PYNCHON NOTES

Editors
John M. Krafft
Suffolk County Community College
Western Campus
Brentwood, NY 11717

Khachig Tölölyan
English Department
Wesleyan University
Middletown, CT 06457

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Coloring Gravity's Rainbow
N. Katherine Hayles and Mary B. Eiser

"Yes, Private, the colors change, and how! The question is, are they changing according to something? Is the sun's everyday spectrum being modulated? Not at random, but systematically [ . . . ]? Is there information for us? Deep questions, and disturbing ones." 1

More than a decade after Gravity's Rainbow first appeared, the central question about this enigmatic text remains unanswered. How can we impute coherence to the text without falling into--or creating--the totalizing structures that the text warns us against? 2 As the "Rainbow" of Pynchon's title suggests, color is an important way in which this question is brought into focus. Most readers are aware that certain colors and color combinations occur repeatedly through the text; but so far no one has connected them either with Pynchon's recurrent themes, or with the more general question of how to reconcile the obviously elaborate patterning of Gravity's Rainbow with its paranoid intuition that all patterns originate in death-obsessed consciousness. 3 Encoded into the color transformations of Gravity's Rainbow are complex responses toward the psychopathologies to which fragmented Western thought gives rise, and the ways in which we as writers and readers get co-opted into participating in and reinforcing this fragmentation.

The possibility of co-option is inherent in the way Pynchon constructs his critique. He can create color within his text only by naming it, and he can name it only by classifying it as distinct and identifiable hues. Similarly, we can participate in Pynchon's creation of color only by decoding his color names, which implies that both reader and author are implicated in reducing the rainbow's "endless streaming" to the distinct hues of Newton's spectrum. At the same time, Pynchon's color coding achieves its force because it utilizes Newton's rules for color combination and refraction to create precise transformations
that connect the color names with such far-reaching themes as racism, the link between the dye and munitions industry, and the effect of synthetic chemicals and drugs upon the fragmented consciousness that they both create and control. As the color names become linked with these thematic concerns, a pervasive ambiguity arises: are Pynchon's acts of naming colors an escape from routinization, or an extension of "Their" totalizing patterns?4

The problem is inescapable; Pynchon's strategies are correspondingly convoluted. They progress by defining colors through binary oppositions, then by seeking ways to elude or transform the very categories that give the colors significance. The overarching color code consists of a progressive bleaching of color, from the blackness of Pirate's opening dream to the whiteness of Gottfried's descent at the end. Within this framing black/white dichotomy, colors appear not "at random," but as systematic combinations in which complementary colors are paired. Newton showed that when a color is joined with its complement, the combination yields either black or white. The appearance of color in complementary pairs therefore suggests that color is constantly at risk, in danger of collapsing into one or the other of the framing dichotomy's terms.

When colors arise that can mediate between the black/white poles, the implicit hope is that some way may be found to escape the rule of the excluded middle. When color disappears, it is a sign that the binary oppositions of a routinized mentality have taken over. The codes that govern this complex emergence and disappearance of color can be illustrated by three color groupings: the black-red-white triad, the three most pervasive colors; the blue/yellow complements associated with Gottfried and Enzian; and the color transformations that Slothrop undergoes. Before turning to an explication of these color codes, it will be useful to review some of the text's allusions to the dye industry, synthetic chemicals and the development of military-industrial multinationals, to understand how Pynchon's color codes will connect with, and thematically reinforce, these concerns.
The Dye Industry: How Color is Routinized

When Walter Rathenau, "prophet and architect of the cartelized state" (164), speaks of the "succession" connecting the discovery of mauve with the German military, he is historically accurate (166). Mauve, the first synthetic dye, was discovered in 1856 by William Perkin, then a student of Wilhelm August Hoffman, father of coal-tar analysis and successor to Justus von Liebig, the first chemist to work extensively with carbons and hydrocarbons. Dissatisfied with his work under Hoffman, Perkin set up a lab in his home and there, while attempting to synthesize quinine, stumbled across what he called "aniline" or "Tyrian purple." Under the name "mauveine," later shortened to "mauve," the dye was marketed by French entrepreneurs who took over Perkin's patent. The astonishing success of this first synthetic dye stimulated the discovery of hundreds more and ushered in the chemical technology that branched into such fields as photography, plastics, pharmaceuticals and explosives. Historically, the development of the dye industry in Germany proved crucial to the German munitions industry, a fact lamented in a 1921 propaganda pamphlet issued by the American Dyes Institute, urging the public to support the American dye industry so that it too could develop the synthetic chemicals necessary for superior military technology.5

The rapid development of the dye industry resulted in numerous color classification schemes, because colors cannot be mass-produced reliably until they can be unambiguously identified. The system that finally won dominance throughout the world was devised by the Commission International de L'Eclairage, whose alternate name comes from the English title for the controlling agency: the International Commission on Illumination, or the ICI. Like the "Icy Eye" of Pynchon's "Imperial Chemical Industries," the ICI color standards represent the triumph of synthetic cognition over natural perception, imposing on the organic unity of the rainbow the routinization that industrial processes demand.
In addition to discussing explicitly the dye industry's role in creating synthetic chemicals suitable for warfare, Gravity's Rainbow encodes this condemnation into its color names by contrasting the vividly true tones of natural colors with the bastardized, muted colors of synthetic dyes. Pirate, in his dream-vision of Hell, notices that the colors there are exclusively synthetic, with "every unpleasant commercial color from aquamarine to beige" represented (548). Opposing these depressing tones are the "true" colors associated with civilizations before they were corrupted by technology and modern analysis. The narrator imagines that the colors of America's pre-technological past were all vivid, "yellow American deserts, Red Indians, blue sky, green cactus" (724-25). Slothrop has a vision of what this lost America must have looked like when he witnesses "the kind of sunset you hardly see any more," resplendent with color like the "landscapes of the American West by artists nobody ever heard of, when the land was still free and the eye innocent, and the presence of the Creator much more direct [. . . . an] anachronism in primal red, in yellow purer than can be found anywhere today" (214). The brighter the colors, the freer the imagination; the further the scene shifts away from the vivid hues into the synthetic tones, the more the creative play of the imagination is repressed.6

At the same time that this natural/synthetic dichotomy critiques binary thinking, however, it also embodies it, for it too is a simple pairing of opposites that, like the opposition between a "We-system" and a "They-system," operates by excluding the middle. It is thus another version of the central dilemma of how to name colors without at the same time becoming subject to the binary thinking that such naming implies. The search for a solution is the more urgent because the end of analytical fragmentation is, the narrator suggests, inevitable: it is the Rocket carrying Gottfried, the dark annihilation implicit in the flight into whiteness. "What is this death," the narrator asks, "but a whitening, a carrying of whiteness to ultrawhite, what is it but bleaches [. . . . ] extending, rarefying the Caucasian pallor to an abolition of pigment, of melanin, of spectrum, of
separateness from shade to shade" (759). How can "separateness from shade to shade" be preserved if the opposites that bracket them collapse into each other? The next code can be understood as an attempt to escape from this dialectic: a third term is introduced to mediate between the binary black/white opposition.

**White-Red-Black: The Basic Triad**

Inserted between the black/white opposites, red, the third term, is meant to open a space in which color can again appear. It too, however, is subject to co-option. The drama is played out in the colors associated with two of Pynchon's major characters, Pointsman and Katje. Descriptions of Pointsman emphasize his absence of color. In the scene where we first meet the "graying Pavlovian," Pointsman is described almost entirely in neutrals, searching through the nighttime wreckage with his foot stuck in a toilet bowl, "vague" eyes of "no particular color" staring out from a Balaclava helmet, a white ear sticking out to the side (42-43). What variations appear in Pointsman's white facade serve to hint at the repressed term of the white/black dichotomy, for when Pointsman is not bleached of color, he is described in shades of brown. "Neutral" Pointsman, treating other people as "human palimpsests" on which he can scrawl "his own brown Realpolitik dreams" (50), exemplifies the repression that is the underside of his scientific objectivity. In the fantasy Pointsman has (and we have?) about hanging out at St. Veronica's Downtown Bus Station to kidnap abandoned children, the principal variations in the monochromatic descriptions are shades of brown. But a touch of color breaks the pattern: the red eyes of the child, a vivid tone that creates an instant of sympathy in contrast to the moral tawdryness of the whole. The red is repeated in the flash of the disappearing travelers' cigarettes--"once, twice--no more" (51).

The flash of red is significant, for red is the mediating third term that comes between black and white to signify a potential for transformation, a germ of passion that could deflect Pointsman from his path of control and repression. It returns when
Maudie Chilkes has oral sex with him in the closet at the PISCES Christmas party. Maudie, the initiator of this "slick and crimson" event, is described in vivid scarlet tones; her knees blush red and she wears a wine-colored hair ribbon. In contrast to Maudie's deep red tones, Pointsman possesses only a "pink Pavlovian cock." But even this weak hue is an achievement for the neutral Pointsman, and he will be granted a rare visitation of color when their "white-lit" moment subsides into visions of green shoals, "sudden tropics in the held breath of war and English December" (168-69).

The pattern established with Pointsman--the complementarity between black and white, modified by a spark of red--is repeated with Katje. Except for her clothing, which she changes as easily as her allegiance, Katje is described solely in neutrals and achromatics. Her skin and features are usually described as white (or in achromatics, such as silver and gold). But when she and Slothrop have sex, her civilized Northern whiteness gives way to the darkness inside, a blackness the more violent because it has been repressed for so long:

the moonlight only whitens her back, and there is still a dark side, her ventral side, her face, that he can no longer see, a terrible beastlike change coming over muzzle and lower jaw, black pupils growing to cover the entire eye space till whites are gone and there's only the red animal reflection. (196)

Like the red eyes of the child, Katje's red signals a moment of change, if only into bestiality. Her changes are, however, neither lasting nor profound. In her role of Domina Nocturna, Katje will again combine her achromatic blackness with a touch of red, but like Pointsman, she can finally change only superficially. "Secretly she fears the Change," Blicero concludes, "choosing instead only trivially to revise what matters least, ornament and clothing, going no further than politic transvestism" (97).

Despite the inability of red to sustain itself against Pointsman's and Katje's neutral ground, in rare moments of grace this mediating third term does
succeed in opening a space between the binary oppositions that rule the analytical mind. Coming at the extreme lower edge of the spectrum, red can be understood as a "transmarginal" color, associated with moments of passage into another order of being. It appears in the "lurid red altitudes" where infinity lurks (664); in the color of Roger Mexico's scarf as the "young anarchist" argues with Pointsman on the beach (89); in the red rose Lyle Bland holds in his hand at his transcendence. Red is the fiery ball of the Rocket before Brennenschluss, the sign of "encrimsoned" Enzian's departure from his people. Signifying transformation, it offers hope that the binary dialectic can be eluded by leaving the realm of rational analysis altogether.

The triadic configuration of black, white and red is fundamental not only because it is pervasive in Pynchon's text, but also because it is associated with the simpler, more innocent mode of vision that the Herero once possessed. Researchers have found that the proliferation of basic color names within a culture correlates strongly with its technological sophistication. Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, for example, examined color terms from 98 languages and found that not only do undeveloped societies have fewer color names than developed ones; the order in which color words appear is consistent between societies.\textsuperscript{8} Blue, for example, appears only in languages that also have a term for red; combination tones such as grey, pink and purple appear only in languages that also have words for red and blue. The highest number of basic color categories found was eleven; the least, three. Whereas languages with eleven basic color names include all those spoken in Western countries, three-color languages are found only in third-world countries, and are extremely rare even there. One of the very few documented examples is Herero.\textsuperscript{9} Herero, like all three-color languages, names as basic colors the same triad that dominates Pynchon's text: white, black and red.

Early theorists, working in the imperialist tradition, took the paucity of basic color terms in "primitive" cultures to mean that people of color could not, ironically, distinguish between colors.
Later research proved conclusively that this is not the case. People in tribal societies can distinguish between as many colors as those from developed societies; but they do not see the point of assigning separate names to the various hues. Cultures that emphasize black, white and red are thus akin to Pynchon's text in distinguishing between perception and acts of naming; whereas color names are common to the culture, the perception of color is always individual and ultimately unnameable for that reason. Opposing the routinization of color names and the parallel development of the dye industry (with all that implies for the formation of military-industrial multinationals) is the hope that the rainbow can still be perceived innocently, without needing to break its subtly nuanced hues into separate color names.

In another sense, however, the psychophysical nature of color perception underscores the complexity of representing (or creating) such innocence. When "They" know the uses of innocence, the attempt to create or re-create it within language points once again to the possibility of co-option. Does the disappearance of color names from Pynchon's text as it draws to its conclusion signify an attempt to return to the simpler, less fragmented mode of vision of the Herero? Or does it recognize, and inescapably re-create, the very division between perception and naming that led to the routinization of color in the first place? In the face of these dual possibilities, we are forced to recognize the subjectivity of our judgment as we attempt to decide if this is a return to innocence, or an extension of analysis. The ambiguity emphasizes that the meanings of Pynchon's colors depend not on the light quanta impinging on the retina or on the stimulation of sense receptors, but on the complex perceptual and linguistic processes that translate those sensations into color names, and hence into signification. To be able to signify, to create color codes that readers can decipher, is inevitably to be subject to this equivocation.
Blue/Yellow Complements: The Collapse into Black and White

The hope that Return is possible and the equally compelling view that attempts to Return are only further perversions are encoded into the two characters who literally attempt to return through the Rocket, Gottfried and Enzian. The colors associated with these characters (blue and yellow for Gottfried, black for Enzian) illustrate how the mutual entailment of complementary colors works. The key to the blue/yellow code lies in the interlocking patterns of absorption and reflection that are joined in color perception.

Yellow pigment appears yellow because it reflects yellow light; it absorbs light in the blue range. Shining a blue light on yellow pigment therefore causes the pigment to be perceived as black, since most of the light is absorbed. In this sense blue and yellow make black. The opposite result can be obtained by combining blue and yellow light, which together make white because their combined wavelengths add up to the same wavelength as white light.\(^\text{11}\) Blue and yellow are also linked in human color perception. If you stare at a block of bright blue for thirty seconds without blinking, then shift your gaze to a blank white page, a yellow after-image will appear where the blue image was previously seen.\(^\text{12}\) This complementarity is the physical basis for the code connecting Enzian and Gottfried, and explains how they can literally be each other's shadow images.

Because blue and yellow combine to make black, Enzian's color is the "infolded" version of these two chromatic hues. When Weissmann/Blicero (the white one/the bleacher) names his black lover "Enzian" after "Rilke's mountainside gentian," the boy protests that he is "red, and brown... black," but Blicero replies, "'this is the other half of the earth. In Germany you would be yellow and blue!'" (101). Blicero leaves Enzian to find in Gottfried's blond hair and blue eyes the "exfolded" version of Enzian's blackness. As Blicero intuits, it is necessary for Enzian to have a blue-and-yellow counterpart on the other side of the earth to fulfill the "mirror-metaphysics" (101) implicit in the color complementarity of the two chromatic hues.
Having been "exfolded" from Enzian, Gottfried's blue-and-yellow coloring will be "infolded" into whiteness when, clad all in white and wrapped in a white Impolex shroud, he is entombed in the Rocket by the white man who is his lover. Enzian in the 00001 Rocket will attempt to follow Gottfried's path in the 00000. Trying to restore the lost unity of vision that his people once possessed by further "infolding" Gottfried's whiteness and his blackness in the final explosion, Enzian hopes to re-create the coming together of opposites that marked the center of the traditional Herero village (563).

Whether such Return is possible once fragmentation and routinization have taken place is by no means clear. Will a mystic moment of unity arrive? Or is this a mad, parodic inversion of true Return? The ambiguity is inescapable, for these color-coded opposites will finally be united only in the annihilating light that follows when the Rocket falls the "last delta-t"; but before this moment arrives, Pynchon's text ends. The ambiguity potentially extends to all the colors of the rainbow, for each color, combined with its complement, can turn into black or white. Are they therefore in danger of disappearing, victims of Western fragmentation? Or are we to understand that they have been "infolded" back into the holistic vision the Herero see when they name only three colors? The ambiguity reminds us that at the same time that Pynchon's names invest his text with color, they are also evidence that there is no route of Return except through language. When that language reflects the analytical categories that identify color names with dyes and dyes with weapons, recovery and betrayal become a single gesture.

Slothrop's Code: The Two Scales

The color codes we have explored so far can all be understood as variations on binary oppositions. Black and white can mutually entail each other; a mediating third term can arise between them; or color complements can be infolded or exfolded from these apparently achromatic opposites. In Tyrone Slothrop, Pynchon's major character, still another possibility emerges: opposites can pull in different directions until the
phenomenon itself disappears. Representing both a
dichotomy and its dissolution, the colors associated
with Slothrop constitute Pynchon's most formidable
color code. Like the previous codes, Slothrop's color
transformations pose the question of how colors can be
named without being betrayed.

A divided being, Slothrop has inherited both a
"natural" and a "synthetic" self. He is the natural
child of his stereotypical American parents, Broderick
and Nalline, and a descendant of the Puritans; but he
is also the synthetic product of Dr. Jamf's laboratory.
In Slothrop, the corrupt natural self that the Puritans
believed was a product of Original Sin is juxtaposed
with the synthetic self that Jamf foretold when he pre-
dicted that carbon chemistry would give way to the
inorganic bonds of Si-N. The colors associated with
Slothrop suggest that his two selves are represented
by two different color scales. When these colors
undergo systematic transformation along their respec-
tive scales, Slothrop is pulled in opposite directions
until he finally dissipates altogether.

The spectral scale, used to represent Slothrop's
synthetic self, is based on refraction of light. From
Newton on, this scale has represented the triumph of
the analytical mind in explaining and controlling the
play of light. It is the scale that occurs when light
is refracted through a prism, beginning with violet,
the shortest wavelength we can see (about 400 mu), and
ending with red, the longest wavelength in the visible
range (about 700 mu). The pigment scale, less familiar
than the spectral scale, was devised by the dye and
paint industry to predict whether a given color will
appear darker or lighter than another. It arranges
colors along a scale according to how far light pene-
trates into the pigment substance. Beginning with
yellow, where light penetration is least, it ends with
green, where the depth of penetration is greatest
before leaving the chromatics altogether; if this
depth of penetration is exceeded, the pigment will be
perceived as black.13 The pigment scale was developed
to accommodate the dye industry's need for reliable
color reproduction, and hence represents a second
route toward the routinization of color. Arrived at
by trial and error, it represents not the triumph of
analytical cognition, as the spectral scale does, but the triumph of dogged persistence when expressed through an industrial-military bureaucracy.

As the product both of the Puritans and of Jamf's laboratory, Slothrop is living proof of Max Weber's thesis that Puritanism laid the foundation for the capitalistic ethic which in turn led to the development of the multinationals, an entanglement that Pynchon represents simply as "Them." The more Slothrop tries to escape one aspect of his dual heritage, for example, by his very unpuritanical sexual encounters, the more he finds himself entangled in other aspects of it, for example, in the correlation between his ejaculations and the rocket strikes. Pynchon's strategy in devising a color code for Slothrop is to play upon this mutual entailment by associating Slothrop with the two color scales that emerged from these two interlocking traditions.

The twist Pynchon gives to this already convoluted code is to have the color transformations Slothrop undergoes pull in opposite directions. He is moving along the spectral scale from lowest to highest wavelength, that is, from purple toward red, and by implication toward the white light that is the highest wavelength of all; simultaneously, he is also moving along the pigment scale from shortest to longest penetration, that is, from yellow to green, and by implication to black. As the two scales shift in opposite directions, they encode increasing dissipation into the colors associated with him. Slothrop's "dissipation" can thus be seen as an alternative to mutual entailment; rather than coming together in the complex represented as "Them," Slothrop diverges until he joins the background radiation of the cosmos. Whether this dissipation is in fact a triumph or another example of co-option is the final question that we will explore through Pynchon's color codes.

Slothrop's Initialization: Purple and Yellow

At the beginning of "Beyond the Zero," Slothrop is identified with purple, the color at the lower end of the spectral scale; this serves as the baseline color for his synthetic self. The connection is underscored
by his name "Tyrone," which can be read as a variant of the first important synthetic dye, Tyrion purple. To this color is quickly added yellow, which serves as the baseline color for Slothrop's corrupt natural self. Purple and yellow, the lowest points of the spectral and pigment scales, respectively, therefore define Slothrop's initial state. From this point both scales begin shifting outward, pulling Slothrop in two different directions. The spectral scale moves past red and leaves our visibility range altogether when it becomes white light. The pigment scale, increasing from yellow to green, moves toward black and dissolution. As Slothrop penetrates deeper into the Zone, his two halves keep shifting in opposite directions, his synthetic self toward white, his natural self toward black, until finally he too is transformed into a wave phenomenon like the light that represents him.

We can trace these transformations through Slothrop's changing colors. The first to appear are purple, lowest wavelength on the spectral scale, and yellow, least depth on the pigment scale. These two colors dominate the descriptions of Slothrop's love life, a product of both his natural lust and his conditioning by Dr. Jamf. The collaboration is marked by the stars on his love chart's corresponding to the rocket strikes. The stars include a "violet density," but under yellow electric light (the narrator stresses this point twice) (17-19). Slothrop remembers one of his girlfriends as having skin stained lavender under pastel lights, and his "garden of love" is said to teem "purple and yellow as hickeys" (22).

The dominance of purple and yellow in descriptions of Slothrop includes his vague premonition that there is more to his history than he knows. In an ominous flashback at the beginning of his stay at the Casino, Slothrop recalls a smell that brings back a moment of Berkshire Saturdays--bottles of plum and amber tonics, fly-studded paper twists swayed by the overhead fan, twinges of pain from blunt scissors. . . (183)

Slothrop's recurring nightmare, in which he discovers that the definition of "Jamf" is "I," occurs "back
home" on an afternoon of "lilacs and bees" (286-87). The purple-and-yellow combination also appears in descriptions of the Rocket, for example, when Thanatz recalls the last rocket firing on the Luneberg Heath, and connects Slothrop to the Rocket that both reflects and precedes his own sexual activity.

In the iris sky one cloud, the shape of a clamshell, rises very purple around the edges, the puff from an explosion, something light ocher at the horizon... closer in it seems snarling purple around a yellow that's brightening, intestines of yellow shadowed in violet spilling outward, outward in a bellying curve. (670)

In addition to establishing a baseline against which Slothrop's further transformations can be measured, the purple/yellow pairing hints at the link between Newton, founder of the spectral scale, the dye/munitions industry, that invented the pigment scale, and Slothrop's personal history.

Slothrop's Color Complements: Purple and Green

Already complex, Slothrop's color code becomes even more complicated when the two base colors, purple and yellow, begin shifting along their respective scales. In "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering," Slothrop's natural side, previously represented by yellow, shifts toward green, color of deepest light penetration on the pigment scale. Thus a new pairing is formed between green and purple (or magenta), purple still representing Slothrop's synthetic self. Purple and green are each other's complements, so when they are combined, they transform into white light. After he "produces" a gaudy orange, green and yellow handkerchief and gives it to Tantivy, Slothrop is associated exclusively with green and purple, transforming to white. These colors also dominate the costume changes Katje uses to seduce Slothrop. The first day he meets her, Katje's blonde lashes are "full of acid green (187); later she wears an "emerald tiara" and a "gown of sea-green velvet" (190). That night before they have sex, she changes to a dress of pure white. In the morning, Slothrop dons a purple satin bedsheet in desperate pursuit of his clothes. While masquerading as the "Great Purple Kite," Slothrop gets stuck in a tree and
is surrounded by green "pungent leaflight" (199). Dressed for the party chez Raoul de la Perlimpinpin, Slothrop sports a French green suit with a "subtle purple check" (244). By the time he leaves France for "neutral" Switzerland in preparation for the Zone, Slothrop's outfit has undergone a significant bleaching:

among all the somber street faces and colors
only he is wearing white, shoes zoot 'n' hat,
white as the cemetery mountains here... (259)

Slothrop's identification with purple and green may indicate that he is being transformed into a projected image, because these colors habitually occur in relation to hallucinated or filmed images. If so, the collapse of the magenta/green complements into white light can be understood as the white light shining through a chemically impregnated celluloid strip that creates the illusion of color in film. In a film image, the perception of color is twice mediated: first because color inheres not in the object itself, but in the interplay of light with the visual receptors as interpreted by the central nervous system; and second because the film image is colored only because light is refracted through a colored object (which, of course, is not colored in itself, because its color too is mediated through the psychophysical processes that comprise color perception). In addition to suggesting his increasing fragmentation, then, the purple/green pairing indicates that Slothrop, like a cinematic image, is receding from us through increasing layers of mediation. The suggestion prepares for the moment when Slothrop will cease to exist as anything other than the wave phenomenon that is white light itself, purveyor of all colors but possessed of none.

Slothrop in the Zone: Green and Red

In the Zone, Slothrop's personality bifurcates still further as his synthetic self shifts from purple to red, longest wavelength on the spectral scale. This redshift places Slothrop at the extremes of both his synthetic and natural selves, for the pigment scale has already shifted to green, color of greatest light penetration before black. As he is pulled apart by these diverging selves, Slothrop's identity goes
from the ridiculous to the absurd: from Ian Scuffling, war correspondent, to cartoon-character Rocketman, to the actor Max Schlepzig, to the pig hero Plechazunga, until finally, stretched beyond the limits of humanity, Slothrop becomes transparent.

During these transformations, Slothrop is associated with varying amounts of red and green. In "go between" Scuffling, the two tones are present in roughly equal amounts, as his escape from the Mittlewerk tunnels illustrates (306-14). Introduced into the midst of Marvy's Mothers when he is swung upside down from a hoist cable, Slothrop's brain is said to approach "the frontiers of red-out" (306). Later, to escape them, he dodges into a paintshop, slips on a patch of "wet Wehrmacht green," and proceeds to fall through "splashes of black, white and red" (308), indicating that his escape is in some sense a return to a more "natural" state. After seeing midget eyes glowing red and green (310), he finally emerges from the tunnel to return to "green mountainslopes" and the "green breath" of woods (312-13).

As Rocketman, Slothrop's association with red and green shifts heavily toward the green side. While in a vegetable patch stealing greens, Slothrop runs into Säure, Trudi and Magda smoking a reefer, the "goldshot green" (365). In this "high" state, Säure crowns Tyrone "Raketemensch" and Trudi and Magda drape a green velvet cape (on the back of which Slothrop imagines sewing a red letter "R") over Slothrop's shoulders (366). Later, when Slothrop develops a hardon, the "ballroom" in his trousers is compared to that in St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Patrick being of course the patron saint of the Emerald Isle. The stoned quartet journey into the heart of Berlin, walking past lime trees, where they see the Reichstag building--their version of the Emerald City (368). Instead of clicking his ruby-slippered heels together three times and repeating "There's no place like home," Slothrop thrice repeats "Hauptstufe" (446), the last step in the Rocket's firing sequence. Perhaps this is a clue that the only home Slothrop has left is "over the rainbow," the rainbow being an illusion that arises when light is refracted through water, as it soon will be through Slothrop.
As Max Schlepzig, actor, Slothrop is identified solely with green, but comes together with red through his lovers. The pattern had begun when Slothrop made "nasal love" with Trudi, her "pink taste-bud[s]" penetrating his nostrils, until finally she crawled inside "the great red hall" (439) of his erect nose. Later, Bianca is associated almost exclusively with this color: Slothrop catches sight of her gown, a "flutter of red" in the corner of his eye; he unzips her "red taffeta"; her mouth is rouged, her nails are scarlet; and he plants hiccies like "red nebulae" across her body until they climax in maroon light, amidst the "red flesh echoing" (468-70).

Before Slothrop's identity shifts to Plechazunga, he completes his return to his ancestral past and its identification with living green, as he becomes "intensely alert to trees, finally" (552). He acknowledges his family's history of "chopping," "amputating," "grinding," and "bleaching" nature's original green life when he sees that the trees, like himself, are the victims of a system that uses up trees and humans alike in its insatiable demands (553).

Slothrop's Dissipation: The Rainbow

As Slothrop is pulled to the extremes by his two conflicting selves, the synthetic self moves through red toward white, while the natural self moves through green toward black. Stepping into his Plechazunga role, Slothrop dons the "startling" pink, yellow and blue multicolored suit (568). Marked by the colors of the rainbow, the varicolored pig costume symbolizes the refraction Slothrop will soon undergo; the association of pigs with innocence also suggests that Slothrop is in some sense regaining an innocence foreign to either side of his dual heritage. After Slothrop returns to the woods, he takes off his clothes altogether, finds his Orphean harp and becomes "closer to [. . .] a spiritual medium" than he's ever been before. The occasion is marked by the appearance in the sky of

a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he
stands crying, not a thing in his head, just
feeling natural. ... (626)

The rainbow marks the beginning of the end of
Slothrop's dissipation. He will gradually become
thinner and thinner until finally he disperses into
a wave phenomenon and merges with the background radi-
ation of the cosmos. Like all of Professor Jamf's
synthetic products, Slothrop was destined to become
transparent. Oneirine ("It's like stuffing wedges
of silver sponge, right, into, your brain!!" [389])
renders consciousness transparent; Kryptosam renders
writing transparent; Emulsion J renders faces trans-
parent; Imipolex is so transparent to colors that it
can appear white, black or grey as occasion demands.
Slothrop finally also becomes transparent when he is
unable either to transcend or to unite his two selves.

What are we to make of this most complex of
Pynchon's color codes? Slothrop's disassembly is the
opposite of Enzian's attempt at transcendence; whereas
Enzian tries to enfold opposite colors into a single
nameless achromatic, Slothrop is pulled apart through
color transformations proceeding in opposite direc-
tions. Dissolution through diverging color scales,
like the collapse of complementary colors, may be a
way to Return; but like Enzian's flight, it is
achieved amidst troubling ambiguities. If Slothrop
has transcended, or at least escaped, Their designs
on him, he has also been pulled to pieces by his
fragmenting color transformation. It is true that
Slothrop's dissolution removes him from where colors
are perceived in all their named particularity—that
is, from Western consciousness; but by leaving that
realm and entering the region outside the visible
spectrum, Slothrop has lost all sense of self and,
with it, all possibilities for effective counter-
action against Them. To escape the color names is
also to become unable to participate in acts of
naming—and hence to disappear from the text alto-
gether.

Slothrop's dilemma is another version of the
problem Pynchon faces when he creates colors that
change "according to something [... n]ot at random,
but systematically." Colors can be created within the
text only by naming them, but naming them also means that they have been identified as distinct and classifiable hues and hence routinized, their ephemeral fluidity destroyed. A similar double bind applies to the color codes that invest these names with thematic significance. Once decoded, the codes warn of the dangers of analysis and control; but to understand the message we had to analyze and control them. Are the narrator's colorful utterances thus doomed from the start to co-option? Will the rainbow, like the Rocket, be betrayed to gravity, its vivid play of color a nostalgic act of recovery that falls prey to the earnestness of analysis? Is it inevitable that the act of naming will both signify and re-create the loss, betraying color to the codes that give it significance?

Perhaps. But two factors render these conclusions less than certain. The first is the unrulefulness of Pynchon's profuse imaginings. No matter how comprehensive the code, there will always be data that cannot be fit into it. As the narrator remarks about the data set he compiles under the song title "Sold on Suicide," "The trouble with it is that by Gödel's Theorem there is bound to be some item around that one has omitted from the list" (320), so that closure is impossible. Certainly this is true of our color names. Though some of the data can be fit into one or another of the codes we have explicated, by no means all can; and the colors which have been "omitted from the list" mean, as the narrator says of his song, that "what one does most likely is go back over the whole thing, meintime correcting mistakes and inevitable repetitions, and putting in new items that will surely have occurred to one, and--well, it's easy to see that the 'suicide' of the title might have to be postponed indefinitely" (320). The inability to achieve closure, frustrating as it is for tidy minds, insures that complete routinization does not take place, and hence offers the hope that the final catastrophe may also be, if not escaped, at least deferred.

The second mitigating factor is Pynchon's insistence on the "last delta-t" that separates the name from the thing. The color name is only a black mark on a white page until we connect it with the
color perception that we have learned to associate with that name; but because of the psychophysical nature of color perception, these connections can never be completely standardized. Despite all of the intricate color scales that the dye industry has invented, color remains an ephemeral phenomenon. What Saussure has taught us about language in general is true with double force of color names: the gap between signifier and signified can never be unambiguously closed.

We are now in a position to understand why each of Pynchon's color codes pointed us back to the arbitrariness of language. Each involved a dichotomy that could not be resolved without introducing unavoidable ambiguities into its signification. Thus it is we, not Pynchon, who decide the final tints that Gravity's Rainbow will have. The "last delta-t" that exists between the signs of Pynchon's text and the significations we associate with those signs is the space between prophecy and fulfillment, us and our fate. However narrow the margin, it is a measure of grace; and how we use it—to sing a last song, to touch someone near us, or to contemplate the significance of the way we have colored Pynchon's rainbow—is our contribution, for good or ill, toward the end that awaits us.

--University of Iowa

Notes

1 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973), 642. Brackets indicate our ellipses; otherwise they are Pynchon's.

2 Brian McHale was the first to articulate the problem with clarity, in "Modernist Reading, Post-Modern Text: The Case of Gravity's Rainbow," Poetics Today, 1:1-2 (1979), 85-110. Two important recent works, Thomas Schaub's Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1981), and Tony Tanner's Thomas Pynchon (London: Methuen, 1982), comment on the problem perceptively, and illustrate how criticism can emerge from the tension between these polarities. Other important essays in establishing consensus are George Levine's "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction," in Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. George Levine and David Leverenz.


4 The term " routinization" comes from Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, as Edward Mendelson noted in "Gravity's Encyclopedia," Mindful Pleasures, 161-96. We extend the term by analogy to the bureaucratic exploitation of color, and by implication of the rainbow itself.

5 This tract, entitled World Disarmament and the Master Key Industry (New York: American Dyes Institute, 1927), emphasizes that "Who makes dyes today can tomorrow make high-explosives" (2). The attitude of the American tract toward the success of the German dye industry is curiously ambivalent. While despising the German dye industry's strategems, it argues that Americans need to give more scope to their "Master Key Industry" so it, too, can become a multinational corporation.

6 The centrality of repression in Gravity's Rainbow is discussed by Wolfley, "Repression's Rainbow."

7 Achromatics are colors derived from black or white, in contrast to the chromatic hues of the rainbow.

8 Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), 216.

9 Berlin and Kay, 140-42.


11 A basic text on color equations and their combinations is The Science of Color, Committee on Colorimetry, Optical Society of America (New York: Crowell, 1973). An illustration of how the blue/yellow pair combines to make white or black can be found in

12 The yellow after-image is caused by the fatigue of the blue receptors in the eye, and the consequent relative stimulation of the green and red receptors.

13 See Jacobson, 120-23 for pigment absorption patterns. Spectral combinations are shown on ii.

14 Examples of this use of the green/magenta pair include the "regulation magenta and green" bandanna (69) that Whappo wears in Slothrop's narcosis-induced Western movie; the "humorless green and magenta face of Mr. Ernest Bevin" that Osbie Feel hallucinates (106); and the "notorious white slayer of Marseilles," who gets drawn into this colorful conversation after experiencing the "hallucinogenic Hollandaise" chez Raoul:

"Hey you," hollering into the trees, "you wanna be a white slave, huh?" "Shit no," answers some invisible girl, "I wanna be a green slave!" "Magenta!" yells somebody up in an olive tree. "Vermillion!" (246)

Similarly, the scene with Darlene and Mrs. Quoad (which later appears possibly to have been hallucinated when Mrs. Quoad turns out to be a chic divorcee rather than a dowdy widow) contains several green and purple reversals. Mrs. Quoad, who suffers from "purples" and "greensickness" (among other things), serves Slothrop a "confection of pastel green, studded all over with lavender nonpareils," as well as a "eucalyptus-flavored fondant" with a core of grape gum arabic ("It is purple in color") (117).
Further Notes and Sources for Gravity's Rainbow

David Seed

The pagination of Gravity's Rainbow used here is for the Viking Press and Picador editions. I am grateful to Steven Weisenburger for identifying Grimm's Teutonic Mythology as one of Pynchon's important sources (Pynchon Notes, 12 [1983]). Some of the notes which follow are intended to supplement his comments. Deutsche Mythologie was first published in 1835. Page references in the following pages are to James Steven Stallybrass's translation of the fourth edition, published in four volumes by W. Swan Sonnen- schein & Allen and George Bell & Sons (London) 1880-8.

I

p. 32 Zipf's Principle...

In 1949 George Kingsley Zipf published Human Behaviour and the Principle of Least Effort, the product of some twenty years' previous research and publications. It is a study designed to show 'that an individual's entire behaviour is subject to the minimizing of effort'. Part of Zipf's method is to examine statistically word-frequency, which he plots against rank-orders on graphs. Gloaming is quite right about the slightly different curves obtained on analyzing schizophrenics.

p. 81 MMPI, etc.

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory was designed in 1943 as a means of personality assessment after work done in the Psychiatric Unit of the University of Minnesota Hospitals. The MMPI consists of an analysis of 550 statements which are measured along scales whose differences reflect differences in personality. P. E. Vernon and G. W. Allport published a paper entitled 'A Test for Human Values' in the Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology in 1931, and the Allport-Vernon Scale was subsequently used to measure goals. R. G. Bernreuter published his The Personality Inventory in 1935, and that same year also saw the publication of J. C. Flanagan's Factor Analysis in the
Study of the Personality. All these various methods of measuring personality are mentioned and simultaneously questioned as being too narrow or simply anachronistic. Pynchon seems to have taken the names of some of his characters from behavioral psychologists. H. C. Blodgett (Waxwing), R. S. Crutchfield (in Slothrop's Western 'dream') and W. C. H. Prentice ('Pirate') are authorities on maze-performance in rats, conformity and visual recognition.

p. 90       F scale

An anachronistic but relevant allusion to a 1950 study called The Authoritarian Personality by T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswick, D. J. Levison and R. N. Sanford. This work examines ethnocentrism, which it locates within a broader set of attitudes revolving around receptivity to fascist ideas. The F-scale measured these attitudes and thus the inclination to authoritarianism of the subject.

pp. 94-5 kneeling before the Oven

Jacob Grimm (Teutonic Mythology, p. 629) notes that the custom of kneeling before the oven shows traces of fire-worship and can be found in German Märchen. This example and other parallels with Grimm in Gravity's Rainbow imply a regression to pre-Christian primitivism.

p. 216       THE PENIS HE THOUGHT...

This ribald song seems to be a variation on a section of Norman O. Brown's Love's Body (1966). The sixth paragraph of Chapter III deals with the absence of genital autonomy: 'In genital organization we identify with the penis; but the penis we are is not our own, but daddy's; or at least, in it we and the father are one. In genital organization body and soul are haunted, possessed, by the ghost of father . . .

p. 258   Ultra, Lichtspiel and Sträggeli

These so-called 'cafés' actually refer to quite diverse entities. Ultra was the secret British system of intercepting German messages during the war, and was little more than a name in accounts of intelligence activity until the publication of F. W. Winterbotham's The Ultra Secret in 1974. Lichtspiel (literally 'light-play') was the original German word for cinema. Grimm
(p. 934) describes the Sträggeli as a variation of Holda, a member of the 'furious host'. The latter was a mythical company of spirits who swept through the air and wove their magic by night. Pynchon has already established Zürich as the city of espionage, an activity which is transacted through its main meeting-places, i.e. its cafés. The names are thus appropriately cryptic, but prove to bear on some of the novel's main themes. 'Wütende Heer' (furious host) is considered (p. 75) by Myron Grunton as a possible code-name for the Schwarzkommando. The allusion to the Sträggeli thus looks back to earlier cryptonyms in the novel and relates to the actual adoption of Teutonic code-names for covert wartime operations; it also looks forward to the proliferating references to German mythology once Slothrop has entered the Zone. Lichtspiel implicitly refers to the use of film in espionage and specifically to Operation Black Wing (again cf. GR, p. 75), which revolves partly around a spurious film of black troops. Thus deciphered, the names of the cafés become shorthand allusions to espionage, film and German mythology.

p. 277 Sir Denis Nayland Smith. 'I have been through ...'

At the end of Section II of the novel Pointsman begins to hear an anonymous but strangely subversive voice which feeds his hitherto muffled dreams of power and which suggests that Pointsman dispose of Jessica Swanlake. Mexico is compared to the hero of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels, Sir Denis Nayland Smith, and a quotation is given from Chapter 5 of The Trail of Fu Manchu (1934). The passage quoted continues: 'It was fate, I suppose, that made me an officer of Indian police. The gods--whoever the gods may be--had selected me as an opponent for ...'; at which point Alan Sterling (the romantic hero) names their dreaded adversary. Fleurette Petrie, the daughter of an Egyptologist and Sterling's fiancée, is being held by Fu Manchu and is later used to bar- gain for his life. Fu himself embodies a whole series of melodramatic sources of power. He is an illusionist, has discovered the elixir of life and is an accomplished hypnotist. Above all, he is a racial
threat. Nayland Smith's exclusive role is to combat Fu, hence Pynchon's ironic references to a puritanical immersion in his work. It is also ironic that Pointsman, supposedly the rational scientist, should fall prey to the melodramatic patterns of Rohmer's 'great Manichaean saga' (GR, p. 631). The Fu Manchu stories replace Pavlov as a guiding text for Pointsman, and one of the crucial points about this quotation is that it appears within an invitation to Pointsman to read his own situation as if it were one of Rohmer's fictions. The latter are referred to several times in GR (Fu Manchu appears in Slothrop's sodium amytal dream [p. 68], for instance) and always to indicate a clichéd thinking in opposites. Pointsman's 'voice' becomes truly subersive because it offers him the possibility of acting out mutually opposed roles--Nayland Smith and Fu Manchu. Pointsman has represented a comic form of the paranoia endemic to the novel and has built his career on theoretical Pavlovian contrasts (cf. GR, p. 88). Therefore, if opposites collapse together, he ceases to exist and from p. 278 onwards more or less drops out of the novel.

p. 327 SCHWARZE BESATZUNG AM RHEIN! (i.e., black occupation on the Rhine)

A photograph fitting Pynchon's description and bearing this title appears in Friedrich Heiss's Deutschland zwischen Nacht und Tag (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1934), p. 22. This propaganda volume presents a sequence of photographs designed to show Germany's rise towards a unified national purpose under Hitler. The photograph in question plays on German racial paranoia and supplies a historical precedent for Operation Black Wing. The specific operation is ludicrous, but the paranoia on which it plays is not. The detail of the poster/photograph challenges the reader's sense of plausibility, complicating his sense of the ludicrous. If the poster is possible, then can Operation Black Wing be dismissed as an impossibility?

p. 330 Brockengespenst
Baedeker's Northern Germany (13th edition, p. 402) contains the following note on the Brocken
Spectre: 'an optical phenomenon rarely witnessed.
... When the summit is unclouded, and the sun is
on one side, and mists rise on the other, the shadows
of the mountain and the objects on it are cast in
gigantic proportions on the wall of fog, increasing
or diminishing according to circumstances'. Pynchon
seems to have used the map of the Harz Mountains (pp.
348-9) for place-names and possibly even for character-
names, such as Ilse (from Ilse-Thai) or Sachsa (from
Bad Sachsa, a spa town).

pp. 374-5 the white woman with the ring of keys ...

An allusion to the Teutonic myths of heroes un-
covering buried hoards in mountains, and one which
would relate to the Tannhäuser story (GR, p. 299),
which Grimm discusses (pp. 935-6). The Wonderflower
(Grimm, p. 971) is a magical plant-talisman which will
supply access to the mountain. It is sometimes called
the key flower 'because it locks the vault, and as
symbol of the key-wearing white woman, whom the bunch
of keys befits as old mistress and housekeeper, and
who has likewise power to unlock the treasure ...
'(Grimm, p. 972)

p. 379 fern seed

Grimm discusses the magical properties of fern seed
on p. 1210: 'Fernseed makes one invisible, but it is
difficult to get at: it ripens only between 1 and 1
on Midsummer night, and then falls off directly, and
is gone'. Grimm then cites the example of a man who
was rendered invisible to his family when fern seed
fell in his shoes. This and related references in the
legends compiled by Grimm suggest collectively that
Slothrop has entered a mythic space in the Zone and
that he is unconsciously acting out roles from a col-
lective Teutonic race-memory. His much-discussed
'scattering' could be read as a kind of Orphic dis-
persal into these disparate roles.

p. 436 It's a horse's skull

Grimm (p. 850) cites the horse's skull as a memento
mori, a sign of 'dominus Blicero'.

p. 482 Weisse Sandwüsste von Neumexiko (i.e., 'White
 Sands of New Mexico')

White Sands was the name of the proving ground
chosen by the U.S. military for testing captured V-2 rockets. In late 1944 a contract was negotiated between the military and General Electric for its establishment. The first captured V-2 was launched on June 28, 1946 (details from James McGovern's Crossbow and Overcast).

p. 537 Gospel of Thomas
Part of the New Testament Apocrypha. The Oxyrhynchus papyri were discovered during excavations in Egypt in 1897 and 1903, and were originally thought to be part of the Sayings of Jesus, but have since been identified as part of a version of the Gospel of Thomas. M. R. James gives versions of this gospel in his The Apocryphal New Testament (1924) which describe Christ sometimes as a wonder-worker, sometimes as a malicious child wilfully cursing those around him. The sentiments of Pynchon's "quotation" would fit, but of course the register is incongruously modern. In the text established by A. Guillaumont (The Gospel According to Thomas, 1959), the gospel consists of 'secret words' of Jesus--proverbs, homiletic sayings, parables, etc.--a Gnostic text which extensively uses an imagery of light and darkness directly relevant to the imagery of Pynchon's novel. The 'quotation' also looks forward to later references to the cabala and secret wisdom in Gravity's Rainbow. Pynchon complicates the reader's sense of textuality by presenting a 'quotation' in a ludicrously modern idiom from an ancient and incomplete apocryphal work. Gravity's Rainbow is saturated with hostile and ironic allusions to a spiritual elitism fostered in particular by Protestantism and regularly directs its attention to the damned or preterite. The 'quotation' thus makes a fitting caption to section 53 of the novel, which describes a 'place of many levels', a possible version of Dante's Hell. The Gospel of Thomas is described by H. E. W. Turner and Hugh Montefiore in their Thomas and the Evangelists (1962), and the 'quotation' is examined in the context of Pynchon's other allusions by David Marriott in his 'Gravity's Rainbow: Apocryphal History or Historical Apocrypha?' (Journal of American Studies 19.1 (1985) 69-80).

p. 549 The Nationalities are on the move.
As an epigraph to the last section of Life Against
Death (1959), Norman O. Brown quotes a passage from Henry Miller's essay 'Of Art and the Future', which he wrote during the last stages of the Second World War. Since there is no doubt that Pynchon used Against Death as a source for Gravity's Rainbow, it is very likely that he read Miller's essay and used it to develop his sense of 1944-5's being a watershed. Miller predicts an era of confusion starting in 1944 when 'all boundaries will be broken down' (Sunday After the War, New Directions, p. 150). As national divisions collapse, a new collective man will rise out of the confusion, and history will no longer be run for the predatory few. Miller's era of confusion partly resembles Pynchon's Zone, where categories blur, and his view of history as a record of cultural elitism relates to Pynchon's repeated indictment of 'they-systems'. Miller also predicts the death of cities (cf. Pynchon's necropolis) and in the passage quoted by Brown points to a free-flowing humanity which resembles Pynchon's evocation of mixed nationalities at the beginning of Chapter 54. Miller writes: 'The peoples of the earth will no longer be shut off from one another within states but will flow freely over the surface of the earth and intermingle' (p. 155). Pynchon likewise stresses flux because it temporarily breaks down divisions between nationalities and between ruler and ruled. Later in his essay Miller attacks art for having been too masculine and too abstract. Pynchon similarly exposes the sexual bias of a culture driven by masculine impulses of separation and abstraction. However, Pynchon is writing with the benefits of historical hindsight, whereas Miller is offering millenarian predictions of a 'break through'. Brown admits that Miller is a utopian writer but insists on the need to affirm humanity. Pynchon characteristically incorporates some of Miller's criticisms without committing himself one way or the other to the ultimate fate of man.

p. 612 M. F. Beal

Pynchon used to visit Mary Beal in Fresno in the early 1970's when she was teaching English at California State University. They used to discuss various physical phenomena (black holes, etc), but the specific reference here is to a conversation they had
about the lower limits of sentience. In a letter of February 27, 1980 Beal referred me to the physical entry under 'sentience' in the O.E.D., which is a quotation from a work of 1883 and which reads as follows: 'If physical esse is intelligi, and intelligi has been evolved from sentience, clearly physical objective existence has been produced by the ordinary impulse or inherent necessity of evolution'. The application of the term 'evolution' here relates to the local context of the reference in GR. In both cases a continuity is established between man and his environment which counters the hubristic assumption among the scientists and industrialists in the novel that Nature is there to be exploited by man. Pynchon and Beal discussed the age of rocks, hence the reference in GR to measuring change visually through photographic frames per century. Beal implicitly humanized the earth's mantle (containing of course rocks and minerals) by drawing an analogy with skin, and Pynchon in the same vein explores a series of discoveries made by Lyle Bland of 'Earth's mind' (p. 589). In an excellent article on this area of the novel ('Probing a Post-Romantic Paleontology,' Boundary 2, 8 [1980], 229-54), J. D. Black has demonstrated that Pynchon's vitalistic view of Nature places him in a long tradition of writers opposed to inert scientific materialism. Beal is the wife of the novelist David Shetzline (cf. GR, p. 389), for whose De Ford (1968) Pynchon write a promotional statement. To date Beal has produced two novels, Amazon One (1975) and Angel Dance (1977). In 1976 she coedited Safe House: A Casebook of Revolutionary Feminism in the 1970's, and has had stories published in the New American Review (3 and 7) and elsewhere. Angel Dance combines an interest in feminism with influence from Gravity's Rainbow. It revolves around Kat, a Chicana detective, who is hunting for her friend, the feminist writer Angel Stone, and in the process stumbles across political conspiracy. The novel returns Pynchon's friendly reference by having Angel replaced in her flat by a new tenant called I. G. Farb.

p. 649 "Phoebus"

In spite of its name this cartel is not an invention of Pynchon's. The International Glow-Lamp Price
Organization was set up in 1912 but by the 1920's had broken down. In 1924 Phoebus S. A. Compagnie Industrielle pour le Développement de L'Eclairage was set up in Switzerland and renewed in 1935. The figures Pynchon quotes for General Electric ownership are correct for the latter year. An administrative organization and a special laboratory were set up in Geneva (Pynchon's 'monitors'). Details given in Erwin Hexner's International Cartels (London: Pitman, 1946, pp. 357-60) and Robert Jones and Oliver Marriott's Anatomy of a Merger (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, pp. 38-41).

p. 749 Isaac
In rabbinical scriptures Isaac is the prototypical sacrificial victim. As the supreme test of his faith Abraham is ordered to sacrifice his only son on Mount Moriah. Isaac cooperates completely in the act, but at the moment of sacrifice an angel stops Abraham, and a ram is sacrificed instead. Isaac represents an archetype of the role to be enacted by Gottfried, except that there will be no divine intervention on his behalf.

II
Pynchon's Tarot
Pynchon's source for his details on the Tarot is A. E. Waite's The Pictorial Guide to the Tarot (London: William Rider, 1911). He names Waite (GR, p. 738) and quotes several passages verbatim from his work. Waite describes the significance of the pack as follows: 'The Tarot embodies symbolical presentations of universal ideas, behind which lie all the implicit of the human mind . . .' (p. 59). Pynchon, however, is characteristically non-committal about his use of the Tarot.

(a) Slothrop's Tarot (GR, p. 738)
Slothrop is earlier linked to 'The Fool' in the Tarot pack (p. 501). Waite explains that one variation of this card is the court jester in motley (p. 30). Pynchon significantly describes Slothrop in his Plecha-zunga costume as a 'trudging pig in motley' (GR, p. 573). The Tarot card of the Fool shows a young man in gorgeous clothes stepping blithely over a precipice. He carries a rose, wand and wallet and is accompanied
by a dog. The card's value is given as zero. Waite describes the Fool variously as 'a prince of the other world', 'the spirit in search of experience' and 'the flesh'. The Fool's meanings can include 'folly, mania, extravagance', etc. or, when reversed, 'negligence, absence, distribution', etc. (Waite, pp. 286-7). The first throw-away reference then makes a useful gloss on Slothrop's mixed qualities, the fool's traditional combination of folly and wisdom. If the fool's value is zero, Pynchon has already led the reader's imagination beyond that zero. Slothrop's anarchic behaviour comically contrasts him with the repressed decorum of other characters and links his style with Pynchon's own verbal extravagance in the novel as a whole.

The 'significator' (GR, p. 738) is the first card which the diviner selects to 'represent the person or matter about which inquiry is made' (Waite, p. 299). The reversal of cards, as Pynchon notes, inverts their qualities. Thus the 3 of Pentacles represents 'mediocrity, in work and otherwise, puerility, pettiness, weakness' (Waite, p. 276). The Hanged Man of course figures in 'The Waste Land' and signifies 'life in suspension' (p. 116), but reversed 'selfishness, the crowd, body politic' (p. 285). The Hanged Man is one of the most mysterious of the cards, possessing 'profound significance, but all the significance is veiled' (p. 116). Appearing in a local context of attempts to define Slothrop, who has now receded into the past of the novel, his Tarot emphasizes how remote and elusive he has become, as if he were already numbered among the dead or preterite.

(b) Weissmann's Tarot (GR, pp. 746-9)

The Knight of Swords, carrying a design of the 'prototypical hero of romantic chivalry', signifies 'skill, bravery, capacity, defence, address, enormity, wrath, war, destruction, opposition, resistance, ruin. There is therefore a sense in which the card signifies death, but it carries this meaning only in its proximity to other cards of fatality' (Waite, p. 230). This impression is increased by Weissmann's pictorial resemblance to Death the rider in Teutonic mythology (Grimm, p. 844). Weissmann's second card, the Tower, signifies apocalyptic destruction: 'it is the ruin of
the House of Life, when evil has prevailed therein, and above all that it is the rending of a House of Doctrine' (p. 132). Waite adds: 'it may signify also the end of a dispensation' (p. 135). The Queen of Swords represents 'widowhood, female sadness and embarrassment, absence, sterility, mourning, privation, separation' (p. 228). The King of Cups represents the aim or ideal here, 'a fair man, man of business, law or divinity' (p. 198). The Ace of Swords suggests 'triumph, the excessive degree in everything, conquest, triumph of force' which Pynchon also glosses as a death card, probably to unify one of the main themes in Weissmann's significance. He may also have had in mind the first part of Eliot's 'Sweeney Agonistes', which revolves around card-drawing. A crisis occurs when the two of spades is turned up, representing the coffin.

The rest of Weissmann's cards read as follows. The 4 of Cups represents 'weariness, disgust, aversion, imaginary vexations, as if the wine of this world had caused satiety only' (p. 218); the 4 of Pentacles 'the surety of possessions' (p. 274); the Page of Pentacles 'application, study, scholarship, reflection' (p. 260); the 8 of Cups 'the decline of a matter' (p. 210); the 2 of Swords 'conformity and the equipoise which it suggests, courage, friendship, concord in a state of arms' (p. 250). Finally the World suggests 'the perfection and end of the Cosmos, the secret that is within it, the rapture of the universe' (p. 156). Waite notes a possible alternative to the latter as 'the Magus when he has reached the highest degree of initiation' (p. 159).

The most famous Modernist text which uses the Tarot is of course 'The Waste Land', and Grover Smith has argued recently that Eliot may have used Waite's Pictorial Guide as a source, although Smith admits that the sources shed little light on the Tarot references within the poem ('The Waste Land', Unwin, 1984, pp. 91-97). Jessie Weston mentions Waite in her From Ritual to Romance, and Pynchon may have picked up the reference when working on studies of myth (Graves, Frazer, etc.) for V. Where Eliot is basically ironic about modern substitutes for religion, Pynchon's use of the
Tarot is more complex. It incorporates into the text the reader's search for certainty about the characters and simultaneously blocks that search by insisting on the diversity of the cards' meanings. It temporarily transforms the two characters into static texts which have to be deciphered and implies that Pynchon has briefly adopted the narrative role of divinator. It also links Slothrop and Weissmann with their archetypes as if the characters are receding into their own past.

--Liverpool University
Pynchon's Hereros: A Textual and Bibliographical Note

Steven Weisenburger

The Hereros of South West Africa are central participants in Thomas Pynchon's work, as one armature around which he has spun fictions. Their history and anthropology, however, are also the most eccentric, obscure points of reference in Gravity's Rainbow. We do have one bit of second-hand evidence about Pynchon's Herero sources. In a recent essay, Joseph Slade paraphrased a 1968 letter Pynchon wrote to Boston University graduate student Thomas F. Hirsch, whose doctoral work focused on the Hereros.¹ In his letter Pynchon evidently claimed to be "obsessed" with them, and also mentioned texts he had been consulting. But what those source-texts are (beyond some previously identified Herero lexicons), and where their presence can be traced in Gravity's Rainbow are questions for which we still have only incomplete or inconcise answers.²

New textual evidence shows that Pynchon's key source was certainly The Religious System and Social Organization of the Herero: A Study in Bantu Culture, by Hendrik Gerhardus Luttig [(Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1933), 121 pages, with bibliography]. A dissertation the author submitted for his doctorate in Anthropology at the University of Leiden, this rare monograph had a number of obvious virtues, for example its availability to Pynchon through the New York Public Library, where he probably did a good deal of his research. Moreover, Luttig's text, primarily in English (some quotes are in German), brings under one expository roof virtually all those earlier, and often more rare, studies of the Herero to which the author of Gravity's Rainbow could have turned--studies by Brincker, Irle, and Vedder that Pynchon's readers have also suspected. Most important of all, Luttig's work is sound Anthropology. His vision is uninfected by the colonialist fever that blurs, for example, William Petrus Steenkamp's pamphlet Is the South-west African Herero Committing Race-Suicide? (see below). Instead, Luttig turns a cool eye on the ways in which Herero cosmology and its social
expressions, once a unified structuration of dichoto-
mies, fell to pieces under the ruling hand of Euro-
pean culture.

Textual parallels reveal that Pynchon had Luttig
close by at several junctures. In Part 3, Episode 3
(V, 315-29; B, 365-82), the first section of Gravity's
Rainbow to treat the Hereros at length, a number of
passages show clear traces of their origin.³ Here, for
instance, is Pynchon at the opening of that episode:

Among the Ovatjimba, the poorest of the Hereros,
with no cattle or villages of their own, the
totem animal was the Erdschwein or aardvark.
They took their name from him, never ate his
flesh, dug their food from the earth, just as he
does. Considered outcasts, they lived on the
veld, in the open. (V, 315; B, 366)

And here is its source in Luttig:

the Ovatjimba may at present be considered as
a group of outcasts, as they do not possess the
requisite number of cattle necessary for social
significance. This explains the fact that they
do not live in villages as do the rest of the
tribe. They live a scattered existence in the
veld. Possessing small herds of cattle, in
sufficient [sic] for subsistence, they are forced
to dig their food from the ground. (53; my
emphasis)

Luttig follows with a derivation of their name--Ova-
is the Herero prefix signifying "people," while tjimba
signifies the "ant-bear," the aardvark or Erdschwein;
hence they are the "ant-bear people"--and he mentions
that "this animal is not eaten owing to religious
beliefs" (53). Indeed, he notes, the animal's power
as totem is suggested by one tribal myth which
relates of a woman all of whose children were
still-born, and who was cured after having been
placed in an ant-bear hole: "Als sie wieder
schwanger war, sagte man, man solle sie in eine
Erdschweinhöhle stecken, um sie zu entzaubern,
dann würden ihre Kinder am Leben bleiben. So
geschah es, sie wurde in eine Erdschweinhöhle
gesteckt und bekam lebensfähige Kinder". ["As
she was pregnant again, it was said that one should plant (stecken) her in an aardvark hole, to rid her of the enchantment, then her children would be able to survive. It so happened, that she was planted (gesteckt) in the aardvark hole and she had viable children." (53; my translation)

Pynchon's fictional reworking addresses a second-person narratee, a hypothetical old Südwest hand who--in a passage which well represents the embedding of perspectives in this novel--is himself called upon for remarkable powers of empathy:

But as you swung away, who was the woman alone in the earth, planted up to her shoulders in the aardvark hole, a gazing head rooted to the desert plane, with an upsweep of mountains far behind her, darkly folded, far away in the evening? She can feel the incredible pressure, miles of horizontal sand and clay, against her belly. Down the trail wait the luminous ghosts of her four stillborn children, fat worms lying with no chances of comfort among the wild onions, one by one, crying for milk more sacred than what is tasted and blessed in the village calabashes. In preterite line they have pointed her here, to be in touch with Earth's gift for genesis. [...] Back in Südwest, the Erdschweinhöhle was a powerful symbol of fertility and life (V, 315-16; B, 367)

There are borrowings like these scattered throughout this particular episode and elsewhere in the novel. Luttig was Pynchon's main source on Herero mythology, ancestral devotions, social organization (such as the role of the Omuhona; the system of matrilineal/patrilineal clans, or eanda/oruzu), as well as village customs, including the mandala-like organization of huts. The following catalogue lists borrowings that can be clearly traced to pages in Luttig's monograph, though its presence is strong throughout the narrative. In addition, I supply annotations for the references in Gravity's Rainbow to William Petrus Steenkamp's Is the South-west African Herero Committing Race-Suicide?
(V, 100; B, 116) "We make Ndjambi Karunga now, omuhona": Luttig devotes his first chapter to "Ndjambi Karunga," the divine creator of all Herero people and, what is more interesting in this context of homosexual love, a bisexual god. Ndjambi Karunga appears in Herero mythology as the father of all created being, and generally a benevolent deity. But while he is thus "the god of life," he is also "the master of death" (8); and in that aspect he is, in short, the Herero version of Blicero ("Lord Death"). The god's bisexuality is signified in the name itself: "Ndjambi reveals more the characteristics of a [masculine] heavenly god and Karunga those of a [feminine] god of the earth" (9). He passes on these dual traits--Lord of the "other world" of the Dead, as well as Lord of this world--to Mukuru, the mythical first man. So in turn the omuhona, Mukuru's embodiment in Herero society, also serves a dual role according to Luttig: not only "chief," but "a living Mukuru" (see below: V, 321-22); thus the omuhona is "one who has been proven" to be the lineal descendent of the Omumborombanga tree and Mukuru at the beginning of time (33-34), and presumably he too embodies the bisexual principle of his origin.

(V, 316; B, 367) "Inside the Schwarzkommando there are forces, at present, who have opted for sterility and death. [...] it is political struggle": Luttig clarifies why, for the Herero, a plan involving "tribal suicide" would be construed as an act of "political struggle." It is that for them suicide could also be an act of "blood vengeance." He explains: "a person who commits suicide under these circumstances is also 'actuated by the thought that the dead are capable of bringing about evil and death more effectively than the living'" (107). If so, imagine getting the whole tribe into battle from the other side.

(V, 316; B, 368) "In each village, as noon flared [...] the omuhona took from his sacred bag, soul after converted soul, the leather cord kept there since the individual's birth, and untied the birth-knot": the background here is certainly Luttig (72), who ex-
plains that after a child's birth the "funicle, when it has fallen off, is handed over to the priest-chief [the omuhona] to be preserved in a sacred skin bag. In this bag leather straps with knots are kept, and each knot relates to a particular individual member of the oruzo. These knots are only 'untied if the child should die or go over into Christianity.'" The untying of such knots "as noon flared" is Pynchon's touch, consistent with similar moments in the novel where noon looms as a judgment-hour.

(V, 317; B, 369) "Some of the more rational men of medicine attributed the Herero birth decline to a deficiency of Vitamin E in the diet--others to poor chances of fertilization given the peculiarly long and narrow uterus of the Herero female": the source here is Steenkamp (22). He discusses the hypotheses of others who had connected infertility to diets deficient in the Vitamin, and notes as well that after the European incursions a typical Herero diet, formerly consisting of milk products and beans rich in E, began to revolve around vitamin-deficient white rice. Steenkamp himself is the one who advanced the "narrow sex-organ" hypothesis, although Pynchon alters several of its details. Here is Steenkamp: "The Herero woman is tall and slender. Her legs are very long and so are her fingers and arms. . . . This brought me on the idea that all the other organs in the body must be proportionally longer. I thereupon began to examine the length of the cervix with Herero [women] . . . and found to my surprise that this was the case. . . . In one instance I even found a cervix so long that it was impossible with a digital examination to feel the body of the womb (corpus uteri). This much longer cervix must thus logically and virtually form a much longer incubation bed for the development of the gonococcus" (20-21; my emphasis). Thus in Steenkamp's view it is the long Herero cervix (not the uterus) which was the condition, and gonorrhea (not Pynchon's "poor chances of fertilization") which was the culprit in their sterility.

(V, 321; B, 373) "the gathered purity of opposites, the village built like a mandala": Luttig discusses the village circle on pages 32-34. It divides into two
"distinct halves, a southern and a northern, the former the abode of the men and the latter that of the women"; calves-pen, milk-calabashes, and "holy fire" in the center; at the eastern quadrant the Omuhona's house into which fire is brought each morning.

(V, 321-22; B, 374) "Tree . . . Omumborombanga . . . Mukuru . . . first ancestor": in Herero creation myth the Omumborombanga is "a great fig-tree which is thought of as a seat of all ancestors" and thus a "tree of life, from which all life emanates; its location is in the North" (Luttig, 25). Luttig devotes an entire chapter to the deity, Mukuru, and only a summary is possible here. He is a god of the North, regarded as the "first ancestor" (21) to spring from the Omumborombanga; his color is red, and he is "intimately associated" with the holy fire and the sacred cattle (30). His name means, simply, "the old one" (18); and Hereros think of him as "present in the grave" (21) as well as present during everyday life by his extension (symbolized in the "birth knots") through the patrilineal clans.

(V, 322; B, 374) "his tribe believed long ago that each sunset is a battle [ . . . ] the sun is born again, to come back each dawn, new and the same": All the details of this passage, the battle and killing of the sun, whence its passage into the North (land of the dead and "land of the one-legged"), thus to rise newly born each morning, stem from Luttig, pages 12-13.

(V, 322; B, 374-75) "It began in mythical times, when the sly hare who nests in the Moon brought death among men, instead of the Moon's true message": Luttig explains that the Moon is referred to as a "hare's nest" (ein Nest des Hasen) and relates the story: "the hare functioned as the messenger of the moon, and was responsible for the appearance of death among mankind by the wrong interpretation and delivery of a message from the moon to humanity. For this the hare was punished by the moon" (15). Furthermore, the moon is associated in Herero mythology with the netherworld, abode of Ndjambi Karunga, a deity who is, as Pynchon notes a few lines farther, "both the bringer of evil and its avenger." And finally, this is why, as Luttig explains, "the Herero sang of the Germans: 'Sie kommen
da her w o der Mond ist,' i.e. out of the Netherworld ... [for when] ... European ships emerged from the horizon, West Coast tribes thought they were coming up out of the spirit land and were confirmed in their opinion by the pale skins of the mariners ... . So was Hahn, the first missionary among the Herero, addressed as Karunga, the god of the netherworld." Later (V, 730; B, 851), the myth supplies the nickname to one of Enzian's men, Henryk the Hare, so called "because he can never get messages right."

(V, 351; B, 409) "Kari, which is brewed from potatoes, peas, and sugar, and in Herero means 'the drink of death'": see Steenkamp, who relates that "Alcohol and its attendant evils was formerly unknown to the Hereros because they did not cultivate wheat and vegetables and had no sugar. Now, however, they brew a potent beer called Kari, which translated into English means 'The Drink of Death.' It is brewed from potatoes, peas, sugar, and yeast. It makes them, in Capt. Bowker's words, 'fighting mad'" (23).

(V, 519; B, 605) "Washing-blue is the abortifacient of choice": among the "abortifacient" substances that Steenkamp identifies as being in use among Herero women, "Another remedy used by them also since the contact with the white man, is washing blue," the ultramarine dye of which causes "a strong stomach irritation" leading up to "uterine stimulation" and contractions strong enough to expel the fetus (29).

(V, 727; B, 848) "the sacred idiolalia of the Primal Twins (some say their names are Enzian and Blicero) of a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide": the "sacred idiolalia" will appear later as what appears to be an anagrammatic enigma--"medoschnicka bleelar medoometnozz in bergamot" (V, 746; B, 870). Puzzled out, it yields the following words, put them together howsoever one will: the-blicero-enzian-mammon-gets-zero-black-doomed. One reading is "Mammon doomed Blicero; the black Enzian gets zero," though any such efforts to find benediction or malediction in the phrase may of course be viewed as the imposition of system where it is unwanted. Nevertheless, Luttg also reports on the quasi-divine status of twins in Herero culture. Because they embody
the same divine polarities as, for example, Mukuru, and because Herero divinity "can give good as well as evil . . . [so] also can the people expect benediction or malediction from the twins." Another of their aspects is antagonism: "They are continually at war with each other and do not hesitate to destroy each other" (115). Compare also the antagonistic searches of the half-brothers Tchitcherine and Enzian, each seeking to murder the other—a collision prevented near the novel's end only by happenstance.

These strategies of reference conform to a larger pattern of intertextuality, which readers of Gravity's Rainbow have been tracing. It shows the way that each of Pynchon's centers of reference tends to draw from one primary text. In the same way that Richard Sasuly's I G Farben supplied the main background on the German chemical industry, or that Thomas G. Winner's Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs of Russian Central Asia became the principal reference point for Pynchon's fictional Kirghizistan, so Luttig's monograph appears to have been the primary resource on Herero culture.

There are well-reasoned, and also political, choices behind such moves. In each case we see Pynchon selecting that text which provides the most acute angle of attack on the vices of imperialism.

--University of Kentucky

Notes

1 See Joseph Slade, "Religion, Psychology, Sex, and Love in Gravity's Rainbow," in Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1983), 160-61. Why he decided to disclose the contents of Pynchon's letter by indirect discourse is a mystery.

2 Edward Mendelson first pointed out F. W. Kolbe's An English-Herero Dictionary (Capetown: 1883) as one source of Pynchon's Herero vocabulary, in "Gravity's Encyclopedia," in Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 193. I later added that, in writing V., Pynchon also consulted a 1937 travelogue by Rex Hardinge, South
African Cinderella: A Trek through Ex-German Southwest Africa (London: Herbert Jenkins), as well as J. Irle's Die Herero (Gütersloh: 1906); see my "The End of History?: Thomas Pynchon and the Uses of the Past," Twentieth Century Literature, 25:1 (1979), 66-67. T. S. Tillotson pointed out the presence of Steenkamp's pamphlet in Pynchon Notes, 5 (1981), an untitled note on page 29. Finally, David Seed gave careful attention to Pynchon's uses of the Herero language and documented its sources in Kolbe, as well as in P. H. Brincker's Worterbuch und Kurzgefasste Grammatik des Otji-Herero (Leipzig: C. G. Böttner, 1886), and Heinrich Vedder's "The Herero," The Native Tribes of South West Africa (Cape Town: 1928); see his essay, "Pynchon's Herero," in Pynchon Notes, 10 (1982), 37-44.

All references to Gravity's Rainbow are given parenthetically, and indicate pages in both the Viking edition (New York: 1973), and the Bantam (New York: 1974).

[I want to thank Donald Stutheit, a graduate student in Fine Arts at Kentucky, who first brought Lütig's monograph to my attention.]
Moviegoing

David Marriott

In the final frames of Monte Hellman's 1971 film Two Lane Blacktop, the film appears to catch and then stick in its projector. The celluloid itself, jammed between two frames, is momentarily revealed before it disintegrates, leaving the screen blank and the audience confused. This temporary disorientation is relieved by the appearance of the credits: our suspension of disbelief has been suspended not by accident, but by design. This is a film, we are reminded; films can break. Whilst Hellman's particular device here is distinctive, self-reflexivity in the cinema is a well-trodden path. In the past, it has characteristically been used with comic intent--

"This is 1870. Don Ameche hasn't invented the telephone yet!" (Groucho Marx, Go West, 1940)1-- although films like François Truffaut's Day for Night clearly explore the theme more seriously. We might compare the effect of Hellman's final frames to the novels of B. S. Johnson, a writer who never lets his reader forget he is reading a novel and not witnessing a slice of life. For instance, at the end of Johnson's Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, the character Christie talks to the novelist about the cancer he has:

"Just think, it may have been caused through those misshapes I had on page 67!"2

Of course, the novel has enjoyed a long tradition of self-awareness from Tristram Shandy onwards; and Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow would seem to merit discussion in this context, were it not for the fact that it appears to suffer a rather distinctive transvestism of genre. Where Charlotte Bronte suddenly drops the mask of impersonality and says, "Reader, I married him," Thomas Pynchon seems to exchange one mask for another when on the final page of Gravity's Rainbow he addresses the reader as one of us.
Old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?). Pynchon identifies the reader not as a reader, but as a viewer; not of a book, but of a film.

Such cross-genre references are quite rare, although the Hollywood film, when "adapting" the well-loved literary classics, has made the symbolic opening and closing of a book, at the beginning and end of a film, something of a cliché. It is hard to find original examples of such usage, but Jean Cocteau's 1945 version of Beauty and the Beast reveals his keen awareness of such pitfalls. He begins his film with the words, "Il était une fois..." ["once upon a time..."] but deliberately avoids the rather obvious symbolism of a book, and instead includes a brief shot of the clapperboard being used for the first "take" of the film. This is a film which obstinately refuses to be a book. Dennis Potter's 1981 film Brimstone and Treacle ends with the closing of a book. Yet the film is made from an original screenplay; Potter is not in any way atoning for the sins of "adaptation," and his motivation is perhaps similar to Pynchon's in using the same conceit in reverse. The book featured at the end of Potter's film is a picture-book, albeit a rather sinister one, and is wholly in keeping with the rather ambivalent good humour of the film. Since the book appears only at the end of the film, it can perhaps be best read as a rather ambiguous "and they all lived happily ever after." Like Cocteau, Potter is attracted by the fairy tale but cynical towards its conventions.

Potter closes his film with the hint that we might "read" it as a book; Pynchon closes his book by suggesting that we are "watching" it like a film. Gravity's Rainbow, from beginning to end, flirts with the notion of itself being a film (the redactional stylised sprocket holes were an astute embellishment). The final section of the novel is made up of a series of brief titled "scenarios" which resembles a movie shooting-script in which the scenes get shorter as the climax approaches; but during the penultimate scene, the narrative flow is interrupted. First Gottfried's memories begin to go "out of focus," and then "they begin to blur CATCH." Another five times the word
"CATCH" disrupts and disjoint the narrative. It is clear that this is meant to represent a film catching in a projector, and as in Hellman's Two Lane Blacktop, this scene effects a change of emphasis from content to form. What we are watching is no longer a feature film, but the celluloid film which is its true nature. We see the sprocket holes in the final frame of Two Lane Blacktop; in Gravity's Rainbow they have been visible all along. The final scene of Gravity's Rainbow has the reader characterised as part of a movie audience, chanting for the restarting of the feature it was watching:

The screen is a dim page spread before us. [...] The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out. It was difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which before the darkness swept in. (760)

Hellman's film is an apparent exercise in the arbitrarily picturesque as much as Pynchon's novel, which seems to suggest an interest in content rather than form. The endings of both the film and the novel, however, reveal a fascination with form which both men share. The rambling narratives of Two Lane Blacktop and Gravity's Rainbow may seduce the viewer/reader into passive receptivity; indeed, as Virginia Woolf observed nearly sixty years ago, such is the nature of cinema:

The eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think.4

But both Pynchon and Hellman force us to think: instead of asking "what comes next?", we must ask "what is going on?"; we are forced to think. It is impossible to tell whether Pynchon recalled the conclusion of Two Lane Blacktop in ending Gravity's Rainbow, but it may be more than coincidence that Rudolph Wurlitzer, who was largely responsible for the film's screenplay, should count Thomas Pynchon amongst his admirers, if we are to believe the jacket-notes on his novels Nog and Flats.
Both Hellman's and Pynchon's cinematographic breakdowns are textual devices, but in 1926, Woolf experienced a similar malfunction whilst watching _The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari_:

a shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. It swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity. For a moment it seemed to embody some monstrous, diseased imagination of the lunatic's brain. For a moment, it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than words. The monstrous, quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement, "I am afraid." In fact, the shadow was accidental, and the effect unintentional.5

Woolf was disappointed by the revelation, but the experience had impressed upon her the advantages for expression the cinema might possess over the novel. Woolf, however, was merely evoking the potential of the film; meanwhile, she deplored the reality of the nineteen-twenties cinema, in which travesties of great novels, simplified to a ridiculous degree, were the norm. Films which masquerade as books simply do not work:

The eye says: "Here is Anna Karenina." A voluptuous lady in black velvet wearing pearls comes before us. But the brain says: "That is no more Anna Karenina than it is Queen Victoria." For the brain knows Anna almost entirely by the inside of her mind—her charm, her passion, her despair. All the emphasis is laid by the cinema upon her teeth, her pearls, and her velvet.6

Of course, modern filmmakers are not always so heavy-handed, and it might be said that they have learned from the novel. This process has been a long one: Eisenstein claimed to have learned montage (intercutting of different scenes for effect) from Dickens, but he never claimed his films were novels. It is reasonable to ask whether the novel has in turn been educated by the film in this century. Claude-Edmonde Magny, writing in 1948, saw the cinema as the biggest single influence on American novelists of that period,7 but
literary critics nowadays are often suspicious of the "new barbarism" which seeks to equate the two genres; neither point of view is without its harmful prejudices. Questions of value and genre aside, however, if there is such a thing as the novel educated by film, then Gravity's Rainbow has undoubtedly been to all the best schools.

The image of film, of course, since film is the medium which most closely mimics life (to the relatively lazy human brain, at least), has provided a convenient, if relatively crude, target for many an author's satire. Thus Guy Grand, in Terry Southern's The Magic Christian, has faked scenes inserted into popular movies such as Mrs. Miniver and The Best Years of Our Lives for showing at his cinema. The result is more than a joke, for it symbolises the outrageous and bizarre interludes he is apt to introduce into the lives of all those he comes into contact with: being very wealthy, he is able to bribe all his victims into playing the most ridiculous and demeaning roles in his own private "movies." Or we might recall the prominence of the cinema in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano, a novel in which half the characters are directly involved in the movie business yet curiously unwilling to see films. Since the only opportunity to do so is to be found at the local cinema, where (like at Pynchon's and Hellman's)"the lighting is always falling," perhaps this is wise; for the cinema in Lowry's novel is a concrete form of both mass- and self-deception. For instance, despite the Spanish Civil War then raging, when Yvonne went to the cinema,"we saw a travelogue, Come to Sunny Andalusia, by way of news from Spain." 

Pynchon is not above using the cinema figuratively and is fond of exploiting our preconceptions about reality and "reality." But Pynchon's favourite theme is the influence of cinema on our everyday lives; it is both symptom and cause of a peculiar cultural perversity, summed up by Tom Robbins in the opening lines of Still Life with Woodpecker:

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, at a time when Western civilization was declining
too rapidly for comfort and yet too slowly to be very exciting, much of the world sat on the edge of an increasingly expensive theater seat, waiting—with various combinations of dread, hope, and ennui—for something momentous to occur. ...

Would it be apocalyptic or rejuvenating? A cure for cancer or a nuclear bang?9

Pynchon decides on the latter, but Robbins' novel begins just as Pynchon's ended seven years earlier. Twentieth century Western culture is pictured in the Orpheus cinema on the last page of Gravity's Rainbow, happy to succumb to the mind-numbness that Virginia Woolf warned of, happily waiting for another show to start, like Beckett's legless Hamm crying out for his "pap," blissfully unaware that this one is finally finished.

Gravity's Rainbow is populated with characters whose lives are shaped by film, from Bianca, who is conceived on a film set during the filming of Alpdrücken, to Gottfried, whose final moments on film are, figu- tively, our own. A movie is the ultimate form of determinism. In Delmore Schwartz's "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," the narrator bemoans the feeling of futility he experiences when watching, in a dream, a film of his parents' courtship. He shouts out:

"Don't do it. It's not too late to change your minds, both of you. Nothing good will come of it, only remorse, hatred, scandal, and two children whose characters are monstrous."

The point is that we should assume individual responsibility for our actions; indeed, we have no choice: "Don't you know that you can't do whatever you want to do?" the usher tells the narrator in his dream.10

Pynchon takes the image further: life is often like a film, and the individual is forced to shoulder the responsibility for events or actions whose course he is powerless to change.

Discussing a deterministic conception of time, Hans Reichenbach uses a similar image:

The deterministic conception of time flow may be compared to the happenings seen in a motion
picture theatre. While we watch a fascinating scene, its future development is already imprinted on the film; becoming is an illusion. We laugh at the person who pleads with Romeo, "Don't do it!"

Pynchon uses film as a figure of determinism, but we can be sure he would not laugh at the person who stood up to plead with Romeo. Personal freedom, he suggests, is an illusion. No one stands up in the Orpheus Theatre; instead, we all chant in unison: "Come-on! Start-the-show!" (760). Of course, this is not merely a deception practised upon us by "Them"; it is a conspiracy in which "We" are actively, or rather passively, involved.

The analogy of the cinema is a subtle exposure of the most successful mechanism of mass subjugation, and indeed may be something more than an analogy. Pynchon's targets are those of us "who've always been at the movies (haven't we?)," content to be the pets and playthings of nameless manipulators like Dr. Mabuse, "the gambler" of Fritz Lang's 1919 film, who, not content with manipulating card games, moves on to playing with people. Pynchon makes much of Dr. Mabuse, and as a number of critics have demonstrated, he has taken up Siegfried Kracauer's thesis that German cinema of the twenties both reflected and fed the coming evil of Nazism. But Pynchon goes further; he suggests that this process has never stopped. More recent cinema may not predispose us to playing Beethoven and invading Poland, but this symbiosis did not end with Nazism; indeed, it may well have been strengthened. The triumph of good over evil is, after all, a no less popular movie-myth. We are all content to watch Their films, to be included in Their film.

It does not take long for the reader of Gravity's Rainbow to be struck by the extent to which Pynchon's characters have exchanged their own identities for more attractive self-images. They may sneer like James Cagney, have hairstyles like Bing Crosby or Rita Hayworth or accents like Bela Lugosi or Cary Grant, wear hats like Greta Garbo or Sidney Greenstreet; the list goes on (I counted forty such examples without much effort). They wander around a landscape of film sets, from German expressionist to Cecil B.
de Mille, where they imagine themselves filmed,
perhaps, if they have artistic pretensions, from a
"German camera-angle" (229). Some changes may be
effectively smoothly with suitable musical accompani-
ment, and characters are apt to break into song at any
moment (on around seventy occasions, in fact), just as
in Meet Me in St. Louis or Flying Down to Rio. How-
ever, whilst such characters are distinctive, they can
be glimpsed outside Gravity's Rainbow, and a short
survey may be informative.

Elmer Rice's satirical novel of 1930, A Voyage to
Purilia, which was written in Hollywood's heyday, is
two-edged. Its critique of Hollywood is achieved by
describing a world in which everyone lives as if he or
she were a character in a film; but like Gulliver's
Lilliput, the world described is not as far from our
own as the narrator would have us believe. Rice's
Purilia takes the affectations of Pynchon's characters
a stage further: Purilia is a gigantic film set,
where everyone has a role in a movie. On his arrival
in Purilia, Rice's narrator remarks upon the captivat-
vating music which is heard constantly in the atmos-
phere, evoking and reflecting moods appropriate to
what is happening at the time:

now pathetic, now gay, now ominous, now martial,
now tender, but always awakening familiar memo-
ries, always swelling mellifluously and always
surcharged with a slight but unmistakable
trémolo.12

Rice is referring, of course, to the piano-music which
accompanied silent films, but we might compare:

The bridge music here, bright with xylophones
[... ] based on some old favorite that will
comment, ironically but gently, on what is tran-
spiring [... ] slowing and fading (222-23)

which accompanies Pynchon's narrative. The observer
of life in Purilia is aided in his understanding by a
disembodied voice which provides useful background
information and scene-setting: for example,

The lovely hour of twilight ... when the
sun sinks behind the western hills and man
and beast return homeward after the day's toil (P, 42)

accompanies the sunset and a herd of cows silhouetted against it. We might compare this to the imaginary "voice-over" provided by the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow for Frau Gnab's voyage into the Greifswalder Bodden:

We now come in sight of mythical Rügen off our starboard bow. [. . .] After an hour (comical bassoon solos over close-ups of the old recreant guzzling some horrible fermented potato-mash lobotomy out of a jerrican, wiping her mouth on her sleeve, belching) of fruitless search. (527-28)

Illustrating a sequence of relevant close-ups (a robin's nest, a new-born lamb, a crocus), the Purilian "presence" informs the narrator that "spring comes early to the Purilian hills" (P, 36). Roger Mexico experiences a spring, neither Chaucer's nor Eliot's, in the tightly scripted film he imagines is his life as:

a bad cinema spring, full of paper leaves and cotton-wool blossoms and phoney lighting. (628)

Of course, the cinematic world of Purilia is sketched in stereotypy, but not all stereotypes are as harmless as new-born lambs or cotton-wool blossoms. The root of racial tension between Purilia's white and black inhabitants is to be found, ridiculously, in the Negro's liking for chicken and watermelon:

in fact, an otherwise law-abiding Negro will stop at nothing to obtain the coveted viands. (P, 138)

Popular cinema not only reflects, but also reinforces popular stereotypes of racism, and it is no surprise that forty years on, Pynchon's America boasts of:

Shufflin' Sam, the game of skill where you have to shoot the Negro before he gets back over the fence with the watermelon, a challenge to the reflexes of boys and girls of all ages. (558)

The treatment of blacks in Purilia is an object lesson in the relationship of cinema and popular
thought. White America's attitude towards black America might be expressed in the appalling shorthand notation of Cabin in the Sky or the "Who Dat Man?" sequence of A Day at the Races ("in more ways than one" [619]); but it is also institutionalised. Some Americans, like the Puritians, have reduced all life to a series of convenient symbols and easily comprehended gestures. (P, 86)

Racial tensions are more easily expressed as a dispute over watermelons than as a catalogue of racial oppression and hatred. Likewise, the Second World War is more easily understood as a "great struggle of good and evil" (54) than as the natural outcome of a period of industrial and commercial expansion and consolidation. Life is easiest lived as if it were a movie. America, say Rice and Pynchon, is a nation of cinema-goers who have abdicated the ability to discriminate between the simplified and neatly structured version of life to be found in the movies and the real world outside the cinema. Claude-Edmonde Magny points out the difficulties this sort of mass flight from reality held for screen actors. Mary Pickford, a screen innocent, created a public scandal when she obtained a real-life Reno divorce to marry Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Bing Crosby's popularity nose-dived after he played a drunkard in Sing You Sinners. Ray Milland's agent took the precaution of insisting that his star was a teetotaler after The Lost Weekend. 13

Of course, it is not hard to understand this delusion. Rice's Purilia is an attractive place; everything is beautiful and the air is sweet. The whole country is suffused with a rosy glow, and more significantly, everyone's life is filled with constant spectacle and excitement: car chases, aerial chases, runaway trains, murder, passion and melodrama. In The Day of the Locust (1939), Nathanael West was more critical of the engineers of such delusions, and saw such a deception leading inevitably to violence:

They realize that they've been tricked . . .
Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on
lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, wars. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titil- late their jaded palates. . . . They have been cheated and betrayed.14

Real life does not compare well with "reel" life, but West credits the cinema-goer with greater reserves of individual strength than does Pynchon or Rice. The cinema is always a place of refuge in Gravity's Rainbow for those "convalescent souls" for whom life has become too arbitrary or painful. Victims of V2 blasts, having sought shelter in the cinema only to suffer a direct hit, regret only "the cinema kiss never completed" (49). Nothing has changed, and Pynchon ends his novel with we, the reader/audience, sitting in another cinema:

the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound, reaches its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre. (760)

And still we chant: "Come on! Start the show!"

For Pynchon, this syndrome is cultural as much as psychological, but Walker Percy has given us an instructive case history in the personal psychology of such a flight from life in his 1961 novel The Moviegoer. The narrator of Percy's novel, Jack Bolling, introduces himself by recalling the childhood day his aunt in- formed him that his brother had died:

"It's going to be difficult for you but I know you're going to act like a soldier." This was true. I could easily act like a soldier. Was that all I had to do?15

Acting becomes central to Jack's existence: at first like a soldier, for All Quiet on the Western Front was one of the first films he saw, then like

William Powell, George Brent and Patsy Kelly and Charley Chase, the best friends of my childhood. (M, 211)

He becomes what he has seen or read; to his mother he
"became Dick Rover, the serious-minded Rover boy" (M, 139), and

During my last year in college I discovered that I was picking up the mannerisms of Akim Tamiroff, the only useful thing, in fact, that I learned in the entire four years. (M, 165)

This is, perhaps, the mark of the chronic "moviegoer": an obsession not with the stars of the screen, but with the more obscure actors. Pynchon's Bodine specializes in supporting roles, he can do a perfect Arthur Kennedy-as-Cagney's-kid-brother, how about that? O-or Cary Grant's faithful Indian water-bearer, Sam Jaffe. (684)16

The more time he spends in cinemas, the more Jack's life seems to take on the easy correspondences of a motion picture. Now he can look back on his aunt's revelation of his brother's death and "It reminds me of a movie I saw last month" (M, 4). He comes to see his life in terms of films, and the boundaries between the two become indistinct.

Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives. . . . What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in Stagecoach, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in The Third Man. (M, 7)

Like Pynchon's and Rice's characters, Jack has succumbed to the cinema's predigested diet of structured realism. His local theatre has emblazoned upon its marquee "Where happiness costs so little." Whilst financially irreproachable, the statement is not without its irony. The cost of becoming a moviegoer is one's individuality: the moviegoer no longer thinks and acts in the clumsy and insignificant way he used to; he becomes part of an audience and assumes his favourite movie persona—"acting" rather than merely acting.

Toward her I keep a Gregory Peckish sort of distance. I am a tall black-headed fellow and I know as well as he how to keep to myself, make
my eyes fine and my cheeks spare, tuck my lip
and say a word or two with a nod or two. (M, 68)
Jack is sometimes "Gregory grim" and muses "Gregory
Peckishly."

This phenomenon is, of course, familiar to the
reader of Gravity's Rainbow. Tyrone Slothrop, who
assumes a constant stream of identities, most often
considers himself in relation to movie stars. He
combs his hair into a Bing Crosby pompadour (184);
acts towards Katje like "the Cagney of the French
Riviera" (222); fancies himself as Errol Flynn (248,
381); affects a Cary Grant accent (240, 292); and
plays a song sung by Dick Powell (622). Of course, he
is not alone; in fact, he perfectly complements a cast
of characters wearing George Raft suits, Caligari
gloves, Sidney Greenstreet Panamas, etc., etc. Movie
stars serve as models for behaviour in Pynchon as much
as in Percy. Take for example Pirate Prentice's grin:

He learned it at the films--it is the exact
mischievous Irish grin your Dennis Morgan chap
goes about cocking down at the black smoke
vomiting from each and every little bucktooth
yellow rat he shoots down. 17 (32)

Percy's narrator doesn't model only himself upon
the films he has seen: everyone he meets is entered
upon the cast-list that constitutes his day-to-day
relations. Eddie Lovell, it seems to Jack, has per-
fected a "Charles Boyer pout"; Mercer has grown himself
an Adolphe Menjou moustache. An old college friend
was "a regular young Burl Ives with beard and guitar,
and a man on the subway is a kindly old philosopher,
"such as portrayed by Thomas Mitchell in the movies."
Sharon looks like "snapshots of Ava Gardner when she
was a high school girl," and so on. And of course
similar things happen in Gravity's Rainbow. Not just
Slothrop models himself on movie stars; although he is
far from being a James Cagney or Errol Flynn, his
admirers argue over whether he is Oliver Hardy or Don
Ameche (381). Slothrop's friend, Tanity, spreads the
rumour that he is "some kind of Van Johnson" (182).
Franz Pöklser is perhaps the most conspicuous example
of a moviegoer to be found in Gravity's Rainbow: more
than being "some kind of fanatical movie hound all right" (577), he is German, and as such prey to
the strange connection between the German mind
and the rapid flashing of successive stills to
counterfeit movement. (407)

Pynchon presumably intends another, humourous recollection of Kraus's thesis here; Pöbler has a personal
version of Kraus's cultural malaise. He confuses movies and life:

"when I heard General Eisenhower on the radio
announcing the invasion of Normandy, I thought
it was really Clark Gable, have you ever noticed?
the voices are identical..." (577)

Of course, it may have been Eisenhower who suffered
from the syndrome, not Pöbler.

A moviegoer in Percy's novel is, significantly,
not necessarily someone who goes to the movies. The
term describes the behaviour of all those "convalescent
souls" who take a break from life. The moviegoer
finds the world of the movies, or of books, or of any
sufficiently structured scheme, preferable to the vague
portentousness of everyday life. He does not merely
withdraw from life, however; rather he approaches his
life as if it were a film, or a book, and he a char-
acter in it. Thus, the young graduate student Jack
encounters on the bus, who is lost in The Charterhouse
of Parma,"is a moviegoer, though of course he does not
go to movies."

His posture is the first clue: it is too good
to be true, this distillation of all graceful
slumps... (He speaks in a rapid rehearsed
way, a way he deems appropriate...). (M, 215-16)

His life will be shaped by the books he reads: he is
going to New Orleans, but like Huckleberry Finn for
the territory, he has "lit out." He means
to load bananas for a while and perhaps join the
merchant marine... to find himself a girl,
the rarest of rare pieces, and live the life of
Rudolfo on the balcony, sitting around on the
floor and experiencing soul-communions. (M, 216)

Being a moviegoer helps you through life, because part of you is never in it. It helps Pynchon's Dillinger not only through life, but through his own death. On his last night he watches Manhattan Melo-
drama:

Clark Gable going off unregenerate to fry in the chair [. . .] "Die like ya live--all of a sudden, don't drag it out." (516)

As Melvin Purvis' "G men" gunned him down outside the cinema,

there was still for the doomed man some shift of personality in effect--the way you've felt for a little while afterward in the real muscles of your face and voice, that you were Gable [. . .]--to help Dillinger through the bush-
whacking, and a little easier into death. (516)

Blackie's screen death enables Dillinger to rehearse mentally his real death; in a life lived like Dillin-
ger's, which is like a movie, such a death is inevit-
able. It is part of the script, and for Dillinger to hope to escape it would be as ineffectual as imploring Romeo, "Don't do it!"

Klaus Närrisch, however, caught in a tight situation which seems sure to end in his death, hasn't been to a movie since Der Müde Tod. That's so long ago he's forgotten its ending, the last Rilke-elegiac shot of weary Death leading the two lovers away hand in hand through the forget-me-nots. No help at all from that quarter. (516)

Närrisch expects to die, like Dillinger, but he doesn't; and implicitly this is because he hasn't been to a movie recently. The accomplished moviegoer selects his actions from a comprehensive repertoire, but the very act of establishing such a repertoire makes him entirely subject to the strictures of narration and symbol which constitute cinema. Dillinger died a violent death outside the Biograph Theatre because the role of screen-gangster he had adopted dictated it.
He died like he lived, not just suddenly and violently, but in the foyer of a cinema. Närrisch, on the other hand, has seen too few movies and values his life too dearly to die "at the end of the first reel." The image is mine, not Pynchon's, but may serve to distinguish two different uses of the metaphor of going to the movies in Gravity's Rainbow. Pynchon uses the device, much as Percy or Rice, to satirise the movie-goer, but the case of Närrisch reveals that the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow, too, suffers from this vice. We leave Närrisch on page 516 of Pynchon's novel, expectantly awaiting imminent death. Since he is not a movie-goer, that death is by no means as inevitable as he imagines, and indeed fifty pages later we learn that he survived; but the narrator gives the game away. Närrisch, when apprehended, tries "to go out Audie Murphy style" (563). Now, Närrisch couldn't possibly be imitating Audie Murphy, as Dillinger imitated Clark Gable, for Murphy wouldn't get into films for another three years. It is the narrator who is the movie-goer in this instance: he is truly one of the "oldest fans."

In Gore Vidal's novel Myron (1974), Vidal appears to be taking Pynchon's image to an even more absurd conclusion. The narrator, Myra Breckinridge, is indeed "trapped inside Their frame" (694). She is trapped in a film--to be precise, the 1948-49 Siren of Babylon, starring Bruce Cabot and Maria Montez.

After twenty years as a film critic, there is nothing I don't know about how to break into the movies.18

The film is fictional, unlike the sixty or so others Vidal manages to mention in 244 pages (and the sheer bulk of his film references invites comparison with Pynchon and Percy). Vidal is unequivocal in his treatment of the movies (as with most things), for like Nathanael West and F. Scott Fitzgerald, he is a disenchanted Hollywood screenplay writer. In Myron, and in the 1968 Myra Breckinridge, Vidal ridicules the so-called "golden age" of Hollywood: 1939 to 1945 "when no irrelevant film was made" (My, 7). An inkling of Vidal's views on cinema can be elicited from his attack on a 1973 book review in the Sunday New York Times:
The bad movies we made about twenty years ago are now regarded in altogether too many circles as important aspects of what the new illiterates want to believe is the only significant art form of the twentieth century. 19

Vidal is very outspoken on the relationship between books and films, and has little time for novelists who acknowledge the cinema in anything but satire. Reviewing some recent novels, he castigates this generation for whom storytelling began with The Birth of a Nation. Came to high noon with, well, High Noon and Mrs. Miniver and Rebecca and A Farewell to Arms. 20

Vidal's personal disenchantment with Hollywood has probably played a part in shaping his attitude on this point, for not all critics or novelists would agree with him. Indeed, it is precisely in the realm of storytelling that cinema most closely challenges the novel:

It is a fact of crucial significance in the history of the novel this century that James Joyce opened the first cinema in Dublin in 1909. Joyce saw very early on that film must usurp some of the prerogatives which until then had belonged almost exclusively to the novelist. Film could tell a story more directly, in less time, and with more concrete detail than a novel. 21

Johnson goes on to suggest that the novel should occupy itself with more than telling stories. Both Pynchon and Vidal would agree on that point, but whilst for Pynchon the cinema provides a useful metaphor, for Vidal it remains a personal bugbear. For a character in a novel to be aware that he is no more than that is a metaphor of the strictest determinism (as in most of Johnson's novels), but for a character in a novel to be under the impression that he is an actor in a film is a type of determinism Vidal finds symptomatic of the seventies. Myra's becoming trapped in The Siren of Babylon is, I think, a parody of Pynchon's notion of the individual "trapped inside
Their frame"; and Myron's discovery that his body has been inhabited by Maria Montez since the age of ten is an interesting version of Pynchon's and Percy's moviegoer. Pynchon is one of Vidal's (many) targets (the gibe at "Vonchon and Pyneggut" suggests he regards neither as individual talents), but Vidal in fact succeeds in criticising the same aspects of our lives as Pynchon.

The plot of Myron revolves around a battle between the cinema and the novel for the hearts and minds of America in the seventies. The head of MGM deliberately engineers the downfall of Hollywood, and rejoices at "the young people of the seventies who laugh at Lana Turner as they read Holkien and Iesse and Vonchon and Pyneggut." (My, 209)

Myra Breckinridge studies literature and decides to release its stranglehold on modern America by changing history:

... if I can film a photoplay [in 1948] with a title that has Beat in it—On Beat, Beat Me Daddy Eight to the Bar, The Beat Years of Our Lives, The Beat Man, Beat Your Meat—I will anticipate and torpedo an entire "literary" movement of the pre-Myra fifties when the so-called Beat writers, howling their words at random, helped distract attention from our Industry's product and made it possible for Charles Van Doren to dominate through television the entire culture, answering questions whose answers he had been given in advance—a twenty-one-inch corruption that was directly responsible, first, for the death of Marilyn Monroe at the hands of the two Kennedys and, second, for R. M. Nixon's current subversion of the government. (My, 151)

Myra does change the Nixon era by manipulating the cinema of the forties. In contrast, Pynchon's Nixon, R. M. Zhlobb, maintains the status quo by controlling his own cinema, the Orpheus Theatre. Gravity's Rainbow, unlike Myron, predated the Watergate affair, but the juxtaposition in both novels of Richard Nixon and the film industry is significant: Myra looks for a re-
establishment of Hollywood values, whilst R. M. Zhlubb has succeeded in implementing a Hays code which applies not just to films, but to real life. Vidal does not admire Pynchon; but both writers are aware of the immense power cinema wields to shape attitudes amongst large numbers of people. Pynchon attributes Nixon's America to the willingness of ordinary people to adopt the role of moviegoer, whereas Myra Breckinridge puts it down to the decline of Hollywood; however, even in the new version of the seventies occasioned by Myra's meddling with history, Nixon is still President, and although Jack Kennedy is still alive, he is discredited. Vidal actually makes exactly the same point as Pynchon.

Vidal, Percy and Rice all parallel Pynchon's use of the cinema as both symptom and symbol of a mass abdication of responsibility in which most people are both deceiver and deceived. All would agree that the cinema, as either cause or effect, exerts a pernicious influence, whether in personal relationships or national politics. Pynchon, however, is nothing if not ambivalent, and balancing his image of a culture at the movies witnessing its own destruction is his use of other films as crucial (and not so crucial) structural images in Gravity's Rainbow. As I have shown, Pynchon's novel is a catalogue of the postures of a generation who select their self-images from the cinema, and Pynchon is as acerbic towards many films as Vidal. "That awful Going My Way" (38) and "every wretched Hollywood lie down to and including this year's big hit, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" (641) clearly invite Pynchon's scorn. But several films, from Dr. Mabuse Der Spieler to King Kong, are of great importance to him, as has been ably demonstrated by David Cowart and Scott Simmon. I would like, in the second part of this paper, to discuss Pynchon's use of several other films in Gravity's Rainbow to help establish exactly what sort of an "old fan" he really is.

The myth of Orpheus runs in several strands through Gravity's Rainbow and forms the basis for much of Pynchon's characterisation and even the structure of the novel itself. It is not surprising, then, that
the climax of the novel is reached in the Orpheus movie theatre in Los Angeles (of course, since the theatre is managed by the Nixon figure, R. M. Zhlubb, this Orpheus is suitably quiet: he has "put down" his harp). If the audience has been attending regularly, they will have caught the "Bengt Ekerot/Maria Casarès Film Festival" (755), where, in addition to Bergman's Seventh Seal, they will have seen Jean Cocteau's Orphée, in which, like Bengt Ekerot in Bergman's film, Maria Casarès played an embodiment of death.

"Legends are timeless: it is their privilege," announces Cocteau in setting his version of the Orpheus story in (then) modern France. But it is also the artist's privilege to use that myth as it suits him, which is what Cocteau does. Cocteau's Orpheus is more than half in love with his own personal death, and resembles Tannhäuser, whose love for Venus under the mountain is his downfall. Tyrone Slothrop is Pynchon's Orpheus, and he also suffers "that not-so-rare personality disorder known as Tannhäuserism" (299); and according to the world-renowned analyst Mickey Wuxtry-Wuxtry--"Jamf was only a fiction . . . to help [Slothrop] deny what he could not possibly admit: that he might be in love, in sexual love, with his, and his race's, death." (738)

Both Pynchon and Cocteau use Orpheus as an image of effete orthodoxy. Cocteau's Orpheus is a rather boring state-patronised poet, a great favourite of policemen's wives. His death is rather a squalid affair, an accident with a gun. He is not savaged to death by the horde of Bacchantes who gather to accuse him of plagiarising the work of a successful avant-garde poet. The state-patronised Orpheus Theatre in Gravity's Rainbow is, as I have said, an emasculated Orpheus. Zhlubb is trying to stamp out the subversive "mouth-harp"; so, like Cocteau's, Zhlubb's Orpheus is silenced. Slothrop is the unofficia Orpheus of Gravity's Rainbow: it is his harp which floats down an unnamed German river; it is he who resurrects the spirits of lost harp-men; it is he, finally, who is "Scattered all over the Zone" (712).
In the same year that Orphée was released, 1949, a British film which at first seems the very antithesis of Cocteau's invoked a mood which permeates Gravity's Rainbow. The film was Graham Greene and Carol Reed's The Third Man. Parts of Pynchon's novel even seem to echo set pieces in that film. The description by the counterforce spokesman of the pursuit of Gnostics through the underground recalls the climactic pursuit of Harry Lime through Vienna's sewers (not forgetting V., of course). The ferris wheel at Zwölfkinder, in the compartment of which Pökler and Ilse ride, recalls the Prater wheel in Vienna where Martins met Lime. The Prater, like Zwölfkinder, is a dying place of pleasure, destroyed physically by bombs as the need for such a place was slowly sapped from the souls of children by a hundred daily inhumanities.

Perhaps Martins meets Harry Lime in the wheel deliberately, or the association may be subconscious. The wheel is normally full of children, but Harry has been, through his penicillin racket, responsible for the deaths of many children. Martins and Lime have a compartment to themselves; no doubt Harry's influence stretches to this, but like the isolation of Pökler and his latest Ilse in the Zwölfkinder wheel, the isolation is not merely spatial. Pökler and Ilse are isolated from time in a counterfeit life which merely suggests movement by a rapid succession of stills; they are truly isolated on a ferris wheel. They are isolated in a city of children, for Ilse is not truly a child, and not truly Pökler's. There are no children on the Prater wheel with Lime and Martins; for Martins has seen the only children Lime has ever touched: they are all dead or maimed.

"In these days, old man, nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't, so why should we?": 22

Harry, like Pirate Prentice and Katje, is a victim of a war in which people have become a means to other ends. People are money to Lime; pointing to the people two hundred feet below:
"If I said you can have twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops, would you, really, old man, tell me to keep my money or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare—Free of income tax, old man....It's the only way to save nowadays." (TM, 111)

Pirate and Katje, too, work in these more brutal currencies:

Jews are negotiable. Every bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars. (105)

The worlds of The Third Man and Gravity's Rainbow are worlds where the black market is the norm, where such private enterprise is only, on a lower level, an emulation of mid-century statesmanship. Pynchon's England, like Hawkes' in The Lime Twig, may well owe something to the novels of Graham Greene, but his post-war Europe certainly resembles Greene's, paradoxically, just as it resembles Cocteau's.

The Third Man and Orphée seemed in 1949 to represent two opposite poles of filmmaking, the one tending towards a documentary realism, the other towards abstraction; and yet in Pynchon's novel the two are seen to have a great deal in common. The Third Man is remembered as one of the first British feature films to be shot on location, and war-torn Vienna is as much a subject of the drama as the black market it supports. Cocteau, too, is fond of evoking moods without words, and it is not surprising that he chose to film a large section of Orphée in the ruins of St. Cyr, a monument to the pointless destruction of the war years. Cocteau, Greene/Reed and Pynchon all play out their dramas against the background of a great destruction which, although historically precise, reflects a cultural and spiritual condition. Vienna, of course, was divided among the Allied powers at the end of the war, and these "zones" are crucial to the plot of The Third Man; they represent different worlds where entirely different standards of behaviour apply, though the standard is not notably high in any. Harry Lime survives entirely by shuttling between zones, never belonging to any one. Our introduction to Vienna, and to the film, is a shot of a poster bearing the message "you are now entering the American Zone,"
followed by posters for the other three powers. These are historical zones, but Cocteau, too, has a "zone" in Orphée. "La Zone" is Cocteau's underworld, represented by the St. Cyr barracks ruins, for it too is post-war Europe, like Vienna, like "the Zone" of Gravity's Rainbow.

Pynchon's "Zone" seems to contain both the historical and the poetic "zones" of Greene/Reed and Cocteau. Pynchon's Zone has a historical and geographical site, but it includes more than Vienna or Berlin and is occupied not by any one power, but by "them." It has the unreal quality of Cocteau's Zone, which cannot be reached by earthly means, as is revealed in the epigraph to Part Three, "In the Zone": "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas any more" (279); but it is also as riddled with earthly bureaucracy as the real zones.

Zones thrive on bureaucracy. To survive, one must learn to manipulate it like Harry Lime, or Tyrone Slothrop for whom forged papers become a way of life. Cocteau's Zone, too, has its bureaucracies: the Princess and Heurtebise are brought before a board of middle-aged, dark-suited bureaucrats to account for their breaking of the rules. They have taken "personal liberties," and are brought to justice by the "Zone police." We might compare the chapter in Gravity's Rainbow which is epigraphed by "Dear Mom, I put a couple of people in Hell today" (537). From the opening nod at Eliot (and Dante), it is clear that this is intended to be for Pirate some sort of educational visit to the underworld, along the lines of Orpheus'. The place has "many levels," and like Vienna's Zones and Cocteau's, it is based on bureaucracy. One corridor contains Beaverboard Row, as it is known: comprising the offices of all the Committees, with the name of each stenciled above the doorway-- (538)

In all these zones, death is administered by a bureaucracy: typewriters kill more people than rockets. Fritz Lang's Der Müde Tod, like Orphée, has a character who plays Death, recalled by Pynchon, characteristically, as "tender, wistful bureaucratic Death" (579); and as Pirate discovers, one can't appeal to God; most of us will never get further than
Beaverboard Row. The Princess reminds Orpheus of this, too: there is no higher appeal than death's bureaucracies:

"The one who gives orders is nowhere to be found: some think he is asleep and we are part of his dream—a bad dream."

This is the same God of The Third Man, and Gravity's Rainbow:

MARTINS: That's a strange crucifix.
WINKEL: Jansenist.
MARTINS: Never heard the word. Why are the arms above the head?
WINKEL: Because he died, in their view, only for the elect. (TM, 56)

Pynchon may well have been attracted to Cocteau's film by its director's fondness for film trickery. Orphée makes use of negative projection, trick camera angles, back projection, and, in particular, running the film in reverse when depicting the raising from the dead of a character. Cocteau reverses the flow of time (notably in a long sequence at the end of the film as Orpheus is resurrected) by reversing the film, a concept which Pynchon finds particularly applicable to the V2. The rocket, in its apparent reversal of time sequence ("Firebloom, followed by blast then by sound of arrival"), mocks our mortality:

... nothing can really stop the Abreaction of the Lord of the Night unless the Blitz stops, rockets dismantle, the entire film runs backward: faired skin back to sheet steel back to pigs to white incandescence to ore, to Earth. But the reality is not reversible. (139)

Except of course to von Göll, the obsessive film director who is eclectic in his monomania. Just as he (like Myra Breckinridge with the Beat Generation) manages to preempt the "corridor metaphysics" (394) of L'Année Dernière à Marienbad by thirty years, on his camera dolly, whooping with joy, barrel-assing down the long corridors at Nymphenburg (750)

he also predates Orphée's film trickery:
pull the trigger and bullets are sucked back out of the recently dead into the barrel, and the Great Irreversible is actually reversed as the corpse comes to life to the accompaniment of a backwards gunshot. (745)

Such concepts are often put wistfully in the mouths of madmen. Joseph Detweiler in Thomas Berger's Killing Time asks

"can a moment be stopped, suspended, frozen, as light can in a motion picture projector; and reversed, relived? This is worth consideration."23

It may be that Pynchon has such a suspension in mind at the end of Gravity's Rainbow. The film has stopped, and Zeno tells us that there can never be a "last delta-t"; all final gaps above the movie theatre are theoretically measurable, and perhaps the rocket will continue falling "absolutely and forever."

In its almost documentary naturalism, The Third Man eschews special effects; it does, however, raise some of the questions familiar to readers of Gravity's Rainbow. Holly Martins is a writer of second-rate western novels, such as The Lone Rider of Santa Fe and Death at Double X Ranch, and not above turning life into art: "Mind if I use that line in my next Western?" he asks Colonel Calloway. His next work, he tells Popescu, is to be called The Third Man:

POPESCU: I'd say you were doing something pretty dangerous this time. . . .
Mixing fact and fiction, like oil and water. (TM, 84)

The Third Man is the film of the book in the same way that Gravity's Rainbow is the book of the film. Martins is a moviegoer; we see him in only one cinema, but like Pirate Prentice in the all-night cinema around the corner from Gallaho Mews, he is seeking shelter. Martins, though, is a bookish moviegoer, and prefers his life expressed as if it were a novel; like Percy's narrator, he becomes aware of this trait. He has imagined Harry Lime, his friend from childhood, as if he were the hero of one of his own yellowback
novels: The Oklahoma Kid, perhaps, which Baron Kurtz, Lime's co-conspirator, carries in his pocket. But Martins comes to realise his mistake:

"For twenty years I knew him, the drinks he liked, the girls he liked. We laughed at the same things. He couldn't bear the colour green. But it wasn't true. He never existed. We dreamed him." (TM, 93)

We might recall the arguments of the last section of Gravity's Rainbow over the nature of Slothrop; was he, too, a fiction, just as László Jamb may have been Slothrop's own fiction? Holly Martins learns what Pynchon demonstrates: the people we know are our own fictions. We may not cast them as cruelly as the moviegoer, as Gregory Peck, or the Oklahoma Kid, but they are our own creations, nonetheless.

If it is fair to suggest that Holly Martins may have imagined Harry Lime as the "Oklahoma Kid," then perhaps we may relate Martins' creation to the shadowy figure of the "Kenosha Kid," who hovers tantalisingly on the verges of Pynchon's novel, often promising revelation, but always disappointing. Kenosha, Wisconsin is not renowned for very much, but it was the birthplace of Orson Welles. This fact alone has led to an almost desperate identification of the Kenosha Kid with Orson Welles. Now, of course, Harry Lime in The Third Man was played by Orson Welles, and if Martins sees fit to think of Welles as the "Oklahoma Kid," then this may explain Pynchon's "Kenosha Kid."

Pynchon offers few hints, but at the conclusion of Slothrop's drug-induced trip down the Roseland toilet, we seem to be on the verge of discovery. Slothrop has come to meet the Kenosha Kid:

In the shadows, black and white holding in a panda-pattern across his face [...] waits the connection he's traveled all this way to see. (71)

This is a deliberate ploy to implicate us old fans, who've always been at the movies, for what we are perhaps meant to recall is (as Jack Bolling puts it)

the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in The Third Man.
A window opens, and Lime's face emerges from the shadows which have partially obscured it. Of course, Pynchon disappoints us, for it is not the Kid: he has been busted. We meet the Kenosha Kid again in one of the fragments of Part Four, LISTENING TO THE TOILET, where he appears to be one of the few figures in the novel who do escape "Their frame." He is the "Sentimental Surrealist" who experiences a partial eclipse of the sun's roar, one of the few to see through the "elaborate scientific lie: that sound cannot travel through outer space" (695). The episode is an incidental conceit, but the Kenosha Kid is clearly a character of some significance, for very few escape "Their editorial blade" (694).

The Kenosha Kid is first invoked in Pynchon's novel in what amounts to a discussion of form and content. As Slothrop succumbs to narcosis, he considers half a dozen "changes on the text" of "You never did the Kenosha Kid" (61). The six words considered as a sentence are given as many entirely different meanings, depending on grammar, intonation and context. The section in fact foreshadows the debate which will take place later when the Counterforce seek to understand the "St. Veronica Papers" (688). Slothrop will come to mean different things to different sects, just as Jesus of Nazareth did; and having a written transcript of Slothrop's trip down the toilet will not preclude a variety of interpretations. If a six word sentence can be interpreted in so many different ways, how uncertain looks the task of discerning content in any more sophisticated form. (This is a problem experienced by, for instance, modern interpreters of the Christian gospels.)

Orson Welles' film Citizen Kane is also a debate on form and content. How do we untangle Kane the man from Kane the phenomenon? Content may be distorted by form, and is often irrecoverable in its original sense. Once a historical fact is included in, say, a Christian gospel, it is immediately susceptible to all the distortions of that form. Once Tyrone Slothrop becomes an object of veneration of the Counterforce, it is immediately impossible to discover who or what he really was:
Some called him a "pretext." Others felt that he was a genuine, point-for-point microcosm.

(738)

Once Charles Foster Kane becomes a public figure, the man recedes under the paraphernalia he collects.

Welles' film is considerably longer than Slothrop's six-finger exercise, but it reaches a similar conclusion.

"I don't think any word can explain a man's life,"
says the reporter assigned to "tell us who he was." The "word" his editor has in mind is "Rosebud," but he can't even put a meaning to that. The "newsreel" which opens the film contains all that is known about Kane the public figure. It confirms Pynchon's notions concerning what is real and what is imagined to be.

"The great yellow journalist himself lived to be history, outlived his power to make it."

For, though a newspaperman, Kane is an embodiment of the idea that what we believe we create, and that what we believe to be true is only what we believe. The counterforce created an imaginary Slothrop; Martins created an imaginary Lime; when Charles Foster Kane created what he imagined, the results were very serious. He meddled in politics and social issues, created wars; he made news instead of reporting it. But Pynchon and Welles both insist that there is no difference: reporting news is creating news; writing history is creating history.

Kane, too, was a "moviegoer," though of a rather rarer type. For the vast majority of moviegoers, their condition is precarious: their habit of living life as if it were a movie is ultimately susceptible to the unhappy vagaries of the random element on this side of the projection screen. Even in the cinema, the rocket will find them. Charles Foster Kane, through his immense wealth, succeeded in largely removing the random element from his life. He scripted his every activity as scrupulously as a Hollywood spectacular: Xanadu was a gigantic film set, and every activity there a perfectly choreographed scene
in the personal movie of Citizen Kane. But Kane learns too late that no amount of wealth and spectacle is a hedge against mortality.

Welles treats his Kane in the same way that Pynchon treats Slothrop. Both are doomed to be dispersed and fragmented: having shaped history, history will not contain them. Kane gradually fades from Welles' film in the same way that Slothrop disappears from Gravity's Rainbow, so that, in the end, it is possible for characters to wonder whether, like Martins with Lime, they didn't just dream Citizen Kane. Finally Kane's possessions are catalogued and auctioned or destroyed. We learn about Kane through these remnants, and through the recollections of others, in the same way the Counterforce learns about Slothrop through the "St. Veronica Papers" or the "Book of Memorabilia" (739). This process is what we might generally call compiling history, but more often than not, such a process merely gives us, like the reporter in Citizen Kane, a jigsaw whose pieces do not fit.

Citizen Kane's dark impressionism is characteristic of the cinema of the forties and is reflected in both Orphée and The Third Man; and whilst Welles wrote his own dialogue for the Third Man, he was also one of Orphée's most outspoken supporters. Citizen Kane, too, vast and sprawling, a series of changing points and methods of narration, tumbling along at a variety of paces from lethargy to frenzy, always sophisticated, but often mawkishly sentimental, reminds us, a little, of Gravity's Rainbow. Welles dismissed Rosebud as "rather dolar-book Freud," but Pynchon, too, is fascinated by childhood in the same way. "The Occupation of Mingeborough," for example, relates Slothrop's current situation to childhood games back in his hometown; and indeed we might compare Slothrop with Kane. Both were entrusted as infants to the auspices of large corporations, and both bear the scars of the experience into adulthood.

Cocteau's Orpheus is instructed by a man in a cafe as to how he may become an innovative poet: "Etonnez-nous," he is told. Cocteau deliberately recalls a command he claimed to have received from Nijinsky in 1912: "Etonne-moi!" Cocteau took Nijinsky's advice
and would no doubt like to be remembered in those terms. It is interesting to compare a description of Orson Welles:

He was born with the power to astonish, and in some ways his film career could be read as a process of learning to curb that power. 24

I think it is fair to say that Pynchon, too, has this power, a power which is revealed most often in the flaunting of convention and the introduction of alien elements. Welles' film of Kafka's The Trial, for instance, ends not with Kafka dying "I like a dog," but with a nuclear explosion. Pynchon's novel echoes Welles' film; we, like Joseph K, are willing accomplices in our own destruction. Pynchon's thoughts on the cinema at first seem paradoxical, and then merely perverse, but his position is logical. The "old theatre" of our civilisation shows the sort of films which sustain the moviegoer. But within cinema's establishment are rebels like Welles and Cocteau and Hellman whose films do not fulfill expectations. These filmmakers use the medium to question its own nature rather than reinforce its subtle deceptions: the question is one not of suspension of disbelief, but of suspension of belief. It is clear from the final sections of Pynchon's novel that Pynchon is using the image of the cinema to question the passive receptivity which characterises all aspects of our culture, the voyeurism which allows and even encourages the spectacles of Vietnam and Watergate. It is almost as if life must now be lived with syndication of its motion picture rights in mind. (Vietnam and Watergate have spawned what we are all guilty of calling "good films." ) Pynchon reminds us that it is possible to go to the movies without becoming a moviegoer.

--University of Manchester

Notes

1 He would, of course, in 1939, in The Story of Alexander Graham Bell.

Gravity's Rainbow (New York, 1973), 760. Subsequent references will be noted in the text.

"The Movies and Reality," 1926; rpt. in Authors on Film, ed. Harry M. Geduld (Bloomington, 1972), 86.

Geduld, 89.

Geduld, 88.


"In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," 1937); rpt. in In Dreams Begin Responsibilities and Other Stories (London, 1978), 6, 8.

The Direction of Time (Berkeley, 1956), 11.

A Voyage to Purilia (London, 1930), 36. References in the text will be denoted (P, __).

Magny, 7.

The Day of the Locust, in The Collected Works of Nathanael West (Harmondsworth, 1975), 146.

The Moviegoer (New York, 1961), 4. References in the text will be denoted (M, __).

In City for Conquest (1940), and Gunga Din (1939), I presume.

In God is My Co-Pilot (1945), perhaps.

Myron (New York, 1974), 7. References in the text will be denoted (My, __).


Vidal, 1977, 5.


The Third Man, Modern Film Scripts series (London, 1969), 112. References in the text will be denoted (TM, __).

Pynchon's "Entropy":
A Russian Connection

Peter L. Hays

In 1923, Russian naval engineer Yevgeny Zamyatin published an essay which antagonized the Soviet government, an annoyance that increased greatly when Zamyatin's dystopian novel We, a satire on the Russian Revolution never yet published in the Soviet Union, appeared in Russian in Prague. The 1923 essay is titled "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters." In it, Zamyatin argues against complacency in government and art and for a continuing revolution, for a continual changing of forms and for a continuous receptivity to new ideas, however distasteful. I think that Thomas Pynchon was aware of Zamyatin's essay when he wrote his own story "Entropy" in 1958-59, but I must create a Kekulean chain to establish the connection.

Zamyatin, during the twenties, before he was denied access to publishing in Russia, worked for a number of Russian journals; he also taught writing and literature and continued his own literary work. In 1921, he mentioned three poems of Vladimir Nabokov's, presumably written at Cambridge, in his review of a new Russian journal in exile, Gryadushchaya Rossiya, published in Paris by A. N. Tolstoy.1 In 1926, he favorably reviewed Nabokov's first novel, Maschenko (Mary).2 In the winter of 1931, when he was allowed to leave Russia after having written a letter to Stalin which Gorky delivered, Zamyatin met several times with Nabokov in Berlin before leaving to visit Prague and then moving to Paris.3 In April of 1937, Nabokov, who had himself moved to Paris to escape Nazi persecution in Germany, participated in a memorial service for Zamyatin after the latter's death.4 In 1944, corresponding with Edmund Wilson about a proposed Pocket Book anthology of Russian stories, Nabokov mentioned Zamyatin for inclusion.5 And now, to make the human chain complete, one of Nabokov's students at Cornell between fall 1957 and spring 1959 was Thomas Pynchon.6

Pynchon says in his introduction to Slow Learner, his collection of short stories, that his early works
were highly derivative of a variety of sources, literary and other. Mentioned by name or allusion in "Entropy" are Henry Miller, Djuna Barnes, William Faulkner, the Marquis de Sade, Henry Adams, and such scientists as Rudolf Clausius, Willard Gibbs, Ludwig Boltzmann, and Norbert Wiener. Zamyatin is not mentioned, but then, not all of Pynchon's sources are. Zamyatin had written a biography of German physicist Julius Robert von Mayer, important for his thermodynamic theories—like Clausius, Gibbs, and Boltzmann. In May of 1923, Frank C. Eve published an essay on solar energy in the Atlantic Monthly; the Russian translation appeared later in 1923 in Sovremennyi zapad, a journal which Zamyatin edited.

Zamyatin's interest in entropy was rooted in his scientific background but concentrated primarily on the metaphoric. He saw in physical entropy, as Pynchon later would, a figure for social and cultural entropy, for stagnation of ideas and people, and so he cried for new forms, revolutionary literature, even if anathema to the government: "But harmful literature is more useful than useful literature, for it is antientropic, it is a means of combating calcification, sclerosis, crust, moss, quiescence" (Soviet Heretic, 109).

Pynchon, as he says in the introduction to Slow Learner, had no virtuous motive in writing of entropy as Zamyatin did in urging a freer, less restricted literature, but rather a "somber glee at any idea of mass destruction or decline. . . . Given my undergraduate mood, Adams's sense of power out of control, coupled with Wiener's spectacle of universal heat-death and mathematical stillness, seemed just the ticket" (Slow Learner, xxiii). And although several critics have seen Meatball Mulligan's efforts in the story as successfully anti-entropic or negentropic, Pynchon's clues in the story are decidedly pessimistic: Callisto tries to prevent the death of a bird from the hothouse aviary of his apartment by sharing his body heat with it, not realizing that all birds have higher body temperatures than humans and that rather than giving his warmth to the bird, he is draining its; in the apartment below, Meatball's refrigerator is broken, and refrigerators work by extracting heat from within the insulated box and dissipating it outside, a dis-
sipation that cannot occur if all things are the same
temperature, that is, in an entropic state—-and in
"Entropy," the temperature is a constant 37 degrees.

The human chain and the mere word "entropy" alone
could just be coincidence; what makes that very much
less likely is the image of violently opening a sealed
and scented apartment which concludes both works.
Callisto and Aubade live in a "hot-house jungle" of
"philodendrons and small fan palms: patches of scarlet,
yellow, and blue laced through this Rousseau-like
fantasy."

Hermetically sealed, it was a tiny enclave of
regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the
vagaries of the weather, of national politics,
of any civil disorder... He and the girl
could no longer, of course, be omitted from
that sanctuary... What they needed from
outside was delivered. They did not go out.
(Slow Learner, 68; my emphasis)

At story's end, Aubade violates the apartment's her-
metic seal. Her action is ambiguous: she may be
trying to stir Callisto out of his lethargy; or,
given Pynchon's pessimistic pose, she is more likely
trying to hasten the stasis of absolute entropy.

Suddenly then, as if seeing the single and
unavoidable conclusion to all this she moved
swiftly to the window before Callisto could
speak; tore away the drapes and smashed out the
glass with two exquisite hands which came away
bleeding and glistening with splinters... (Slow Learner, 85)

Zamyatin, urging the need for continuing revolution,
argues for violating comfortable, hermetically sealed
positions:

No revolution, no heresy is comfortable or easy.
For it is a leap, it is a break in the smooth
evolutionary curve, a break is a wound, a pain.
But the wound is necessary: most of mankind
suffers from hereditary sleeping sickness, and
victims of this sickness (entropy) must not be
allowed to sleep, or it will be their final
sleep, death.
The same disease often afflicts artists and writers: they sink into satiated slumbers. . . . And they lack the strength to wound themselves, . . . to leave their old familiar apartments filled with the scent of laurel leaves. . . .

(Soviet Heretic, 112)

Both revolutionary writers see entropy in social terms, and both write of it as an enclosing apartment, sealed to the outside, which only violence will open.

--University of California, Davis

Notes


At Cornell, Nabokov taught Slavic Literature, but also Lit 311-312, Masters of European Fiction, and Lit 325-326, Russian Literature in Translation. Which of the two courses Pynchon took is not known. Nabokov's lectures for these two courses have been published,
but I have not found Zamyatin's name in them; it is impossible to
determine with what oral comments Nabokov may have embroidered these
written lectures. The published texts are:

Vladimir Nabokov, Lectures on Literature, ed. Fredson Bowers

Vladimir Nabokov, Lectures on Russian Literature, ed. Fredson
Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and Bruccoli Clark,

7 Thomas Pynchon. Slow Learner (1984; rpt. New York: Bantam,
1985), ix-xxxiv.

8 See Peter L. Hays and Robert Redfield, "Pynchon's Spanish
Source for 'Entropy,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 16:4 (1979), 327-
34.

9 Shane, 218, n. 81.

10 E.g., Hays and Redfield, cited above, 334, and Stephen P.
Schuber, "Rereading Pynchon: Negative Entropy and 'Entropy,'"
Pynchon Notes, 13 (1983), 47-60.

11 I am indebted to Robert Redfield for this mechanical
knowledge.
Pynchon on Household:
Reworking the Traditional Spy Novel

John L. Simons

A possible influence on the creation of the Victorian explorer Hugh Godolphin, "F.R.G.S.," who appears in V.,¹ may be found in a character with the same unusual surname in Geoffrey Household's spy-thriller, Fellow Passenger.² Of minimal literary merit, and far less exciting than other Household classics of the thriller genre, Fellow Passenger is a boring book by a notoriously uneven writer. Yet besides the character named Godolphin, it contains the seeds of a number of complex themes which subsequently flourish in the far richer imagination of Thomas Pynchon, who read Household as a teenager.³ I want to explore the relationships between V. and Household's book in order to demonstrate how Pynchon transforms the materials from a lowly potboiler into a serious work of art, and I want to focus finally on the metamorphosis of the Godolphin we see as a fatuous romantic escapist in Fellow Passenger, to the prophet of the twentieth century's impulse toward destruction and doom we find in V. But first it will be necessary to give a brief summary of Household's novel, since it is likely to be far less familiar to readers than V.

The hero of Fellow Passenger is Claudio Howard-Wolferstan, an Englishman and a former spy for the Allies, who has been living in South America since the end of the Second World War. When his father dies, son Claudio returns to England to claim his estate, but his ancestral home has been purchased by the British government, which is using it to conduct top-secret research relating to atomic reactors. In a covert attempt to snatch some family jewels from a secret hiding place, Howard-Wolferstan is discovered and wrongly arrested as a traitorous Communist spy. He escapes, and the remainder of the novel revolves rather tediously around his repeated thwartings of both Scotland Yard and the Communists, who are convinced that Claudio is one of theirs.
Fellow Passenger concludes with Howard-Wolferstan's re-capture by the British, his subsequent imprisonment in the Tower of London, and his writing the memoir which is the book we have just read. Then follows a pompous but accurate "Epilogue" written by an establishment aristocrat and government scientist, the abundantly titled Alexander Romilly, "S.H., D.Sc., D. Litt., F.R.S.," who has helped secure Howard-Wolferstan's release. Romilly attributes Claudio's arrest to the rampant anti-Communist paranoia of the "Red Scare," which typified so much Western political activity in the post-war 1950's. Romilly is right, but his bedrock belief that objective information can explain away any muddled situation, such as Howard-Wolferstan's, gives the lie to his own Olympian self-assurance about the true nature of contemporary reality.

Alexander Romilly, a throwback to a Victorian age of confident optimism, can only appear naive, at times ludicrous, to conscious inhabitants of the multiplicitous world of the twentieth century. Romilly sees only surfaces, comprehends only facts, when it is what lurks beneath those surfaces, and the questionable truth of those "facts" that so complicate our understanding of the modern experience.

Does this mean that Geoffrey Household, who lampoons Romilly's bloated certainty, adopts a world view closer to that of his younger contemporaries, Thomas Pynchon for instance? It is difficult to say, because we seem to be dealing with "two Households" here: the conventional thriller writer whose forte is the escapist entertainment, and the latently serious writer who seems to see the contradictions that exist within his own created world. The "two Households" fail to converge in one coherent stance. Trapped by the limited conventions of the genre within which he writes, Household seems content only to touch on issues of immense subtlety and complexity, while the burden of his book rests yawningly on old spy fiction formulas, formulas reminiscent of his mentor, John Buchan, master of the "hunted hero" novel.

What then does Pynchon do with a novel so promising and yet ultimately disappointing? He takes Household's
trivial book and parodies its form, as well as its themes, with a serious intent. What I think may have specifically interested Pynchon about *Fellow Passenger* is its ironic structure. It makes its hero the center of an intricate web of factitious circumstances and events of which he has no knowledge and about which he would perhaps not care. The accusations against Claudio Howard-Wolfertstan have been devised by men trained to unearth plots and conspiracies, even if, as here, they do not exist.

Not uncoincidentally, Pynchon has chosen the same Cold War period, indeed the same year as the publication of Household's novel, 1955, for the opening of *V.* Pynchon is fascinated by people's obsessions with fashioning plots out of the essential plotlessness of life. There is in his world, unlike the world of Alexander Romilly, no actual, or knowable, objective reality. Thus the Cold War serves as a perfect historical period within which to explore the contrasting relationship between the mind's interpretation of external events and the empirical "reality" of those events. Not a fighting war, but instead a verbal struggle where minds contend against minds, the Cold War is fought with words, essentially in the minds of its antagonists, although those warring intelligences can turn their thoughts into actions, as we see in *V.*, where real war threatens to erupt in the Middle East.

But Pynchon does not wish to limit his understanding of international politics solely to the Cold War. Set in 1899, the Florentine section of the novel, where we first encounter Hugh Godolphin, is an immensely (and I think deliberately) confusing parody of complicated spy story plots in which every event must somehow tie in with every other event, culminating in a solution to the posed mystery. But Pynchon subverts the spy novel principle by not relating to each other the various separate stories which compose the Florence chapter. All that really exists is what a veteran of such muddles, Sidney Stencil, of the British Foreign Office, calls "The Situation." "No Situation had any objective reality," concludes Stencil; "it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment" (*V.*, 174).
In spite of his belief, which he shares with Sidney Stencil, in the pointlessness of all existence, Pynchon nevertheless sympathizes with, even participates in (through his novels) his characters' efforts to extract meaning from meaninglessness. Central to this basic paradox in Pynchon is a fabled country called Vheissu, which has purportedly been seen by the explorer Hugh Godolphin. To discover Vheissu, the novel seems tantalizingly to argue, is to discover the secret of V., the woman who symbolizes it. For V. is the twentieth century, and Vheissu is its emblem. What then is Vheissu? To Hugh Godolphin's horror, he learns that Vheissu is only an integument, a bright-colored skin, a "madman's kaleidoscope," "not real shapes, not meaningful ones. Simply random, the way clouds change over a Yorkshire landscape" (V., 155). Vheissu is like a dream then, but a dream which masks its nightmare significance: "Nothing" (V., 188). It is the pure emptiness of a reality into which we pour our own mental creations. And because V. has no meaning, our thoughts about it become, for Godolphin, a "gaudy dream... of annihilation" (V., 190), which bewitches the twentieth-century mind. The Lady V. enslaves and destroys Hugh Godolphin, who falls under her nihilistic spell after his vision of Victorian order is shattered by Vheissu.

In Fellow Passenger we encounter a Peter Bowshot St. John Gode|olphin, who I believe gives rise to V.'s Hugh Godolphin. Household's Godolphin is an amusing, slightly mad English gentleman-explorer, clearly out of another age, who has found his own escapist (from the twentieth century) Shangri-La in South America. Peter Godolphin is described by his friend Claudio Howard-Wolferstan in language which makes him the comic counterpart of his doomed fictional progeny, Hugh Godolphin:

He was an old schoolfellow and intimate of mine, whom I had rediscovered in a primitive little paradise of his own making, halfway down the eastern slopes of the Andes. If ever a man were completely lost to sight, it was. He allowed me to help him with a few necessaries, but made me swear not to bring down on him his family or
their letters. He wanted to be left in peace with his three Indian wives and his peculiar religion. (FP, 174, my emphasis)

Peter Godolphin exemplifies the classic British eccentric who flees the restrictiveness and conventionality of his native land in order to "get away from it all." It does not seem to me that the phrase "paradise of his own making" means a great deal to Household in this context, but it does reflect his novel's implicit theme of the manufacturing of "reality." On the other hand, I would argue that the phrase could have meant much more to Pynchon when he read Household's novel. One of the motives for Hugh Godolphin's life-long explorations, as with those discoverers who sought a passage to India, is the search for an earthly paradise. What he finds instead, as we know, is the dreaded Vheissu. But Vheissu may, as old Hugh—using language which echoes Household's on Peter Godolphin—tells his friend, Signor Mantissa, be a creation of his (Hugh's) own making: "'If it [Vheissu] were only a hallucination, it was not what I saw or believed I saw that in the end is important,'" says Hugh. "'It is what I thought. What truth I came to'" (V., 190).

Hugh Godolphin's picture of reality, as well as, I would argue, Thomas Pynchon's, differs greatly from that of Peter Bowshot St. John Godolphin and his creator, Geoffrey Household, even though, paradoxically, they emerge from the same source. Hugh's is a vision of darkness, of mind at the end of its tether, of a despair which leads men to desire their own deaths and the deaths of others. Pynchon seems to be saying either we wholly fabricate reality, which means that isolation, loneliness and solipsism result, or we abandon ourselves to the chaotic randomness of the world, which can only lead to purposeless drift. Between solipsism and drift there is little to choose. This is a long way from the reality of Geoffrey Household, whose Fellow Passenger concludes with a fatuously happy ending: It is fascinating then to observe how Thomas Pynchon has assimilated the crude matter of a traditional spy-thriller and re-shaped it into the substance of art and of vision.

--The Colorado College
Notes

1 Thomas Pynchon, V. (1963; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1964). Quotations will be cited within the text.


4 For an entirely different discussion of the origins of Godolphin's name, out of Edgar Allen Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, see Hanjo Beressem, "Godolphin — Goodolphin — Goodolphin — Goodol'Pyn — Good ol'Pym: A Question of Integration," Pynchon Notes, 10, 1983, 3-17.
"Words You Never Wanted to Hear": Fiction, History and Narratology in The Crying of Lot 49

C.E. Nicholson and R.W. Stevenson*

From the unnerving proliferation of critical responses to Pynchon's fiction in the seventeen years since the publication of The Crying of Lot 49, one of the more positive directions to emerge is traceable back to Edward Mendelson's Introduction to the Twentieth Century Views volume of essays. "To the methods of reading and criticism which the past two centuries have developed in order to domesticate romantic and modernist literature, the work of [Pynchon] is almost opaque and impermeable." Mendelson goes on to explain that one of the reasons for this perception of Pynchon's fiction as a radical, innovatory and difficult project is the novelist's "refusal to dwell on psychological drama or domestic detail." He continues: "in its attention to the interior landscape, recent fiction has forgotten the density of the exterior one. Modernism prefers to speak of the world of politics and ethics in personal and aesthetic terms. Pynchon does the opposite. In his books, character is less important than the network of relations existing either between characters, or between characters and social and historical patterns of meaning."¹ Pynchon, then, is understood to have moved away from an interest in the individual and towards an interest in the systems, social, philosophical, economic or otherwise, which threaten the survival or autonomy of that hitherto safely assumed individuality. Mendelson's influence is felt across a range of subsequent readings, from

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the claim that "all of Pynchon's work to date is an examination of our current cultural problems, of their sources and possible resolutions" (Siegel 1978, p. 7), to the assertion that "Pynchon's books . . . reveal, and document the reality of history" (Schaub 1981, pp. 150-1).

In turn, this preliminary stance has been significantly extended in the first issue of Poetics Today, with Brian McHale's suggestion that Gravity's Rainbow is a text which challenges the competences and decorums learned from modernism, teasing the reader by introducing him or her not into streams of consciousness but frequently into streams of fantasy. Accounting for what he calls the ontological instability of Gravity's Rainbow, McHale explains that "having reconstructed a partial picture of the novel's fictive world, the reader learns that the episode on which he based his reconstruction never 'really' occurred after all." Such elusive modes of intelligibility lead the reader to feel "conned, bullied, betrayed," and this in turn suggests that "perhaps the question should be not so much what to make of [the novel], as what it makes of one." The conclusion offered is that "the effect of this troublesome novel is, finally, the salutary one of disrupting the conditioned responses of the Modernist reader (and we are all, still, Modernist readers), of de-conditioning the reader" (McHale 1979, pp. 91, 106-7). And as far as Gravity's Rainbow is concerned, the case is made, and made well. Naturally enough, Pynchon's big novel has tended to dominate critical discussion: the present paper seeks to establish that the challenges offered by Gravity's Rainbow to recently developed analytical procedures are posed also by The Crying of Lot 49, and that the unfolding of Oedipa's quest involves the reader in a similar scrutiny of the ways in which we interpret as we read; and in an analogous "deconditioning" of conventional assumptions about the relation between fiction and the wider world in which it is written and read.

The nature of criticism and of the interpretive act are, after all, occasionally subjects of The Crying of Lot 49. In his early Pynchon essay "Decoding the
"Trystero" Frank Kermode refers to Oedipa's dilemma by suggesting that she is being confronted by a wilderness of signifiers without it ever being clear, either to her or to us, exactly what structure can be discovered for those signifiers such that they could all be transformed into something whose significance is clear. "Making sense of . . . somewhat arbitrary symbolic universes, understanding their construction, is an activity familiar to all critics. . . . The activity of the critic . . . seeks order. . . . What Oedipa is doing is very like reading a book" (Kermode 1978, p. 163). The analogy is confirmed by a concern with deducing the significance, even the textual accuracy, of "The Courier's Tragedy," which forces Oedipa herself to become a literary critic of a sort. The play's director, Randolph Driblette, however, is dismissive of the validity of this role. "'You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but'--a hand emerged from the veil of shower-steam to indicate his suspended head--'in here. That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh.'"2

But then the director makes a remark which is destined to recoil upon Oedipa during her researches as it does upon the critic in his:

'If I were to . . . be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too. You, that part of you so concerned, God knows how, with that little world, would also vanish. The only residue in fact would be things Wharfinger didn't lie about. Perhaps Squamuglia and Faggio, if they ever existed. Perhaps the Thurn and Taxis mail system. Stamp collectors tell me it did exist. Perhaps the other, also. The Adversary. But they would be traces, fossils. Dead, mineral, without value or potential.' (p. 54)

Driblette's dismissal of the possibility of any significance in the factual background to "The

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2 Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49, 1966; rpt. London: Picador, 1979, pp. 53-4. All subsequent citations are to this edition and are given in parentheses.
"Courier's Tragedy" constitutes a kind of anti-historicism which later appears more explicitly during Oedipa's subsequent encounter with Wharfinger's editor, Emory Bortz, but by that time it is already running counter to Oedipa's needs and expectations. "'I would like to find out,' she presently plunged, 'something about the historical Wharfinger. Not so much the verbal one.'"

'The historical Shakespeare,' growled one of the grad students through a full beard, uncapping another bottle. 'The historical Marx. The historical Jesus.'

'He's right,' shrugged Bortz, 'they're dead. What's left?'

'Words.'

'Pick some words,' said Bortz. 'Them, we can talk about.' (p. 104)

Partly through such an encounter in the nineteen-sixties, Oedipa realises that her own education at an American university in the fifties had equipped her with a scholarly response to textual matters which obfuscates political or social understanding of the wider world in which texts belong—making her, as she says of herself, "a rare creature indeed, unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts" (p. 72). As the novel progresses, Oedipa begins to learn the limitations of her conventional critical devotion to the word, and seeks instead, from Bortz and other sources, the sort of wider historical understanding necessary to contextualise the significance of word and text. The further possibility of rival, opposing and subterranean histories both increases her paranoid doubts while contributing to her partial enlightenment.

Much of the same diversion of interest from word and text onto history and background is experienced with Oedipa by the reader of The Crying of Lot 49, such participation being an inevitable consequence of the almost absolute congruence of the narrative point of view with Oedipa's own. Thus the reader shares Oedipa's uncertain attempts first of all to construe the implications of the novel's initial text, Inverarity's will, then of the textual variants of "The
Courier's Tragedy," and eventually of the whole bewildering miasma of cryptic signs, including acronyms and graffiti. Oedipa, in fact, is well named after Sophocles' solver of riddles, and the reader's complicity in her attempts to understand a world whose meaning is teasingly elusive bears further comparison with the detective genre, whose relevance to his own novel Pynchon indicates at several points, references to the radio detective character the Shadow being only the most obvious. Oedipa's detective work leads her through an unfolding configuration of historical clues to a conjectural conclusion of belief in the possibility of a subterranean organisation, the Trystero system, which may have played a significant part both within and as an alternative to the historical development of the world she inhabits. The reader, so generally confined to Oedipa's perspective, is in one sense singularly better equipped to assess and to attempt to validate the conclusions which Oedipa draws from the jungle of signifiers through which she moves. As readers, we are aware of the historical actuality of some of the novel's references in a way that Oedipa, part of the texture of the fiction, cannot be. Pynchon explicitly alerts us to this possibility in the passage quoted above where Driblette remarks that stamp-collectors had told him that the Thurn and Taxis mail system did exist. The stamp collectors are right, of course. Not only did it exist, but it delivered most of Europe's mail between 1290 and 1806. And this is far from being the only historical fact significantly reproduced in Pynchon's novel. Oedipa's unnerving descent into the historical penumbra of the Trystero closely parallels our own detection of a hidden history of actuality. If, as Driblette urges Oedipa to do with Wharfinger's play, we throw away the readily recognizable fictional elements in Pynchon's text, we do indeed find many residues "in fact," many things which Pynchon "didn't lie about"; things which, far from being dead, mineral, fossilized and inert, instead enshrine considerable value and potential. They are, in fact, vital clues for the ways in which we interpret our text.

The so-called "traces, fossils," because they do derive from the real world beyond the fiction, are
precisely what enable us to understand what Oedipa's experiences might signify better than she herself is able to comprehend them. One illustration of the importance of this possibility may be offered by considering its significant, if negative implications for an otherwise instructive approach made to the novel by the critic with whose counsel for caution concerning conventional approaches to Pynchon's fiction the present paper began. In his essay "The Sacred, the Profane, and The Crying of Lot 49," Edward Mendelson develops the engaging theory that "everything in Lot 49 participates either in the sacred or the profane." In this reading, the fact that the novel tells us that Oedipa has "all manner of revelations" (p. 12) suggests the centrality of religion in Oedipa's quest. And there is a persuasive structure of religious imagery running through the text to lend support to the notion that what we await at the end of the novel is a divine descent of the spirit of God to reanimate the despiritualised waste of shame which is the tale's California. It becomes crucial, in this schema, for Mendelson to determine precisely who in the novel is sacred, and who profane. The critic has this to say: "Metzger, who never takes the slightest interest in the other characters' preoccupations, seems to serve . . . as the representative of the entirely profane. His name, appropriately enough, is the German word for butcher" (Mendelson 1978, pp. 117, 124n). But it is also entirely typical of Pynchon's methodology that almost any of the stamp-collectors who helped Driblette might also have assisted Mendelson. Because of the peripatetic nature of their trade, German butchers in the Middle Ages were given letters to carry from village to village: Metzger hence came to signify "temporary postman." As mere notation this is slight, but it assumes considerable importance for a reading which proposes a sacred or pentecostal communication descending to earth to redeem the wasteland which the novel explores. Far from being an entirely profane character uninterested in the preoccupations of others, Metzger is the first person to "pierce" (p. 27) Oedipa, (the first lover after Pierce Inverarity, that is) before departing, and in that sense serves as annunciation. Moreover, as far as pentecostal imagery of tongues is
concerned, the novel describes Metzger taking Oedipa's hand "as if to shake on the bet and kissing its palm instead, sending the dry end of his tongue to graze briefly among her fate's furrows, the changeless salt hatchings of her identity" (p. 22). Tongueing her fate literally, and affecting her fate crucially.

In a contrary direction, John Nefastis is one of a long list of characters assembled by Mendelson as believers, members of the faithful in the novel, and religious rhetoric is extensively deployed to present him. The Latin etymology of his name, however, offers adjustment to this perspective. Nefas means unspeakable, and unpleasing to the gods; hardly grounds for attributing sacred functions to him as a character. It will be suggested later that there are excellent reasons for understanding Nefastis as a character whose experiments make him profoundly antipathetic to the ethos of the novel. (Some of his sexual proclivities might anyway have suggested that he is hardly a character to sanction affinities with the sacred.) Meanwhile, it is worth noting the significance for an understanding of Lot 49 of the things Pynchon "didn't lie about": of the small but suggestive historical or etymological clues he incorporates in his fiction. Mendelson's otherwise illuminating argument shows the peril of ignoring these. In the instances cited, his assignment to categories of sacred or profane may be exactly inverse to the text's implication.

The clues Mendelson might profitably have considered are merely examples, of course, of a very much wider suggestiveness created by Pynchon's complex system of reference to historical actuality beyond the fiction. Of itself, the appearance in fiction of the world as we know it is nothing remarkable: in many ways it is the stuff of novel-writing. What is remarkable in Lot 49 is the sheer density of such references and allusions. Following the first paragraph's mention of Jay Gould, and on thereafter to densely-packed Californian contexts for Nazism generally, including the Gestapo and Hitler himself; to the exiled painter Remedios Varo, to Flores Magón, Zapata, and so on, there is a thronged layering of citations of what we recognise as the real world. And a particular feature
of these associations is that unlike Oedipa at the very beginning of her adventures, they are by no means confined to the contemporary world of the novel. Rather, they are recurrently and systematically historical. From the McCarthy era of Oedipa's student days, which is very nearly contemporary with the novel's own now, we return in Chapter 3 and the bones in the Lago di Pietà to episodes from the Second World War which themselves succeed what we have received about the Great War and the Gallipoli landings in Chapter 2. By the time we reach Chapter 6, the novel's historical references have taken us as far back as 1848, and in the history of Thurn and Taxis, far beyond that, back into the thirteenth century. Consequently, besides their particular historical character, the sheer profusion of these actuality references also begins to blur and dissolve the boundaries between what is real in the novel and what is not. For once having realized the historical accuracy of the established dominance of the Thurn and Taxis mail system between the years 1290 and 1806, we begin to wonder with increasing unease about the possible actuality of Wharfinger and even of the Trystero itself.

Yet when, after Peter Potamus and the Peter Pinguid Society, we encounter Rear Admiral Popov, with a name so redolent of the cartoon characters whom Pynchon loves to include or invent, we hardly give the possibility of his historical existence a second thought. Frank Kermode, in his book The Genesis of Secrecy, does not countenance the possibility, although he has, if somewhat nervously, historicised his earlier reading of Lot 49. So this episode, which "purports to describe an engagement between an American and a Russian warship off the coast of California [in 1864],' is one which "admirably represents a modern skepticism concerning the reference of texts to events.... The only sense attributable to the naval engagement arises from the operation of coded fantasies in a lunatic group. And the impotence of that group, as we see from its account of the sea fight, is such that their pseudo-history cannot supplant the official histories, which serve a different and much more successful ideology" (Kermode 1979, pp. 107-8). Although we have nothing to argue against the general development of
this reading, we do wish to suggest that Pynchon may be weaving further complexities around what Kermode now calls "a serious historiographical exercise," and that there are other possible ways in which sense may be attributed to it, so that when, after her traumatic night in San Francisco, Oedipa worries that she "would have trouble sorting the night into real and dreamed" (p. 81), the reader, too, feels a comparable uncertainty in the task of sorting the novel into real or imagined. In the attempt to establish which of these multifarious references to what appear to be real history are in fact that, and which belong to some other realm in the author's imagination, the reader becomes a demon in Pynchon's world, struggling to sort the facts and developing a growing awareness that the history of the Tristero instructs us to understand the novel's final words, "the crying of lot 49," as something very different from a merely self-reflexive return to its title.

What we discover is that European refugees from the revolutionary ferment of 1848 begin to arrive in America in 1849, the year of the celebrated gold rush in California. And what then happens to those refugees is a discovery in turn of an American frustration of their political aspirations. In the reaction of Emory Bortz, "'all the Tristero refugees from the 1849 reaction arrive in America . . . full of high hopes. Only what do they find? . . . Trouble . . . 1849-50 was no time for any immigrating Tristero to get ideas about picking up where they'd left off back in Europe!'" (pp. 119-20). So the novel unravels the lot of those who drifted westwards to reach California, charting the subsequent corruption of the original forty-niners by

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3 At a characteristically teasing level both of the possible sites for the mooted sea battle are geographically locatable off the coast of modern California. One of them is Pismo Beach—Pismo, the romanised form of the Russian word for letter. The alternative possible site recalls Mount Carmel where Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal: "Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God" (I Kings 18:24). Typically, in Pynchon's version either side may, or may not, have fired first.
the very urge which took them there in the first place. The open frontier has become "census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts" (p. 14) under the control of Moguls like Pierce Inverarity. In this way Pynchon intertextually translates to California in the west the terminal elegiac musings of Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway on America's eastern seaboard, where he is himself confronted both by the contemporary corruption of a dream, and by the still vivid sense of its once vital historical promise. So, as the crying of lot 49 becomes the crying or suffering of those who arrived in California in 1849, we are faced with another analogy between ourselves and the Oedipa who thought she was simply tracking down what Inverarity had left behind, "never suspecting that the legacy was America" (p. 123).

Neither did the unsuspecting reader expect such a slight novel about "a nutty American broad" to develop into a penetrating examination of the state of America, and more than that, an examination of how America came into being. Yet patently, the more we understand the book, the more continental its solemnity seems. For if Oedipa comes to realise, standing on the railroad track outside one of Pierce's factories, that San Narciso has lost its uniqueness, has been "assumed back into the American community of crust and mantle" (p. 123), then the reader experiences the concomitant revelation that the novel itself resists closure, gives up its own uniqueness, and is in turn assimilated into what we know about America, and the world outside the fiction. Those crucial years of 1848-9 resonate further through the text, and one way of tracking their significations is through one of Pynchon's early short stories,"Under the Rose," a phrase which occurs in Lot 49, and a title which plays with the idea of "sub rosa" meaning secret. Pynchon's narrator comments:

the events of 1848 and the activities of anarchists and radicals all over the Continent seemed to proclaim that history was being made no longer through the virtù of single princes but rather by man in the mass; by trends and tendencies and impersonal curves on a lattice
of pale blue lines. 4

No longer amenable to manipulation by a single powerful will, or even to discrimination by an individual consciousness, history in this process becomes a mass phenomenon, perceptible only when reduced to a statistical performance projected onto graphs. In 1848 one aspect of resistance to this attenuation of freedom was rooted in the European movements of political anarchism. The notion of an anarchist resistance to a history that has somehow gone wrong is one which powerfully informs The Crying of Lot 49. "The Trystero drifted on," we are told speculatively, "reduced to handling anarchist correspondence; only peripherally engaged—in Germany with the ill-fated Frankfurt Assembly, in Buda-Pesth at the barricades, perhaps even among the watchmakers of the Jura, preparing them for the coming of M. Bakunin" (p. 119).

In accordance with the kind of accuracy which we begin to suspect is characteristic of the book, we acknowledge that two of the people who did invite Bakunin to the Jura were in fact watchmakers. But Bakunin is mentioned twice in the text, and with Jesús Arrabal he may be said to appear a third time, in disguise, a use of coincidence which in this novel strongly suggests the possibility of deeper significance.

Michael Bakunin was condemned for his political activities to penal servitude in Siberia. To effect his escape he reached a port on Russia's eastern seaboard where he embarked incognito on a government ship, the Strelok. By chance, the Strelok took in tow the Vickery, an American'sailing ship, and Michael was able to transfer to it and reach the Japanese port of Yokohama. There he boarded a ship bound for San Francisco, reaching America's western seaboard in 1861. It was a narrow escape, since the authorities knew of his whereabouts and, a Russian fleet being at that time in Yokohama preparing to sail for home, Bakunin was expected to return with it. The commander of the fleet, and in fact commander of the Russian fleet in the Pacific from 1854 onwards, was Alexandrovitch Popov (1821--1898). Given the ways in which

historical clues function in Lot 49, it is inevitable that the reader's attention is redirected to the account of the lunatic group, the Peter Pinguid Society, founded to celebrate the initial outbreak of hostilities between Russia and America; a state of hostility which survives into the now of the novel and also into our own present. But beneath this surface history of conflict Pynchon, as we see, subtly includes a sense of concord and conjunction; of illicit, "sub rosa" Russo-American cooperation. The idea that in apposition with various anarchist figures a miraculous sense of accord can be forged out of the disjunctions of received history is also powerfully present in the novel, with one suggestion of the way the idea presents itself to us emanating from Professor Bortz, as Oedipa pursues her own research. "But should Bortz have exfoliated the mere words so lushly, into such unnatural roses, under which, in whose red, scented dusk, dark history slithered unseen?" (p. 112). With this utterance we receive intimations of the phrase under the rose, and all its secretive connotations. But more intriguingly we are also given a description of what Pynchon himself is doing.

Beneath the pages of The Crying of Lot 49, constituting a sub-text to the novel's surface structure, dark history slithers unseen. Through the connecting presence of an historical anarchist, Bakunin, and his fictive counterpart, Jesús Arrabal, the novel achieves a secret integration as its surface account of familiar global discord, originating in this version in 1864, at first conceals and then reveals an opposing sense of cooperation in the Pacific. Clearly, the disorder which anarchism counterposes to superficial and orderly notions of rationality is very much a concern here. Such ideas of anarchy and of principles of order and disorder also require to be seen in the context of Pynchon's notoriously abiding interest: entropy, itself a thermodynamic version of disorder. Indeed, Pynchon's intimate familiarity with the pervasive use of entropy as an image of the apparent decay which seems to afflict any sense of the progression of events in the world in Henry Adams's version of history, is now a critical commonplace. And entropy in its thermo-
dynamic sense of disordered waste does intrude into
the novel at several points.

But conversely, besides existing in that partially
familiar thermodynamic usage, entropy achieves counter-
active meaning in the field of Information Theory. As
Nefastis tells Oedipa, "the equation, for one, back
in the '30s, had looked very like the equation for the
other. It was a coincidence" (p. 72). In the world
of this novel the coincidence proliferates meaning.
In Information Theory, entropy signifies the disorder
within any set of possible communications or messages;
a disorder which is necessary for communication to be
viable or worthwhile. If a set of possible communica-
tions is entirely orderly and wholly known by the
potential receiver of any message chosen from it, then
nothing can be genuinely communicated in the sense
that there is no prospect of the receiver's store of
knowledge being enhanced or added to in any way. Com-
munication, we know, figures largely in the book and
there are, moreover, many examples of systems which
fail because of their lack of entropy in the Informa-
tion Theory sense: Mike Fallopian's reception of
vacuous letters sent merely to exercise the system:
the many, doubtless equally vapid "arid betrayals of
spiritual poverty" (p. 118) which Oedipa begins to
suspect any number of Americans are reserving for the
official U.S. Mail. The important point in this re-
spect is that entropy in its Information Theory context
signifies something positive and worthwhile, a quality
necessarily preconditioned to the transference of
information. Since it is communication which is the
key to the redemption of the world of the novel, an
inter-personalism which can rescue Oedipa and presum-
ably others from a solipsistic "entrapment . . . in a
tower," we recognise how functionally significant is
Pynchon's linking of it to an idea of necessary dis-
order. The text rehearses once more its demonstration
that anarchy, and disorder, far from being merely quali-
ties that lead to the ultimate wasteland and heat-death
of entropy in the thermodynamic sense, are potentially
essential and regenerative qualities. This crucial
aspect of the novel is revealed in one way through its
peculiar linguistic adroitness--witness, the punning on
DTs/dt--to exploit superficial resemblances between
different fields of knowledge. Moreover, in the
character of Nefastis, who explains one such resemblance to Oedipa, a further example is available of the very marked difference between the novel's own surface texture, and the latent, "sub rosa" aspect of its communication.

Nefastis's attempt through Maxwell's demon to extract mechanical energy by reducing a disorderly system to order, is anti-entropic in the Information Theory sense, therefore anti-communicative, negative; almost literally unholy in the novel's secular sense of redemption through communication. It is precisely because he is willing to exchange information for power that Nefastis is unspeakable to the gods; his machine swaps communication for a stultifying order. As the text expresses it, his machine implies a "massive complex of information, destroyed over and over with each power stroke!" (p. 73). Later, after her waking nightmare in San Francisco Oedipa, too, "remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information" (p. 88). Nefastis, by using the positive sense of entropy from Information Theory, and "wasting" it by trying to change it into thermodynamic order, assumes demonic proportions himself. Beneath the rosete exfoliations of Pynchon's style, we discover the hidden extent of its communications. Attentive reading of the historical sense and other clues which lurk beneath the semantic surface of the fiction not only rectifies such interpretations as Mendelson's, but also provides for an understanding of the novel as a whole and of the real significance of Pynchon's vision of Oedipa's unraveling of her Californian world.

The Crying of Lot 49 appears to demand, most unusually, that information and communication are preferable to order, and, Coleridgeans as we are, the strangeness of a work of art suggesting that what is required in life is not order registers as subversive indeed. Artistic advocacy of disorder strikes as perverse a readership trained to expect and seek out a fictive ordering of experience. Symptomatically, the way in which California is ordered within the novel intimates that disorder might be a healthy antidote. We read: "the salvation of Europe ... depends on communication!" (p. 113), a communication which may have to be achieved at the expense of the existing
order. If history has indeed become "impersonal curves on a lattice of pale blue lines," governed by reductive versions of actuality, then there is an obvious value in escaping from entrapment within that mass historical process by introducing to it a sense of anarchy; a sense of disorder. Such images function variously in the text. When Oedipa leaves Nefastis's house and seeks escape upon an appropriately named freeway, the freeway enhances her own sense of freedom by being itself disordered. "All the silence of San Narciso--the calm surface of the motel pool, the contemplative contours of residential streets like rakings in the sand of a Japanese garden--had not allowed her to think as leisurely as this freeway madness" (p. 75), where apparently random movement allows Oedipa a greater sense of herself. And such imagery is refined in the disorderly ordered dance of the drunken deaf-mutes in Oedipa's hotel. In perfect harmony with the free-floating discourse of her narrator, Oedipa muses: "There would have to be collisions... but none came. She was danced for half an hour before, by mysterious consensus, everybody took a break, without having felt any touch but the touch of her partner. Jesús Arrabal would have called it an anarchist miracle. Oedipa, with no name for it, was only demoralized" (pp. 90-91). And it is doubly interesting that Arrabal, who introduces this notion of miraculous conjunction, and who is the novel's fictional anarchist, is himself firmly blended into historical fact in that the sixty-year-old syndicalist newspaper which he carries, Regeneración, is dated 1904. After the United States government attempted to suppress the newspaper by charging excessive rates for its postal delivery, 1904 was the year of its legitimate reissue.

Arrabal's acknowledgement that the "'higher levels have their reasons'" (p. 83), suggests that he is a character for whom history really does seem to flow unseen, and his reference to anarchist miracles follows the novel's second allusion to Bakunin. He explains to Oedipa what he takes the actual consensus which comprises an anarchist miracle to be:

'anarchists also believe in another world. Where revolutions break out spontaneous and
leaderless, and the soul's talent for consensus allows the masses to work together without effort, automatic as the body itself. And yet, señora, if any of it should ever really happen that perfectly, I would also have to cry miracle. An anarchist miracle.' (p. 83)

To read the novel religiously or sacralily, then, is to substitute Jesus Christ for Jesús Arrabal, and to envisage a pentecostal as opposed to the "mysterious consensus" of a secular, anarchist miracle; that anarchist miracle offered in the text as "a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrors the head of everybody American you know" (p. 118). Only by a disordering of this lack of potential for choice might a sense of freedom be reintroduced into the world of the novel. And finally, feeling as though she is "walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless" (p. 125), Oedipa, too, comes to examine the process itself by which she is forced to make order at all. Through her realization that "excluded middles . . . were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity" (p. 125), she detects that what is at fault with her interpretation of experience is exactly her rigorous division of it into rigid categories, and that a literally more entropic approach to experience, a more anarchic sense of her world's possibilities is enabling. It is in this arduously achieved Keatsian state of uncertainty that Oedipa tremulously awaits "the crying of lot 49."

The novel's conclusion with this phrase, thereby refusing any resolving revelation of a unitary truth behind the ambiguities presented, requires to be seen not as an example of the self-reflexive negation of responsibility for the real world beloved of the nouveau roman, but as a final deconditioning of the reader's expectations; a final indication of a proper methodology for interpreting his experience, which cannot be confined within any firm closure of the fiction itself. Oedipa's reflections when she meets the old sailor during her darkly epiphanous night in
San Francisco propose the sort of expansion in significance Pynchon seeks beyond the immediate context of the novel:

he suffered DTs. Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's ploughshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe ancient foetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. Oedipa did not know where she was. (pp. 88-9)

Fiction and metaphor bear an analogous relation to life and reality. Fiction can, at any rate, also be seen as a thrust at truth, an attempt to imitate and understand some of our experience of the world; or, simply and obviously as a story, an account of things which have not happened, a lie. By destabilising the relation between fiction and historical event in the ways indicated, Pynchon leaves the reader uncertain, like Oedipa, of whether he is "inside, safe, or outside, lost"; uncertain whether he is safely contained within an artefact created partly for the sense of order it brings to and imposes upon the randomness of experience; or "outside," reading a novel which directly reflects the threatening and unsatisfactory processes of American history, a real world of arbitrariness and contingency which has created the mephitic Californian contemporaneity which Oedipa encounters. Either way, the novel refuses any assimilation into a safely satisfying ending. These dual possibilities are only confirmed by the novel's "frustrating" conclusion. Throughout, the density and significance of Pynchon's habitual reference to facts and events in the real world beyond the literary artifice never allows the reader much of the security of an ordered and ordering fiction. It is in this way
that the novel presents us with "words you never wanted to hear," words which serve to connect our own experience with Oedipa's viewing with some horror her growing entrapment in the processes of discovery of the Trystero:

As if the breakaway gowns, net bras, jewelled garters and G-strings of historical figuration that would fall away were layered dense as Oedipa's own street-clothes in that game with Metzger in front of the Baby Igor movie; as if a plunge towards dawn indefinite black hours long would indeed be necessary before the Trystero could be revealed in its terrible nakedness. Would its smile, then, be coy, and would it flirt away harmlessly backstage, say goodnight with a Bourbon Street bow and leave her in peace? Or would it instead, the dance ended, come back down the runway, its luminous stare locked to Oedipa's, smile gone malign and pitiless; bend to her alone among the desolate rows of seats and begin to speak words she never wanted to hear? (p. 36)

Beneath the dense layerings of Pynchon's images and allusions lurks an aspect of his fiction which cannot be defined simply as performance, cannot be "flirted away" as only fiction, and which will not leave us in peace when we close the book. Pynchon's historical figurations compel the reader's attention onto a problematic historical reality from which fiction is never allowed to be a complete refuge. And we thereby see how carefully Pynchon "does the opposite," as Mendelson puts it, not only to the conventional "lisible" fiction which Roland Barthes maintains confirms readers in the bourgeois security of their complacent view of reality, but to the modernist work, which, whether or not we accept Lukacs' view of its deplorable irresponsibility to socio-economic actuality, certainly does retreat into individual consciousness and ahistoric memory as refuges from the exigencies of a collapsing European history around the time of the First World War.

If Lot 49 is thus distinguished by a novelistic strategy of opposition to much of the mainstream of twentieth century literature, it is likewise innovatory
in requiring and almost illustrating a critical strategy which does not fall back on the urge to "domesticate . . . literature" indicated by Mendelson. The reader can hardly fail to learn from the fate of a character whose interpretive dilemma is so close to his own. Like her namesake in Thebes, Oedipa discovers that a determination to reduce the riddling complexity of her experience to satisfyingly rational and unitary conclusions is one that only brings trouble on herself. Similarly, the readerly habit of reliance upon an explicative resolution of the symmetrical but antithetical possibilities the novel presents--"either you have stumbled . . . on to a secret richness and concealed density of dream . . . Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you. . . . Or you are fantasizing some such plot" (p. 117-8)--is correlativey reductive and restrictive; a narrowing of focus which Oedipa learns to repudiate. She discovers that any possibility for redemption in the spiritless California she observes seems to lie with the potential of a secret anarchist community existing behind it, and yet able to dissolve its narrowness of choice, its "absence of surprise." So the text of Lot 49 reveals its own lack of interest in any conventional notions of fictional self-containment, committed as it is to an underlying world of historical actuality. This in turn requires a critical strategy prepared to look beyond the text towards such episodes as the "anarchist miracle" of Bakunin's escape. Odd though this requirement may seem, it is anyway, and obviously, fitting that a novel which so imaginatively asserts that communication can take place only if a set of possibilities exists sufficient to allow the element of surprise should itself communicate in surprising and unconventional ways. Then, a novel which proposes a semi-redemptive set of historical possibilities quite independent of, even antithetical to, the officially acceptable public history and actuality of America should communicate, itself, in a clandestine, sub-rosa manner.

This strange amendment of the conventions relating to the ontological status and communicative strategy of fiction, hardly recognised by critics of Lot 49,
has imperilled the validity of many of the novel's interpretations to date, illustrating what a recent reviewer calls "the manner in which Pynchon criticism regularly succumbs to a practical duplicity—talking about how Pynchon's works implicitly unfix interpretive authority while covertly advancing fixed interpretive viewpoints." It is not the case that Pynchon unfixed interpretive authority to the point at which it is impossible to extrapolate meaning. What he does do, in The Crying of Lot 49, is to unfix the prevalent critical assumption that a literary text autonomously contains sufficient information for its own interpretation. Instead, Pynchon's concern with "social and historical patterns of meaning" requires the critic's own return to history, encyclopaedia, and other aids to the real, non-literary world in order to understand the full range of meanings and possibilities offered by the fiction. This is the best possible antidote to any literary version of the ivory-tower entrapment which threatens Oedipa at the end of the first chapter: a characteristic which makes Lot 49 such a responsible, and radical novel; never allowing the reader to remain "safe" inside the fiction, but directing him, rather, "outside" into engagement with the nature and origins of the threats of contemporary history. Pynchon's radicalism in this respect has been recognised in Gravity's Rainbow. In his second novel he similarly delivers his text from hermeneutic enclosure. Fifty days after Christ's crucifixion His spirit descended upon His disciples, confirming their mission and bestowing unitary significance upon their world. The digital aporia which ends, or rather extends The Crying of Lot 49 endlessly postpones such sacerdotal definition. Literary criticism has a lesson to learn.

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A Historicism Approach to Pynchon

Ian J. Rankin


At the start of their essay, Nicholson and Stevenson state that their aim is to show that Lot 49's purpose is the "'deconditioning' of conventional assumptions about the relation between fiction and the wider world in which it is written and read" (298). This they achieve, and along the way they manage also to raise some difficulties attached to Edward Mendelson's reading of Lot 49, to offer a new theory concerning the importance of the title of Pynchon's novel, and, perhaps most importantly, to offer historical criticism as a necessary corrective to the proliferating interpretations cast upon Lot 49 and Pynchon's other works by the literary critics.

For Nicholson and Stevenson, a full reading of Lot 49—indeed, a correct reading—must include a large amount of historical research on the part of the reader (they have certainly done their research), and a full reading of the novel therefore comes to constitute an analogy with Oedipa's quest. The authors find, in their historical burrowing, many ingenious and persuasive arguments as to the meaning of Pynchon's book: "European refugees from the revolutionary ferment of 1848 begin to arrive in America in 1849" (304), and Lot 49 "unravels the lot of those who drifted westwards to reach California, charting the subsequent corruption of the original forty-niners by the very urge which took them there in the first place" (305). Nicholson and Stevenson find the book to be, therefore, "an examination of how America came into being" (305), and they replace Mendelson's sacred-profane tension with an anarchism-order one, the novel itself coming down on the side of Information Theory entropy (a
positive notion) over order, order, in Pynchon's novel, constituting the very death-knell of communication.

The reader, in all of this, ends up "uncertain whether he is safely contained within an artefact created partly for the sense of order it brings . . . or 'outside,' reading a novel which directly reflects the threatening and unsatisfactory processes of American history" (312). In conclusion, the authors say that a proper reading of Lot 49 should engage the reader in historical reality in a way that modernist texts never did or do.

What Nicholson and Stevenson do not explore is the dichotomy set up between the novel's historical expansiveness and the growing (ultimately chilling and overwhelming) claustrophobia of Oedipa's situation within the novel. Also, their use of "narratology" in the title of their paper is misleading, since they do not discuss narratology (in the manner of Propp, Todorov, et al.) at all. What the authors do, however, is to offer a new and valuable way into Pynchon's fiction, a historicist approach at odds with many current readings of his works. If their analysis proves correct (and the case they make is strong), then, as readers, we have a lot of work still to do in coming to terms with Thomas Pynchon.

--Fife, Scotland

Note

For a Pynchon bibliography he is compiling, David Seed would be very grateful to hear of any items by or about Pynchon, particularly reviews of critical works. Items should be sent to:

David Seed
Dept. of English Language and Literature
University of Liverpool
PO Box 147
Liverpool L69 3BX
U.K.
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.

PYNCHON:


CRITICISM AND COMMENT:


Hite, Molly. Rev. of Signs and Symptoms. Substance, 44/45 (1985), 132-34.


A tribute to Pynchon by present-day students of Oyster Bay High School.


On a list of one hundred noteworthy titles, V. is asterisked as "particularly important," in the company of, for example, Watership Down, A Good Man is Hard to Find, and The Doll Who Ate His Mother.


Summarizes an MLA Convention paper by Frederick R. Karl on the "Mega-Novel." "Pynchon is our contemporary Hawthorne."


Brief quotation from "Is It O.K. to be a Luddite?"


Reports on a European-based text-production enterprise which produces advertising copy, speeches, filmscripts, academic works, fiction, and so on by collective authorship under any name desired. Gravity's Rainbow was one of its projects.


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Contributors

MARY B. EISER, a graduate of Dartmouth College, is an aspiring writer from Minnesota. Having earned her living working on an Alaskan crab boat, writing computer programs and doing various other odd jobs, she is about to devote herself fulltime to her writing.

N. KATHERINE HAYLES, associate professor of English at the University of Iowa, is the author of The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), which includes a chapter on Gravity's Rainbow. Her articles on literature and science have appeared in New Literary History, Mosaic, Contemporary Literature and The Markham Review. She holds a graduate degree in chemistry from Caltech, and has first-hand experience with synthetic chemicals.

PETER L. HAYS is a professor of English at the University of California, Davis. Of his many articles on modern American literature, the present note is his third on "Entropy"; a fourth essay on Pynchon is forthcoming in University of Mississippi Studies in English.


COLIN NICHOLSON was educated at St. Chad's College, Wolverhampton, and later at the University of Leeds. He is currently Convener of the North American Studies Program at Edinburgh University. With R. W. Stevenson, he is the author of volumes in the York Notes series on The Sound and the Fury and The Crying of Lot 49.

IAN RANKIN is an award-winning Scottish novelist and short-story writer. He also contributes articles and reviews to many British journals, and will be published in a forthcoming issue of the American Journal of Narrative Technique.
DAVID SEED is a lecturer in the Department of English Literature of Liverpool University. He has published widely on nineteenth and twentieth century British and American prose and poetry. He is on the editorial board of the Journal of Narrative Technique, and has recently taken over the twentieth century American literature chapter of The Year's Work in English Studies. His book, The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon, is forthcoming from Macmillan.

JOHN L. SIMONS is Associate Professor of English at The Colorado College. He is the author of "Third Story Man: Biblical Irony in Pynchon's 'Entropy,'" in Studies in Short Fiction, as well as articles on John Berryman, W. C. Williams, Nathanael West, Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch, and Philip K. Dick.

RANDALL STEVENSON is a lecturer in English Literature at Edinburgh University. He is the author of the volume in the York Notes series on David Copperfield and, with C. E. Nicholson, of the volumes on The Sound and the Fury and The Crying of Lot 49.

STEVEN WEISENBURGER is Associate Professor of English at the University of Kentucky. He is the author of articles on Gaddis, W. C. Williams, West, Hawkes, and Flannery O'Connor, as well as Pynchon. His book-length manuscript, Under the Rainbow, is currently circulating, while he is at work on another book, Satire and the American Novel, 1930-1980.

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