PYNCHON NOTES

Editors

John M. Krafft
Miami University — Hamilton
1601 Peck Boulevard
Hamilton, Ohio 45011

Khachig Tölöyan
Wesleyan University
Middletown, CT 06457-6061

Bernard Duyfhuizen
English Department
University of Wisconsin — Eau Claire
Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

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Khachig Töp López and Clay Leighton's Index to all the names, other capitalized nouns, and acronyms in Gravity's Rainbow is also available.

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EDITORIAL

We would like to extend a formal welcome to Bernard Duyfhuizen, who has joined us as a third editor of Pynchon Notes. The qualities and talents which long made him a valued contributor to Pynchon Notes now make him an invaluable colleague. Readers will recall in particular his fine essay "Starry-Eyed Semiotics: Learning to Read Slothrop's Map and Gravity's Rainbow" (Pynchon Notes 6), and his judicious guest-editorship of the special issue Deconstructing Gravity's Rainbow (Pynchon Notes 14). Since joining us during the late stages of preparation of issue 20-21, Duffy has also revealed a gift for management. He has brought a novel order and clarity to Pynchon Notes' business affairs, a tone his handling makes seem a little less grandiose. We are fortunate to have such an insightful critic, skillful editor, and good friend with us.

Please note that JMK has recently moved to the Hamilton campus of Miami University. His new address is listed on page 1.
GRAVITY'S RAINBOW AND THE CULTURE OF CHILDHOOD

Strother Purdy

But this light must change us to children.

—"The Aryn's Song"

In skillfully distorting the closing days of the Second World War to make them adumbrate our own closing days, Pynchon chose to include civilian victims in his representation, and thereby set himself a problem that bears a certain resemblance to one discussed in the summer of 1941 by SS-Sturmbannführer Eichmann, representative of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, and SS-Sturmbannführer Höss, Kommandant von Auschwitz, when they met to set in motion history's greatest mass extermination: What to do about the children? They worried that killing them, like killing the women, would be a load (Belastung) too heavy for even the SS men to support, "rock hard" as they were in their determination to rise to the necessity of carrying through this cruelly severe mission of Massen-Vernichtung. Such psychological impressions (psychische Eindrücke) were, Höss felt, ineradicable (unauslösliche). The solution they hit upon was to minimize visibility and proximity, and thereby the psychological impression, by having the victims introduced into a closed room by other victims, and having an SS man drop poison gas in through an opening in the roof. The SS man was then in the elevated and impersonal position of a bombardier. For the moment anyway, his victims were as invisible as those in a city from 10,000 feet, and their destruction as abstractly part of the war effort.

The mantle of invisibility can be cast as well by the novelist-historian as he calls his readers to experience the work of SS man or bombardier. He can simply leave the more pitiable victims out, escaping in that way the danger of sentimentality or other literary Belastung. Höss left out many things in his Auschwitz narrative, but not the children. Given his literary inexperience and his presumable eagerness to impress the reader with his humanity, writing as he was from a condemned cell, this is understandable. But sure enough, the effect is maudlin as he describes, for instance, how things went wrong on one occasion and he had personally to deal with two children who refused to stop their play and enter the room with the others. Worse still, he could not build and maintain enough ovens to keep up with the incoming torrent of victims. While he complained to the Reichsführer SS, Himmler was inspiredly taking over Peenemünde, the birthplace of the ICBM. Here would be, given time, the ultimate solution to the problem of mass extermination at a psychological distance. Even at 10,000 feet, bombardiers could be subject to psychological strain; Pynchon's Angel of Lübeck serves as a dramatic demonstration. Nevertheless, there was progress: as
executioners could be refined into bombardiers, bombardiers could be refined into rocketmen, and much more protective space added. The killing could be carried on a continent away. V-2's don't need pilots, and are not built to carry passengers--until Gravity's Rainbow (SR). If the children were to be "put in" the book/oven, there was little literary precedent to draw on: Pynchon was pioneering not only in creating something as unclassifiable as a "rocket novel."4

From the historical victims themselves there is testimony, some of it evocative. This is from a London mother about the Blitz:

"You'd hear the bomb drop so many hundred yards that way... you'd think, My God, the next one's going to be a direct hit. But you'd continue to read: 'And the ugly sister said'--and you'd say, 'Don't fidget, dear.' And you'd think, My God, I can't stand it."5

Demonstrated here are two elements an American novelist, a child himself during the war, would assign thirty years later to such experience: the fairy tale used as a kind of charm that both protects and denies, and the peculiar horror of physical annihilation arriving as if gratuitously and from nowhere. Better than any bomb for that, of course, is the rocket--the 3000 mph V-2 arriving before its sound, carrying a ton of high explosives. It comes from outside the earth's atmosphere--it has been in outer space, and carries in its design the promise of space travel for mankind. A pretty combination: as Jean Michel put it in his moving book about the Dora camp, the range is "de l'enfer aux etoiles" (from hell to the stars).6

Pynchon's first step was to turn the lens of fantasy onto history. His American hero, Lt. Slothrop, is obsessed with the idea of a rocket with his name on it, while the V-2 strikes follow him throughout London, falling where he has last lain with a woman. His counterpart on the German side, the teenage soldier Gottfried, is employed in an opposing fashion, equally fantastic-sexual: he is dressed as a rocket-bride and launched in a V-2 to realize his officer-lover's concept of Liebestod. Superficially trifling, a mockery of history, these events are linked through childhood to lie at the center of an encyclopedic narrative aspiring to encompass the world. This is childishness of a different kind, sometimes displayed by gods:

"That bad Krishna went and ate mud!"
"Is that true, Krishna?"
"It's a lie, Mother. Look at my mouth."
"Open it."
And when the little boy opened his mouth his mother saw the whole world inside of it.'
The magic of immanence is put differently in CR, involving the child more with the dead than with gods. Its most common effect is thought transference:

there's that smell again, a smell from before his conscious memory begins, a soft and chemical smell [...]. Once something was done to him, in a room, while he lay helpless. [...] A smell, a forbidden room, at the bottom edge of his memory. He can't see it, can't make it out. Doesn't want to. It is allied with the Worst Thing.

So gropes Slothrop's conscious mind toward the secret of his earliest childhood, the experiment performed on him, about which he has never been told. He will discover that smell is Impolox:

The soft smell of Impolox, wrapping him absolutely, is a smell he knows. It doesn't frighten him. It was in the room when he fell asleep so long ago, so deep in sweet paralyzed childhood... (754)

This is not Slothrop, but Gottfried—or Slothrop's mind impinging upon Gottfried's, as if in culmination of the hopeless search Slothrop has undertaken for the rocket in which Gottfried was sent to his death wrapped in Impolox, the plastic film to whose molecular structure Slothrop's limbic system has been attuned. Twin victims of imaginings of sex and power, they are two Hänsels shoved into the oven of incandescent technology, each unaware of the fate of the other. "Do children meet again?" asks Roger Mexico's song. "They took us at the gates of green return, / Too lost by then to stop, and ask them why" (627). As Pointsman, master technician of the mind, seeks out child subjects for his experiments, characters lost in the zone unconsciously ape his actions: Pöklär searches for his daughter, Ilse; Slothrop hunts for the secret of his childhood, which involves him with Gottfried, his somehow double, and with Bianca, his child bride. Victimization is corrosive of personal identity; Thanatz muses:

He lost Gottfried, he lost Bianca, and he is only beginning, this late into it, to see that they are the same loss, to the same winner. [...] Doesn't know which child he lost first [...] even if they aren't two names, different names, for the same child. (671)

As it dawns upon Slothrop that his search is a trap, part of a larger scheme in which he is a(n expendable) pawn, he attempts to disappear. Offers of assistance come from the child world. Katje, who plays Gretel, suggests she and Slothrop are united under the sign of the rocket's flight, "as if it were the Rainbow, and they its children" (208). In parallel fashion, the doomed Bianca tells him, "I'm a child, I know how to hide. I can hide you too!" (470). Slothrop's most successful disguise in
his flight is a pig suit, part of a children's festival. Sleeping in it, under trees made Christmassy by fallen aluminum chaff, he seems "a gaudy present waiting for morning and a child to claim him" (575).

Equally innocent is the following image:

    For a moment, ten thousand stiffs humped under
    the snow in the Ardennes take on the sunny Disneyfied
    look of numbered babies under white wool blankets,
    waiting to be sent to blessed parents in places like
    Neunton Upper Falls. It only lasts a moment. (70)

Such moments of kinship between the dead and the children are not only metaphorical: the dead appear in dreams, speak through mediums, and hover above the action, as if in conjunction with the dramatic signs in the sky, starting with the great Angel rising above Liebeck as the city is bombed into ashes.

Here Pynchon found the work of a poet that could serve him, a poet remarkable for taking a transparent view of the child and concurrently of the dead: Rilke. Indeed, GR is uncannily like what would come of an effort to write a novel of the Duino Elegies, of saying, "I am going to take the concepts of the Angels, of the City of Pain, of the necessity of Death seen in unity with Life, and translate them from poetic metaphor into dramatic action." Such a novel would need to incorporate the statistically disfavored occurrence and to dramatically present powerful illuminations of the world as child's world. Slothrop's journey in his pig suit, for example, could stem from the following abstract representation:

    Yet, when alone, we entertained ourselves / with
    everlastingness: there we would stand, / within the
    gap left between world and toy. . . ."

Such a gap or privileged space (Zwischenraum), from which one (here the child) can see out of normal space, out of this world into another (here the everlasting), is in GR an "interface," meeting point or border zone, that can suddenly, and dangerously, offer passage.

One of these is the Trip to the Moon, throughout history both an adult dream and a childish fantasy, made real in 1959. Thereby the moon has been both world, pale companion to Earth, and toy, brilliant bauble in the bedtime sky, a magic kingdom to fly off to—and neither: a world with no life, a toy no child could hold, thus Zwischenraum. Two of the doomed children of GR, Ilse and Gottfried, show the way. Ilse sees the V-2 at Peenemünde and asks her father, "May I fly in it someday? I'd fit inside, wouldn't I?" (410). Gottfried does fit inside. He whispers his "father," Blicero, to sleep at night "with stories of us one day living on the Moon" (723). Ilse does likewise for her father:
Ilse whispered to him bedtime stories about the moon she would live on, till he had transferred silently to a world that wasn't this one after all: a map without any national borders, insecure and exhilarating, in which flight was as natural as breathing. (410)

So Pökler is brought through an interface, conquers (or sees the rainbow of) Gravity, feels himself "rising, [...] yes, firmly in flight" (410), and represents a glimpse of what Rilke put as "all things want to float":

All things want to float. And we go about like weights,
lay our self upon everything, delighted with gravity;
O what we're learning we are for things,
while they succeed at eternal childhood."

He won't disabuse the child of her view of the moon as a place to live, Pökler decides; he will preserve her innocence. Pökler himself dreams that Zußlkinden, the children's play city on the Baltic, "was also Nordhausen, a city of elves producing toy moon-rockets" (431), while at the real Nordhausen Slothrop is rescued from pursuing murderous Americans by an "oversize elf" (399), one Professor Glimpf, who speeds him to safety down tunnels populated by mischievous creatures doing handstands, swinging on ropes, and staring with green and red glowing eyes. The V-2, great engine of destruction, forerunner of the ICBM, ends by being infected with the same innocence, even being compared to Baby Jesus. Preamphunde shows on the map "like a Wilhelm Busch cartoon face, some old fool for mischievous boys to play tricks on [...] even sneaking in to set off a rocket in the middle of the night" (507). And indeed, a "Max" and a "Moritz" are among those manning the climactic launch of the novel's secret V-2. Pökler's wife, Leni, who engages in the Communist struggle for power in pre-Nazi Germany and scorns her husband for his apolitical passivity, leaves him, reasoning "Franz has his toy rockets to the moon" (134).

The effect of much of the elfish fun is a disturbance of narrative consistency, a doubling of adult and child in a single point of view, whether Slothrop's or the author's, that we expect to be dependably adult. It is a disturbance that carries with it a demonstration of how we are double beings, blind to the child half, that which is "put away" for us by St. Paul (1 Cor. 13:11). Most children's literature, written with one eye on the adult reader, has such a demonstration in mind, but does not use it to upset adult perspective: like the special voice used by adults when seeking to entertain children, it is meant to enable the adult to revisit, or indulge in nostalgia over, childhood. When the doubling is seen from a child's point of view, which must be single, the element of mystery or confusion is tinged with terror. How can you tell eating from being eaten? Many fairy tales evoke the terror (the wolf eats Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother), and then dispel it (the hunter
cuts open the wolf's belly and rescues grandmother), thereby
helping the child achieve control of the terms of existence.

When the terms of existence become uncontrollable for the
adult, the adult finds himself in the place of the child. When
Blicerco, the tortured and torturing German officer at the center
of the symbolic rocketry of GR, forces his two young captives,
Gottfried and Kat'ja, into a sadomasochistic pantomime of Hënsel
and Gretel, all three tacitly agree that the fairy tale "shall
be their preserving routine, their shelter, against what outside
none of them can bear--the War, the absolute rule of chance,
their own pitiable contingency" (95). Blicerco, a disillusioned
adult, plays the witch. Gottfried-Hënsel, young enough to think
of the rockets as "pet animals," "knows, like everyone, that
captive children are always freed in the moment of maximum
danger" (103). Likewise innocent Slothrop, at the outset at
least, "is almost sure that whatever They want, it won't mean
risking his life, or even too much of his comfort" (207).

Childhood fantasy versus adult reality, the standard
dichotomy of adult culture, is used in GR, but only in
conjunction with variations on adult fantasy. This is
illustrated by a counter-passage, the performance of Hënsel and
Gretel as a Christmas pantomime in a London theater. Here
Hënsel will be rescued, and, by the same necessity of the
performance of a set text, the witch will go into the oven, as
the audience watches. The physical terror of that is strong:
to be put into the oven, to be small enough to fit in there,
and to have the door shut behind you--who has not had that
nightmare! It recurs in the outer text of the novel; the reader
must know of the ovens at Auschwitz and Treblinka--and Dora.
In the very moment Gretel is to give the shove that seals the
witch's fate, a V-2 lands just down the street, introducing a
new term into the drama. In the "gathering silence" (174) that
follows the sound of the explosion, a few babies begin to cry,
and Gretel steps to the footlights to sing a song. Its purpose
is to banish the murderous adult reality of invisible sudden
death from the sky with some innocent childish fantasy--which is
how it starts out at least:

Oh, the greengrocer's wishing on a rainbow today,
And the dustman is tying his tie . . .
And it all goes along to the same jolly song,
With a peppermint face in the sky! (175)

This doesn't last. The words become less and less reassuring,
almost as if some other message is breaking through the surface
of the text:

We can fly to the moon, we'll be higher than noon,
In our polythene home in the sky . . .

Pretty polythene home in the sky,
Pretty platinum pins in your hand--
Oh your mother's a big fat machine gun,  
And your father's a dreary young man. . . . (175)

This is the Trip to the Moon, but with the suggestion of a  
plastic vehicle or capsule that rings oddly in the represented  
context. It leaps from the stage to the outer context of the  
ovel, to the plastic that conditioned Slothrop and encloses  
Gottfried in his rocket, making for him both "womb" (750) and  
"shroud" (751). A mother--your mother!--turned murderous weapon  
sharpens the dislocation--how will that stop babies crying--  
and the song ends with a further intensification of disquiet.  
Everyone is asked to join in the singing, and to sing  
reflexively:

And those voices you hear, Boy and Girl of the Year,  
Are of children who are learning to die. . . . (175)

Gretel can't be singing this; it is an intrusive voice,  
hardy authorial, but mockingly omniscient. The dichotomy has  
become that of this life, on the one hand, and death, or a  
Rilkean other half of life reached through death, on the other  
hand, whence this voice speaks. Speaks or sings, it makes  
little difference, for the voice is also not there at all, since  
"those voices [we] hear" must be our own. As readers we  
normally avoid accepting second person reference from fiction,  
so we tend to treat this one the way we treat the "you" of "Let  
us go then, you and I" of "Prufrock" (an invisible inner  
auditor), or that of "And thence to France shall we convey you  
safe" of Henry V (the Globe audience). Who, me? Not on your  
life (if I so choose). When speaker and spoken to are not  
clearly identified, there is always the threat of a "you" or a  
"we" getting out of the textual representation and inescapably  
including me. Pynchon repeatedly presses this threat. When  
he tells us Blicero "is the father you will never quite manage  
to kill," for "we are condemned in our weakness to impersonate  
men of power our own infant children must hate" (747), the  
normal intertextual narrative plane is again broken through.

Appeals to generalized humanity, of which this could be  
called an example, are common enough in literature: the  
classical apostrophe can be so used, and they form a staple of  
the nineteenth-century novel. Not so common is Pynchon's  
practice of offsetting the addressing voice from that of the  
author, placing it in a blank representational space and then  
employing that space thematically. In the cases I have noted,  
the space coincides with the nexus of childhood and death.  
Some further examples of this coincidence: when another "you"  
intrudes upon Pointsman's dream, it bears a revelation of  
"something wrong, drastically wrong," and shifts the dream  
location into childhood--"You walk out into the evening. It's  
the street before your childhood home" (137); when Penelope  
feels the presence of her dead father in the room, it is an  
indication of how
Mothers and fathers are conditioned into deliberately dying in certain preferred ways: giving themselves cancer and heart attacks, getting into motor accidents, going off to fight in the War—leaving their children alone in the forest. [. . .] Perhaps it's even better to have this presence [. . .] than a father who still hasn't died yet, a man you love and still have to watch it happening to. [. . .] (176)

Penelope being only a child, her mind can contain some, but not all, of these words: the Hänsel and Gretel reference, and "going off to fight in the War," but hardly the conditioning and "preferred ways." The "you" is personally deadly, casting its shadow out from the child mind or childhood reminiscence.

Strongest of the "presences" are those of children dead or about to die. When Klaus Nürrisch, a rocket engineer, is trapped by the Russians at Peenemünde and feels himself close to death, his mind roves over familiar rocket guidance math—and then is interpenetrated by something quite out of his personal experience:

[. . .] somewhere a quantity $B$ would be gathering, building, as the Rocket gathered speed. So, up till assigned Brennenschluss velocity, "v" [. . .] radio signals from the ground would enter the Rocket body [. . .] the control surfaces twitch, to steer you back on course the instant you'd begin to wander off (how could you've kept from lapsing, up here, into that radiant inattention, so caught up in the wind, the sheer altitude . . . the unimaginable fires at your feet?). (517)

There is only one character in GR who finds himself at such an altitude: Gottfried. Has not Nürrisch's mind been invaded, then replaced, by that of Gottfried, who does ride in a rocket, is caught up in the fires at his feet as he rises to the top of the parabola, then rushes down to destruction? So is Slothrop's mind used as a pathway by the spirit of the dead Blanca:

She's still with you, though harder to see these days, nearly invisible as a glass of gray lemonade in a tulip room . . . still she is there, cool and acid and sweet, waiting to be swallowed down to touch your deepest cells, to work among your saddest dreams. (517)

"They aren't my dreams," you may protest, but these dreams can't be dodged. For while the linguistic surface may be unruffled and the mind of Slothrop may be within the representation brooding over his lost child-bride, the "room" in which the Blanca-glass sits is not part of Slothrop's existence. It is a simile, language-artifact, shared by text and reader. Neither
Slothrop nor we can swallow the contents of a glass so located; both he and we have dreams that can be so worked.

Child-death-reader contact is maintained through to the final scenes of GR by images of motherhood. At the Krupp Fest, a gruesome fairy tale dinner of the power elite at which Roger Mexico and Seaman Bodine, two of Slothrop's allies, are to be roasted alive and eaten, the hostess, Frau Utgarthalki, is "a blonde image of your mother dead" (712). No such "you" is at the dinner: this is your, and my, mother. When the end comes, "we" sit in a Los Angeles movie theater the instant before an incoming rocket strikes. The screen has gone blank. What image had it just shown? "It may have been a human figure, dreaming of an early evening in each great capital luminous enough to tell him he will never die, coming outside to wish on the first star" (760). A child, wishing on a star, for a childish boon? A blank screen appears in many people's dreams, and it has been suggested that it may be "a pictorial somatic memory" of the maternal breast, an emblem in turn of the Earthly Paradise, a "world where all is in harmony, and where the little child is king."

Breast is synecdoche for mother; therefore, I propose, it is the face of the mother, one's own mother, that fills the screen next:

And in the darkening and awful expanse of screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see... it is now a closeup of the face, a face we all know-- (760)

And finally, for the last time, the child holds open the door to death to this "we," for the wish-object "was not a star, it was falling, a bright angel of death" (760), a rocket.

Before revisiting that conclusion, I want to turn back to the children's town where Slothrop met Pöklé, Zwölfkinder (Twelve Children). It is introduced thus:

In a corporate State, a place must be made for innocence, and its many uses. [... 7]he culture of childhood has proven invaluable. Games, fairy-tales, legends from history, all the paraphernalia of make-believe can be adapted and even embodied in a physical place, such as at Zwölfkinder. [... 7] If you were an adult, you couldn't get inside the city limits without a child escort. There was a child mayor, a child city council of twelve. Children picked up the papers, fruit peelings and bottles you left in the street, children gave you guided tours through the Tierpark [... 7] child police reprimanded you if you were caught alone, without your child accompanying. Whoever carried on the real business of the town--it could not have been children--they were well hidden. (419)
"They" are, in ascending order, the local, Gau, and national functionaries of Nazi Germany; the international business interests controlling world populations and resources, at which level "Nazi," "Allied," "Soviet," and so forth are no longer distinguishing terms; the unlocated voices of the text; Rilke's angels. Possible models for a children's town are many: Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens, an amusement park with child soldiers, child courtiers, and a scaled down carriage drawn by ponies, in which a child king and queen make a daily progress through their realm; Madurodam at The Hague (as a historical V-2 firing site, The Hague figures in [35]), a Lilliput town built to 1/25 scale to delight children; parks and fairs around the world giving some part of their space to the fantasy of a world scaled down to and inhabited only by elves or children. There are more ancient and less carefree models too: Krishna's Vrindaban, where the child is king; and the Warsaw Children's Republic, a Jewish orphanage founded in 1911 by Janusz Korczak. Korczak was a doctor, psychologist, and writer. His novel King Matt the First, about "a child-king who organized a children's crusade to reform the world,"[19] was widely read. In the lives of Warsaw slum children he felt he heard "the weeping of the centuries,"[20] and he determined to do something to give them, and every child he could reach, a sense of individual worth as a human being. The Children's Republic, with its newspaper, parliament, and court all run by the children themselves, did just that. In 1940, when the Germans forced the Jews of Warsaw into the Ghetto, the Republic went too. There "it seemed an oasis of sanity in a world gone mad."[21] It lasted two years. Toward the end Korczak had the children perform a Tagore play, which he said would help them to accept the Angel of Death. On the day of the deportation to Treblinka of some 4000 children, those in his care included, he led his little band out to the freight cars in marching order, the oldest boy carrying a large green flag like that carried by King Matt on his crusade. Korczak himself may have been offered a chance to escape; it is said that he replied, "You do not leave a sick child in the night and you do not leave children at a time like this. . . . Is it thinkable that I should leave the children alone to suffocate in a gas chamber? How could I live after that?"[22]

Korczak also published, in the line of advice to parents, a piece called "How to Love a Child," which contains some remarkable sentiments:

You say: "My baby." It is not. The child is a common property, he belongs to the mother and father, the grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Some distant "I" that was dormant in an array of forefathers, the voice of a disintegrating, long forgotten coffin suddenly begins to speak through your child. . . . Sometimes a sensitive child fancies that he is a founding in his parents' home. It may be so: his begetter died a century ago. . . . I call for a Magna
Carta of children's rights. I have found three basic ones, though there may be more:
1. The right of the child to die.23

This was written during the First World War, years before anyone dreamt of a Treblinka—at about the same time Rilke was working on his Elegies. But isn't it better to separate the child, the promise of new life, as far from death and the dead as possible? What is convention for? That thought does not seem to have bothered those Jews who included Korczak among the Lamed-aww, "the 36 Just Men, whose pure souls . . . make possible the world's salvation."24 "How to Love a Child" also makes Korczak more than just a victim of history, however courageous; it shows him to have been a seer, like Rilke, who perceived childhood as an interface between parallel worlds of the living and the dead.

Pynchon's Zwiolfkinder embodies that same perception. Behind its child-government and innocent fantasy looms the shadow of the state with its war and its own miniature replicas, the death camps. Even the first year Pöklter takes Ilse there, she comes to him from a camp of the Oachau type, set up for the "re-education" of Communists and other enemies of the state like her mother. By the time of their last visit, in 1944, Ilse may be dead and the child who holds Pöklter's hand a stand-in foisted on him. She's growing; he sees her only once a year; he can't tell. He may be taking the shade of a dead child to an illusionary city of the soon-to-be-dead. As they walk along, they hear voices: "From behind the decaying mythical statues, sentenced children shouted to each other" (430). Of one of these omniscient voice asks, as Ilse watches:

Who was that, going by just then—who was the slender boy who flickered across her path, so blond, so white he was nearly invisible in the hot haze that had come to settle over Zwiolfkinder? Did she see him, and did she know him for her own second shadow? (429)

Her linked shadow partner is Gottfried, his name here absent, his identity uncertain. Like her, he is there and not there; dead and living interpenetrate under the gaze and in the body of a child. The Ilse-child comes this year from Dora, the Infamous K-Z Lager that supplied the workforce for the Nordhausen V-2 complex. Pöklter now works at Nordhausen, and "[f]or months, while her father across the wire or walls did his dutiful hackwork, she had been prisoner only a few meters away from him, beaten, perhaps violated" (428). The interface has been at his elbow: his rocket, their ovens. He has kept innocence for himself, and seen it decompose into death.

Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus are dedicated to "the name and protection of a dead girl whose incompleteness and innocence holds open the door of the grave, so that she, gone from us, belongs to those powers who keep half of life fresh and open towards the other wound-open half."25 In a 1923 letter, Rilke put much the
same idea as the child's role in "keeping life open toward death," reminding his correspondent that there is no full living without death; as John Mood aptly summarized: "Still more difficult is to see that life always goes toward death and that dying is an intimate and lively part of living."26 There are two common ways of protecting oneself against such an idea, both distasteful to it. First, and traditionally, there is the piety-enhancing view that whom the gods love die young, or that God takes his little angels back. Second, we can emphasize the transcendence in the moving across the boundary, the making invisible, Rilke describes, as if it were sublimation.27 Either course makes it seem at least in bad taste to bring together Korczak, Rilke, and Pynchon. Are we to imagine that Korczak told his children, who ranged in age from two to seventeen, that he was taking them to the Angel of Death? What he did tell them must remain a matter of speculation: could he, who knew so much beyond ordinary apprehension, whose revolutionary approach emphasized never lying to a child, have sunk to a lie? Some believe he told them they were going at last to their summer camp in the country.28 Is that any better than telling them they were going for a shower bath, as did the SS-Aufseherin Irma Grese, nicknamed "The Angel"?

Suddenly a five year old girl threw a big red ball. The others ran after it, threw it into the air, and played... in the warm September sun... Irma Grese then clapped her hands like a kindergarten teacher: "That's enough, put the ball down. We must hurry now, time to go take a bath."

The children obeyed and ran down the steps into the crematorium. Twenty minutes later, the ventilators howled into action: the job was done. In front of the crematorium lay the little trousers and embroidered dresses—along with the red ball.29

Rilke didn't live to hear of that ball, so it must have been one of his terrible angels who gave us these materials to put together. One of the Sonnets to Orpheus, written in memory of Egon von Rilke, who died in childhood, describes children at play, and ends with these lines:

What was real in the All?
Nothing. Only the balls. Their glorious curves.
Not even the children... But sometimes one would step,
alas, ephemeral, under the falling ball.30

A toy is a metonymy, a part of the child's world and identity, which can also encapsulate what we mean by sentimentality (the little shoes, or Tiny Tim's crutch, in the corner) and all that of childhood we would put aside. Pynchon, our Rilke-novelist, allows no putting aside. Those curves are glorious (herrlich),
and they include the curves of space of the toy rockets that will take us to the moon, or kill us all. Technological man is mad, a child, acting out a childish dream; so Leni, wife and mother, tells Pökle:

"They're using you to kill people," Leni told him[...]. "That's their only job, and you're helping them."

"We'll all use it, someday, to leave the earth. To transcend."

She laughed. "Transcend," from Pökle? (400)

Erik Erikson's Childhood and Society gives one answer to this argument: "If man permits his ethics to depend on the machineries he can set in motion, forgetting to integrate childhood and society, he may find himself helplessly harnessed to the designs of total destruction along with those of total production." But Pökle has more of the child in him than Leni does. The child won't come into integration without bringing death along; my child is my death. Nor will he be used as a counter in a dialectic; he is too inextricably woven into the seamless web of correspondence that is life. The world is living and dead intermingled, with the child standing on the boundary, moulding and conditioning the doings of adults in his play. So sets itself on that boundary and finds an adult-language representation for that play. No paraphrase, not a poetic equivalent, but a suitable epigraph exists in the last lines of the 9th Duino Elegy:

Look, I am living. On what? Neither childhood nor future are growing less... Supernumerous existence wells up in my heart.

A strange place to be, and it's where this extraordinary novel puts us. Its hero gone, it comes to no real end, except the fantasized end of a Los Angeles movie theater visited by the Angel of Death. That very event, with its chronologically and physically impossible link to what comes just before, the firing of the rocket bearing Gottfried, leaves the reader suspended in a Zwischenraum, a between-space bounded by time, where "neither childhood nor future are growing less." Such erasure of the adult-child boundary looks grotesque, but it leads to supernumerous existence (überzähliges Dasein). That is a very unusual child world, almost without parallel in fiction. It might be called an amusement park, where children rule, or seem to rule, and can be taken and killed; where heavy tasks of understanding are sat, and can be laughed off; where the gates and doors open onto the vistas of the heaven and hell of the irrationalist philosophers. For his bringing the life of modern technology into the novel as never before, Pynchon has gotten his critical due; for his doing something more difficult, indefinable, and unsettling with child life in the novel, we have yet to praise him.

--Bridgewater, CT
Notes


2 Höss 132. Of sadistic practices on the ramp regarding children, or of his own sexual opportunities with their mothers (cf. William Styron, Sophie's Choice [New York: Random House, 1979]), Höss has nothing to say.

3 In the Second World War, some bomber crews who never saw angels would apply their own defensive magic: they would start out, then pause for a minute. That meant many of the innocent they were going to kill would escape, having been given a minute to progress to another place, out from under the collapsing roof or wall, or into a shelter.


9 Rilke's influence is treated in Fowler and in Schaub above, and in Joseph W. Slade, Thomas Pynchon


13 Max und Moritz established Busch's fame and provided the models for our Katzenjammer Kids.

14 This is like the child's address, "Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home! Your house is on fire and your children are all gone!" It is formalized, equivalent to textual identity, and applies generically as well as dramatically: if you're a ladybug, you're it. Lack of identity in the voice constitutes a dérèglement of the type discussed by Todorov in his Les genres du discours (Paris: Seuil, 1978); see the chapter "La lecture comme construction" and the discussion of "you" in Dostoevsky's Notes d'un souterrain.

15 Most discourse in the novel is third person omniscient alternating with free indirect speech or erlebte Rede, perhaps better distinguished as "narrated monologue" mixed with "psycho-narration"; see Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978). In the terms employed by Gerald Prince's notable 1973 Poétique article, trans. as "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 7-25, Pynchon undermines the narratee "relay" between author and reader, so that
"the partial reading of the text" obtainable "by interpreting all the signals of the narration as a function of the narratee" (12) is put in jeopardy.


17 Literary evidence for such a nexus is slight; in the traditional novel repression has been prevalent. Fairy tales are more forthcoming: Leslie Fiedler, "Child Abuse and the Literature of Childhood," Children's Literature 8 (1977): 151-53, has interesting comments; Jung 179-79 is illuminating on psychological background.


20 Lifton 97.

21 Lifton 101.


23 Korczak 87, 128.

24 Lifton 94.

25 "... unter den Namen und Schutz eines verstorbenen Mädchens gestellt erscheint, deren Unvollendung und Unschuld die Grabtöre offen hält, so dass sie, hingegangen, zu jenen Mächten gehört, die die Hälfte des Lebens frisch erhalten und offen nach der anderen wunderbaren Hälfte zu."


27 "das Leben gegen den Tod hin offen zu halten."

27 Pynchon uses the neutral word "change" (DR 97) to translate Rilke's "Wandlung" in the critically important "enraptured with flame" 12th sonnet of Sonette an Orpheus, Zweiter Teil, as if to remove any such comfort.

28 Lifton 102.

29 "Da war ein fünfjähriges Mädchen plötzlich einen grossen roten Ball...." Inge Deutschkron...


32 So Freud, with an acuteness akin to that shown by Rilke and Pynchon, was led by a child playing at throwing toys to see repetition compulsion (Wiederholungszwang) and, from there, beyond (Jenseits), through the interface to the death-wish (Jenseits des Lustprinzips (Beyond the Pleasure Principle), 1927).

PYNCHON'S ANGELS AND SUPERNATURAL SYSTEMS
IN GRAVITY'S RAINBOW

Robert L. McLaughlin

One of the ways Gravity's Rainbow refuses to cooperate in its own interpretation is by refusing to let the reader be confident about what he or she can "know" is "true" in the novel. That is, the reader is repeatedly confused about which events are supposed to be actually occurring in the world of the novel and which are not. The novel combines carefully researched facts about the rocket program, the V-2 blitz of London, and postwar Germany with Pynchon's own fictional creations. In addition, the narrator swings wildly from being grittily realistic and intensely serious to being outrageously fantastic and sarcastically parodic. Pynchon often makes it impossible for us to judge the significance of those parts of the novel that fall between these extremes. Yet the amount of seriousness we grant to these parts can affect our interpretation of the work as a whole. Among the novel's ambiguities are the mysterious, giant, supernatural beings who appear from time to time to observe the action. These beings, especially the Angel of Lübeck, have usually been identified as Rilkean Angels. However, a study of the way these beings function in the novel and of other uses of "angel" imagery suggests instead that they are the ultimate manifestation of Them, the novel's ubiquitous controllers. This interpretation implies that the supernatural Other side is not a holistically unified realm free of the divisions and distinctions made and enforced by earthly controllers, as some of the characters claim, but rather the originary system of control that structures the entire life/death system.

These angels (for simplicity's sake I will refer to these beings collectively as "angels," even though only one is specifically termed an angel) appear infrequently in Gravity's Rainbow, but their appearance marks key moments. For example, an angel is seen by a bomber pilot during the British attack on the city of Lübeck, in retaliation for which Hitler began the V-2 strikes against London: "saying the RAF to make a terror raid against civilian Lübeck was the unmistakable long look that said, "hurry up and fuck me, that brought the rockets hard and screaming, the A4s, which were to've been fired anyway, a bit sooner instead."" The pilot sees a gigantic angel observing the destruction:

Basher St. Baise's angel, miles beyond designating, rising over Lübeck that Palm Sunday with the poison-green domes underneath its feet, an obsessive crossflow of red tiles rushing up and down a thousand peaked roofs as the bombers banked and dived, the Baltic already lost in a pall of incendiary smoke
behind, here was the Angel: ice crystals swept
hissing away from the back edges of wings perilously
deep, opening as they were moved into new white
abyss...

[For the few moments the visitation lasted, even
static vanished from the earphones. Some may have
heard a high singing, like wind among masts, shrouds,
bedspring or dish antennas of winter fleets down in
the dockyards... but only Bashir and his wingman
saw it, droning across in front of the fiery leagues
of face, the eyes, which went towering for miles,
shifting to follow their flight, the irises red as
embers fairing through yellow to white, as they
jettisoned all their bombs in no particular pattern.
(151)

Another angel presides as the atomic bomb drops on Hiroshima:
"At the instant it happened, the pale Virgin was rising in the
east, head, shoulders, breasts, 17° 36' down to her maidenhead
at the horizon. A few doomed Japanese knew of her as some
Western deity. She loomed in the eastern sky gazing down at the
city about to be sacrificial. The sun was in Leo. The fireburst
came roaring and sovereign" (694). These two events, the
bombing of Lübeck and the bombing of Hiroshima, are seminal for
the novel and for our age: the first provides an excuse some
months later for initiating the rocket blitz; the second is the
initial use of the atomic bomb. The rocket and the atomic bomb
will be united in the ICBM that threatens the reader and the
entire world at the end of the novel.

Because of Gravity's Rainbow's frequent allusions and
references to the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, most critics
have identified these angels with the Angels of the Duino
Elegies. Rilke's Angels are perfect manifestations of Human
consciousness. As Rilke commented:

The Angel of the Elegies is the creature in whom that
transformation of the visible into the invisible we
are performing already appears complete... The
Angel of the Elegies is the being who vouches for the
recognition of a higher degree of reality in the
invisible. Therefore "terrible" to us, because we,
its lovers and transformers, still depend on the
visible.

Leishman and Spender elaborate:

The Angel may be described as the hypostatisation
of the idea of a perfect consciousness--of a being in
who the limitations and contradictions of present
human nature have been transcended, a being in whom
thought and action, insight and achievement, will and
capability, the actual and the ideal, are one. He is
both an inspiration and a rebuke, a source of
conflation and also a source of terror; for, while he
guarantees the validity of Man's highest aspirations
and gives what Rilke would call a "direction" to his
heart, he is at the same time a perpetual reminder of
man's immeasurable remoteness from his goal. 4

Critics have made a case for interpreting Pynchon's angels in
this way. Joseph W. Slade writes, "From the many invocations of
the Duino Elegies, it is apparent that Pynchon thinks of angels
in much the same way as Rainer Maria Rilke." 5 Similarly, David
Cowart argues, "A looming presence in several scenes, 'The
Angel' is meant to remind us of the secular Angels in Rilke that
dispasionately monitor the doings of humans. 6 Mark Richard
Siegel 7 and John Q. Stark 8 also identify Pynchon's beings with
Rilke's Angels, and Thomas H. Schaub, although he does not
specifically mention the mysterious beings, links the novel's
angel imagery to Rilke's Angel consciousness, "a meta-vision
capable of binding the opposites tearing [Pynchon's] characters
apart. 9

The Rilkean interpretation, however, is not the only
possible explanation for the angels. They, like so much else in
Gravity's Rainbow, are shrouded in ambiguity. Pynchon refuses
either intra- or extratextually to endorse any univocal
interpretation of most areas of his work. In attempting to
develop a coherent interpretation of the various characters,
scenes, and symbols in the novel, the reader must contend with
the possibility that somehow the text undercuts such
interpretations or that, by misperceiving some sequence's
context or by misunderstanding the author's sense of humor or
commitment to some idea, he or she has misread the novel.
Almost everything in Gravity's Rainbow can be read in at least
two ways; the text and the absent author refuse to supply the
limiting information needed to remove the ambiguity and
establish one reading. Ulm and Holt make just this point in
regard to the angels in their discussion of Quinean
indeterminacy in Gravity's Rainbow: "So, instead of certainty,
we are left quite uncertain as to whether the references to
watchers at the world's edge and such are best taken as a
Pynchonian joke or whether they are as 'real' as Seaman Bodine.
We can say only that either hypothesis would be reasonable, were
it not for the existence of the other. 10 Ulm and Holt suggest
as one possibility that the angels are a "Them behind Them,"
and this possibility can be developed through a reading of the
angels' appearances and the novel's angel imagery. If we set
aside (though perhaps we cannot and need not wholly reject) the
Rilkean interpretation, the angels, rather than perfect
manifestations of human consciousness and reconciliations of
human contradictions, become the novel's ultimate manifestation
of Them, the controllers, manipulators, and rulers of the human
and natural resources of the earth. 

The angels seem to take their place with the novel's
earthly controllers when they appear on an occasion somewhat
less momentous than the Lübeck and Hiroshima bombings. At the Casino Hermann Goering, when Slothrop manages to get Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck drunk, the two end up on the beach, where Dodson-Truck confesses his part in the conspiracy against Slothrop. However, they are not alone:

But out at the horizon, out near the burnished edge of the world, who are these visitors standing... these robed figures—perhaps, at this distance, hundreds of miles tall—their faces, serene, unattached, like the Buddha's, bending over the sea, impassive, indeed, as the Angel that stood over Lübeck during the Palm Sunday raid, come that day neither to destroy nor to protect, but to bear witness to a game of seduction. [...]

What have the watchmen of the world's edge come tonight to look for? deepening on now, monumental beings, stoical, on toward slag, toward ash the color the night will stabilize at, tonight... what is there grandiose enough to witness? (214-15)

As Dodson-Truck complains about the people who give him his orders and define his function, his description of Them seems to apply equally well to the observing beings: "They're so cruel. I don't think they even know, really... They aren't even sadists... There's just no passion at all." (216). Dodson-Truck equates Their lack of passion with cruelty. In fact They have misjudged Dodson-Truck in just this respect: They thought he shared Their ability to "observe without passion" (216), but he is humanly unable to observe Slothrop and Katje without becoming emotionally involved. "I care!" he blubbers to Slothrop (215). For his part, Slothrop, even confronting this tangible member of the conspiracy against him, "can feel, in his own throat, sympathetic flashes of pain for the effort it is clearly costing the man" (215). In contrast, Their dispassion is uncaring, inhumane, cruel. And the angels display this same lack of passion. They are described as "serene, unattached... impassive... stoical," and as "visitors" and witnesses. These descriptions suggest that the beings have no emotional involvement with the earthly events they watch. And as Dodson-Truck says of the earthly Them, such emotional distancing can be the same as cruelty. To be sure, dispassion is sometimes a virtue; but dispassionately watching others suffer, or dispassionately watching the bombing of civilians, or dispassionately watching the detonation of an atomic bomb is cruel. Such dispassion places the angels with Them. At the same time, the angels' presence, their bearing witness to the exchange between Slothrop and Dodson-Truck, suggests some kind of interest or involvement. Do they, like the earthly Them, have some stake in Slothrop and the Rocket? The angels here are analogous to the "dark-suited civilians" in the "coal-black Packard" (40) who sit, parked, observing the destruction that results from a V-2 explosion. These unnamed men are the first hint that there are conspirators on the Allied side who have a
stake in the Rocket. The angels too may have some controlling function in the novel's structure of power.

This identification of the angels with Them is further supported by much of the novel's angel imagery. For example, Jessica Swaneke complains about the "angel's-eye view" of the rocket blitz in Roger Mexico's Poison equation: "Why is your equation only for angels, Roger? Why can't we do something down here? Couldn't there be an equation for us too, something to help us find a safer place?" (54). Jessica associates the angels' perspective with Roger's emotional distancing by abstractions of numbers, variables, equations, and graphs from the actual events of the explosions and the actual lives lost. Much later in the novel, when Sibel Bumme's Der Platz becomes overrun with visitors, no one will make a decision about whom to let in and whom to keep out.

Decisions like that are for some angel stationed very high, watching us at our many perversities, crawling across black satin, gagging on whip-handles, licking the blood from a lover's vein-hit, all of it, every lost giggle or sigh, being carried on under a sentence of death whose deep beauty the angel has never been close to. (746)

This passage suggests not only the angels' position of detached observation but also their power of control. Making decisions about who should stay and who should leave is division and definition, two hallmarks of control throughout the novel. In addition, the passage points out the separation of the angels from basic human experience; they have achieved the earthly Them's goal of transcending the preterite's sentence of death. The novel's angel imagery also implies the supernatural beings' active control over human life and destiny. The narrator refers to Walter Rathenau's death as when "the Angel swooped in" (184), and Blobadjian's guide says that angels are among the machineries for repaying Tchitcherine's blasphemy (355). Finally, Sir Marcus Scarnmony, the most highly-placed representative of the earthly Elect the novel presents directly, "demands to be called Angelique" (613). Thus much of the novel's angel imagery seems to support the characterization of the angels as dispassionate and cruel observers and as powerful manipulators of earthly life, a supernatural extension of the terrestrial Them.

Such an interpretation of these giant beings has important implications for our reading of the supernatural in Gravity's Rainbow. Recently dead spirits who communicate back to the living. From the Other side report that the division between life and death is factitious and false; what the living see as two separate states is instead one integrated life/death system. At first glance this seems to confirm the traditional Herero view of a holistically unified system which has been perverted by Western rationalization and analysis. Indeed, some of the
spirits' remarks (e.g., Roland Feldspath's [30]) endorse the view expressed in the Advent Evensong oration and elsewhere in the novel that the systems and controls of the earthly Elect are factitious and arbitrary, manufactured and limiting restraints on a pre-existing "real." However, the presence of the angels (which Peter Sachse's spirit confirms [131]) complicates this theory. These beings seem to be part of a hierarchy in the life/death system, members of the upper region of a system-enveloping bureaucracy, the lower reaches of which are manifested in the governmental, military, and industrial power structures of our world. This hierarchy of control is basic to the entire life/death system.

The recently dead spirits, although they have not yet reached the stage where they can see and understand the entire system, can begin to perceive such a structure, extending from the system-wide hierarchy, to the controlling procedures of the earthly Elect, to the make-up and function of molecules. Walter Rathenau sees the structure evidenced in the process by which the molecules of once living things are rearranged under the pressure of gravity to form coal. Coal is used to make steel, and even the waste material from this process, the coal-tar, has industrial uses. Rathenau hints at a process and a structure by which humankind's manipulation of the natural for profit and power is an extension of a similar, superhuman manipulation. This process is a part of the controlling structure which Rathenau sees increasingly clearly—and describes here for members of the corporate Nazi elite: "These signs are real. They are also symptoms of a process. The process follows the same form, the same structure. To apprehend it you will follow the signs." (187). Soon after his crossing over, Blobadjian also begins to recognize levels of controlling structures:

How alphabetic is the nature of molecules. One grows aware of it down here: one finds Committees on molecular structure which are very similar to those back at the NTA plenary session. [. . . .]

Blobadjian comes to see that the New Turkic Alphabet is only one version of a process really much older—and less unaware of itself—than he has ever had cause to dream. (355)

This comparison of the supernatural controlling structure to the Soviet Union's imperialistic imposition of control over the Central Asian people by creating a written language for them shows that the impulse to manipulate and control is not unique to this world but pervades the life/death system. As if to confirm this, Roland Feldspath, a spirit who at first felt free in the holistic unity of the Other side, eventually becomes "one of the invisible Interdictors of the stratosphere [. . . .], bureaucratized hopelessly on that side as ever on this." (298).

Although they explain it only vaguely and by analogy, the spirits report a hierarchical controlling structure that governs
on both sides of the illusory line dividing life from death. Most of the living are unaware of this comprehensive system because they are caught up in their own factitious and partial controlling structures. But these latter are only a limited expression of the total (if, perhaps, no less factitious) structure and its processes.

There are many levels of control in the life/death system. Gravity's Rainbow focuses primarily on relatively low-level controllers such as Pointsman, who attempts to control others by treating them as experimental subjects; von Gill, who controls others both as a movie director and as a black marketeer; and Thanatz, who controls others in the power game of sexual dominance. Aware that there are other people and institutions more powerful than they, these lower-level controllers consciously or unconsciously emulate those others in order to attain their own degree of power. They may not be aware, however, at least until quite late, that they themselves are controlled and manipulated by the levels above them. Pointsman, for example, manipulates Slothrop, but he is subject in his turn to the demands of the Operation. The upper reaches of the governmental-military-industrial power complexes exercise control those at lower levels often do not suspect or cannot imagine. The War, divisions between countries, conflicts between political ideologies and conventional religions are contrivances, their meaning for the preterite created by a public-relations appeal to nationality, morality, religion, etc. that masks their meaning for the Elect—the manipulation of events for increased profits and power.13 Similarly, we can conclude by analogy that the upper reaches of the earthly Elect are unaware that their self-serving operations and schemes are in fact part of a process that originates beyond them. What they do for the sake of their own power also serves the interests and power of the bureaucracy of the Other side. This bureaucracy, like the earthly ones that imitate it (or that it imitates), is made up of committees and power levels; the angels may be supervisors or foremen representing levels higher than themselves. The far-reaching purposes and aims, if any, of this bureaucracy are unclear, but we can infer that it, like earthly bureaucracies, exists to maintain and increase its own power.14

To sum up, once we set aside the Rilkean reading of Gravity's Rainbow's angels, we can interpret them as supernatural controllers, part of the hierarchy of the life/death system that the recently dead spirits report. This interpretation is not the only reading of the angels that the text will support, but it is a possible reading with important implications for the interpretation of the supernatural and the nature of control in the novel. Thus, the Other side is not a holistically unified alternative to or escape from the bureaucracies, divisions, rationalizations, and controls of this world, but instead a bureaucracy with its own divisions, rationalizations, and controls. In addition, the hierarchy of
the Other side seems to be the archetypal structure of control that is manifested in the controlling systems of this world.

--Illinois State University

Notes


2 Also, the bombing of Lübeck was the first of the Allies’ experiments in "area bombing," in which large civilian targets were destroyed in hopes of lowering enemy morale. This strategy reached a climax in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. See Richard Rhodes, The Making of the Atomic Bomb (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986) 470-71.

3 Quoted in J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, trans., Duino Elegies, by Rainer Maria Rilke (New York: Norton, 1939) 87. This is the edition of the Elegies Pynchon acknowledges on his copyright page.

4 Leishman and Spender 87-88.


11 In the context of the Rilkean interpretation, Slade and Stark also suggest the possibility that the angels somehow control human life, because this concern is introduced and eventually worked out in the Duino Elegies. Charles Hohmann (Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow: A Study of Its Conceptual Structure and of Rilke's Influence (New York: Peter Lang, 1986) 317-24) discusses the influence of Rilke’s Angels on Pynchon’s in detail; he says that both are "inaccessible" and "impassive to the human lot," but
that "In Gravity's Rainbow, the Angel is always an angel of Death" (322-23). Thomas Moore (The Style of Connectedness: Gravity's Rainbow and Thomas Pynchon [Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1987] 70-72) also comes to the angels through Rilke; he argues that they can be seen as controllers only in the paranoid projections of certain characters. Douglas Fowler (A Reader's Guide to Gravity's Rainbow [Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1980] 125-26, 138-39), in his Manichean reading of the supernatural in Pynchon, sees the angels as a Them, but a Them against Us, an invasion force from the Other side rather than an extension of the controlling structures and forces already present in this world.

12 Note that Rilke says of his Angels, "It would be inconsistent with the passionateness of the Angels to be spectators; they surpass us in action precisely as much as God surpasses them" (quoted in Leishman and Spender 88). This is one specific point where Pynchon's beings are clearly distinct from Rilke's.

13 This is not to suggest that all the preterite are unaware of the power of the controllers or of their own positions as victims. In fact, many of the changes in characters like Slothrop and Roger Mexico come from their growing sense of themselves as victims and of their own participation in the Elect's systems of control.

14 An interesting question this reading of the life/death system in Gravity's Rainbow raises is whether the bureaucracy of the Other side, like the earthly bureaucracies, perverts and rationalizes some pre-existing, unified "real." In other words, is this supernatural hierarchy of control as illusory as are the terrestrial levels of control in the novel? This question goes beyond the scope of this essay; however, I think the examples of Lyle Bland and Slothrop indicate that the control of the life/death system is factitious and that there are possibilities for passing beyond or perhaps submerging into the life/death system entirely.
The "disparition" of Thomas Pynchon and the quasi-absence of peripheral data about him make it rather difficult to trace the sources of the Pynchonian luxuriance. It is therefore hazardous to claim to have identified any source, direct or indirect. Nevertheless, it is likely that Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* was known to Pynchon when he wrote *Gravity's Rainbow*. Not only is it one of Nietzsche's most famous and most accessible books, but it is also the one dealing directly with what is clearly a concern for Pynchon's opera. My hypothesis is supported by remarkable similarities between the two books, not the least of which is the reductionism both have had to suffer.

Going counter to Pynchon's own implicit warnings against all attempts at totalization or synthesis, critics of GR have too often reduced the book's tremendous richness to oversimplified patterns. Most commonly, it has been (mis-)read according to a scheme of binary oppositions that imposes a dichotomous, or even Manichean, reading frame upon a book which rejects precisely such modes of narrow rationality. BI's critical history is also marked by a misleading impulse to simplify which, in spite of its possible pedagogical relevance, cannot help betraying the complexity of Nietzsche's first work. The book is fairly small in bulk, but its scope is immense. Though primarily the work of a philologist, it combines aesthetic with metaphysical and ethical concerns.

Writing at once as a poet and as a philosopher, Nietzsche based his conception of the genesis and development of Greek philosophy and thought on a study of ancient Attic tragedy. His mythic tale is one in which two principal forces, at once antagonistic and complementary, dominate by turns: Dionysian musical rapture and the Apollonian dream of plastic perfection alternate in a pendulum-like movement. The first prehistoric phase of life, as Nietzsche claimed the Greeks saw it, was the age of the Titans. The cornerstone and condition of their domination was the terror they inspired, which humans exorcised in the ecstasy induced by the orgiastic Dionysian celebrations of wine, music and dance. Fundamentally, Nietzsche's Dionysos must be understood as the divinity of universal fear and suffering in the face of cosmic terror. The second age saw Apollo overthrow the Titans and replace their rule of organic violence with a dream of formal and individual harmony. Whereas the Dionysian longing to exercise fear found its main outlet in the music associated with dance and drink in the Dionysian festivals, the Apollonian genius of secure harmony and balance found expression in the plastic arts of architecture and
sculpture, which provided a "veil of Maya" to conceal the frightful reality. Nietzsche's thesis in BT is that pre-Socratic Greek culture achieved a perfect synthesis of these two poles in its tragedies, with Apollo embodied in the text and Dionysos in the chorus. Nietzsche explained "The birth of Tragedy out of the spirit of music" as a victory of the Apollonian illusion of form and rationality over the blind and incomprehensible terrors inspired by an unblinking survey of nature and history. Ancient Greek tragedy is "an artistic conquest of the horrible," in which life is affirmed as beautiful in spite of everything. This definition illustrates Nietzsche's conception of art as the supreme metaphysical activity.

Socrates is the third major figure of BT. For Nietzsche he embodied the corruption of the Apollonian spirit, which no longer merged with Dionysian frenzy in a perfect poise. Instead, Socrates' ethical optimism led to a substitution of the illusion of Apollonian harmony for the reality of Dionysian terror, which Socrates denied altogether. Socrates' absolute faith in rationality and his ignorance of Dionysian mysticism, according to Nietzsche, made him a depraved figure who contributed to the decadence of the Greek tragic spirit. In this view, those posterity called the pre-Socratic philosophers were not precursors of Socrates at all. Nietzsche discerned a clear historical and philosophical break between the essentially tragic philosophy of the pre-Socratic thinkers and the "over-Apollonian" doctrine of Socrates.

Neither denouncing this evolution (without which Greek civilization and culture might have perished altogether) nor advocating a return to the pre-Apollonian age of Dionysian terror, Nietzsche called for a modern and German version of the synthesis achieved in the ancient tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. He saw in himself this kind of "artistic Socrates" and in Richard Wagner the composer most likely to father, in his operas, the fully integrated art form in which Apollonian and Dionysian energies would merge again.

BT is, of course, a problematic text, rich and suggestive to several generations of readers, but not a work one could accuse of an excess of clarity. Nietzsche established oppositions between Apollo and Dionysos and between the Attic (tragic) and Socratic spirits; at the same time, he seems not to have trusted the duality fully. As a result, he tried to circumvent the difficulty by turning his antitheses into syntheses. In later works, Dionysos is no longer the "twin" of Apollo, but a synthesis of both divinities, i.e., the embodiment by himself of the tragic spirit, whereas Apollo more and more appears as a totally negative (anti-life) force. Understandably, therefore, BT is often read in the shadow of later works and consequently misconstrued, reduced to a Manichean opposition between Dionysian life energies and Apollonian artificiality. For my argument, it is essential to
bear in mind that in Nietzsche's early thought concerning Greek culture, the two gods are as inseparable and as "valuable" as the two sides of a coin.

To a certain extent, this problematic ambiguity repeats itself in GR. Pynchon also appears uneasy with the oppositions he constructs but does not fully control. The reductionism his work is often subjected to is not always and entirely the critics' fault. One essential pole in the various binarisms that have been discerned in Pynchon's work is cause-and-effect visions, to which Nietzsche too devoted considerable thought.

In BT, the Socratic spirit is defined in terms of uncompromising rationalism (i.e., a rejection of the mysterious, the mystic) and blind faith in the virtues of cause-and-effect. Socrates is the ominous figure announcing the decadence and eventual death of the organic spirit of ancient tragedy, and its replacement by the Apollonian spirit of rational control:

Let us now imagine Socrates' great Cyclops' eye—that eye which never glowed with the artist's divine frenzy—turned upon tragedy. Bearing in mind that he was unable to look with any pleasure into the Dionysiac abysses, what could Socrates see in that tragic art which to Plato seemed noble and meritorious? Something quite abstruse and irrational, full of causes without effects and effects seemingly without causes, the whole texture so checkered that it must be repugnant to a sober disposition, while it might act as dangerous tinder to a sensitive and impressionable mind. (BT 86; my emphasis)

Earlier in BT, this concern occurs in an interesting evocation of Schopenhauer, who "described for us the tremendous awe which seizes man when he suddenly begins to doubt the cognitive modes of experience, in other words, when in a given instance the law of causation seems to suspend itself" (BT 22).

GR privileges such "events without cause" promised by "The first star" (GR 253). Although they may (and often do in GR) generate a really gothic (or Dionysian) terror comparable to Schopenhauer's "tremendous awe," these inexplicable, irrational events testify that there is much more to our universe than just the rational phenomena science and reason can account for.

Ned Pointsman, the Pavlovian head of PISCES is one of GR's cause-and-effect men. Like Socrates he firmly believes in the unlimited potential of science. He represents Nietzsche's "archetype of the theoretical optimist, who, strong in the belief that nature can be fathomed, considers knowledge to be the true panacea" (BT 94). His scientific creed of total belief in the complete understandability of nature's most intricate mysteries is stated forthrightly: "The ideal, the end we all struggle toward in science, is the true mechanical explanation.
[... ] No effect without cause, and a clear train of linkages" (GR 89; my emphasis). This blind faith in knowledge is the very essence of the Apollonian dream. Instead of helping to face the Dionysian reality of the inexplicable—which Nietzsche thought was terrifying and Pynchon does not always regard as such—"Socratic" optimism covers it with a secure veil of illusion.

Pointsman's simplistic attitude also leads him to generalize his own views, as when he takes for granted that all scientists necessarily endorse his ideal of ultimate cause-and-effect explanation. In fact, Pointsman is simply incapable of considering any alternative to his causal conception of the world. When Roger Mexico, the proof in himself that Pointsman is wrong—that there is an alternative scientific perspective—dares question the validity of his boss's method, Pointsman categorically rejects the possibility of any other approach:

"It's not my forte, of course," Mexico honestly wishing not to offend the man, but really, "but there's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go. That for science to carry on at all, it must look for a less narrow, a less ... sterile set of assumptions. The next breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle."

"No—not 'strike off.' Regress. [...] There are no 'other angles.'" (GR 89)

The opposition between these two characters epitomizes the evolution of modern science from a Newtonian humanistic faith in absolutes to a probabilistic approach that takes contingency into account. But they do not differ from a methodological point of view only; they oppose each other as human beings. While Pointsman is exclusively concerned with the mechanics of rocket falls, thus discarding feelings and emotions altogether, Mexico worries about the victims. The causes and effects he cares about exclude those that lead to war, maiming, destruction. Of all the "positive" characters in GR, Mexico may come closest to Nietzsche's "artistic Socrates." Though he can hardly be defined as an "artistic scientist," he does combine a scientific mind with a great emotional power, which latter Pointsman lacks. Pointsman seeks and finds his own "Veil of Maya" in Pavlov's theories, which comfort him, assuaging the pain caused by his reductive world-view. For him, as for his master, reality is limited to the poles of a binary system: "Pointsman can only possess the zero and the one. He cannot [...] survive anywhere in between" (GR 55). This space "in between" opposite poles—or the "Ellipse of Uncertainty" (GR 427)—is precisely what primarily interests Pynchon. But Pointsman, walking again in his master's footsteps, defines it as the domain of mental illness: 
Pavlov thought that all the diseases of the mind could be explained, eventually, by the ultraparadoxical phase, the pathologically inert points on the cortex, the confusion of ideas of the opposite. He died at the very threshold of putting these things on an experimental basis. But I live. I have the funding, and the time, and the will. (GR 90)

Here Pointsman's typically Socratic optimism and determination (amounting to ruthlessness) are once again made clear.

Far from equating the "confusion of ideas of the opposite" with madness, Nietzsche advocated a surpassing of traditional dichotomies, most notably good and evil, in order to regain a fresh awareness of the Dionysian reality concealed behind Apollonian illusions. This surpassing should enable us to regain a real power to cope with the "unknown," which, frightening though it may be, constitutes our ultimate reality. For Nietzsche, Apollonian culture was never a way of dealing with Titanic terror, but only an illusive escape. He considered Attic Tragedies, by contrast, not only better mirrors of that reality (i.e., more truthful and therefore more "realistic"), but also artistic ways of actually coping with it. He hoped to find the same virtues in Wagner's operas, though he was soon disappointed. Of course, this is a very exacting conception of art. The main difficulty for us is that in our conception of drama, opera and art in general there is usually a clear-cut separation between actors and audience. Whereas we have become mere spectators, participating emotionally at best, the participants in the Bacchanalia were, in Nietzsche's view, so deeply involved, physically and spiritually, that they literally lost themselves in collective rapture, which enabled them to survive the terrifying confrontation with reality.

Several voices in GR echo this Nietzschean aspiration to resolve dichotomies and oppositions. One of them declares, "Forget frontiers now. Forget subdivisions. There aren't any" (GR 294). This important motif recurs with even greater clarity in the character of the Herero Enzian, who conceives of God in terms of universal union of opposites: "God is creator and destroyer, sun and darkness, all sets of opposites brought together, including black and white, male and female" (GR 100). But in spite of such straightforward statements, and in spite of the plausible characterization of Roger Mexico, Pynchon cannot eschew the problematic evoked above in relation to BT. On the one hand, he rejects the dichotomous world-view embodied by Pointsman, but on the other, he cannot help counterpointing the two scientists, going as far as describing Mexico as "the Antipoitsman" (GR 55). Like Nietzsche in BT, Pynchon seems not to be satisfied with the oppositions he establishes, which creates a sometimes puzzling ambiguity. He is ironically aware that the exigencies of representation force him to create the binary pairs; but he is also uneasily aware, from a philosophical point of view, that the abandonment of opposites
in favor of a continuum does not resolve the philosophical and narrative issues.

Pynchon is commonly thought to be a prophet of doom, or, at best, a black humorist, because what I define as Apollonian forces seem to dominate in his fiction. They are undeniably overwhelming in GR, but the novel provides a strong, complementary Dionysian life-affirmation as well. Throughout the book the tropics symbolize life in its Dionysian sense: primitive, pagan, colored, warm, luxuriant—like Pirate's celebrated banana breakfasts, counter-entropic enclaves of life within the winter desolation of cold, northern, wartime London. The fragrance of the tropical fruit recreates "a southern island well across a tropic or two from chill Corydon Throop's mediaeval fantasies" (GR 10). They take over "not so much through any brute pungency or volume as by the high intricacy to the weaving of [their] molecules, sharing the conjurer's secret by which—though it is not often Death is told so clearly to fuck off—the living genetic chains prove even labyrinthine enough to preserve some human face down ten or twenty generations... so the same assertion—through—structure allows this war morning's banana fragrance to meander, repossess, prevail" (GR 10).

The vision of Dionysian life in GR is twofold: it always appears to be dominated, crushed by formidable powers, but it also possesses an almost inextinguishable strength due to its luxuriant complexity. "The never-sleeping percolation of life [is] too finely labyrinthine" (GR 881). No matter how strong, efficient and destructive the technological metropolis may be, "some vestige of humanity, of Earth, has to remain. No matter what has been done to it, no matter what it's been used for" (GR 883). Hope in GR lies in this complexity behind the apparent frailty, and faith in the possibility of slowing down the entropic process instead of accelerating it. An interesting instance of such a motive occurs in the episode of the church choir presenting a Jamaican corporal singing among white companions (GR 129-29). Although he seems lost among the "many [white] faces," and although he is being used for "the intricate needs of the Anglo-American Empire," he constitutes an enclave of decreasing entropy in the overall system.

In spite of the frequent Manichean oppositions in GR, Pynchon, like Nietzsche, insists upon the primeval unity of the creation and of humanity. The rhetorical question "Are we not all one?" (GR 454) is reminiscent of Nietzsche's "gospel of universal harmony [in which] each individual becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him—as though the veil of Maya had been torn apart and there remained only shreds floating before the vision of mystical Oneness" (BT 23). Dionysos is the master figure of this fundamentally mystic, vital unity, this "luxuriant, triumphant existence, which deifies the good and the bad indifferently" (BT 29). In Pynchon's vision, everything—"the good and the bad"—is likely
to be "deified." Again, however, not all oppositions disappear; both GR and BI are problematic. In BI, we have the Dionysian vision of terror, with Dionysian intoxication as a response to it, followed by an age of Apollonian rationalism. Finally, tragedy emerges as the balancing act between the two, for which Nietzsche hoped Wagnerian opera would become a modern counterpart. GR can be read as such a balancing act, though in a different way. One possible formulation of the problem can be found in Pynchon's own terms: paranoia and anti-paranoia, between which GR tries to establish a poise.10

Though correspondences do exist between Nietzsche's study of tragedy and Pynchon's novel, looking for systematic and absolute parallelism would be beside the point. GR is much more complex than a series of variations on a triadic pattern (as is BI). Whereas various pairs of antitheses can easily be discerned (Pointsman vs. Mexico, for example), syntheses are not "embodied" in one single character. Instead, the various elements of what might constitute the Synthesis are scattered among several characters (Mexico, Enzian, Gwennidwy, to name only a representative few) and activities or attitudes (singing, drinking, kindness, etc.). Ultimately, GR suggests, if not a solution, then a possibly viable response to the situation it depicts. That response is permanent revolution, a subversive resistance to the Apollonian "culture of death." Not through violence, mind you, but in all sorts of apparently futile ways, among which singing, to drown out the noise of airplanes, and drinking are not the least remarkable. But not just any kind of drinking; life-affirming drinking (quite Dionysian this), the kind Thomas Gwennidwy, Pointsman's colleague, practises:

His singing voice is incredible, in his spare time he strolls out past the wire-mesh fighter runways looking for bigger planes—for he loves to practice the bass part of "Diadem" as the Flying Fortresses take off at full power, and even so you can hear him, bone-vibrating and pure above the bombers [. . .]. Gwennidwy likes to drink a lot [. . .], whatever's to hand really. His is the hale alcoholic style celebrated in national legend and song. [. . .] None of your sedentary drinkers though. Pointsman has never seen Gwennidwy off of his feet or standing still—he fusses endlessly pitch-and-roll avast you scum down the long rows of sick or dying faces, and even Pointsman has noted rough love in the minor gestures. (GR 189-70)

Gwennidwy's portrait offers an interesting pendant to Pointsman's. Though both are men of science and co-owners of "The Book," they are fundamentally different. The former believes in original oneness, which the latter, to put it mildly, questions:
"What if we're all Jews, you see? all scattered like seeds? still flying outward from the primal fist so long ago. "Man, I believe that."
"Of course you do, Gwennhdwy." "Aren't we then? What about you?"
"I don't know. I don't feel Jewish today."
"I meant flying outward?" (GR 170)

The difference is fundamental between a Pointsman, "with all his mean heart," and a Gwennhdwy, "radiating like a sun," forever smiling when Pointsman "has been too shy, or proud, ever to've smiled at Gwennhdwy without some kind of speech to explain and cancel out the smile" (GR 171).

Other "subversive" powers in the novel are drugs, the black market (which counters the official white market They impose and rule), and sex. Sex has the power to transform even Pointsman, though only for a very brief moment, when Maudie Chilkis leads him to a closet during a Christmas party to give him "this sudden tropics in the held breath of War and English December, this moment of perfect peace" (GR 189), a moment allowed to the loveless Pointsman, who usually "masturbate[s] himself to sleep [. . .]. A joyless constant, an institution in his life" (GR 141).

The urge to recover the primitive unity with nature through drink, dance and song is central to BT: "we are in a position to apprehend the essence of Dionysiac rapture, whose closest analogy is furnished by physical intoxication. Dionysiac stirrings arise . . . through the influence of those narcotic potions of which all primitive races speak in their hymns" (BT 22). Nietzsche advocated a return of instinct over dry rationalism, of passion over indifference, as Pynchon does. In GR, one major danger threatening humanity is the absence of passion (also figured as "the routinization of charisma" [GR 325]), which is Their most characteristic trait: "They're so cruel. I don't think they even know, really. . . . They aren't even sadists. . . . There's just no passion at all!" (GR 216). GR's antidote to the poison of Indifference is warmth, "mindless" human touches, and, above all, love, togetherness par excellence. GR pleads for "decent impulses to conspire, however marginally, whenever possible, against power and indifference" (GR 209), in spite of all, because, as "with Rossini, the whole point is that lovers always get together, isolation is overcome, and like it or not that is the one great centrifugal movement of the World. Through the machineries of greed, pettiness, and the abuse of power, love occurs!" (GR 440). Even in the moments of climactic terror, "There is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you" (GR 760).

Pain and terror are two essential traits Nietzsche associated with the figure of Dionysos, "the suffering Dionysos of the mysteries. He of whom the wonderful myth relates that as a child he was dismembered by Titans" (BT 66). Nietzsche
explicitly defined dismemberment as the truly Dionysiac form of suffering and described this "truly Dionysiac suffering" as "a separation into air, water, earth, and fire" (BT 66). GR's principal sufferer is, of course, Tyrone Slothrop, whose individual identity is progressively shattered until he mysteriously vanishes, having perhaps undergone a gradual metamorphosis into "air, water, earth, and fire." If he cannot exactly be defined as the Dionysian figure of the novel, he is identified with another mythological victim of Dionysian suffering more closely associated with dismemberment: Orpheus, the lyre player (Slothrop's lyre is a harmonica) who, during a Dionysian orgy, was literally torn apart.

But pain has a twofold status in both BT and GR. For Nietzsche, pain can also generate (sensual) pleasure: "a delight born of pain" (BT 35). Similarly, various characters in GR affirm—or reassure themselves about—their humanity through masochistic suffering: "[Katje's] masochism [...] is reassurance for her. That she can still be hurt, that she is human and can cry at pain" (GR 662). Near the end of the book, in a short scene entitled (coincidentally?) "Strung into the Apollonian Dream...." we read: "Your skin aches. At last: something real" (GR 754). Masochistic pain as lever of revelation recurs in the portraits of Brigadier Pudding and of the aging actress Greta Erdmann, who begs Slothrop to be cruel to her: "Could you be? Please. Find something to whip me with. Just a little. Just for the warmth!" (GR 396).

Fear arises from the tearing of the Apollonian veil of secure illusion behind which incomprehensible mysteries stretch. Those standing on the verge of that frightening otherworld resemble the "pneumatic toy frog [that] jumps up onto a lily pad trembling; beneath the surface lies a terror" (GR 152). Like the ancient Greeks who, "In order to live at all . . . had to construct these delites" (BT 30), modern man has to create an Apollonian illusion of order, of security, of deliberate patterning: "We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more and more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that openness: it is terror to us [...] that anarchic oneness!" (GR 254).

Nevertheless, GR advocates a break with the Apollonian spell, a tearing of the veil of illusion hiding the "world just before men. Too violently pitched alive in constant flow ever to be seen by man directly" (GR 720). The voice in Pynchon's text urges us to plunge into and join the Dionysian Whole, its face "too beautiful to bear" (GR 720). Yet we must remain attentive and not, like Gottfried, mistake a fall into the abyss of death for the quest for Dionysian life. In spite of the novel's sometimes puzzling ambiguity, there must be no doubt that GR's hope is "for the life to win out" (GR 24). The novel constantly reminds us of the danger of seeing Eros perverted into Thanatos. "Now it is time to wake, into the breath of what
was always real. Come, wake" (GR 754), Gottfried thinks, or the narrator says. Read in the light of the whole novel, this passage cannot be misunderstood as a victory, either for Weissmann/Blasco or for Gottfried himself. Surrender to Death in GR is always a defeat, an acceleration of the entropic process leading to the extinction of life. But the temptation of this surrender, indeed the whole Freudian theorization of it, owes a great deal, not just to the slaughter Freud saw in the First World War (the precedent, of course, of the Second World War), but also to Nietzsche, whose words were equally familiar to Freud, to Rilke and, I surmise, to Pynchon.

---University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve

Notes


2 Opera is an important element in GR, but I have not dwelt on this subject since it has been discussed competently by, among others, David Cowart; see his Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988).

3 In BT already, Nietzsche defined art as "the metaphysical act par excellence."

4 The German title is Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik.

5 Wagner was both a poet and a musician. He set his own texts to music, which enabled him to achieve a degree of organic coherence and unity not always achieved in operas written and composed by two different persons. It is therefore no surprise that BT, written when Nietzsche and Wagner were still on good terms, should be emphatically dedicated to the German musician. The rupture between the two men occurred when Nietzsche came to see Wagner as having gradually succumbed to Socratic moralism (especially in the later operas, which are of definitely Christian inspiration), thus shattering Nietzsche's hopes of seeing recreated in modern Germany a spirit comparable to that of Attic drama.

6 Most notably in Beyond Good and Evil and in The Genealogy of Morals.
7 Gwenhidyw (see below) corresponds to this description much better.

8 Cf. the later Beyond Good and Evil.

9 Pynchon's abundant—but never random—use of capital letters is revealing here: "Go ahead, capitalize the T on technology, defy it" (GR 521).

10 I have mentioned the problematic nature of GR as far as binary oppositions are concerned. The question is a difficult one, especially if one looks for an answer in what can conveniently be called the content of the book, which is what a good part of Pynchon criticism keeps dealing with—and stumbling upon. I am convinced that a more satisfactory solution can be found in the form and language of GR, and am currently directing my research towards these matters rather than towards thematic issues (i.e., sociological, historical, or scientific issues, to mention only the main trends).

11 These two characters can be seen as antithetic, but I tend instead to consider Gwenhidyw as a synthesis of dry scientific rationalism (Pointsman) and some anti-scientific mind which does not appear as such in the book. Pynchon never rejects science out of hand, and neither does he reject technology; but he implicitly distinguishes between good and bad science, just as he explicitly distinguishes between good and bad technology, i.e., between life-promoting and life-destroying technology.
Hieroglyphs of Revelation:
Thomas Browne and Thomas Pynchon

Mark T. Irwin

The sun itself is but the dark simulacrum,
and light but the shadow of God.
-- The Garden of Cyrus

In Sir Thomas Browne, asserts F. L. Huntley, "one finds three great nourishers of the mind and heart of man: religion, poetry, and science. They met in the seventeenth century and may be coming together again in this mid-term of the twentieth" (Browne vii). In Thomas Pynchon, who began his studies at Cornell in engineering physics, we find an exploration of these same three themes, begun in his first novel, V. (1963), and continued in The Crying of Lot 49 (1966) and Gravity's Rainbow (1973). Like Browne, Pynchon is interested in the poetic expression of the "twin themes of scientific research and religious exploration" (Green 7). Paul Ricoeur (among others) has shown that the dialectic which arises out of such a dual interest is the same which characterizes the history of Western religions. The poles of this tension are found in the appearances of the sacred and the interpretation of the Word (Ricoeur 13). The "hermeneutic of proclamation" first gained ascendancy over the "phenomenology of the sacred" in Judaism, and this pattern was subsequently embraced by Christianity and Islam. Within the dialectic the revelation of the Word is concretized with "the support and renewing power of the sacred cosmos and the sacredness of vital nature" (Ricoeur 35). Four important similarities, each arising from this problematic, link the work of Browne and Pynchon.

The primary affinity between Browne and Pynchon is found at the nexus of the scientific and the religious Lebenswelt, in the ambience of accident and design, or coincidence. A second similarity, operating within the realm of coincidence, is found in the attention of each author to the correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm. This correspondence works not only within the text but in the "death of the author" as well. A third and fourth contiguity lie in the use of the hieroglyph, in its basis in mathematics and in its use as revelatory vehicle. I wish to explore this chain of ideas by reference to a single text characteristic of each author: for Browne, Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus (parts of a single whole; see Huntley, "Relationship"); and for Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49. The informing a priori of both writers is the idea that, in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, "it is possible to be led up from the sensible to the divine" (66). In his discussion of symbol Gadamer neatly delineates the interrelationship of coincidence, correspondence, and hieroglyphic I wish to explore in Browne and Pynchon.
The only reason that the word "symbol" can be raised from its original application as a document, sign or pass, to the philosophical idea of a mysterious sign, and thus become similar to a hieroglyph which can be interpreted only by an initiate, is that the symbol is not a random choice or creation of a sign, but presupposes a metaphysical connection of visible and invisible. The inseparability of visible appearance and invisible significance, this "coincidence" of two spheres, lies at the basis of all forms of religious cult. (86)

I

When scientific and religious paradigms of the world are placed in competition, it is inevitable that the ambiguity of accident and design, or coincidence, should become heightened. A single event may be seen as proceeding either from the natural course of events or from supernatural activity. When literature functions on both levels simultaneously, as is the case in Browne and Pynchon, the text may begin to function hieroglyphically. Hence Hydriotaphia (or Urn Burial) is, on one level, a discourse on burial urns; The Garden of Cyrus is, superficially, a horticultural handbook; and Lot 49 may be read as a detective story concerned with a woman's discovery of an underground communications network. But beneath the surface each text suggests that nature may be infused with the numinous.

Browne breaks up the dialectic of coincidence, choosing to deal with accident in Urn Burial and design in The Garden. The questions raised in Urn Burial are frequently unanswerable. Uncertainty, conjecture, and even a tentative agnosticism color the work. In writing of the urns Browne comments that "nothing [is] of more uncertainty" than the "time of these urns deposited, or precise antiquity of these relics" (103). From this concrete observation he speculates that "the certainty of death is attended with uncertainties, in time, manner, and places" (113). In The Garden, however, the process of knowing is certain, and even obscure particulars lead to universal truths. In fact, knowledge and the "numerical character" of reality blossoms in The Garden with such proliferation that Browne falls exhausted at the last, suggesting that his reader make further inquiries:

If any shall further query ... he shall not fall on trite or trivial disquisitions.
And these we invent and propose unto acuter enquirers, nauseating crambe verities and questions overqueried. Flat and flexible truths are beat out by every hammer, but Vulcan and his whole forge sweat to work out Achilles his armour. (198-99)

Browne's harmonious equilibrium of accident and design is replaced with disequilibrium in Lot 49. Pynchon asks the reader
to answer the riddle of coincidence for himself, and in this respect Lot 49 resembles \textit{Ur}
\textit{n Burial} more than \textit{The Garden}. Concerned with "these dead bones," \textit{Ur}
\textit{n Burial}’s subject is entropic—temporal, immediate, fading, and nameless. In Lot 49 the
bones of Second World War soldiers are exhumed from an Italian lake and sunk again in a
California resort lake. They are also used to make cigarette filters. But it is the reader
who must decide whether the bones contain significance or not: "... the bones of the GI’s at the
bottom of Lake Inverarity were there either for a reason that mattered to the world, or
for skin divers and cigarette smokers" (181-82). The problem of coincidence, writes Tony
Tanner, is "a dominant one in Pynchon, where figures like Stencil in \textit{V}, and Oedipa Maas in Lot 49 have
to try to work out whether they are really discovering clues, finding codes and seeing signs, or
whether they are projecting or hallucinating in a plotless, clueless world" (23). This
tension, operative for the reader reading the text as well as for the events inscribed within the
text, is readily displayed in a scene between Oedipa and her psychiatrist, Dr. Hilarius:

"I came," she said, "hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy."
"Cherish it!" cried Hilarius, fiercely. "What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its
little tentacle, don’t let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it
is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you... begins to cease to be." (138)

Oedipa’s "fantasy" is linked by Hilarius to being itself. If this "whatever it is" is read as the possibility of belief in a
sacral universe, then the question of correspondences should become crucial, as indeed it does for both Browne and Pynchon.

\textbf{II}

In the sacred universe the logic of meaning is a logic of
correspondences, wherein the cosmos continually signifies
something other than itself; for example, the marriage of man
and woman corresponds to the hierogamy of earth and sky, and so
forth (Ricoeur 20ff.). This correspondence is in most cases one
between the microcosm and the macrocosm, a correspondence Browne
and Pynchon heavily rely on.

In \textit{Religio Medici} Browne writes, "the world that I regard
is myself; it is the microcosm of mine own frame that I cast
mine eye on; for the other, I use it but like my globe, and turn
it round sometimes for my recreation" (79). Browne would say
that, rather than reflecting the macrocosm, he becomes it:

I was born in the eighth clima, but seem for to be
framed and constellated unto all; I am no plant that
will not prosper out of a garden; all places, all airs
make unto me one country—I am in England everywhere
and under any meridian. I have been shipwrecked, yet
am not enemy with sea or winds; I can study, play, or
sleep in a tempest. (63)

Browne's assumption of the macrocosm seems particularly relevant
to the homogeneous, media-saturated culture of the late
twentieth century. One must quickly learn "to be framed and
constellated unto all" climates to survive the exponential
growth of technology and its changing demands on culture. For
the artist such an operation may entail the "death" of the self.

"The death of the author," which received so much attention
a few years ago, means no less than "the necessary disconnection
of the author and his life from whatever texts bear his name,"
notes Tanner (11). Knowing the world--taking on the
macrocosm--is at least partially what is at stake here. In an
attempt to describe the shift of emphasis from author to reader,
Roland Barthes writes, "the reader is the face on which all the
quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of
them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its
destination . . . the birth of the reader must be at the
cost of the death of the author" (149). The author's text
becomes a macrocosm in which each reader must find his own
microcosm. Browne hands the reader a macrocosm fully
glossed--"the world that I regard is myself"--proclaiming a
complete coincidence of author with world, microcosm with
macrocosm. But Pynchon, as invisible author, offers no such
explanations of the world. His "death" means that he practices
abstention rather than identification, so that the work of
projecting a world is transferred from author to reader.

The logic of correspondence is worked out concretely for
both Browne and Pynchon in an image of "womb-generation-death.
In Urn Burial Browne uses the circle and the circular
shape of the burial urn as a hieroglyph for the womb, birth, and
spiritual rebirth into the afterlife. He builds his metaphor
within the dialectic of correspondence, so that mortal birth is
to mortal life what mortal death is to life beyond the grave,
"making our last bed like our first; not much unlike the urns of
our nativity" (108). Near the end of Urn Burial a dialogue
occurs "between two infants in the womb concerning the state of
this world" (124), suggesting that the text be seen within the
image of the womb, a microcosm within the macrocosm.

In Lot 49 Pynchon employs the image of "womb-generation-
birth-death" in the scatological names of the men who surround
Oedipa: Boyd Beaver, Stanley Koteks, and Mike Fallopian, as
well as radio station KCUF (where Oedipa's husband, Mucho,
works). Oedipa must lose all of these men in the death of her
relationships to them before she can find the mysterious life
offered in the Trystero. As she tells herself:

[They are stripping away, one by one, my men. My
shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband,
on LSD, groggs like a child further and further into the rooms . . . of the elaborate candy house of himself and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved 15-year-old; my best guide back to the Trystero has taken a Brody.
Where am I? (153)

The mysterious Trystero is the subject of The Courier's Tragedy, a play within the novel which Pynchon uses both to parody seventeenth-century drama and to reflect in miniature the thematic macrocosm of the larger text. Through the play Pynchon also underscores his question to the reader regarding coincidences: is there design in the text or merely accident? Has Oedipa stumbled on this play by accident, or was she intended to do so by the unknown Trystero? Does the play hold some secret information regarding the nature of reality? These questions raise an identical set of questions regarding the reader's relation to the text of Lot 49, and hence the reader's understanding of his environment generally: is there design at work, or not? Pynchon may tip his hand, and Browne certainly does, in their use of what Browne calls the "mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven" (190), the hieroglyph.

III

In the original sense of hieroglyphikos, "hieroglyph" may mean a "sacred carving" or "sacred writing," and thus serves as a bridge between numen and logos. For Browne the primary symbol is the quincuncx, five points arranged so that connected they form an "X" or the Greek letter chi: ☳. This hieroglyph, "the emphatical decussation, or fundamental figure" (141), is discussed throughout The Garden, first as it appeared in the ancient garden of Cyrus, and then generally in religion, science, art, and nature. However, in Urn Burial Browne begins not with the quincuncx but with the circle: "Circles and right
lines limit and close all bodies, and the mortal right-lined circle must conclude and shut up all" (128). Browne's "mortal right-lined circle" is an allusion to the Greek letter theta, θ, the first letter of thanatos, "death." Browne expands this hieroglyph until, by the end of chapter four of The Garden, it has become a double circle, one horizontal, one vertical, together forming a quincunx as well as the letter theta and the number five (see fig. 1). Thus expanded, the hieroglyph becomes one basis for the unity of Urn Burial and The Garden in the many meanings the twin circles suggest: perfection, life, death, God (see Huntley, "Relationship" 205).

All things are seen quincunically" for Browne, from bones recently turned up to the quincuncial arrangement of the Garden of Eden (181). The dynamism of this kaleidoscopic hieroglyph opens up innumerable vistas for exploration, and by concentrating on it, as Peter Green says, "Browne paradoxically releases the reader's mind into an infinite number of associative levels of awareness, without any preconceptions" (21).

There are two quincunxes in the final chapter of Lot 49, and the central point or "decussation" of each is Oedipa Maas. In the first one, Oedipa realizes that her psychiatrist, her husband, her lover, and her "best guide" to the Trystero--the four men who formerly supported her--have been taken away from her (153). This quincunx of external support is paralleled a few pages later by an internal, ontic quincunx. In an attempt to organize her world, Oedipa posits the possibility of four alternative "realities": 1) a kind of Tillichian "authentic being"; 2) a hallucination; 3) an elaborate, labyrinthine plot against her; or 4) a fantasy conjured up by mental illness. "Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives. Those symmetrical four" (171). But the vehicle for Oedipa's choices appears in another hieroglyph, one which dominates the novel.

After reading The Garden, Coleridge once remarked, "Quincunxes in everything!" (quoted in Huntley, "Relationship" 219). Had he read Lot 49, he might have said, "Muted post-horns in everything!" The muted post-horn ( ), the symbol for an underground communications system, is the chief hieroglyph of Lot 49. Like Browne's hieroglyphs, this symbol too is ultimately mathematical, and suggests order. Pynchon describes it as "a symbol ... a loop, triangle and trapezoid" (52). Like the quincunx, the Trystero's emblem creates a density of texture and allusions; it comes to signify everything from a Renaissance postal service to the muted "horn of the Apocalypse." As Edward Mendelson says, it "recurs in countless settings, in children's games, in postmarks, lapel pins, tattoos, rings, scrawled on walls, doodled in notebooks—in dozens of contexts that cannot, through any secular logic, be connected" (132). Both quincunx and muted post-horn are hierophanies, revelations of the sacred. "Although we cannot directly describe the numinous element as such," writes Ricoeur,
we can at least describe how it manifests itself" (14). In its broadest definition, the hieroglyph may thus serve to spatialize the sacred through a non-linguistic form.

Unlike Browne, Pynchon does not make elaborate use of the "mystical mathematics" of order. But he does hint that there is a connection between mathematics, order, and revelation when he writes of "revelations which now seemed to come crowding in exponentially," and when he describes one locale as "the usual hieratic geometry . . . shimmery for the sand roads, down in a helix" (81, 56). "Hieratic" and "helix" in combination "attest to an inscription of the sacred in a level of experience beneath that of language" (Ricoeur 15). "Hieratic" may refer to the ancient cursive form of Egyptian writing, which only the priests working in the temples knew, or it may signify priestly functions. A "helix" (a three-dimensional curve which obliquely crosses its right sections at a constant angle [see fig. 2]) suggests in its curve a connection with the cursive hieratic script, as well as suggesting mathematic precision, hence order and design. (Coincidentally, it is also a kind of three-dimensional theta, recalling Browne's hieroglyph.) Ricoeur writes that "innumerable figures, such as the circle, the square, the labyrinth, and the mandala, have the same spatializing power with regard to the sacred, thanks to the relations these figures establish between the center and its dimensions, horizons, intersections, etc." (15). Browne moves from doubt to certitude in his use of such figures, while Pynchon allows the reader to see them and decide for himself. For Browne the hieroglyph reinforces the proclamation of orthodox Christianity, while for Pynchon the hieroglyph functions to denote the primal sense of the sacral as overwhelming, awesome, and very likely malevolent towards humanity (see Ricoeur 14). But whether it functions neoplatonically (Browne) or gnostically (Pynchon), the hieroglyph for both authors is a potential vehicle for revelation.

IV

Early in Religio Medici Browne writes:

I am now content to understand a mystery without a rigid definition, in an easy and Platonic description.

... where I cannot satisfy my reason, I love to humour my fancy. ... Where there is an obscurity too deep for our reason, 'tis good to sit down with a description, periphrasis, or adumbraion. (10-11)

Later in The Garden he says, "The greatest mystery of religion is expressed by adumbraion," by an indistinct foreshadowing, which illumines the tension between accident and design (181). Quoting "the Greek expression concerning Christ in the Canticles" (Song of Solomon 2:9), Browne makes one of his most mystical statements regarding the role of Christian revelation:
"He looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice!—that is, partly seen and unseen, according to the visible and invisible side of his nature" (148). Design, for Browne, is something which can be seen only through faith.

The hermetic definition of God as a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere is an apt one to Browne, who pokes and prods the paradoxical patterns of coincidence, and concludes by saying that "God hath not made a creature that can comprehend him" (12). Such a definition applies equally well to Pynchon's Trystero, which, as Oedipa comes to realize, might also be found "anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entranceways," or nowhere (179). Browne revels in the paradox and then presents his conclusions for the reader's inspection, while Pynchon demands that his reader work through the problematic of coincidence for himself. Browne leads the reader from one discovery to the next, but Pynchon leaves his reader to discover for himself: "Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth" (181). Both authors are open to the possibility of revelation in the hieroglyph. Pynchon makes this apparent in the opening pages of *V.*:

Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her . . . ; so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. . . . she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant. (24)

Just behind the scrim of radios, circuit boards, and Southern Californians lurks the hint of revelation. But ultimately, for Oedipa, this possibility rests in the Trystero.

The Trystero's manifestations are always accompanied by sacral language, and, as Mendelson points out, the word "God" (which occurs some twenty times in the book) is always hovering near Oedipa's discoveries (117, 126). The religious language of the text suggests that Oedipa's quest is nothing less than "a quest for the Word, the Logos that is the immanence of divine reason in all things," as David Cowart writes (107). Oedipa's quest is likened to Job's when Pynchon says of Oedipa's "religious instant" that it was "[a]s if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken. She thought of Mucho, her husband, trying to believe in his job" (24-25). Asking for the Word, both Job and Oedipa receive the enigmatic voice out of the whirlwind.
Perhaps the fact that Oedipa's initials, "O.M.," form the word of divine quest for Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism is no coincidence. This hieroglyph (⅓%), the greatest of all the mantras or phrases of mystical potency, is uttered at the beginning and end of prayers and chants and during meditation (Noss 161, 177, 191, 194, 197). Pynchon's Oedipa is thus similar to Browne's "Oedipus," since, as Browne writes: "I perceive every man's own reason is his best Oedipus, and will, upon a reasonable truce, find a way to loose those bonds wherein the subtleties of error have enchained our more flexible and tender judgements" (7).

For Browne and Pynchon the dialectic of the sacred and the logos manifests itself hieroglyphically, secretly, in objects of the natural world. Through the logic of correspondences, the microcosm and the macrocosm in Urn Burial, The Garden, and Lot 49 have sacral as well as secular explanations. In the movement from the rational examination of the urn to the supra-rational exploration of the quincunx, Browne moves from mutability to mysticism. Pynchon, unlike Browne, leaves the reader to determine for himself whether the sacred is operative within the natural.

Like Browne, Pynchon loves to lose himself in a mystery and "pursue . . . reason to an altitude" (Browne 9; Romans 11:33). In both men's quests the mind is exhausted before the mystery, and in the "adumbration," the guarded disclosure, the reader is left to make his decision. The closing lines of Browne's work leave the reader in "Night . . . the daughter of Chaos" (190), slumbering. Being assured of order in all things, the reader is left to "conjecture" the possibility of the resurrection. In the closing lines of Pynchon's work we read that "Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49" (183) -- to await the auction of a stamp collection which may contain within its physicality the metaphysical answers she requires. Browne and (more especially) Pynchon lead the reader with an unresolved chord of expectation, a caesura marking the possibility of revelation.

--University of Virginia

Notes

1 On each writer's interest in science, see Green 27 and Mendelson 191. A bridge between Browne and Pynchon is Jorge Luis Borges, mentioned in Gravity's Rainbow. Inquisiciones, Borges's first volume of essays, includes an essay on Browne. Mendelson argues that Borges's story "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim" (in Ficciones) is the "concealed and unacknowledged source" behind Lot 49 (145-46).

2 I must reserve treatment of Pynchon's gnostic worldview for the future. Let it suffice to note here
that the nature of the sacred in Pynchon is at
antipodes from Browne's understanding.

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METAPHOR AND V: METAPHYSICS IN THE MIRROR

Elizabeth Campbell

Wipe your hands across your mouth and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

—T. S. Eliot, "Preludes"

In the afternoon we saw what was supposed to be a
rock, but it was found to be a dead whale.

—Cook's Voyages
"Extracts," Moby-Dick

Thomas Pynchon's V. is, among other things, a lament over
the separation of the physical from the metaphysical in modern
existence. To use D. H. Lawrence's terms from Studies in
Classic American Literature, V. is a parodic narrative about
those "post-mortem effects" which follow Moby-Dick, such as the
"ghoulish" quality evident in Whitman's poetry:

So that you see, the sinking of the Pequod was
only a metaphysical tragedy after all. The world goes
on just the same. The ship of the soul is sunk. But
the machine-manipulating body works just the same;
digests, chews gum, admires Botticelli and aches with
amorous love. (171)

Lawrence's description is an eerie anticipation of V. and its
ironic relation to Moby-Dick. Both novels have to do with
"metaphysical tragedy" as a sinking of the ship of soul. As
Edward Mendelson argues, V. is a "tragedy of human limitation,
and like all tragedy it points towards the larger frame in which
the tragic action occurs" (116). V., by drawing its structural
metaphors from Moby-Dick, mirrors the earlier novel as its
"larger frame"—its metaphysic, if you will. V. laments the
loss of anima, in life and in art.

The poem that Brenda Wigglesworth reads to Profane, "I am
the twentieth century," reiterates this theme of the loss of
soul, of "ghoulish" effects as promiscuous plasticity.

"... I am the virgin's-hair whip and the cunningly
detailed shackles of decadent passion. I am every
lonely railway station in every capital of Europe. I
am the Street... the tourist-lady's hairpiece, the
fairy's rubber breasts, the traveling clock which
always tells the wrong time and chimes in different
keys... I am all the appurtenances of night."

(454)
In this parody of Whitman, Brenda's free-verse assertions of identity have become a cliche, showing the result of the dangerous tendency, the contradiction, always inherent in American democratic idealism. To be "all" is to feel superior to everyone else, while paradoxically losing one's identity. To quote Lawrence again, "Think of having that under your skin. All that!" (72) Such bodily plasticity can lead, according to Lawrence, and has led, according to Pynchon, to the purely mechanical and its deification. The imitative form and the content of Brenda's poem indicate that Lawrence's worst fears have been realized, for unlike Whitman, Brenda presents herself as a series of inanimate objects. Further, she recognizes that this soulless identity is not even her own: "it's a phony college-girl poem. Things I've read for courses!" (454). Brenda's conventionality contrasts with Profane's pedestrian honesty, which necessitates, however, equally bleak assertions:

"The experience, the experience. Haven't you learned?"

Profane didn't have to think long. "No," he said, "offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddamn thing." (454)

Profane's journey has not been a soul's progress but only the getting to another "apocheir," "the point furthest from the yo-yo hand" (35), a return, via the same repetitive movement, to the state already achieved in Chapter One.

Profane, like Ishmael, begins his novelistic journey as a wanderer and one-time sailor. He arrives at a seaport, Norfolk, on Christmas Eve; Ishmael arrives in New Bedford in December, and the Pequod sails on Christmas Day. Profane's tavern, "the Sailor's Grave," carries the same ominous connotations that Ishmael's tavern has--"The Spouter-Inn--Peter Coffin." In each case the name foreshadows the novel's conclusion, but in V, a pun makes the death-in-life theme more explicit: Profane "stood in the doorway a moment watching; then realizing he had one foot in the grave anyway, dived out of the way of the fight and lay more or less doggo near the brass rail" (10). In the Grave, Pynchon combines low humor with the Divine Comedy: all the barmaids, thanks to a quirk of the owner, are called Beatrice, for according to Mrs. Buffo, "just as small children call all females mother, so sailors, in their way equally as helpless, should call all barmaids Beatrice" (12).

Mrs. Buffo's "Beatrice" is a relatively simple example of the increasingly complex functioning of metaphor in the novel and serves as an embryonic version of the novel's major symbol, V. In this case we have the analogical process through which the metaphor is created--Mrs. Buffo is named Beatrice--and the terms on which it is applied. The naming adds a kind of harmonious consistency to the atmosphere of the Sailor's Grave, even if it results in a loss of individual identity for the
barmaids and creates confusion for the reader—the Beatrices, as mentioned in the narrative, are indistinguishable.

Earlier in the chapter, we learn that Profane has applied the same process of metaphoric leveling to his world, although his motive seems to be exhaustion rather than a desire for order:

After that long of more named pavements than he'd care to count, Profane had grown a little leery of streets, especially streets like this. They had in fact all fused into a single abstracted Street, which come the full moon he would have nightmares about. (10)

Profane's "Street" is one continuous thoroughfare—in Richard Chase's terms, a "field of action," one "conceived not so much as a place as a state of mind" (19). For Profane it serves as a private yet vague symbol for the randomness of his movement, the purposelessness of his activities, the meaninglessness of life. But other characters use the street as a private symbol as well. For Fausto Maljastal, whose streets in Valletta were bombed during the Second World War, it symbolizes "The street of the 20th Century, at whose far end or turning—we hope—is some sense of home or safety"; "A street we are put at the wrong end of"; "But a street we must walk" (323-24). And for Sidney Stencil, the street represents a political faction, those alienated by rigid governmental control:

"If there is any political moral to be found in this world," Stencil once wrote in his journal, "it is that we carry on the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left: the hothouse and the street. The Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future." (468)

Fausto's and especially Stencil's metaphorical uses of "street" explain in increasingly sophisticated terms Profane's private symbol. Profane lives in what was in 1919 "the dreamscape of the future": his Street is a nightmare because he represents the "highly alienated" populace Stencil predicts will predominate "within not many more years." (468). Profane's symbolic Street is to Stencil's what Mrs. Buffo's Beatrice is to Dante's: a vestigial form of the original, a metaphor without a metaphysic.

The street is that realm of disorder outside the sanctuaries of Western "culture"—outside the "hothouse," as Sidney Stencil calls it. Thus it is metaphysically a negative space, an amorphous region defined only by the controlled environment of tradition, order, or authority it borders. For its inhabitants like Profane, it represents a level of
consciousness, an awareness of the meaningless life. Pynchon, as well as Profane and Fausto, uses the street as a spatial metaphor for the hard realities of everyday life, including the encroachment of the inanimate, and for humankind's consciousness of that reality.

Nevertheless, in the largest sense, as a novelistic trope, "street" incorporates and transcends private associations and functions. It is, like East Main in Norfolk or Strada Stretta in Valletta, an actual part representing the whole of urban civilization, the open territory, field of action, and battleground of the twentieth century, the one area which remains public, accessible to everyone. It is both a part of civilization and the periphery of social organization. In V., the street is the frontier where anything can happen, where the forces of order and power—whether armies of Imperialists, police, or the Shore Patrol—clash with indigenous populations—whether Maltese, Arabs, Hereros, winos, bums, AWOL sailors, or yo-yos.

This realm of empirical observation contrasts with the territory "under the street"—the subway, the sewer, or the bomb shelter—the territory of the unconscious, of sleep, of fantasy, or of escape from danger. In those parts of the novel involving Profane, "under the street" is the area of the fantastic, where events and reported events seem least credible. For example, Profane takes a job in the New York sewers shooting alligators although he has never used a shotgun at street level. "But a shotgun under the street, under the Street, might be all right" (43). There he ventures toward the even more fantastic by way of the stories about Father Fairing’s Parish:

The stories, by the time Profane heard them, were pretty much apocryphal and more fantasy than the record itself warranted. At no point in the twenty or so years the legend had been handed on did it occur to anyone to question the old priest’s sanity. It is this way with sewer stories. They just are. Truth or falsity don’t apply. (120)

These stories recount Fairing’s efforts during the Depression to convert sewer rats to Catholicism. They derive from the priest’s journal, which is "still preserved in an inaccessible region of the Vatican library, and in the minds of the few old-timers in the New York Sewer Department who got to see it when it was discovered" (120). Profane gets the legend by word-of-mouth, but journalistic excerpts are included in the narrative for the reader. This interpolated story performs three functions: first, it causes Profane and the reader to question the relation between "history" and "fiction," between "fact" and myth; second, the novel’s record of a record further blurs the distinction between reality and fiction within the novel; and third, the first two functions have a leveling effect, serving as a reminder that Profane himself is a fictional
creation and making the reader wonder whether there are in fact levels of reality at work in the novel. Pynchon uses this same principle to create the major symbol of the novel, V.

The V. mystery begins with the introduction of Herbert Stencil, former British Foreign Office agent. We learn that Herbert's sole purpose in life is the pursuit of "V.," a quest inspired by his father Sidney's journal entry from "Florence, April, 1899":

"There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report." (53)

Pynchon sets up the reader to pursue V. as single-mindedly as Stencil does, but never provides a definitive solution to the mystery. The problem is not a lack of clues but the superfluity of them. In the various interpolated narratives which cover events dating from Alexandria in 1898 to Malta in 1943, the weight of the evidence suggests that V. is an English woman who undergoes drastic transmogrifications, including changes in name (Victoria Wren, Vera Meroving, and Veronica Manganese), occupation, personality, national allegiance, place of residence, religious belief, sexual habits, and bodily parts. Such changes force us to consider what constitutes identity, not to mention "character." In her chronologically latest appearance, as the "Bad Priest," V. is dismembered by the children of Malta, but the parts they remove are inanimate--false teeth, a wig, a glass-eye-clock, artificial feet, and a sapphire from her navel (342-43). These items seem like displaced parts from earlier sections of the novel: the false teeth remind us of Seaman Ploy's, and the sapphire of Profane's dream of the boy with the golden screw in his navel. In fact, V.'s deterioration from "personhood" leads us to associate V. with all the other "V.'s" in the novel: Botticelli's Venus, Venezuela, Wheissu, and Vesuvius in the Florence episode; Hedwig Vogelsang in Mondaugen's story; the V-Note bar in New York; the novitiate rat Veronica in Father Fairing's journal; Profane's mechanized dream-woman, Violet; Valletta; Queen Victoria; and many more.

V. is also connected with violence, voyeurism, and venery, as both the agent and the victim these terms imply. Stencil suspects her "natural habitat to be the state of siege" (62), and by 1919 she has become an agent provocateur in Malta. As the Bad Priest, she is victimized by the violence of the children. As voyeur, V. is most obviously the agent in the Paris episode, when Mélanie l'Heuremaudit becomes her lover and "fetish." According to Stencil--or the narrator--lesbianism and fetishism are both forms of narcissism; Mélanie, V., and a mirror multiply identities and couplings (407-10) so that watching another becomes a version of watching oneself. Victoria, Vera, and Veronica are watched by a series of would-
be lovers, agents, and voyeurs, and Stencil's search for V. may be his form of narcissism: the crowd at the Rusty Spoon in New York concludes "that Stencil was seeking in her his own identity" (411). V. is "ambiguously a beast of venery," with its  double meaning--"chased like the hart, hind or hare, chased like an obsolete, or bizarre, or forbidden form of sexual delight. And clownish Stencil capering along behind her, bells ajingle, waving a wooden, toy oxcap. For no one's amusement but his own" (51-62). In the context of both meanings of venery, V. is the pursuer and the pursued, but Stencil is primarily the hunter.

Work, the chase—for it was V. he hunted—far from being a means to glorify God and one's own godliness (as the Puritans believe) was for Stencil grim, joyless; a conscious acceptance of the unpleasant for no other reason than that V. was there to track down. (55)

V. is for Stencil not just the object but the principle of the hunt, since its value remains only insofar as it is not attained ("but if he should find her, where else would there be to go but back into half-consciousness?" [55]). In this respect V. is a fetish, an object of self-love, for she—or the symbol—gives Stencil life and identity as "He Who Looks for V." (228). According to the narrator, by telling about V., Stencil "had left pieces of himself—and V.—all over the western world"; "V. by this time was a remarkably scattered concept" (399).

With her myriad identities V. suggests the condition of twentieth-century identity—elusive, plastic, diffused, defined by its appuranences and accessories, by the ease with which it can fragment, in short, by its lack of soul. Schizophrenia is its characteristic, and integrity of character a thing of the past. Thus the mannequins SHOCK and SHROUD have as much character as many other characters in the novel, their level of existence being about on a par with that of Fergus Mixolydian, whose only animation is as an extension of his television set (56). As a narrative principle, "V-ness" (as Alvin Greenberg calls it) diffuses throughout the novel, causing the reader's occasional inability to identify the narrative voice and accounting for such bizarre happenings as Monaugen's having (apparently) Fopp's dream. Just as Profane's private Street is coopted by other characters, so old Godolphin's secret Veissus—a fantastic, alien land and a kind of global "under the street"—becomes common knowledge. Godolphin tells Vera Meroving, "Our Veissus are no longer our own, or even confined to a circle of friends; they're public property" (248). In the world of the twentieth century and of the novel, the mystery of identity is that the concept is disintegrating, and "V-ness" is the negative quality which indicates that loss and comes to fill the void created by identity's fragmentation. As Tony Tanner argues, "If V. can mean everything it means nothing" (58).
V.'s identity, like Moby-Dick's whiteness, has the "all-color, no-color" significance which opens up a spectrum of possibilities, or forces interpretation to either extreme. Moby-Dick has a fully determined and fixed symbolic value for Ahab alone: the whale represents the force of evil which must be destroyed before it causes more destruction. Ahab, essentially a destructive force, searches for "destruction" because it is a projection of himself. Similarly, Stencil, a vestigial identity, maintains a semblance of identity by tracing a vestige, one which embodies their jointly representative fragmentation. As a shade of identity searching for his shadow, Stencil is like Ahab's soulless mirror image. Stencil nevertheless shares Ahab's narcissism, his search for the "ungraspable phantom of life," which is his own reflection. His obsessive self-effacement, so to speak, is ultimately the supreme egotism:

"Forcible dislocation of personality" was what he called the general technique, which is not exactly the same as "seeing the other fellow's point of view"; for it involved, say, wearing clothes that Stencil wouldn't be caught dead in, eating foods that would have made Stencil gag, living in unfamiliar digs, frequenting bars or cafés of a non-Stencilian character; all this for weeks on end; and why? To keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person.

(62)

Stencil's technique of "forcible dislocation of personality" allows him to maintain a smug sense of superiority because he detaches "Stencil" from most of what he does. The real self remains private, but fades away; the plastic self takes action. Such dissociation relieves "Stencil" of responsibility and involvement, so that it becomes an equally artificial concept, an "other" removed from the experience of the self.

If Stencil represents one extreme of identity--its complete fragmentation--then Profane represents the other. He remains "himself" throughout the novel, but also refuses commitment and purposeful action. By allowing himself to be victimized by inanimate objects, he contributes to their control. Together Stencil and Profane represent the polarization of society predicted by the elder Stencil: the smug "Stencil," an inhabitant of the hothouse of the past, represents the Right; Profane, the man on the Street, represents the Left. Both are alienated from the "real present" (the "proper relation" to extremes, according to Thomas Schaub [12]) because they are convinced of its meaninglessness, and the inanimate defines the identities of both. In this respect they are mirror images, reversals of each other, exhibiting the century's "intolerable double vision" (468).

The scene of Rachel's visit to Schoenmaker's office suggests the important connection between mirror-imagery, time,
and identity. A mirror hangs behind an ornate "turn-of-the-century clock" with a "double face" (45), creating, from Rachel's point of view, a double vision: "time and reverse-time, co-existing, cancelling one another exactly out" (46). The two faces of the clock move in opposite directions, one toward the past and one toward the future, making the room a nodal point of "zero" time because the opposing forces create a kind of vacuum, paradoxically fixing an image of movement. The time captured at this node is not the same as the "real present," which moves only unidirectionally; the node creates an artificial present by mirroring the past. The node— the room—is the place of fake identities, appearances, attracting "the imperfect, the dissatisfied," giving them a mirror image, and causing them to live afterward in the mirror to grasp the phantom of identity.

We find mirrors elsewhere in V., besides Schoenmaker's office, other reflections of extreme artifice and other attempts to establish a nodal point of zero time. Fopp's Siege Party in 1922 retreats into memories, fantasies, and reenactments of 1904, the year of von Trotha's extermination of the Hereros, mirror-image of Hitler's extermination of the Jews. In this episode we, like Mondaugen, cross the equator and enter "mirror-time in the South-West Protectorate" (230). V.'s Paris apartment in 1913 holds the "null-time of human love" (403), and Mélanie's last name (l'Heureinduit = "Cursed hour") suggests the danger of living in this temporal zone. Both these episodes are characterized by transvestism, fetishism, and voyeurism. As the mirrors multiply, time disappears, identity fragments, and individuals become interchangeable. Mondaugen watches others in mirrors and then has their dreams (246, 259); Mélanie and V. each reflect herself and the other (409).

Figurative mirror images, as reflections and distortions, are a narrative device throughout V. When the whole Sick Crew retreats to the Rusty Spoon or Rachel's apartment, where they talk "proper nouns" and drink as a way of asserting their animateness (130-31), they mirror Fopp's Siege Party, another clique of decadents attempting to stave off—but perhaps only hastening—decay. Profane's yo-yoing is a version of a Cook's Tour, without a Baedeker. Although Profane follows no guidebook for his "Distribution of Time," he is a tourist; one of the "Street's own," yet more like the "near-inanimate barmen, taxi-drivers, bellhops, guides: there to do any bidding, to various degrees of efficiency, on receipt of the recommended bakshash, pourboire, mancia, tip" (408-09). Herbert Stencil and Evan Godolphin are mirror images and "de-generations" of their fathers. Stencil's quest is essentially a reenactment of his father's history. The disfigured surface of Evan's face, the result of failed plastic surgery, recalls Hugh's vision of Vheissu: "I wondered about the soul of that place. If it had a soul. Because their music, poetry, laws and ceremonies come no closer. They are skin too. Like the skin of a tattooed
savage. I often put it that way to myself—"like a woman"
(170).

"Like a woman"—that is, like V.: each of these mirrored
fragments reflects the novel's central metaphor. Like
identities, metaphors in V. are displaced appearances, surfaces
only, as Hugh says, a "gaudy godawful riot of pattern and color"
(171), leprous tissue which both disguises and reveals the
actual decay underneath, the decadence of the twentieth century.
The entire novel is a node of zero time housing "a transient
population of the imperfect, the dissatisfied," a populace
alienated from the "real present." The mirror imagery indicates
that the world of the novel, like that world "if not created
then at least described to its fullest by Karl Baedeker of
Leipzig," is "two-dimensional." Its "supranational" tourists
have "identical responses"; "they share the same landscapes,
suffer the same inconveniences; live by the same pellucid timescale" (408-09). Their world is analogous to the mirror world
of Schoenemaker's turn-of-the-century clock.

This mirror image of time and identity also reveals the
status of metaphor itself in V. The novel is a tissue of
analogies, and the reader makes connections by tracing the
similarities or identities from one episode to another. For
example, "V.'s" appear in the journals of both Father Fairing
and Sidney Stencil, suggesting a relationship that at least
pushes the limits of credibility. We may conclude with
Stencil—"placing emphasis on different words"—that "Events
seem to be ordered into an ominous logic" (449). The repeated
fragments come in like Mondeugen's sferics, atmospheric sounds
which may have some pattern of significance or may be only so
much noise. We may assume, as Weissmann does of the sferics,
that they are a code signifying a conspiracy (277-78). They may
be clues to plot within the novel—"The Big One, the century's
master cabal" (226)—to the plot of the novel, or to Pynchon's
plot against the reader. In any case, because the images work
as a series of overlays which fail to match perfectly, the
reader may "Stencilize" his own patterns on the text, or may
(Profanely) refuse to do so—the interpretation reflecting the
interpreter. The novel's metaphors are therefore self-
reflexive: images mirror each other but have their significance
assigned from the outside by a voyeuristic reader who sees
himself in their reflections. A reading is like one of the
elder Stencil's "Situations," having no "objective reality" but
existing "only in the minds of those who happened to be in on it
at any specific moment" (189). The reader becomes one of the
crowd with the characters, part of the "fiction" of the
twentieth century.

Yet, although Pynchon's metaphors reveal their self-
reflexivity, they also refer to the world external to the novel,
which, in its turn, can be construed as another Situation with
no objective reality. But this dissolution of epistemological
limits does not negate the novel's function: novel and reader
can work together toward a new imaginative construction by
turning the novel on its side, so to speak, and including the
reader in the fictional circle. V. asserts the necessity of
stretching the imagination toward new possibilities if we are
not to collapse under the weight of the conspiracies we have
artificially created. The quality of our fictions—which are
reflections and projections of ourselves—determines our future.

In describing how the Maltese survived the air raids of the
Second World War, Fausto Maijstral explains the function of
metaphor in the novel:

The same motives which cause us to populate a dream-
street also cause us to apply to a rock human
qualities like "invincibility," "tenacity," 
"perseverance," etc. More than metaphor, it is
delusion. But on the strength of this delusion Malta
survived.

Manhood on Malta thus became increasingly defined
in terms of rockhood. This had its dangers for
Fausto. Living as he does much of the time in a world
of metaphor, the poet is always acutely conscious that
metaphor has no value apart from its function; that it
is a device, an artifice. So that while others may
look on the laws of physics as legislation and God as
a human form with beard measured in light-years and
nebulae for sands, Fausto's kind are alone with the
task of living in a universe of things which simply
are, and cloaking that innate mindlessness with
comfortable and pious metaphor so that the "practical"
half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie, confident that their machines, dwellings, streets and
weather share the same human motives, personal traits
and fits of contrariness as they.

Poets have been at this for centuries. It is the
only useful purpose they do serve in society; and if
every poet were to vanish tomorrow, society would live
no longer than the quick memories and dead books of
their poetry.

It is the "role" of the poet, this 20th Century.
To lie. (325-26)

Fausto's—and Pynchon's—metaphors do not signify some absolute,
but assert the need for an operational metaphysics, for a
"transcendental function," for a faith to give us the will to
continue. The "fact" of life is that we live by metaphor
anyway; even the secular, the "Profanes," create their symbolic
streets and give life to the "innate mindlessness" of inanimate
things. But "metaphor has no value apart from its function."

While Esther identifies "rockhood" with "loss of Estherhood"
(106), the Maltese identify it with their own strength, which in
turn serves to reinforce and verify that strength. The metaphor
is a mirror image, an appearance only, with no intrinsic life
or soul, yet still an appearance which validates identity. The
poet's role in the twentieth century is to revitalize the mindless inanimate constructively. Pynchon performs this role, not by continuing to deceive readers about "the Great Lie," the belief that "their machines, dwellings, streets and weather share the same human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness as they," but by admitting the artifice, letting readers in on the secret that the novel, like the Maltese children's playing at war, is "poetry in a vacuum" (332). Readers must be able to face the "facts": to see that the reflections are imaginary and that, as McClintic Sphere says, "There's no magic words" (366). To refuse to project destruction onto the objects and metaphors of human creation may be to regain some control over human affairs. In that way, "life" may be returned from "the universe of things that simply are" to a re-animated humanity. Dahoud's pedestrian point in Chapter One, after Ploy's attempted suicide, seems appropriate in this context:

"Man, I want to die, is all," cried Ploy.
"Don't you know," said Dahoud, "that life is the most precious possession you have?"
"Ho, ho," said Ploy through his tears, "Why?"
"Because," said Dahoud, "without it, you'd be dead." (12)

In a novel whose characters have one foot in the Grave already, these corny lines achieve a new significance. Metaphor as a prosthetic device must not be an end in itself, but a reminder that "To have humanism we must first be convinced of our humanity" (322).

Because Fausto explains the function of metaphor in the novel, he therefore reveals the "location" of V. In presenting his former "identities," Fausto recounts his decay into the inanimate and his subsequent return to humanity after administering extreme unction to the Bad Priest (344). This administration is an assertion of the animate because it attempts to redeem what "soul" still remains in V. Before this, Fausto had been part of the "decadence," by "pretending it was a great struggle between the laws of man and the laws of God," of "human law v. divine," "within the arena in quarantine...his soul and...the island" (322). By couching the problem in this way, by refusing responsibility in effecting its solution, "Fausto" disappeared, and what appeared in his place between the extremes of the physical and the metaphysical, "human law v. divine," was the sign of another fragmented identity—a "V." V. appears again in a state of siege and at the scene of violence, not as a cause but as an agent provocateur, one that finds space in the field of human activity and change when the individual no longer assumes responsibility for his actions. Her forms can be linked to situations as various as the German soldier's torturing Hereros in Mondaugen's story and Sidney Stencil's idling time away with Veronica Manganese during the June Disturbances on Malta. As Sidney realizes, "The street and the
hothouse; in V. were resolved, by some magic, the two extremes" (487). V.'s location, quite literally in the middle of things, suggests that she occupies the arena of human activity and possibility, the territory of uncertainty and change. Like Machiavelli's Fortune, "She shows her power where there is no wise preparation for resisting her, and turns her fury where she knows that no walls and dykes have been made to hold her in" (Ch. 25). V. is intrinsically neither malign nor benign; she is simply chance, who gains power with the loss of responsible human control.

In one of his impersonations, Stencil becomes Waldetar, a conductor on the Alexandria and Cairo express and one of the most sympathetic "characters" in the novel, reflecting an admirable fragment of Stencil's identity. Waldetar pondered the story of Ptolemy Philopator's unleashing a herd of drunken elephants in the Hippodrome to kill imprisoned Jews only to have the elephants turn "on the guards and spectators instead." Waldetar, although "a highly religious man," is "inclined to take the common-sense view"; he doubts that the Jews' escape was due to God's intervention: "elephants have souls. . . . Events between soul and soul are not God's direct province; they are under the influence either of fortune, or of virtue. Fortune had saved the Jews in the Hippodrome" (78).

The story is a parable. V. presents a bleak vision of society, but the picture is not entirely hopeless. Chance plays a crucial role in determining the plot and the future, but just as its effects are incalculable, so are they not necessarily destructive. V. therefore offers a wide range of possibilities, for it contains two variables: chance and the varying degrees of human control, or fortune and virtù. V.'s characters represent a deteriorating society, but through their constant activity, they still show signs of life, even if it seems more animalistic than human. Society in V. functions like Ptolemy's drunken elephants; nevertheless, "Anything that can get drunk," we must conclude with Waldetar, "must have some soul" (78). A Pig Bodine or a Benny Profane is not yet a SHROUD, and even in a novel we can still tell the difference.

Pynchon's imagination and his humor serve to counteract the bleakness of the world he describes. His novels demonstrate that artifice can be a humane response in the face of a grim reality. So long as metaphors are used in the service of humankind, the possibilities for society and the novel will not be exhausted.

--Oregon State University

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PORTER'S "FLOWERING JUDAS" AND PYNCHON'S V.

John Vukmirovich

Chapter 7 of Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), "She Hangs on the Western Wall," contains one of the novel's most interesting characters, the Venezuelan revolutionary known as the Gaucho. This character has his origins in an earlier fictional revolutionary, the character Braggioni, in Katherine Anne Porter's short story "Flowering Judas" ("Flowering Judas" and Other Stories, 1935). In fact, this story, and its central image of the Judas tree, can be seen as a seed for this crucial chapter in Pynchon's novel.

Porter's story deals with the relationship between a North American woman, Laura, and an arrogant Mexican revolutionary, Braggioni. The personality and physical characteristics of Braggioni, a mixed blood, are quite interesting in relation to Pynchon's Gaucho, as will be seen below. Braggioni has a "mournful voice," as well as being given to "snarling under his breath" while playing his guitar (FJ 139). He possesses a "specialized insolence," and has a tremendous sense of "self-esteem" that none of his followers dares to stand up to (FJ 140). Braggioni is a "leader of men, a skilled revolutionist, and his skin has been punctured in honorable warfare" (FJ 140). Although overweight and overdressed (FJ 141, 143), Braggioni was once "so scrawny all his bones showed under his thin cotton clothing" (FJ 153). This, we learn, fits Laura's romantic view of what a revolutionary should look like: "a revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith" (FJ 141). Although the story seems set in a post-revolutionary time, Braggioni is still trying to foment revolt, and he tells Laura about how a possible clash soon will be played out on May Day: "[The] Catholics hold a festival in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and the Socialists celebrate their martyrs on that day. . . . There will be two independent processions, starting from either end of town, and they will march until they meet, and the rest depends. . . ." (FJ 155-56).

Pynchon draws on these characteristics of Braggioni for the Gaucho and on other details of Porter's story for the situation in Chapter 7 of *V.* First, Pynchon endows the Gaucho with the air of insolence and activism exhibited by Braggioni. Early in the chapter the Gaucho haughtily proclaims to Signor Mantissa, who has retained the Gaucho to help him steal Botticelli's Birth of Venus, "I'm a man of action, signor, I'd rather not waste time!" (V 161). In keeping with this air of aggressiveness, the Gaucho likes to refer to himself as a lion and not a Machiavellian fox (V 152). The Gaucho, a mixed blood like Braggioni, further describes himself in a way that is, perhaps, Pynchon's humorous allusion to Porter's story: "I come from the north, and there may be some tedesco [German] blood in these
veins. The tedeschi are taller than the Latin races. Taller and broader. Perhaps someday this body will run to fat, but now it is all muscle" (V 164; emphasis added). Furthermore, the Gaucho is in Florence to stir up a revolt among the Venezuelan nationals living there (V 179). The clash between the Venezuelan nationals and the Italian army—which also provides a diversion from the attempted theft of the painting—follows to a certain degree Porter's description of Braggioni's May Day disturbance (V 207).

It is the central image of the flowering Judas tree, however, that makes the final connection between this chapter in V, and Porter's story. Porter uses the tree to stand for a series of betrayals. Laura is a foreigner who teaches English to peasant children. Although we are not told specifics, Laura feels that she "owes her comfortable situation and her salary to [Braggioni]" (FJ 140). Braggioni uses his power to try to win Laura's affections, but she rejects him, as she also rejects a smitten young minstrel (FJ 149). These rejections can be seen as forms of betrayal. At one point Laura herself feels betrayed "by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be" (FJ 142). She therefore maintains a "stoicism" and tries to deny "everything" concerned with the world around her (FJ 150-51), but to deny existence is in essence to betray the promise of life.

In V., Signor Mantissa plans to steal The Birth of Venus, which he obsessively desires, from the Uffizi rolled up and placed inside a hollowed-out Judas tree. But once in the gallery, Mantissa realizes that his obsession is nothing but a "gaudy dream, a dream of annihilation" (V 210). To seize and own the mistress of his obsession would be to betray his love. Moreover, Mantissa recognizes that he is obsessed with an inanimate object, merely an alluring surface, that could only betray his love.

What else can be said about Pynchon's use of Porter's short story? By using the elements discussed above, Pynchon accomplishes three things. First, the Gaucho personifies the Machiavellian man of action, a type who will be lost in the chaotic, entropic world Pynchon sees evolving after the turn of the century. Second, Pynchon's version of Braggioni—in conjunction with the paranoid reaction to Vheissu—helps provide the motive force that unleashes the revolution and disorder associated in the novel with the modern world. Third, the Judas tree allows Pynchon to place into the heart of the novel a tension between the ideas of obsession and betrayal. V. can be viewed as a novel of obsessions: Herbert Stencil's obsessive quest for V., Hugh Godolphin's obsession with Vheissu, as well as Signor Mantissa's obsession with The Birth of Venus. Yet to attain the object of one's desires is to betray the very motive force which centers one in a world of chaos and entropy. Pynchon's use of elements from "Flowering Judas" allows him to
develop this tension which radiates throughout the rest of the narrative.

--University of Illinois at Chicago
A PROBABLE SOURCE FOR THE TITLE OF
"THE SMALL RAIN"

M. Keith Booker

Richard Darabande suggests that the title of Pynchon's short story "The Small Rain" may have been derived from a passage in Deuteronomy. He goes on to argue that the atmosphere of Pynchon's story is appropriate to the Old Testament reference. Indeed it is, though I would like to suggest that the story echoes the Old Testament, not directly, but indirectly through the works of Ernest Hemingway and T. S. Eliot. Pynchon himself admits to having made a conscious effort to echo A Farewell to Arms and The Waste Land in his story, and both of those works have atmospheres that can be fruitfully glossed by reference to the Old Testament, particularly to Ecclesiastes. Moreover, rain is extremely significant in both of those works, as Pynchon's story explicitly remarks:

Back at the truck Picnic said, "Jesus Christ I hate rain."
"You and Hemingway," Rizzo said. "Funny, ain't it. T. S. Eliot likes rain." (51)

Specifically, it is important to note here that, during the rain of the famous Caporetto retreat in A Farewell to Arms, Frederic Henry muses:

Blow, blow, ye western wind. Well, it blew and it wasn't the small rain but the big rain down that rained. It rained all night. You knew it rained down that rained. Look at it. Christ, that my love were in my arms and I in my bed again."

Henry, of course, is remembering lines from the anonymous sixteenth-century lyric:

O western wind, when wilt thou blow,
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ! that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.

It is certainly possible that Pynchon is directly alluding to the same lyric, since it is well known. It appears, for example, in The Oxford Book of English Verse (under the title "The Lover in Winter Pleadeth for Spring"), and Louis recites the poem in Virginia Woolf's The Waves. Still, given the importance Pynchon himself places on A Farewell to Arms as an inspiration for his story, it seems likely that Hemingway's book is the primary source of Pynchon's title.
This simple reference to Hemingway also illustrates the potential richness and complexity of Pynchon's intertextuality. Perceptive readers of Pynchon have already become sensitized to the fact that a seemingly odd phrase or expression in his work often signals a reference to some other text. Riffaterre (without reference to Pynchon) describes this technique:

"Intertextual connection takes place when the reader's attention is triggered by the clues ... by intratextual anomalies--obscure wordings, phrasings that the context alone will not suffice to explain—in short, ungrammaticalities within the idiolectic norm ... which are traces left by an absent intertext, signs of incompleteness to be completed elsewhere."

Interestingly (just to show how intertextual echoes are to be found in all sorts of places), Riffaterre goes on to describe intertextuality as one aspect of the general tendency of literary language, in which "every lexical element is the tip of an iceberg" (627). The echo here, though apparently unintentional, is again of Hemingway, who compares his own literary language to an iceberg in Death in the Afternoon, noting that "the dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water." Meanwhile, we know to expect that the submerged seven-eighths of a Pynchon text is often to be found in other texts. Thus, Darabaner finds in Pynchon's title a reference to the Old Testament, and though that was probably not the reference Pynchon intended, it nevertheless serves as a useful gloss. And again, when the reference to Hemingway is correctly identified, the reference is still not definitively fixed, because it ripples through Hemingway to the sixteenth-century lyric, and perhaps (if the reader is so minded) even to Woolf. Hemingway himself provides an excellent example of this ripple effect in A Farewell to Arms, in which Henry cites the famous lines from Marvell's "To His Coy mistress" in response to the honking of a motor car (146). The association of these lines with that stimulus, of course, is a clear reference to The Waste Land, in which Eliot (in a clear reference to Marvell) writes: "But at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors . . . " (198-97).

Some observers will decry the sort of literary anarchy that gives the reader such freedom of interpretation, but then some observers have been decrying such things at least since 1922. Others will appreciate the richness, density, and liberating multiplicity that intertextuality brings to Pynchon's work. So what if some readers think of the Bible, some of Hemingway, some of Eliot, and some of sixteenth-century poetry? The point is that they think. The reader of a simple short story like "The Small Rain" can thus experience not only that text but other familiar texts such as A Farewell to Arms and The Waste Land, as Pynchon clearly intended. Others may experience texts Pynchon did not intend, but if that experience enriches the reading of
Pynchon’s story, then it is a benefit nevertheless. After all, as all readers of Gravity’s Rainbow (and of For Whom the Bell Tolls, and of John Donne . . .) know, everything is connected.

--University of Arkansas

Notes


2 Thomas Pynchon, Slow Learner (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984) 4.

3 Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Scribner’s, 1929) 189.


5 Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon (New York: Scribner’s, 1932) 192.
REFUSED READINGS: NARRATIVE AND HISTORY
IN "THE SECRET INTEGRATION"

Stuart Barnett

Will Postwar be nothing but "events," newly created one
moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history?
---Gravity's Rainbow

One of the most common impressions derived from Thomas
Pynchon's work is that the author has digested libraries of
information. Much of this information is obviously historical,
yet the depth and scope of historical detail in Pynchon's
fiction almost questions the very notion of the historical
event. In Gravity's Rainbow, for instance, the Second World War
is made to accommodate such traditionally marginalized matters
as the fate of the Hereros, the political significance of the
Zoot suit, the extermination of the dodo bird, etc. These are
all elements that usually wind up on the trash heap of
traditional historiography. For Pynchon, however, they become
the very substance of a counter-history.

The organizational principle governing this counter-history
can be better understood by examining it in a context where it
is elaborated on a thematic level—that is, explicitly as trash.
Trash is prominent in both "Low-lands" (1960) and "The Secret
Integration" (1964). In Pynchon's early fiction, trash is
emblematic of the refuse of an entire culture. As Tony Tanner
notes:

Any reader of Pynchon will recognize that he has an
extraordinary feeling for what society designates as
'rubbish'... Many actual rubbish heaps or tips
appear in his work—not as symbolic wastelands (though
those are there too), but exactly as 'rubbish'.

Tanner helps to draw our attention to the interpretive challenge
posed by actual trash in Pynchon's work. In what follows, I
concentrate on "The Secret Integration" in order to better
illuminate the significance of trash as both a topos and an
emblem of history as a narrative event.

"The Secret Integration" contains two main narrative
events, in both of which the children demonstrate what is
asserted throughout the story—their opposition to the world of
adults. In one, the children come to realize their parents' hatred for the Barringtons, a black couple that has moved into
their previously all white neighborhood. The narrative
centerspiece, an analepsis, is the children's encounter with the
alcoholic Carl McAfee, a black musician who is "just passing
through" town. Feeling the desperate need for drink, McAfee
calls the local AA for help. In a story otherwise full of
pranks dreamed up by children, the most serious prank is pulled by adults. The adults at AA call young Hogan Slothrop and ask him to help McAfee. Hogan agrees, not suspecting that he is the agent of the adults' cruel joke. Hogan and his friends go to McAfee and help him as best they can, until McAfee is arrested for vagrancy. During their visit, McAfee tells the boys stories of his life, stories that somehow do not fit into the comfortable narratives their parents have provided for them. His stories seep into their minds, much as the disembodied voices of the ham radio they listen to in their sleep sometimes do: "It was as if Mr. McAfee too were broadcasting from somewhere quite distant, telling about things Tim would not be sure of in the daylight" (SL 179). To accept these stories, however, would be to question the very concept of narrativity as established by the adult world. According to the adult world, what McAfee tells the boys are not legitimate narratives. They necessarily constitute counter-narratives, narratives that stand in opposition to the reigning narratives established by the culture. It is towards this possibility of counter-narrative, nonetheless, that the children orient themselves in the story.

The children make two major efforts to produce counter-narratives. The first involves their imaginary friend, Carl Barrington, imaginary son of the Barringtons. The second, which I will deal with later, has to do with their hideout. Their parents would be horrified if the children were actually playing with a black child. Thus in their imagination they commit the greatest transgression against the taboos the adult world has taught them. The children construct Carl out of the refuse of the adult world, out of a refused race, but above all out of the refuse of representation and legitimized narrative:

Carl had been put together out of phrases, images, possibilities that grownups had somehow turned away from, repudiated, left out at the edges of towns, as if they were auto parts in Etienne's father's junkyard—things they could or did not want to live with but which the kids, on the other hand, could spend endless hours with, piecing together, rearranging, feeding, programming, refining. (SL 192)

Just in imagining the existence of Carl, the children resist the racism of the adult world. Carl, moreover, does not remain a loose assemblage of cultural refuse. Rather, he functions as a character in the story. The narrative potential of refuse is granted a space within which it can articulate itself. Hence it is clear that cultural refuse can indeed be employed to construct counter-narratives.

It is important to stress that Carl does not merely serve to indict the racial prejudice of the adults in the story. He is also a figure for forms of knowledge that "The Secret Integration" can only hint at. He is an emblem of the sort of narratives that can be pieced together by picking through the
garbage of one's culture. Carl's possible significance is suggested as follows:

Carl shrugged and sat watching them, as if he knew what, knew everything, secrets none of them had even guessed at. As if there were after all some heart-in-hiding, some crypt to Northumberland Estates that had so far managed to elude the rest of them, and which Carl would only someday tell them about, as reward for their having been more ingenious in their scheming, or braver in facing up to their parents, or smarter in school, or maybe better in some way they hadn't yet considered but which Carl would let them know about when he was ready, through hints, funny stories, apparently casual changes of subject. (SL 159)

Carl is, then, a figure for an organizational principle of possible counter-narratives in both history and culture. Just as Carl is placed together out of cultural refuse, so would counter-narratives have to be constructed out of information and histories not granted a place in a reigning culture. This possibility is fully realized in Gravity's Rainbow, where the refuse of history and culture is embraced as a narrative principle.

In a certain sense, Carl already belongs to the rainbow of Pynchon's later fiction—the pleasures tagged as "mindless" because they do not fit into the historical and cultural discourses of the West. One quality of Carl can hardly be accidental:

[Tim] did think of Carl as not only "colored" himself, but somehow more deeply involved with all color. When Tim thought about Carl he always saw him against blazing reds and ochres of this early fall, only last month, when Carl had just come to Mingeborough and they were still getting to be friends, and he thought that Carl must somehow carry around with him a perpetual Berkshire autumn, a Wonderful World of Color. Even in the grayness of this afternoon and this district they had entered (which, it seemed, was deprived of its just measure of light because part of it belonged to the past), Carl brought a kind of illumination, a brightening, a compensation for whatever it was about the light that was missing. (SL 161-62)

Carl "colors" the narrative of "The Secret Integration" because he is the crystallization of everything that cannot be brought to narrative. Carl thus points to the explosive jumble of counter-narratives that come to dominate Pynchon's later work, for it is there that "Carl" becomes a narrative principle that attempts to piece together cultural and historical refuse.
Carl belongs to what is characterized in Gravity's Rainbow as the preterite. After "The Secret Integration," however, such figures in Pynchon's fiction do not remain merely at the margins of narrative. Instead, they work to elaborate a counter-narrative to their culture. This is, for instance, the function of WASTE in The Crying of Lot 49. WASTE provides, for the preterite of The Crying of Lot 49, the very medium to articulate an oppositional form of knowledge of the reigning culture within which they live. This possibility is likewise employed in Gravity's Rainbow. Figures of preterition are not merely constructed in the resistant psyches of select characters—as, like Carl, are the blacks in the men's room of the Roseland Ballroom. Rather, they are empowered by narrative. Hence figures such as Enzian and the other Schwarzkommando are accorded a distinct place in the novel, and the counter-narratives they elaborate are carefully drawn out in the course of the narrative. More important, preterition becomes something that implicates all the characters of the novel. For this reason, it is only a small surprise that Tyrone Slothrop, as he uncovers the reasons for his being drawn to the V-2, learns that he was part of a bizarre experiment in which his code name was Schwarzknaube (blackboy: GR 286). In this sense, all the characters of Gravity's Rainbow become, like Carl, constructed out of cultural refuse.

The strategy of reading cultural refuse is adopted not only as a thematic element but also as an organizational principle in Gravity's Rainbow. To accommodate a wealth of historical and cultural detail, Gravity's Rainbow renounces the very form of traditional narrative. Linear progression is thus disrupted by a proliferation of counter-narratives. Indeed, the linearity and closure that traditionally define the novel as a genre are abandoned for virtually autonomous counter-narratives. In this way, Pynchon's fiction carries on the modernist attempt to undermine the form of Western narrative. Novels such as Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, Joyce's Ulysses, and Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg embraced the range of narrative detail to be found in quite limited spans of time. Yet, to the extent that the modernists ultimately subordinated the disruptive potential of the detail to the formal aesthetic properties of the text as a whole, they perpetuated the Western novel's imperative to inscribe narrative detail within a constraining economy of form. Pynchon, however, gives free rein to narrative detail. He pursues the plurality of narratives that an attention to detail requires. As a result, Pynchon's fiction makes a more decisive break with the detail-refusing novel of the West.

For the children of "The Secret Integration," the crucial confrontation with the adult world occurs when they discover the front yard of the Barringtons littered with garbage thrown there by racist neighbors. The children have trouble understanding why anyone would do this to the Barringtons, but to their shock they recognize the garbage—it belongs to them and their families. In this scene of actually reading refuse, the logic
of implication that the children have resisted is brought to the fore. The trash proves that all their parents are committing acts of racial hatred. At this point the children have only two options: either they must reject entirely the adult world, or they must submit to all of its narratives. The latter option would require that they no longer read the refuse of their culture. This is no doubt the significance of the story's ominous ending, involving the banishment of Carl. For Carl is, after all, constructed out of cultural refuse. It is also no doubt the significance of the story's ominous title. Only at the end of the story do we realize that the idea of a secret integration might refer, not just to an imaginary integration by means of the creation of Carl Barrington, but also to the integration of the children into the adult world by means of the banishment of Carl Barrington.

Where Carl is banished to, however, establishes the relation between narrative refuse and history. Carl is banished to the children's hideout, a house that is somehow bound up with local and international history. The house belonged to a would-be king, Yrjö, "a European pretender who'd fled the eclipse then falling over Europe and his own hardly real shadow-state sometime back in the middle Thirties (SL 160)." King Yrjö is, along with all the other European emigrants who fled to America, part of the political refuse of Europe. The children sense that his house is tied to a history they have little knowledge of. In fact, this history constitutes a meta-narrative that the adult world of their parents is only a part of. As Pynchon writes:

The king's exile, kids could sense, was something their parents were in on but was effectively cut off from the kids: There had been the falling dark, yes, and general flight, and a large war—all this without names and dates, pieced together out of talk overheard from parents, television documentaries, social-studies class if you happened to be listening, marines-in-action comics, but none of it that sharp, that specific; all of it in a kind of code, twilit, forever unexplained. King Yrjö's estate was the only real connection the kids had with whatever the cataclysmic thing was that had happened. (SL 160-61)

King Yrjö's house is linked in a tangential way to the Second World War, but not in a way that would find a place in any traditional narrative of that war. The house is certainly not the most distinctive remnant of the war, yet the children accept this piece of refuse as the most concrete evidence of "the cataclysmic thing." It seems to them a very tangible piece of history that is strangely ignored by the adults. Thus they accept it much more readily than all the narratives that are fed to them, for it is clear that there is something sinister about the war that the narratives of the adults only serve to
conceal. A counter-narrative of it could be elaborated only by reading the refuse of the war.

In "The Secret Integration" the strategy of reading cultural refuse is explored to a limited extent in the narrative development of the character Carl Barrington. This development is halted by a reading of actual refuse that establishes the extent to which the children in the story are implicated in the adult world. This strategy, however, suggests the possibility of linking narrative to cultural and historical refuse. King Yrjö's house, to which Carl Barrington is banished, is the site of Pynchon's later fiction. For it is in Pynchon's later fiction that characters are constructed out of cultural refuse in an attempt to develop a counter-narrative of history.

--State University of New York at Buffalo

Notes


2 For a unique and stimulating analysis of the theoretical implications of trash, see Michael Thompson, 

3 These issues are being addressed in some areas of contemporary historiography. Initially, it was the Annales school that confronted the economic and social structures of daily life. Successors to this school, such as Jacques le Goff and George Duby, have continued this effort to historicize what traditional historiography has considered the trivial aspects of individual and communal existence. Also of decisive importance to scholarship in the United States was the work of Michel Foucault, which presented extended "histories" of the historically and socially marginalized. The work of Paul Feyerabend is likewise of relevance in this regard in that it seeks to reveal how any historical account will always produce a certain amount of trash—that is, data and information that simply do not fit into the narrative being elaborated.

4 For a discussion that links both junk and trash to the notion of entropy, see Peter L. Cooper, 


7 For further elaboration of this notion, see George Levine, "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction," in Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) 113-36. Levine aptly notes: "The exhaustiveness of Pynchon's catalogues of waste moves him beyond decadence because he challenges us to resist the entropic reductionism of the systems we have been trained to impose on them. The question the prose proposes for us at every moment is whether we are strong enough to accept the details as they come to us" (116).

8 (1966; New York: Perennial, 1985). As Pynchon writes of WASTE: "For here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private" (124).
FROM THE BERKSHIRES TO THE BROKEN: TRANSFORMATIONS OF A SOURCE IN "THE SECRET INTEGRATION" AND GRAVITY'S RAINBOW

Donald F. Larsson

Since the publication of "Under the Rose" and V., Thomas Pynchon has been recognized for his ability to use secondary sources to create a compelling sense of time and place. While his debts to the guidebooks of Karl Baedeker in particular have often been cited, there has been little examination of one source central to Pynchon's last published short story, "The Secret Integration," and to certain sections of Gravity's Rainbow. Examination of this source not only illuminates both of these texts but makes the correlations between them more apparent.

In his introduction to Slow Learner, the collection of most of his short fiction, Pynchon admits that "The Secret Integration" is really about Long Island, where he grew up, though placed in the context of a different setting:

I . . . drew a line around the whole neighborhood, picked it up and shifted it all to the Berkshires, where I still have never been. The old Baedeker trick again. This time I found the details I needed in the regional guide to the Berkshires put out in the 1930's by the Federal Writers Project of the WPA. This is one of an excellent set of state and regional volumes, which may still be available in libraries. They make instructive and pleasurable reading. In fact, there is some stuff in the Berkshire book so good, so rich in detail and deep in feeling, that even I was ashamed to steal from it. (SL 21)

The text in question is The Berkshire Hills, one volume of the Federal Writers' Project's American Guide Series. It is still available in libraries, and Pynchon is quite right about its pleasures. The book is structured as a tour of the mountains of western Massachusetts, beginning in the northeast section of the region in the town of Savoy, working south along the eastern edge of the hills, and then wending north along the western edge until the tour concludes in the northeast again, this time in the town of Florida. In addition to economic, demographic and tourist information about most of the towns and cities in the region, the book is filled with anecdotes from local history and legend which are interesting not only for themselves but also for their relevance to Pynchon's works.

The Berkshire of the 1930s, as described by the guide, is an area still rich in natural beauty, political and literary history, and colorful personalities. It shares the economic woes of Depression-era America, but the authors choose not to
dwell on the negative side. Despite their occasional acknowledgment that the region has seen better days, that there is unemployment, and that the natural environment has suffered at the hands of its settlers, these employees of the New Deal tend to maintain a faith in Progress. The General Electric plant in Pittsfield, the ubiquitous paper mills, and the newly paved roads that run through the region are almost always represented in positive terms. With the hindsight of some fifty years, one reads these descriptions with a sense of nostalgia and regret, for beneath these confident reports is the sense of an area on the brink of failure. The authors mention in passing the mills that have closed, the lines that have formed for work or relief; they briefly present the towns and hamlets that have suffered through one disaster or another, economic or natural. In addition, for a modern reader, the book's black-and-white photographs of "modern" Berkshire are relics of a bygone era, a feeling enhanced by the Model T Fords that line the streets and by the bare tree limbs of late autumn, when most of these photographs were taken.

These elements all together—the lively anecdotes and precise descriptions, the eager hopes and the sense of loss—appealed strongly enough to Pynchon for him to choose this region as both the setting of "The Secret Integration" and the home territory of Gravity's Rainbow's major character, Tyrone Slothrop. In "The Secret Integration," Pynchon creates the fictional Berkshire town of Mingeborough, Massachusetts, based partly—as he admits—on his memories of Long Island, partly on hints from The Berkshire Hills. Mingeborough is an ironic name, derived from "minges," small biting insects (also known as "midges" or "no-see-ums") common to New England. This community is apparently situated in the center of the region, close to the cities of Lenox and Pittsfield. The name of the black family whose move to Mingeborough prompts the action of the story is "Barrington," probably suggested by the Berkshire city of Great Barrington.

The details Pynchon lifts from The Berkshire Hills for the short story are few, but they provide him with the materials to create a narrative and thematic landscape. For example, one of the projects of "Operation Spartacus," the children's attempt at rebellion against their elders, is to close down the town's paper mill. The guidebook frequently cites the importance of the paper industry to the Berkshires, and at one point describes the need for fresh water at the mills in Dalton: "Until the [18]60's, natural springs afforded sufficient water for the mills. The growing demand for paper finally made this water supply inadequate if the Dalton concerns were to expand. The use of surface water was too risky. Its cleanliness could never be assured, as even a slight summer shower polluted it with mud and silt, the heartbeat of every paper-mill man" (BH 237). From this hint Pynchon creates the incident of Etienne Chevalier's having "managed to stop the paper mill last year for almost a week by making up the water it used" (SL 166).
Paper mills in "The Secret Integration" belong to the adult world of work and repression, but the mills are only one element of that enemy world that the children, especially Grover Snodd, wish to subvert. The story is aimed partly at what Pynchon sees as the growing blandness of American life. As his introduction to Slow Learner hints, he thought of that blandness as exemplified by the Long Island on which he grew up; however, he mends his Long Island with the Berkshires of the Federal Writers' guide. This imaginative mixture is seen most clearly in the contrast between Mingeborough's new housing development, named "Northumberland Estates," and the older, mostly abandoned mansions that still surround the town:

The kids didn't like the development much, didn't like it being called "estates" when each lot was only fifty by a hundred feet, nowhere near the size of the old Gilded Age estates, real ones, that surrounded the old town the way creatures in dreams surround your bed, higher and hidden but always there. . . . [T]here were mysterious deep eyes fringed in gimcrackery and wrought-iron masks, cheeks tattooed in flowered tiles, great portcullised mouths with rows of dead palm trees for teeth, and to visit one of them was like reentering sleep. (SL 158)

While Northumberland Estates belongs to Pynchon's Long Island, and while the physical details of the mansions belong to Pynchon's imagination, the inspiration for the passage lies in The Berkshire Hills, in particular the section on Lenox, once a fashionable resort area:

Wherever you go in the town, whatever route you take in entering it, you will see romantic villas and pretentious mansions. Set far back from the public thoroughfares, these houses are like enchanted palaces about which, as though in mockery to the curious, hedges have grown high and close. There is perfection of landscape on every side, but the dominating motif of it all is to conceal.

These "enchanted palaces" have, in the true fairy-tale tradition, turned into white elephants today, awaiting the magic touch of a buyer. . . . With the passing of the heads of many of the old families, houses and gates have been closed and barred. One after another the grand residences are being struck off to buyers who want them for dairy farms and hotels or else to cut up their grounds into a number of lots and sell them to prosperous business men and industrial executives seeking refuge from nearby noisier towns. (BH 125-26)

The high hedges and the motif of concealment mentioned above undoubtedly appealed to Pynchon, as did the references here and elsewhere to the abandonment and sale of these old
castles. As early as "Low-lands," he had begun to indict the openness and exposure and the resultant absence of surprise of modern life--two of his greatest concerns. In "The Secret Integration," the new development lacks the possibilities for surprise offered by the old estates:

[N]o small immunities, no possibilities for hidden life or otherworldly presence: no trees, secret routes, shortcuts, culverts, thickets that could be made hollow in the middle--everything in the place was out in the open, everything could be seen at a glance; and behind it, under it, around the corners of its houses and down the safe, gentle curves of its streets, you came back, you kept coming back, to nothing; nothing but the cheerless earth. (SL 158)

The antithesis of Northumberland Estates for the children is the abandoned Gilded Age mansion of "New York candy magnate Ellsworth Baffy" (SL 162), which had passed to the deposed King Yrjb and then ultimately been left to ruin. The grounds of the mansion feature the remnants of Venetian bridges, statues, and a summer house, and the "Big House" itself is marked by "turrets, crenellations, flying buttresses" (SL 163). This property offers exactly the chances for surprise that the children find so lacking in the little houses of Northumberland Estates. Baffy, Yrjb, and the specific architectural features of the mansion are all Pynchon's creations, but they are also extrapolations from The Berkshire Hills descriptions of abandoned estates in Lenox and elsewhere.

Though they once were vacation spots for the robber baron elite of the Gilded Age, the old estates have an air of adventure and a sense of romance denied in modern tract housing. Just as Ellsworth Baffy's mansion and the other old houses around the town have become part of the children's private mythology, so too have characters from local legend. One such character is Crazy Sue Dunham, described by the narrator as "that legendary and beautiful drifter who last century had roamed all this hilltop country exchanging babies and setting fires," a cult figure and "the patron saint of all these kids" (SL 151).

Crazy Sue, it seems, was real, a well-known figure in the town of Savoy, Massachusetts. Pynchon's description of her is a fairly close paraphrase of a passage in The Berkshire Hills:

Savoy's most remarkable character was a witless wanderer, "Crazy Sue" Dunham, of whom it was said that "no fairer human being ever blossomed out into maidenhood upon these hills than she, or less more pretty, pert, and quick witted." Sue lost her sanity while still young, either from religious excitement, study, or a tragic love affair. For fifty years, through the storms and heat, ice and snow, Sue
traveled the roads of Berkshire, a poor, wild, aimless, and harmless being who recognized no family and no home. . . .

Still and all, Savoy did not really get excited over the antics of "Crazy Sue." If she set a fire, someone put it out. If she "swapped" babies, well, mothers usually recognized their own and "swapped" them back again. If she had a verbal battle with a preacher—why, the preacher was always defeated. Did a preacher good to have the wind taken out of his sails occasionally. (BH 255)

In Pynchon's fiction, it is often hard to determine where invention begins and "reality" leaves off. Ellsworth Baffy's party for James G. Blaine (who never showed up) sounds quite plausible, but it is only one in the long string of decadent parties that occur in almost every one of Pynchon's works, from "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" through Gravity's Rainbow. Crazy Sue Dunham, on the other hand, sounds too contrived to be real, yet has her origin in actual Berkshire history. Although "The Secret Integration" contains few other details taken from The Berkshire Hills (or, in fact, few other details of geographic description at all), the Federal Writers' Project guidebook allows Pynchon to create a landscape that is partly the guide's and partly his own, partly 1930s New England and partly 1950s and '60s Long Island. It may be that this fictionalized setting gave Pynchon the distance he needed to begin exploring the story's central theme, American racism. The Berkshires exist as a geographic convenience, remote enough not to carry too much symbolic weight for most readers, but close enough to the economic expansion and increasing suburbanization of New York and New England to be a plausible setting for the story's events. In any event, the Berkshire settings would be carried over to and given additional symbolic weight in Gravity's Rainbow.

Places and themes in "The Secret Integration" return in force in Gravity's Rainbow, though their significance is easily lost in the sheer mass of that book. Family and place names in the short story connect with the novel's main character, Tyrone Slothrop. Tyrone is the brother of Hogan Slothrop, who would become a doctor and the father of a namesake son, the reformed juvenile alcoholic of "The Secret Integration." Middleborough is Tyrone's home town, and lends its name to the section of Gravity's Rainbow titled "The Occupation of Middleborough" (GR 744). From Grover Snodd, the "boy genius with flaws" of the short story (SL 142), Gravity's Rainbow takes the name for "Snodd's Mountain," the local landmark where Slothrop's witch ancestor, Amy Sprue, sacrificed stolen chickens (GR 329). Crazy Sue Dunham is mentioned in conjunction with Amy Sprue, and King Yrjö is recalled in Mrs. Quand's dream, attempting to cure her scrofula (presumably before his Berkshire exile) (GR 119). By far, though, the most important carryover from "The Secret Integration" to Gravity's Rainbow is the theme and treatment of
racism. In "The Secret Integration," the portrayal of the black jazz musician, Mr. McAfee, and the children's creation of their imaginary black playwright, Carl Barrington, mark Pynchon's politicization as a writer. Along with his journalistic essay, "A Journey into the Mind of Watts," the story is Pynchon's preparation for the meditations on race evoked by the Hereros and Malcolm X in the novel. Moreover, even minor details from "The Secret Integration" return in Gravity's Rainbow. Slothrop, for example, experiments with fake cardboard moustaches similar to those used by Grover and the other boys in the short story. More significant, the children's dream of an uprising in "Operation Spartacus" and their eventual return to their parent's world prefigure the creation and cooptation of the Counterforce in the novel.

For Slothrop's Berkshire background, as well as other details of Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon not only draws from his short story but also returns to his original source in The Berkshire Hills. Sometimes these references emerge in small and otherwise puzzling allusions. (The guidebook is not Pynchon's sole source; it does not mention, for instance, the Aspinwall Hotel Fire. See Weisenburger 29.) For example, the last name of the minor character Webley Silvernail was probably taken from Silvernail House, one of the oldest houses in West Stockbridge, shown in a photograph in the guidebook (BH 89). A fictional comic book character, Sundial, out of Slothrop's Berkshire past (GR 472) may have gotten his name from the pointed reference to a "SUN DIAL" in the center of Pittsfield (BH 54). The obscure reference to the "Chapter 81 work" Slothrop recalls from summers working on road crews also has its origin in The Berkshire Hills:

"[T]he one occupation which survives all depressions in the small Berkshire villages is road work. Regardless of bad financial conditions, citizens sidetrack other appropriations to continue voting "to raise and appropriate the sum of $___ dollars for Chapter 81 highways," "$___ for Chapter 80," "$___ dollars for bridge work," and "$___ for snow removal." (BH 214)

Road work begins, the authors remark, in April or May with the patching of the highways (BH 216). This is followed by road improvement, called "Chapter 81 work," in May:

The first operation is scraping the road with a large scraper to remove sod from ditches and shoulders. A second gang follows the first and throws the sod on the banks; a third unit cleans out waterways and ditches with shovels and removes stones the scraper missed. Still another group replaces rotten and rusty culverts with new ones. Brush along the roadside is cut and gravel dumped to fill the mudholes. Any money left over is used to widen sections made dangerous by washouts and floods. (BH 216)
We can see from this passage how Pynchon transforms his original sources. The objective and straightforward account of the guidebook becomes in Gravity's Rainbow the elegiac rendering of a piece of Slothrop's past, evoked as he struggles with the dispersal of his personality:

He used to pick and shovel at the spring roads of Berkshire, April afternoons he's lost, "Chapter 81 work," they called it, following the scraper that clears the winter's crystal attack-from-within, its white necropolizing...picking up rusted beer cans, rubbers yellow with preterite seed, Kleenex wadded to brain shapes hiding preterite snot, preterite tears, newspapers, broken glass, pieces of automobile, days when in superstition and fright he could make it all fit, seeing clearly in each an entry in a record, a history: his own, his winter's, his country's... (GR 625-26)

Pynchon enriches his source with his own details of the preterite waste Slothrop has found on these jobs. He amplifies the sense of loss a modern reader feels in The Berkshire Hills, tying it into the imaginary past of his character, a preterite individual from a preterite community.

Slothrop's past and its history and geography are evoked early in Gravity's Rainbow when he is introduced in the novel's fourth episode. Warned that, for Slothrop, "A lot of stuff prior to 1944 is getting blurry now" (GR 21), we are nonetheless given much about his past. We get the family genealogy, from William Slothrop to Constant and his mathematical son, Variable, on through "Mrs. Elizabeth, wife of Lt. Isaiah Slothrop (d. 1812)," and down to "Slothrop's grandfather Frederick (d. 1933)" (GR 27). Moreover, Pynchon makes the history of their home territory, the Berkshires, parallel the family's preterite doom. Slothrop's ancestors "began as fur traders, cordwainers, salters and smokers of bacon, went on into glassmaking, became selectmen, builders of tanneries, quarriers of marble" (GR 27). The family thus becomes associated with the exploitation of the region, typified by the necropolitical marble dust that covers the countryside, and by the "timberland whose diminishing green reaches were converted acres at a clip into paper—toilet paper, banknote stock, newsprint—a medium or ground for shit, money, and the Word" (GR 28).

The details of the Slothrop's Berkshire, a Yankee Yoknapatawpha, are lifted straight out of The Berkshire Hills. Most of the trades and professions the Slothrops tried are mentioned throughout the book; the one significant exception is the "salters and smokers of bacon," an addition by pig-loving Pynchon. The guidebook mentions several of the region's marble quarries and, again, frequently cites the role the paper industry plays in the county's economy. There are pictures of several mills in the book, and particular attention is paid to
the firm of Zenas Crane and Company, which first used the term "bonds" for high-quality paper, and which in 1879 won a continuous contract from the Federal government to produce stock for United States currency (B4 238).

The importance of paper to the region also explains a later detail, the sprigs of hemlock worn by the "Slothrop Regulators" who patrolled the Hills on the side of Shays' Rebellion (GR 268). Steven Weisenburger finds the hemlock "an ambiguous reference" (Weisenburger 140), but The Berkshire Hills notes several times the declination of the ancient hemlock forests to provide pulp for the paper mills. At the time of Shays' Rebellion, the Slothropes "were still for the living green," while the government troops wore "a tatter of white paper" in their hats (GR 268)--paper and whiteness being Pynchon's two most persistent images of death.

Shays' Rebellion itself exemplifies how Pynchon uses but also departs from his sources. There are many anecdotes about the uprising in The Berkshire Hills, and the authors note several times how much support the rebels had in the region: "Hard on the heels of the Revolution came Shays' Rebellion. The Berkshire farmers, oppressed by heavy taxes, hard times, and the almost worthless post-Revolutionary currency, understood better than the 'city folks' in Boston the real purpose of Daniel Shays' uprising" (B4 137). However, while apparently sympathetic to the rebels' aims, these anecdotes are decidedly pro-government in tone, casting common folk who opposed the rebels as the heroes. This rebellion, like those of Operation Spartacus and the Counterforce, finally succumbed to the Establishment: "The despair and bitterness that incited Shays' Rebellion gradually faded, as an improved system of finance and government brought new hope" (B4 130). Given the context in which The Berkshire Hills was written--a Federal project to alleviate the effects of the Depression among writers--it is not surprising that its authors should find centralized government more appealing than anarchic revolution. It is the rebels who are valorized in Gravity's Rainbow, but the Federal Writers' Project gives Pynchon the cue to suggest that Shays and his followers represented one more alternative path America could have taken but rejected.

Another example of America gone wrong cited in Gravity's Rainbow is the career of "Jubilee Jim" Fisk. While Fisk is best remembered in history as the robber baron who, with his partner, Jay Gould, precipitated one of the great financial scandals of the Gilded Age, Pynchon's references to the financier seem more benign. Lyle Bland is described as "a hustler in the regional Jim Fisk style" (GR 285), and when Slothrop is seized by "what the Book of Changes calls Youthful Folly," the following song emerges:

Jubilee Jim, just a peddlin' through the country,
Winkin' at the ladies from Stockbridge up to Lee--
Buy your gal a brooch for a fancy gown,
Buggy-whip rigs for just a dollar down,
Hey come along ev'rybody, headin' for the Jubi-lee!

In its chapter on the town of Otis, *The Berkshire Hills* recalls Fisk's days in the county:

Not the least of those who have since traveled the Great Road was "Jubilee" Jim Fiske [sic], king of Berkshire peddlers. In 1835 he sent out through the Berkshires twenty-five outfits, peddling his goods from door to door. Otis remembers "Jubilee" Jim, not so much for his great wealth and power, as for his famous Paisley shawls....

Otis likes to remember "Jubilee Jim" as the shrewd, suave peddler, rather than as the wealthy and famous Jim Fiske who later departed from Berkshire, acquired the Erie Railroad, beat down the power of his rival Jay Gould, and behind the scenes of State and Federal politics, pulled wires manipulating officials like puppets. (BH 212-13)

Pynchon would seem to agree with the townspeople of Otis, yet *Gravity's Rainbow* also acknowledges the later, less jubilant truth when Squire Bummer tells Slothrop that the money Von Gbil promised him "is gone where the woodbine twilneth." Exactly what Jubilee Jim Fisk told the Congressional committee investigating his and Jay Gould's scheme to corner gold in 1869. The words are a reminder of Berkshire" (GR 438).

As that "reminder of Berkshire" suggests, in *Gravity's Rainbow* this region represents a scene of loss, of failed beginnings and goals unachieved. The Berkshire references in *Gravity's Rainbow* acquire their greatest resonance, though, once Slothrop reaches the zone and encounters, first, Gelli Tripping and, then, Margherita Erdmann. Slothrop has reservations at first about his involvement with Gelli, a professed witch. His only previous knowledge of witches was of his ancestor Amy Sprue: "Slothrop grew up not quite knowing what to think about her. Witches were certainly not getting a fair shake in the thirties. They were depicted as hags who called you dearie, not exactly a wholesome lot" (GR 330). Such depictions did not belong only to movies like *The Wizard of Oz*. In one anecdote about Crazy Sue Dunham, *The Berkshire Hills* refers to her as "the Berkshire wandering Hag" (BH 70).

Nevertheless, Slothrop's encounter with Gelli leads to one of the novel's most spectacular scenes. Standing at the peak of the Brocken, Gelli and Slothrop watch the sun rise:

As the sunlight strikes their backs, coming in nearly flat on, it begins developing on the pearl cloudbank: two gigantic shadows, thrown miles
overland [. . .] "By golly," Slothrop a little bit nervous, "it's the Specter." You got it up around Greylock in the Berkshires too. Around these parts it is known as the Brockengespenst. (GR 330)

Geli and Slothrop dance erotically, their "God-shadows" projecting gigantically, until the sun rises higher and "the shadows have come shrinking back to their owners" (GR 331).

Remarkable as it is, it is quite likely that the entire scene was inspired by this passage in The Berkshire Hills about Mount Greylock, the highest point in Massachusetts:

Of the stories and legends about Old Greylock, the one about the "Specter" is most popular.

Thirty years ago [1909], at the end of the summer season, a Berkshire man was bringing down the piano from the little recreation house atop the mountain. Suddenly he saw himself, his horse and wagon and the piano standing upright, outlined in monstrous design against the sky. Unable to decide whether he had quaffed too much from the "cup that cheers," he is said to have fled in haste from the mountainside to the minister, and taken the pledge at once.

The phenomenon of a gigantic shadow of an object reflected in a cloud is so well known as to have a German name, the Brockengespenst (Specter of the Brocken) from Brocken, the highest peak of the Hartz [sic] Mountains. As Greylockgespenst would be a bit unwieldy for Berkshire, here it is simply called the Specter. (BH 42)

Like a specter, the past of Slothrop's family and home territory haunts him. The Berkshires are Pynchon's image of America itself, particularly the forgotten American landscape of preterite failure. Slothrop's abandonment of Bianca to the mercies of her deranged mother triggers a new round of associations with the landscape of his past:

Her look now--this deepening arrest--has already broken Slothrop's seeing heart; has broken and broken, that same look swung as he drove by, thrust away into twilights of moss and crumbling colony, of skinny clouded-cylinder gas pumps, of tin Moxie signs gentian and bittersweet as the taste they were there to hustle on the weathered sides of barns, looked for how many Last Times up in the rearview mirror, all of them too far inside metal and combustion, allowing the days' targets more reality than anything that might come up by surprise, by Murphy's Law, where the salvation could be. . . . Lost, again and again, past poor dam-busted and drowned Becket, up and down the rut-brown slopes, the hayrakes rusting in the afternoon, the sky purple-gray, dark as chewed gum,
the mist starting to make white dashes in the air, aimed earthward a quarter, a half inch ... (GR 471)

Slothrop's memories of Blanca and his own inaction raise for him the memory of his home country. The battered signs and empty landscape of the Berkshires again preclude the chances for surprise-as-salvation desired as well in "The Secret Integration." One place within the region stands out as the symbol of this loss: the reference to "drowned Becket" is an allusion, not to the Martyr of Canterbury (Weisenburger 217), but to a town in the Berkshires that was nearly destroyed by a flood:

In 1927, when the Ballou Reservoir burst its earthen bank and poured a twenty-five-foot wall of water down the narrow valley, the railroad embankment was destroyed, roadways were ruined, and the settlement was nearly wiped out. The town's principal industry, a silk mill, was swept away; houses and shops floated downstream with the flotsam and the debris. This disaster marked the end of Becket's era of industrialism. Since then, save for Ballou's basket factory and a gristmill, the town's shops and mills have either closed down or been destroyed. (BH 220)

Becket, like the rest of its region, is for Slothrop a reminder of loss. Like the Watts of Pynchon's journalism, Berkshire has become a place where surprise and salvation are in short supply. The beautiful, once-prosperous community described by the Federal Writers' Project becomes in Gravity's Rainbow:

a hilltop desolation of businesses going under, hedges around the estates of the vastly rich, half-mythical cottagers from New York lapsing back now to green wilderness or straw death, all the crystal windows every single one smashed, Harrimans and Whitneys gone, lawns growing to hay, and the autumns no longer a time for foot-trots in the distances, limousines and lamps, but only the accustomed crickets again, apples again, early frosts to send the hummingbirds away, east wind, October rain: only winter certainties. (GR 28)

If Pynchon's winter certainties aren't shared by the authors of The Berkshire Hills, he still has not done their work or the region a disservice. Pynchon's Berkshire is a region of words and of the mind. In his introduction to The Berkshire Hills, Walter Prichard Eaton remarks on the difference between real and linguistic geographies:

Ninety-nine out of every one hundred Americans to this day see the Catskills as Irving colored them, and the fact that they aren't a bit like that any more doesn't trouble most of us merely because we don't go there.
If Bryant had created as vivid a legend for the Berkshires as Irving did for those mountains which we can see from our Taconic divide, huddled blue against the west, I suppose we would resent the General Electric plant in Pittsfield, the Lenox villas, the cement highways, and all the other marks of the later nineteenth and this twentieth century. (Some of them, may I remark parenthetically, some of us do resent.) But no such overwhelming haze of legend was distilled around the Berkshires to remove them forever into a hushed and wistful past. (BH xi-xii)

Pynchon, who shares that resentment of the General Electric plant and "other marks of ... this twentieth century," prepares his own legend for this region, but not in any "hushed and wistful past." Just as he appropriates this geography for Slothrop's past to help give that character much greater depth than is often acknowledged, so too in "The Secret Integration" and Gravity's Rainbow does Pynchon create a legend for these hills that returns them to the rest of the nation.

--Mankato State University

Works Cited


BANISHING THE PESKY DEMON: THE FINAL WORD

Laurence Dow

Thomas Pynchon's work is well known for its concern with the subject of entropy. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, for example, the idea of entropy in thermodynamics is linked to the idea of entropy in information theory. As Oedipa Maas succinctly puts it: "there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the '30's, had looked very like the equation for the other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon" (105). Oedipa is correct. Until recently, however, no one knew why. But in a recent Scientific American article, "Demons, Engines and the Second Law" (November, 1987, 108-16), Charles H. Bennett takes pains to make a distinction between the thermodynamics of the physical world and the so-called thermodynamics of information theory, to have, as it were, the last word on the failure of Clerk Maxwell's gnome-like mythological sorter that could supposedly cheat the second law of thermodynamics.

In 1871, Maxwell conceived the demon as a type of information-processor that could sort individual molecules to create and sustain differences in temperature without itself doing any work. These differences in temperature would be a source of usable energy, and, in effect, the work the demon did not do would be the work a heat engine could do. Scientists saw that such a demon would violate the second law of thermodynamics, which holds that the entropy of a closed system always increases. Yet, it remained difficult to prove exactly why the demon would not be able to violate the second law. As Bennett puts it: "To protect the second law, physicists have proposed various reasons the demon cannot function as Maxwell described. . . . The correct answer—the real reason Maxwell's demon cannot violate the second law—has been uncovered only recently. It is the unexpected result of a very different line of research: research on the energy requirements of computers" (108).

In a 1929 article entitled "On the Decrease of Entropy in a Thermodynamic System by the Intervention of Intelligent Beings," the physicist Leo Szilard argued that the measurements the demon needed to make could not be done without the performing of work, which, in turn, would cause an increase in entropy; thus, the demon could not violate the second law. Szilard's work was carried forward in the 1950s by Leon Brillouin and Denis Gabor, whose main aim was to prove what Szilard had vaguely defined as "The irreversibility of measurement." They understood that the demon functioned primarily as an information processor and that its acts of
sorting were thermodynamically costly, but not necessarily in a mechanical way. Yet, they finally had to attribute the probable failure of the demon to the quantum theory of radiation: the energy of the photons contained in the electromagnetic radiation the demon would use to observe the molecules of gas it sorted would have to come from somewhere, to be taken from another system, thereby increasing that system's entropy; thus, again, the demon could not violate the second law.

The next major advance in the effort to banish the pesky demon was made by Rolf Landauer of IBM in the 1950s as a side effect of research he was doing on what was becoming known as "the thermodynamics of data processing." In computers, certain data-processing operations, such as copying data from one device to another, are analogous to measurements, in that one device acquires information about the state of another. These processes, like the measurements made by the demon, are thermodynamically costly. In the 1950s, data processing operations were believed to be intrinsically irreversible (in the thermodynamic sense of the word) because any kind of data operation was thought to require the generation and removal of at least one bit's worth of heat energy for every bit of data being processed within a computer's electronic circuitry. The process of data transfer would therefore always be irreversible because it would always be thermodynamically costly. Yet, once again, though perhaps for the last time, physicists were on the wrong track. In later work, Landauer discovered that some data operations are, for one reason or another, free of any fundamental thermodynamic limit. But it was not until around 1982 that Bennett and others finally determined exactly why Maxwell's demon could never do what it was supposed to do.

The key to the failure of the demon lies in the surprising fact that forgetting or discarding information, not gaining it, is what is actually thermodynamically costly. In order to decrease the entropy of its environment, the demon has to increase the entropy of its memory. When the demon forgets information, its memory actually becomes less organized than when it remembers it; it is, therefore, more entropic. In order to cause this change of state, the demon needs energy. Recall that the demon is really nothing more than a supernatural type of information-processing computer. If a computer's memory, which can exist in any number of possible electromagnetic states, is reset or cleared, the value of each location of the memory must be set to the same value, regardless of its previous value. Before the operation, the memory could have been in n number of states; after the clearing operation, the register can be in only one state. As Bennett puts it: "the operation has therefore compressed many logical states into one, much as a piston might compress a gas"(116). This process of logical compression is irreversible; therefore, and most importantly, it is thermodynamically costly. The increase in entropy which occurs in accordance with the second law of thermodynamics takes place during the resetting of the memory.
Thus, after more than a century of hypothesizing, we have found the real reason Maxwell's demon cannot violate the second law: in order to observe a molecule, it must first forget the results of previous operations. Forgetting results, or discarding information, is thermodynamically costly, and the demon is forced to increase the entropy of its memory in order to decrease the entropy of the heat engine. In the world of information processing, the process of making measurements is thermodynamically costly. The demon cannot work. Physicists have finally banished it forever.

--The University of Western Ontario

The title of David Seed's recent book and the description on the jacket flap may lead readers to expect an Ariadne—or at least some guiding thread—to help them find their way out of the disturbing complexities of Pynchon's fiction.

The possible meanings and allusions in Thomas Pynchon's work are almost infinite. His rich, polyvocal texts and his personal ability to remain virtually invisible pose a number of questions to readers and scholars alike: How do we read these encyclopedic fictions? What is the effect of all the tonal shifts? Where—if anywhere—is Pynchon's own voice, and how do we begin to interpret it?

Despite these leading questions, the reader soon discovers that in Seed's view there is no exit from the labyrinths of Pynchon's fiction: characters and readers alike are trapped. Stencil will never find his way out of the maze of V.—references, and neither will we: "This image of being trapped in a labyrinth constantly 'chasing dead ends' could stand as a representation of one possible reading of the novel" (109)—in fact, the only reading Seed gives. In The Crying of Lot 49, Pynchon "denies both Utopia and the reader the time to sort out the information. . . . The chronological sequence of events proves to explain nothing, partly because it includes a proportion of sheer chance and partly because the texture of the events is so complex. Pynchon indicates the complexity by using recurrent images of networks or labyrinths" (125-26). Finally, Seed describes "Pynchon's literary strategies" in Gravity's Rainbow as "embedding the reader in the text and denying him an over-view." And this embedding and denial are emphatically negative, entrapping, disempowering: "Pointsman, for instance, proves to be as much in a maze as his own rats and the maze supplies a metaphor of the novel's own labyrinthine structure" (205).

It has been some time now since Pynchon criticism took such an unreservedly bleak view of Pynchon's fiction as Seed does here. Indeed, when Seed does mention other critics, it is often to disagree strongly with their affirmative readings. Seed argues that "One drawback in Siade's approach [to "Low-lands"] is that he tends to moralize the story and to look for signs of affirmation which simply do not exist" (33). Similarly, Seed argues about "Entropy" that, "Plater and other critics
notwithstanding, the story affirms nothing" (52). Even critics who find some reason for hope in Pynchon's uncertain structures, some definite possibility of optimism in Pynchon's indefinite labyrinths, are represented as taking a negative view. Through highly selective quotation, Seed reverses Molly Hite's emphasis on decentering as potential openness and plurality of structure, making it into a notion of total failure: "Hite has recently explained the absent Centre as a crucial ordering device in all of Pynchon's fiction, particularly Gravity's Rainbow, which demonstrates a 'plenitude of failed revelations'" (188). Perhaps most tellingly, Seed enlists Thomas Schaub against Edward Mendelson in an argument against the "positive value" of the "religious and transcendental references" in The Crying of Lot 49: "In contrast Schaub has pointed out the important element of doubt and uncertainty in Pynchon's sacred terminology which teasingly gestures towards another realm without categorically asserting its reality" (130). Here, unlike with Hite, Seed appears to capture perfectly Schaub's sense of the potentially positive nature of Pynchon's ambiguity, but in Seed's view Schaub does not go far enough toward seeing labyrinth as trap, uncertainty as deflation, doubt as the demise of possibility: "We could take Schaub's argument a step further by suggesting that the religious allusions in Lot 49 are either parodic or paired with a profane meaning which constantly deflates the possibility of the spiritual" (130). But is this really the direction Schaub was going? Should the reader follow Seed in taking this last, decisive step?

In exploring these questions, we will take a closer look at the history of Pynchon criticism. First, however, we should note the qualities and features which recommend Seed's book in spite of its tendency to reduce Pynchon's fictional labyrinths to inexorably closing traps. Seed, a lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool, has written numerous articles on Pynchon (some of which have appeared in Pynchon Notes), and he is well versed in Pynchon criticism; his book shows none of the simple errors often made by those just getting their feet wet in Pynchon studies. Seed's prose is jaunty and unburdened by jargon, much like that of another British critic of Pynchon he often quotes admiringly, Tony Tanner. Indeed, Seed's discussion is rather like a series of free-wheeling lectures, moving spiritedly through Pynchon's works in chronological order, pointing out what seems of most interest to him in any given place. What the book lacks in depth and in close-knit argumentation (Seed rarely pauses to tie his points together), it partly regains in sharp local observations and intelligent liveliness.

Particularly good are Seed's comments on Pynchon's short stories and nonfiction. In an enlightening turn of phrase, he describes Callisto and Aubade from "Entropy" as "maladroiteds of form" (40). About the use of second-person address in "Watts," Seed succinctly points out that "the 'you' draws the reader imaginatively into the dramatic predicament of the
blacks. This is certainly the main polemical thrust of the article" (152). In another elegantly revealing formulation, Seed comments on Pynchon's depiction in "Watts" of the whites as colonialists: "This is why he refers to the police as 'white forces' and the welfare offices as 'the outposts of the establishment.' Watts is an area under siege, 'a siege of persuasion' to conform to white images which is not entirely metaphorical because it is supported by arms" (154).

Although it is rather hard to find justification for the book jacket's claim that "Seed reinterprets Pynchon's texts from an original perspective" (neither the jacket nor the introduction makes any explicit mention of just what is original about the book), still Seed does seem to pay special and important attention throughout to the theme of capitalism's turning characters into passive consumers, the media's colonization of the unconscious. Here is Seed's apt description of Dedopa's attempt to resist commodification: "Dedopa demonstrates a humanizing impulse in her desire to see the life these images conceal and to probe behind the Fangosa Lagoons complex, for instance, to see how and why it was created. Her curiosity cuts across Inverarity's implied mercenary treatment of lots of land as mere commodity to be bought and sold" (148).

Finally, Seed's book has some added attractions that Pynchon readers may find interesting and useful. The last chapter, although it does not exactly place "Pynchon in Context" because very few connections with Pynchon are drawn, does give plot summaries and some critical discussion of the books for which Pynchon has written advertising blurbs over the past twenty-two years. An appendix prints the whole text of the letter Pynchon wrote to Thomas F. Hirsch in 1959 about Pynchon's research on the Hereros. The book also contains a good reproduction of Bordando el Manto Terrestre by Remedios Varo.

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We have seen how Seed draws a sustained parallel between Pynchon's readers and his characters, between the labyrinths of and in Pynchon's fictions. Indeed, writers on Pynchon frequently begin their essays by noting that most of Pynchon's characters are themselves readers. What is less often observed is how many of Pynchon's critics succumb to the same reader temptation that begets his characters. There are, in fact, two kinds of reader temptation to which critics and characters regularly fell prey. The first and most obvious involves coming to a premature conclusion about the meaning of events, fixing on one of several possible interpretations, whether optimistic or despairing, as the definitive statement of the truth. The second temptation, more insidious, is to decide on ambiguity, to determine that the meaning of Pynchon's fiction is indeterminate and that this undecidability implies a certain openness on Pynchon's part to the possibility of positive change. The critics and characters in this second group fix on
uncertainty as a guarantee that more than one (the negative) interpretation is still possible, that a saving plurality of options still exists.

I would like to suggest that, as readers of Pynchon, we ought to try to resist the temptations that assail the readers in Pynchon, to move beyond repeating these characters' too-easy assumption that their readings, whether definite or definitively indefinite, are necessarily warranted. Let us get past the critical repetition of characters' compulsions in order to examine what is behind their fears and desires (as well as ours) as readers, in order to understand what drives them to succumb to reader temptation. As I read it, Pynchon's fiction is about this very subject of reader temptation: the self-defense tendency on the part of readers in and out of fiction to reduce what I shall call the ambiguity of ambiguity. While our first group of readers reduces an unsettling ambiguity to a single definite interpretation, our second group reduces the ambiguity of ambiguity to a positive ambiguity—that is, to a certain and optimistic ambiguity of open possibilities that defends against the one possibility that must be closed off: that there may really be only one authorized interpretation of events and that this interpretation may be entirely negative. This second group of readers wants to believe in a positive ambiguity as reassurance from the author of the word[d] that these readers still have a (positive) choice among still possible meanings, that the word[d]'s end has not already been (negatively) predetermined beyond their control. What both groups of readers consistently refuse to accept—and what, as I shall argue, Pynchon keeps raising before them (and us) as a possibility—is this unthinkable ambiguity of ambiguity. Critics and characters alike can be observed defending against this radical undecidability, the possibility that meaning may be neither comfortably definite nor encouragingly ambiguous, but disturbingly unreadable—a meaning that thwarts the reader's desire for security of any kind, even the minimal assurance of positive uncertainty.

The most obvious defense against the possibility of such ambiguity—to-the-second-degree is, of course, that adopted by our first group of readers: to reduce it all the way down to zero, to absolute certainty. Douglas Fowler is probably the most conspicuous among this group defending reader certainty. As he argues, "One cannot oversimplify Pynchon's only story: it is the oldest fairytale of all." In Fowler's reading, the meaning of Pynchon's fiction is spatially and temporally determinate. One can distinguish the "life"-affirming good side from the "mysterious" yet still identifiable "murderous" bad side, and one can know that the good side will be "unsuccessful": "Pynchon's real story always presents an isolated partisan of life unsuccessfully defending Our Kingdom against a mysterious and murderous antagonist from somewhere else" (123). The assertiveness of Fowler's diction ("One cannot oversimplify," "Pynchon's only story," "Pynchon's real story"
always") gives evidence of how strongly he feels the need to
defend against even a hint of ambiguity. When Fowler insists
that "We should not lose sight of the fact that [Pynchon's]
fiction is fantastic" (10), the asseveration in "fact" and the
underlining of "fantastic" seem to betray some anxiety that we
(or he himself?) may indeed "lose sight" of the "only" "real"
interpretation of Pynchon's work.

In reading Pynchon, Fowler seems to give in to the same
temptation that besets the characters reading in Pynchon. In
The Crying of Lot 49, Oedipa tries to read the signs in order to
discover the meaning of the "Tristeros." Some of the signs seem
to point toward the Tristeros being an underground network
offering hope to those barred from the official channels of
communication, but other signs would indicate that the Tristero
is either an evil organization murdering social outcasts or a
figment of Oedipa's own paranoid imagination, a symptom of her
mental illness. Throughout the novel, Oedipa is continually
tempted to fix on one of these interpretations as the truth
about the Tristero, but even at the very end she resists giving
in to her fear or desire for a conclusive reading, whether
this be optimistic or despairing. Instead, she continues in
expectation of further evidence: "Oedipa settled back to await
the crying of Lot 49."3

But the critic succumbs where the character resists.
Whereas Oedipa continues to hope that her negative
interpretation of events is only one of several possible
readings, Fowler says:

we realize the poignance of her hoping to find herself
only "mentally ill, that that's all it was."... We
know that that is not all. There is very little real
paranoia in Pynchon's fiction, for the paranoid sees
design and danger in excess of the facts; Pynchon's
protagonists always begin by accusing themselves of
paranoia but end up wishing their terrible
recognitions were merely paranoia. The facts they
discover are worse than any fantasy. (16-17)

"We should not lose sight of the fact that [Pynchon's] fiction
is fantastic": "the facts [Pynchon's protagonists] discover are
worse than any fantasy": the "fact" that Fowler sees about
Pynchon's fiction is equivalent to the "facts" within the
fiction that the characters could see if only they would give up
their fruitless hope for a saving uncertainty and recognize the
"only" "real" reading of the world: that the other is evil
and that the self is doomed.

Not surprisingly, Fowler is more approving of the
characters in Pynchon whose reading of the "facts" within the
novels seems to correspond more closely to Fowler's reading of
this "fact" about the novels. When Fowler turns to another
reader in Pynchon, Herbert Stencil in V., the critic seems to
find in the character a congenial form of negative certainty. Stencil is trying to read the "V."-signs in order to discover the truth about history: is the world entropy running down, or is there still some hope that history's course may yet be open to positive change? Does V. represent the entropic principle ruling the world or something else, something perhaps less dire and deterministic? Now Stencil may very well incline more toward a negative interpretation of events than does Odipa, but even he refuses to accept any reading of the world as absolutely certain. V. may be read as a sign pointing unequivocally to the world's inevitable disintegration, but Stencil resists this negatively certain interpretation throughout the novel. Even at the end, Stencil avoids settling for any one reading; he leaves Malta just as the secret of V. seems about to be revealed (was V. the woman or force that killed his father, Sidney Stencil?). Herbert insists on retaining the "sense of animateness" his lively search for V. has brought him: "To sustain [this animateness] he had to hunt V.; but if he should find her, where else would there be to go but back into half-consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid" (V 55).

But Fowler reduces Stencil's complex attraction-repulsion concerning the mystery of V. to a dead certainty:

In [V.] Stencil files is our guide to the history beneath history, and he speculates (and we are of course to realize he's correct) that our world has contracted a "disease" sometime between 1859 and 1919 "which no one ever took the trouble to diagnose because the symptoms were too subtle--blending in with the events of history, no different one by one but altogether--fatal." (123)

Yet, in the context from which Fowler has excerpted this quotation, Stencil's words are indeed "speculation." It is Stencil père (Sidney, not Herbert) who is speaking, and his words begin with "But then: suppose," and form part of a dialogue in which several different interpretations of events are considered. "Why say a disease?" is one of the responses to Sidney's fearful imaginings (V 401). But Fowler "realizes" the Stencils' worst fears as a matter "of course"; the critic reads père as fils, dialogue as monologue, speculation as truth. Why should a critic so readily agree to such a "fateful" interpretation as the only "correct" reading when even the characters themselves seem to try to avoid it? The temptation here to which Fowler succumbs is that of negative certainty: for some of Pynchon's critics and characters, believing they know the worst seems to be at least a fraction better than total uncertainty about the meaning of events. (For an example of such a negatively certain character, recall Calisto in "Entropy," who reads the signs of his environment as clearly pointing toward the entropic dissolution of the world: "[in]
his obsession [..] that constant 37 [degrees Fahrenheit] was now decisive" [SL 98].)

Fowler is joined by other critics in this nihilistically certain reading group. In what follows, I have selected a representative sampling of dead-sure critical statements, and I have broadened the range of focus to include discussion of Gravity's Rainbow. Like Oedipus, Slothrop has difficulty deciding whether his fears have a basis in fact or are merely the symptoms of his own paranoia. Like Stencil, Slothrop is uncertain whether or not human sympathy can reverse the world's entropic decline or counter its movement toward a fiery apocalypse. But the following critics are certain--of disaster:

[Gravity's Rainbow] is not about the paranoid vision, but is one.4

Pynchon's law of human entropy orchestrates the life of the nation, the couple, the family, the individual into a symphony of death centuries in the unrolling.5

One can only wonder if in some odd way Pynchon has not taken the concept of entropy too seriously, allowing an idea from physics, which has validity as a psychological delusion, to dominate his own view of human life.6

[The rocket in Gravity's Rainbow] is falling in absolute silence, and we know that it will demolish the old theatre--the old theatre of what is left of our civilization.7

In Gravity's Rainbow the possibility of boldly confronting the world and one's fellow human beings with true sympathy is totally corrupted by the prevalence of hierarchically structured human relationships and only when these patterns are momentarily subverted, more often by accident than otherwise, does sympathy emerge as a true alternative. It offers, however, no way out of the apocalyptic predicament.8

These critics may take different attitudes toward Pynchon's work, but all agree on what that work means: the drift in and of Pynchon's fiction is undeniably entropic. In each case the fearful uncertainty of Pynchon's characters is reduced to critical certainty that fear is warranted, that Pynchon has authorized his characters' fearful visions: "Pynchon's law of human entropy"; "Pynchon has ... taken the concept of entropy too seriously"; "[Pynchon's work] is not about the paranoid vision, but is one." Symptomatically, critical knowledge seems to be as absolute as the object of knowledge is negative: "we know that it will demolish"; "the possibility ... is totally corrupted"; "no way out of the apocalyptic predicament." What
Josephine Hendin says of Pynchon is more probably true of herself and these other dead-sure critics:

And in his myth of himself as death incarnate, Pynchon transcends his limitations, puts himself beyond the pale of human pain and cruelty. He allies himself with the ultimate aggressor, the impersonal force of the entropy god. In the thores of his pessimism, by force of his pessimism, Pynchon still pursues his own invulnerability. (50)

It is Pynchon's critics who, taking the same epistemological bait laid for his characters, have settled for a pessimistic reading in order to convert a knowledge of powerlessness into a power of knowledge.

But Pynchon's characters have far more difficulty than his critics in finding a dead-certain resting place. Although it might be some small consolation to know that one's "paranoid" suspicions are in fact confirmed by solid evidence, that the plot connections one fearfully infers are indeed a crucial network inescapably closing on the self, the ambiguous plot in and of Gravity's Rainbow, for example, does not ensure such awful certainty. As Slothrop is forced to realize:

If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long. Well right now Slothrop feels himself sliding onto the anti-paranoid part of his cycle, feels the whole city around him going back roofless, vulnerable, uncentered as he is, and only pasteboard images now of the Listening Enemy left between him and the wet sky.

Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that reason... (GR 434)

Slothrop might be surprised to read that certain critics have provided him with just such a (terrible) raison d'etre, that they at least are sure that he lives only to be killed by a real enemy with a definite plot centered squarely on him. These positively despairing critics, in trying to give Slothrop the pathetic consolation of negative certainty, deny him what little hope he has of a saving ambiguity—the possibility that the network of plots is not yet determining, that he is not necessarily the target's dead center. But Slothrop would still like to believe that the world can "sustain many other plots besides those polarized upon himself [...] this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom" (GR 803).

Which brings us to the critics who would like to see Slothrop's hopes of a saving ambiguity turned into a sure thing. There is one more kind of critic among our first group of
readers: unlike the deadly certain interpreters above, this type claims a positive certitude. Here is one such critic disagreeing with Fowler's negative reading of Pynchon's text while implicitly agreeing with Fowler's assumption that Pynchon's meaning can be determined:

In seeing Pynchon's ghosts as entirely supernatural and malignant, Fowler repeats the very mistake made by so many of Pynchon's characters: he fails to see the physical connection between the dead and the living, the spirits' affirmation of the interdependence of all things in this world.

This is my own statement from an essay in a previous Pynchon Notes, where I too succumb to the temptation of a desire for fixed meaning. The other critic's (and characters') failure becomes my "success" as I reverse Fowler's authorization of characters' fears into a validation of hope: "These ghosts are not malignant, but only appear so"; "Pynchon's ghosts represent a warning to the human race"; "there is yet time for those still living to learn to understand" (84, 84, 84). This battery of declarations shows me confidently penetrating beyond appearance to reality, explaining the reason for others' confusion of the two, and reassuring them that they still have time to learn what I know.

Happily, I am not alone in this essentially unqualified optimism: Edward Mendelson also falls into this group of positively determined readers. In his extremely influential discussion of The Crying of Lot 49, Mendelson distinguishes between the book's "ostensible subject" and its secret subtext, but both are quite positive in import—especially the second:

The ostensible subject . . . is one woman's discovery of a system of communication, but the system refers to something far larger than itself: it fosters variety and surprise, and offers a potential access to "transcendent meaning" and "a reason that mattered to the world."10

One "discovery" fosters another revelation: a working "system of communication" among people in the secular world increases the "potential" for communication with the "transcendent" beyond. By the end of Mendelson's essay, this "potential" has become a firm reality:

This "promise of hierophany," of a manifestation of the sacred, is eventually fulfilled, and [Oedipa's] "sense of concealed meaning" yields to her recognition of patterns that had potentially been accessible to her all along, but which only now had revealed themselves. In the prose sense, what Oedipa discovers is the Trygleri, "a network by which X number of American[s] are truly communicating whilst reserving
their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of
spiritual poverty"--that is, everything profane--"for
the official government delivery system." (119)

"Fulfilled," "revealed," "recognizes," "discovers"--but these
positives are Mendelson's, not Oedipa's or Pynchon's. A look at
the general context from which Mendelson has excerpted these
particular quotations shows that Mendelson's knowledge is both
more certain and certainly more joyful than Oedipa's: as she
worries to herself,

Either you have stumbled indeed [. . .] onto a network
by which X number of Americans are truly
communicating[. . .]. Or you are hallucinating it. Or
a plot has been mounted against you[. . .]. Or you are
fantasying some such plot, in which case you are a
nut, Oedipa, out of your skull. (CL 170-71)

As I did with Pynchon's ghosts, Mendelson seems to have reduced
the disconcerting ambiguity of the signs surrounding Oedipa to
a wonderful certainty.

Interestingly, the more disturbing elements in this same
passage from The Crying of Lot 49 rise to the surface sixteen
pages later in Mendelson's essay like a return of the repressed,
but the critic will admit them only in distorted form.
Mendelson's compromise-formation retains his own optimistic
certainty about the meaning of the Trystero (it is positively
sacred) while conceding that Oedipa may still be unsure. What
it seems she must do now is, as Mendelson has done, overcome her
doubting-Thomas side and make a leap of faith:

This is why the novel ends with Oedipa waiting, with
the "true" nature of the Trystero never established:
a manifestation of the sacred can only be believed in;
it can never be proved beyond doubt. There will
always be a mocking voice, internal or external,
saying "they are filled with the new wine"--or, as
Oedipa fears, "you are hallucinating it... you are
fantasying some plot." [. . .] Her choice now is
either to affirm the existence of the
Trystero--through which continuity survives, renews,
reintegrates itself over vast expanses of space and
time--or to be entirely separated, isolated, an "alien
... assumed full circle into some paranoia." (135-
36; my emphasis marks the return of the repressed.)

From Mendelson's perspective, Oedipa has a clear choice between
positive and negative alternatives: "either" "affirm[ative]"
faith in a community-saving Trystero "or" "mocking," "isolat[ing]" doubt. Mendelson's belief that he has a clear
view of the problem and is in sight of the solution makes him a
perfect example of the second kind of critic in our first group:
the positively determined reader.
Thomaz Schaub's "Open Letter" and Pynchon's The Voice of Parnassus are famous for qualifying Mendelson's optimistic certainty and maintaining the ambiguity of Pynchon's fiction. Schaub thus falls into our second group of readers: those who insist that one simply cannot get to any "stable meaning" in or of Pynchon's work. In his discussion of The Crying of Lot 49, Schaub argues that "Neither [Oedipa] nor the reader is allowed by Pynchon to ascertain the stable meaning of the blossoming pattern: without this certainty her usefulness in preserving order against a declining culture remains painfully ambiguous" (Ambiguity 30-31). Notice how certain Schaub is about Oedipa's (and our) lack of certainty, how definite he is about Pynchon's ambiguity: "Neither . . . is allowed by Pynchon to ascertain the stable meaning."

But Oedipa is not so certain of her uncertainty; she is very much afraid that she may already know the immutably stable meaning of the pattern and that this meaning may in fact be the confirmation of her worst nightmares. As more and more of the people she loves disappear or die, Oedipa begins to fear that she does indeed detect a sinisterly stable pattern: "They are stripping from me, she said subvocally--feeling like a fluttering curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss--they are stripping away, one by one, my men" (CL 152-53). Like Slothrop, Oedipa becomes afraid that, instead of facing a reassuringly ambiguous field of open possibilities, she confronts a decidedly evil plot centered on herself: what if she is not free to choose, but already chosen as a victim? Because of her fear that her future is unambiguous, that the (terrible) truth will be revealed to her, Oedipa hesitates to follow her assumptions about the meaning of the Tristero so that it will not assume her: "Having begun to feel reluctant about following up anything . . . . [Oedipa] left it alone, anxious that her revelation not expand beyond a certain point. Lest, possibly, it grow larger than she and assume her to itself" (CL 166). Thus, while Schaub's assertion is an important counter to Mendelson's reduction of Pynchon's ambiguity, Schaub has himself reduced the ambiguity of ambiguity in Pynchon's work: the possibility readers in Pynchon face that there may be no ambiguity, that the very option of opting among more than one possibility may already have been closed off.

Schaub's positive insistence on ambiguity is what allows him to read ambiguity as something persistently positive. It is not long in his reading before the instability of meaning which he had earlier described as "painfully ambiguous" becomes much more optimistically undecidable: "with Oedipa we experience a broadening of consciousness, and a sense of the possibility for meanings which inheres in the world and in language. Those meanings, most skillfully in The Crying of Lot 49, depend for their vitality on the suspension in which they are caught" (Ambiguity 41). The meaning in and of the book is more "vital" because of its "suspension," more "broadening" because it cannot be closed off by any authorized interpretation. For Schaub,
Pynchon's ambiguity is a form of affirmation, indirect but necessarily so; it indicates that one need not feel bound by any existing structure of meaning, that one can always establish a new "relationship" with the word and thus discover in it new meanings.

For Pynchon to affirm directly that Oedipa's experience is mystical or religious, or that Tristero exists literally, would be to change the entire nature of the book and reduce the importance of her adventures. Such an affirmation would mean only that she had found a secret enclave, instead of an exact and rigorous relationship between her culture and her understanding of it. (Ambiguity 107)

In the end, Schaub seems as confirmed and affirmative about Pynchon's ambiguity as Mendelson is about Pynchon's determinably literal and religious meanings. Like Mendelson's, Schaub's reading can be read as a defense against Pynchon's radical ambiguity. In a compromise-formation even subtler than Mendelson's, Schaub lets a certain amount of ambiguity in only so as to feel he has mastered it all. Schaub is ready to renounce the certainty of "mere facts" and "answers" only if he can be certain that the consequent ambiguity is "ordered" in such a way that it is "luminous" and "animating": Pynchon's stylistic balancing orders the ideas and visions of his fiction so that they remain "... strict and luminous possibilities rather than mere facts, animating clues instead of answers" (Ambiguity 4).

It is probably fair to say that the majority of Pynchon critics writing today may be placed with Schaub in this second group of positively ambiguous readers. Of course, as we have seen with Seed, there are also some negatively ambiguous critics, decisive about the undecidability of Pynchon's fiction and equally certain that this unascertainability is a negative thing: "We could take Schaub's argument a step further by suggesting that the religious allusions in Lot 49 are either parodic or paired with a profane meaning which constantly deflates the possibility of the spiritual." But, as we have seen, Schaub's qualification of Mendelson's relatively positive certainty was headed in the direction of a positive ambiguity, not, as Seed seems to believe, toward a negative ambiguity. This last is Seed's own position, evidenced, for example, by the following:

[In Gravity's Rainbow there is] a certain lexical set which revolves around the concept of conditioning. The main terms are: 'reflex', 'mosaic' ... 'maze' ... and 'labyrinth', the latter three functioning as reflexive metaphors of the novel's own assembly. Pointsman may be forgotten but reflexes never are. Slothrop after all comically reminds the reader of the sexual reflex. The notion of conditioning reinforces
the determining nature of psycho-cultural patterns in
the characters' behavior. (177-78)

Once again we note that for Seid Pynchon's "labyrinths" are
inescapable. Characters and readers alike are caught in a
negatively "determining" "maze," an imprisoning self-reflexivity
that is entirely determined by a disempowering wor(l)d:
"Pynchon's vision of human action is bleak indeed" (168).

But most Pynchon critics today seem to favor Schaub's
position over Seid's,13 reading Pynchon's fictional labyrinths
as positively ambiguous, optimistically undecided. The length
of the following list testifies to the popularity of the
Schaubian position (Note that all of these statements are by
authors of entire books—not just essays—devoted to Pynchon):

Tristero both urges and denies interpretation, thereby
preserving its inward mystery and supplying the sense-
making structure necessary to connect the world with
meaning... the reader's active engagement with the
text... becomes a creative act that transforms and
renews. One's willingness to interpret while
accepting the limitations of interpretation [acts as]
a defense against creative exhaustion.14

[Pynchon's] main characters learn to live without
planned futures, without livelihood, without stable
identity... Even broken and imperfect patterns are
capable of evoking the feelings that accompany our
finding a sense of meaning... [Reading] can help
us assimilate an experience of "meaningfulness,"
whether or not we are able to express the latter in a
coherent statement.15

[Pynchon's] own fictional worlds... are
pluralistic—governed not by a rigid, absolute, and
universal Idea of Order but by multiple partial,
overlapping, and often conflicting ideas of
order... Precisely because the present lacks
unity, it leaves room for unanticipated developments.
As long as burgeoning meanings do not converge at a
Holy Center, further meanings are possible. The
absence of a definitive, synthetic unity is finally a
condition for freedom.16

The very atmosphere of uncertainty so peculiar to
Pynchon's work suggests that possibilities remain open
even if unrealized.17

Despite its frequent grimness, [Gravity's Rainbow] is
not a novel of despair, but one of possibility... each critical view has tended to isolate one of the
relative points of view in the novel as an objective
conception of Pynchon's point of view, while actually
each point of view is really a part of an entire spectrum which is the "rainbow" of possibilities encompassed by Pynchon's vision. 

[About the end of Gravity's Rainbow] Is it a third world war, a nuclear catastrophe? Or is it the leading edge of a radiant hour of enlightenment for mankind, of liberation from the cycle of entropy that we have been imprisoned in? The author does not tell us, for the future is yet to be shaped by us all.

The critical consensus here seems oddly--and tellingly--in inverse proportion to the complexity and controversiality of Pynchon's fiction. Each of the above readings argues that, for critics and characters, Pynchon's meaning is positively ambiguous: its "mystery," "imperfect patterns," "absence of definitive unity," "atmosphere of uncertainty," "rainbow" of possibilities," and wide-open questions all leave room for optimism--hope and free choice--on the reader's part.

It is true that Pynchon's novels, especially Gravity's Rainbow, contain scenes of promising uncertainty and hopeful doubt. Characters keep asking optimistic questions about whether or not impromptu action on their part might counter the plots formed to split them up: "Could it be there's something about ad hoc arrangements [...] that must bring you in touch with the people you need to be with? that more formal adventures tend, by their nature, to separation, to loneliness?" (GR 620). Always there is the hope that somewhere in the interstices of the plot's cruel structure it may still be possible to extemporize a bit of freedom, to evade determinism and find some "second chance" (GR 338): "There is the moment, and its possibilities" (GR 159). One of these key moments occurs when Slothrop, in the middle of his journey, has a vision of positive ambiguity, a "feeling" that he may yet escape the cause-and-effect of predetermined plot and reroute the course originally laid out for him:

Just for the knife-edge, here in the Rue Rossini, there comes to Slothrop the best feeling dusk in a foreign city can bring: just where the sky's light balances the electric lamplight in the street, just before the first star, some promise of events without cause, surprises, a direction at right angles to every direction his life has been able to find up till now. (GR 253)

These instances of promising uncertainty are important and do deserve to be singled out, as they have been by the critics quoted above. The problem arises when such critics read this optimistic ambiguity as definitive, when they speak of "The absence of a definitive synthetic unity" as "finally a condition for freedom"; of "mystery" as enabling "a creative act"; of
"uncertainty," as indicating "open if unrealized" "possibilities." Such summary statements about Pynchon's meaning reduce his radical ambiguity to something positive; they leave out of account equally important scenes where ambiguity itself seems in doubt, where readers are forced to face the possibility that all possibility of hope may be gone: the terrible truth is in sight.

To take what is perhaps the most compelling example, consider the last page of Gravity's Rainbow. Just as Slothrop, mid-way through his journey, stood at "dusk in a foreign city," waiting for the "first star" and hoping that his wish to escape their plot would come true, so Gravity's Rainbow ends with what "may have been a human figure, dreaming of an early evening in each great capital luminous enough to tell him he will never die, coming outside to wish on the first star." But this positive ambiguity is then made disturbingly radical, achieving for a moment a terrible clarity: "But it was not a star, it was falling, a bright angel of death" (GR 780). It is hard to find much optimism or uncertainty in this sentence. Could it be that the deepest uncertainty concerns whether readers have any hope left of evading destruction, any real possibility of acting to avert catastrophe? At the end of Gravity's Rainbow, a rocket bomb seems set on its predetermined course, just about to fall on characters and critics alike, on sky-readers all. A positive ambiguity--"Just for the knife-edge, [...] just before the first star, some promise of events without cause, surprises"--is counterbalanced by a negative that seems not really ambiguous enough:

And it is just here, just at this dark and silent frame, that the pointed tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, [...] reaches its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta-t.

There is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you, or to reach between your own cold legs . . . (GR 780)

Even the song that readers are then encouraged to sing ("Now everybody--"), though it seems to contain some ambiguous hope ("There is a Hand to turn [back?] the time, / Though thy [hour?] Glass today be run"), is nevertheless included in the list of all-too-certainly cold comforts like touching a stranger or masturbating: "Or, if song must find you, here's one" (GR 780).

Optimistically ambiguous readings, because they do not take into account the strong negative tendency of scenes like this, effectively prevent us from seeing important aspects of Pynchon's meaning. Such readings will not admit that Pynchon seems to see destruction from nuclear bombs--descendants of the V-2--as a near-inevitability. The description of the "Rocket" as "reach[ing] its last unmeasurable gap" above our world may hold out some very small hope, but its tendency is certainly
downward. Furthermore, by suggesting that Pynchon sees escape from the fearful plots of those in power as a definite possibility, these readings seriously underestimate Pynchon's concern about the strength of the military-industrial complex and its near-deterministic control over future events. In his Introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon writes:

> Except for that succession of the criminally insane who have enjoyed power since 1945, including the power to do something about it ["The Bomb"], most of the rest of us poor sheep have always been stuck with simple, standard fear. I think we all have tried to deal with this slow escalation of our helplessness and terror in the few ways open to us, from not thinking about it to going crazy from it. (SL 18-19)

This passage is remarkably unambiguous about the terrible strength of those in power and about a corresponding tendency on everyone else's part toward increasing "helplessness and terror." Similarly, numerous passages in Pynchon's fiction join the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* in suggesting a decidedly downward turn to the plot that characters and critics would rather not face:

> But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakably. It is the parabola [of the Rocket's flight and fall]. They must have guessed, once or twice—guessed and refused to believe—that everything, always, collectively, had been moving toward that purified shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chances, no return. (GR 203)

What I would like to suggest is that in reading Pynchon we should give due weight to this ambiguity of ambiguity—the ever-present possibility that, whether readers want to admit it or not, uncertainty is not necessarily positive. Doubt may be merely a defense against fearful knowledge. The world's meaning, the (negative) tendency of its one correct interpretation, may already have been decided beyond the reader's control. Pynchon's characters read the signs of their world in order to gain the clear understanding necessary for effective action, but they are also reluctant for understanding to clarify in case it should reveal that no effective action is possible, that the world's destruction is a foregone conclusion. One half of the reading dilemma facing Pynchon's characters is thus the problem of disambiguating the mysterious signs around them, gaining knowledge so as to claim some power; the other half involves the fear that knowledge, once attained, will prove disempowering, a death sentence that cannot be suspended.

The same year (1984) Pynchon wrote of the widening gap between the power of the military-industrial complex and the
escalating helplessness and terror of everyone else, he also wrote that there seems to be a growing consensus that knowledge really is power, that there is a pretty straightforward conversion between money and information, and that somehow, if logistics can be worked out, miracles may yet be possible. ... [It may be that the deepest . . . hope of miracle has now come to reside in the computer's ability to get the right data to those whom the data will do the most good. With the proper deployment of budget and computer time, we will . . . save ourselves from nuclear extinction.]

This statement—from the essay "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?"—perfectly describes the hope shared by so many of Pynchon's characters that, if they could get to real knowledge, they might have some effective power, maybe even enough to work a miracle, to avert the near-inevitability of nuclear destruction. In this essay Pynchon still speaks of the military-industrial complex as "completely" dominant over the rest of the population, but he seems to join in his characters' hope that knowledge and hence power may yet be attainable:

The word "Luddite" [originally attributed to those who smashed machinery in the early days of the industrial revolution] continues to be applied with contempt to anyone with doubts about technology, especially the nuclear kind. Luddites today are no longer faced with human factory owners and vulnerable machines. . . . [T]here is now a permanent power establishment of admirals, generals and corporate CEO's, up against whom we average poor bastards are completely outclassed. . . . We are all supposed to keep tranquil and allow it to go on, even though, because of the data revolution, it becomes every day less possible to fool any of the people any of the time. (Luddite 41; emphasis added)

Pynchon's novels are filled with characters who would like to believe that their only reading problem involves getting to the truth, resolving the ambiguities devised by the power establishment to fool them, to keep them ignorant and impotent.

But there is also that other side to the reading dilemma, the fear that resolution means dissolution, certainty certain destruction. It might be better not to know if knowledge must prove incapacitating, confirming the loss of power one had hoped to find. Perhaps the prime embodiment of all Pynchon's characters' fears in this regard is Byron the Bulb, whose dream of informed action turns into a nightmare of confirmed futility. Byron investigates the power establishment, disambiguating their signs until the true pattern begins to emerge, but this reading
only reveals the undeniable extent of their power, the unbeatable force he is up against:

Byron [. . .] sees more and more of this pattern. [. . .] The pattern gathers in his soul [. . .], and the grander and clearer it grows, the more desperate Byron gets. Someday he will know everything, and still be as impotent as before. His youthful dreams of organizing all the bulbs in the world seem impossible now—the Grid is wide open, all messages can be overheard, and there are more than enough traitors out on the line. (GR 654–55)

It is the horror of ending up like Byron, "knowing the truth and powerless to change anything" (GR 655), that traps the readers in Pynchon between fear and desire, between a need for knowledge to ensure power and a fear of knowledge confirming impotence. Like Byron, these readers want to see reading as a prelude to resistance: the right information must be gathered so that the rebellion can be organized, effective action against a known enemy. But reading may reveal that the enemy has already taken every position that matters, already co-opted enough of the potential resistance to make revolution impossible. This is the reading dilemma presented to readers in and of Pynchon's fiction.

Facing up to this reading dilemma means not taking that "step further" toward the negatively ambiguous reading advocated by Seed, but it also means refusing to succumb to the hopeful open-endedness of a positive ambiguity (Schaub's interpretation). We cannot feel the full disturbance of the radically ambiguous reading dilemma confronted by Pynchon's characters if we as critics reduce that deep uncertainty to a negative—or a positive--ambiguity. Pynchon's fictional depiction of the reading dilemma we face in confronting the world is both more complex and more accurate than has often been realized.

--Cal Poly

Notes


13 Of course Seed is not alone in reading Pynchon's fiction as negatively ambiguous. Thomas S. Smith, for example, provides this classic formulation of the view:

> What we are left with, once the attempt to understand Pynchon is taken very far, is an array of fragmented information, ambiguous, self-destructive conspiracies, and
unfulfilled transformations that leave the reader, like Slothrop, foundering in the Zone. ("Performing in the Zone: The Presentation of Historical Crisis in Gravity's Rainbow," Clio 12.3 [1983]: 253.)


16 Molly Hite, Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983) 10, 21.


HOW WE HAVE LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING

Sohnya Sayres


The last time the Bomb starred as the leading representative of our horror, as the mushroom phantasmagoria of the end, was in the films of the late (1950s-70s) avant-garde. Since then, activists—some historians, some of the arms negotiators, surely—have not forgotten to be afraid, but the rest of the country rather liked its entertainment to be post-apocalyptic, in the steel dawns of the barbaric future. When the Bomb was re-centered in the story, as in Atomic Cafe, we could have been traveling through America with Umberto Eco. The place looks grainy, hyperreal, provincial, high-spirited, and deadly. The Bomb itself and the technocracy that created it were crew-cut square and right out of Kansas. That was the forties and fifties, these films say; we can shudder and laugh, for we're so much more sophisticated now. Now with Eastern Europe retiring its communist parties while the Soviet Union applauds, the whole militarist rationale for the Rocket-Warhead State seems about to wither away. Bush is being cautious: he has to. For the Army is leaping ahead with scrap-and-retool plans to become a hot (surgical) strike force.

A new era? Who or what gets the credit for this yet another reason not to worry. Has the Pax Nuclear won? In freezing action and impoverishing both sides? Has the New Left won? In being the force buried in the samizdats and moving through the political underground of the East? The Church, in Poland? Labor, in East Germany? The Right, here? Or is this the promised convergence of the two world systems earlier theories predicted—or just an image of that end?

Dale Carter's The Final Frontier worries. It has not had the opportunity to relish these latest devolutions and developments. Its language is hard, and its ambition is very big. Carter believes Gravity's Rainbow sets the essential paradigms of the trajectory of the American century (a shortish century, beginning in the 1940s and curving downwards in the 1980s) at the moment when the Nazi Oven State was taken up and carried away to become the Rocket State. Actually carried away. Carter reports that in 1945 the US liberated from the Zone 400 tons of rocket equipment and 14 tons of printed matter, along with some famous Operations types like Werner von Braun.

Between 1946 and 1947, von Braun wrote a space-travel novel, tested the recovered V-2 rockets at White Sands, New Mexico, and created the math that would prove the feasibility of
space flight. The Air Force's Project RAND concurred with the Navy's report on the potential of Earth satellites just as Robert Heinlein was publishing Rocket Galileo. Heady opportunism seized fertile minds. It was not enough that the military had solidified science's incorporation into the superexploitable complex of war-fears. Science trained itself in its own needs by visionary fiction, until, according to Carter, fiction made science and vice versa. Scared and thrilled, the country watched.

It was quite a moment. The logic of nuclear warfare fueled the ambitions of the space age, with the movie makers pulling down the skies in disasters. Audiences were held in their seats at the Orpheus Theater with endless replays of invasion fantasies introduced by endless newsmen of the Red Menace sending its hordes over the geographical parallels, or infiltrating and corrupting the innocent. But, Carter reminds us, this "transmarginal leap" between the actual and the imaginary can include a 'surrender' to hallucination, manipulation, and control, depending on the historical context; the term of the 'nonstop revue' (91). The country needed a fabulous adventure to uplift it from the scene. Americans could not be allowed to ponder too much the thought that all their great success and might would bring them was nothing but a cataclysmic terminus. This was a time when millions were sacrificed to inexcusability at the war tables. These sacrifices would be worth it, big thinkers argued, until the point was reached when the survivors would wish to be dead. To shoot for the stars, or as Walter Cronkite remembers, to have been able to "wave goodbye to Columbus"--with the astronauts headed for the Moon--this was the country's reprieve. In Carter's view, this is Ilse Plicker's dream. This is America's bright-white future of an entirely engineered world beyond this one, integrating us, transcending us, in the suspended time of space.

For Pynchon is haunted, says Carter, by the "grown baby" fantasy of the kind General Cummings voices in Mailer's The Naked and the Dead. Such a fantasy "transforms history into metaphors of inevitability, natural or mechanical, which requires a subordinate like Hearn to be 'nothing but a shell,' and which implies a society of would-be Pharaohs engaged in limitless combat: a program of heroic vitalism and the antithesis of any sort of social coherence based on mutual aid" (70). One character after another in Gravity's Rainbow has invested in this "dream of inviolability" within a "single universal plot" of destruction, which "renders the human rigid and fearfully anxious within its codings, and constitutes a neurotic mania whose realization may be suicidal" (70-71).

Carter proposes that Gravity's Rainbow presents the "Genesis to Revelation" of the Rocket State's "origins, range, domain, and bearing, as well as its justification of false mobility within naturalized security," beginning with "the receding flood tides of World War II" and arcing towards "the
closing firestorms of nuclear war" (71). It is as if Pynchon's thoughts had rushed backward from where he sat in the decade of moon landings and blanket bombings of Vietnam to conceive of the point of inheritance, in the paranoid prescience of his characters, of the new "voluntary totalitarianism." Gravity's Rainbow puts before us the parable of the Descent and the Orpheus Theater as we sit in front of the television screens waiting for the Challenger show or the Star Wars show to begin.

For the historian Carter, the novel is utter inspiration, for its energy, dread, dissociation; for the way its anger and admonitions are woven through with historical persons and places; for the way it asks if there "might almost--if one were paranoid enough--seem to be a collaboration here, between both sides of the Wall, matter and spirit. What is it they know that the powerless do not? What terrible structure behind the appearances of diversity and enterprise?" (GR 165). To Carter, the novel is uncanny in the way it illuminates "The American vice of modular repetition, combined with what is perhaps our basic search: to find something that can kill intense pain without causing addiction" (GR 348), and in the way it images the America of the plastics factory, brevity its industrial secrets, dreaming of the Implex future. Above all, Carter admires the novel for the way it shows the "process of absorption facilitating the survival, transformation and reproduction of a partly obsolete imperial power structure in the form of its incipient totalitarian replacement" (8). All this encapsulation and representation stirs Carter to new efforts of "synthetic" history-criticism.

The Final Frontier aims to be, not a literary discussion or a social history of the space age, but a new thing, a form of high critique reaching through the structures and language of Gravity's Rainbow to draw parallel after parallel to the forces behind the story of America's space efforts. The result is obsessive, extraordinarily researched and detailed, brilliantly inventive about the novel, and pressed by a demon to reveal the meaning behind the spectacle. Eric Mottram, of King's College, is quoted on the book's cover as saying that this is a "sober and witty investigation of space-weapon and space-probe politics and technology." Perhaps to the Brits, who may all be mad. To American ears, even ones that can remember the emphasis the New Left gave to the language of incipience, transformations, and declines, this book is the last one would call sober and witty. It holds to the terms of the novel, no matter at what symbolic strain. And while Pynchon may indulge in "gallows humor. A damned parlor game" (GR 165), Carter cannot. The not-so-funny, after all, picaresque of the novel (with, of course, the inverted dowser of Slothrop's cock) has to be forsworn in writing history.

While some of Carter's writing uses a narrative style, blending portraits, media, politics and economic forces, most of it reflects Carter's loathing for the power-players of the
nuclear threat, elevating them into maximal disassemblers and manipulators, while the culture as a whole is shown groping for emotional safety valves. America is dramatized as reconstructed from the chaos of the Zone, built upon a "precarious structure of imminent civil conflict and inescapable security programming, of evasive action and endemic stasis..." by which the outdated and untenable relationships of authority and obedience characteristic of the imperial age are reproduced in the interests of the post-war order's extension" (9). One might ask why, with so much to be concerned with, Carter focuses on space. The answer is that the rocket is "the endlessly absorbing expression of a movement" even as it is translated "into its more imaginative forms at the heart of the Rocket State's rise" (9). In Carter's mind, Gravity's Rainbow virtually propelled his study. "For as the parabolas leading from the UFA studios at Neubabelsburg and Lüneburg Heath clearing converge at the Orpheus Theater, creating the complex spatial and temporal intersection at 'the last delta-t' where the Faustian Rocket State is produced and consumed, so Pynchon projects a third parabola resulting from their occlusion... the American-manned space program" (83).

In Carter's description of that program, hardly an event gets named without reference to Gravity's Rainbow. Yet America's imaginative forms come through clearly enough, especially when it goes all out. Carter begins with a leap from the 1939 to the 1964 World's Fair ("the shape of things to come"). There on the horizon is Bilicero's "great glass sphere, hollow and high and far away"; there are the protesters, yelling about segregation in the fair's construction and about the shameless expense of the project, getting arrested; and there is Disney in Florida buying up land twice the size of Manhattan for his EPCOT center (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow). Thus the crisis years following Sputnik reveal their dynamics: fancy staging that pictures the future as the universe conducted by the US, the jeering part of the crowd that won't buy it, and the entertainment magnate dreaming of a world where social problems can be fixed by design. It's a show, it's daring, and from the start it suffered from an eroding set of beliefs. Soon the war, the inflation, the burning cities do their work; liberal capitalism falters, and the buck-makers use "vision" to sell their products. When the EPCOT center opens in 1982 as part of Disney World, Carter reminds us, its original futurist-utopian vision has been replaced by patriotic silliness and industrial exposition intended to "capture the American public as loyal and satisfied customers without having to underwrite their liberation as informed and intelligent citizens" (6).

The next chapters document how truly successful that captivation became. By 1956, "the United States became the world's first service economy and the first country in which the population spent more time watching television than working" (100). Suburbia was growing forty times faster than the cities.
The consumer motor, in overdrive, rode in where angels feared to tread. Two hundred companies demonstrated the durability of their products within the blast zone of a nuclear test. Others labeled their products with the FBI's own "Fidelity, Bravery, and Integrity" slogan, to the FBI's outrage. By 1970, "52 percent of the world's foreign investments were in the hands of American-based multinational corporations and banks, the result of an eight-fold increase in overseas capital accumulation by U.S. firms since 1945" (32). And, "Within twenty years of the war's end, total short-term consumer debt rose from $5 billion to $374 billion to finance not just the 'pin-ups and library shelves' of the Orpheus Theater's 'Invisible rooms' but the entire consumer goods fallout blanketing the new private quarters" (98-99).

But for all these distractions, never far from the minds and efforts of the "merchants of discontent" (although surprisingly far from most Americans' thoughts: in a 1954 survey, only one percent mentioned communism as their chief concern) was the "fetish of preparedness" against the communist threat. One megamunition after another roared off into the blue. Korea was a "lockheed war" and the first to claim a totally unseen kill. In the nuclear arsenal's hall of fame, the legend of unstoppable missile. Silos, "top secret," were built at the edge of towns; everybody knew what those small zones of loathsomeness held.

In describing the shock of the nation at the launching of Sputnik in August of 1957 (and the joke: remember the "Sputnik cocktail"—one-third vodka, two-thirds sour grapes?), Carter exorcises the "had-to's": "The United States therefore had to demonstrate the superiority of the free enterprise system by restoring a high level of economic growth; it had to prove its capacity for justice by making an effective commitment to civil rights; and it had to regain its position as the world's leading scientific power by outpacing the Russians in space" (126-27). When the Vanguard rose only four feet off its launch pad in 1957, the "Flownik," "Kaputnik," "Staputnik," flunked Eisenhower and brought Senators Johnson (the "Space Cadet") and Kennedy into position to deploy the rhetoric of the New Frontier. That frontier meant space; it also meant massive rearmament for flexible response and strategic strikes at a time Kennedy later defined as 'the hour of maximum danger'" (138).

While Kennedy argued for a "politics of expectation," he was also proposing a "politics of exertion"—the great public sacrifice and unity he had praised in terms of "voluntary totalitarianism." Carter found this phrase in Kennedy's 1940 book, Why England Slept. Had Kennedy not used those words, Carter would have invented them. For they seem to explain a lot—the jingoism of "America first," the bases around the world, the wars of intervention, and the concomitant manufacturing of consensus at home that made it all possible. By the 1980s, the country acts sedated, tranquilized by disaffected, losing-the-race tremors, perhaps, but as has been
true for a long time, placated by the strength of a never
demilitarized war machine throwing its fancy stuff at us. We
seem to have voluntarily agreed to sham politics at home in
order to wield the bludgeon in "our" interests abroad. For
Carter, Kennedy becomes the very embodiment of this process at
its formation; or, rather, Kennedy is "part of the Operation's
multifaceted replacement for its outdated Führer system: a
figure capable of addressing an appeal for voluntary
totalitarianism across an indulgent society by calling for a
more accommodating joint command structure" (9).

In naming this whole process "incipient
totalitarianism," Carter admits that no single term adequately
describes the post-war power structure. His Appendix I contains
a curiously truncated discussion of the term. We have to
interpolate for ourselves that Hannah Arendt's four conditions
for totalitarianism (quoted on page 20) were beginning to be
met in the America of the 1950s and 60s. First, classes have
been transformed into masses in this country, at least in
consumer sociology. Second, the party system has taken on
nominal functions in representing the less well-to-do; that
purpose has been taken up by the social movements. Third, the
center of power has shifted internally from the army to the
police and to the many branches of surveillance. Externally, we
have called our various aggressions police actions. Fourth, we
have established a foreign policy directed towards world
 domination, even if it is called containment.

The nuclear threat, arguably enough, terrorized us totally,
and followed another of Arendt's maxims: this total terror,
"independent of all opposition," brought about and carried forth
as if by "the force of nature or of history," raced freely,
"unhindered by any spontaneous human action" (The Origins of
Totalitarianism [1973] 464-65). Loneliness for Arendt was the
spiritual precondition for the collapse; the 1950s saw the
American as a member of the lonely crowd.

One thought of Arendt's, however, does not yet seem to be
so true, even granting the power of the Presidents.
"Totalitarian policy," she writes, "does not replace one set of
laws with another, does not establish its own consensus iuris,
does not create, by one revolution, a new form of legality. Its
defiance of all, even its own positive laws implies that it
believes it can do without any consensus iuris whatever, and
still not resign itself to the tyrannical state of lawlessness,
arbitrariness, and fear" (Origins 462). Despite "Democracy by
the US Airborne" policies, Internally, Americans sense that
they are diverse enough to be still capable of pulling and
tugging at the control structure within the framework of courts
and interests. True, these special interests block a
"liberating tolerance," to use Marcuse's words, because as
Robert Paul Wolff said, it is the genius of American politics to
"treat even matters of principle as though they were matters of
conflicts of interests" (A Critique of Pure Tolerance [1969] 21,
But events proved another point. Not to glorify them unduly, but the social movements (civil rights, antiwar, feminist, gay, ethnic minorities) did create a politics of principle in this country. They interrupted, for a while, the drive towards a Marcusian "totally administered society" whose opposition had given up, a priori, the threat of counterviolence. The cities did burn; there were stand-offs. The State has been forced to recognize demands for entitlement or reparations or needs servicing. Consider too the privacy/disclosure acts, the Watergate trials, the restraints on secret government; notice the recent desertions from the drug wars. These may be hopeless against the technology of the Rockat State, but they reveal a space for citizenship that might be just enough to slow down the full development of "casual" totalitarianism. Carter draws his position from the more radical critiques of Arendt; he is not prepared to equivocate, for all his mention of the "precarious structure of imminent civil conflict," despite what he hides in that word "incipience."

Instead, he emphasizes that zest for big government needs to be continually reinforced. The space program was and is America's most successful flag-waving venture. Every aspect of it—from the great new work force, the revitalization of the South and the extraordinary grab for public resources by the business community to the elaborately groomed appeal and political fortunes of the astronauts—has been an incontrovertible boon to the State. For a particular demonstration, after reading this book, visit the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum on the Capitol's mall. The New Future and America's claim to its achievements swing from the rafters in boosterism. The effect on most people is the sense that it just "had to be."

The space program also had to decline, under the pressure of enormous inflation and its woes, beginning in the late 60s. Between 1969 and 1971, two-thirds of the work force was fired. The dramatic manned flights were supplanted by satellites and shuttles. More sinisterly, the military made increasing inroads into a program that had previously been remarkable for allowing relatively free access to its information and for its dedication to scientific endeavors.

Carter's conceptual time comes down in 1986 with the "quick frozen permanent frame" of the death of Christa McAuliffe in the space shuttle Challenger—the nation's "most celebrated material icon." For McAuliffe, as it must be for all of us who somewhere dream Iise Pöchler's dream, the stars "lit no viable way out." "On the contrary, as Pynchon makes clear when the oven State's last clearing caves in... such dreams of transcendence rose on the very instruments of death they eschewed" (209). A possible coda to the story, the peace shield forever, SDI, Star Wars, trails off with Reagan as a lunatic lighting out "for
territories new." It resounds with Dr. Strangelove's gleeful yell: "'Mein Führer, I can walk!'" (271).

Not that the space age is over. We calmly await space stations and space probes, hoping sense will overtake Congress and they will stop Star Wars. But there's no question that space's political promise is more tenuous. And we have grown a little more lonely in the heavens, a little less sure that They are looking for us. In 1965, 10,147 UFO's were reported to the US Air Force; now such reports trickle into a single privately funded researcher, who carefully debunks them, for the record. Pravda (reporting a landing this fall in the Ukraine) is just keeping up the tradition.

What does Carter say about Gravity's Rainbow? The novel's brief time span is its key: all forces have rushed to that moment to accelerate the transition and maturation of the new order. The war has ended; Fascism, a most vicious element of a brutal system, is in defeat; the victors stand ready for the spoils. Though they may wrap themselves in the language of benign democracy and liberal markets, in fact they are recoalescing world forces with the tools and the rationale of perpetual warfare. The first hundred pages of The Final Frontier predict who in the novel will succeed in crossing the zone and finding a place for themselves in the new order. Some, like Werner von Braun, are instantly whisked to new sites of operation. But others have to be tested, especially tested against capitalism's show of "leaving the war behind." What the transformation requires, in Rózsavölgyi's words, is something "able to draw them into a phalanx, a concentrated point of light, some leader or program powerful enough to last them across who knows how many years of Postwar" without the "terrible disease like charisma" (67).

The Rocket State, says Carter, "becomes an environment located, like Henry Miller's Air-Conditioned Nightmare (1945), somewhere between insane asylum and shopping center" (86). Consequently, we can count on Yoyodyne's Clayton "bloody" Chicitz, that man from the future, to demonstrate "essential" agency. He "translates military conflict and civilian anxiety into effortlessly marketable entertainment" (79), and he guesses rightly that V-weapons will be the way to go. Gerhardt von Goll will also rise. His "dream factory career documents the inflection of propaganda from its imperial form as a discrete intrusion on society to its totalitarian form as its continuous and pervasive condition" (80). So too the modest Pökler. "Although his decision to 'quit the game' in the dying days of the Oyen State seems to distinguish Pökler from Burroughs' archetypal agent, who blows the world up because it is his job to do so, Pökler first completes Gottfried's shroud, and his decision to 'quit' does nothing to stop his joining the next game, to be pulled in by new stakes and new players. Pökler remains 'just the type they want!'" (78-79). Plasticsman Mossmoom will triumph most of all, for he is "the synthesized
behavioral unit of post-war society," who acts as "the integrated capitalism's own history: a temporary lodger in commercial accommodation; an interchangeable part inside a technical system" (46).

Pointsman makes a stab at the transition and loses—"his dreams of personal omnipotence an embarrassing and inefficient remnant" (43). Blicero, that "vehicle of imperialism" whose "plot is a monologue of retreat," must utterly dissolve. He, "like Pointsman, is an agent of power whose authoritarian dream is at once revealed and dismembered by the loss of his child victim; a would-be Führer who is himself rendered impotent in the interests of the Operation's survival" (48).

Finally, Slothrop is presented "not only as a wave but also as a particle whose decay releases new elements" (38). A knowing confidence man, a plaything of power, Slothrop is "broken down and removed from history; his engineered shells fill the naturalized environment of post-war morphological differentiation whilst his anarchic core is displaced to an ahistorical world of fantasy beyond" (41). He "escapes location and structure at the cost of identity and autonomy. In each case his division increases the entropic chaos of oversystematized energies as, in Hannah Arendt's sense, public praxis is displaced by social behavior" (39).

To Carter's credit, he rather wonderfully elaborates details and adds myriad references to these stick figures of economic and political allegory. His notes range easily from Melville to Marshall McLuhan and H. T. Wilson's The American Ideology, Science, Technology and Organization as Modes of Nationality in Advanced Industrial Societies. But patience can crack. Carter piles up associations even as he overworks his monolithic blocks of imperialism and incipient totalitarianism. The strain is often too much, his language glutted, harried, dogmatic. Powerful physical metaphors drive this book through the "political, economic, technical, and cultural minutiae of post-war American society" (83), as if Carter were too impressed with his own efforts to match Pynchon's arc for arc. Though Carter professes a history which is human-made, in investigating the "intersecting processes of evacuation, elevation, and elimination, of what Thomas Pynchon describes as the 'great frontierless streaming'" (6), he works too hard to reproduce those mechanisms. Cultural artifacts and political and economic "completions and transformations" are fused, as if a novel, a movie, a bid for the presidency, a merchandising scheme were already/burned up in the aftermath of unstoppable technical trajectory, Blicero's virus of Death.

Admittedly, such synthesis is the ghastly inspiration of Gravity's Rainbow; history-writing usually dares not such paranoid feats. If Carter turns out to be right, and we should have worried more, and we live to reflect upon it, then indeed
we can grant him his due. We are doomed to the forces of a single dynamic emanating from the Zone of 1945.

--The Cooper Union
PLAYING SOCCER IN LEFT FIELD

Michael W. Vella


One of the unfortunate but perhaps significant tendencies in Pynchon criticism is for explication to replicate the writer's sense of a reality dense with multiple meanings that are often contradictory and almost always elusive. Pynchon criticism too often reads with nearly the same labyrinthine complexity as his texts, and what might have aided in exegesis ends in confusion. This tendency is unfortunate because Pynchon has his detractors, and critics who succumb to this tendency do not do much to counter them. In fact, criticism that too much mimics Pynchon's world may contribute to his reputation, in the view of some, as something of a cult writer, adding fuel to the anti-Pynchon fires. This same tendency is significant, however, because if critics often replicate his polysemous worlds, then it is symptomatic of how these critics share with Pynchon the postmodernist loss of epistemological boundaries. Such a loss is one of Pynchon's major themes, and he would not be exploring it if it were not a general condition of our times, characterizing critics as much as physicists, philosophers, and the man in the street.

One example of such epistemological shifting of boundaries in contemporary criticism is the deconstructionists' radical rupturing of signifier and signified, and any fall into epistemological anomic on the part of criticism is part of much larger and more general contemporary developments in the foundations of knowledge which Pynchon's writing in large measure expresses and explores. But these are weighty matters, and here I want only to touch on them as they impinge on Georgiana M. M. Colville's Beyond and Beneath the Mantle: On Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49.

Colville's book exemplifies fundamental epistemological problems that Pynchon explores and that characterize recent developments in theory. When Colville remarks, as many have done before her, that reading The Crying of Lot 49 engages one in a search much like that of Oedipa Maas only to arrive at no certainties, she could be describing her own book. "The reader, like Oedipa Maas, accumulates more and more information, facts, figures and connecting signs, which, instead of leading him/her anywhere specific, merely confuse him/her further" (11). While interpretation need not attempt to attain certainty, and indeed may be better off for not posturing as doing so, Colville's book is filled with assertions about her object of inquiry that run counter to her ostensible theoretical point of departure.
Reading a critic like Colvile, or an author like Pynchon, with an acute sense of epistemological problematics merits closer attention than is permitted here, but suffice it to say that Colvile is caught on the horns of the current dilemma of doing interpretation while adhering to an epistemological position that undermines more archaic interpretive gestures. That is, Colvile follows her impulse to interpret her text by finding its referents and correlations in the world, while at the same time adhering to a view that disavows much epistemological coherence between such signs as texts and such signifiends as the world.

A central concern of Colvile's is the relation between Pynchon's Crying of Lot 49 and a series of quasi-surrealistic paintings by Remedios Varo. Potentially, this is an interesting parallel to draw, for in V4, for example, numerous allusions and details point to Pynchon's being influenced by surrealism as an art movement. In Slow Learner he is explicit about his indebtedness to the aesthetic of surrealism as well. But such concrete (dare I say positivistic?) connections are not in Colvile's purview when she treats Pynchon and Varo together, and what emerges is rather a case of parallel analysis—Pynchon's novel on one side, Varo's paintings on the other—because Colvile's method doesn't push her toward making such connections. Her dual analyses have their brilliant moments, but like parallel lines they seem never quite to connect. Varo, formally married to Benjamin Peret, herself a participant in French surrealism until she emigrated to Mexico City in 1942, an accomplished artist in her own right, draws Colvile's attention in regard to Pynchon, but Colvile reduces what might have been a source of insight to the following: "Remedios Varo and her work seem strangely related to Pynchon's world. They appear to be linked by a kind of objective chance" (47). Since Pynchon was familiar with the French surrealists who emigrated during the Occupation, not pursuing the literary historical connections impoverishes our understanding of the Varo-Pynchon connection. Colvile has not set herself this kind of research, but perhaps it is the métier of both the critic and the literary historian to explore such "objective chance."

Of the many examples of how Colvile's dilemma leads to confusion, none are more troubling than her flip connections between Pynchon's novel and American society. Of San Narciso, for example, Colvile writes that it is "an invented suburb of the real L.A. (Los Angeles)" (14), and remarks offhandedly that San Narciso "alludes to narcotics" (35). "Narco," which evidently she sees as a root in "San Narciso," "alludes" not only to narcotics, but to all the cognates built upon it. Yet Colvile explores no such linguistic connections. I am thinking of narcolepsy, for example, the disease of sleep; and so, San Narciso is a sleepy suburb as much as a drug-abusing extension of Los Angeles. In the same passage Colvile does nothing with Saint Narcissus, other than to assert that he is the patron saint of the suburb, and makes no mention of narcissism, which presumably has its place in any California suburb as much as
drugs and sleepiness. The problem here is deeper than it might seem, and this is not to quibble over etymology, but to see that these offhand and quite often reductive interpretive gestures run counter to Colville's desired deconstructivist complexity. They run against the epistemological underpinnings of her method as well. There is a disturbing lack of rigor here that has less to do with Colville and more to do with a faulty methodology wielded imprecisely.

Colville makes many such connections between text and culture where her critical method tends to belie her interpretive manipulations. To cite a few examples: when Oedipa has a sexual encounter in a closet, Colville writes that it "proves to be symptomatic of a decline of sexuality in the novel and in postmodern America in general" (16); or, when Dr. Hilarius's favorite put-on face turns out to be that of Fu Manchu, Colville remarks that it is "an obvious reference to Vietnam" (63). In the latter case, Colville is even quick to expand, arguing that the weird Doctor's face-making represents an American penchant for Behaviorism: "The anti-Semitic implications are obvious and form part of the satirical parallel Pynchon is constantly drawing in the background of his novel between Nazi Germany and postwar America" (63). The point here, aside from Colville's jejune understanding of both Pynchon and American civilization, is that if the Word's capacity for referential meaning is as attenuated as other remarks of Colville's lead us to believe it is, she is unfitted to make these kinds of correlations, no matter how off the mark they might be, between text and culture. Her doing so is like playing soccer in left field.

How, for example, does allusiveness attain in texts where the Word is so attenuated? For Colville, Pynchon is a deconstructionist. "[H]e heralds the death of the referent" (17), we are told, only to learn that "A postmodern novel may be about communication and postal systems and yet deliver no message" (17). In this vein Colville writes that "Pynchon attacks 'the Word,' although he cannot replace it, partly because it is too limited, an intellectual ivory tower" (19). And yet, yes, and yet, "The Word is also one of the numerous intertextual elements in C. L. 49" (19). The root of many of the stylistic ticks, equivocations, even hesitations before many of Colville's interpretive gestures lies, I think, in her sense of an attenuated Word that nevertheless she wills to interpretation. We read such equivocations as "The plot or story," "This ignorance/innocence," "Then the narrator and/or implicit author," "The reader who is trying to follow the story (plot)," until at times the wavering itself waffles and flip-flops, and "plot/story" becomes "plot/Plot" (14). Careful revision and editorial attention might have eliminated much of this equivocation, which aspires to nuance but fails short of it, yet it is symptomatic of larger methodological problems that afflict Pynchon criticism and postmodernist discourse at its weakest in general.
Colville's book is not without its perceptions into Pynchon; in fact, if anything, it is fraught with them. At the end of Chapter IV, for example, the discussion of metaphor and postmodernism verges on more coherence than it attains. But then a sudden shift occurs from contemporary theory (Derrida, Blanchot, Barthes, the requisite appellations are here; Beckett has "nothing to say") to psychological theory, and after a discussion of perversion the book's language takes a perverse turn:

It seems to me that Trystero could be disseminated into Tryst (with) Ero(s) and Tristero into Trist(e) Ero(s) (in a triste era), which, like the paradoxical entropy metaphor applied to information, alludes to the huge tide of sexual exhibition and pornography leading to the sadness and/or death of Eros, reducing the phallus to a muted horn and the writer's pen to silence. (45)

Perhaps Helene Cixous' advice to female writers, quoted by Colville in her study of Pynchon, should have been heeded. We are reminded that female writers need to "break away from traditional binary patterns like the signifier and the signified." Cixous says, and Colville quotes, "Amie, garde-toi du signifiant qui veut te reconduire à l'autorité d'un signifié! ... Romps les cercles; ne reste pas dans la clôture psychanalytique: fais un tour, et traverse! ['Friend, keep away from the signified that wants to lead you back under a signifier's authority, ... Break out of the circle; do not stay in the psychoanalytic fence: do a turn and go through it!']" (89; my translation).

--Indiana University of Pennsylvania
SAFER OR SORRIER?

Brooke K. Horvath


Elaine B. Safer's The Contemporary American Comic Epic considers six novels by four authors: Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor and Giles Goat-Boy, Pynchon's V. and Gravity's Rainbow, Gaddis's The Recognitions, and Kesey's Sometimes a Great Nation. Safer's purpose is to understand in what ways and toward what ends these novels are both comic and epic. This would seem to be a harmless enough undertaking, although some readers may find themselves exasperated by the author's unself-conscious return to a simpler critical world undisturbed by the implications of structuralist and poststructuralist thought, a world in which the critic's primary business is charting allusions, making genre distinctions, and offering propaedeutic thematic analyses. Safer may nod in passing to the work of, say, Umberto Eco or (in a note) Hayden White, and she may speak of intertextuality or label her subjects "postmodern" (which she does without further comment, as though the term were self-explanatory and unproblematic), but for her Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis, and Kesey remain essentially what they once were judged to be: existentialists, black humorists, absurdist fabulatours. Consequently, the appropriate approach to Barth et al. is still yesterday's, with each novelist seen as exploiting black humor and ironic allusiveness (that is, allusiveness which "mocks the present and is often ambivalent about the past" [21]) in the service of an absurdist vision that incorporates the techniques of traditional comic prose epics and makes parodic use of the conventions and intentions of the traditional epic to yield existential satire. As Safer writes in her conclusion,

These postmodern works have their roots in the traditional epic and also are linked to the comic tradition of Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes's Don Quixote, and Fielding's Joseph Andrews. They, like Joseph Andrews, are comic epics in prose. They, too, expose the pervading attitudes of vanity, hypocrisy, and concern with worldly pursuits. However, while Joseph Andrews attacks follies and vices by contrasting them with the ideal values of charity and good-heartedness, the twentieth-century comic epics mock all ideals, emphasizing man's foolishness in seeking them. All these postmodern epic novels are encyclopedic in scope, focus on the ironic quest of the hero of the absurd, and use exaggeration to satirize all institutions. Highly allusive and full of farce, satire, and the grotesque-


comic aspects of black humor, these contemporary comic works are philosophically grounded in existentialism and the absurd. (157)

Thus, "contemporary epics indicate a disappointed desire for order in an irrational twentieth-century world. They emphasize a culture that seems to have lost confidence in norms and in heroic subjects, a culture of people whose quests are—in the end—absurd. These mock epics suggest a decline in revered values within a twentieth-century community devoid of heroic meaning" (159). What saves these novels from bleak nihilism, what gives each its affirmative underpinning, is not only its humor but the order imposed by carefully controlled allusiveness and the revamping of traditional epic conventions: "the highly ordered comic epic novels show that man is capable of creating imagined worlds that transform despair over lost ideals into newfound comedy" (160). This affirmation is arrived at by readers' negotiating the novels through a 'tripartite process: first, realization of the exposure of false ordering systems; second, the readers' disorientation when they cannot find meaning; and, finally, the comic awakening to and acceptance of the sheer absurdity of the human predicament, the acceptance of the Camusian exhortation to laugh with scorn at the absurd quest and try our best to meet disappointment with humor and strength" (24).

Such remarks have been unexceptionable truisms of American novel criticism for decades. Perhaps Safer cannot be faulted overmuch for having chosen this particular route to comprehension rather than one a bit less threadbare, a bit more innovative. Still, I wonder: do we really need 161 pages of text, 31 pages of notes, and a 16-page bibliography to support the contention that Gravity's Rainbow and Giles Coat-Boy are comic? Or that they are epic in scale and ambition? Or that they employ black humor and allusiveness to drive home their points (if we grant point-making to be part of the postmodern agenda)?

Safer can hardly be criticized for her selection of texts. The books she has chosen certainly support her contentions and are indeed important contemporary American novels. Yet one might ask why JR is ignored; Safer offers no reasons for this exclusion. Nor does she explain why she elected not to include Cooper, whose Public Burning in many respects suits Safer's intentions better than Sometimes a Great Nation. (Catch-22, which might also come to mind, is dismissed with the observation that it is simply "not epic" [20].) One might raise similar questions regarding those touchstone texts—traditional epics, comic prose epics—seen as important sources for Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis, and Kesey: why Magnolia Christi Americans but not U.S.A.? Why Don Quixote but not Modern Chivalry? But as I say, it would be unfair to fault Safer for choosing not to discuss certain works. So let us instead consider in some detail what Safer has done.
Following an overview of her project which defines terms and introduces the ideas she intends to develop, Safer offers two chapters—one on Mather's epic, one on Leaves of Grass—that are meant to identify the epic conventions (catalogs, typological associations, historical sweep, allusiveness, the articulation of national/community values) and characteristic American themes (America as the new Eden, the American as Adam, the translatio motif, and so on) that inform, albeit ironically, the contemporary American comic epic. Thus, for instance, Magnalia Christi Americana is important, Safer contends, "for three major reasons":

It is an early example of a highly allusive American epic in prose, a form to which the twentieth-century epic novels develop an ironic counterpart. It contains themes that recur in American literature and are mocked in the contemporary American comic epic novel: the concept of America as a new Garden of Eden; America as a new Canaan; and America as the high point of the westward advancement of culture, the arts, and empire. It utilizes genres (in addition to the epic) that are parodied in the twentieth-century novel: the history or chronicle; saints' lives; and the jeremiad sermon, which encourages men to repent their evil and preaches God's forgiveness. (25)

Throughout these two background chapters, interesting topics surface: the metamorphosis of the jeremiad from Mather's use of it to Pynchon's; or, in the Leaves of Grass chapter, the transformation of Adamic man into "alienated man." Yet here as throughout, Safer sells her insights short by abbreviating her discussions, leaving them undeveloped and consequently lame. Here, for example, is her initial treatment of the contemporary jeremiad almost in toto (at the ellipsis I have deleted a quotation from the end of Gravity's Rainbow):

Mather uses the jeremiad form to affirm his belief in the covenant between God and the Puritans, his faith in redemption, and the importance of New England's mission in history. The contemporary prose epic Gravity's Rainbow, on the other hand, uses the jeremiad form to convey lamentation but not a hope for salvation. A hymn of lamentation is recalled at the close of the novel, just as the rocket lands on the roof of the theater... Pynchon's novel presents a world in which there is no covenant between man and God, no hope of redemption. The only way of lessening the torment is through the laughter of black humor. (30)

Although Safer returns to the jeremiad in her chapter on Pynchon, she does not do much more with the idea. Similarly, when she speaks of the transformation of Adamic man into alienated man, she fails to discuss the latter concept (as
though its meaning and implications were obvious), reverting to remarks about the contemporary hero as "naive bumbler" and "schlimazell" (43), and leaving the reader to puzzle out whether these are indeed synonymous with "alienated man."

Each of the chapters devoted to individual authors is organized around the particularities of the novels discussed. The Sot-Weed Factor is read primarily as a parody of "traditional frames of reference" such as "the historic John Smith-Pocahontas story; the American Adam; the Socratic dialogue; traditional romance that contains conventions of chastity and love at first sight; and Aristophanes' famous explanation of love as a desire for one's other half" (56). The explication of Giles goat-Boy, while still governed by the notion of "parodic allusiveness" (69), zeroes in on the quest motif (with special attention to Barth's burlesque rendition of the Christian hero) before turning, rather unsuccessfully, to a consideration of "one of the novel's basic metaphors: the "universe as a university" (73). This digressive turn culminates in a discussion of "Emersonian Traditions of Education" and the following non sequitur paragraph, which closes the chapter:

Even though Barth satirizes academia, he gains his primary readership from university faculty and students. He himself puzzles over this: "Do you know what I think is interesting.... It's the spectacle of these enormous universities we have now, all over the place, teaching courses in us.... Now that means that a born loser like The Sot-Weed Factor might even be gotten away with, because 2,000 kids in northeast Nebraska or somewhere have to read it in a Modern Novel course. Alarming.... God knows what we're up to." (78)

By any standards, this isn't much of a conclusion; within the context of Safer's larger discussion, the point of this paragraph escapes me.

The Pynchon chapter finds, in contrast to Barth, "a darker and more caustic vein" of humor brought to bear upon "man's quest for meaning in an absurd world" (79). Safer covers much ground here, though with too great brevity, reducing complex issues to banal simplifications that, Safer implies, require little elaboration. She covers the topic of "Puritan Themes," for example, in a section two-thirds of a page long, and the topic of "The Sacred and the Profane" in a section little more than a page long. (Actually, she returns to these topics at various places throughout the chapter; focus and organization, despite an abundance of subsegmenting, are not among the book's strengths.) The reader familiar with Pynchon and his critics will find few surprises here: Benny and Stencil are absurd heroes; the Whole Sick Crew receive a two-paragraph section, the point of which is that Esther, McClintic, and the rest help
establish the novel's absurdity through "redefinition of the spiritual to the profane" (50); entropy and Pynchon's related notion of the "dream of annihilation" receive the usual comments; and Safer explains the topic of "U. and Twentieth-Century Society" in less than a page. Safer's 15 pages on Gravity's Rainbow focus on Pynchon's adaptations of the American tall-tale tradition, the jeremiad, comic-strip characters, quest motifs, and Paradise Lost (the point of this last. Pynchon's "vision of hell invites comparison with famous traditional descriptions, such as that in Paradise Lost, which continually presents hell in relation to heaven" [102]).

In her discussion of The Recognitions, viewed as a satire on contemporary society's materialism and allegiance to false values, Safer doggedly focuses on ironic allusiveness—the novel's references to transcendental themes, Flemish art, the third-century Clementine Recognitions, alchemy, and Goethe's Faust—to reach a by-now-familiar conclusion: "The Recognitions presents a world in which the artist Wyatt continually searches for meaning, a glimpse of a lost paradise, a sign that God is watching. Instead he finds only randomness.... It is a book about the ironic desire to soar in atonement in a world in which God is not watching, a world in which God may never have been watching.... Gaddis uses(s) jest to spend his rage, as he recognizes the absurdist vision that emerges from the contrast between the ideal and its loss" (136-7). Sometimes a Great Notion is seen as centering, more than the other novels discussed, "on traditional heroic subjects: the conflict between two brothers, the Oedipal bind, and the reaction to the death of a loved one" (138). Yet here again the principal lesson is that black humor and "an absurdist vision" (138) inform the tragicomic, alienated quest that is the story of the Stamper clan.

I have truncated these last two chapter summaries because Safer's approach has been established. Moreover, although each chapter does target specific concerns with each novel, more generally, as I have suggested, the book repeatedly rehearses the same salient characteristics of the contemporary comic epic: black humor, ironic allusiveness, absurdist questing, comic deflation in a world of existential randomness, etcetera. And repeatedly, it reaches the same conclusions: "This black humor novel [Giles Goat-Boy] shows the inversion of traditional comedy when disorder, not order, emerges at the end of the quest" (73); "Black humorist Pynchon laughs at man's helplessness in an alien universe and in a social network that has grown way beyond his control, and he wants the readers also to laugh" (108); "Gaddis's second major inversion of the allusive mode to develop absurdist comedy is based on medieval alchemy" (124); Kesey "ironically makes the reader aware of the frailty of [his] characters in an alien universe" (138).

In addition to these problems with The Contemporary American Comic Epic already mentioned, one might briefly mention
that the index is an embarrassment (there is, for instance, no entry for "existentialism"), that Safer relies excessively on secondary sources (often letting a snippet of someone else's work do her job for her), and that although the documentation is perhaps admirably thorough, it too is certainly excessive and frequently unnecessary (and, often, Safer presents citations without introducing them, forcing the reader to rummage through the endnotes to learn who said what where).

More significantly, the idea of "epic" tends repeatedly to fade from view, although this does not finally matter much because what Safer has to say about these novels is dependent less on their being epics than on their being black, absurdist comedies in the allusive mode. Again, whereas the book returns obsessively to certain ideas, it slight's others in need of closer attention and more careful articulation than they receive, and this problem, combined with Safer's desire to cover too much ground too quickly, yields a book filled with redundancies; focus and organization problems; digressions (consider, for instance, the sections "John Barth, the University, and the Absurd" and, from the Pynchon chapter, "The Comic Strip and Black Humor"); and glib because unsupported assertions like the following: "In the American comic epic novels, references to religion also generate laughter. But the novels lack the intrinsic religious character that exists in Ulysses, a pattern that is naturally part of the intellectual outlook of Irish Catholics and is commonly absent in the twentieth-century American world" (19-20). When such generalizations are not outrageous, they often (as mentioned above) have the effect of implying that complex ideas are in fact simple to the point of being self-evident, or else they merely result in rather lame material, as these brief excursions into affective criticism reveal: "Readers of Gile's Goat-Boy, aware of traditional quest literature, enjoy the incongruity between expectations and their reversals and they take pleasure in the black humor of the absurd" (72); "As the characters in Gravity's Rainbow quest for answers... readers... hope for a movement that will culminate in successful action. That they do not achieve this sense of an ending disappointed readers, but the imaginative process gives them a kind of pleasure in appreciating how they have been tricked" (106).

All of which is not to say The Contemporary American Comic Epic lacks merit. The prose is eminently readable, clear and accessible, and because Safer touches upon so many concerns basic to an understanding not only of the six novels she discusses but of contemporary American fiction generally, her study should provide anyone desiring it a useful introduction both to the often puzzling worlds of Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis, and Kesey and to certain main currents in recent fiction. Another way of saying this is that I think Safer's book offers a very teachable approach to these novels, and this is no small feat. Moreover, the book contains a number of provocative ideas: that Kesey is primarily a caricaturist (an idea I would enjoy seeing
Safer elaborate); that in Pynchon's novels the tallest tales turn out to be the true ones. Finally, as Steve Moore remarks in his review of this book (Review of Contemporary Fiction 9.1), one ought to thank Safer for reminding us "that some of the most important novels in contemporary American literature are also some of the funniest."

--Kent State University
A MONUMENT TO PYNCHON SCHOLARSHIP*

John M. Krafft


Thomas Pynchon is often described as the greatest living novelist writing in English, largely on the strength of Gravity's Rainbow (1973), an encyclopedic novel of vast historical, cultural and scientific erudition, and inordinate formal complexity, experimental sophistication and linguistic vitality. At the end of the 1980s came a milestone and an anniversary in Pynchon's career. Vineland (1980), his first novel since Gravity's Rainbow, reached bookstores just before New Year's in 1989, some thirty years after the publication of his first mature fiction.

That anniversary was also marked by the publication of Clifford Mead's Thomas Pynchon: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials—a valuable resource for scholars, a treasure for collectors, and a treat for other admirers of Pynchon. This is the first comprehensive Pynchon bibliography published since the mid-1970s, when there was so much less to comprehend. Less criticism, that is. Literally hundreds of articles and chapters, and almost all of the thirty or so books and essay collections devoted to Pynchon have appeared since the publication of the useful Scott (1977) and the rather unsatisfactory Walsh and Northouse (1977) bibliographies. Pynchon himself has published relatively little in the meantime, but Mead has listed and even included some interesting older material—juvenilia and miscellany—not widely known or readily available before. In fact, apparently everything of Pynchon's which is known or presumed to be in the public domain is here.

Mead's enumerative bibliography of Pynchon's own work is divided into five sections. Section A lists the various English-language editions of the three novels V., The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, and of the collection of early stories, Slow Learner. The section includes many photographs of

*Originally published untitled in Bulletin of Bibliography 47.2 (1990), and reprinted by permission of the Meckler Corporation, 11 Ferry Lane West, Westport, CT 06880. Matthew Monahan, who was to have reviewed Mead's Thomas Pynchon for Pynchon Notes, died suddenly this spring before completing his review. Collectors of Pynchon, lovers of books, and friends will all remember Matthew for his helpfulness, enthusiasm, and generosity.
covers, among which are an advance reading copy of V, and a trial cover design for Gravity's Rainbow. Section B lists Pynchon's short fiction—stories and excerpts—and miscellaneous non-fiction—reportage, a technical article, an introduction, a book review, a few published letters, and so on. The listing in this section of six stories published by the fifteen-year-old Pynchon in his high school newspaper, Purple and Gold, in 1952-53 will amuse and please many readers—as will Mead's thoughtful inclusion of the stories themselves in the appendix to Thomas Pynchon. Until now, even photocopies of the juvenilia have been scarce. Not everyone who had heard of them may have believed they actually existed. But now, Mead has provided both readable photographic reproductions of four of the stories and transcriptions of all six. While these juvenilia are, well, juvenile, enthusiasts and scholars alike will appreciate them, even if they don't reshape our sense of Pynchon's oeuvre.

Section C lists and carefully describes the English pamphlet reprints of five stories and one article. These editions are generally thought to have been "unauthorized." Indeed, anger over being pirated is rumored to have been Pynchon's reason for publishing the collection of his early stories, Slow Learner, in 1984. But Jim Pennington of Aloes Books has recently been quoted as saying that the editions were in fact authorized by Pynchon's agent. Of course, that is just what one would expect him to say, even if it is true. Section D lists translations of novels, excerpts and stories into more than a dozen languages, from Swedish and Italian to Japanese and Hebrew.

Section E lists, reproduces and/or transcribes the endorsements Pynchon has written for the books of thirteen other authors, including Richard Farina, Rudolph Wurlitzer, Marge Piercy, Peter Matthiessen and Tom Robbins. This material is interesting as Pynchon's writing and important as an index to his literary taste and values. David Seed's recent analysis of the light these endorsements shed on Pynchon's fiction exemplifies the kind of work Mead's compilation may encourage more of.

For students and other Pynchon scholars at least, Part 2, the bio-bibliography, is likely to prove the richest vein in Thomas Pynchon. Here are listed more than a hundred dissertations devoted partly or wholly to Pynchon, and a polyglot array of books, chapters, excerpts, significant mentions, essays, conference papers, articles, reviews, gossip columns—everything from academic treatises to journalistic snippets—published between 1962 and 1988 and numbering perhaps a thousand. Anyone undertaking research into Pynchon or Pynchon criticism faces quite a task, one which Mead has greatly facilitated but which he has wisely refrained from making seem simpler than it is. Apart from the dissertations, which are listed chronologically, the bio-bibliographical material is presented strictly alphabetically, without Scotto's artificial
and sometimes arbitrary divisions of reviews from criticism and of items about one novel from those about another, and without Walsh and Northouse's pointless division by year of publication. (Admittedly, beginning or casual researchers may prefer chronological or novel-by-novel arrangement, but comprehensive alphabetical listing is ultimately more suitable for the serious investigator.)

Besides the juvenilia mentioned above, the appendix to Thomas Pynchon reproduces a number of pages and photos from Pynchon's 1953 high school yearbook, the Oysterette. Text reproduced here identifies Pynchon as the author of the otherwise unattributed Purple and Gold stories. The photos include group pictures of the Purple and Gold and Oysterette staffs, the math club and the National Honor Society, as well as Pynchon's senior picture. According to the Senior Class Will, "Tommy Pynchon leaves his big vocabulary to Jimmy Donovan."

The bibliography of a living writer, particularly a writer of Pynchon's stature, dates rapidly, as the appearance of Vineland has already shown. So we will eventually need and welcome a second edition of Mead's Thomas Pynchon. With that prospect in mind, I will venture a few suggestions. According to his preface, Mead "attempts to be inclusive rather than selective," but "some trifles of negligible value have been omitted." That is fine, doubtless even fortunate, given some of the true trifles I have read. Nevertheless, I would have appreciated Mead's articulating his principles of selection. What makes a trifle--size, lack of critical intent, lack of acumen . . . ? It would also have been useful to know what databases and indexes covering what periods Mead drew on. If researchers knew, for instance, that Mead had already mined the Arts and Humanities Citation Index through 1986 and the MHRA Annual Bibliography through 1986, they would know what sources they didn't need to recheck. Finally, perhaps sacrificing correctness to utility, I would have listed dissertations by their DAI citations.

Such quibbles notwithstanding, Thomas Pynchon: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials is a monument to thirty years of Pynchon's work and to nearly as many years of Pynchon scholarship. And it comes with a bonus, though something of a teaser at that. The dust jacket is illustrated with portions of a manuscript poem signed "Tom Pynchon." The bibliography itself, however, contains no mention of any such poem.

--Miami University--Hamilton
OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

The following books will be reviewed in future issues of Pynchon Notes:


NOTES

A network has recently been started on Bitnet (a computer mail service linking 800 universities worldwide) for discussion of Pynchon's work. At present there are about 25 people on the net. Anyone can join by sending his/her computer address to Jody Gilbert at userdog@sfu.bitnet or at userdog1@cc.sfu.ca. Messages can be put directly into the net at pynchon@sfu.bitnet. Plans include getting all of Pynchon's work on line.

***

Lance Schachterle and Joseph W. Slade are planning a conference in 1993 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Gravity's Rainbow. Part or all of the event may be held in London under the sponsorship of the London Project Center of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Professors Schachterle and Slade would like to hear from others who might be interested in helping with the conference. Anyone with ideas should write to Professor Schachterle at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 100 Institute Road, Worcester, MA 01609.

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Lance Schachterle and Michael W. Vella are preparing a facsimile edition of William Pynchon's The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption (London, 1650) to be published by Peter Lang as part of the series Worcester Polytechnic Institute Studies in Science, Technology and Culture. The facsimile will be accompanied by Professor Vella's analysis of MP's historical, theological and literary contexts, by Professor Schachterle's history of the Pynchon family in England and America, and perhaps also by a critical essay discussing the use Thomas Pynchon makes of his ancestor's work.

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Worcester Polytechnic Institute Studies in Science, Technology and Culture aims to publish critical studies, monographs, tightly-edited collections of essays, and research tools in interdisciplinary topics which investigate the relationships of science and technology to social and cultural issues and impacts. The series is edited by Lance Schachterle and Francis C. Lutz, and published by Peter Lang.

The editors invite proposals in English from beginning and established scholars throughout the world whose research interests focus on how science or technology affects the structure, values, quality, or management of our society. Send a letter describing your proposed submission, along with a brief curriculum vitae, to:

Stephen Tomaske would like interested readers to know that the University of Texas at Austin has among its holdings an unbound, uncorrected galley proof of V. (which an accession record indicates was acquired on December 18, 1968), consisting of 195 sheets, each measuring 25" by 6-1/4". According to Cynthia Farar, Assistant to the Research Librarian, casual inspection of the document reveals no "annotations or abnormalities." In his own examination of several photocopied pages, Tomaske notes the sort of typographical errors one would normally expect to find in this stage of printing.

To obtain reduced-size copies of this material or to request additional information, write to:

The University of Texas at Austin
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center
Office of the Librarian
PD Drawer 7219
Austin, TX 78713-7219

Stephen Tomaske's curiosity was piqued when he read in PN 11's annotation of the bibliographic entry "Opportunities and Awards" (Cornell Daily Sun 29 May 1959: 12) that Pynchon had won the George H. Coxe Award in American Literature at Cornell in 1958. What, Tomaske wondered, was the Coxe Award? For the similarly curious, he discovered this description of the award in Prize Competitions 1958-1959 and 1959-1960, published by Cornell in 1958:

The George Harmon Coxe Award in American Literature, founded in 1951 by Mr. and Mrs. George H. Coxe in memory of their son, George Harmon Coxe, III, who was a student at Cornell University, is an annual award of $120 for distinguished work in American literature and creative writing.
1. Those eligible are men registered in the University as members of the sophomore, junior, or senior classes. Any student who wishes to be considered may consult the chairman of the Department of English before 12 o'clock noon of April 15, or before the same time on April 16 in the event that April 15 falls on a Sunday. Other students may also be nominated by members of the staff and will be invited to submit specimens of their written work.

2. In even-numbered years, the award will be made on the basis of outstanding ability in the study of American literature at Cornell, as revealed both through records in all pertinent courses and through written studies of suitable American writings or authors.

3. In odd-numbered years the award will be made on the basis of the student's achievements at Cornell in creative writing and related work.

4. The President of the University will appoint a committee of three to recommend the award.

5. If in any year no student's work is deemed worthy of the prize, the award will be made in a subsequent year.

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Correction: In Alec McHoul's "Gravity's Rainbow's Golden Sections" (Pynchon Notes 21-22 [1977]: 31-35), the editors inadvertently omitted the square root sign from the formula on page 32. The formula should read: \( \sqrt{5} - 1 \)/2.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
(--1990)

We would like to remind 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 noteworthy with regard to Pynchon. We also welcome news of work in progress, circulating manuscripts, and forthcoming works.

PYNCHON:


CRITICISM AND COMMENT:


Chapter 4: "The Novel as Quest: Thomas Pynchon's V."


"Pynchon understands but does not love these fictive figures who are embodiments of the madness of this century."


"When Winter's Tale was published, Thomas Pynchon sent a message of congratulations and approval."


Mostly about Pynchon.


Briefly discusses Smith's work with Pynchon.


Chapter 4: "Lessons in Love and Silence: Gravity's Rainbow and the Apocalypse in Gödel's Universe."


"Pynchon deliberately and ironically misreads his recently issued early short stories in his 1984 preface to *Slow Learner.*" Also contrasts Pynchon with Bellow.


Parodic echoes of *V* and *Vineland*, and a character named T. V. Pychor.


Pynchon's [and Ashbery's] "demystified quest-romances" represent "the initial, or negative, postmodern impulse."


To get "[o]ut of the canon," Pynchon-in-drag hires Slade "to bring down the whole system of dispensation."


Sidebar on the Pynchon mystique.


Pynchon is "ghastly." CR "didn't win [the NBA] because of me."


Discusses Lot 49 and CR in relation to obsession and entropy.


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---. Rev. of A *Gravity's Rainbow Companion.* *Modern Fiction*

Holdsworth, Carole A. "'Versiones, Perversiones': Borges and
Pynchon on the *Martín Fierro* Theme." *Revista de Estudios*

---. "'Celestina' Times Two and 'Entropy.'" *Celestinesca* 13

Holton, Robert. "In the Rathouse of History with Thomas
Pynchon: Rereading *V.*" *Textual Practice* 2.3 (1988): 324-44.

Horvath, Brooke K. Rev. of *Pynchon's Mythography.* *American*

Hyles, Vernon. Rev. of *The Contemporary American Comic Epic.*

Iannone, Carol. "Pynchon's Progress." Rev. of *Vineland.*

Announces *Vineland.*

May 1990: 98.
*Vineland* realistically represents contemporary video
culture.

Pynchon "has the dual focus of a generation that did not grow up on television but became overwhelmed by it later."


"[T]he theoretical postmodernism of Deleuze and Guattari allows us to see how [GR pushes] beyond the conceptual limits of modernism and make[s] the new informational arrangements that perhaps define our present visible as part of the same movement in which the older ones are being dissolved."


Discusses V. as "one of the most arresting examples of postmodern writing. . . . a powerful illustration of the self-negating aesthetic of postmodernism."


Princeton.


Reprints a half dozen essays mentioning Pynchon from the 60s.


Discusses V., Lot 49, GR, and "Entropy."


Lists V. as among five possible winners.


Quotes "the eminent Cornell psychopharmacologist Thomas Pynchon" on the effects of XTC.


Outlaw quester Thomas "Tom" Dylan.


Pynchon, "the greatest and last of the quantum linguists," . . . pulled off the ultimate feat of performance art. He, himself, has become silent and invisible, the first true human-quark."


"In trying to go beyond man, Pierce Inverarity confirmed the limits of what it means to be human."


Responses to Begley, above.


Announces the Bantam reprint of *Slow Learner*.


Promotes *Vineeland* as the Book of the Month Club's Main Selection for April.


Brief remarks on *Lot 49*.


...Discusses Pynchon under "The Art of Decadence."


...Timothy Leary's prison reading included GR; G. Gordon Liddy's apparently did not.


Chapter 3: "Thomas Pynchon: An Interface of History and Science."


An April Fool's spoof in response to Shider, below.


Hawthorne and Pynchon are "with Faulkner probably the two major historical novelists to have appeared in America." Discusses Puritan hermeneutics; uses Pynchon "as a skeleton key to The Scarlet Letter."


Posits but denies the existence of the ideal Pynchon reader.


Romine, Danny. "Be Very Quiet: We're Stalking the Willy Pynchon." Charlotte Observer 14 Jan. 1990: 7F.

"Rushdie Questions Pynchon's Secrecy." Yakima Herald-Republic
15 Jan. 1990: 4A.

Pynchon cited throughout, from "abreaction" to "zoophilic."


"I sometimes imagine that Stanley Cavell is the public face of Thomas Pynchon."


Tate, J. D. "Sufferin' Succotash." Rev. of Vineland. National Review 30 Apr. 1990: 98.


Letters in response to McConnell, above.

Response to Kermode, above.


Deception and Vineyard stand "at the extreme[s] of contemporary fiction, bookends as it were."


FORTHCOMING:


CONTRIBUTORS

STUART BARNETT received an M.A. in German from the University of Virginia, and is now a doctoral student in comparative literature at SUNY/Buffalo, where he is writing his dissertation on narrative and self-discipline in Dorothy Wordsworth, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot. His essays, reviews, and translations have appeared in such journals as German Quarterly, Lessing Yearbook, and Diacritics.

M. KEITH BOOKER, an assistant professor of English at the University of Arkansas, recently received his Ph.D. from the University of Florida, where he wrote his dissertation on history, subjectivity, and textuality in Joyce. The author of numerous essays on literature and literary theory forthcoming in such journals as ELH, College English, Journal of Modern Literature, and James Joyce Quarterly, he is also the author of Transgression, Abjection, and the Carnivalesque: Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature, forthcoming from the U of Florida P.

ELIZABETH CAMPBELL teaches the novel, Victorian literature, and poetry writing at Oregon State University. She received her Ph.D. in 1983 from the University of Virginia, where she wrote her dissertation on metonymy in the novel, and is currently working on a book-length project, "Fortune's Wheel: Women's Time in Victorian Narrative." She is the author of recent articles on John Foules and Thomas Hardy, and of forthcoming articles on Christina Rossetti and George Eliot.

LAURENCE DAW teaches at the University of Western Ontario, specializing in the works of Pynchon and other modern British and American authors. He has published several articles on Pynchon, is working on three novels, and trains for triathlons in his spare time.

BROOKE K. HORVATH is an assistant professor of English at Kent State University and an associate editor for The Review of Contemporary Fiction. Recent work has appeared, or is soon to appear, in American Literature, Chicago Review, Denver Quarterly, Missouri Review, Modern Fiction Studies, Poetry, and elsewhere.

MARK T. IRWIN received both an M.A. in English and an M.A. in Religious Studies from Baylor. At the University of Virginia he is now completing his Ph.D. dissertation on the religious dimensions of Pynchon's fiction (construed as Menippean satire) and its place in the Jeremiad/anti-Jeremiad tradition of American literature.

DOUGLAS KEESEY teaches English at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. He wrote his dissertation at Princeton on Pynchon. The
author of essays on Pynchon that have appeared in Pynchon Notes and Boundary 2, he recently read a paper, "The Indictment of Rape in Pynchon's V.," at the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference in Louisville. An essay on "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" is forthcoming in Pynchon Notes.

DONALD F. LARSSON is a professor of English at Mankato State University in Minnesota, where he teaches film, composition, and modern literature, and will be Acting Director of the Humanities Program next year. He has published numerous reference articles and is currently working on aspects of film narrative.

YVES-MARIE LÉONET is an assistant in the Department of English at the University of Louvain in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, where he is also writing his Ph.D. dissertation on Gravity's Rainbow. He is the author of a memoir on the English poet David Gascoyne, and of an essay on Pynchon's use of Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel" forthcoming in Merveilles & Contes.

ROBERT L. McLUGHLIN, an assistant professor of English at Illinois State University, received his Ph.D. from Fordham University in 1987. He has published on Mailer, Hemingway, and Eliot, and is currently revising his dissertation on ideology and spirituality in Gravity's Rainbow for publication.

STUART PARRY lives in Bridgewater, Connecticut, and writes on literature, film, and technology. He is currently involved in a book-length World War II project.

SOMNYA SAYRES teaches humanities at the Cooper Union in New York City. Her most recent book is Susan Sontag, The Elegiac Modernist (Routledge, 1990). She is also co-editor of the Journal Social Text.

MICHAEL W. VELLA teaches English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. His essays on Pynchon's relation to the surrealists have appeared in Pynchon Notes and Twentieth Century Literature. Current projects include an essay on the historical, theological, and literary contexts of William Pynchon's The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption, and two essays on Whitman. Inner Vision and Society in the American Novel is forthcoming from Cambridge UP.

JOHN VUKMIROVIĆ teaches English at the University of Illinois at Chicago while working on his Ph.D. in American literature at Loyola. An essay on the influence of Adams' Mont-St.-Michel and Chartres on V., and two essays on Farama and Pynchon are now circulating.

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