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Editorial

In earlier issues of Pynchon Notes, we have informed readers of the problems faced by scholars who wanted to organize formal seminars on Pynchon's work at MLA Conventions. As announced in our last issue, an informal meeting of such scholars was held at the 1981 Convention in New York on Monday, December 28. Thirty-two people attended this get-together, where the principal topic of discussion was the possibility of securing a more regular forum that would make possible the presentation of papers, in a seminar format, at the next MLA Convention.

Thanks to the initiative of Professors Lance Schachterle of Worcester Polytechnic, Alan Friedman of Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science, and Joseph Slade of Long Island University, there will be a panel devoted to papers on Pynchon at the MLA's 1982 Convention in Los Angeles. As one of the directors of the Division on Literature and Science, which is a permanent organization within the MLA, Professor Schachterle suggested that a session devoted to the influence of science and technology upon the language, style or structure of Pynchon's works could be held under the aegis of that Division. This suggestion was welcomed by all those present. Professors Friedman and Slade are now the committee of two in charge of organizing the seminar. They request that abstracts or proposals, 1 - 3 pages long, be sent to Prof. Joseph Slade, Communications Center, Long Island University/Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn, NY 11201, before April 1.

In a less formal way, there was some discussion of the desirability of forming a Pynchon Society, similar to such organizations as the John Updike Society, which would function as an integral part of the MLA structure and not need constantly to ask for validation of its proposals for annual seminars at the Convention. While the organizational advantages of having such a Society were obvious to many, others objected to the institutionalization of a writer with the sort of attitudes we ascribe to Pynchon. There was no formal proposal, only rambling debate. Those of us who have been present at several such discussions at
earlier Conventions detected a decrease in the intensity of the opposition to creating a Pynchon Society. It is conceivable that in another year or two a Pynchon Society will be formed, especially since the MLA is lifting its moratorium on the acceptance of new allied organizations. We hope to convene some sort of informal meeting, perhaps just before or just after the session devoted to Pynchon at the 1982 Convention, in order to discuss this issue further. Until that time, the Editorial page of PN will keep interested readers informed of developments.

JMK, KT
Linguistic Distancing in *Gravity's Rainbow*

Brooke Horvath

"Not me," Thanatz sez.
"Not you, eh? Tell me about it." ¹

When we read Malamud's *The Fixer* or Updike's *Rabbit, Run*, Percy's *The Moviegoer* or even Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, something happens that would be curious were it not so common: although we know Yakov and Harry, Binx and Ebenezer to be fictive creatures existing only in a world of words spun by their authors, we nevertheless become involved in their lives, laughing with them, fearing for them, wishing them luck. The novel becomes the Hilton of our minds' latest vacation from reality, although, like tourists overwhelmed in a Mexican sidestreet, once sucked into the author's world, we are often at his mercy. That fiction should often be this way is neither good nor bad; still, given the fact that *Gravity's Rainbow* is the Iran of fictive worlds today, we might be grateful to know it is a place we can read about yet never really visit.

And we cannot visit because the novel has been so constructed as to keep the reader out, looking in from a distance, though that distance varies almost from page to page. That the book is uninhabitable by readers of traditional fiction is in large part a function of its modernism. Other characteristics, easily documented, which serve both to remove the reader from empathetic participation and to place *Gravity's Rainbow* in the modernist camp, include its emphasis on process over product, the forwarding of multiple realities, the renunciation of any desire to communicate, the dismissal of traditional means of characterization and narration, the element of play apparent throughout, the constant reduction of man to his biological and/or brute features, and a rejection of Humanism. It is, however, the novel's attitudes toward itself and its readers as established by the language of the book that I wish to address here: the efforts Pynchon makes to thwart whatever possibilities might exist for the reader to identify with the work, to reach some sort of empathetic understanding with
characters or message. Pynchon succeeds in leaving us ever outside the circle of his novel, I suggest, by careful if chaotic manipulation of distance. Although distancing could be approached at a structural, thematic, or content level, I intend to concentrate on certain linguistic ploys calculated to keep a wall between reader and work: multiple vocabularies, syntactic complexity and sentence length, inadequate contextualization, and the juxtaposition of styles, tones and genres.

Distance is an important concept for modernists, as Chester Eisinger notes in "Another Battle of the Books: American Fiction, 1950-1970," wherein he cites various modernists on aesthetic distance. Ortega y Gasset is quoted as asserting that "Preoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper," while John Barth argues (in Eisinger's words) "that since art is not life it requires distance and artificiality." Other modernists voicing similar opinions could be cited. However, as the reader must suspect, distancing is not the concern of modernism alone. Edward Bullough, for example, has discussed its importance in his essay "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle." While it is not my intention to abstract this study here, a few of its central points are worth repeating. Bullough begins by noting that a fog at sea cannot be considered aesthetically by a sailor in fear of his life because of it (at least his likelihood of viewing it aesthetically is slight), although the fog may be a source of beauty and enjoyment for a spectator safe on shore. The difference is one of distance, "obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one's own self, by putting it out of gear with practical needs and ends. Thereby the 'contemplation' of the object becomes alone possible" (96). Bullough, no modernist, argues that the most affective (and hence effective) art is that which manages "the utmost decrease of distance without its disappearance" (100, Bullough's emphasis). Yet underdistancing, which leads to charges of the art's being "'crudely naturalistic,' 'harrowing,' repulsive in its realism" (101), is not the only dilemma the artist faces. In attempting to compensate for the audience's inability to distance itself, art can
become overdistanced, which "produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity" (101).

I suggest that Pynchon attempts to distance his readers from his work by constantly changing the distance between text and reader, by alternately over- and underdistancing via a strategic amalgamation of tones and styles, genres and vocabularies. The result is that we are never certain for long of our exact relation to the book and so can never relax and lose ourselves in the novel's world, for that world is constantly changing: one moment we are adrift in an overdistanced world of scientific equations; a few paragraphs later we cross the border into the underdistanced world of pornography or pop culture. Before we can become totally familiar with London during World War II, we are hustled onto a linguistic bus and deposited in German Southwest Africa twenty years prior. And before we become accustomed to the accents of black humor or forties' military slang, we are stopped by a passage of lyric beauty. The consequence is a continual need to reevaluate our position relative to the world of Gravity's Rainbow. There is no time for participation, for bags must be repacked constantly, passports checked, new languages learned.

Linguistic distancing occurs on several levels, and I can do no more than suggest them here. Pynchon's vocabulary—or vocabularies—is the first factor alienating the reader (I use alienation here as synonymous with distancing). The reader has not only foreign words and passages to contend with, but esoteric and technical vocabularies as well (how many of us, for example, could describe an Erlenmeyer flask without doing some research? And how many others are comfortable with the language of Tarot card reading?). Further, as mentioned, there is an attempt to capture military and forties' slang, and the hip ebb and flow of pop culture ("Mont Blanc sez hi, lake sez howdy too. . . ," 266); there is the language of serious literature, replete with allusions and spoofs on literary criticism (the parodic search for meaning, and the symbol hunting); and there is the lewd voice of pornography. Certain readers are apt to be alienated by one or another of these vocabularies: left confused, perhaps worried that they have missed some-
thing, perhaps offended. And to the extent this happens has Pynchon succeeded in achieving distance.

However, language also functions to distance the reader in ways that have little to do with specialized vocabularies or obscene words. Critics as well as admirers have noted the difficulty of Pynchon's prose. Gore Vidal's exaggeration is built on a truth when he writes that "the energy expended in reading Gravity's Rainbow is, for anyone, rather greater than that expended by Pynchon in the actual writing." Pynchon's syntax breaks down whatever opportunities for reader involvement remain once vocabulary has been mastered (again, this is to ignore for the moment problems inherent in the content and structure, and, in conjunction with these, the book's length). I should like to approach syntactic distancing via a notion of relative readability developed by E. D. Hirsch in The Philosophy of Composition. Though my digression is rather long, it does suggest a psychological basis for Pynchon's technique.

In essence, Hirsch is interested in determining what constitutes good prose, and taking his cue from Herbert Spencer's essay "The Philosophy of Style," Hirsch writes that "we should choose the most economical expression from among those different expressions which serve the same purpose" (144). This point is refined through explorations of the psychological bases of reading comprehension and the controls which, on the other hand, often work against this "most economical expression."

It is the short-term memory which makes possible, among other things, the act of reading, because it is the short-term memory that retains and orders the flow of words as our eyes scan a page. However, it can store only a very few items (five to seven) at a time before it must reach at least some tentative semantic closure. And this fact has a direct bearing on the readability of prose:

If the clause requires a reader to exceed the capability of the short-term memory, then the clause will not be very readable, because some of the functional words or phrases will have been forgotten before the clause terminates,
and the reader will have to go through the scanning-reviewing process all over again. (111)

Clause length, then, is one important factor of readability, because the mind has difficulty handling too many discrete items before assimilating the meaning and transferring it to the long-term memory.

"Depth" is another determining factor of readability. It involves "the number of relationships which any grammatical structure requires a person to keep in short-term memory" (112). Depth is what makes the phrase "a certainly not very clearly defined color" more difficult to understand than "certainly not a very clearly defined color."

The length and grammatical complexity of Pynchon's clauses, which most readers have observed, are illustrated in the Slothrop/Bianca and Mexico/Pointsman passages to which I will turn in a moment.

Yet readability is relative because Hirsch realizes that some prose must be difficult, and he is careful to distinguish readability from simple "reading ease." The desire to achieve several effects simultaneously, to convey meaning fully, or to avoid stylistic monotony will each necessitate at times a prose less readable than rules of absolute readability might dictate. Meaning in particular works against speed of closure and so reduces readability. Hirsch writes: "if [the writer's] meaning is complex and subtle, he cannot always convey it with rapidly closed and familiar phrasal units." And he goes on to explain: "readability demands rapid closure to avoid taxing the reader's short-term memory. But readability also demands explicit constraints on meaning in order to guide the reader's understanding" (134). These constraints include contextualization, audience awareness, and the strategic use of proleptic devices ("moreover," "but," and so on) and thematic tags (such as "he" for Slothrop and "Slothrop" for a complex of personality traits). The purpose of constraints is to "reduce the number of plausible alternatives which must pass through our matching-monitor [which makes predictive leaps from word to succeeding word] before a stretch of discourse is understood" (102). Pynchon, on the other hand, seems to subvert the devices of constraint
in order to increase the number of plausible alternatives; he thereby distances the reader by forcing him to work overtime to decode the text. Pynchon himself might relate this to information theory and the fact that information communicated decreases as ambiguity increases.

Still, good prose as Hirsch defines it is prose that is as readable, as efficient, as it can be while continuing to do everything its author intends. Hirsch formulates a "principle of linearity":

So long as the reader can process what he reads without having to circle back and reread an earlier part of the text, then the writing is linear. It is writing that has not crossed over the boundary line into unreadability. . . . Since the reader stores textual meaning mainly in non-linguistic form, and since his memory for linguistic form begins to decay very rapidly, the only memorable feature of difficult, unlinear prose is the memory of its difficulty. (136)

Throughout Gravity's Rainbow certain syntactic features combine with subject matter, tone, and diction to undermine the novel's readability: a lack of transition and coherence devices (apparently to suggest the suddenness of a movie scene bursting in its totality across the screen); the difficulty of determining referents, even when proper names are supplied (not only because some of the characters answer to more than one name, but also because many of the three hundred plus cast have their entrances separated by hundreds of pages); the subordination of main ideas; the very length of some of the clauses and sentences; the omission of certain sentence elements and the inclusion of "extra" punctuation (quotation marks, italics, ellipses, dashes); and the frequent interrupters which aid the syntax in conjuring up the fragmented world presented. Consider, for example, the following passage, chosen at random. Here, early in the novel, Mexico and Pointsman confront one another.

Like his master I. P. Pavlov before him, [Pointsman] imagines the cortex of the brain as a mosaic of tiny on/off elements. Some are always in bright excitation, others darkly
inhibited. The contours, bright and dark, keep changing. But each point is allowed only the two states: waking or sleep. One or zero. "Summation," "transition," "irradiation," "concentration," "reciprocal induction"—all Pavlovian brain-mechanics—assumes the presence of these bi-stable mechanics. But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one—the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion—the probabilities. A chance of 0.37 that, by the time he stops his count, a given square on his map will have suffered only one hit, 0.17 that it will suffer two... "Can't you... tell," Pointsman offering Mexico one of his Kyprinos Orients, which he guards in secret fag fobs sewn inside all his lab coats, "from your map here, which places would be safest to go into, safest from attack?"

"No." (55, Pynchon's ellipses)

The prose is clearly understandable; the reader can certainly recall more confusing passages. Yet even here, the use of ellipses, the inclusion of parenthetical information—set off by dashes—the distracting quotation marks, and the imbedding of phrases and clauses all slow down the reader. It is, in Hirsch's term, a question of depth. The free modifiers "bright and dark," for instance, don't contribute additional information so much as break the sentence's flow, distracting the reader. It is perhaps a small example of entropy in information theory—an excess of facts disturbing rather than enhancing communication. It is not so much a matter of bad grammar, as Vidal would have it, but of purposely manipulated syntax. Consider another example. Here, Slothrop, leaving Bianca, is provoked into reminiscence by her farewell glance. The prose reflects the rush of memories of adolescence that crowds his mind. The effect is exact and not unlike John Ashbery's use of the past and memory. Yet the passage, in its effort to escape closure, in its headlong accumulation of data, and despite its constraints, requires a conscious decoding effort on the reader's part, an effort which prohibits his losing himself in the flow of Slothrop's thought—

Her look now—this deepening arrest—has already broken Slothrop's seeing heart: has
broken and broken, that same look swung as he drove by, thrust away into twilights of moss and crumbling colony, of skinny clouded-cylinder gas pumps, of tin Moxie signs gentian and bitter-sweet as the taste they were there to hustle on the weathered sides of barns, looked for how many Last Times up in the rearview mirror, all of them too far inside metal and combustion, allowing the days' targets more reality than anything that might come up by surprise, by Murphy's Law, where the salvation could be.

... Lost, again and again, past poor dambusted and drowned Becket, up and down the rut-brown slopes, the hayrakes rusting in the afternoon, the sky purple-gray, dark as chewed gum, the mist starting to make white dashes in the air, aimed earthward a quarter, a half inch ... she looked at him once, of course he still remembers, from down at the end of a lunchwagon counter, grill smoke working onto the windows patient as shoe grease against the rain for the plaid, hunched-up leaky handful inside, off the jukebox a quick twinkle in the bleat of a trombone, a reed section, planting swing notes precisely into the groove between silent midpoint and next beat, jumping it pah (hm) pah (hm) pah so exactly in the groove that you knew it was ahead but felt it was behind, both of you, at both ends of the counter, could feel it, feel your age delivered into a new kind of time that may have allowed you to miss the rest, the graceless expectations of old men who watched, in bifocal and mucus indifference, watched you lindy-hop into the pit by millions, as many millions as necessary ... Of course Slothrop lost her, and kept losing her—it was an American requirement—out the windows of the Greyhound, passing into beveled stonery, green and elm-folded on into a failure of perception, or, in a more sinister sense, of will (you used to know what these words mean), she has moved on, untroubled, too much Theirs, no chance of a beige summer spook at her roadside. ... (471-72, Pynchon's ellipses)
When to the vocabulary and syntax is added the number of scenes, characters, and ideas the reader must bear in mind—the amount of information contained in what Robert Alter has called the novel’s "encyclopedic account of the relentless destruction of history in our own era"—all within a sprawling 760 pages written in a variety of styles and genres, contextualization becomes even more of a problem. Referring again to entropy and information theory, I agree with John Leland that Pynchon’s quantity of noise relative to amount of information exchanged is rather great, thanks to ambiguity, redundancy, excessive detail, and so on. Leland: "Language as a mirror of reality or as a medium capable of establishing significant contacts beyond its own closed systems is radically denied in Pynchon’s fiction." The inadequacy of contextualization is apparent when we consider one of the many minor characters. Géza Rózsavölgyi first appears on page 79, where he is introduced as a "violently anti-Soviet" refugee. He fails to appear again until page 273, after which he vanishes for 350 pages before reentering the scene on pages 632, 647, and 692. The question is how even the most straightforward prose can adequately contextualize the sudden reappearance of such a minor figure absent for hundreds of pages at a time. It cannot; Hirsch’s notion of linearity is destroyed as we flip back and forth, trying to recall Géza’s role. Hence, even the simple passages containing Géza ("Of course Géza Rózsavölgyi is still with the project. A fanatic," 273; or "Not in his office. But Géza Rózsavölgyi is. . . .", 632) are rendered unintelligible. Though the problem is one of structure more than syntax, it does involve information overloads, lack of constraints, ambiguity, and so on—factors contributing to reading difficulty at the sentence level as well. Contextualization is a significant problem in Gravity’s Rainbow, for although individual passages often do make sense, it is often difficult to place them in their proper relation to the rest of the book.

As noted before, a wide range of subject matter is detailed in Gravity’s Rainbow, and distinct literary genres or sub-genres are represented: the war novel, the detective novel, the horror story, science fiction and science disquisition, pornography, history text:
and historical fiction, journalism, pop fiction, mathematics textbook, fantasy fiction and drug literature, psychological casebook, occult speculation and theological commentary, literary parody, comics, song lyrics and poetry, and cinema script. Several of these genres are presented in various styles, from high to low, technical to lyric to abstruse. It is an illusion-shattering synthesis of often incompatible styles and genres which manages to distance the reader through its dislocating effect. Rather than an exhaustive classification of Pynchon's exhausting tactics, a representative sampling might suffice. The mathematics textbook, to begin, weaves in and out of the narrative, wearing a variety of stylistic masks. At times it appears in fairly straightforward textbook dress (chalk on the elbows and so forth)—

"Personal density," Kurt Mondaugen in his Peenemünde office not too many steps away from here, enunciating the Law which will one day bear his name, "is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth."

"Temporal bandwidth" is the width of your present, your now. It is the familiar "\( \Delta t \)" considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. (509)

And again, it can appear in its most esoteric and technical abstractness, as in this equation "explaining" the rocket's passage:

\[
\theta \frac{d^2 \phi}{dt^2} + \delta \frac{d\phi}{dt} + \frac{2L}{3\alpha} (s_1 - s_2) \alpha = -\frac{\partial R}{\partial \beta} s_3 \beta \quad (239)
\]

And the mathematics is often presented with uncharacteristic humor, as in this joke straight from the math teachers' lounge:

\[
\int \frac{1}{(\text{cabin})} \ d \text{(cabin)} = \log \text{cabin} + c = \text{houseboat} \quad (450)
\]

Mathematical/linguistic puns ("c" and "sea") provide what humor there is for the nonmathematician. Yet because the math is accurate, it presents a curious blend of fact and fiction in itself disconcerting, as is the case with Pynchon's mix of historical fact and
fiction, or psychological accuracy and character presentation.

From the world of higher mathematics we drift into a world of Freudian psychology:

Unexpectedly, this country is pleasant, yes, once inside it, quite pleasant after all. Even though there is a villain here, serious as death. It is this typical American teenager's own Father, trying episode after episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it. Imagine that. So far he's managed to escape his father's daily little death-plots--but nobody has said he has to keep escaping. (674)

Scott Sanders has called Gravity's Rainbow not so much a "plot of interwoven facts" as a series of "overlapping case histories of private manias." Talk of Pavlov and of psychology generally proliferates throughout, and critics have found Freud the only means of accounting for such scenes as this, starring the incomparable Brigadier Pudding:

Despite himself--already a reflex--he glances quickly over at the bottles on the table, the plates, soiled with juices of meat, Hollandaise, bits of gristle and bone. . . . Her shadow covers his face and upper torso, her leather boots creak softly as thigh and abdominal muscles move, and then in a rush she begins to piss. He opens his mouth to catch the stream, choking, trying to keep swallowing, feeling warm urine dribble out the corners of his mouth and down his neck and shoulders, submerged in the hissing storm. When she's done he licks the last few drops from his lips. More cling, golden clear, to the glossy hairs of her quim. Her face, looming between her bare breasts, is smooth as steel. (235, Pynchon's ellipsis)

I have seen Hollandaise sauce keep fairly rank company before, but never anything quite like this. Regardless of what such a scene might "mean" in terms of the novel or of Pudding's personality in particular, it is certainly calculated to offend even devotees of the hardest core pornography, and juxtaposed with such scenes as the following, leaves the reader dizzy in
his rapid transit from style to style.

The winter's in suspense—all the sky a bleak, luminous gel. Down on the beach, Pointsman fishes a roll of toilet paper, each sheet stenciled PROPERTY OF H. M. GOVERNMENT, from a pocket to blow his nose. Roger now and then pushes hair back under his cap. Neither speaks. So, the two of them: trudging, hands in and out of pockets, their figures dwindling, fawn and gray and a lick of scarlet, very sharp-edged, their footprints behind them a long freezing progress of exhausted stars, the overcast reflecting from the glazed beach nearly white... We have lost them. No one listened to those early conversations—not even an idle snapshot survives. They walked till that winter hid them and it seemed the cruel Channel itself would freeze over, and no one, none of us, could ever completely find them again. Their footprints filled with ice, and a little later were taken out to sea. (92, Pynchon's ellipsis)

This passage, though it begins in the same vein, more or less, as Pudding's divertissement, becomes prose poetry that is quite evocative. Meanwhile, the bewildered reader is left to wonder how these two passages found their way into the same novel.

Again, the reader is continually aware of the novel's self-referential nature from the opening page—where the observation that "this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into" (3) seems as much about the novel's structure as about anything else—to the implicit comparisons to Joyce and Tolstoy, Burton and Browne, Melville and Henry Adams, elaborated by the critics. And then there are those literary comparisons the novel itself seems to request: to Ishmael Reed, say, or to Borges: "We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that openness: it is terror to us. Look at Borges" (264).

Another stylistic ploy to achieve distance, one used by Brecht for the same purpose, is the abrupt shift from prose into song or verse. And again, the
lyrics move from dirty limericks and music hall burlesques to the poetry of Rilke and Dickinson. As Richard Poirier, among others, has noted, Gravity's Rainbow, like V. and The Crying of Lot 49, assumes the obligation of

[shaping] the world occasionally in compliance with techniques developed outside literature or high culture. All three books take enormous, burdensome responsibility for the forces at work in the world around them, for those "assemblies" of life, like movies, comics, and behaviorist psychology, that go on outside the novel and make of reality a fiction even before the novelist can get to it.14

The comic book--often underground Comix--figures rather self-evidently here. Plastic Man, Sundial, Zorro, and Green Hornet are mentioned; Slothrop as Rocketman parodies those superheroes so popular both in the years of the war and in the sixties and seventies during which Pynchon wrote this book; and Slothrop in his pig suit recalls those "funny animal" strips equally popular during the Golden Age of Comics.

Movies inform the book as well; from the film sprocket holes used to indicate chapters, to overt comparisons of the text to film ("Come-on! Start-the-show! Come-on! Start-the-show! The screen is a dim page spread before us. . . ." 760), to the cinematic presentation of scenes.15 Other styles and genres move us from the pop absurdity of Pirate's Banana Breakfasts to an immersion in the cold water of Slothrop's toilet fantasy. We surface into the hip knowingness of "The Doper's Dream," straighten our ties, and, in Poirier's words, "lurch into Time-ese."16 The comedy itself is a distancing factor if one agrees with Henri Bergson that laughter often arises from the reduction of man to the level of machines.17

In Gravity's Rainbow the reader drifts through an acid dream of juxtaposed linguistic worlds, the Unlike-liest being a world of religious reflection. For example, of Slothrop we read,

"It's only a 'wild coincidence,' Slothrop."
He will learn to hear quote marks in the speech of others. It is a bookish kind of
reflex, maybe he's genetically predisposed—all those earlier Slothrop's packing Bibles around the blue hilltops as part of their gear, memorizing chapter and verse the structures of Arks, Temples, Visionary Thrones—all the materials and dimensions. Data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God. (241-42)

Yet if this suggests a Calvinist determinism—a world view which sees everything related in some inexorable divine plan—informing the novel, as certain critics have argued, it is a Calvinism turned on its head: "Calvinist theology conceived in the mode of perdition rather than salvation," in the words of Sanders. Sanders argues that to conceive of the interrelatedness of all things without a corollary belief in God as Prime Mover is to subscribe finally to a paranoid theory which sees history and the world as a vast and possibly sinister conspiracy hatched by a mysterious power intent on keeping us both controlled and ignorant. Further, relates Sanders, however malignant the conspiracy involving us, the alternative ("one or zero") is even worse. "To be passed over, to drop out of all plots, is to lose one's identity. Isolated from external schemes, character dissolves." And without complete interrelatedness, nothing connects: "reality either radiates from a Center, or it is centerless; history is either wholly determined from without, or it is wholly meaningless; the individual is either manipulated, or he is adrift." Without pattern, freedom from control and certain damnation; yet without pattern, chaos; without a place in the pattern, loss of identity.

And so distancing works both for and against us. By attempting to encompass all of history and Now, Gravity's Rainbow is too eclectic for the average reader, who is therefore left outside the pattern, adrift in an absence of gravity. However, given gravity's downward pull toward entropy and death, our weightless alienation is a blessing. And further, our position as outsiders does provide us with an identity: we are the decoders of the pattern that involvement would not permit our seeing. And so we are implicated in a special way, for with Pynchon we each
become, in a sense, the Prime Organizer, imposing pattern on this abundance of data.\(^1\)

Certainly, distance is in part a by-product of Pynchon's encyclopedic novel. In addition, our intended or accidental alienation from Pynchon's world makes further points. Epistemologically and ontologically, the novel implies the insufficiency of any one style, genre, or vocabulary—that is, of any single vision of reality—to explain, to encompass the world and describe the self, while simultaneously illustrating the reader's inability to enter fully into a world defined and patterned via a necessary combination of approaches. Teleologically, the novel's orchestration of chaos flies in the face of entropy, because however much Gravity's Rainbow is exemplary of the breakdown of traditional fiction, its 760 pages do keep the rocket from falling, do present evidence that order is possible and that the end is not yet. The distancing of reader from work negates as well any "real world" concerns on the reader's part as he works his way through the book.\(^2\) Gravity's Rainbow negates the horror of the modernist view of reality through overkill—a novel too convoluted, too valueless, too absurd, too grim—and the distancing indeed becomes a blessing, for it not only removes us from empathetic involvement in that world, but also suggests that such a world could not contain us. And, therefore, because we exist, . . . .

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Notes

1 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973), 668. All further citations from this edition are included in parentheses in the text.


3 This essay is found in Bullough's Aesthetics (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), 91-130. Page references will follow in the text in parentheses. Bullough's ideas are echoed elsewhere in criticism. Hazard Adams places him in that line of critical orientation that views art in terms of its
relation to audience, and suggests a specific debt to Coleridge and Kant. Bullough also warrants comparison with, in this century, Mukařovsky and Richards, who distinguish between standard (for Richards, scientific) and poetic language. Richards' notion of pseudostatements and his ideas on "doctrine in poetry" also warrant comparison. One might also compare Bullough's work with literary applications of speech act theory (for instance, Searle's "The Logical Status of Fictitious Discourse" or Ohmann's "Speech, Literature, and the Space Between") which argue that literature allows the reader to unearth poetic content and contemplate it with a freer play of speculation, because literature's statements are mock illocutions that remove participation from practical considerations to the realm of the purely mental and imaginative.


6 It is the long-term memory which stores the meaning of longer discourse units—preceding chapters, paragraphs, sentences—yet this meaning is stored "in a nonlinguistic, non-sequential form" (Hirsch, 122).

7 Vidal, 121.


10 Scott Simmon's "A Character Index: Gravity's Rainbow," Critique, 16, No. 2 (1974), 68-72, goes some way toward rectifying the problem of handling the novel's large cast. However, constantly pausing to check Simmon's list proves as effective in breaking linearity as a muddled fumbling through hundreds of
pages on one's own in efforts to recall characters or other information.


Sanders, "Pynchon's Paranoid History," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 21, No. 2 (1975), 182.


Lawrence C. Wolfley, for example, writes that "Movie techniques pervade even the finest details of Pynchon's narrative presentation. . . . Pynchon composes, it would seem, by first projecting an imagined scene on the screen of his mind and then transcribing what he has observed according to the unmediated sequence of raw perception" ("*Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel*," *PMLA*, 92, No. 5 [1977], 874).


Sanders, 185.

Ibid., 186.

Ibid., 186.

Leland forwards a similar theory with regard to *The Crying of Lot 49* in his article already cited.

In "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," Poirier suggests that fact is manipulated in Pynchon's works so that characters will not believe in reality. Poirier writes, "[fact] disguises itself as fiction
to placate us and the characters. Fact is consciously manipulated by 'They' in order to create the comforting illusion that it is fiction..." (156). I, on the other hand, argue that Pynchon's technique does not create an illusion of fiction, but finally proves that the novel can be nothing but fiction.
Pynchon's V. and Durrell's Alexandria Quartet: A Seminar in the Modern Tradition

Carol Marshall Peirce

Lawrence Durrell's alter-ego, Pursewarden, in The Alexandria Quartet defines his work in a way that seems particularly applicable to Pynchon's V.:

Pursewarden on the "n-dimensional novel" trilogy: "The narrative momentum forward is counter-sprung by references backwards in time, giving the impression of a book which is not travelling from a to b but standing above time and turning slowly on its own axis to comprehend the whole pattern. Things do not all lead forward to other things: some lead backwards to things which have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one. Anyway, that was my idea". . . .

This quotation seems even more pertinent after we read old Stencil's wry thoughts near the end of V.:

He had changed none of his ideas on The Situation. Had even written an article, pseudonymous, and sent it to Punch: "The Situation as an N-Dimensional Mishmash." It was rejected.

This response—for so I take it to be—of Pynchon to Durrell instantaneously throws light on a possible approach to teaching Pynchon—one which a colleague of mine, Professor Stephen Matanle, and I decided to try in team-teaching a senior seminar on the modern tradition in fiction. We both wanted to use V. as our culminating work but came to it from very different backgrounds. Professor Matanle had just finished using it as one of a series of novels in a course in Contemporary Fiction and had been frankly frustrated by his students' lack of sympathy and difficulty with it. I had not taught V., but had several times centered on one work, studying it in depth and reading both historically and tangentially as we went along. Thus, in teaching V., one might, for example, look into the Pashoda Crisis and the Boer War, while also reading The Education of Henry Adams and Heart of Darkness. This latter approach, however, presupposed a significant interest in the work on the part of students or
else an appreciation that might rapidly develop during the course. Professor Matanle's experience spoke against this.

The third teaching possibility—and the one we chose—suggested setting two works in tandem (see the course syllabus below). We decided that the first would be *The Alexandria Quartet*, immediately glamorous and approachable, but with many levels and hidden depths, in some ways the quintessential modern novel; the second, *V.*, seemingly the post-modern antithesis, working in fabulous, funny, icy contrast. Actually, however, both works epitomize modern man existing in the waste land of his city world, yet forever following a quest for the ideal and for self-realization. Also, intriguingly, each incorporates multiple mirrors and multiple points of view. And each is self-reflexive and "'classical'—for our time," as Durrell puts it, in its assumption of entropy, multiplicity, and the Einsteinian universe. Pynchon runs the gamut in *V.* all the way from the adopting of similar situations, such as intricate spy plots, similar exotic locales, and even pointedly exact and marvelous parodies of Durrell's style to a deeply serious re-examination of theme and an extension into the post-modern of many of the methods of Durrell.

Indeed, in the juxtaposition of these two novels, a real way to approach Pynchon seemed to be evolving. Throughout, what Durrell's work takes seriously (or even expresses in joyous laughter), Pynchon parodies and attempts to undercut; but, in his very rephrasing of plot, character, symbol, and theme, Pynchon is able, through the comically grotesque, to reassert what he takes seriously.

Our venture into comparative teaching ended with the students giving papers that seemed to us examples of informed understanding. One of the best of them, "From Universe to Multiverse," summed it up:

Finally, the movement from unity to multiplicity, a movement which Henry Adams foresaw at the turn of the century, manifests itself in artistic decadence in Pynchon's *Whole Sick Crew*; on the other hand, a recognition of this movement provides Durrell's artist with the necessary nudge into the heraldic universe. Balthazar
betrays this knowledge when he admonishes Darley [the narrator], "At each moment of time all multiplicity waits at your elbow. Why, Darley, this should thrill you and give your writing the curves of a pregnant woman." 7

Or, one might add, of a dynamic machine! The approach we had chosen turned out to work amazingly well. The students loved and, more than loved, came to revel in V., with all its quirks, contradictions, tall tales, and skeptical versions of the quest. What Pynchon is parodying, what he is illuminating became more clear and comprehensible in the light of The Alexandria Quartet. Against the background of Durrell’s shining white city of the imagination, it is not hard to contrast all of us—and Benny Profane too—running in a world gone dark "through the abruptly absolute night" down the long receding V street "of the 20th Century." 9

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Notes

1 This essay was originally presented at the meeting, "Teaching Pynchon to Undergraduates," at the Twelfth Annual College English Association Conference, April 3, 1981.


4 Cf. Durrell and Pynchon's use of mirror symbolism. Among many references:

I remember her sitting before the multiple mirrors at the dressmaker's, being fitted for a shark-skin costume, and saying: "Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?" Durrell, Justine, 27.

Rachel was looking into the mirror at an angle of 45°, and so had a view of the face turned toward the room and the face on the other side, reflected in the mirror; here were
time and reverse-time, co-existing, cancelling one another exactly out. Were there many such reference points, scattered through the world, perhaps only at nodes like this room which housed a transient population of the imperfect, the dissatisfied; did real time plus virtual or mirror-time equal zero and thus serve some half-understood moral purpose? Pynchon, V., 36.


6 Among a number of examples, note especially:

... where all the nostalgias of an Iberian littoral lost to them--the squid hung to dry, nets stretched across any skylow morning or evening, singing or drunken cries of sailors and fishermen from behind only the next looming warehouse (find them, find them! voices whose misery is all the world's night)--came unreal, in a symbolic way, as a racketing over points, a chuff-chuff of inanimate breath, and had only pretended to gather among the pumpkins, purslane and cucumbers, lone date palm, roses and poinsettias of their garden. Pynchon, V., 68.

He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment. Since these several minds tended to form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogeneous, the Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three. Pynchon, V., 174.


8 Both works project against the real/naturalistic world a romantic quest for the ideal woman (Justine, V., Aphrodite, Venus, or Virgin) that ends in each case in possible destruction, possible revival. In the fourth volume of the Quartet Durrell's mythical figure, Justine, becomes "a woman at last, lying there, soiled and tattered, like a dead bird in a gutter,"
her left eye drooping from a stroke, "her hands crumpled into claws." But on almost the last page she is reported seen, walking down the Rue Fuad, "radiant and beautifully turned out": "It was as if, like some powerful engine of destruction, she had suddenly switched on again." Lawrence Durrell, *Clea* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960), 49, 62, 280.

In Pynchon, of course, V. (like Adams's Virgin and Dynamo) gradually becomes a machine, with her left eye artificial—indeed, a watch—and, as she seems to be dying in Valletta, revealing a star sapphire navel and artificial feet ("Surely her arms and breasts could be detached; the skin of her legs be peeled away to reveal some intricate understructure of silver openwork.") Yet, in the end, in a flashback to 1919, on a beautiful cloudless day, old Stencil's boat is sucked down in the Mediterranean by a whirling waterspout—accident, sea nymph, or V. eternal? Pynchon, *V.*., 219, 321-22, 463.

9 Pynchon, *V.*., 2, 303, 428.

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**Syllabus**

**Seminar in English**

Profs. Peirce & Matanle

**The Modern Tradition:**

Durrell and Modern Fiction

"[The] masterpiece seems to draw us to a point at which we can see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance. Here we begin to wonder if we cannot see literature, not only as complicating itself in time, but as spread out in conceptual space from some unseen center."

——Northrop Frye

**I.** Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet (4 weeks)

"A marriage of past and present . . ."

- *Justine*
- *Balthazar*
- *Mountolive*
- *Clea*

**II.** The Past is Prologue (2 weeks)

"The narrative momentum forward is counter-sprung by references backward in time . . ."

- Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*
- Cavafy, *Selected Poems*
- Proust, *Swann's Way*
III. Pynchon and V. (3 weeks)
". . . a book which is not travelling from a to b but standing above time and turning slowly on its own axis . . ."

V.

IV. The Future is Present (1 week)
". . . with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one."
Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths"
"Funes the Memorious"
"Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"
"Death and the Compass"
Robbe-Grillet, Jealousy
Barthelme, "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning"
"Views of my Father Weeping"
Coover, "The Babysitter"

V. Reports on Seminar Papers (1 week)

Description, Purpose, and Requirements:
The course attempts a close examination of a major twentieth-century work in the light of modern literary traditions. It is hoped that, through group discussion, oral and written reports, and panels, the student will relate the work, as a touchstone, to other writings of past and present. In the latter part of the term students will pursue independent research, culminating in a critical study.

Texts:
Durrell. The Alexandria Quartet.
Shakespeare. Antony and Cleopatra.
Cavafy. Selected Poems.
Pynchon. V.
Klinkowitz and Somer (eds.). Innovative Fiction.

Selected Background Material:
Bellamy, Joe David. The New Fiction.
Cirlot, J. E. A Dictionary of Symbols.
Ellmann and Feidelson. The Modern Tradition.
Forster, E. M. Alexandria.
Forster, E. M. Aspects of the Novel.
Joyce, James. Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.
Olderman, Raymond M. Beyond the Waste Land.
Scholes, Robert. The Fabulators.
Tanner, Tony. City of Words.
Weston, Jessie. From Ritual to Romance.
The Crying of Lot 49:
Pynchon's Heart of Darkness

Martin Green

Recent studies of Thomas Pynchon have demonstrated that allusion is one of the central premises of his art. His works are a thicket of references to music, painting, scientific theory, pop culture, and other literature. Among writers who have influenced Pynchon, according to David Cowart, Thomas Schaub, and others, Conrad figures prominently. Schaub, for example, discussing V. and Gravity's Rainbow, asserts that Pynchon's writing "integrates Conrad's view of civilization as a white force mining the southern darkness, trying in this way to domesticate the black unknown which threatens our conscious lives." Specific Conradian echoes in V. and Gravity's Rainbow underscore Pynchon's debt to the early modernist master in those two books which see colonialism as a central burden of modern Western man. While imperialism and colonialism are not central concerns of The Crying of Lot 49, Pynchon's second and shortest novel, it too has its Conradian dimension.

"And this, also, has been one of the dark places of the earth"; the portentous words of Marlow, narrator of Conrad's short novel, Heart of Darkness, might provide as fit an epigraph for Pynchon's exploration of the paranoia and cultural decay of mid-twentieth century life as the report of Kurtz' death provides for Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Marlow's journey from England to the Congo brings him to an awareness of the darkness that lies at the heart of modern civilization. Oedipa Maas' more circumscribed journey from the sunny and comfy world of Kinneret-Among-The Pines through the night-time world of California traverses a landscape filled with intimations and shadows of the darkness that is the underside of the bright and plastic landscape of America.

That The Crying of Lot 49 and Heart of Darkness should be so closely akin in metaphoric terms is a testament to the archetypal quality of both fictions. Both Conrad and Pynchon have addressed themselves to an examination of the essence of modern man's nature,
and to do so, they have employed one of the most
durable of fictional plots—the journey of the innocent
to awareness. Beyond this parallel, however, a close
reading of the two novels juxtaposed against each
other, and an examination of some of the key techniques
by which Conrad and Pynchon convey their thematic
concerns, indicate a still closer affinity between
them. That affinity is illuminating in and of itself,
but it also suggests something about Pynchon’s place
in the history of fiction. Despite the contemporaneity
of his references, the occasional hip-glibness of his
style, and the playful inventiveness of his plots and
digressions, Pynchon occupies a place on the line of
fictional vision that descends from Conrad. At the
same time, Pynchon’s position in the latter part of
the twentieth century provides him with an ironic
awareness that calls into question some of the premises
of the early modernist novel and that leads to a re-
definition of what constitutes the heart of modern
man’s darkness.

On the level of technique, both novels operate
primarily through a dense and evocative style packed
with symbol and implication. Neither author spells
out his theme in explicit terms. Indeed, the narrator
of the frame section of Heart of Darkness calls
Marlow’s experience “inconclusive” (70)—a characteriza-
tion literally true of Pynchon’s fable. But both
authors provide passages of description that contain
the essential clues to the unraveling of their themes.
This is particularly true near the beginning of both
works, where descriptions of landscape—Brussels in
Heart of Darkness and San Narciso in The Crying of Lot
49—establish key thematic metaphors. These metaphors
are woven into a network of implication and hints,
into structures of images that are built of repetitions
and echoes.

In Heart of Darkness, Brussels reminds Marlow of a
“whited sepulchre,” a veritable graveyard of narrow
streets “in deep shadow, [with] high houses, innumer-
able windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence,
grass sprouting between the stones . . .” (73). By the
time Marlow reaches Kurtz’ hideout deep in the Congo
many months later and sees the ‘skulls surrounding it,
he has passed through a landscape marked with the
images of death Brussels prefigures. Dying blacks in groves, wrecked machinery lying moldering and rusting, a colonial administrator whom Marlow describes as a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles" (93), among other things, evoke the landscape of Hell. Africa is literally and figuratively an inferno, and Kurtz, the presiding genius at his inner station "at the bottom of there," as Marlow puts it, is "an animated image of death carved out of old ivory" (135). The imagery of death and hell carries over beyond Marlow's trip up and down the Congo River. When he returns to "the whitened sepulchre" to confront Kurtz! "Intended," he is received in a gloomy drawing room in which "a grand piano stood massively in a corner: with dark gleams on the flat surface like a sombre and polished sarcophagus" (153).

Oedipa has her first glimpse of San Narciso from a hillside; she squints in the sunlight and smog down at an "ordered swirl" of streets and houses "which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth." The pattern, like that of a printed circuit, suggests to her "a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate"(13). As she drives along the main drag, "the silence and paralysis" of a Sunday morning greet her. Oedipa's subsequent journey from San Narciso to San Francisco and back is less straightforward than Marlow's journey from Brussels to the Congo, but her meandering journey on the California freeways in her attempt to solve the puzzle of Pierce's will and the mystery of Tristero is filled with constant reminders of the difficulty of interpreting the hieroglyphic. At one point she wonders "whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she . . . might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself . . ."(69). While "the central truth" remains elusive, subsidiary truths do, nonetheless, confront her. Chief among them is the reality of an America peopled with drop-outs and sexual deviants, anarchists and right-wingers, and paranoids of all stripes. The landscape they populate is littered with the trash and detritus of modern society--the bones of G.I.'s killed in World War II, used car lots, burnt-out shopping malls, instant housing tracts, slums, and skid-rows--the literal and
figurative embodiments of waste and death, or W.A.S.T.E. and D.E.A.T.H., the acronyms of Tristero.

In both novels, in addition to the metaphoric landscapes, a map and a painting foreshadow key thematic concerns and are the nodes of complex nets of connecting images.

In Heart of Darkness, the map that fascinated Marlow as a child (71) appears prominently in the anteroom of the company office in Brussels, "a large shining map with all the colors of the rainbow" (73). The colors are the sign of Europe's dominance over Africa and they are indirectly connected to Kurtz himself through the character of the man in motley, that strange figure who considers himself to be Kurtz' protege, and whose suit of patchwork reminds Marlow of the pattern of the map. This connection of motifs serves to link Kurtz to both Africa and Europe, to define, in other words, the dialectic of colonialism that Kurtz embodies. "All Europe went into the making of Kurtz," says Marlow late in the novel (122). commenting on Kurtz' mixed parentage. This statement is metaphorically true of Africa, which, through colonialism, has been made by "all Europe." Kurtz, the emissary of light, truth, and civilization, has sunk into barbarity and cruelty, and his lack of restraint, his rapacious greed and savage violence, are as much a product of his own nature and European culture as they are of the savage environment he has set out to tame. The two poles of Kurtz' nature--the European and the African--are embodied in the two women of Kurtz' life--his European beloved and the African warrior woman who tries to prevent Marlow from reaching Kurtz. Both of these women are foreshadowed in Kurtz' painting of a "woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch" which throws a "sinister" shadow on her face (92).

In The Crying of Lot 49, the painting by Remedios Varo, "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," which Oedipa recalls seeing in Mexico City with Pierce (10), establishes the key chain of echoing images. Its haunting depiction of "frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows . . . into a void,
seeking hopelessly to fill the void," brings tears to Oedipas's eyes as it summarizes at the outset Oedipas's quest not only to fill the void of her life without Pierce, but to weave a tapestry out of the threads of evidence she discovers about Tristero. The tapestry's intricate patterns prefigure the hieroglyphic pattern of the streets of San Narciso and echo through the novel in the "complex web" spun by the out-of-control hairspray can in Oedipas's motel (23), "the helix of roads" leading to Lake Inverarity (37), the communications networks--both official (TV sets, radios, telephones) and underground (Tristero's W.A.S.T.E. boxes)--that are scattered through the novel, and finally, the railroad tracks on which Oedipas muses in the penultimate scene (135). As important as these physical networks are all the social networks Oedipas encounters--the Peter Pinguid Society, the Inamorati anonymous, the Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas (CIA), and all the other groups linked together in the web of Tristero's vast, dark and secret empire. All these networks, webs, and tapestries double back on themselves in their endless convolution, and in her attempt to disentangle them, Oedipas is like Maxwell's Demon sorting cold from hot molecules, or the mythical Psyche sifting chaff--or more precisely, the mythical Echo.

The direct allusion to the myth of Echo and Narcissus in the place names of The Crying of Lot 49 (San Narciso, the Echo Courts Motel) explicitly calls attention to the artistic method of The Crying of Lot 49, a method that is implicit in Heart of Darkness. More important, it is central to Pynchon's preoccupation with the narcissism of twentieth-century America embodied in its cultural structures. Pierce Inverarity is the preeminent representative of the way in which Pynchon sees twentieth-century American man imposing an image of himself on his world. Whatever else Pierce may have been, he is the embodiment of the metaphor of the projector that Driblette and Oedipas discuss after the performance of The Courier's Tragedy --a man of wealth and power who has imposed his image on every aspect of life in San Narciso, and more importantly on Oedipas's life. He seems not only to have been a man capable of creating a giant industrial corporation and a town, but also to have had the power
and wealth to create the vast practical joke that the Tristero seems to be to Oedipa in her more lucid moments. Significantly, Pierce's ubiquitousness is expressed in a map flashed on Oedipa's TV screen at the Echo Courts Motel, just as a map prefigures Kurtz for Marlow.

In a way, all the strands of imagery in *The Crying of Lot 49* lead to Pierce, just as all the strands of imagery in *Heart of Darkness* lead to Kurtz. Like Kurtz, Pierce seems to have been a devouring ego, trying to incorporate into himself "all the air, all the earth, all the men before him," as Marlow says of Kurtz (135). Both men represent a fundamental mystery which Marlow and Oedipa have to unravel. For Marlow, the mystery is how someone of Kurtz' potential, a man of "universal genius," could become so utterly savage and brutal. At the end of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is still confused about what his experience of Kurtz ultimately means. What he may not consciously see is that Kurtz is part of himself, a secret sharer of his consciousness, a pre-Jungian shadow side of his European psyche. At the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa is no more capable than at the beginning of deciding what her experience has amounted to: whether the Tristero exists and she has accidentally stumbled on its traces; whether it is all a vast practical joke arranged by Pierce as some sort of revenge on her; or whether she is paranoid in imagining either of the former possibilities. She is left with the pieces of a puzzle or the elements of a vast metaphor for which she must supply the missing piece or missing connection. As David Cowart suggests: "Oedipa seeks the Word that will order all words and all things, but while the words and things mockingly show forth their intricate and increasingly remote concatenation, the key to their connectedness continually eludes her." What Oedipa fails to see, the clue she always seems to miss, is that the Word that will "order all words" might be the name of her former lover.

Pierce "appears" only once in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and significantly, only in Oedipa's recollection of their last telephone conversation. In that phone call, Pierce put on his "Lamont Cranston" voice—the voice of the alter ego of *The Shadow* of the old radio program. Pierce is indeed a shadow cast over much of
Oedipa's life and over all the clues to Tristero; but he is also, as Kurtz is to Marlow, an alter ego to her, a shadow in a Jungian sense. It may be coincidental, or it may be an elaborate allusion on Pynchon's part, but the radio Shadow's famous motto, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" is a paraphrase of Conrad's title. Having that knowledge, she might be able to penetrate (pierce) the mystery she confronts.

But if Kurtz and Pierce occupy central positions in the structure of their respective fictions and share a boundless ego and a certain malevolence, the different roles they play in the novels point to a fundamental and important difference between Conrad's and Pynchon's views of the ultimate nature of the heart of darkness. Despite the fact that Kurtz is off-stage for most of Conrad's novel, when he does appear—and even before he appears—he is a presence; like a memento mori in a Renaissance painting, he is an emblematic warning of the inner darkness of the soul of man that can erupt through the thin veneer of civilization we have erected to protect ourselves from that truth. Conrad's moral vision is a vision of psychological and social dimensions: psychological in its grasp of the contending forces within the psyche that lead to personal disintegration; and social in its recognition of how these psychological forces lead to the social sickness of Western man expressed in imperialism. Pierce, on the other hand, is never on-stage at all in The Crying of Lot 49; he is an absence rather than a presence, and he embodies in his absence the ultimate ambiguity that for Pynchon is the heart of darkness. While The Crying of Lot 49 has its social vision, Pynchon's concerns are primarily metaphysical rather than psychological. Kurtz' famous final words, "the horror, the horror," express the recognition of the chaos that lies within man; Mucho Maas' nightmare of the N.A.D.A. sign swinging in the void outside his used car lot is one expression in the novel of the "howling emptiness," to borrow a phrase from Saul Bellow's Herzog, that confronts late twentieth-century man. Pierce's testament (in contrast to Kurtz'), as Oedipa recalls, is the ironic and elusive "keep it bouncing."

Ambiguity is as fundamental to Heart of Darkness as it is to The Crying of Lot 49. Half way through his narrative, Marlow wonders whether he is conveying
his meaning to his audience on the yacht and concludes that it is "impossible to convey the life-sensations of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle penetrating essence" (95). His narrative is thus filled with tentative formulations and metaphors ("I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or a menace" [94]). These perceptual ambiguities reflect the kinds of moral ambiguities modern life offers. But for Conrad, despite the breakdown of civilized values, there are still moral certainties—honor and loyalty, for example, and the preserving of the thin veneer of civilization (the butcher and the policeman; protecting women)—and his literary technique, despite the ambiguous texture of Marlow's narration, locates Conrad's art in the tradition of moral parable through which those who have eyes may see the meaning through the ambiguities. His art rests on the assumption that there is a common ground between author and reader on which meaning may be erected.

For Pynchon, none of Conrad's certainties—as fragile as they may be—exists. In the novel, Oedipa finds nothing or no one to which she can anchor herself: her husband slips deeper into LSD-induced schizophrenia; her sometime lover, Metzger, runs off with a teenybopper; her former lover, Pierce, is dead; and her shrink flips out in paranoia. All she has left are the myriad clues leading to a possible alternative reality. But that reality is either a malevolent one—a net of conspiracy and paranoia stretching back nearly 400 years—or it is a figment of her own obsessions, and her ultimate confirmation of its existence eludes her as she stumbles deeper into the minutiae of textual criticism and the lore of postage stamp forgeries. Pynchon's art is ultimately an ironic inversion of Conrad's fundamental assumption of artistic communion between author and reader, for at the end of the novel, the reader is in the same position as Oedipa. The ambiguities of the novel remain ambiguities, and the full implication of the meaning is never fully graspable.  

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Notes


4 See Cowart, 100, on Pynchon's use of the quest plot.


6 Cowart, 98.

7 I have not had the opportunity to see Carol Pearson's "The Shadow Knows: Jung, Pynchon, and The Crying of Lot 49," *Higgenson Journal* 20 (1978), 29-45, or John Guzlowski's "'The Shadow' and The Crying of Lot 49" (unpublished paper delivered at the Midwest Popular Culture Conference, October 1981). See the bibliographic section of *Pynchon Notes* 7 (October 1981), 56 and 58.

8 A very brief version of this paper was read on the panel, "Teaching Pynchon to Undergraduates," at the annual College English Association meeting, April 1981. My thanks to Beverly Lyon Clark, moderator of the section, for her comments on early versions, and to my colleague Walter Cummins for his suggestions on the present version.
The Origin of Pynchon's Tchitcherine

Steven Weisenburger

His right knee hinged with threads of gold, Vaslav Tchitcherine limps through Gravity's Rainbow bearing a portfolio of a name. Terry Caesar (PN 5, 1981) rightly calls attention to its "multiple puns and arcane allusions," but he discloses no knowledge of what those references may be. Then David Seed (PN 5 again) tracks a red herring when he proposes that the fictional Vaslav and the historical Georgi Tchitcherine are secret sharers, despite Pynchon's warning that "He [Vaslav] is no relation at all to the [Georgi] Tchitcherine who dealt the Rapallo Treaty" (GR, 338). Well, why not take Pynchon at his word?

There are good reasons for doing so, particularly when a more appropriate and less "arcane" ancestor of Vaslav Tchitcherine lies before our noses, in the last work of the Russian satirist Nikolai Gogol. His trumpet-nosed character Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov, a traveling-agent for Death in the unfinished prose epic, Dead Souls, is the true literary progenitor of Pynchon's character.

First a word about translations of Russian. The Cyrillic letter 'ч', seventeenth in the alphabet, is generally rendered as tch by French or as ch by English translators, and Pynchon points out this equivalence in Gravity's Rainbow. In the novel's 34th episode, itself devoted to Tchitcherine's story, he explains how the phonetic ѣ (in Trager-Smith symbols) is "pronounced with a sort of tch sound" (GR, 353). This is no idle detail in an episode where Pynchon's controlling idea is the essential ambiguity (openness) in any interpretation (translation) of printed signs. The important consideration here is that, spelled out in Cyrillic characters, Tchitcherine's name would reveal his etymological descendence from Chichikov. The root forms of both names are alike: Gogol's чичиков and Pynchon's чичерин.

Whatever alphabet one uses, these stand as entirely unique literary names. And Gogol, with whom Pynchon (like Nabokov) shares an obvious delight in onomastics, opens Chichikov's name to a variety of references.
Chichikov, great lover of florid speeches and "the open road," recalls for example the Russian noun chicherone, signifying one who guides, as well as the Latin-derived "cicerone," signifying one who is known for lavish outpourings of discourse. Gogol's portly Chichikov, ever the polite fellow, also recalls the Russian chichisbeo, from the Italian cicisbeo, meaning one who plays the gallant (perhaps an adulterer); but also and more ironically his name evokes the cici-bean, or garbanzo (Cicer arietenum), a concise simile for Chichikov's rotund physique.

Pynchon's Tchitcherine battens on all of these associations, and more. The "-ine" suffix signifies—as in chemical nomenclature—Tchitcherine's "family" relation to Gogol's overweight character. For Pynchon's "stocky, Latin-eyed emissary from Moscow, this Soviet remittance man" (GR, 347) has a genetic make-up strikingly like Chichikov's. Not only are they both rotund; they also both walk with a halting gait. Chichikov's nose blares like a brass trumpet whenever he clears it, while Tchitcherine (an extrapolation of Gogol's character, with his skull plate, steel teeth, and gold wire-work knee) has literally become "more metal than anything else" (GR, 337). There are still other things about Gogol's Chichikov that readers of Gravity's Rainbow will find noteworthy: for example, the "rainbow colored scarf" he wears; his gargantuan diet (including a special delectation for whole roast suckling pig at dinner); and his several servants (two live dushi, or "souls") who attend Chichikov's needs much as Džaqyp Qulan and others wait upon Tchitcherine in Gravity's Rainbow.

In his study of Gogol, Nabokov describes Chichikov as a bureaucratic remittance-man, an "ill-paid representative of the Devil, a travelling salesman from Hades." Chichikov's wobbling gait connects him to the underworld of Hephaestus or Vulcan (gods of fire and metalworking, as Pynchon might note). But most of all Chichikov is linked to Hades by his obsession for building a kingdom of dead "souls" or serfs (dushi means both) who exist only as names on paper, in tax rolls, years after their actual deaths. Indeed, this virtual abstraction of their being, as pure signs, when the rest of the novel bulges with savored detail, makes for the controlling irony of Chichikov's adven-
tures. Gogol says about Chichikov: "The passion that leads him on is not part of him," nevertheless, "in his cold existence there lies hidden that which will one day make a man fall on his knees in the dust before the wisdom of the heavens." The same may be said of Tchitcherine's cold-hearted paper chase, during which the Rocket and his fratricidal passion collapse into one mortal compulsion. Pynchon explains that, like Gogol's character's, Tchitcherine's "real mission in the Zone is private, obsessive.... The little State he is building in the German vacuum is founded on a compulsive need he has given up trying to understand" (GR, 337-38; my ellipsis). His role in Gravity's Rainbow--like Slothrop's, Enzian's, or Blicero's--is to become, without his ever fully knowing it, a functionary of the Rocket cartel, a Postwar kingdom of the dead. Gogol's "wisdom of the heavens" is precisely this groping, half-knowledge of mortality. Potentially, it is knowledge of how Death's "other kingdom" establishes properly staffed trading posts within our frontiers; and while Tchitcherine may be numb to this network, at least he achieves a moment's worth of that Heavenly "wisdom," In a flashback at the end of episode 34, he reaches "the Kirghiz Light," and as Gogol might have it, he even lies down "face up on the desert." Yet this vision does not sustain him. The moment is not a "birth" into new life, but the onset of a forgetting: with "millions after millions of souls gone behind him, he will hardly be able to remember It" (GR, 359; my emphasis). Like preterite Cain, Tchitcherine is doomed to wandering the open roads.

The reference to Dead Souls brings us to one of Pynchon's great themes. David Cowart especially has shown that in Pynchon's work the "literary allusions function like his musical allusions, contributing to a mythology of the Other Side." Thus peace and war, organic and inorganic, life and death are states that maintain a commerce in his fictions and most of all in Gravity's Rainbow. Like the novel's main characters, we glimpse that network only in part, through synecdoche, not directly as with the Kirghiz Light, but indirectly as ambiguous glyphs on paper. So it is unfortunate that a masterwork of satire like Dead Souls has passed unnoticed in virtually every discus-
sion of Pynchon's literary allusions. Parts of Gravity's Rainbow have a compelling affinity with Gogol's unfinished prose epic, and Tchitcherine is the principal link between the two texts. In fact, when Pynchon exclaims, "How alphabetic is the nature of molecules" (GR, 355), he might as well have reversed his terms and said, "How molecular is the nature of the alphabet." For once we sort out the alphabetic variants, Tchitcherine—whom Pynchon calls "a giant supermolecule with so many open bonds available" (GR, 346)—reveals himself as an avatar or, if you will, a grandchild of Gogol's Chichikov.

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Notes

1 Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1944), 73. Interestingly, the text of this short study is almost identical with the lectures that Nabokov used to deliver at Cornell, where Pynchon was his student. Compare the New Directions text with the chapter on Gogol in Nabokov's recently published Lectures on Russian Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1981).


Pynchon and Nabokov's V.

David R. Mesher

Vague affinities in their fictions and the fact that Thomas Pynchon studied at Cornell under Vladimir Nabokov have led most critics to the general assumption that, as William M. Plater has it, "Without question Pynchon was influenced by Vladimir Nabokov, whom he had as a teacher, but the influence was certainly greater after publication of Nabokov's novels."¹ There may be no question about the fact of that influence, but there also has been almost no questioning about what such influence comprised. Lolita (1955) was first published in the U.S. in 1958, while Pynchon was still at Cornell, and the resultant uproar was certainly enough to attract Pynchon's interest—if, indeed, the undergraduate had not already been attracted by Nabokov's course on Russian writers. But a better case for literary influence than those proposed for either Nabokov's lectures on literature or his Lolita, can be built around Nabokov's first novel in English, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (1941), which was reissued in 1959.

The name Knight suggests the extensive chess metaphors of the novel, and this knight must be added to the admittedly long list of possible inspirations for Gerhard von Göll's alias, der Springer, in Gravity's Rainbow (1973). Roger B. Henkle has already noted some closer correspondences between The Real Life and Pynchon's first novel, V. (1963): the use of the same initial, by Nabokov for his narrator-quester and by Pynchon for the object of his quest (Nabokov's V. even spies Pynchon's "magic initial"² in a "V-shaped flight of cranes"³); the multiple identities of the woman being sought in each novel; and the problem of distorting history by re-creating it, in both works.⁴ The last of Henkle's points, a popular academic cliche, obscures more than it reveals. All history is a recreation, and therefore inevitably distorted, as both Nabokov and Pynchon surely realized. Their interests, in The Real Life and V., are located elsewhere—in the understanding that fiction, as a creation, is free of such distortion. As we will see, in both novels, the hero is only purportedly "re-creating" another's
character, while in fact creating his own.

First, however, we should note some similarities in the circumstances surrounding the quests at the heart of both novels. Nabokov's V., like Pynchon's Herbert Stencil, is searching for an unknown woman. V. does not even know the name of his quarry; he burns her letters to his half-brother after Sebastian's death and on his orders, but inadvertently notices the letters are written in Russian. Later, when V. determines to go in search of Sebastian's Russian correspondent, he learns that "Sebastian had been getting letters in Russian from a woman he had met at Blaubergh. She had been living at the same hotel as he. Nothing else was known." (111). Stencil knows slightly more: the woman he seeks has the initial V., as he learns from his father's journal (43). But the goal of both quests is the same: self-knowledge, through the creation of self.

Nabokov's V. begins the hunt supposedly as research for the book he is writing on his half-brother. But from the first page of the novel, it is clear that V.'s identification with Sebastian Knight is more than that of a biographer for his subject or even a younger sibling for his older, famous brother. The final lines of the novel only confirm this. "Try as I may," concludes V., "I cannot get out of my part: Sebastian's mask clings to my face, the likeness will not be washed off. I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows" (205).

Herbert Stencil begins reading the journal to discover the father he has never known, Sidney Stencil. But Pynchon makes this into another route to self-knowledge and identification: Stencil refers to both himself and his father simply as "Stencil," and what could be more like-father-like-son than the reproduction of a Stencil? The quest shifts to V. as the unknown in the elder Stencil's life, the key that might explain the father and therefore the son to himself:

Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to Stencil had become directed entirely inward, toward this acquired sense of animateness. Having found this he could hardly release
it, it was too dear. To sustain it he had to
hunt V.; but if he should find her, where else
would there be to go but back into half-conscious-
ness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any
end to the search. Approach and avoid. (44)

The quest is all. It becomes the quester's identity
for Nabokov's V. and Pynchon's Stencil, as well as for
Humbert Humbert, Oedipa Maas, Tyrone Slothrop, and the
others. The end is always anticlimactic: rather than
finding himself, the quester loses what identity has
been created. Therefore Stencil fears that "the dis-
assembly of the Bad Priest" (322), the end of V., may
be his own:

Stencil would have liked to go on believing the
death and V. had been separate for his father.
This he still could choose to do (couldn't he?),
and continue on in calm weather. He could go to
Malta and possibly end it. He had stayed off
Malta. He was afraid of ending it; but, damn it
all, staying here would end it too. Punking out;
finding V.; he didn't know which he was most
afraid of, V. or sleep. Or whether they were
two versions of the same thing. (324)

The same options, more or less, are explored by
Nabokov's V. when he realizes that Sebastian's lover
was Nina de Rechnoy, and therefore not the woman he
is seeking, Helene von Graun, but the one he has found,
Madame Lecerf—unless, indeed, she is all three. V.
leaves her without asking the question which supposed-
ly has made her the object of his search:

That question which I had wished to ask Nina
remained unuttered. I had wished to ask her
whether she ever realised that the wan-faced man,
whose presence she had found so tedious, was one
of the most remarkable writers of his time.
What was the use of asking! Books mean nothing
to a woman of her kind. . . . (174)

This could not, of course, have been the original
question which V. had wanted to ask his brother's un-
known lover, since he didn't know then that she was
"a woman of her kind." Her relationship with Sebastian
is unfathomable to V., because he has rejected her, and
his idea of Sebastian's personality is only a projec-
tion of the one he has created for himself. Notice
how this recognition scene with Rechnoy/Lecerf suggests the ultimate difference between fictional creations and historical re-creations, while presaging the anti-climactic nature of all such anticipated revelations in both Nabokov and Pynchon: the story continues in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, as it does after the documentation of V.'s death in V., because literature itself is a continuous, inward-turning quest for an understanding that is always concealed but never revealed within it, or imposed upon it.

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Notes


2 Thomas Pynchon, V. (New York: Bantam, 1964), 211. Further references are to this edition.

3 Vladimir Nabokov, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (New York: New Directions, 1977), 139. Further references are to this edition.

Critical Cornucopia

Mathew Winston


If my tally is complete, there are now a dozen books in print about Pynchon: volumes by Cowart, Fowler, Mackey, Plater, Schaub, Siegel, Slade, and Stark, and collections edited by Levine and Leverenz (Mindful Pleasures), Mendelson (Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays), and Ickstadt (Ordnung und Entropie), besides the one reviewed here. Later this year, Methuen will publish a study of Pynchon by Tony Tanner, Ohio State University Press will bring out Charles Clerc's collection of essays on Gravity's Rainbow, and a second periodical, Pynchon Studies, will join Pynchon Notes.

Essays about Pynchon, in an amazing variety of contexts, are proliferating almost beyond count, and so we must be thankful to Richard Pearce for gathering thirteen previously-published essays and a new one by Marcus Smith and Khachig Tololyan in Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon. Perhaps Pearce's greatest service has been to include in addition a critical review by Beverly Lyon Clark and Caryn Fuoroli of a diversity of the "best conceived" and most influential studies not in this volume. I can, of course, cavil about some of their choices; I miss Richard Poirier's "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," I find no representative of deconstructive or post-structuralist criticism, and I suspect that only the feminism of the reviewers led them to include both Marjorie Kauffman's and Catharine Stimpson's interpretations. More important, however, the reviewers do provide an excellent introduction to Pynchon criticism, and they move well beyond summary to discuss, extend, and argue with the criticism in a fashion that rewards reading even by someone who is familiar with it.

Most of the essays Clark and Fuoroli survey have already been included in Mindful Pleasures or in Mendelson's anthology of criticism, and so their review becomes an integral part of Richard Pearce's generous
acknowledgment of the necessary incompleteness of the collection. His book cannot fulfill the aim of the series "to collect the most important previously published criticism"; it supplements the earlier collections but does not replace them.

Both Pearce as editor and Clark and Fuoroli as reviewers could have added substantially to the utility of the book had they connected the essays they include with each other and with relevant essays that have not been reprinted. It would have been quite helpful, for example, had they directed the reader of Alan J. Friedman and Manfred Puetz's "Science as Metaphor: Thomas Pynchon and Gravity's Rainbow," a worthy exploration which I am glad to see reprinted here, to other treatments of Pynchon's science, such as the essays of Lance Ozier. But Pearce's introduction does not attempt even to discuss the essays he has assembled, much less to interrelate them. Consequently, as the reader moves among Pearce's selections, which deal with all three novels and range from an essay published in 1968 to one making its first appearance here, he shares the experience of the hapless electron making a "quantum jump," which is defined by Pearce as "the discontinuous movement of an electron from one ring of an atom to another, or the discontinuous transformation of an electron from one level of energy to another."

Readers of Pynchon are relatively comfortable with such discontinuity, but that does not necessarily mean that we encourage it in criticism. Although I applaud Pearce's industry in locating and reprinting several essays that do not deal exclusively with Pynchon, I regret the needless fragmentation that results when he edits them as though they did. John W. Hunt's "Comic Escape and Anti-Vision," for example, originally treated Catch-22 as well as V. and The Crying of Lot 49 (and found Heller a better novelist than Pynchon), but only passing references at either end indicate to the reader that Hunt's discussion of Pynchon has been taken out of context. Richard Wasson's "Notes on a New Sensibility" is as much about Robbe-Grillet, Murdoch, and Barth as it is about Pynchon, though only his presentation of the last is included here, and Elaine B. Safer's essay on "The Allusive Mode and Black Humor" in Gravity's Rainbow was equally concerned with Giles Goat-Boy when it first appeared.
One can sympathize with Pearce's need to conserve space, but his editorial decisions remove Pynchon's work from some important contemporary contexts.

In an analogously unfortunate move, Pearce has reprinted Josephine Hendin's "What Is Thomas Pynchon Telling Us?" as Hendin first published it and not in the reworked version she incorporated in her Vulnerable People. Admittedly, the book version is longer, but it is also better and less sensational. Contrast the sentence that ends the first paragraph of the anthologized magazine article—"He [Pynchon] is the American Goya whose dazzling canvases are lit from hell, whose message is: Death Rules"—with the book version: "He is the American El Greco whose canvases seem lit from another world." If cutting was necessary in Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon, then Pearce should have taken his editorial scalpel to some of the early critical assumptions about Pynchon that now appear rather naive, and especially to the summarizing of plots and identifying of characters that soon become repetitive and are no longer needed in any case.

Two of the "essays" in Pearce's collection are actually pieces of longer studies. Thomas Schaub's "'A Gentle Chill, An Ambiguity': The Crying of Lot 49" is the second chapter of his Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity, an excellent book that was reviewed in the last issue of Pynchon Notes. The chapter stands well by itself, but it becomes much richer when read in the context of Schaub's introductory chapter, and I hope that the sample included here will entice people to read the rest of the book. The same holds true for Maureen Quilligan's piece on Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, which is carefully stitched together from dispersed sections of her The Language of Allegory, a fascinating book which argues that allegory is found "when language itself becomes the focus of ... attention rather than the action language describes."

The two essays mentioned above are both concerned with how to read Pynchon, with the process involved, as are Richard Patteson's "What Stencil Knew: Structure and Certitude in Pynchon's V." and Richard Pearce's contribution to the volume, to which I shall return. For most of the essays, however, one may appropriate the words that Lawrence Wolfley applies to
his own essay tracing Pynchon's debt to "psychoanalytic culture criticism"; like "Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," which most readers probably know from PMLA, they are "concerned primarily with thematic structure, rather than with esthetic surface, where the moment-to-moment reading experience lies." So it is that Speer Morgan relates Gravity's Rainbow to the literary anatomy and to Menippean satire (via Northrop Frye); Scott Simmon looks at "Gravity's Rainbow as Film," Steven Weisenburger explores Pynchon's use of history in the same novel, and Marcus Smith and Khachig Töloöyan together place it in the tradition of the American jeremiad.

Each of these essays leaves me ambivalent. On the one hand, I appreciate the new perspectives they reveal and the esoteric information they provide. Simmon's essay, for instance, shows how the techniques of film have opened up narrative possibilities for Pynchon, and Simmon is one of the very few who can explain the "obscure joke" of the "Bengt Ekerot/Maria Casarès Film Festival" sponsored in Gravity's Rainbow by Richard M. Zhubb: "Ekerot played Death in The Seventh Seal (1956), Casarès Death in Cocteau's Orphée (1950)." And who but Weisenburger could gloss the reference to Herr Halliger's inn on Greifswalder Oie? Like most Pynchon aficionados, I delight in the way his novels lead me to inquire about Maltese history, J. Clerk Maxwell, or V-2 rockets, and so I welcome this sharing of goodies.

On the other hand . . . well, the other hand rises in dismay when I encounter someone who is trying to carry Pynchon off to his own critical niche and claim that is where he belongs, when, to cite one case, Simmon asserts that "Gravity's Rainbow is more accessible to movegoers than literary critics because of its reliance on the conventions of the American genre film." At this point I begin to have nightmares in which a communal endeavor to interpret Pynchon becomes critical imperialism and critics align themselves in factions which make the committees devising an alphabet for the Kirghiz look in comparison like models of efficiency, cooperation, and panache.
Smith and Tölölyan do not exhibit this sort of territorial imperative in their treatment of Gravity's Rainbow as "The New Jeremiad." They claim that "the controlling idea of GR is that the world's present predicament--the system of global terror dominated by ICBMs--threatens to fulfill in historical time the apocalyptic and millennial visions which prevailed in the Puritan culture of colonial New England." Their reading of the novel focuses on the hope Pynchon holds out, despite the failures of history and of his own characters, that if one is willing to live in the present rather than in the past or the future and rather than attempt to transcend time, then one may be able to accept "the fleeting possibilities of shaping a fragment of Self or a minute part of History." The interpretation works very well, particularly when they relate it to the central significance of the word "now" and to Pynchon's "relentless commitment to the present tense."

Their essay makes a convincing argument that Pynchon consciously uses characteristics of the American jeremiad, but there are some problems when they discuss the tradition. As they acknowledge, the jeremiad changed its emphasis at different times, and our understanding of the form has also shifted from the explanations of Perry Miller to those set forth in 1970 by Sacvan Bercovitch in his Horologicals to Chronometricals (which they connect usefully, if at the cost of some terminological confusion, with Frank Kermode's The Sense of an Ending). Has Pynchon derived his understanding of the jeremiad from Bercovitch, or has he discerned the identical features independently and then employed them? The latter seems unlikely. And unless Smith and Tölölyan mean to imply the former, which I doubt, then there is no reason for not having drawn on Bercovitch's more recent treatment of the same theme in The American Jeremiad (1978), which extends his discussion and even contains a footnote, in keeping with their thesis, about "the tenacity of belief (however wistfully or laconically expressed) in twentieth-century American writing--for example, in our major novels from Fitzgerald's Great Gatsby through Dos Passos's USA and Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow."
Smith and Töloolyan demonstrate that Gravity's Rainbow has features of the jeremiad, and their essay is exciting when they use the conventions of that form to cast light on the novel. But Gravity's Rainbow can be related to so many genres and to such various traditions that "jeremiad," like any other label, proves more restricting than liberating. Ultimately we are thrown back on Edward Mendelson's description of the novel as "encyclopedic" and on Jorge Luis Borges' observation in "Kafka and His Precursors" that "every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."

Pearce's contribution, "Thomas Pynchon and the American Novel in Motion," presents Pynchon as breaking away from his predecessors. It becomes most interesting if we notice that Pearce has surreptitiously turned his introduction to the book into a prologue to his essay. The introduction summarizes Henry Adams on how civilization's source of energy changed from the Virgin to the Dynamo, and it then traces another shift via the disconcerting notion of entropy and Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy. The essay shows a corresponding concern with "America's unchecked energy," which has its locus classicus in Whitman. In what Pearce calls "the novel of movement," illustrated by Gatsby and The Day of the Locust, the reader can follow the direction and pattern of the author's and the characters' energy from point to point. In contrast, Pynchon writes "the novel in motion." V., which Pearce oversimplifies by insisting on the stability and omniscience of the narrative perspective, gives way to The Crying of Lot 49, with its "overloading . . . of information into a simple linear plotline" and culminates, for now, in Gravity's Rainbow, "which abrogates direction, which focuses on the field of forces that governs contemporary life," and which is about "speed and energy, undergoing constant and inexplicable transformation."

Pearce's treatment of Pynchon possesses the energy he writes about. His categories are useful up to a point, but they would be much richer if he recognized the extent to which they overlap the more familiar ones of modernist and post-modern or contemporary
fiction. Perhaps his book-in-progress, of which his essay (and introduction?) will form a part, will complete the process he has begun here.

College of William and Mary
Pynchon Enters the Zone, or: Almost Lost in Translation?

Louisa Pleischman

and

Burt Weinshanker


Ordnung und Entropie. Zum Romanwerk von Thomas Pynchon, a collection of critical essays dealing with Pynchon's fiction, was released in November after a three year moratorium. Completed in 1978, the book was planned as a companion text to the translation of Gravity's Rainbow, which was originally scheduled for print in the same year. But due to the problems inherent in the translation of such an extremely complicated text (and to avoid the necessity of editorial remarks similar to "unfortunately the German translation does not follow the original text here," found in an article on V.), the final version of the translation by Thomas Piltz was not sent to press (thankfully) until late last year. Though the bibliography was up-dated, the articles were not, and this may explain the absence of reference to more recent Pynchon criticism. All three of Pynchon's novels are now available in German translation. (The Rowohlt Publishing House now has the rights to all of Pynchon's translated work, carrying on a tradition of translating American literature--Hemingway, Wolfe, H. Miller, Nabokov, Barth, Jong, and others--begun prior to the second world war.) V. was translated in 1968, The Crying of Lot 49 (as Die Versteigerung von No. 49) in 1973. In contrast to the marked absence of a splash made by its forerunners, Gravity's Rainbow (translated as Die Enden der Parabel) was promptly placed upon the "Bestenliste des SWF," representing the opinion of Germany's most prominent literary critics. Thomas Pynchon has long been accepted in Germany by the members of a literary elite. One of the goals of Ordnung und Entropie is to help acquaint a larger, more general public with Pynchon's fiction, though whether it will succeed is questionable, given the density of some of the essays.
As Heinz Ickstadt, Professor of American Studies at the Kennedy Institute of the Freie Universität Berlin, points out in the "Introduction," there are definite affinities between Pynchon and Germany. The former is seemingly fascinated, "if not obsessed by Germany and its more recent history. An admirer he certainly is not." Though the names of many figures in his fiction will doubtless be appreciated by the German reader, it is less certain that various historical events referred to will evoke the same sense of familiarity, or that the response to them will always be appreciative. However, portrayals of such events as the slaughter of the Hereros in V. need not be taken too personally by German readers, as German history is often used by Pynchon to show a more general western decline, a more general decadence. As the title of Ickstadt's collection suggests, the reader will become intimate with the concept of entropy.

The collection includes translations of articles which have become "classics" of Pynchon criticism, as well as lesser-known scholarship (primarily German) from the past several years. Because Tony Tanner is seen as the actual father of Pynchon criticism, his two articles, "Carries and Cabals" and "Games American Writers Play," occupy the positions of honor at the beginning and end of this volume; between them, ten other essays are bound. At least five of these latter will also be familiar to American readers of Pynchon criticism: W. T. Lhamon's "Pentecost, Promiscuity and Pynchon's V.," David Leverenz's "On Trying to Read Gravity's Rainbow," Lance W. Ozier's "The Calculus of Transformation: More Mathematical Imagery in Gravity's Rainbow," Lawrence C. Wolfley's "Repression's Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon's Big Novel," and Mathew Winston's "The Quest for Pynchon." The remaining five articles are briefly discussed below.

Manfred Pütz's "Thomas Pynchons V.: Geschichtserfahrung und narrativer Diskurs" (1978) considers V. within the framework of the genre of the historical novel. Focusing on Stencil's attempts to track down V., Pütz stresses that the concept of fiction (what Eigenvalue calls "Stenciling") plays an increasingly larger role in Stencil's strategy, a "surrogate" for the lack of historical coherency he finds. What
Stencil and other characters in V. show is their need for what Frank Kermode has termed "concord-fictions," that would enable them to cast a light on the world which would make it correspond to a recognizable reality. In V., Putz maintains, Pynchon does not so much question the legitimacy of this necessity as he doubts its efficacy with respect both to historical understanding, and to the ability of the individual to cope. For the "paranoia" that is intimately connected to the need for order also undermines the latter, in that it gives birth to the suspicion that all recognizable order is but mere construct, that there exists no possibility of escaping individual subjectivity. At best, the result is rampant self doubt; at worst, loss of self (Stencil has no "I"). Fausto Maijstral writes, "So we do sell our souls: paying them away to history in little installments." The history-creating consciousness is another manifestation of decadence. As it becomes clearer that hazard is in fact the dominant catalyst in history, the attempts to "narrate" history, i.e., to bring history and the recounting of history into harmony, find their parallels on another textual level: the problem of narrative becomes the object of a narrative. By breaching the realms of the "metafictional," Pynchon metamorphoses a type of historical novel into a novel concerned with the "conditions for the possibility of a historical novel." Finally, because that consciousness which attempts to deny historical entropy ultimately becomes one which produces entropy, Putz reads V. as a testimony to the impossibility of the historical novel.

Heinz Ickstadt's "Thomas Pynchon, Die Versteigerung von No. 49" (1975) is a dense, original article dealing primarily with Pynchon's second novel. Oedipa Maas, connoisseur of civilized frustration, is seen as trying to cope with a new version of Profane's existential "angst" through a form of Stencil's speculation. The scene in which Metzger and Oedipa bet on the outcome of the melodrama Cashiered prefigures the denial of plot which is the theme and structure of Lot 49. Due to a mix-up in the reels, Oedipa must essay to decipher the true interrelation between the fragments of a projected reality. The lack of coherency in the film with which Oedipa is confronted, the actual denial of plot, reflects the theme and structure of the novel. The basic structural elements (analogy, pun
and metaphor) are used by Pynchon not only to suggest links between incongruous elements, but at the same time to cast these links into doubt. The authorial "as if," both explicit and implicit, serves not only to reveal, but also to cache meaning. Choosing to reject the question of whether or not Tristere in fact exists in favor of the assumption that it could and must exist, Oedipa accepts the possibility that she may be weaving her own tapestry of the world (like the girls in Remedios Varo's "Bordando el Manto Terrestre"). Citing the often quoted, "The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost," Ickstadt maintains that this is where both Oedipa and Pynchon are at the end of the novel--on the verge of a revelation, the recognition of which is threatened by paranoia. Pynchon's novels themselves constitute a sort of "interface," suggesting that there is a plane of "complementarity," while at the same time suggesting that the notion of such is pure artifice, fiction-making in the face of chaos. Tristere could be either what Jesús Arrabal would call an "anarchist miracle" (as could be the mystical feeling of community Oedipa senses during the dance of the deaf-mutes), or the silence of perfect communication, or the silence of total alienation. In a realm somewhere between those two silences, Pynchon tries to make verbal a lost reality of non-rational experience through a fictional strategy directed against fiction. The multi-dimensional open structures of his novels are Pynchon's own attempts to fend off entropy, but in the same vein, they become his own "waste," entrapping him in a system he has recognized as irreversible.

Complementing Tony Tanner's stimulating essay, "Games American Writers Play," Dietmar Claas' "Ein abgekartetes Spiel?" Handlungsspiele in Die Versteigerung von No. 49 und die innovative Leistung des Lesers" (1978) seeks to view literary games in the light of a European perspective. The central theme of Pynchon's literary experiment, the attempt to make manifest the mythic history of the United States in the midst of apocalyptic foreboding, arises within the context of historical exhaustion and disillusionment. Reflecting in many ways a game of hide and seek, theater metaphor in Lot 49 functions at various levels on the "stage of
'San Narciso' in Oedipa's allegorical quest for America. Reading Pynchon's comment on 17th century audiences, designated as "so pre-apocalyptic, death wishful, sensually fatigued, unprepared . . .", the reader gains insight into Pynchon's game strategy--self reflection. Though Oedipa fails to decipher the Inverarity machine, her attempts reveal fragments of America's mythical history. These attempts deal obliquely not just with the historical, but also with the way in which history is written and read; the reader is drawn into the game of plotting, with its inherent and continually new deviations and permutations. Much like the protagonist, the reader often succumbs to the overdeterminism of the "plot," only to find himself in a stalemate. Oedipa's frustration in her attempt to unravel the Inverarity legacy, her suspicion that she is the victim of "some grandiose practical joke," is mirrored in the reader's quest for meaning within the text. Offered an abundance of signals, the reader is maneuvered into recognizing the function of "San Narciso" as dramatic metaphor in general, and his own assigned role as reflective participant in particular. The reader is constantly made aware of the fact that the possible means of decoding the myths are fictions, but that they are nevertheless useful as such, and are perhaps the only feasible resource available. Pynchon's final casting of Oedipa in the role of rebel is the final appeal to the reader, in whose critical consciousness the boundaries between fact and fiction have broken down.

Klaus Poenicke's "Senex, Puer, Pikaro und Pynchons Enden der Parabel" (1978) offers an interesting variant within the polyvalence of Pynchon's critical reception. Placing Gravity's Rainbow within the scope of American post-modernism and focusing on characterization, Poenicke reads Rainbow in the context of post-Jungian archetypal psychology. James Hillman's revision of Jungian psychology, his endeavor to replace the monotheistic psychology, with its emphasis on a unitary self, with a polytheistic psychology, allowing for a multiplicity of selves in general, and his essay "Senex and Puer: An Aspect of the Historical and Psychological Present" (1967) in particular, provide Poenicke with an innovative frame of reference. Concentrating on the investigation of the post-modern
mutation of the picaro (i.e., the increasing abandonment of unitary personality and singular identity), and working within the phenomenology of the senex-puer archetype, Poenicke proposes to reveal the direction of the "identity diffusion" (Erikson) within postmodern literature. Burroughs' Lee and Pynchon's Slothrop serve as "fixed" objects of observation. The senex-puer constellation demonstrates a model of consciousness defined by a potential for polarity. The poles are latent in the archetype but activated via ego-consciousness. The inherent oppositions split, manifesting two contrary patterns—individual, as well as social-behavioral—combating one another for power. Senex, tending toward a rigid dominance of the world (mythologically affixed to Chronos and Saturn), manifests itself in repressive totalitarianism; Puer, yearning for escape from all limitations (mythologically affixed to Hermes and Mercury), manifests itself in anarchic revolution. The senex configuration within Rainbow, to which such characters as Weissmann, Pökler, Margherita Erdmann, and Pointsman are assigned, designates an omnipotent, established order. Pynchon stages this order in its most oppressive and aggressive mode; its ultimate aim is the destruction of any creative aspect of sexuality, whose powers of usurpation it fears. And yet, adhering to a dialectic of polarities, the senex consciousness unintentionally, but inevitably, creates its own underground of latent adversaries. Puer consciousness centers on the revolt against the tyranny of the father. Creative transgression, symbolized not least in the rocket's breaking away from gravity, defines the field of action for the puer constellation. Foremost candidate for puer-representative is the neo-picaro, Slothrop. The foremost trait of this post-modern picaro, and that which distinguishes him from his classical forerunner, is his "absence of ego." Manifesting the strategies of "identity diffusion," the puer-picaro Slothrop remains amorphous, multiple and collective, thereby evading, if not transgressing, the fixity of established form and order. Yet Poenicke is wary of announcing Slothrop as a new culture-hero deserving veneration. For just as senex succumbs to delusions of grandeur, so is puer a victim susceptible to regressive reality loss.

Charles Russell's "Signs, Systems and Subversion" (translated as "Aporien der Postmoderne: Thomas
Pynchon und die Schwerkraft der Systeme") (1978) is concerned with the system of language as a model for reality within Gravity's Rainbow. Russell contends that the process of rigorous self-reflection and critical analysis, which Pynchon advocates as the only means of revealing the limitations of language and logic, underlies the decisive structural and thematic elements of the novel. Since all systems depend on signs and derive from logic, i.e., logical discourse, they all threaten to falsify the experience they define. As Stencil, Enzian and Slothrop come to realize, the system or context of experience is actually irrelevant; fear, hope, and disillusionment remain constant. It is the potential of the spoken word to become autonomous and generate a new system that underlies the total development of the novel. The interaction of reality and language—naming, differentiation and reconstruction—is comprised in the speech act, and is in fact the basis at once for power and for suffering within human existence. The implied antithesis between the realizations of Blobadjian and Tchitcherine recurs in each system presented in Rainbow. Blobadjian advocates a redemption of words from the mortal stream of speech; Tchitcherine fears alienation through written language which increasingly separates the speaker from the spoken. Pynchon repeatedly emphasizes these two fundamental and complementary mechanisms which underlie all processes of knowledge. The dilemma with which Pynchon confronts all his characters rests in the fact that every possible alternative to a particular, contingent system in turn generates a new system with its own ominous autonomy. The work, questioning the power of language, aims at confronting its own linguistic boundaries.

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Pynchon in Japan: A Bibliography
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TRANSLATIONS OF PYNCHON INTO JAPANESE:


---------. "Wanigari" (Alligator Hunt, from Ch. 5 of V.). Trans. Masao Shimura. Umi, 10, No. 6 (June, 1978), 221-30.

WORKS ABOUT PYNCHON IN JAPANESE:


Sato, Yoshiaki. "Bunka o Nugu Koto, Kigaeru Koto:


"Introduction to Thomas Pynchon." Bokushin, No. 12 (1978), 112-17.


"Katari, Plot, Pynchon" (Deception, Plot and Pynchon). Gendaishi Techo, 21, No. 5 (May, 1978), 50-56.


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Notes

1 I have not "transliterated" those words that are borrowed from the English vocabulary, except "Amerika."

2 Omitted are gossips, short reviews, and "mentions."

3 There is no chief editor(s) to this three-volume collection of essays. It is a collaboration of many friends and disciples of one Professor Ohashi, in commemoration of whose retirement this work was published.

4 Written in Japanese. Only the title is in English.

5 Another of his works is cited in PN 1, 12.
Call for Papers

The MLA's Division on Literature and Science will sponsor a special session on Thomas Pynchon at the December 1982 MLA Convention in Los Angeles. The topic is the influence of science and technology upon the language, style or structure of Pynchon's works. The seminar is being organized by Professors Alan J. Friedman and Joseph Slade, who request that paper proposals or abstracts of one to three pages be sent to Prof. Slade, Communications Center, Long Island University/Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn, NY 11201, before April 1.
Bibliography

We would like to remind our readers that they are invited to contribute bibliographic information about bibliographies, dissertations, books, chapters, essays, articles, reviews, interviews, translations, newspaper and magazine stories, fragments, oddments, stray comments, conference papers, and anything else of the sort which seems significant, interesting, or otherwise valuable and worthy of wider publicity with specific reference to Pynchon. We also welcome news of work in progress, circulating manuscripts, and forthcoming works.

SUPPORT NOTICES BY PYNCHON:


CRITICISM AND COMMENT:


Friedman, Melvin J. "The Schlemiel: Jew and Non-Jew." Studies in the Literary Imagination, 9, No. 1 (1976), 139-53. (150-51) Friedman finds "Profane less a schlemiel than any of the other characters discussed in this essay. Still one should acknowledge Pynchon's obvious fascination with the word and his effective use of it as a verbal leitmotiv."


Schaub, Thomas H. "Where Have We Been, Where Are We Headed?: A Retrospective Review of Pynchon Criticism." Pynchon Notes 7 (1981), 5-21.


Mentions Gravity's Rainbow as a "picaresque/experimental novel" and "send-up classic."


FORTHCOMING:


Contributors

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BROOKE HORVATH is a graduate student at Purdue University, where he is writing his dissertation on the search for spiritual fulfillment in contemporary American fiction. He recently presented a paper on John Ashbery's poetry at the University of Louisville's Conference on Twentieth Century Literature. An essay of his on Henry James' short stories of writers and artists will appear in the Spring 1982 issue of Modern Fiction Studies.

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MATHEW WINSTON received his Ph.D. from Harvard University, and is Assistant Professor of English at the College of William and Mary. He is the author of "The Quest for Pynchon," (which has been translated into Polish and German) and of essays on Nabokov, Beckett, Albee, black humor and Shakespearean drama. His New Concepts of Comedy will be published by Methuen.

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