but so dispersed that communication among them is highly uncertain--postmen are being snatched off of their rounds by stiff-pimped Adenoid tentacles of fluorenscent beige, telegraph wires, are apt to go down at any whim of the Adenoid. . . . Every day for $2^1/_2$ years, Pirate went out to visit the St. James Adenoid. It nearly drove him crazy. Though he was able to develop a pidgin by which he and the Adenoid could communicate, unfortunately he wasn't nasally equipped to make the sounds too well, and it got to be an awful chore. As the two of them snuffled back and forth, alienists in black seven-button suits, admires of Dr. Freud the Adenoid clearly had no use for, stood on stepladders up against its loathsome grayish flank shoveling the new wonderdrug cocaine--bringing *hods* full of the white substance, in relays, up the ladder to smear on the throbbing gland-creature, and into the germ toxins bubbling nastily inside its crypts with no visible effects at all (though who knows how that *Adenoid* felt, eh?) (*GR* 16)

Isn't it simply too grotesque and carnival not to laugh out loud? Pynchon is indeed a carnival man. Because of Pirate's dealing with the Adenoid, Lord Blatherard Osmo was finally able to devote all of his time to Novi Pazar; however, after his usefulnees is exhausted, Osmo was discovered mysteriously suffocated in a bathtub full of tapioca pudding. As to Pirate, after his success in saving Europe from "the Balkan Armageddon" Osmo dreamed of, the Firm/They keeps controlling him by "allowing Pirate only tiny homeopathic doses of peace, just enough to keep his defenses up, but not enough for it to poison him" (*GR* 16)

The Adenoid surely is a perfect example of the grotesque body, materializing

completely the gigantic dimensions of infinability. It is especially grotesque in that not only the physical (if there is any) description of the Adenoid is disgusting but the act of devouring living people is simply too horrible; however, as play is never negligible in the grotesque art, even in such a gruesome scene, carnival laughter, which is curative in nature, is present—we cannot but laugh at the uselessness of the psychology, the advanced scientific knowledge, sophisticated equipment, and whatnot.

Another important message is about the "new elect." In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the world is roughly divided between "They" (the elect) and "We" (the preterite). As mentioned already, Pynchon, as a "responsible" writer, feels called upon to speak for "the preterite" from the very beginning of the novel. Now the ones being elected--the "new elect"-- are sent to death, instead of into heaven; thus, being the preterite is the only way to escape from death. While "the elect" like the great scientists or politicians who are running the war are proud of human achievement in the fields of physical science, medicine, politics, or even psychology, nature counters it with a big joke of having an imaginary monster devouring the whole London and her people--a reversal of the natural course, according to man's criteria. And the funny part of it is that the new elect enjoy being swallowed up—decrowning with carnival laughter.

To mention in passing, it is significant that Pirate Prentice, together with the other manipulated, later becomes an important member of "the Counterforce"(most representative of "Us") continuing fighting against "Them" with carnival strategy of debasement and decrowning.

Horror and delight are both involved in the disgusting dream-stuff Adenoid, whose ever-growing lymphatic body, whose exhilarating devouring of the elect, and whose defiant challenge to the most advanced scientific lore, all make it a perfect grotesque image/body, telling us some truth of the grotesque realism, that is, the reality you experience in your real life may not be as real as the reality in your dream. "Their" truth is manipulated/man-made due to "Their" need to control everythig in people's life, including the subconscious emerging in your dream life, so as to acquire as much profit as possible, and the war time is the best possible time to manipulate everything dirty under the sun in the name of science or some noble slogans. The episode of the Adenoid functions as the curative carnival laughter to remedy man's arrogance and ignorance in a most grotesque way.

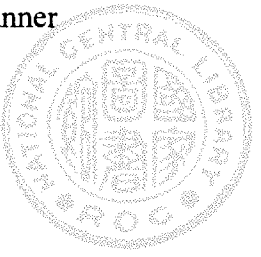
6. Conclusion

"All that is terrifying becomes grotesque" (Bakhtin 91). Indeed, Pynchon has achieved that in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but he adds a touch of the carnival spirit to each, making it both fun and curative. The glimpse of the grotesque realism in this paper covers only Pirate Prentice's experience. Actually, grotesque elements can be detected and savored in every episode in *Gravity's Rainbow*. This paper just offers a glimpse (a synecdoche), a starting point to appreciate the big bulk of Pynchon's masterpiece. The use of the grotesque, simply put, magnifies the familiar to extremity, creating the sense of grotesqueness, which, being so strange and so gigantic, cannot be ignored by the viewer/reader; consequently, as the impact of the grotesqueness is so intense, new understanding can often be derived from the magnified experience.

Of course, there remain many more complicate and subtle grotesque images in *Gravity's Rainbow*, a literary monster in many aspects, and the total effect of the grotesqueness is to create an ambience for the possibility of genuine humane concern, especially for the preterite. Of course, "play" is always there in the creation of the grotesque art, especially for Pynchon, whose humor has often been defined as the "black humor" of the sixties. However, "a carnival-grotesque humorist" would be a more appropriate term to describe him, and his version of the grotesque realism incarnates the noblest fighting spirit, battling carnivalesquely for the most basic human freedom and dignity to live in accord with one's will. In short, it's the ideal of genuine democracy that is the Grail, the Grand Text, and *Gravity's Rainbow*, which reminds the reader from the very beginning of the possibility of life going on/transforming unceasingly in the reincarnation circle, has achieved that, at least in the carnival-grotesque spirit.

Notes

1.Critics have different views about the status of *Gravity Rainbow* as a novel. In Frederick R. Karl's opinion, "*Gravity's Rainbow*, whatever failings it may have as literature, has become the *Ulysses* of the seventies: a work whose difficulties, abstruse references, and historical sweep recall Joyce's plan of the twenties" (444). Tony Tanner



opines that *Gravity's Rainbow* is "both one of the great historical novels of our time and arguably the most important literary text since *Ulysses*" (75). According to Robert Newman, besides being an encyclopedic narrative like Joyce's *Ulysses*, the rejections of *Gravity's Rainbow* by the Pulitzer Advisory Board and by other members of the literary establishment as an affront to good taste also recall the indignant self-righteousness that characterized the public reception of *Ulysses* five decades earlier (93, 94).

2. Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973). 166. Subsequent citation is from this version and abbreviated as *GR*.

3. Baroque, which in Spanish means "imperfect pearl," is chiefly an architectural term, meaning irregular, odd and whimsical, with specific application to the florid, ornamental style of late Renaissance architecture. Highly ornate writing of the seventeenth century is called "baroque" by analogy (Gray 41).

4. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venius* (Vol. XI of *Works*, ed. E. T. Cook, and A. Wedderburn, London, 1904).

5. In the "Introduction" of *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin has detailed discussion of the grotesque realism.

6. It's worth noting that in the introduction of *Rabelais and His World*, the carnival and the grotesque are often juxtaposed such as "the carnival spirit and grotesque imagery," "carnival-grotesque images," "the carnival-grotesque form", "the carnival-grotesque element," which indicates the closeness and interchangeablity of the two terms.

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