Pynchon's Prism House of Language

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian University

by Anna Johannes Campbell

February, 1986.
I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

A.J. Campbell
Abstract.

This thesis investigates the deconstruction of the reading process as presented in the novels of Thomas Pynchon, demonstrating how the text undermines the concept of closure upon which theories of the reading process are based. A representative sample of definitions of the reading process as defined by psycholinguists and literary theorists will indicate the extent to which this process is regarded as a reduction of uncertainty, where predictions are confirmed or disconfirmed and where to comprehend is to assign coherence to a text. The effect of anomalies and ambiguity in the text on the reader indicates that a text which cannot be "clozed" cannot be read. If such definitions of the process of reading are valid, Pynchon's novels become progressively more "unreadable".

An overview of the fictive context of Pynchon's novels demonstrates that the work of other authors such as Kafka or Sterne anticipates many of the concerns of the post-modernist author and that challenging the conventions of the genre is by no means a purely post-modernist phenomenon. Pynchon's novels, however, foreground the act of reading to a far greater extent than either his literary predecessors or his contemporaries. In a number of cases the types of readings which have been made of the novels is anticipated within the novels themselves, while the interpretation of texts is a major concern in each of the
novels. The novels also demonstrate that the type of text encountered affects the type of reading which is produced and that any text is an artifice, a recoding of the "real" text. No fixed point of reference is provided by the narrators of the novels, so that systems of categorisation such as distinguishing between the real and the imaginary, the animate and the inanimate or the comic and the serious becomes impossible. Reading Pynchon's novels is therefore a process which does not reduce uncertainty, but increases it.

The arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified has long been acknowledged by linguists and those concerned with theories of literature or theories of communication. Pynchon's novels demonstrate the effect of such arbitrary relationships on the process of reading. Names, both common and proper, as signifiers of a single meaning or a single identity are employed in a manner which deconstructs the signifying process and the search for a definitive meaning is shown to be futile.

Although Pynchon's novels appear to invite specific kinds of readings because they contain such obvious allusions to other literary and non-literary works and imagery from a wide range of subjects other than literature, the representation of the relationship between males and females in the novels has not been analysed by more than one or two literary critics. If what is read is determined in part by the cognitive set of the reader, a reading of the representation of the relationships between
males and females in the novels provides the case for an aberrant reading of the novels which literary criticism has not thus far produced.
Contents

Preface 1-3

Introduction : The reading process 4-15

Chapter 1 : Intertextual referents - Modernism and post-modernism. 16-29

Chapter 2 : Readers in/of Pynchon's novels. 30-54

Chapter 3 : The prosthesis of copula. 55-74

Chapter 4 : Lies, lies and more lies. 75-100

Chapter 5 : The reading of names. 101-130

Chapter 6 : The prism house of identity. 131-156

Chapter 7 : Categorization - the real/imaginary. 157-176

Chapter 8 : Categorization - the comic/serious. 177-199

Chapter 9 : The sexual prosthesis of copula - conflicting cognitive sets. 200-220

Conclusion : 221-235

Notes : 236-254

Bibliography : 255-273
The publication of the novel *V.* in 1963 established Thomas Pynchon with both the general public and literary critics as one of the major American novelists of the twentieth century. His subsequent publications - *The Crying of Lot 49* in 1966, *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973 and the collection of his previously published short stories in *Slow Learner* in 1984 - confirmed Pynchon's status as a novelist. Among Post World War Two novelists only the works of Günter Grass have had a similar record of public and literary acclaim. While earlier critical response to the novels ranged from ecstatic hymns of praise to scandalised cries of blasphemy and obscenity (responses which scarcely detracted from the popularity of the novels), later criticism almost without exception "reverberates with reverence" (Töloolyan, 1983:165) and Pynchon seems the most likely candidate for the position of the Greatest American Novelist of the twentieth century, if not the Greatest American Novelist.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to determine whether such praise is warranted. Judgements about literary merit are after all only a matter of opinion or indications of personal preference, and comparison with other novels establishes little except differences between them. Pynchon's novels differ from those of his
predecessors and his contemporaries in some respects and are similar in other respects. One of the major differences is that the novels present a deconstruction of the process of reading as defined by psycholinguists and literary theorists. Schaub (1981) has analysed the ambiguity of Pynchon's novels, but has not questioned the implications of this ambiguity in relation to the process of reading itself, explaining the ambiguity only in terms of a mimetic theory of literature, where because the "real" world offers no certainty, but only fragmentation and relative truth, neither should Art. (Schaub, 1981:3).

Strehle (1983:34) has a similar reflectionist explanation of the form of the post-modernist novel. As defining whether a novel is "realistic" or not depends on a subjective judgement about what is "real", there seems little point in attempting to explain Pynchon's fictions in terms of a comparison between the "real" world and the fictional worlds of the novels.

The following analysis will investigate the extent to which Pynchon's novels undermine assumptions about the reading process based on closure. Such assumptions presuppose that texts have syntactic and semantic coherence at both local and global level; that predictions will be either confirmed or disconfirmed; that anomalies in the text will sooner or later be resolved and that decisions can be made about the relevance or irrelevance of information presented in the text. Although such theories
of the reading process allow for interpretation of literary texts, it is assumed that the text itself contains meanings, even though the individual reader will bring as much meaning to the text as is contained within it. Pynchon's novels, especially *Gravity's Rainbow*, cannot be read in this way. The novels show rather than tell that the process or reading as traditionally defined reconfirms the power of the printed word and that to question the assumptions on which theories of the reading process are based is also to question the power of the printed word.
INTRODUCTION

THE READING PROCESS

And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself in a sleepy sort of way, "Do cats eat bats?" and sometimes "Do bats eat cats?" for you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it.

* * * *

Alice in Wonderland (Carroll, 1972:12)

Do readers get meaning from texts?
Do readers give meaning to texts?
And if we cannot answer either question, does it matter which way we put it? The intricacies of this rather unproductive debate have long occupied philosophers, linguists, psycholinguists, psychologists and more recently also literary theorists and literary critics. Taken to extremes the argument becomes ridiculous, but this has not prevented the pro and anti "reader's liberation" (Eagleton, 1982:449) supporters from taking extremist positions, and the argument continues unabated in literary and psycholinguistic journals. (See for example Smith, 1975:9-117; Goodman and Burke, 1980; Kemp, 1980:1-14; Singer and Ruddell, 1976 - especially the debate between Gough and Brewer:509-58; Rader, 1974:245-72; Regis Jr., 1976:263-80; Fish, 1980; Slatoff, 1970; Iser, 1970; McHoul, 1982; Culler, 1975:28-34; van Dijk, 1976; Macherey, 1978; Eco, 1979; Hall, 1980).
Theories about the reading process seem destined to remain theories, particularly as what goes on during the reading process can only be deduced from what the reader says is happening or by setting up experimental situations such as those of Fish or McHoul where readers are given an artificially constructed text and their responses are analysed to provide evidence for the existence of various types of reading behaviour. As Regis (1976) has pointed out, the methodology involved in this approach is rather suspect, and determining what goes on inside the head by analysing what is said or written in response to a text involves at least a transformation of the reading process into oral or written language, so that the researcher is always analysing the product of reading rather than the process while the nature of the task as perceived by the reader influences the type of behaviour which will be produced. Any reader asked to read a "poem" will have some idea of what is expected in this situation, and even if the "poem" consists of a random list of words (Fish) or unconnected lines of poetry (McHoul), will attempt to comply to the requirements of the perceived task. In each case this may give little indication of what might actually happen in a less directed reading situation. The work of Goodman (1968), Kemp (1980) and Campbell (1981), using the technique of miscue analysis comes closer to establishing how the reading process operates in a "natural" situation, but the theories of the reading process resulting from this
research still depend on the interpretation of observed phenomena.

Despite the difficulties of defining the reading process and the differences of opinion among researchers, it is generally accepted that the reader comes to the text with a background knowledge of syntagmatic, morphophonological and paradigmatic conventions (knowledge which I have elsewhere (1981, 1984) designated as "real world knowledge"), even if there is no previous acquaintance with a written text (itself a rather unlikely occurrence in a print-dominated Western society) which will influence the reader's response to the text. Even very young children who have not yet learned to read have established expectations of how the printed text may relate to their knowledge of syntagmatic and paradigmatic conventions (Clay, 1972; Holdaway, 1979; Kemp, 1980), and as Smith (1973) and Kolers (1973:8-16) point out, these expectations influence the "reader's" interpretation of the text. In other words, even non-readers have some idea of the function (or different functions) of a text.

To read, however, implies an interaction between the reader and the graphic symbols on the page. It would be as ridiculous to insist that the text in itself has a meaning which is not subject to the variables imposed by those who read the text as to insist that all meanings given to the text by a reader are equally acceptable. The debate in fact centres more on the relative emphasis on
reader versus the text rather than absolutes which critics of one school of thought attribute to those whose opinions differ from their own. So what is reading?

Reading is:

...an integrated habit of producing the sounds of one's own language when one sees the written marks which conventionally represent the phonemes.

(Bloomfield, 1935:128)

Is it? How often does one produce the sounds of one's own language when reading silently? Who decides the conventions? Does Derrida (1981:39-44) break an existing convention when he creates written marks which defy the graphophonic conventions such as "différence", and yet fails to question the convention which enables him to be both unconventional and at the same time through the repetition of the word/sound/letter comply to convention?

Can conventions be avoided? Deconstructed? Do such conventions signify hierarchies? The power of the dominant ideologies of (Western) societies? (Foucault, 1977) A system of classification where a sound/letter/word is either one or (an) other? (de Lauretis, 1984:16-25). Is reading only the production of sounds, mere word calling?

Reading is:

A weighting of each of the many elements in a sentence, their organisation in the proper relations to one another, the selection of certain of their connotations and the rejection of others, and the cooperation of many forces to produce the final response.

(Thorndike, 1917:323)
But how are the connotations selected or rejected? Why? Does the reader's alignment with the dominant ideology of her/his culture result in a "preferred" final response? Would the reader's alignment with the ideology of a minority culture result in an oppositional response or an aberrant response? Whose reading would be right? How selective is any reading? What is the final response? Reading is:

a search for meaning

(Kemp, 1980:6)

Whose meaning? The author's meaning? The reader's meaning? Which reader? The informed reader? (Fish, 1972:406) The responsible reader? (Riffaterre, 1959: 154-74) The resisting reader? (Fetterley, 1977) The phallocentric reader? (Ellmann, 1979:27-54). If there can be as many readings of a text as there are types of readers, does it make sense to speak of reading as a search for meaning? Is reading then a process which is purely a personal interaction with the text? Reading is:

the absence of uncertainty

(Smith, 1975:34)

Uncertainty about what? Who sets the questions which are answered and thus reduce uncertainty? Why? Why some questions and not others? Why do readers have certain
expectations of a text and not others? Are these expectations influenced by the type of text the reader encounters? Is reading a newspaper article or a science text or a novel or a poem the same act of reading or different? If I read "scholarly" as "complying to the conventions of a patriarchal academic elite" and do not experience an absence of uncertainty, am I reading? Do words mean exactly what I want them to mean, neither more nor less? Does two plus two equal five if I am certain that this is so? Why? Or why not? Is the relationship between signifier and signified totally arbitrary, or are there rules and conventions of language to which I am subject? Who or what is reading?

The underlying assumptions of the major theories of reading which have proliferated in the last two decades are based on the concept of closure. Individual researchers may differ/defer on the relative importance of various aspects of the reading process which are seen to facilitate or impede the progress toward a final comprehension of the text, but the end product of reading is never in doubt; to read is to understand the meaning of the text. This does not, of course, imply that definitions of the reading process necessarily insist that every text has only a single possible meaning (most researchers acknowledge at least the influence of a cultural framework as a determiner of meaning), but for the reader to have "read" a text means that the reader is satisfied that she/he knows what the
text "means". Such an assumption necessarily presupposes a framework of contextual referents which have become conventionalized and internalized by those who participate in the communication process - authors and audiences.

The extent to which any participants could be said to share such a framework, however, is almost impossible to establish with any degree of assurance. Even at the minimal level of the morphemic unit there is likely to be an almost infinite number of possible variations of meaning dependent on the cognitive set of the reader. As I have stated elsewhere (Campbell, 1979:683-9), syntagmatic constraints do not take precedence over the cognitive set of the individual reader and there is no evidence to support the view that any individual reader is aware of more than a limited range of ideological or schematic conventions.

Although psycholinguistic research has established that how a text is read depends to a large extent on why it is read, there is no evidence to suggest that the cognitive processes involved in reading sustained discourse are any different when the reader is confronted with a "literary" as opposed to a "non-literary" text. In each case the reader assigns a semantic structure to the respective units of the text (the morphophonological and syntactic elements of the surface structure) and transforms these into meanings which are cognitively represented in terms of concepts. Unless a specific socio-cultural context demands an "unnatural" cognitive set, such
as a linguist reading a text for the purposes of analysing the incidence of elaborated verb phrases or a student given the task of analysing a specific aspect of the surface structure such as variation in sentence length, imagery, alliteration or allusions, processing of the surface structure elements of the text is neither conscious nor retained in the reader's long term memory. In sustained discourse sequences of propositions are assigned coherence in the reader's long term memory on the basis of anaphoric and cataphoric reference at the local level of the text (see Campbell, 1981; 1984). The propositional elements of sustained discourse are similarly assigned coherence at the global level of the text. (See McHoul, 1982:11-36) At all stages of the cognitive process the cognitive set of the reader determines which aspects of the text are important or relevant and which are not, and the cognitive set is contextually variable depending on the reader's knowledge, expectations, attitudes, opinions, needs and purposes. (7)

Even when reading so-called "readerly" texts this process is far from passive. When a text is "readerly" the emphasis shifts towards reader-based processing (Tierney, 1980:606-13), partly because of the reader's relevant prior knowledge (the real world knowledge which is contextual) and partly because these pre-existing knowledge structures readily assimilate information contained in the text (Anderson et.al., 1977). When a text is "writerly", processing becomes more text-based (Taylor, 1979:375-80),
partly because the reader has to create new knowledge structures for the purpose of assimilating information through the use of analogies embedded in the text (Hayes, 1979), through metaphorical association (Ortony, 1981: 42-63), through inferences and summarization rules (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1977), through concept formation processes (Taba, 1965:534-42) and similar metacognitive processes (Brown, 1981:184-95). The surface-based features of the text thus produce a cognitive set in the reader, so that the focus of interpretation is on the surface features of the text itself.

The socio-cultural context of literary communication also influences the cognitive set of the reader. Poetry, for example, is read in the socio-cultural context of the genre which implies a convention of function even though the surface features may be very similar to those of a shopping list, while a scientific text is read in the socio-cultural context of a convention of function of scientific texts. As Steffensen, Jogdeo and Anderson (1978) have demonstrated, different cultural contexts also influence the cognitive set of the reader and determine both the perception of elements of the text as seen by the reader to be relevant to the coherence of the text at both local and global level and the extent to which the focus of interpretation is on the text itself. Such evidence supports the theory that although the amount of attention paid to the surface features of a text may be dependent on the socio-cultural context, the cognitive processes in
reading are not a product of the text, but exist independently as a "theory of the world in the head" (Smith, 1978:88). No matter what the reading task, the reader attempts to search for coherence between parts of the text and the whole, and to relate the reading experience to her or his "real world knowledge". All of the research on the process of reading has demonstrated that these are the essential components of the reading process. To approach a text is to have certain expectations which are confirmed or disconfirmed, modified, or remain unresolved.

The entropic text forces the reader to attend to the surface features of the text because it is unpredictable in terms of phatic, socio-cultural, literary or ideological conventions. Obviously the extent to which any text is regarded by the reader as entropic will depend on the degree to which the knowledge of such conventions is shared by author and audience, but authors such as Burroughs, Barth or Pynchon have produced texts which are entropic to a degree previously unknown in literature. The cognitive processes of reading are undermined by the structures of the text which make coherence impossible at either local or global level (see for example Patteson, 1974:30-44; McHale, 1979:85-110 for an analysis of how the structure of Pynchon's novels affects cohesion at the global level of the texts). The cognitive processes of reading are challenged by such structures which make coherence
impossible at the global level, but Pynchon's novels, particularly *Gravity's Rainbow*, also challenge the cognitive processes at the local level of the text. Instead of the text acting as a means of communication between author and audience, it deconstructs the premises on which such a relationship is based; instead of reducing uncertainty it increases it; instead of establishing a relationship between signifier and signified, however complex or arbitrary, it deconstructs such relationships; instead of enabling a reader to confirm or disconfirm or modify predictions it presents multiple possibilities, any one of which can only be confirmed by ignoring others; instead of presenting separate but related information, the text contains an overload of information which cannot be categorised or classified except on a variable basis and at the whims of the individual reader; instead of presenting a fictional world which however different from its socio-cultural context is consistent within its fictional constraints, the text conforms to no such restraints.

The complex cognitive process of reading depends on accommodating new information on the basis of that which is already known, either contextually or intratextually. Information is classified according to systems of similarity or difference. If there is no system by which such differences can be established, if it is impossible to establish categories of relationships, the result is non-meaning; linguistic entropy. Pynchon's texts demonstrate the extent to which shared conventions influence the act of
communication by deconstructing the premise of closure on which such conventions are based.
As stated in the previous chapter, the reader approaches any text with a cognitive set determined by her or his previous experience, including her or his expectations of the nature of the specific reading task. To a reader with prior experience of reading a variety of different types of texts the task of reading a novel would be perceived as different from that of reading poetry, reading a collection of short stories, reading a menu, a set of instructions or a textbook. The reader's expectations in relation to reading a novel would also be influenced by her or his perceptions of the nature of a text called a novel. Such perceptions would be in part determined by overt or implicit definitions of the genre—for example, the reader's concept of "novel" might include that the novel consists of sustained, coherent and connected prose discourse; is fiction rather than fact; has a theme or themes; plot or plots and a larger or smaller number of characters. Prediction in reading (or as Barthes might say, the pleasure of the text) begins well before the act of reading the text.

Calvino describes some of these anticipatory pleasures in the opening chapter of If on a winter's night a
the pleasure of realising that a favourite author has just published another book (expectations about the text based on the reader's prior experience with other works of the author and the implication that the reader's initial knowledge of an author's publications is not based on the random possibility of just happening to pick up a book in a bookshop, but on references to the book in the literary criticism pages of newspapers or journals); the pleasure of locating the book in its cellophane wrapping in a bookshop (the fact that the book is new and that in a sense the reader is the first reader of this particular book adds a special pleasure); the pleasure of sampling small sections of the book or deferring such sampling until the reader is comfortably located in her or his favourite reading position at home, with cigarettes or a glass of something to drink at hand so that the pleasure of reading the book will not be disturbed in any way (the act of reading as an activity which is associated with pleasure). Such expectations are all indicative of a cognitive set in the reader which exists prior to the act of reading itself. The subsequent events in Calvino's story effectively prevent the realisation of the anticipated pleasures of the text, although the existence of the Other Reader and the
two readers' shared (though different and unexpected) pleasure compensates to some extent for the fact that the text does not develop as anticipated. The pleasure of sharing discoveries about a text is, in Calvino's novel, as important as the pleasure of reading a text.

Like the reader in Calvino's novel, most if not all readers approach a specific novel by a specific author from within a framework of intertextual referents; perhaps a familiarity with other works by the same author (readers who anxiously await the publication of each novel by Robert Ludlum, Stephen King or John Barth or Thomas Pynchon), perhaps a familiarity with the genre (historical novels, romance, or modernist or post-modernist) or perhaps because the specific novel has been highly recommended by a reviewer, a literary critic, an academic colleague or a friend. Even before beginning to read a new text it is placed in its context by the reader.

The modernist and post-modernist text, however, poses considerable problems for the reader whose expectations are based on familiarity with the genre of the novel as typified either in the traditional form or that of popular fiction. It is true, of course, that ever since the publication of *Tristram Shandy* such intertextual referents of the novel have been challenged by authors who refuse to adhere to the conventions of the genre, which is probably fortunate for the industry of literary criticism and particularly for Russian formalists such as Shklovsky,
whose analysis of *Tristram Shandy* (Shklovsky, 1965:25-7) makes much of the "syuzhet" rather than the "fabula". Novels have always had a habit of transcending the neat generic categories which literary theorists such as Scholes (1974:131-8) attempt to impose on them; comedy becomes tragi-comedy or black comedy, fiction becomes faction, and the description "modernist novel", which would appear to be broad enough to encompass any type of contemporary novel, is distinguished from the "post-modernist" novel (a use of language which defies the laws of logic and fixes "modern" in a specific period of time which in the nineteen-eighties could hardly be considered "modern" and those novels which are classified as "modern" in a specific genre).

Attaching generic labels is only partially adequate as a means of determining the reader's expectations in relation to a specific text, but like any form of literature, the post-modernist novel is not without its literary antecedents. The works of Kafka, for example, already anticipate the issues, form and structure which are generally regarded as typical of the post-modernist novel, although Kafka is not usually included among post-modernist novelists by literary critics. While an analysis of Kafka's major novels would be beyond the scope of this thesis, one of Kafka's shorter fictions demonstrates that Kafka anticipates many of the features of the post-modernist novel.

In the very short prose narrative "A Common Confusion" Kafka (1970:129-30) captures in an anecdote many of the
qualities which distinguish post-modernist literature from that of earlier periods. Kafka describes a perfectly ordinary situation (a business appointment) but this perfectly ordinary event suddenly takes on inexplicable qualities, the event becomes a non-event, neither A nor B succeeds in meeting the other and it is clear that in the type of world described by Kafka no amount of exertion on the part of either A or B would have led to a successful meeting; action is futile under any circumstances, a mode of motion leading nowhere, just like the futile yo-yoing of Benny Profane and the Whole Sick Crew in Pynchon's V...

The intradiegetic narrative also reveals a fragmentation of existence, for in Kafka's world A's first journey to H and back takes only ten minutes each way while A's second journey to H takes ten hours and the second return from H takes only a moment. The difference in time apparently has nothing to do with external conditions and there is no indication that it has anything to do with A's state of mind. In fact, the narrator offers no explanation at all for the wildly conflicting amounts of time required for this simple journey, so that the only possible conclusion for the reader is that time as a measure of distance is subject to change from one moment to the next. In such a world external reality ceases to be relevant and every experience is purely accidental, unpredictable, so that the more obvious accident of A falling on the stairs just as he hears B is part of a
continuing series of accidents in an existence not governed
by the rules of cause and effect.

This disconnectedness is paralleled by the
fragmentation which occurs between A and B, for the
perceptions which A and B have of events are quite different
and incompatible, so that A and B appear to be moving in
quite different worlds, which is possibly why they could
never meet and why A at the end of the narrative cannot
tell whether B passes quite close to him or at a great
distance. The two different perceptions of A and B are
presented by the narrator as equally valid, so that the
reader can only conclude that there is no connection
between the different perceptions A and B have of events
which are said to have occurred. This kind of
inconsistency is magnified by the contradictory accounts of
the text itself. A is informed that B originally left his
house quite late in the day and after B tired of waiting
for A, but in the next paragraph A is told that B had
arrived quite early at A's house, in fact, just as A was
leaving and certainly before B could have tired of waiting
for A. That the anecdote is called a common confusion
signifies that the irrational, the arbitrary, the
displacement of time and place has become the norm.

The text in Kafka's narrative operates against itself,
is a deconstruction of the form of traditional prose
narrative which consists of sequential systems of order,
coherence, connectedness. The implicit assumptions of
narrative structure are used to undermine these
assumptions, magnifying and emphasizing the irrationality of the intradiegetic world, its complete and total disorder, its irreducible meaninglessness, in which the imperturbability of the narrator's tone is an integral part of the absurd accidentality. The contours of Kafka's world — public business turned to private nightmare, the futility of action, the absence of causality in sequential events, the fragmentation of the world of time and space and of the relationships between individuals and the absence of any explanation by the narrator — anticipates not only the narratives of Thomas Pynchon, but also those of many post-modernist authors such as Gass, Barth, Barthelme or (1) Burroughs. Kafka's anecdote also anticipates the concern of post-modernist authors with aspects of order versus chaos, institutions versus individuals, contradictory experiences at public and private level, and the problem of finding a mode of presentation which is an adequate means of depicting such concerns. Although Pynchon's novels have often been labelled "unique" they present no radically different concerns from those of many other post-modernist authors and certainly the description of Kafka's narrative could be applied equally well to Pynchon's novels, particularly Gravity's Rainbow.

This does not imply that Pynchon's novels (or indeed those of other post-modernist authors) are similar to those of the preceding century which are based on theoretical presumptions of a causal sequence in the progression of
events and that society is a totality or ordered system within which the individual experience achieves its meaning. Novels which accept these theoretical presuppositions function analogously to history and from its beginnings in the oral tradition narrative has been a form which provided the continuity of the consciousness of the race, at first through myth, or a mixture of myth and history as in the Iliad or the Bible (Kahler, 1973:9). As Grossvogel observes:

story-telling is closely related to the development of the social structure: structure presupposes continuation and continuation implies history; the tribe preserves its definition through ritual rote, part of which is the telling of what was in the past - what it was being a major justification for continuing to be. (1968:13)

The novel partakes of and develops from this narrative tradition and as Kermode (1968) points out, there are some obvious ways in which the traditional novel resembles an historical narrative. Both are structures imposed on events and the narrative link between events is an historical explanation -

Thus, insofar as a story works, whether it is invented or based on a set of documents, we shall find that narrative implies historical explanations and that these embody human topics and assumptions. (Kermode, 1968:231)

The theoretical concepts implicit in the historical schema - causal progression and meaningful social
interdependency are therefore seen by critics such as Kermode to have a determining effect on the form of the narrative. Citing Gallie, Kermode (1968:232) notes that what a reader asks of a story is followability and coherence. In the late twentieth century, however, and particularly among post-modernist authors, the form-providing model of the historical narrative is abandoned. Although post-modernist authors have been accused of indulging in arbitrary experimentation for its own sake, the rejection of the traditional form of the novel could also be indicative of a re-evaluation and reformulation of the position of the individual in society. Lukacs regards the change in the form of the novel during the twentieth century as a major change in ideology - modernist writers, he states, are governed by the ideology of Heidegger's ontology which:

...implies not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself, but also that it is impossible to theoretically determine the origins and goals of human existence. Man thus conceived is an ahistorical being ... He does not develop through contact with the world, he neither forms nor is formed by it. The only development in this literature is the gradual revelation of the human condition.

(Lukacs, 1971:20-21)

Lukacs also states that man for these writers "is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (1971:20). Although Lukacs is referring to authors such as Kafka, Joyce, Musil and Beckett, his description of the ideological bases of
modernist authors could also be applied to Pynchon, Barth, Barthelme or Gass, or indeed to a great number of post-modernist authors. Lukac's tendency to regard this as a system (to an extent greater than appears to be warranted, given the variations in form and function of the novel in the twentieth century) is perhaps a reflection of his own ideological basis, as is his rejection of this ideology, but he does identify major thematic concerns in the modernist novel and provides a framework within which the theoretical significance of the formal innovations of such novels can be understood.

This applies particularly to the fragmentation of plots, or, as in the narratives of Bartheime or Burroughs, the absence of any discernible plot. As Jameson notes:

Our satisfaction with the completeness of plot is therefore a kind of satisfaction with society as well, which has through the possibility of such an ordering of events revealed itself as a coherent totality and one which, for the moment, the individual unit, the individual life is not in contradiction. That the possibility of plot may serve as something like the proof of the vitality of the social organism we may deduce from our own time where that possibility is no longer present, where the inner and the outer, the subjective and the objective, the individual and the social have fallen apart so effectively that they stand as two incommensurate realities, two wholly different languages or codes, two separate systems for which no transformational mechanism has been found.

(3)
(1971:12)

Scholes and Kellogg (1966:207) describe the abandonment of plot as a literary form of spatial art. The spatial form undermines the assumption that a definitive
and permanent significance can be attributed to the past, since the past can never exist as a discrete entity apart from our consciousness of it in the present. As Mendilow (1965:105) describes it, in the spatial form:

... actions, thoughts, and feelings are not looked upon as stationary milestones that mark off what is past: for the whole of ... experience is implicit in any moment of ... (the) present. The progress through life is not to be viewed like that of a point moving along a line, but that of a wave, increasing and swelling with every instant of its movement. In fact, for such writers, and they include the stream of consciousness school, there is no past at all, only a growing present, for no part of the past has an independent identity, the whole grows and alters as the present shifts.

In other words, there is no vantage point outside the continual flux of the present from which the meaning of the past can be determined. As Borges (1968:106-8) has observed in terms of literary criticism, the past is always re-interpreted from the perspective of the present.

Such replacement of plot by the random sequence of moments implies a lack of faith in the meaningfulness of temporal processes and the possibility of temporal progression or development. But even if the modernist or post-modernist author adopts the spatial form it is difficult to avoid the problem of temporal sequence, for as Frank (1945:231) has pointed out, language itself proceeds in time, so that it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception in print except by breaking up
the temporal sequence of the narrative. As a result the novel becomes:

... not so much a statis of concluded action, as a statis of illumination, when the missing pieces of the temporal jigsaw are all finally in place and the picture therefore complete.

(Scholes and Kellogg, 1966:235)

But in the post-modernist novel there is no "finally" and no "complete picture". The fragments remain fragments and no amount of re-reading will do more than reveal just another pattern created by the turn of the reading kaleidoscope. There is no single meaning and no end to possible meanings. The fragmentation of the narrative, the abandonment of plot, the use of spatial form and the resultant inability to impose a pattern on experience or to arrive at an ending are all signs of a fragmentation which is based on a loss of faith in the meaningful relationship of cause and effect. Ambiguity and an absence of narrative authority undermine the very act of narrating. There is no point of absolute certainty somewhere outside the text, only multiple, relative perceptions, incomplete fragments which can never be re-assembled to form a complete picture. No homogeneous reality, no point of view more valid than any other. The post-modernist novel is not a story any more. Jameson regards this as an indication of the "atomization" of the modern age, where the intertwining of collective destinies and the places where such
intertwining could occur — the tavern, the marketplace, the city — have decayed, which implies an abandonment of the faith in the interconnectedness of human beings. (Jameson, 1971:13). Benjamin (1969:83) expresses a similar view, although from a different angle, in his discussion of the demise of story-telling. For Benjamin the continuity of experience no longer exists, and hence the continuous form of the traditional narrative must be abandoned. Benjamin and Lukacs clearly regard this as a loss, while Alan Friedman (1966) regards it as an expansion of individual possibilities beyond the limitations of social form and therefore a liberation of individual energies. Scholes and Kellogg regard it as a result of cultural factors at work throughout the history of the novel. But the breakdown of narrative coherence is, whatever the reason, a different approach to individual experience and to the form of prose narrative. While we need not fear the death of the novel in the foreseeable future, the post-modernist novel is different in form from its predecessors. This is neither unknown nor unfamiliar and has been commented on in various ways and in various contexts by a wide variety of literary critics who have attempted to define the essence of post-modernist novels.

For the reader of post-modernist novels such as those of Barthelme, Burroughs, Gass or Pynchon intertextual referents can therefore only provide a limited basis for relevant prediction, and such novels are entropic at the
global as well as the local level. There can be little doubt that this accounts to some extent for the "difficulty" of post-modernist fiction, although as the following chapters will demonstrate, Pynchon's novels contain many more challenges to a reader expecting closure than those which are caused by creating a text which is different from the conventional narrative.
READERS IN/OF PYNCHON'S NOVELS.

(1)  
As a number of critics have observed, one of the features of post-modernist fiction is the fact that the presentational process itself is frequently foregrounded in the text. Poirier (1968:339) sees this as a form of self-parody in which the author acknowledges the limitations of his own procedures and parodies the procedures employed within the text itself. Whether an acknowledgement of the limitations of the procedures necessarily results in this new form of parody is open to question - Barth in "Life Story" certainly presents a parody of the agonised author too aware of the latest conventions of literary production to produce a narrative and his non-narrative is extremely self-parodic (as is the title story, "Lost in the Fun House") while Nabokov's Pale Fire (1962) is also a parodic presentation of the process of reading/writing (literary criticism) without, however, being self-parodic (except in the sense excluded by Poirier from self-parody; as a parody of an earlier work by the author and of a literary mode of presentation). While the metafictional texts of authors such as Nabokov, Barth, Gass, Borges or Calvino foreground either the presentational process and/or the process of reading and thus blur the distinction between fiction and theories of literary production on one hand and the distinction between fiction and theories of literary
criticism on the other, they are not so much self-parodic as a means of encompassing within the texts of fiction the processes of the production and reception of fiction. Meta-fiction is not, of course, an exclusively postmodernist phenomenon. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* already foregrounds the presentational process in a novel which is as much about the process of writing a novel as it is the writing of a novel, but unlike "Life Story" *Tristram Shandy* both shows and tells how this process operates.

Pynchon's novels also show the presentational process in operation rather than telling about the process. In each of the novels the process of presentation is a reversal, a tracing back rather than a development towards. Like Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1982) fragments of a text lead back to more fragments of texts through a series of diversions and regressions. Unlike Barth or Calvino, however, Pynchon rarely comments explicitly on the processes of reading and writing, but instead presents models of various types of reader/writer in and through the text itself. That the distinction between reader and writer should be blurred is not surprising. Both reading theory (psycholinguistic reading theory in particular) and theories of literary criticism since the late sixties have acknowledged that reading is an active, creative process, and that the process of interpretative reading is more of a re-writing process than a passive absorption of the written text. It may be no historical accident that the birth of the reader in both
psycholinguistics and literary theory coincided (3) with the Death of the Author and that this change in focus from author to reader coincided with a period when authority in its many manifestations was being questioned both in Paris and America, but it is demonstrably after this period that the role of the reader became the object of investigation for psycholinguists such as Goodman (1968), Smith (1973) or van Dijk (1976), literary theorists such as Barthes (1975), Iser (1974), Fish (1980) or Macherey (1978) and semiologists such as Eco (1979) or Hall (1980).

Although the debate continues about the extent to which the text determines reading or the reader determines the text (a debate which Jonathan Culler (1978:72) states is unresolvable, but then resolves in favour of the text manipulating the reader), the belief that texts have a meaning or meanings which are exposed by the reader has long been exposed as a fallacy. Theorists such as Macherey may continue to insist that "reading and writing are not equivalent and reversible operations" (1978:12) but it is now generally accepted that any text contains "spaces" (Macherey, 1978:87) or "gaps" (Iser, 1974:283) which are filled in the imagination of the reader - a fact which seems to have come somewhat belatedly to the attention of literary theorists, given that Sterne in Tristram Shandy already pays the reader the compliment of filling the gaps
in the text:

The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.

(Sterne, 1956:II,11,p.79)

as does Fielding in *Tom Jones*:

for thou art highly mistaken if thou dost imagine that we intended, when we began this great work, to leave thy sagacity nothing to do.

(Fielding, 1957: XI,9,95)

long before what Eagleton rather flippantly refers to as "the Reader's Liberation Movement" (Eagleton, 1982:449).

Of course, not even the most liberated member of the "Reader's Liberation Movement" would claim that any reading of a text is admissible (although Fish strongly implies that this is the case) and reading, although more creative and closer to writing than it was previously supposed to be, is still regarded as an interaction with the text rather than a totally separate and totally free "creative" writing. That the type of text being read influences the type of writing which is produced about the text is a presupposition which is contained in much of the critical response to Pynchon's novels (in particular that which deals with *Gravity's Rainbow*). Leverenz's (1976:229-49) impressionistic commentary, for example, experiments with a "new" form of critical writing which he feels is more appropriate to the form of the novel and McHale
invites readings of the novels which approach them with a "negative capability". While psycholinguistic research (Campbell, 1979:683-9; Tierney & Lazanski 1980:606-13) has demonstrated that the type of text and the reader's purpose in reading the text influence the type of reading which occurs (to take an obvious example, an encyclopedia is not read in the same manner or with the same purpose as reading a novel), it is equally obvious that a "conventional" text can be read/rewritten in an unconventional manner, as is the case in Barthes' reading of "Sarrasine" in S/Z or Derrida's reading of a wide range of texts from Plato to Poe, while "unconventional" texts such as Pynchon's can be read/rewritten in a very conventional manner, as for example the technical explanations of entropy, rocketry, mathematics or physics as metaphor of Ozier (1974:73-90) or Nadeau (1979:454-471) or the psychological readings/writings of Siegel (1978) or Guzowski (1981:48-60). Of course, as Eco (1979:19) and Fiske (1982:145) point out, every reading of a text is also affected by the reader's intertextual competence; the specific text occurs within a framework of other texts which are similar or different, so that the reading of any specific text is influenced by the placement of that text within a larger context which is not present in the text itself, but supplied by the reader. The "reading" is thus shaped by other readings (in literature, philosophy, science, psychology or whatever), but each reading is also different from other readings. Borges (1965:42-51) plays
with this concept in his short story "Pierre Menard, author of Don Quixote", where Menard has enriched, by means of a new technique, the hesitant and rudimentary art of reading: the technique is one of "deliberate anachronism and erroneous attributions".

(p.51)

Although Borges' story is satirical, the observation that reading a text as if it had been produced by a different author and in a different period would produce different (and perhaps more "informed") readings is an interesting one, as his example of the two verbally identical passages of Don Quixote (one by Cervantes, the other by Menard) demonstrates; that which in the seventeenth century would have been "a mere rhetorical eulogy of history" (49), would for a contemporary of William James be the expression of an "astounding" idea. Borges' satire of the normative approaches to literary criticism is extremely amusing and it is interesting to speculate on the reaction of literary critics if the elusive Thomas Pynchon were in fact another author or if the chronology of his novels were different to that indicated by the date of publication. Despite the death of the author, most criticism, even while insisting that the relationship of the author to his work is unimportant, in fact still attributes a great deal of authority to the "absent" author (Pynchon as Superman leaping from physics to metaphysical poetry in a single bound).
Although Pynchon's novels do not at first sight appear to be metafictions in the same way as the stories of Borges or Barth obviously are, they do present within the context of the narrative models of reading which would appear to satirize the types of readings that have been made of the novels, except that obviously Pynchon's "readers" within his texts obviously prefigure the interpretive critical readings which proliferated after the publication of the novels. It almost seems as if Pynchon knew beforehand the types of readings to which his novels would be subjected, something which is not altogether impossible, as the developments in literary criticism would certainly not have been difficult to determine by any reasonably well-educated and intelligent author of the sixties.

Perhaps the most obvious reader-model in Pynchon's novels is Oedipa Maas, who in the course of the narrative reads two inter-related texts - the text of her American heritage and the text of The Courier's Tragedy. Oedipa's self-appointed task (self-appointed in the sense that she could have left the "reading" of the will to Inverarity's lawyers and need not have traced the Trystero reference) is to find the meaning of her inheritance; her purpose to unravel the relationships of the text to society. Oedipa is a very specific type of reader, the product of a particular type of education in a particular institution.
in a particular period in America:

she had undergone her own educating at a time of nerves, blandness and retreat among not only her fellow students but also most of the visible structure around and ahead of them, this having been a national reflex to certain pathologies in high places only death had had the power to cure. . . . unfit perhaps for marches and sit ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts.

(C.L.49,71-2)

This type of reader operates within the safe boundaries of academic scholarship, the only action that of tracing the instances of the occurrence of a word, an activity with little risk attached to it, politically or in any other way. Like the beginnings of many pieces of academic research, Oedipa's research activities are instigated virtually by her own intuitive response to a mysterious and knowing look exchanged by the actors in The Courier's Tragedy which appears to invest the word "Trystero" with abnormal significance.

From this point on, Oedipa's reading/writing of the text of the Trystero resembles the process of gathering data for a post-graduate degree. First she goes back-stage to interview the director of the play, Driblette (as the author is obviously not available for comment, what better source of information than a director?) Driblette, however, is not terribly helpful and rather disparaging about "scholarly disputes" and the scholar's concern with words, (C.L.49,53) but he does give Oedipa another source to trace - Zapf's bookshop. In the case of Pynchon's
novels, interviewing the author has also proved rather difficult for the readers of his texts, and like the director, the narrator in Pynchon's novels re-directs the reader to second-hand bookshops to trace words such as "entropy" or "parabola" which are felt intuitively to be significant because the "actors" exchange such knowing looks; secondhand bookshops filled with the texts of Werner Heisenberg, James Maxwell, Robert Graves, Henry Adams, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rainer Maria Rilke, Kekule von Stradonitz or Hermann Helmholtz, texts which reveal traces of the words, but not necessarily the meaning or significance of the word in Pynchon's texts.

In the next stage of her research project Oedipa reads the will more closely and discovers that there are many areas of knowledge where she is remarkably ignorant - law, investment, real estate, the "author". This is something generally not admitted by literary critics or researchers, although more than one of Pynchon's critics has acknowledged that his "encyclopedic" novels challenge the expertise of traditional literary critics and a feeling of relative "ignorance" among Pynchon's readers may not be as uncommon a phenomenon as the scholarly publications would be prepared to admit. One of Oedipa's reading "problems" is that once she begins to suspect that everything is
related (the approach to reading taken by Iser):

If we cannot find (or impose) this consistency, sooner or later we will put the text down.

(1974:285)

it seems as if everything is related. In terms of either her literary quest or her literal quest this is quite a logical possibility. As the Inverarity estate consists of an "artificial" environment of institutions, industries, housing developments, companies – in fact a typical national monopoly – it is not surprising that Oedipa discovers traces of Inverarity's business interests everywhere in San Narciso. It is also not surprising that her literary research discloses connections which link the historical Tristero to the secret communication system of WASTE, as after all this is precisely what Oedipa sets out to discover. What cannot fit so readily into the pattern is the connection between the two, a connection which rests entirely on the sign of the muted post-horn.

Oedipa's post-graduate research continues along predictable lines. Tracing literary allusions in a text, as Cowart (1980) could testify, is a very scholarly and thoroughly respectable enterprise. Who but a Cowart would trace two casual references to a wrecked Hannomag Storm in Gravity's Rainbow to the very automobile in which Wernher von Braun crashed in March 16, 1945 on his way from Bleicherode to Berlin and broke his arm [a detail available to Pynchon, according to Cowart, in James McGovern's Crossbow and Overcast New York: Morrow, 1964:p.94]
(Cowart, 1980:139) and who but an Oedipa would trace a reference to the Trystero, one word in a five act play, to the Vatican version of The Courier's Tragedy (a pornographic version of which Dribblette used only the last couplet), with all the true dedication of a student of Jacobean drama?

Although conducting independent research, Oedipa gets assistance from a wide variety of people in the community. Old Mr Thoth remembers that in a Porky Pig cartoon all of the anarchists were dressed in black (as were the anarchists in Dribblette's play) as were the Indians who weren't really Indians who attacked the Pony Express (C.L.49,63-64). Cohen the stamp dealer confirms her suspicion that the fake stamps in Inverarity's collection have something to do with the Trystero, and sure enough, the watermark is that of a muted post-horn. Once aware of the symbol, like the awareness among Pynchon's critics of entropy as a symbol, Oedipa finds it everywhere. None of which gets her any closer to discovering what it all means.

Consulting academic experts doesn't get her very much further either. Professor Bortz may be an expert on Jacobean literature in general and The Courier's Tragedy in particular, but talking about words does little more than trace the history of the Thurn and Taxis alternative communication system through Europe in the sixteenth Century. The scholarly discussion Oedipa has with Bortz regarding the sources available to Driblette for his
version of the play parodys in advance those critical discussions of Pynchon's novels which trace the sources of Pynchon's parodies of literary genres, such as Cowart's (1980:102-7) discussion of the sources available to Pynchon which are used in The Courier's Tragedy. Pynchon's novels, like Wharfinger's plays, may be notorious for their borrowings, so that The Courier's Tragedy becomes a parody of Pynchon's own method of literary production, but the discussion of Wharfinger's "borrowings" is also a parody of a critical convention; that of a particular approach to literary criticism which consists of tracing the sources of such borrowings.

Tracing the meaning of the word Tristero in libraries also proves unproductive for Oedipa, as this process only establishes the origins of the word, and further discussions with Bortz develop along the lines of an intellectual game based on Bortz's "mirror image theory" (C.L.49,112), again anticipating critical interpretations of Pynchon's novels which use mirror-image theory as the basis for readings of the novels - the "mirror-time" (V.,230) of the historical episodes in V. and the "mirror metaphysics" (G.R.,101) of opposition between North and South in Gravity's Rainbow. Cowart is not the only critic who has suggested that Pynchon's novels make extensive use of mirror image theory in a manner similar to that of Lewis
Carroll (Cowart, 1980:112-3), but as the narrator in Lot 49 observes:

should Bortz have exfoliated the mere words so lushly, into such unnatural roses, under which, in whose red scented dusk, dark history slithered unseen?

(C.L.49,112).

Interpreting the text to fit into a particular theory does not prove that the theory is valid, and it is at this point that Oedipa becomes "reluctant about following up anything" (C.L.49,114).

Oedipa's reading/writing of the text of The Courier's Tragedy and the text of American society ultimately amounts to no more than a gathering of data. The entire process, for all its scholarly respectability, is finally unproductive and does not provide Oedipa with a basis for determining further action. At one point she does consider the possibility of distributing her legacy among the nameless people who are the "other" in American society, but immediately rejects the idea as impossible (C.L.49,125). There are too many who could intervene to prevent a gesture such as this from being made and Oedipa's fleeting thought only confirms her impotence. Although she may have discovered a great deal in the course of tracing the history of the Tristero, and her dedication to scholarly research may be commendable, tracing the Word does not provide her with a basis for future action. At the most, the reading itself was the action and although Oedipa may have learned much through her scholarly research, like Profane in V. she has also learned nothing.
If Oedipa's reading/writing of the text is a parody of the scholarly approach to the interpretation of the text, Stencil's reading is a much more creative process. Like Oedipa, Stencil inherits his text through the death of the author (in this case his father, Sidney Stencil) and like Oedipa, Stencil feels intuitively that there is something significant about a particular reference in the text; the letter V. Numerous critics have assumed the same thing, not realising perhaps that Stencil, the reader of V, prefigures parodically the literary critics who have read so much significance into what is after all only the occurrence of a letter. Critics such as Golden (1972:11) who reads V as a "symbol of pure inanimativeness, of the nothingness of death" or Lehan (1973:158) who reads V as the historical decline of Woman from sex goddess to lesbian and transvestite - from mother to manufactured object, from the human to the grotesque,

a reading which presupposes, as Stencil's readings do, that the identity of V is continuous, verifiable and not a fabrication of Stencil's imagination and which, [unless Lehan is invoking Jungian theory, which does not appear to be the case] misreads the relationship between V and Stencil as that of mother and son; or Henkle (1971:209) of who reads V as "Western man's conception of woman", a reading which might invoke Graves and mythology (with a surprising absence of Jung), but is one that even Pynchon might dispute (not to mention any number of sociologists and
psychologists, and not necessarily only those aware of feminism) and which totally disregards the fact that the conception of V is that of one of the characters within the novel, and not a generalised comment on "the female" as a concept, Western or otherwise. Maybe Henkle and Graves share Stencil's conception of "woman", but this scarcely validates their opinions as a generalisation. It would be quite possible to argue a case for V being Western woman's conception of man - violent, aggressive, thriving on conflict, dominating in colonies and continents, amoral, infatuated with the inanimate - but this would also be to impose a preferred reading on a text which precludes such readings. Or alternatively V could be read as the Paraclete or Holy Spirit (Llahmon, 1975:168), a reading which Tanner (1980,54) finds difficult to accept and one that sits rather uneasily in a context where "speaking in tongues", in words which do not communicate to others is typical of most of the characters in the novel, where V is anything other than a "Holy Spirit", and where V as the Father, Son and Holy Ghost is stretching the credibility of the argument a bit beyond the bounds of belief. All such readings duplicate Stencil's reading of V, attaching a great deal of significance to a letter in a text, creating fictions of meanings which are as elaborate and carefully constructed as Stencil's own fictions, for Stencil is a prototype for the type of reader who brings meaning to the text. Unlike Oedipa, Stencil does not pursue in a scholarly and methodical fashion the object of his research
project. Instead, he relies on his intuition in recognising a "lead" which is worth following up or not, and on the basis of the merest fragments of information produces the most elaborate readings of a virtually non-existent text. Stencil creates patterns, exists entirely through his readings/writings, a parody of the absent author whose existence does not extend beyond the boundaries of the texts, a parody perhaps of Pynchon as another creator of fiction, but even more a parody of the carefully absent, determinedly disinterested and neutrally indeterminate authors of those fictions which claim to be valid observations and true generalisations in literary criticism. Like academics scrambling for promotion, Stencil is utterly dependent on his fabricated raison d'Être - he must continue to read, to write, to indulge in an "adventure of the mind" (V, 61) for he has become psychologically dependent on the interpretation of a text. Fortunately, if anything starting with the letter V can be part of Stencil's pattern, he will probably still be producing readings of V long after literary critics have exhausted their productive energy.

Mondaugen is another model of a reader, the type of reader who, faced with a complex and confusing text, has a firm belief that if only the code can be "cracked", the meaning will become apparent. The type of reader who searches for a key to interpretation, keys such as paranoia (Siegel, 1978) or mathematics (Ozier, 1974, 1975) or
physics (Nadeau, 1979). Mondaugen takes a great deal of time and effort to decode his signals, constructing tables, equations and graphs in his attempts to read the signals, but in the end it is Weissmann who cracks the code by removing elements of the text (V., 278) which when rearranged spell Kurt Mondaugen's name, while the remaining letters spell out "DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIST".

Even if the author is removed from the text, that which remains is everything, which is the case. Readers of Gravity's Rainbow should perhaps note that the process of reading which uses keys to interpretation is called "finagling" and that the remaining text is still everything which is the case. Patterns can be imposed on a reading, but this does not necessarily mean that such patterns exist.

In Gravity's Rainbow the process of reading is foregrounded specifically on a number of occasions. Those who have been struck by lightning are described as special individuals, those who "know" (G.R., 664). The narrator traces the reading of the text of A Nickel Saved through a number of different levels of "knowing". First those readers who know the rest of the proverb, and who therefore know that the real meaning of the quote is Mark Hanna's:

You have been in politics long enough to know that no man in public office owes the public anything (G.R., 664-5)

so that the real title of the magazine called "A Nickel Saved" is "Long Enough", which those who know, know, just
as those who are in the know, know the real titles
(political or ideological attitudes of the editorial
committees) of journals such as Meanjin or Diacritics. To
outsiders the text of a magazine may seem innocuous, but
when it is transformed, any such text reveals interesting
messages. The implication is that neither writing nor
reading is an act that is divorced from the social meanings
which produce or reproduce the texts. What is "read"
depends very much on what is "known". A reader of
Gravity's Rainbow who "knows" physics (Nadeau) or
mathematics (Ozier) or psychology (Siegel) will therefore
read the text as if the surface structure masks a deep
structure which is totally different, not a relationship
with differences as metaphoric or metonymic, but a re-
writing which is a totally different text.

In contrast to Pynchon's earlier novels, Gravity's
Rainbow is a text which continually draws attention to the
surface structures of the text. Although Pynchon's novel
does not defy the conventions of presentation of a text to
the extent that Gass does in Willie Master's Lonesome Wife
(1968), where different sections of the book are presented
in different colours, coffee mug stains are superimposed on
the print, print type and size varies from paragraph to
paragraph, photographic art is covered by print, marks of
citation interrupt the print and a whole page of print is
presented as a mirror reverse of the adjacent page,
Gravity's Rainbow does have a wide variety of different
forms of graphic representation. There are a number of different sizes of typeface - the main body of the text, the section titles, the notes to the section titles, quotes from other sources (as for example the quote from Neil Nosepicker's Book of 50,000 Insults which has three different sizes of typeface (G.R., 83) and is itself in a much smaller form than that of the surrounding text) so that the print itself is foregrounded. Capitals and italics are also used extensively throughout the text (two sizes of capitals, one used for the titles of songs and places and another for emphases within the texts such as "here comes, here comes LITTLE - AHH - ...OTTO!") The subtitles to section four contain a mixture of capitals of both sizes. Series of words in sentences are also capitalised:

No But Then You Never Really Thought It Was Did You Of Course It Begins Infinitely Below The Earth And Goes Back Infinitely Back Into The Earth ......

(G.R., 726)

as if each word were separate from those around it, or the beginning of a new sentence or a proper noun, and words in a sentence are capitalised as if the sentence were the title of a scholarly article - "Toward a Case for Bland's Involvement with Achtfaden Too" (G.R., 587) in the type of the pseudo-modest fashion used in academic publications with titles such as "Toward a Sociology of the Novel" or "Toward a Structuralist Interpretation of Gravity's Rainbow."

That typography reduced reality to the monomorphic
world of the printed word and thus strengthened the visual bias to the detriment of the other senses is regarded by McLuhan (1964:87) as a numbing of perception. According to McLuhan, "Literate man undergoes much separation of his imaginative, emotional and sense life" (McLuhan, 1964:90) because the richness and diversity associated with an aural culture is completely lost in the translation to a visual culture which limits perception to one sense alone. The variations in print form in Gravity's Rainbow, although obviously still perceived only through the sense of vision, convey a sense of spoken language which attempts to go beyond the limitations of the printed word, not only through the use of different types of print to denote different types of speech acts, but also through the graphic representation of unusual intonation patterns such as "shape-less blob of experience" (G.R.,81) or the rendition of accents such as "Getcher ass offa dat fire" (G.R.,641), so that the reading of the novel almost becomes a listening. That the visual aspects of a text are closely related to the type of reading act required by the text has long been known by psycholinguists (Martin, 1972; Holdaway 1979) as well as those involved in the publication of magazines and newspapers or the advertising industry and authors of children's books have traditionally used a much greater variety in the presentation of narratives than those who write for adult audiences by using graphic forms which reinforce the contents of the narrative. Even in post-modernist fiction, however, with the exception of
Gass's *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* and to a lesser extent, some of the fiction of Barthelme and Borges, conventional forms of print are the norm. This could be due to simple economic necessity as the costs of publishing a lengthy novel in anything other than conventional print form would be prohibitive, but it also seems that most authors are not aware of the meaning of the book itself as a signifier. As Carpenter points out:

> The format of the book favored linear expression, for argument ran like a thread from cover to cover; subject to verb to object, sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, chapter to chapter, carefully structured from beginning to end... (Carpenter, 1960:167)

Although post-modernist authors have been able to present texts in which the argument does not run from cover to cover in a continuous thread (and none more so than Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow*), the medium of print itself is almost always presented in a linear sequence and also read in a linear sequence, so that the book itself reinforces a linear mode of thought. The fact that the book is portable and can be read in privacy and isolation, McLuhan claims (1964:50), helped to produce an alienated man who defined himself in highly individualistic terms and thus created the prerequisite for the development of Western capitalism. The isolation of the reader is dealt with at length in Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1982) and in *Gravity's Rainbow* Slothrop as a reader of the texts of the Rocket and the Zone is also
increasingly isolated. Whether McLuhan's assertions are valid has not yet been verified, but Stencil, Oedipa and Slothrop certainly are or become alienated from their society in the course of their reading of the texts.

McLuhan's assertions about the influence of print on the values of a culture are very similar to those expressed by Tchitcherine in relation to the attempt to introduce the New Turkish Alphabet to the Kirghiz people. (G.R., 338-341) Before the arrival of the NTA "it was purely speech, gesture touch among them" (G.R., 338). Even after the introduction of the NTA there are Silences which can never be filled by an alphabet, but print also has the power to change society:

On sidewalks and walls the very first printed slogans start to show up, the first Central Asian fuck you signs, the first kill-the-police-commissioner-signs (and somebody does! this alphabet is really something!).

(G.R., 355-6)

Putting something into print fixes it for all time. The improvisation which is part of all spoken language is destroyed by print and Tchitcherine realizes that once the song-duel is recorded in print it will be lost (G.R., 357). To put something into print is to make it into a tangible object, a process whereby language loses its freedom. In print it is important to get the Texts straight (G.R., 729). otherwise misreadings will occur - fighting for a desert is not the same as fighting in a desert, as Christian
points out to Katje. (G.R., 729) But the Text of the Zone may not be the Real Text (G.R., 520), any more than the Rocket is the Real Text, a Text which "scholar-magicians" (G.R., 520) regard as something:

to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicaded and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop

(G.R., 520)

while that which appears as the Text is only a "coding, recoding, redecoding of the Holy Text" (G.R., 521).

Slothrop is one of the readers of several of the Texts. Like Oedipa, he is an educated reader, although the only time he uses the knowledge gained at Harvard (G.R., 553-4) his theoretical predictions based on that knowledge prove to be incorrect (G.R., 729). Unlike Oedipa and Stencil, he is not a voluntary reader of texts, but is selected for the purpose by Pointsman. His first reading task is a refresher course in technical German (G.R., 206) a task which consists primarily of the study of words, but words, as Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck knows, always suggest other words (Hawaii I to Haverie, with all its associated meanings - G.R., 207) and even mathematical symbols can suggest mythical meanings (Is Dodson-Truck playing the same game as Schaub (1981:51-4) who also traces the meaning of a mathematical symbol to a myth? And if so, does this get either of them any closer to the Real Text?). Slothrop finds that his reading sessions give him a hard-on (G.R., 211), even though there is nothing erotic in the texts, a reaction which is described as "peculiar", but
which appears to reinforce the theory that Slothrop reacts to anything related to the Rocket with an erection, in which case it is not the Rocket as such, or the conditioning process of Slothrop's infancy, but a mental reaction to rocket technology itself which turns Slothrop on. That there are readers who are stimulated by technological prose seems quite possible, just as there are readers who are stimulated by pornographic prose, and The Rocket is read as an erotic text by most of the engineers who are involved in its construction. The rocket limericks, for example, emphasize the sexual aspects of rocket technology (G.R.,311), Monzaugen looks at fuel and oxidizer as "male and female principles uniting in the mystical egg of the combustion chamber" (G.R.,403) and Weissman's rocket symbolism is predominantly sexual (G.R.,750-61). Although Slothrop dutifully reads his texts, it is Katje who knows the real angle, that the great airless arc is an allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself, and Those who use her - over its peak and down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm... which is certainly nothing she can tell Slothrop. (G.R.,223)

Slothrop reads only the surface of the text and although he suspects that there may be more to be read than this, never penetrates beyond the surface, at least not by reading these texts. Katje hopes that perhaps one day, "in one of their bombed out cities, beside one of their rivers, even
one day in the rain" (G.R.,224-5) Slothrop will understand the real text, but Slothrop will have to discover this for himself.

And he does, but not by reading the text of the Zone, which like the text of the Rocket is just another form of coding, a text created by people for their own purposes. Instead Slothrop becomes a non-reader of coded texts, reading instead:

the guts of trout he's caught and cleaned, scraps of lost paper, graffiti on the broke walls ... broken in specific shapes that may also be read

(G.R.,623)

writing his own sign and finally becoming his own sign, returning to a natural state.

The various types of readers in Pynchon's novels prefigure the types of readings of the novels, but Slothrop cannot prefigure any reading except a non-reading. Maybe there are already many non-readings of Pynchon. Maybe these are the readers who are not readers at all, but who are busy concerning themselves with more important activities than reading the texts of American society or the texts of literature. Maybe Slothrop as a reader shows that there comes a time when it is necessary to stop reading the coded texts of literature and society and to look for the real text instead.
CHAPTER 3

THE PROSTHESIS OF COPULA

The fact that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary has occurred not only to de Saussure (1974), but also to critics of Pynchon's novels (Tanner, 1978; Leverenz, 1976; Levine, 1976; Lhamon, 1975; Wills and McHoul 1983:274-91). In fact it would be difficult to ignore the arbitrariness of the signifier in Pynchon's novels. To take the title of his first novel V, a V which represents/names the book. V for volume, a voluminous book. The function of the title of a novel is generally considered to be that of giving some indication of its content, but although some of the content of the novel is about V, the novel as a whole is not exclusively about V. It is also about Profane and the Whole Sick Crew, about Rachel, Esther and Josefina. At least half of the content is set in the fictional present where Vs occur, but are too abundantly scattered and associated with too many contradictory concepts to permit any generalisation about the meaning of V to be made. As signifier of the content of the novel the V of the title is misleading.

Following the list of contents is a page which consists of nothing but a V-shaped pattern of Vs, the last V in the pattern followed by a period. This diagrammatic symbol of signifiers anticipates the patterning which Herbert Stencil attempts to impose on the Vs he discovers, as well as functioning cataphorically as signifier for the
complexity and significance of the signifier V. The pattern of Vs is misleading, for although there are indeed a great many Vs in the novel, they do not form a neat pattern and even Stencil's attempts to force his V clues into a pattern may be nothing more than a reflection of his own need for such a pattern (V., 389, 450).

V is . . .

In the beginning a street as "an asymmetric V" (V., 10) receding to the east where it's dark and there are no more bars. Two dimensional space, two lines diverging or converging depending on where you start. A concrete noun (a specific street, East Main in Norfolk, Virginia), a concrete surface, a created surface/text/pavement which covers up that which lies beneath. To construct pavements is to construct a system of co-ordinates; to impose a pattern on the random nature of the wor(l)d. Profane builds roads, but tries to escape the mechanical patterning of his own behaviour. He has spent much of his life either working or travelling on the street (V., 36) and regards the street as signifier for the consumer society, "a bright gigantic supermarket" (V., 37) where his only function is to want and from which he has learned nothing. The street as a Baedeker world which is one of "inanimate monuments and buildings; near inanimate barmen, taxi drivers, bellhops, guides . . ." (V., 408), a two dimensional world created in the image of the perceiver where the tourist may wander without
fear, where "War never becomes more serious than a scuffle with a pickpocket, one of the:

huge army ... who are quick to recognise the stranger and skilful in taking advantage of his ignorance; depression and prosperity are reflected only in the range of exchange; politics are of course never discussed with the native population

(V.,409).

But even Profane suspects that there may be more to the street than the Baedeker surface. He has a recurrent nightmare in which he is walking on a street at night where "there was nothing but his own vision alive" (V.,39). The dream turns into a nightmare when Profane fears that like the boy with the golden screw where his navel should have been, he is looking for something which will make his own disassembly as plausible as that of any machine (V.,40). The street has fragmented into its oppositional components; the two dimensional street filled with objects which is not frightening and the empty street which is associated with death. Any street has the potential of turning a normal night's dream into nightmare, turning "dog into wolf, light into twilight, emptiness into waiting presence" (V.,10), for violence and chaos are never far below the surface of the innocuous street. It is not long before the relative peace and quiet of East Main is shattered by the drunken brawl at the Sailor's Grave (V.,16-17); not long before the Playboys' search for "cono" turns into gang warfare and Josefina is raped; (V.,150-1); not long before the seemingly innocent tourists in Cairo and Venice are
involved in political intrigue (V, Chs. 3 and 7); not long before the streets of Valetta are synonymous with death and destruction (V, Chs. 11, 16 and Epilogue). There are no more bars when it's dark on the street. No bars to what? No colour bars? No bars to drink in? No bars to pattern music? No differences? No distinctions between what is and what is not? The text provides no answers.

V is ...

Vheissu. The mysterious country which haunts Godolphin's dreams, a country which has a colourful, everchanging surface which Godolphin feels he has never penetrated. Colours which actually distract him from seeing beneath the skin, prevent him from finding the heart or soul of the country. (V, 204). Plagued by memories of having failed to penetrate the surface of Vheissu, Godolphin mounts an expedition to the South Pole, hoping that at "one of the two motionless places on this gyrating world" (V, 205) he will find the answer to the riddle of Vheissu. But the only answer he finds is the perfectly preserved corpse of one of Vheissu's spider monkeys, a creature which more than anything else depicts the iridescent, everchanging surface of Vheissu and Godolphin realizes that the "skin" was all there ever had been (V, 206) because beneath the surface there is nothing. Even if, as Signor Mantissa argues, Godolphin's experience at the South Pole was an hallucination, it is a truth in which he believes and with which he must now live.
The image of Vheissu with its coloured surface masking a dream of annihilation (V, 206) suggests, as Tanner (1978:36) observes, that the function of the surface is to create fantasies which enable the avoidance of reality, but that while these fantasies are a necessary component of survival, they also represent "an infiltration of that death we are so eager to postpone" (Tanner, 1978:36). Mehemet's account of the man painting the sinking ship (V, 460) captures both the need to create an attractive surface and the futility of such attempts, and there is ultimately not much difference between the painting of the Goddess Venus, which may be only a "gaudy dream, a dream of annihilation" (V, 210) and Slab's fifty-six paintings of a Cheese Danish (V, 354). But like "V", Vheissu is the presence of an absence, existing in the memory of Godolphin and encompassing contradictory meanings, surface and under the surface, artificial constructions and void.

V is ...

Valetta, denoting the sexuality of the feminine gender (V, 465), the peacefulness of a passive existence in the womb (V, 474), the vortex of political intrigue (V, 476), the converse of the process of history (V, 481), the epicentre of existence (V, 457) the personification of inconstancy and deception (V, 457), the transition from animate to inanimate through death (V, 346, 386), the source of subconscious motivation (V, 444), the place where pure accident is controlled by the goddess of fortune
(V., 432) and the homeland of metaphor and delusion (V., 325). No fixed meaning, just differences in meaning, an undermining of the process of signification through an excess of meanings.

V is . . .

A repetition of Vs, each one full of contradictory meanings. The Whole Sick Crew frequent a Jazz club called the V-note, which couples V with the decadence of the Whole Sick Crew, but McClintic Sphere also performs at this club, which couples V with the humane characteristics of McClintic. V is the signifier for destruction in the form of the V-type rocket, but is also explicitly compared to "spread thighs" (V., 61), a description which has obvious sexual connotations. The letter V occurs at the beginning of such contrasting places as Venice, Venezuela, Vheissu, Valetta and Vesuvius and names such as Victoria Wren, Vera Meroving, Veronic Manganese and the woman V as well as Veronica the not quite saintly sewer rat and the painting of the goddess Venus. If V is read as the Roman numeral five, there is also an association with the five figured comb which belongs to the woman V. This comb is passed on from Paola to Pappy Hod in Valetta and is described as a symbol of death and deception (V., 443), but is given in what appears to be a gesture of love. Only one meaning of V is specifically denied in the course of the novel, and that is the meaning of V for Victory (V., 54). Stencil's denial of this particular meaning reinforces the fact that
meaning is given to signifiers, that a signifier in itself has no definitive meaning. The process of signification, the act of signifying is based on a system of categorization which uses inclusion and exclusion as a means of distinguishing between signs. The specific meaning of any sign for the reader is determined as much by what it is not as by what it is; in fact, can only be determined in this manner. The signifier V is distinct from other signifiers only because it is different from them.

V is . . .

"The V.-jigsaw." (V., 55)

The process of signification is carried out by Herbert Stencil. The first enigmatic reference to Stencil's preoccupation with the process of signification is presented in a stylised dramatic dialogue which is elaborated by a retrospective analysis of his lifestyle before and after nineteen forty-five. Whether the date of the end of World War Two is significant or not is never discussed, but it is at this point that Stencil notices the passage relating to V in his father's diary, even though he has had the diary in his possession since nineteen twenty-two. To use an analogy from catastrophe theory, Stencil in nineteen forty-five has reached an inflexion point and his existence after this takes a different direction (Zeeman, 1976:65-83). Stencil's serious dedication to his search for the transcendental signifier is ridiculed through a
comparison with the 'rathouses' which people construct from the unrelated catastrophes which they read about in the newspapers. It is estimated that in New York alone there are five million of these rathouses, not counting those of cabinet ministers, heads of state and civil servants around the world (V., 225). By implication, Stencil's search for meaning is the construction of yet another "rathouse" to be added to the collection.

Stencil traces/finds many Vs in the course of the novel, but there are always more Vs than those that happen to cross Stencil's path. V as in Virginia, Veronica, Vera, Venus, Vogelsang, Valetta, Vheissu, Vesuvius, Venice, violence, vector, venery, valley and vision. Not so much repetitions of V, but modifications, transformations, differences which change, disappear or re-appear depending on which angle you hold the plate. They are formed into a pattern by Herbert Stencil, but provide no meaning, cannot explain randomness and accident in terms of cause and effect. Stencil names the Plot Which Has No Name, but begins and ends with the initial. Stencil insists that every incidence of a name must be connected through the occurrence of the initial V, but if the key is V, then Stencil always/already had the key and still cannot find the meaning. V is a necessity used by Stencil to attempt to resolve the opposition of accident and intention, a means of convincing himself that he will find the controlling principle of history if only he can find the
transcendental signified of V. But this presupposes a chronological continuity from Victoria Wren to V, the establishment of a relationship which only Stencil (or Lhamon, 1975:163-76) assumes exists. Stencil re-creates his/story. Although he does not know what sex V might be, (V, 226), he always refers to V as she; V is the "Other", signifier of the passive female role, vampire feeding on violence, voyeur, virgin and Venus. Nothing new in this projection of a pattern. If you have to blame an/other, and if you happen by chance to be male, why not "she"? Why not project your own headache? (V, 90)

If V can mean anything, how can differences be established? In Gravity's Rainbow, Lyle Bland suddenly discovers that distinctions between the animate and the inanimate are not valid distinctions after all (G.R., 588-91). Although the tone of the passage begins as satire, Bland's sudden insight is presented as a significant moment of truth. The rest of us, not as lucky or inspired as Bland (according to the narrator) go on categorising, differentiating, naming, trying to fit parts into the appropriate places of the patterns we invent, producing an endless chain of signifiers with no signified. One word leads only to another - "baby bottles" to "tranquilization"; "meat packages" to "disguise of slaughter"; "dry-cleaning bags" to "infant strangulation". And so on. Lyle Bland simply abandons the signifying process. His mind/spirit leaves the body, although one could ask how this could be so if there is no distinction
in the first place. Is Lyle Bland insane? Is the narrator satirizing Lyle Bland's beliefs or emphasizing the arbitrary nature of systems of classification, or both?
Are those who search for "Kute Korrespondences" (G.R., 590), like Stencil or Oedipa or Pointsman or Slothrop or the readers of Pynchon's novels "not chosen for enlightenment" (G.R., 590)?

The act of reading, the process of finding the meaning of a text depends on the recognition of differences between signifiers. Such differences may only exist in the opinion of the perceiver, but the sorting out process is essential to the construction of meaning. If there are no differences, as the "enlightened" Bland claims, then anything can mean anything or everything or nothing. To give up the search for meaning, to stop categorizing, even if the means of categorizing are invalid, arbitrarily determined by the purpose of the search, is to stop being alive. Bland transcends the realm of Gravity where such distinctions are made, finding, it is implied, in death the means of avoiding the process of making sense (G.R., 590). Stencil suspects that the end of his quest for meaning will also be death. Taken literally, death would certainly put a stop to any quests for meaning, any systems of categorization, but this is scarcely the most profound insight of the century. Although quests for a transcendental signifier are satirized in/through Pynchon's novels, there is really no alternative to the system of
classification except to stop. The consequences of stopping are clear to Bland, but less so for Stencil, Slothrop or Oedipa.

Oedipa's life has little meaning. America is all around her, but her life is measured out in cocktail glasses, contained in Tupperware containers. Then her life is pierced by a will. She is sensitized by a letter. Not a letter V, but a letter from her husband, Mucho Maas. Not the contents of a letter, but a misprint on the enveloping envelope. And once a misprint is discovered it leads to more misprints - stamps of WASTE.

Oedipa traces Pierce Inverarity's estate. An estate which is present through Pierce's absence. There are traces of Pierce's estate everywhere - Fagonso Lagoons, (real estate), Yoyodyne Inc (the Galactronics Division), Beaconsfield Cigarettes (bone charcoal filters - the very best type). Every commercial on television leaves another trace of Pierce's estate. "What the hell didn't he own?" asks Oedipa (C.L.49,25) and seems not to know the answer. Does not search for the answer, but searches instead for the meaning of WASTE, the significance of The Tristero. But the search does not lead to some more general truth. Historical figurations fall away to reveal only more historical figurations. Parallels remain as parallels and do not converge. The bones of soldiers from Lago di Pieta turned to charcoal for Beaconsfield Cigarettes are not the bones of the Lost Guard of Faggio made into charcoal and
then into ink. The two things are close - too close for Oedipa, but why assume connections?

Oedipa traces The Tristero. Through Dribblette, the director of The Courier's Tragedy, who tells her there is no absolute truth, but only his version, or her version which ceases to exist whenever they themselves do (C.L.49,54). Through Zapf, seller of used books, who may have been able to tell her who else was interested in the book she wants, but Oedipa does not ask. Through old Mr Thoth and his stories about the Pony Express in the gold rush days. Through Genghis Cohen, stamp dealer who can recognise a counterfeit when he sees one. Through Emory Bortz, lecturer in English who can tell her about words in Wharfinger's text, but not why Dribblette refers to the Trystero only on one particular night of the performance of The Courier's Tragedy. Without the human element, all that can be talked about is words. Not just any words, but a supplement to the text, with a dead man as a linking feature, but not the key.

All that is left is a symbol, hieroglyphics scribbled on the wall of a toilet, on a pavement. The city is infected with signifiers of W.A.S.T.E. which lead Oedipa not to some transcendental signified, but only back to the beginning. Only a repetition of symbols, a repetition which is meaningless as she has lost the "direct, epileptic Word" (C.L.49,81). Words as a buffer zone, standing between the reader and meaning, blocking the access to "spectra beyond the known sun" (C.L.49,89). Like literary
critics, Oedipa is devoted to the Word. The Word is a system of connections, a structure where nothing happens by accident. But how then explain accident? Is the Trystero a symbol for the Other? If it is, what is it that Oedipa has discovered? Not a system of connections, but only random occurrences of a word. A "y" where an "i" should have been. "I can't read this," Oedipa said. (C.L.49,108).

Who controls the lines of communication?

Like Stencil, Oedipa can only trace instances of the occurrence of a symbol, never sure whether the traces she discovers are fact or fabrication; refuses to face the possibility that the traces have been placed by Pierce Inverarity, even though she discovers that he owned the Tank Theatre where Dribblette directed the crucial performance of The Courier's Tragedy, as well as the shopping centre which housed Zapf's used bookshop, as well as . . .

Either way, there is no meaning, no end. Just more data. The only thing to do is to stop. Accept the possibility of the Other, but don't use systems of logic to prove its existence. But will Oedipa go through with it?

The fragmentation of meaning. In the beginning was the Rocket. The Rocket was created by German scientists and technologists and was only another in the long line of weapons of war. But that was in the beginning. For in Gravity's Rainbow the rocket is not present, but absent. Even when it is present, it is the absence of the rocket
which is felt. Tangible rockets offer no threat. The fear of an impending rocket is terrifying. The Rocket is:

A giant white fly: an erect penis buzzing in white lace, clotted with blood or sperm ... the womb into which Gottfried returns

(G.R., 750)

The resolution of opposites, penis and womb, animate and inanimate, dissolution of differences, whiteness, bleaching out of colour, the ultimate penetration ...

"but what's this just past the spasming cervix, past the Curve Into The Darkness, The Stink The... The White...The Corner...Waiting...Waiting For -\"

(G.R., 757-8)

Who can be sure what lies beyond? What's waiting around the corner? Is there an escape from falling? Is the prophecy false? Is going up with the rocket preferable to waiting for its descent? Who needs comfort?

The Rocket is ... 

The Revealer. Showing that no society can protect ... Before the Rocket we went on believing, because we wanted to. But the Rocket can penetrate, from the sky, at any given point. Nowhere is safe

(G.R., 728)

Not America, not Europe, not Africa. Faith in Destiny. The destiny of death, "the Rocket, this most of terribly potential 'bombardments" (G.R., 728), carefully crafted by the war, carefully reassembled after the war, perfection of technological techniques, but curiously vulnerable, at the mercy of small things - dust, a film of
grease, oil from a touch of a human finger, rain, corrosion - any one can turn the Rocket into pieces of dead metal. Like the destiny of humans, the destiny of the Rocket is at the mercy of accident. No reason. Many Rockets never reach Brenn schluss, the point of transition beyond which it has an independent being, no longer in the control of those who have the power. The power to fire/fuel the Rocket. The point of "terminal orgasm" (G.R., 223), the submission of its feminine counterpart, the zero point, the arc a "clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet ..." (G.R., 223). Lusts of transcending, of freedom from the laws of gravity, of the gravity of laws, of the impossible in the system of the possible. The escape from a two dimensional existence, where even those that reach the final row are condemned to creep, but the Tower rises above the two dimensions and offers the "Vertical Solution" (G.R., 735). Real violence occurs in the repression of this information.

The Rocket is . . .
The Tower. "Everybody has a different story on it" (G.R., 747). Ejaculation; symbol for the Church of Rome; any System which will not tolerate heresy, but which by its nature must sooner or later fall; victory over splendour and avenging force (see Goebbels); the Golden Dawn (G.R., 747-8). In the path of the Tower/Rocket the Ravens of Death and The Poisons of God have merged dialectically to produce new guardian demons for the Rocket. Mystical,
mysterious allusions. A transcending of the crude mechanical components which can still malfunction. A system still, but how will this system fall? Two Rockets or three? Cosmology or heresy?

But the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it - in combat, in tunnel, on paper - it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable . .

(G.R., 727)

The heretics: gnostics, the engineers, scientists, technologists who see in the Rocket, beyond simple steel erection:

an entire system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature

(G.R., 324)

A system which can be controlled, where cause and effect apply, where data can be analysed to correct error, where the Rocket's passage can be reduced to bourgeois terms, equations, mathematical signs, forces which seem to be under control. Control, a means of scientifically verifying results of an experiment, but also to have power over. Is there a Control which cannot be named? What are the gnostic Rocket limericks if not an attempt to control the gravity of the Rocket? (G.R., 306-7) Retracing the Rocket's becoming, its component parts (G.R., 305) does not give any indication of the meaning of the Rocket, nor does the meaning lie in the signs - the double integral, the sign of the Rocket, deathwish, double lightning stroke,
backward symmetry, a falling away of time, a transformation of "meters per second to meters" (G.R.,301), an interface.

The heretics: Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter - permuting and combining the text into new revelations, always unfolding, imposing meaning, naming "the act of naming the physical utterance obeys the pattern" (G.R.,322). North as Death's region, the Rocket produced out of a place called Nordhausen, dwellings in the North, produced by Weissmann/Blicero - Blicker the early German name for death, seen as white, bleaching, blankness. Unfolding of meaning, lost messages, messages found. The true message has never come, but perhaps the Rocket will provide the means of finding the truth, if the moon is not both bringer of evil and its avenger. Does the Eternal Centre, the Final Zero exist? Is there an end? A resolution of opposites? If you listen to the Rocket, do you hear a revelation? Experience? Illumination? Terror?

The heretics:

Manicheans who see two Rockets, good and evil, who speak together in the sacred idiolalia of the Primal Twins (some say their names are Enzian and Blicero) of a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle.

(G.R.,727)

The oldest heresy of all; the designation of the irreducible alterity of the Other inscribed in history, in religion, in myth, in politics. A heresy found in debates about the function of the Rocket (or Atomic Bombs, or
nuclear energy), but who decides what is good and what is evil?

The Rocket transcends such heresies and heretics will be silenced. Each will have his own personal Rocket, ready to seek him out, hunt him, rushing closer. There are no common meanings, no dominant or deviant beliefs, only personal confrontations with the Rocket. There is only time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you, or reach between your own cold legs.

The Rocket is . . ?

Each of Pynchon's novels plays with the gap between signifier and signified, with the divergence of meaning that is the consequence of tracing signifiers in a search for the transcendental signified, with the differences, deferred meanings of repetition. To discover more is to discover less. Any certainty which may have existed, existed in the beginning. To impose a pattern is not to discover meaning, for there is always the possibility of yet another signifier just beyond the reach of the searcher. Those who search for meaning - Stencil, Oedipa, Slothrop - discover only connections, not meaning.

Pynchon's novels deconstruct the notion of a transcendental signified, showing both the necessity and impossibility of such a notion.

While to anyone familiar with communication theory the proposition that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary has long been accepted as a given,
it is more difficult to accept that the chain of signifiers may extend indefinitely without leading to a transcendental signified. At the textual level particularly, a word leads only to yet another word; repetition with difference which never reaches a point of absolute undifferentiated meaning. As long as we are operating at the level of language a word is only defined in terms of other words. Even in a dictionary or thesaurus where the parameters of meaning are determined by convention and culture this is the case. The process of establishing meaning is not a narrowing of a specific meaning, but a divergence of possible meanings. Take a word. Any word. "Dog", for example. A single point of divergence leading to quadruped of many breeds wild and domesticated; hunting dog (figuratively dogs of war, havoc, rapine); male of dog; wolf or fox; worthless or surly person; constellation, also Sirius or Procycon, chief star in either; kinds of mechanical device for gripping etc.; short iron bar with upturned spike at each end in common use for joining heavy timbering; light near horizon portending storm; follow closely, pursue, track. And so on.

To trace the meaning of any one of these meanings is to repeat the process all over again. Take "quadruped", or any other word in the above series of words. At the completion of the process all that is reached is the paradoxical position of any one word meaning anything else. "Dog" can mean "cat" or "copy" or anything else I choose it to mean. Linguistic entropy; all words are equal; the
ultimate democracy of the word.

To trace the meaning of "V", or the meaning of an inheritance, or the meaning of a relationship is to engage in a process of divergence. All that is established is a connection and even this connection is determined by the searcher for meaning and establishes no end point. There will always be more connections just beyond the boundaries of the text as written.

There is no transcendental signified, only the process of signification; a repetition, a tracing, a copy.

V. is . . .
Lot 49 is . . .
Gravity's Rainbow is . . .

an illusion; a fragmentation of meaning into meanings until it is all over, for only in the beginning was there the word.
CHAPTER 4

LIES, LIES AND MORE LIES

If the writer of a scientific text (or a mathematical text or any non-fiction or even a PhD thesis) were to tell lies, lies and more lies, readers would be bound to object. Authors of fiction have always been granted more leniency and narrators who are unreliable are by no means uncommon in the novel, nor does anyone confuse the narrator (or narrators) with the author anymore. Except perhaps Pynchon.

In the introduction to *Slow Learner* Pynchon states that the narrator of his short story "The Waste Land" is "almost, but not quite me" (S.L.,5) and criticizes the narrator for dealing defectively with the subject of death. The extent to which a narrator is the identifiable voice of the author has always been a somewhat problematical matter in the novel. As Wayne C. Booth (1973:316) points out, there is a long tradition, particularly in comic and ironic fiction, of separating the narrator from the text in order to achieve a distancing effect. As early as 170 AD in Lucian's *True History* the narrator states "I now make the only true statement you are to expect - that I am a liar" (Booth, 1973:316). If the narrator actually states that he is a liar, obviously the reader will interpret the narrative with a degree of suspicion and will be less likely to accept the views of the author as being those of
the narrator. The function of the lying narrator is to draw attention to the irony of the text, to avoid the possibility of the text being taken as a serious statement of beliefs, particularly those texts which do not, like, for example, Swift's *Modest Proposal* (1960), contain propositions which obviously outrage existing values or beliefs and which offer no comparisons between a set of socially accepted values and the application of these values to a commodity unacceptable in terms of these values. There is, logically and economically, nothing absurd about Swift's *Modest Proposal*, but the text does not require a lying narrator for the reader to grasp the fact that Swift's Proposal is satirizing economic values by applying the same principles to the production, marketing and consumption of babies. After all, no-one eats babies, do they?

Similarly novels such as *Catch-22* (Heller, 1964) contain within the text itself such obvious extensions of logic carried to absurd degrees that a reader cannot mistake the irony - the belief that identity exists only in the official records that confirm identity, for example, is satirized in the novel by the physical existence of Doc Daneeka, who nevertheless does not exist as far as the administration is concerned, and there is no doubt about the fact that Heller is satirizing a belief dear to the hearts of administrators in all bureaucratic systems.
No reader of Heller's text would confuse the voice of the author with that of the narrator who describes war as a marketing system in *Catch-22*, or regard the text as anything other than a satirical exposition of the values pertaining to a military (and, by extension) bureaucratic system.

In many modern novels it is by no means as easy to establish the distance between the author and the narrator. Some, like Nabokov in *Lolita*, explicitly state that the narrator is not to be confused with the author:

> My creature Humbert is a foreigner and an anarchist, and there are many things, beside nymphets, in which I disagree with him.

(1966:333)

Some, like Grass in *The Tin Drum* (1965:11), indicate that the narrator is mad "Granted: I am the inmate of a mental asylum", but present through the narrator a world which is as insane as the narrator himself, so that the reader occupies an uneasy position between the insane narrator and the plausible account of an insane society and cannot judge whether insanity plus insanity equals validity.

Some, like Burroughs in *The Naked Lunch* (1964), provide the disjointed narrative perspective of a drug addict, but who is not addicted?

Some, like Barthelme in *Snow White* (1968) give little indication of the distance between author and narrator but provide strange juxtapositions in the text, such as the
objective test at the end of part one, which points to a reading of the text as ironic representation of the myth of Snow White, while the surrealistic use of language defies any attempt to be taken literally.

Some, like Joyce in *Ulysses* (1961) give no indication at all about any possible difference between the author and narrator, so that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to judge whether the text is to be interpreted as ironic or not ironic, in its entirety or in part, except by external systems of reference.

Until the publication of *Slow Learner* Pynchon provided no such external system of reference; his texts stood alone to be interpreted as the reader pleased, no hint was given regarding the distance between author and narrator, even though the distance between the narrator and the viewpoints of the characters was often clearly indicated, no means was provided for distinguishing between the position of the narrator and that of the author. Then, after twenty years of silence, comes the statement that in at least one of his short stories Pynchon identifies with the voice of the narrator. If this is true of one of his short stories, whose is the voice of the narrator in Pynchon's novels? Can the newly informed critic any longer state with conviction "I would question whether Pynchon (3) "states" anything," when Pynchon himself states that he identifies with the narrator? We could of course rationalize the basis for our particular opinion by hiding
behind the well-documented "intentional fallacy" (Wimsatt, 1970) and go on to demonstrate that Pynchon's texts do not reflect Pynchon's intentions, but this becomes a rather tenuous position when Pynchon also states that many of the attitudes of his narrators are not only similar to Pynchon's own attitudes, but that these attitudes reflect the prevailing mores of the generation of young Americans with which Pynchon identifies; the intellectual "beat" generation concerned with the possibilities of life outside the closed and cloistered system of academe, the "drop-out" generation, the generation concerned about the insanity of war and the insanity of those in power since nineteen forty-five who could have, but chose not to do anything about it; the generation, more than a generation, which shared a feeling of impotence in the face of the power of The Bomb and which between the extremes of refusing to think about it and going crazy by worrying about it occasionally wrote fiction about it. (S.L.,18-19) Such comments clearly indicate that Pynchon does not regard his concerns as radically opposed to the concerns raised in his texts. He is not ironic about issues such as systems of power and control, whether at the political, industrial or economic level. He is not ironic about the impending threat of annihilation, whether by V-2 rocket or The Bomb. He is not ironic about the helpless terror of those who have no power within the system, but who are nevertheless caught up in the machinations of the plot.
If there is a distance between Pynchon and the narrators of his texts it lies in the function of the narrator within the text and not in the relationship between the attitudes of the narrator and Pynchon's attitudes. This function changes in the course of the three novels. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon uses a heterodiegetic narrator who does not intrude into the text as a separate persona.

As Genette (1980:245) has pointed out, the heterodiegetic narrator permits the text to function with an immediacy which is not possible when a homodiegetic narrator is used (regardless of whether the homodiegetic narrator is "reliable" or "unreliable") because neither narrator nor narratee is interposed between the narrative and the reader. Of course any narrator, whether heterodiegetic or homodiegetic, directs the function of the text, making connections between narrative instances, and focalizing the narrative discourse. The narrator can also emphasize the relationship between narrator and narratee, either explicitly or implicitly, in either phatic or conative mode and to a greater or lesser degree (as, for example in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or Pynchon's *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*); can supply commentary on or justification for the action (the function of the narrator in most television documentaries), or can comment on the role of the narrator itself (Oskar in *The Tin Drum* or Chief Broom in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). But when
the narrator focalizes the extradiegetic elements of narration, the immediacy of the text is replaced with a distance between reader and text.

In *The Crying of Lot 49* the narrative has an internalized focalization through its protagonist, Oedipa Maas. The narrator adheres to self-imposed restrictions of field and partial ignorance which coincide with Oedipa's increasingly "sensitized" perceptions in relation to her quest for the meaning of the Trystero, so that the focalization remains consistent throughout the novel. Nothing is revealed to the reader that is not also made available to Oedipa, nor does the narrator explain the significance of any narrative situation for the benefit of the reader alone.

Despite this internalized focalization, there are a number of instances which approach paralepsis - as, for example, when Oedipa (among others) hypothesizes about the reasons for Dribblette's suicide (C.L.49,111-2) or when Oedipa speculates on the possibilities of The Trystero being a hoax or not (C.L.49,117-8). The fact that these hypotheses remain as hypotheses maintains the internalized focalization of the narrative and the immediacy to the reader of the problems posed by the text.

The main function of the narrator in *The Crying of Lot 49* is to direct the function of the text. By means of temporal and spatial analepsis the text is given dimensions beyond the intradiegetic level of the narrative in
much the same manner that Oedipa dons layer after layer of clothing in her game with Metzger (C.L. 49, 23-4), an analogy which is explicitly stated in the course of the novel (C.L. 49, 36). Some instances of analepsis have an explanatory function, as for example, when Oedipa recalls her experiences while gazing at the triptych "Bordando el Manto Terrestre" and relates this to her inability to penetrate surfaces, or when Mucho recounts his experiences as a used car salesman and relates this to his disillusionment of the process of "Endless, convoluted incest" (C.L. 49, 8). Others have the function of analogy, such as Oedipa's intuitive "epileptic" understanding of the presence through absence of the ghosts of the dead when drinking Cohen's dandelion wine (C.L. 49, 66-68) or the correlation between past and present versions of The Trystero. Regardless of whether the metadiegetic analepses are verified or not, (or perhaps more precisely, because they are not) the narrative discourse establishes the power of narrative to influence the lives of those who function at the intradiegetic level of the text - in this case Oedipa Maas. The only direct connection of the two levels exists through the will of Pierce Inverarity, and this connection is never established definitively, nor, ultimately, is very relevant to the effect of the metadiegetic narrative on Oedipa. Like Oedipus before her, Oedipa is pierced by her knowledge and cannot (4) undiscover it. Her revelation may well be false, but at
best Oedipa can only refuse to go further down the path of revelation. This dominance of the narrative is the result of the function of the narrator in The Crying of Lot 49.

The fact that the narrator is heterodiegetic does not, of course, preclude variations in the tone of the narrative discourse. The opening paragraphs of the novel consist of a humorous parody of the middleclass female stereotype of "bored housewife" filling her afternoons with Tupperware parties and similar suburban trivialities and much of the humour in the novel is created by the disparity between the attitudes and beliefs of the characters and the narrator's ironic appreciation of the inconsistencies of the situation which are not apparent to the characters. The Yoyodyne stockholders' meeting, for example, complete with songfest (presumably taken seriously by the president and stockholders of the company) which consists of old favourites such as the loyalty song to the tune of Cornell's alma mater (a parody of the artificially induced loyalty in both company and university) and the more sinister undertones of the hymn to competitive private enterprise in the field of nuclear warfare sung to the tune of "Aura Lee" (C.L.49,57), or the hilarious episode (though again with serious undertones) where Oedipa plays shrink to her shrink while Hilarious explains that if he'd been a real Nazi he would have been a Jungian psychiatrist instead of a Freudian one (C.L.49,95), an explanation which does not, of course, enable him to rationalize his feelings
of guilt, just as following a different leader does not justify atrocities.

Such variations in tone prevent the narrative discourse from being entirely internally focalized, but do not counteract the predominant focalization of the narrative. A more serious problem of focalization occurs when the narrator includes philosophical and mystical speculations which are inconsistent within the internalized focalization of the narrative. At the most crucial point in the novel Oedipa has a revelation about the function of metaphor which is based on the concept of time differential and which enables her to temporarily break through the layers of insulation which surround her. The explanation that she gained understanding of this concept through her acquaintance with a collegiate boyfriend seems inadequate as an explanation of her sudden understanding, particularly as she has, throughout the novel, been shown to have a singularly deficient understanding of any scientific principles. In general, the more abstract metalinguistic passages such as that above or the passage on entropy (C.L.49,72-3) sit uneasily in their contexts. It is true that the internalized focalization is maintained in the case of the latter, but the concept is crucial in relation the mystical level of Oedipa's quest, so that her lack of understanding on this occasion marks an inconsistency in a narrative where everything else Oedipa discovers becomes part of the system of connections. As both W.C. Booth (1973:163-4) and Genette (1980:192) point out, this is one
of the penalties of adopting an internalized focalization and difficult for any author to avoid.

The heterodiegetic narrator in the *Crying of Lot 49* does, despite the above reservations, maintain a consistent focalization of the narrative. The distance between the text and the reader is minimal and it has an immediacy not present in Pynchon's other novels, but is more typical of his short stories.

In *V.* Pynchon introduces the homodiegetic narrator, although the extent of the intervention between the reader and the text is by no means as pronounced as it is in the later novel *Gravity's Rainbow.* Initially the narrative appears to be presented by a heterodiegetic narrator who, like the narrator in *The Crying of Lot 49*, controls the pace and dimension of the narrative through spatial and temporal analepsis. Within the introdiegetic level of the narrative of the opening pages of the novel the metadiegetic narrative of Profane's recurrent nightmare is presented as a co-existent parallel (**V.**,10) which functions also as both a cataphoric and anaphoric reference in the text. The spatial dimension in this case is unspecified while the temporal dimension is concurrent and continuous, so that from the outset the text is seen to exist at a number of levels which are not mutually exclusive. The intradiesgetic narrative is further disrupted by the metadiegetic narrative of Ploy's teeth, analepsis of both spatial and temporal dimensions which are explicitly
included in the text (V.,11). Like the Profane metadiegetic narrative, it also includes a cataphoric reference (teeth) which at this stage of the novel cannot be allocated any specific significance. Both the pace and dimension of the intradiegetic narrative are thus controlled by the narrator and this is a function of the narrator maintained throughout the novel.

In contrast to The Crying of Lot 49, the intradiegetic narrative is increasingly replaced by meta and meta-metadiegetic narrative; a build up of layer upon layer of text. For much of the novel the narration is re-allocated to Herbert Stencil, who expertly delegates the narrative role to other characters within the metadiegetic narrative. In Chapter Three, for example, there are eight homodiegetic narrators each presenting an internally focalized narrative from a restricted field of a particular event which is not significant to the individual narrators, but which is significant to Herbert Stencil. Each of these narratives, moreover, contains analepses which contain paralepsis and/or paralipses so that the relationship between the intradiegetic and metadiegetic and meta-metadiegetic narrative is extremely difficult to establish. To add to the confusion, the narrator of the intradiegetic narrative states that Stencil's narration consists of "impersonation and dream" (V.,63) and that Stencil "does eight impersonations" (V.,61). Similarly Stencil the narrator is replaced by Mondaugen the narrator who includes in his
narration the internally focalized narrative of Weissman (V., 229-279). The effect, as has been pointed out often enough, is an uncertainty about the validity of any narrative level and yet the function of the metadiegetic narratives is, as in the Crying of Lot 49, still one which reinforces the power of the narrative as narrative. Like Oedipa, once Stencil has been sensitized to the existence of the narrative it changes his life, although Stencil cannot conceive the possibility of simply stopping and thereby perhaps stopping the effect of the narrative's power over him.

As well as the delegation of narrative function to characters within the novel, the narrator questions the motives of these sub-narrators - from ironic passing comments such as the change which occurs after Mondaugen's narrative has been "Stencilized" (V., 228) to openly undermining the propositions put forward in Stencil's narrative (V., 239-414) by pointing out the differences between his interpretation of events and those of Stencil (V., 407). At this point the narrator also creates a conspiratorial association between himself and the narratee which implies that both narrator and narratee occupy a position of superiority to Stencil (V., 406) and that the narratee is naturally in agreement with the opinions of the narrator; "we" agree that lesbianism in the Freudian period of history stems from self love projected on to some other human object, don't we? But perhaps . . .
Immediately the narrator puts forward another possibility, equally plausible, so that "we" really can't tell which is correct. Similarly the narrator lets the characters speculate about the precise nature of the relationship between Melanie and V, but then gives the "true" version himself, a version which exists largely outside Stencil's narrative and which elaborates on the new science of the mind (familiar to Itague, but not to the ostensible narrator at the meta-metadiegetic level) and its explanation of fetishism in terms not accessible to Porcepic and never employed by Stencil. The association which is made between V and the superficial level of existence as depicted in tourism is also one which is not made at any stage in the novel by Stencil and so appears to be a comment at the diegetic level rather than the intra or metadiegetic level of the narrative. The contradictory versions of the narrative situation lead to an unresolved problem in respect to the relationship of the narrator and narratee, where the only possible conclusion is that the narrator at the diegetic level may be as unreliable as any of the characters who operate within the text as narrators.

This applies also in respect to the confessions of Fausto Maijstral, confessions which have a specific narratee at the intradiegetic level in the character of Paola, Maijstral's daughter. Although Paola is seen to be in possession of the Confessions, there is no record in the narrative of any response made by Paola to the Confessions. She does return to Malta, but her reasons for doing so are
not given and if she makes contact with her father, this is not recorded either. The only possible effect of the Confessions on Paola could be (and even this is only speculation) that she decides to return to Pappy Hod (her husband), which might indicate a return to the "single given heart, a whole mind at peace" (V.,314) which her father would like her to possess.

Fausto's narrative itself is, despite its single author, presented by multiple narrators which Fausto claims have quite distinct identities, so that the fragmentation of narrative focalization in Chapter Three of the novel is repeated. In the course of his "Confession", moreover, Fausto reads into the behaviour of other characters (Elena and the Bad Priest) a meaning which is little more than speculation and certainly indicative of an internalized focalization. Although the tradition of epistolary narration has long been accepted as a fiction like any other narrative, the inclusion of this particular form of narration at this point in the novel appears to provide independent verification of the existence of dossiers which are of significance to Stencil. Unlike other metadiegetic narratives, the Confessions are not pure fabrications by Stencil, though they could be pure fabrications by Maijstral. The inclusion of a specific narratee adds to the "authenticity" of the Confessions, but also adds to the confusion surrounding the allocation of narrative and narratee functions in the novel.
In the Epilogue the narrator resumes his function at the heterodiegetic level. The narrative at this point includes information which would have been extremely useful to Stencil, but which, through its position, is inaccessible to him. Spatially there is a convergence of location at the conclusion of the novel, but temporally there is a complete divergence. Without the preceding text, the Epilogue could be regarded as a definitive statement on the nature of V and the relationship of V to Sidney Stencil, but by this stage the narrative function has been deconstructed to such an extent that the authority usually associated with a heterodiegetic narrator is itself questioned by the reader. While it is common knowledge that the narrator of a novel is not the same as the author of a novel and that the opinions of a narrator can differ from both those of the characters within the novel and those of the author, the deconstruction of the function of the heterodiegetic narrator in V throws into question the nature of the relationship between narrator and narratee, even a narratee who is encouraged to create his own text to a very large extent.

In V, the narrative has as much power to influence the recipient of the narrative as in The Crying of Lot 49, but the novel itself demonstrates through the variable narrative positions that the reader need not be as susceptible to the power of the narrative as the characters within the novel are.
In *Gravity's Rainbow* the homodiegetic narrator completely deconstructs the power of the narrative.

The narrator in *Gravity's Rainbow* cannot be ignored, cannot be assumed to be present through absence. He (why "he"?) insists on intruding on the events covered by the narrative, reminding the reader that not only the characters, but also the readers are creatures of limited intelligence who are objects of condescension. The narrator is often a supercilious smart-arse, interrupting at any stage to address the reader directly in a fake folksy camaraderie like a nasty little conjuror performing fake magic for a gullible audience: "Sounds like a Roll of Honor, don't it . . . . Dungannon . . . Bristol . . . Murdo Mackenzie" the narrator comments (G.R. 695) after listing a number of geographical locations which are related to his theoretical "pocket of no sound" and leads his gullible audience into making the connection between death towns and Blicero or Bleicherode only to continue with:

Well, you're wrong, champ - these happen to be towns all located on the borders of Time Zones, is all. Ha, ha! Caught you with your hand in your pants! Go on, show us all what you were doing or leave the area, we don't need your kind around. There's nothing so loathsome as a sentimental surrealist.

(G.R. 695-6)

A sleight of hand and you, the reader, are being invited to join the Sentimental Surrealist under the shadow of sound silence, become as loathsome as the Sentimental Surrealist, be put on the Dark Dream while the narrator stands at the
side of the stage laughing.

The narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* is a showman, a virtuoso of narrative techniques, but above all the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* is a liar, selfconsciously pandering to the supposed needs of his audience, but always lying.

Lies, lies and more lies. Unlikely as it may seem, the most resistant reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* may be prepared to accept that within the fiction of the narrative there is a connection between Slothrop's erections and the V-2 rocket strikes. The fiction is created carefully enough by the manipulative narrator, even though the narrator insists passim that such connections are only provided to meet the needs of the reader accustomed to textual coherence. The state of the art in nineteen seventy-three is quite adequate to provide that kind of data retrieval. If we want interlocks and spreadsheets, the narrator can supply them.

The rocket strikes happen. Slothrop, like any male, has erections. The Rockets land in London. Slothrop is in London. In Slothrop's office is a map of London, with silver, red, blue, green and gold stars, the names of girls, beside the stars. Slothrop started putting the stars on the map about the time when the rockets started falling in London. The location of the stars coincides with the location of rocket strikes. Allied Intelligence is interested.
It takes more than a willing suspension of disbelief to accept that there is a connection between Slothrop's erections and the rocket strikes - commonsense suggests that you've got to be kidding. Pointsman's Pavlovian explanations are obviously a parody of Behaviorist theory of stimulus/response carried to ridiculous extremes. But Slothrop is connected/coupled to the rocket; is sent by Allied Intelligence to locate the Rocket in the demilitarized Zone of Europe. If everyone believes a fiction does it become true?

The narrator builds up connections; slowly, spasmodically, in fragments connected to/by Slothrop. Imipolex-G, the erectile plastic used to obtain a conditioned reflex in baby Tyrone - the most easily measured reflex. Ridiculous? Hilarious? When he discovers this piece of information, Slothrop believes in his own conditioning. Pointsman always knew about the experiment. Pointsman always believed. But Pointsman is a caricature of a Pavlovian psychologist - why believe Pointsman?

The white plastic Imipolex-G does induce a sexual response. Margharita Erdmann will vouch for that. And Gottfried, if lucky little Gottfried hadn't been fired up into the wild blue yonder in the rocket by kind considerate Weissman/Blicero. A defeat of Gravity there all right. What goes up stays up - animate into inanimate. No more categorization, no more separation of life and death. No
Beyond the zero, "Where ideas of the opposite have come together, and lost their oppositeness" (G.R., 50).

Whose notion? Pointsman's or the narrator's? Pavlov's or Spectro's? Our madmen, our paranoid, maniac, schizoid or morally imbecile? (G.R., 49) Is there a connection or isn't there? The case is elaborately built up for a connection. Based on the need to see connections - there is cause and effect. Isn't there?

Don't we have a Text to be "picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop" (G.R., 520). Doesn't the Text have to be decoded, coded, recoded and redecoded? Isn't this the point of reading, of understanding the meaning? Anything will fit the purpose in a pinch. On with the coupling. Slothrop with the Rocket; animate with inanimate.

And then . . .

In the middle of the text, inconspicuous, easy to pass over, the crucial lie - Slothrop created the map of his conquests in London. The Sallys, Carolines, Marias, Annes, Susans and Elizabeths were pure fiction. The map was created purely as a distraction, to camouflage his relationship with Katje (G.R., 302). There are times when it is easy to hate a narrator, and this is one of them. If Slothrop's admission is true, then what of the rest of the novel? What of the elaborate charade at the beginning of
section two where Slothrop rescues the unknown lady in distress from a giant octopus? If Slothrop had been Katje's lover in London, how are we to believe that he did not recognise her at the Casino Hermann Goering? How can the fiction that there is a connection between Slothrop and the rocket strikes be maintained?

Who is lying? When? Why? How can the reader tell? Not by reading the text, for the text provides corroboration for Slothrop's unexpected confession - when Pointsman checks on the existence, past or present, of Slothrop's ladies, there is no trace (G.R., 271-3). Although Pointsman insists on hiding behind the scientific escape clause "the data, so far, are incomplete" (G.R., 272) it is obvious that all the data so far undermine his initial hypothesis. His rationalizations by analogy with Freud's research are both inconsistent with his Pavlovian theory and fail to provide a convincing case for any connection, except ...

Every name mentioned in the text is connected in some way to the Rocket, and there are an aweful lot of names in the text. In the act of naming a connection is made, but the narrator tantalises the reader by insisting that it is "you" out there who want the connections, and so for the sake of the reader the connections are supplied. Is the obliging narrator making fun of the poor reader? Can the narrator be believed? Is it stretching coincidence too far when everyone Slothrop happens to run into in the Zone is connected to the Rocket? Or is the point a subtle way of
demonstrating that the narrator is a superior computer operator who can punch in "Rocket" and get a print-out of everything connected to the Rocket? If the proposition that Slothrop's erections are linked to the Rocket strikes is false, why should his journey through the Zone be anything more than another Slothrop fantasy? Where does this leave the remaining four hundred or so pages of the text? In whose imagination do they exist? Slothrop's or the narrator's? What's the difference between a local lie and a global lie? Why all the lies?

Now there is nothing very novel in a novelist having a narrator who is unreliable. The venerable Wayne C. Booth in his venerable Rhetoric of Fiction (1973:371-4) raises the issue of the unreliable narrator in James' novels and attributes the increased use of unreliable narrators in modern fiction to a preference among critics (and presumably authors) for living in fog.

Certainly it would be difficult to refute Booth's assertion that an unreliable narrator gives the critics the advantage of interpreting the resulting ambiguities in any way they please, with the prize going to the critic who has the most persuasive power (or, one might add, the critic who comes up with the most fashionable interpretation of the text as determined by the currently dominant ideology of those who judge such criticism - publishers, editorial committees, or examiners of PhD theses). It would also be possible to argue that since Barthes the "writerly" text,
the text which is complex enough to warrant a teasing out of puzzles in meaning is regarded by the elite of academe as the "great" text. Though Barthes does not make an explicit value judgement about "readerly" and "writerly" texts, he does state that

the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text

\[\text{(S/Z, 1974:4)}\]

As his analysis of "Sarrasine" is very much a produced text, it is difficult to avoid the implication that "worthwhile" literature, that which merits the attention of the critic, is "writerly" literature, particularly as he makes the distinction in terms of the text itself and not in terms of the process of reading the text. Such distinctions seem rather arbitrary and the extent to which any text is judged to be "readerly" or "writerly" would surely depend on what the reader does with the text, the background knowledge of the reader and the function of the text. In fact, Barthes appears to be reinforcing the Formalist definitions of literature and the concern with "defamiliarization" as the identifying feature of the literary text, a concept which feminist criticism in particular would regard as an invalid criterion for determining which texts are suitable for literary analysis (5) and which are not.

Despite these reservations, the award of prizes for literature seems to reinforce the notion that "great" is
synonymous with "difficult to read" in the post-World War Two era and that as Booth claims, clarity and simplicity are suspect. If this is the case, any novelist (or critic) aspiring to greatness might well set out with the specific intention of producing a text which is as obscure as it can possibly be. A more cynical interpretation might be that the mere ability to produce an incomprehensible text ensures the superiority of the author over the reader; to admit that a text is not understood is almost invariably an indictment of the reader rather than the author.

But there is a big difference between an author who produces a text which is "writerly" and one like Pynchon whose text in itself draws attention to the fact that either the narrator or (one of) the characters or both narrator and characters are lying. Which leaves us with the problem of why either or both should lie and beyond this, why the author should weave this pattern of lies, only to expose the fact that they are lies.

According to the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow, it is the reader who is determining the relationships between people and events in the novel - if the reader wants connections, the narrator obligingly provides them. But can a lying narrator be believed? Is the assumption that readers want coherence in a text not a form of condescension on the part of the narrator? Is the explicit display of this textual artifice a means of satirizing an assumed need for coherence and closure among readers? How
does the narrator know what readers want? And if the narrator is so concerned about satisfying the needs of the reader, what does the presence of two irreconcilable versions of an event in the text imply?

Either one version of Slothrop's connection to the rocket is correct, or another. The only way in which a lie can be established as a lie is by means of verification with other sources of evidence. As long as the narrator is consistent in presenting a particular set of propositions there is no way in which the validity of those statements can be questioned, even if the narrator claims that they are fabrications. For the first part of *Gravity's Rainbow* the narrator builds up a consistent, if bizarre, set of propositions. Even if these seem preposterous in comparison to any reader's commonsense or experience, they can be accepted at the fictional level of the text.

The inclusion of information which contradicts the initial propositions throws doubt not only on those propositions, but also on the information which is contradictory. The only conclusion the reader can reach is that a judgement about "truth" is impossible; the data do not compute. This conclusion undermines the assumption of the narrator that the reader is being supplied with that which the reader wants, so that the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* deconstructs the principles on which the narrator claims it is based. As results of experiments on the effects of contradictory components in sustained discourse on the comprehension of readers have indicated, the reader
in such a situation will either ignore those elements which are incompatible with the dominant cognitive set of the text or give up in frustration. (Baker-Anderson, 1982: 281-94) To stop. To put an end to the power of the narrative. And let's not be fooled, narratives have always had a lot of power - Greek narratives, Christian narratives or political narratives. Such narratives can and do change lives. In each of his novels Pynchon investigates the power of the narrative, but in *Gravity's Rainbow* he deconstructs both the power of the narrative and those who determine the nature of the narrative, the narrators. Perhaps not before time.
CHAPTER 5

THE READING OF NAMES

Even the most casual reader of Pynchon's novels would have to notice that they contain a proliferation of names—Tölölyan has recently published a list of proper names in Gravity's Rainbow alone which comes to one hundred and twenty-six pages (Tölölyan, 1984). Several critics have also noted that proper names in Pynchon's novels are employed in a somewhat unusual manner (for example, Henkle 1971:207-20; Young, 1968:69-71; Tanner, 1980:60), but without considering the possibility that the way in which proper names are used in Pynchon's novels deconstructs the central position of the name as signifier for identity and also the process of naming.

The power of naming has long been acknowledged in myth, primitive cultures and more recently in feminist criticism (Spender, 1980; Lakoff, 1975; Scheman, 1980; Kramarae, 1980; Martyna, 1980), and the power of naming has always resided with the dominant groups in society. Those who enforce the rules of naming (teachers, academics, media) occupy positions of power and those who do not abide by the "rules" set by the dominant group are deemed inferior, users of a restricted code. Generation after generation of adolescents have been aware of the power of naming, carefully creating names for their own exclusive use as if by sharing the secrets of naming only with their
peers they will guarantee their separateness from the adult world (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980:133-4). Scientists, medical practitioners, lawyers, economists, sociologists, psychologists, structuralists and deconstructionists similarly name their own names. To live in the world is to name it. Names are essential for the construction of reality, and although Chomsky and Russell (1972:13-46) would probably never have agreed on the question of how the ability to name is acquired, there is no dispute about the fact that to name is to impose a structure on experience. Naming is a process of classification, a sorting into categories on the basis of trial and error, "mother" as "other", later separated from other things which are other but not mother. Dog as different from wolf, night as different from day, shit as different from shinola, gradually becoming more precise when defining attributes or functions of the thing named, learning to generalize on the basis of class inclusion, continually comparing, adjusting, sorting, building up frameworks of "isa" and "hasa" qualities of the thing named (Smith, 1975:9-27). To name is to manipulate the interrelationships of the perceived world. We all know, of course, even without reading de Saussure (1974), that there is no mandatory correspondence between the name we impose and the concept which is signified by that name. We all know that all names function as metaphor, but we also know (at least since Sapir, 1970:1-44 and Whorf, 1956:212-4) that naming
is not a totally arbitrary and random process, but one
which is determined by the existing rules and principles of
a culture which predetermine certain modes of observation
and interpretation. As Whorf puts it, naming is:

\[...\] no act of unfettered imagination, even in the
wildest nonsense, but a strict use of already patterned
materials. If asked to invent forms not already
prefigured in the patterning of his language, the
speaker is negative in the same manner as if asked to
make fried eggs without eggs.

(1956:212)

It is, of course, quite possible to invent new words,
especially in new technological areas such as computing,
but even these new names are rarely totally new inventions
(words such as byte, software, cursor, floppy disc) and new
names, if they are not to be meaningless, rapidly acquire a
pattern of meaning through repetition. Occasional playful
attempts at creating new words such as that of Lewis
Carroll in Jabberwocky (1971:116–8) remain no more than
exceptions to the rule governed process of naming. While
debate about the relationship between language and thought
has occupied philosophers and linguists from Plato,
Socrates, Wittgenstein or Nietzsche to Vygotsky, Beneviste
and Derrida and the definitive solution to the question of
whether we are trapped by our prison house of language
(Jameson, 1972) or construct our prison house with language
(1)
may be as elusive as ever, it is obvious to feminists that
regardless of social status, one group has had, and
continues to have, a monopoly on naming and that group is
male.
Daly (1973) traces the politics of naming within religion. Her analysis reveals that males have named themselves as superior and have classified females in negative terms from non-spiritual to evil, from deviant to other. Males, accustomed to having the power of naming, of controlling language, may find it difficult to understand why feminists object to records of creation (produced by males) in which God is male and in which, contrary to the laws of biology, female is created from the rib of a male rather than female giving birth to the male. But as Daly (1974:130) points out:

It is necessary to grasp the fact that women have had the power of naming stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God. The old naming was not the product of a dialogue - a fact inadvertently admitted in the Genesis myth in which Adam named the animals and women. Women are now realizing that this imposing of words was false because partial. That is, partial and inadequate words have been taken as adequate.

Pagels (1976:293:303) demonstrates that this deletion of the female from the concept of God was by no means accidental, but a reinforcement of the male view of the world with themselves as central and the female as subservient. Alternative versions of the Fall were available, but not utilized by those who compiled the "men's Bible".

The power of naming enables men such as Witkin (1962) to describe females who saw stimulus and surrounding field as "field dependent" while males who were more likely than
females to separate stimulus from surrounding field as "field independent", thus perpetuating the patriarchal notion of male superiority. Terms such as "context awareness" for female responses and "context blindness" for male responses would have been just as appropriate and would have placed females in the central position. The power of naming enabled Freud to describe the female's awareness that she was not a male as "penis envy", a description which even if not regarded as "fantastic" perpetuates the notion of male superiority. Lacan (1977:181-291) scarcely changes this pattern when he describes the phallus as the signifier of the absence which separates the self from the Other, which despite his insistence that the phallus is not to be identified with the penis, privileges the psychosexual development of boys at the expense of girls and still places the Law of the Father in the dominant position. The power of naming enabled Erikson (1967:1-26) to describe female spatial organization as "inner space" and link this to the proper function of the female as producer of children, children which fill her "inner space" while males are concerned with "outer space", the realm of the great outdoors and adventure. Guess who is in the dominant position?

From Millet to Greer to Kramarae to Irigaray feminists have documented the history of the male monopoly on naming, the definition of the male as central, the female as other.
As Irigaray (1977:63) states:

the feminine is in fact defined as nothing other than the complement, the other side, or the negative side of the masculine; thus the female sex is defined as a lack, a hole. Freud and psycho-analysts maintain that the only desire on the part of a woman when she discovers that she has no "sex" is to have a penis. The only sexual organ which is recognised and valued.

Sexuality is regarded as a positive attribute in a male, but negative in a female and this is indicated through the naming process. Males are "virile" if they are sexually active, females "sluts", "whores" or "nymaphomaniacs" (Hage, 1972:2-14). Bachelors are "eligible" while spinsters are "frigid" (Lakoff, 1975:32-3). As Schultz (1975:65-8) points out, there are many words in the English language which refer to the organs and processes of sex that are taboo, but "rape" is not one of them. Instead, rape is strangely neuter. The reality of what rape means to a female, Schultz suggests, has been suppressed because it is a name given by males to an act which they do not regard as a vicious, violent exploitation of power.

The process of socialization into traditional male and female roles begins at a very early age and reinforces the belief that the sexes are socially, psychologically and biologically unequal, the female sex being the inferior one (Alberle & Naegele, 1960; de Beauvoir, 1953; Kohlberg, 1966; Spender, 1980; Roberts, 1981). The inferior role
of the female is reinforced by the education system (Cless, 1969; Spender, 1982; Keogh & Heineke, 1983; Taylor, 1981) and the mass media (King & Scott, 1977; Edgar & McPhee, 1974; Campbell, 1980; Ray, 1972). It should therefore not be surprising that the issue of the "proper name" for a female is one which is closely linked to a need to establish an individual identity (Spender, 1980:25-28). In the American culture a woman's identity is symbolically (and to a large extent legally) surrendered to her husband at the time of marriage. Not only does she lose her own surname, but in some cases she also loses her given name to become Mrs John Doe (a point also made by Spender (1980) and Stannard (1973)). To females who have been socialized into defining their identity in terms of their roles as wife and/or mother, the loss of even their name becomes a further indicator of their lack of individual identity. Among feminists the first step in regaining the power of naming is often an insistence on the right to retain their own name and thus their own identity. As Foucault (1977:214) states, to produce names is often the first step in the reversal of power.

Feminists are certainly aware of the power of naming. So were the Jews in the Third Reich (In Gravity's Rainbow von Göll changes the Jewish names of his two leading actors to Max Schlepzig and Margharita Erdmann). So are the "niggers", the "spivs", the "boongs" or the "wogs". Parents are well aware of the power of naming, of the
difference of the signifier/name and its traces, as they search for names for their offspring with traces of family heritage or connotations of grandeur bestowed by more famous names while avoiding the "Dons" and "Norms" which remind them unpleasantly of all the "Dons" and "Norms" it has been their misfortune to meet. Adolescents are well aware of the power of naming, generating nicknames for themselves which give them a sense of uniqueness and importance and which make a statement about their identity. Whorf's linguistic relativity hypothesis may well remain only an hypothesis, but no-one has yet denied the power inherent in the act of naming.

Perhaps one of the first authors to be intrigued by and play with the process of naming is Lewis Carroll. Long before Derrida (1984:2), Carroll plays with the differences between the interpellative and designative function of a name; the difference between a sign's employment as such in a proposition and a reference to its capacity as a sign; the difference between use and mention of a name:

..."The name of the song is called "Haddocks Eyes""

"Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, trying to feel interested.

"No, you don't understand," the Knight said, looking a little vexed. "That's what the name is called. The name really is "The Aged Aged Man"."

"Then I ought to have said, "That's what the song is called"?" Alice corrected herself.

"No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The song is called Ways and Means: but that's only what it's called, you know!"
"Well, what is the song, then?" said Alice, who was by this time quite bewildered.

"I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really is "A-sitting On A Gate": and the tune's my own invention."

(Carroll, 1971:186-7) (ellipses in original)

The passage reveals Carroll's sophistication in realizing that if language is used to discuss language, if names are to be given names, if labels are themselves to be labelled, there must be some conventional way of distinguishing the signifier from that which is signified. In written and printed discourse the conventional notation of single quotation marks or ellipses provides the means by which a metalanguage can be established, but Alice, of course, only hears the words and therefore becomes thoroughly confused by the references to the call/name of the song (Haddock's Eyes), the name of the song (The Aged, Aged Man), the call/name of the song (Ways and Means) and the song (A-Sitting on A Gate). Theoretically there would be no limit to the hierarchy of successive metalanguages capable of being thus formed.

Carroll also anticipates Pynchon in his play with the concept of the personal (proper) name as signifier of individual identity. To Gardiner (1954:47) human beings look so alike that it is only their proper names which establish their identity as individuals, while Mill (1952:20-22) regards the proper name as the only form of language which has no meaning, which has only the function
of designating, thus enabling one individual to be distinguished from another as the subjects of discourse. Humpty Dumpty challenges these assumptions:

"Must a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.

"Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "my name means the shape I am - and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost."

(Carroll, 1971:160)

Like Humpty Dumpty, Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow* believes that a proper name ought to mean something - he chooses the code name Blicero because of its connotations of death (G.R., 322), although if he had read *Moby Dick* instead of German myths, he might well have been satisfied with the connotations of Weissman. He also chooses the name "Enzian" for his young Herero sexual partner because of its connotations of Rilke's mountainside of gentian Nordic colours, even though the mirror-metaphysics which Weissmann uses as a basis for logic are questioned by Enzian (G.R., 101). Weissman would obviously agree with Humpty Dumpty, that a word can mean anything he wants it to mean (Carroll, 1971:163). Like Humpty Dumpty, a number of Pynchon critics appear to believe that names in Pynchon ought to mean something. Lhamon (1975:170-1), for example, gives a great deal of meaning to the names Victoria Wren, Vera Meroving and Veronica Manganese. His description of the meaning of the name "Manganese" sounds remarkably like
Humpty Dumpty's explanation of how a name ought to reflect the shape of the person named:

Manganese is a chemically active metal which does not occur free in nature, though its compounds are widely found. This description is similar to that of vanadium and implies the increasing inanimateness of V. as she assimilates things beyond her, and as she continues to ally-alloy herself with the world

(Lhamon, 1975:171)

Cowart (1980:19) and Tanner (1978:164) also give meaning to the names in Pynchon's novels, but although in many cases the names are used attributively or connotatively, there is frequently no direct relationship between name and identity in the novels. A cautious critic might do well to remember the fate of Humpty Dumpty.

Both Carroll and Pynchon question the function of the proper name. Proper names ("so-called proper names", as Derrida (1974:89) calls them) represent systems of classification based on differences. The proper name functions as a uniqueness attribute, one which Allport (1961:117) describes as the "most important anchorage of our self identity". The function of a proper name, Derrida states, is:

consciousness itself. The proper name in the colloquial sense, in the sense of consciousness, is (I should say "in truth" were it not necessary to be wary of that phrase) only a designation of appurtenance and a linguistico-social classification.

(1974:111)
A person's name is signifier for an individual identity and a means of placing that identity in the social context. Barth's short story "Ambrose his mark" (1972:23-42) demonstrates the importance of the association of name with identity. In this story the new baby for some months has no proper name, partly because Ambrose's mother had hoped for a daughter and had already selected the name Christine (a name which soon becomes "unfunny") and also because the "right idea" seems to be to wait until the family finds out who the boy is (in the sense of establishing his unique characteristics) so that his name can accurately reflect the type of individual that he is (Barth, 1972:25). Barth plays with the fact that the baby is called the Honig (honey), and when bees and honey feature largely in the baby's life (a naming sign), the eventual name must therefore, in the opinion of Grandfather, have connotations of bees. The names Plato and Xenophon are rejected, even though both of them were "sweetened" by the phenomenon of having bees land on their mouth (Barth, 1972:40-41), which is where "they got their way with words". Bees swarming on the mouth becomes the signifier for great speaker, and the baby is finally named Ambrose after Saint Ambrose, who everyone said would also be a great speaker. Even though Barth's story is an amusing satire of the belief that a person's name shapes his destiny, the child's identity is not fixed until he has acquired his "proper" name.
The extent to which a name is the identity of the person is also the source of one of the comic episodes in Heller's *Catch-22* (1964:362-6), Doc Daneeka's name is on the list of those killed in McWatt's plane crash and his identity as a person ceases to exist. If this belief in the name on official records as evidence of a person's identity and existence seems farfetched, it should perhaps be pointed out that establishing identity in modern society is frequently a matter of having a name on record in some official file or on a computer printout. Not that a name alone is any indication of identity, particularly if the name happens to be a common one such as John Smith or Tom Brown, but the importance of the name to the individual cannot be denied, as anyone who has ever referred to someone by the wrong name or applied for a passport in Australia recently could testify.

While a number of post-modernist authors have used language in ways which demonstrate their attempts to evade the limitations of the structures of language – Barthelme and Burroughs, for example – Pynchon's novels foreground the act of naming. A number of critics have noted that names in Pynchon's novels are not "realistic". Henkle (1971:207-220) calls them "comic book names" and feels that the presence of such names is one indication of the fact that Pynchon has not dramatized his themes through characterization, a comment which does not, however, explore the function of Pynchon's names, and Henkle does
not appear to be aware of the deliberate distance which Pynchon leaves between the name and its traces, a distance which leaves plenty of space for a multitude of ironies. Regardless of whether Henkle's concept of "character" is appropriate for the analysis of any novel of the postmodernist period, let alone those as multifarious as Pynchon's, observations such as those by Henkle do not deal with the function of naming, a function which the names themselves would appear to invite.

Young does discuss the function of naming in Pynchon's novels. In the course of defending Pynchon against criticism such as that of Henkle regarding characterization he states:

What Pynchon does is to name his characters . . . so that their names are obviously "significant" and sometimes wonderfully improbable, but then to deny the characters most, if not all, of the qualities and significance that the name usually shouts

(1968:71)

While Young's observation is perceptive as far as it goes, Pynchon's deconstruction of the act of naming is far more complex than simply denying the characters the qualities and significance that the name shouts. To take one of Young's examples, Herbert Stencil. A Stencil, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, is:

a thin plate of metal etc. in which a pattern (interrupted when necessary by a thin bar of the material to prevent the piece from falling out) is cut out. Verb - produce pattern on surface, ornament with pattern, stencilling - a process by which patterns and designs can be produced.
The first characteristic of a stencil is that it mostly isn't there - it is the absence in the material which makes the "thin piece of metal etc." a stencil, and throughout V. Herbert Stencil is just such an absence, present only to the extent of retaining the thin bar of the material to prevent the piece from falling out. Stencil frames V, gives shape to V, is the outline of V, while Stencil's quest for V is the tracing of a pattern, a production of pattern and design. It is difficult to see how Stencil's name does not indicate his characteristics and Young's assertion lacks validity as a generalization. In Stencil's case the name defers to / relies upon the signification of the name "Stencil". Obviously. Much too obviously. To be named entirely according to function is historically not without precedent - Mr Fisher, Mr Smith, Mr Shoemaker - but to name in terms of function is to deny individual identity, like naming someone Mrs Housewife. If the function is prestigious, as in Mr President, the loss of identity is of little consequence, but to name someone Stencil is to ironically emphasize the more ridiculous aspects of naming by function and to call into question the process of signification.

Pynchon, of course, is by no means the first author to use names which denote specific functions - Dickens provides an obvious example of the same technique - but Dickens' use of names is restricted to either a "realistic" randomness in allocation or a coined name which suggests
the characteristics of the individual thus named. Pynchon, in contrast, plays with the act of naming; to name is to pin something down, to harpoon it, to give it a meaning. Melville's novel *Moby Dick* starts not with "Call me Ishmael", but with an etymology. It is a novel which is as much about the relationship between signifier and signified as about the relationship between men and whales. The chapter on the whiteness of the whale is a chapter on the meaning of meaning, on signifiers and deferment. (Melville, 1965:163-170) Pynchon is not the first author to be aware of the process of naming. "Names by themselves may be empty, but the act of naming ..." (G.R., 336).

There is no shortage of names in Pynchon's novels - names with metaphorical connotations, names from history or mythology, names from opera, from literature, from comic books, from science, from twentieth century society, from film, and names which are pure fabrications. It does not take a great deal of analytical insight to work out that Pynchon deconstructs the very act of naming and takes a great deal of pleasure in the process. In *Slow Learner* Pynchon comments on his reasons for naming two characters in his short story "Under the Rose":

Attentive fans of Shakespeare will notice that the name Porpentine is lifted from *Hamlet*, I,v. It is an early form of "porcupine". The name Moldweorp is Old Teutonic for "mole" - the animal, not the infiltrator. I thought it would be a cute idea for people named after two amiable fuzzy critters to be duking it out over the fate of Europe.

(S.L., 19)
Pynchon clearly enjoys the games which can be played through naming, but his explanation also demonstrates the contrast between the names he gives to the characters and the activities in which they are involved. Throughout his novels Pynchon varies the relationship between names and their connotations and the behaviour of those associated with the names. Some, like Stencil, operate purely in terms of function. Taken to extremes such functions become SHOCK (synthetic human object, casualty kinematics) and SHROUD (synthetic human, radiation output determined) (\textsuperscript{5},\textsuperscript{284-5}).

More flippant are the references to the "virtually interchangeable" airline stewardesses Hanky and Panky (\textsuperscript{5},\textsuperscript{374}) and the two government girls Flip and Flop (\textsuperscript{5},\textsuperscript{418}). The names of these females relegate them to little more than sexual objects, defined in terms of their sexual function. The comical name of Brenda Wrigglesworth from Beaver College with her memorable seventy-two pairs of Bermuda shorts (\textsuperscript{5},\textsuperscript{452}), is an image which captures the shallow female college student/tourist abroad in one short name and sentence.

Names such as Dr Hilarious for a Freudian psychologist who is a caricature of all psychologists, but whose name belies the not so funny feelings of guilt over his actions in the past, or Pointsman for a Pavlovian behaviorist who hunts dogs during the London Blitz so that he can continue his experiments, but whose name is also referred to as that
of the master-controller, who throws the lever that changes the points (G.R., 644), and suddenly the comic connotations of a name acquire sinister overtones. The innocuous Pointsman becomes the "only kind of man who puts in very little work and makes big things happen, all over the world" (G.R., 645). His face always in the dark, the pointsman can send you to Happyville or Leid-Stadt, but in either place the War is always there. And the pointsman is always in control. The name is suddenly signifier for far more than the preceding text had led the reader to believe. A meaning has been withheld, showing that meaning does not reside in a name.

Pudding, a name conjuring up visions of nurseries and boarding school, stodgy British "afters", amorphous, sweet bulk. Coupled with Brigadier the name appears to mock the concept of the stern-faced British soldier. But Pudding cannot cope with his memories and eats shit to atone for the horrors of death in war. The pudding is not palatable fare, but a nauseating composition of decomposed corpses. What's in a name? Jessica Swanlake - Shakespeare and ballerinas, romance and fairytales, but only a female who returns to her duties after all. Mafia Winsome, villainess of the piece, with Winsome Rooney, that likeable lad as husband. Fergus Myxolydian, an Irish Armenian Jew, whose name is as much a mixture as his ethnic origin. Myron Grunton, a BBC announcer whose melted toffee voice is known to all who listen. Cheap humour or . . . a thrust at
truth, at the artificial association of meaning with name?

The sheer quantity of names in Pynchon's novels is overwhelming. Names are everywhere, cannot be avoided, thrust themselves at the reader, too obvious in their meanings to be ignored. The act of naming has gone beyond a joke. Too much naming undermines the specific value of a name. To speak of identity in such a context is ridiculous. "Real" names may provide the illusion that a name represents identity, however disparate the semes which cross it (Barthes, 1975:67-8). Pynchon's names destroy the illusion. The presence of a name is no guarantee of identity - Ilse is not Ilse, just a number of adolescent girls linked by the belief in the continuity of a name as signifier of a unified identity.

And yet the history of a name matters. Tyrone Slothrop. Tyrone, a name which fond parents not aware of Tyrone Power's homosexual inclinations (Clarke, 1985) may have bestowed on an infant son (Tyrone as tyrant?). Vision of fame and power, perhaps. Slothrop. Not a name to conjure with, but the inheritance of the Slothrop name can be traced back for generations and the Slothrop ancestors possessed qualities which Tyrone Slothrop views with awe. Constant Slothrop, whose epitaph states:

Death is a debt to nature due
Which I have paid and so must you

(G.R., 26)
Constant, who was the first of the Slothrops to be peculiarly sensitive to things revealed in the sky. Followed by Variable Slothrop, Isiah Slothrop and ten generations of Slothrops, culminating in Tyrone Slothrop. The names "Constant" "Variable" and "Isiah" suggest a pattern which may lead to "Tyrone" with the father of them all, William, existing outside the pattern, at one with the earth:

lying under fallen leaves, mint and purple loose-strife, chilly elm and willow shadows over the swamp-edge graveyard in a long gradient or rot, leaching and assimilation with the earth . . .

(G.R.,27)

William, inspired by his hogs destined for slaughter to write a tract on preterition, defending the holiness of the Preterite, the ones passed over when God chooses a few for salvation and whose absence would render meaningless the presence of Elect. Pigs betrayed by their trust in man. The name of William changes in the space of a few paragraphs from a simple label for a hog driver to a philosopher whose ideology reflects one of the major concerns in the novel to signifier of the fork in the road which America never took, a path which may lead back to a place where there is no distinction between elect and preterite, where there might be "fewer crimes in the name of Jesus and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot" (G.R.,556). The name of William as the name of the Zone,
depolarized without even nationality to fuck it up, where maybe love can stop "it" from happening.

It is unusual for Pynchon to provide the history of a name, but "Slothrop", through its history, is invested with far more meaning than its initial connotations would appear to imply. The name Slothrop is not the specific property of Tyrone Slothrop, in fact the name is quite distinct from that associated with Tyrone Slothrop. The power of naming is illustrated by the names given to Slothrop as he travels through the Zone. From the moment when he is divested of all traces of his own name by Katje Borgesius, Slothrop as a specific identity ceases to exist. Traces of identity such as his ID, his service dossier, his past (the bureaucratic definitions of identity) have been taken from him and this absence is replaced by the clothing of Bloat, a uniform and an identity as a British soldier. To escape from this identity, Slothrop dresses in

a green French suit of wicked cut with a subtle purple check in it, broad flowered tie . . . brown and white wingtip shoes with golf cleats, and white socks

(G.R., 244)

The name Ian Scuffling is that of an English war correspondent and while Slothrop has this name he is treated as and behaves as a war correspondent and "ace reporter" (G.R., 283) who will be sure to trace down clues. Playing someone else's game, a "Singing Nincompoop" in someone else's opera. The name of Rocketman is a "hype", a
name of power. By taking on the name of Rocketman Slothrop takes on the characteristics of the role of superhero suggested by the name and the costume which goes with the name. As Slothrop he is afraid to go out in the streets of Berlin at night, but as Rocketman he has no such fears. (G.R., 437) As Rocketman he can retrieve the package of heroin for Bodine from those who "are safely caught and paralyzed in comic books" (G.R., 379). And as Rocketman he can philosophically accept that he will not receive payment for his efforts (G.R., 438). The name invests Slothrop with the power of the name.

The name Max Schlepzig has a different meaning, a substitute Germanic name for a very Jewish name. To Margharita Erdmann Slothrop becomes a substitute Schlepzig and as Schlepzig, Slothrop functions as Margharita's fellow paranoid (G.R., 395) while fulfilling the role of victimizer that Margharita desires. Another name, another role, another identity. A temporary lapse from Rocketman and superhero. Slothrop has begun to thin, to scatter, has a narrower sense of "now" and "likewise groweth his Preterition sure" (G.R., 509). Slothrop exchanges clothing with Tchitcherine (G.R., 513) and is no longer recognized by the passengers and crew of the Anubis (G.R., 530) or Major Marvy (G.R., 557-8). Slothrop becomes Plechazunga, the pig-hero who in Egyptian mythology is dismembered, but who in German mythology routed a Viking invasion. The colourful pig costume seems to fit perfectly. Hmm. As Plechazunga
Slothrop has a peaceful day, but does not rout the invasion. He expresses a fear of commerce - the ability to turn "green reaches" into paper, banknote stock, newsprint - or shit, money and the word - not typical of the Slothrops and an indication of how far he has fallen. But by now identity resides entirely in the name and the costume. When Major Marvy dons the costume, he is assumed to be Slothrop and is castrated in Slothrop's place (G.R., 606-9). Slothrop continues to pursue the documents which will give him a name, but he has escaped the tyranny of naming, escaped from the heritage of the Slothrop name associated with commerce, and becomes one of the Preterite, the ones passed over. The name Slothrop exists only in the files and dossiers of institutions and is only a name.

The importance of a name in establishing a single, unified and continuous identity is both illustrated and undermined through names such as Bodine and Weissman. Although Bodine and Weissman have the same names as two characters in the earlier novel V. and their single and continuous identity is confirmed by details of their background which are consistent from one novel to another, (Bodine's background as a sailor and Weissman's background in South West Africa) the personal attributes covered by the names are quite different in Gravity's Rainbow from those presented in V.. In V. Bodine is presented as a lewd, vulgar, alcoholic slob. His main activities consist
of escaping military police, getting drunk and casually screwing any females he can get his hands on. He does have a vitality and energy which is similar to that of the Bodine in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but he displays none of the entrepreneurial expertise in the system of free enterprise such as the Drug Market nor is he concerned with more than satisfying his own decadent needs. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Bodine seems more like the McClintic Sphere of *V.*, with a "keep cool but care" attitude to those around him. More than any other character in the novel he appears to be free of obsessions and retains his independence at little cost to himself. He describes himself as someone who is only a cog, but who can tell the difference between the real thing and the false (*G.R.*, 711), something which virtually nobody else is able to do. He is the last person to attempt to maintain contact with Slothrop and seems genuinely concerned about Slothrop's welfare (*G.R.*, 741), as well as that of Roger Mexico (*G.R.*, 13-5). He fits into his environment rather than fighting against it as he does in *V.*. The name is the same, but the personality is noticeably different.

The Weissman of *V.* is also different from the Weissman of *Gravity's Rainbow*. In *V.* Weissman is a corrupt, decadent sado-masochist who in the siege relives his "glorious" experiences during the von Trotha regime. He believes that the Herero victims want their death and that inflicting indignities on the blacks is quite justifiable
that there is an "operational sympathy" between those who kill and those who are killed, that killing is in fact not an accurate description of this "functional agreement" between victim and victimizer. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Weissman is not just the victimizer that he is in *V.*, but is both victim and victimizer, so much so that Leverenz (1976:242) claims that he feels as much sympathy for Weissmann/Blicero as for anyone else in the novel (a general wallowing in the sorrow of the human condition which is already satirized in *V.*, 201). Unlike *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents Weissman's sado-masochism not as aberrant behaviour, but as a means of controlling through play-acting the horrors of the war. At least in Weissman's Hansel and Gretel game the rules are consistent and have set limits, which is not the case in the game of war, and death to Gottfried is something which can happen only outside the safety of his "cage" (*G.R.*, 102-103).

Weissman's perverse sexual desires are closely linked to the obscenity of war itself and the variation of the fairytale provides an apt allegory, in the form of the "games" that he and Gottfried and Katje play, for the passive role of occupied Holland at this time. Although Katje and Gottfried appear to be the victims in this game, Weissman is in fact more dependent on his victims than they are on him:

> Among the dying Reich, orders lapsing to paper impotence, he needs her so, needs Gottfried, the straps and whips leather, real in his hands which still feel. (*G.R.*, 97)
Like Brigadier Pudding, Weissman appears to need the masochistic sexual rituals in order to convince himself that he can still feel. Even though in the "game" he plays the role of Witch who attempts to push children into the Oven, in the larger game of life it is Katje who "at some indefinite moment must push the Witch into the oven intended for Gottfried" (G.R.,96), an event which is not unwelcome to Weissman, who would like to be out of the winter, "inside the Oven's warmth, darkness, steel shelter" (G.R.,99). Weissman is a victim of the War in a way that he was never the victim of the events in South-West Africa.

Nor is the Weissman of V. the superior player of the game that he is in Gravity's Rainbow (G.R.,416-22) when he plays human chess with Pökler. In Gravity's Rainbow Weissman is always the organiser, the controller who supervises the construction of the rockets and diverts the talents of the engineers and scientists for his own purposes. He is always in command, right up to the moment when he retreats to the Lüneberg Heath and his "final madness", to the place where he may have pushed the buttons which send Gottfried to his final destination. The fact that the names Weissmann and Blicero are used interchangeably (Blicero is Weissmann's SS code name) suggests that he has at least two identities, but neither of them are the same as that of the Weissman in V., just as the Pig Bodine of V. is not the same identity as the Seaman Bodine of Gravity's Rainbow. Names in Pynchon's novels are not signifiers of identity.
In the space between name and identity Pynchon places the implications of the power of naming, questioning the authority of the naming process by using names which convey too much or too little. Names such as Thanatz, captain of the Anubis, with their obvious mythological allusions, invite metaphorical interpretation. In case there is any doubt, the narrator even supplies such interpretations on occasion, as in the case of Weissmann/Blicero or Erdmann or Enzian. These convenient interpretations contained in the text illustrate the extent to which names are given meanings, have meaning imposed on them. Comic book names illustrate the imposition of limited meaning on a name, the process of metonymy rather than metaphor in which part is taken to represent the whole. Even when Pynchon uses geographical names (Malta, Egypt, Lüneberg Heath, Nordhausen, San Narcisco, London, the Zone) these function as metaphor or metonym. All names contain traces, whether within the context of the novels or from beyond the context of the novels. The fact that some names, like London or Los Angeles or Kekule or Kennedy are "factual" while others such as Vheissu or Pudding are fabrications does not change the relationship of the name and that which it represents, which is never a one to one correspondence. There is no definitive meaning of a name like Eigenvalue, which could be simply a composite hybrid of "own" and "value", but could equally well be the laws governing a particle moving
under the influence of a time independent potential (Eisberg, 1961).

In almost every respect Pynchon's texts undermine the authority of naming, deconstruct the presuppositions upon which the act of naming is based, with only one exception. The convention of naming females by their given names instead of their surnames is not questioned.

Herbert Stencil, Oedipa Maas and Tyrone Slothrop all search for meaning, each figure is "central" to the development of the text in which it exists. Their function in relation to the text could be said to be equal. The inequality lies in the difference. Stencil is predominantly present through absence, functioning as a narratological necessity for the introduction of the traces of V. He is the stencil, the textual artifice, the prosthesis for V, which is itself a textual artifice, prosthesis for "V", as transcendental signifier. But when he is referred to, it is by his surname, not his given name. Slothrop is initially present, but becomes progressively present through absence. He is the present absence, the absent signifier for the presence of the future which is now. But when he is referred to, it is by his surname, not his given name. Oedipa is continuously present; the continuous present, functioning in the text as the focal point, the coming together of a disparate elements of meaning which do not form a cohesive pattern, except by the imposition of meaning. But Oedipa is
referred to by her given name, not her surname. Why the difference?

Pynchon can scarcely be accused of being a conventional novelist, nor is he unaware of the effect of naming, but with very minor exceptions such as Frau Gnahb in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the female figures in his novels are referred to by their given names, while the male figures are referred to by their surnames. Very conventional. Very limiting. Very suggestive of the fact that while males exist in a continuum of a broader, historical context - Slothrop's ancestors were, after all, called Slothrop, and even Herbert Stencil was preceded by a Sidney Stencil - females occupy a transitory position in the immediate present of the text. Imagine replacing "Oedipa" with "Maas" through the text. Sounds strange, doesn't it? Too unconventional. Yes, one could argue that Oedipa is only Maas by marriage, it is not her real name, she was Oedipa something before she was Oedipa Maas. Her identity, insofar as it exists, is fixed only in her given name. But this argument does not hold for most of the other female figures in Pynchon's texts. Katje Borgesius is always referred to as Katje, but there is no reason why she should not be named "Borgesius"; Rachel Owlglass is referred to as "Rachel", not "Owlglass"; Greta Erdmann is referred to as "Margharita" or "Greta" but not "Erdmann", even though both names are fictions created by Von Göll. And so on.
To distinguish between male and female in Pynchon's novels is to distinguish between surname and given name. A narrower bandwidth for females, broader for males. Identity for females lies only in the personal sphere, the limited landscape contained in that small world where it is only necessary to differentiate between the Annes and Elizabeths, and even this distinction is sometimes unnecessary - just call all barmaids Beatrix, what does it matter? Given Pynchon's general concern with the process of naming, the adherence to conventions in the naming of females seems surprising. Perhaps the constraints of culture and ideology are not so easy to escape from after all, even when one is aware of the power of naming.
It would no doubt be helpful to a reader if the identity of characters within a novel were to be clearly established by the author; it would help the reader's categorisation and sorting process to know who was who and how they were distinct and different from others, especially in novels which contain as many characters as *Gravity's Rainbow*. In Pynchon's novels this is not the case. Identity, like everything else, is fragmented into its component parts and individual identity is a concept which is deconstructed in a manner which questions the validity of any such concept.

Although the question of identity has intrigued philosophers since the very beginnings of philosophical thought, it is a question which by the late sixties had received so much publicity in both the popular press and in more serious psychological and sociological journals that the quest for identity had become virtually a cliché. Contemporary man in search of an identity had become, as the narrator of *V.* observes, 'Rusty Spoon-talk' (*V.*, 226), a fashionable topic of conversation in intellectual, academic, religious and artistic circles. Lasch (1976:5) blames the identity crisis of the sixties on a permissive society which does not encourage the individual to subordinate his needs to those of others, so that concepts such as love and duty (which, he implies, counteracted the
self-indulgent concern with only the pleasure of the individual in earlier periods) are now regarded as irrelevant. Having an identity problem, as Erikson's research (Erikson, 1968) as well as that of de Levita (1965), Dashefsky and Shapiro (1974), Glasser (1975), Stein et al (1960), Strauss (1959) or Bennett et al. (1958), (to mention only a few of the many publications which deal with identity problems), indicates, is more fashionable than having a sexual neurosis. Housewives, ethnic minority groups, University students, adolescents, marginal groups in society, workers alienated through mass production and institutionalisation, celebrities and nonentities in society all have identity problems. What had previously been a question which occupied philosophers had become by the sixties a question which everyone was asking. The reasons for this sudden need to establish identity have been attributed to a dramatic change in the social structure of society, and in particular American society. One factor contributing to the need for the individual to establish an identity is the breaking up of old traditions in connection with modernization and acculturation (Lerner, 1959) which represents not only political and economic change, but an explosion of identity needs in which people seek both an individual and a collective self image. The need for a collective as well as an individual identity has been of particular importance to groups such as ethnic minorities (for example, Blacks and Jews), those who have
felt that their identity has been incorrectly determined on the basis of their association with another person (for example, the establishment of a separate female identity among feminists) or those who wish to dissociate themselves from the identities imposed by a particular role in society (dissident University students, counter-cultures such as the Hippy movement). The need to establish an identity different from that imposed by a society whose values have still generally been accepted, but where prejudice and discrimination have made the collective identity of a group unacceptable to that group, is a particular problem which affects those who belong to the "marginal" groups in society; the American immigrant, the Blacks and, although the description "marginal" hardly seems accurate, also the female in America. As Essien-Udom (1962:24) points out, the choice for Black Americans frequently amounts to an either/or decision between a black or white identity. The problems facing women similarly involve a choice between the imposed identity (imposed by the image of women in magazines and television as well as conventional attitudes to women) as an adjunct to the male (with all that implies) and a separate, independent female identity.

The mobile pluralism of American society - movement of individuals from one status, subculture, class, community, job, family or association to another - has produced a situation where adjustments to identity are felt to be necessary, or where the use of strategies such as withdrawal or learning to play various roles without
involving oneself become a means of retaining a sense of identity which may be counterproductive - how many roles can an individual maintain and still retain a sense of individual identity? Will the real Slothrop please stand up? The unity of individual identity is thus threatened by the fragmentation of identity into a series of different roles.

The mass media have also contributed to a dissatisfaction with any personal identity, particularly for females, who are exhorted to be more beautiful, camouflage their natural body odours, and/or become the ideal housewife and mother, all of which presuppose that the existing identity is somehow inadequate. It matters little that the ideal does not exist. To the female, and particularly the adolescent female, the message is clear - you are inadequate. Nor can the male assume that his identity is adequate, for the mass media also convinces him that his identity depends on the acquisition of an ever increasing range of consumer goods. In the mass media "Who am I?" is answered by "I am what I own and what I appear to be".

The problem of identity has also been associated with the increasing mechanization of labour and the feeling that the individual is simply an anonymous, replaceable cog in the wheels of production (Whyte, 1956). Large organizations maintain order and control over a large number of human resources by reducing the variability of
the members' behaviour (Katz & Kahn, 1966), creating conditions of deindividuation and nonidentifiability.

Walker and Guest (1952:169) state that:

Any production worker can, and sometimes does say: There are hundreds of jobs like mine, not much better, not much worse. The differences are so slight to management that I am interchangeable...... We suggest that the sense of becoming depersonalized, or becoming anonymous ... is a psychologically more disturbing result of the work environment than either the boredom or tension that arises from repetitive and mechanically paced work.

Although on the one hand American society appears to value individualism in the freedom from restrictions of class which enables anyone to become whatever they choose, on the other it is also a society in which the loss of the identity of the individual is one of the major concerns (Gross and Osleman, 1971). Equality of opportunity, equality before God and the law, and equality in education may be very laudable ideologies, but a society where everyone is equal in the sense of being the same is not an ideal society. Kurt Vonnegut describes such a society in the short story "Harrison Bergeron" (1971:7-13), where nobody is smarter than anybody else, nobody is better looking than anybody else, or stronger or quicker than anybody else. The Handicapper General and his agents ensure that everyone is literally equal by imposing handicaps on all those who do not conform to the average. Vonnegut's satire demonstrates the ridiculousness of insisting that everyone is the same as everyone else by
taking the ideal of equality and turning it into a literal situation. To many it seems as if the individual identity has lost the battle against deindividuation, where the individual is reduced to a decimal in the ratings of a television programme, a statistic in the census, a number in a social security file or a cipher in official records (Goffman, 1961; Zimbardo, 1969; Ziller, 1964) and where institutions such as schools, hospitals, gaols, homes for the aged, orphaned, physically handicapped, or mentally disturbed, the armed forces or large companies strip the individual of a sense of individual identity (Goffman, 1961:6-16). But despite the presence of such deindividuating forces in society, or perhaps even because of them, the need to establish individual identity has never been stronger than in Post World War Two society.

In fiction, novels such as Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, Bellow's *Herzog* or Heller's *Something Happened* deal at length with the problems of establishing an identity, and much of the literature of the sixties is extremely introspective (see Sypher, 1964; Trilling, L, 1972). The treatment of identity in Pynchon's novels, however, questions assumptions about identity, particularly the assumptions that identity consists of a personal unity (Harre, 1983:204), that it is continuous (Harre, 1983:205) and that temporal and spatial dimensions can adequately define identity (Harre, 1983:208). That Pynchon is aware of the "identity problem" of the sixties is clearly demonstrated in the narrator's comments regarding Stencil's
quest (V., 226) and the satirical tone of the remarks indicates that the fashionable aspects of such quests for identity are just so much intellectual waffle. The figure of Stencil is a typical example of a non-identity. Stencil's early background is presented with the objective formality of official records:

Raised motherless. The father, Sidney Stencil, had served the Foreign Office of his country taciturn and competent. No facts on the mother's disappearance.

(V., 52)

Very little is added to these basic facts in the course of the novel. There are no details about his physical appearance, few details about his lifestyle beyond the fact that he occupies the empty apartment of the son of Bongo-Shaftesbury (V., 63) and is a fringe dweller of The Whole Sick Crew. The fact that Stencil always refers to himself in the third person is characteristic not only of Henry Adams and assorted autocrats, but also of small children at a certain stage of their development (V., 62), which implies that Stencil regards himself as the 'Other', or as Lacan would describe it, he exists only in the symbolic state (Lacan, 1968:6). In the course of his quest Stencil impersonates others, most notably in chapter three of the novel where he "does eight impersonations" (V., 61) and Stencil does not have an individual identity so much as a series of identities, of which that designated "Stencil" is only one. Stencil is a mere narratological necessity, he exists only as a means of providing the historical segments
of the novel and his identity is determined purely in terms of his function as He Who Looks for V. As Pig Bodine succinctly observes, Stencil is a fake (V, 418). He has no sense of personal unity and his attempts to impose a structure of relationships on the incidences of what may well be random occurrences of violence in history is an attempt to project the unity which is lacking in his own identity onto a larger social construct.

Paola Maijstral also lacks any personal identity. She is "something we can look at and see whatever we want" (V, 350), a typical example of the sociologists' description of people who blend into the background of their social situations and who change identities to suit the changes in the situation. In the Sailor's Grave she looks like an East Main barmaid (V, 15), to Mafia she is a German (V, 350) at Matilda Winthrop's brothel she is a negro prostitute named Ruby (V, 350), to Winsome Rooney she is an object of sadism (V, 221). Although she is Maltese, she is not purely Maltese but a reflection of what Maltese has meant to outside observers (V, 350) so that she is like "the prairie hare in the snow, the tiger in tall grass and sunlight" (V, 15) "who could be any age you wanted. And you suspected, any nationality" (V, 14). Although Paola, despite her lack of personal identity, may, as her father hopes (V, 314) have escaped a fracturing of personality (Paola does not appear to be unduly concerned about her lack of individual identity and her personality remains
consistent regardless of the role she happens to be playing at any particular instance), she is another absent identity in V. who exists only through the function of giving McClintic Sphere and Pappy Hod someone to love.

The question of appearance and identity is also raised in relation to Esther, the Jewish girl who rejects her ethnic identity in favour of an identity which conforms to the supposed ideals of the dominant cultural group in society as popularized in the mass media (V.,103). Rachel Owlglass challenges the plastic surgeon Schoenmaker on the right of anyone to sell changes in identity, but he claims that identity, especially ethnic identity, is inherited and that the appearance of an individual will not affect their sense of identity. In Esther's case it is clear that the nose job offers a chance of escape from an identity which she does not like. She regards herself as ugly because of the shape of her nose (V.,102) and the new Irish shape of her nose will, she hopes, get rid of her feeling of alienation which has "driven her to bed with so many of the Whole Sick Crew" (V.,103). The detailed, blow by blow description of the operation is enough to turn anyone off the idea of cosmetic surgery (V.,104-8) and for Esther it does not resolve the identity problem - all that happens is that she falls in love with the man responsible for her "new" identity, gets pregnant and has to have an abortion. As the description of the operation and Schoenmaker's subsequent attitude indicates, re-modelling the appearance of an individual reduces people to objects. Taken to
extremes, the narcissistic preference for the image can also reduce other people to objects, as is the case with Melanie L'Heure maudit, whose identity as an individual is entirely replaced by her role as the dancer, La Jarretierre, who feels she is not pretty unless she is in costume and to whom the mirror-image is the main source of sexual pleasure (V, 398). On one occasion she dreams that she is actually behind the "quicksilver of the mirror" (V, 401) watching the other Melanie who appears to be an attractive wind-up doll. Melanie is simply an object of desire, "une fetiche" (V, 406) which only has to be seen to provide complete fulfillment not only for those who see Melanie but also for Melanie herself. As far as Melanie is concerned, it is obvious that the human Melanie will always fall short of the ideal in the mirror. Only in death can the imperfect human version be replaced by the ideal and Melanie dies as Su Feng, a virgin sacrificed. Her individual identity, already replaced by her role as object of desire thus becomes purely the object.

While the transformation from an animate human state to an inanimate state may be inevitable, there is a considerable difference between Melanie's transformation and that of Narcissus; a dead body on a pole is hardly the equivalent of an attractive flower, even if it is dressed in a colourful costume. Defining identity purely in terms of role or appearance, preferring the ideal image to the imperfect reality reduces people to objects. At a broader
social level the belief that there is an ideal appearance and the concomitant attitude that those who do not conform to this image can be treated as objects can, as the events which occurred during the Third Reich demonstrated, lead to mass destruction of human life, a point which is made on a number of occasions in V. (V., 81, 253, 261, 263, 286, 295).

Fausto Maijstral defines his identity using the three conventional sociological criteria of relationship (Paola's father), given name (Fausto) and function (an occupant of a room). The importance of name as an indicator of identity, as recent developments in the women's liberation movement have shown (Stannard, 1973; Spender, 1980) has long been taken for granted, even though a name alone scarcely establishes identity, particularly when increases in population mean that a name is not likely to be unique. As Derrida (1984:2-5) has pointed out, names can have an interpellative function, a designatory function and also a metalinguistic function, but each of these functions do not conclusively establish identity. The names of the characters in Pynchon's novels, as discussed in chapter five, deconstruct the relationship between name and identity. To Fausto, however, name is still related to identity. Although he refers to different "Faustos" and claims that the assumption that identity is single and soul continuous is false (V., 307), his confessions in fact presuppose that his own identity is continuous, because
they are based on his own memories, not those of separate identities. As Harre (1983:210) states:

To ponder on whether my recollections are another's memories is at most to ask whether I could perhaps be recollecting someone else's experiences. Whatevver they were, they must, as recollections, be my experiences, since I am now experiencing them.

The different versions of Fausto are not different identities, but represent different stages of his development - from undergraduate student to poet and ex-priest. He may regard these as separate identities, but exhibiting radically different types of behaviour and attitude (changes in personality) does not invalidate the proposition that identity is single and soul continuous (Prince, 1905). As author of the journal, Fausto maintains the bodily continuity which is one of the major criteria for individual identity (Harre, 1983:205). If he is physically the same Fausto, then questions regarding his different identities are questions of attitude changes, for the spatiotemporal continuity is maintained throughout the journals. Fausto's journal therefore contradicts the presuppositions about identity on which it is based.

While the question of identity is not one of the major issues in The Crying of Lot 49, Oedipa's quest is among other things a search for a cultural identity; what it means to be an American in the sixties. Before becoming the executrix of Pierce Inverarity's will the question of cultural identity does not appear to have occurred to her,
although she does express dissatisfaction with the identity imposed on her as a middle-class female (C.L.49, 13-14). Until she starts tracing the complex web of interconnections revealed by Inverarity's will, however, she does not realise that there is such a thing as an American identity which is more inclusive than her personal identity. The American identity she discovers consists of two parallel identities, one connected through the materialistic bonds of private enterprise and the other through the WASTE system which connects those who are the disinherited of American society. As her search progresses Oedipa comes to identify more with the latter than the former, but through her connection to Inverarity via his will she is in fact more part of the materialist system than of those who are disinherited. Like the Blacks or immigrants, she faces a crisis of identification. Both the America of Inverarity's legacy and the America of the disinherited exist, but the alternative to a zero or one decision is to become totally alienated. The excluded middle, as Oedipa puts it, is "bad shit" (C.L.49,125), but she still feels that it is only as an alien that she can be relevant to the America she has inherited (C.L.49,126), for this is the only way to avoid identification with one or the other.

Mucho Maas on the other hand loses his specific identity, is "less himself and more generic" (C.L.49,97) - not, like Fausto, by assuming that different stages of his development represent different identities, but through a
fragmentation which anticipates Slothrop's fragmentation in *Gravity's Rainbow*. He is a "walking assembly of man" (C.L.49,97). His new found generic identity is partly the result of his experiences with LSD, but he also believes that by breaking every experience into its component parts the singular experience becomes a generic experience:

> the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time ...

(C.L.49,99)

His own individual experiences, broken down into small enough fragments, are the same as those of any number of other people broken down into similarly small fragments, so that everybody is a roomful of people. The effect on the individual identity of Mucho, however, is that it ceases to exist. A collective identity is possible only at the expense of a personal identity, which in Mucho's case has dissipated to such an extent that Oedipa realises that the individual identity of Mucho disappeared the day she left for San Narcisco (C.L.49,100). Assuming a collective identity is of course also a way of avoiding individual responsibility (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Singer et.al. 1965; Zimbardo, 1969) and Mucho's preference for a generic identity may, as Oedipa realises, be a way in which he can avoid the feelings of guilt about his experiences as a used car salesman (C.L.49, 100). Mucho's new generic identity is, however, an artificial construct because it depends on drugs for its existence. It is an avoidance of identity
rather than a new identity and Oedipa refuses to accept
Mucho's solution to the problem of either cultural or
individual identity.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* the concept of individual identity
is totally fragmented. Trees, dogs, pinballs and
lightbulbs are all treated as if they had as much or more
of an identity as the human figures in the novel. Byron
the idealist revolutionary lightbulb is developed more
fully than most of the human characters in the novel. The
narrator offers insights into Byron's attitude to Bulb Baby
Heaven, (the place where all bulbs wait to be manufactured)
his elation at finally being born, his plans to organise
all the bulbs in the world into a Guerilla Strike Force,
his response to his growing awareness that he is immortal
and his animosity towards Phoebus, the lightbulb cartel
which limits the intellectual and emotional growth of bulbs
(*G.R.*, 647-55). Byron the Bulb has an identity which has
both unity and transcends time, for he is immortal, but
despite the fact that his immortality means that he will
eventually know everything, he will still be impotent
(*G.R.*, 654). Unlike "real" prophets, who are either killed
outright or "given an accident serious enough to make them
stop and think, and most often they do pull back"
(*G.R.*, 655), Byron is condemned to go on forever, knowing
the truth and unable to change anything, so that eventually
he will find himself enjoying the anger and frustration.
And he does go on, for he appears again later in the novel
with his own opinions on the kazoo as a subversive instrument, which he regards as a brotherhood of the Kazoo with all the captive and oppressed lightbulbs (G.R., 745). Like Gyro Gearloose's little lightbulb helper in Walt Disney comics, Byron has an identity of his own. By revealing the thoughts, attitudes and feelings of a lightbulb which are obviously fabricated by the narrator, similar thoughts, feelings and actions on the part of human characters in the novel are made to appear as fabrications as well.

If the distinction between animate and inanimate is no help in establishing identity in Gravity's Rainbow, names are also no longer the signifiers of identity. The name "Ilse" is given to the daughter of Franz and Leni Pökler, but to both Franz and Leni the name Ilse becomes the signifier of absent daughter rather than specific identity (G.R., 610, 407). Weissmann has established that Pökler would work more effectively if he could stop thinking about his wife and daughter and arranges to have a substitute daughter visit Pökler once every year. The physical appearance of even the first "Ilse" is different to the image in Pökler's memory, but every year the physical appearance of the girls changes. Pökler is well aware that the girls are probably not his daughter, for he realises that Weissmann must have thousands of such children available (G.R., 418) and that he and Weissmann are involved in a game in which both know the rules (G.R., 417). On the
one occasion when he breaks the rules of the game and questions the current "Ilse" about a conversation held with the one presented in the previous year she fails to recognise the significance of the question and Pökler realises that he cannot afford to prove beyond doubt that she is not his daughter. Identity to Pökler does not depend on Ilse's physical appearance, which changes from year to year, or on a continuity of her memories which does not exist. It is only his need for a daughter which enables him to believe in the identity of Ilse. At a broader level, the problem of establishing identity is that of those who were separated from close relatives by the events which occurred during the Second World War, and in particular those who were separated as a result of the displacement caused by the internment of the Jews. The story of Pökler is a poignant example of the fact that for those known as "displaced persons", establishing an identity which could be proved to be "true" was virtually impossible. As Pökler observes, given the events of the years which have separated him from his daughter, there is no way in which he could prove her identity "beyond the knife-edge of zero tolerance that his precision eye needed" (G.R.,421). Presented with a live daughter, why not accept that she is indeed Ilse?

Like Ilse, Bianca is another character whose identity is a shadowy absence/presence. Max Schlepzig is only one of her putative fathers (G.R.,472,461) and Stefania doubts
that Bianca has a father at all: "It was partheno-genesis, she's pure Margharita" (G.R., 462), a comment which makes Bianca a double for Margharita, just as she is also a double for Ilse and Gottfried (G.R., 671). Ilse, Gottfried and Bianca are different names for the same child representing the same loss to the same winner (G.R., 671). They have a generic identity, not an individual identity and this generic identity continues to exist long after the physical person has disappeared from the text. In this sense Bianca is everyone's child, she is closest to "you, who came in blinding color, slouched alone in your own seat" (G.R., 472). The "you" may refer to Slothrop, but it may also refer to you the reader, who will never get to see her. Like many of the characters in the novel (Tantivy Mucker-Maffick, Närrisch, Ilse, Gottfried, Weissmann, Slothrop) Bianca may have died, but this is never established beyond the knife edge of zero tolerance. Slothrop thinks she is swept overboard from the deck of the Anubis (G.R., 491), but the syntax of the passage which describes her disappearance permits two interpretations:

Slothrop will think he sees her, think he has found Bianca again ... he will see her lose her footing on the slimy deck ... slip himself as she vanishes under the chalky life lines and gone ...

(G.R., 491)

As Slothrop does himself slip under the chalky lifelines and falls overboard, the meaning of this passage could be that Bianca vanishes as Slothrop slips overboard
just as easily as meaning that both Bianca and Slothrop slipped overboard. The emphasis on the future tense also suggests that Slothrop may be imagining the whole event. Der Springer later reassures Slothrop that Bianca is still alive "Bianca's a clever child, and her mother hardly a destroying goddess" (G.R., 494) and after being rescued by Frau Gnahb Bianca gets in under the blankets with Slothrop (G.R., 492), talks to him and hugs him. There is no indication in the text that this is a dream, no indication whether this really is Bianca or not, no way of determining whether she did or did not drown. Later still it seems as if Bianca is still on the Anubis (G.R., 530-1). Again there is no way of determining whether she is really present or whether Slothrop only imagines her presence. So who is Bianca? Clearly not a specific identity which can be separated from the identities of Ilse or Gottfried, but a generic identity which is an absence rather than a presence, an absence which is experienced by Leni Pökler, Franz Pökler, Thanatz and also Slothrop:

She's still with you, though harder to see these days, nearly invisible as a glass of gray lemonade in a twilight 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.

(G.R., 577)

The concept of separate, individual identity is further fragmented in Gravity's Rainbow by a confusion of identities. Gottfried is not only coupled with Bianca and Ilse, but also with Katje and Enzian. Enzian is coupled
with Tchitcherine and Weissmann in a complex negative-positive relationship, but Weissmann is also coupled with Thanatz through Erdmann and Gottfried, while Erdmann and Thanatz are coupled through their relationship to Bianca. Pöklär and Slothrop are also coupled through Bianca/Ilse, and Thanatz and Weissmann through Gottfried. The individual identities cannot be kept separate in any obvious way and continually merge and fragment to form different patterns. The concept of a separate, unique and individual physical or psychological identity is totally fragmented, so that the novel challenges the premises on which assumptions about individual identity are based. There may be such a thing as a collective identity, but each individual identity is part of and inseparable from the collective identity.

Even assumptions about the psychological basis for identity are challenged. According to psychological definitions of identity there is no way in which a person's dreams can be anything other than his own. Pirate Prentice, however, dreams other people's dreams, has other people's fantasies (G.R., 12-14). It is not a case of Pirate imagining that he is someone else and presenting his fantasies as if they were the fantasies of the person he imagines that he is, they are actually fantasies which belong to somebody else, an occurrence which Freud would have been among the first to deny as a possibility. The psychological identity of Pirate
therefore includes that of other identities, in particular that of Lord Blatherard Osmo, who at one stage was responsible for the entire fate of Europe (G.R., 14). If Pirate's fantasies are not his own, then what is Pirate's identity? Is he Pirate/Osmo, whose mission is to establish liaison with the Adenoid to prevent it taking over all of London? Can Pirate and Osmo's psychological identities be separated? Obviously not, for Pirate spends two and a half years acting out Osmo's fantasy by attempting to communicate with the Adenoid (who, it should be noted, has no time for admirers of Dr. Freud) while Lord Blatherard Osmo is at last able to devote his time to the problem of Novi Pazar (although he is discovered later mysteriously suffocated to death in a bathful of tapioca pudding). By merging the two psychological identities of Pirate and Osmo the concept of an individual psychological identity is questioned, just as it is in Slothrop's sodium amytal hallucinations which may represent the collective American subconscious, but contain references to the political role of Jack Kennedy which do not appear to be related to Slothrop's individual psychological identity (G.R., 65) and reveal little of Slothrop's own attitude to racism for example, which in the novel appears to be tolerant rather than fearful as implied in his hallucinations. The fact that both Pirate's secondhand fantasies and Slothrop's hallucinations are satirical representations of theories of dream interpretation (in Slothrop's case in the form of a
parody of the stream of consciousness, interior monologue narrative techniques popularized by James Joyce) casts a further doubt on the ability of insights into the psychological identity of the individual to provide any relevant information about the specific individual identity. Siegel (1978: 47) even claims that Slothrop is an integral part of the narrator's personality because Slothrop subconsciously knows many of the things that the narrator knows, but which, like the references to "John F. Kennedy" (sic) (Siegel, 1978: 47) are not within the scope of Slothrop's subconscious. Slothrop's fantasies, claims Siegel, are the fantasies of the narrator, which confuses the issue of psychological identity even further, although Siegel later distinguishes quite clearly between Slothrop's fantasies and those of the narrator (Siegel, 1978: 48-9).

Who then, is Slothrop? He is first introduced through Bloat's description of the materials on Slothrop's desk. Slothrop obviously uses the archaeological filing system and his desk hasn't been cleaned down to the original wood surface since 1942. The layers of debris show rather than tell that Slothrop is messy, smokes, reads the News of the World, is interested in music, has a mother, Nadine, in Massachusetts, doesn't answer letters, does jigsaw puzzles, doesn't throw away tape, string or chalk or telephone numbers and is interested in females. (G.R., 18). If identity could be established through a person's possessions, Slothrop's identity, at least initially, would seem to be aptly captured in his name. Slothrop's identity
is also presented through his ancestors, the generations of Slothrop's from whom he is descended. More than any other figure in Pynchon's novels, Slothrop is given a specific identity, only to have that identity stripped away and fragmented until nothing remains. Possessions and ancestors, it is implied, are false indicators of identity. As the narrative progresses Slothrop's original identity - the Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop who used to occupy a desk at ACHTUNG - is removed (G.R., 210). Katje jokes about making one American Lieutenant disappear (G.R., 198), but this is in fact what happens (G.R., 199-200).

Apart from his initial consternation, Slothrop is more interested in what they are adding on to his new identity than about the removal of the paper evidence of his identity (G.R., 210). His new identity, however, consists of a series of roles which he is forced to play through circumstances beyond his control. To others he exists only in terms of his roles - As Rocketman he plays Pig Bodine's hero, even though he is aware of his own inadequacy for the role (G.R., 366-371); for Närrisch he plays the role of superspy (G.R., 507-16); for the villagers of the coastal town near Wismar, he plays the role of the pig-god Plechazunga (G.R., 568) for Greta Erdmann he plays the role of Max Schlepzig (G.R., 445-6) and for Tchitcherine he plays the role of informant (G.R., 390). Slothrop's individual identity is of no significance to anyone - even Pointsman regards him only as an interesting subject for
psychological experimentation and Pirate Prentice, although setting out to find Slothrop, never contacts him. The effect of constant role playing is that his "personal density" decreases as his "temporal bandwidth" increases (G.R., 509). As the narrator observes, since at least the Anubis era, Slothrop has begun to thin, to scatter. To demonstrate the point that it has got to the stage where you have trouble remembering what you were doing five minutes ago, or even what you are doing here, Slothrop's conversation with Närrisch is described as a situation in which he does not remember what he is doing there, a conversation which follows immediately the narrator's description of these symptoms of a "scattered" identity. Slothrop is the paradigmatic case of the vanishing individual identity. After Peenemunde he becomes a displaced person, making occasional and aleatory appearances, knowing, even though he has made an arrangement with Der Springer to get a new set of identity papers, that he can never return to America (G.R., 623).

By the last section of the novel, however, Slothrop has divested himself of all of his assumed roles and "likes to spend whole days naked" (G.R., 623). The only real identity he has is the one which is natural, not the identity established in documents, nor the one created by identification with the generations of Slothrops, nor the one revealed by his hallucinations, nor the many identities which are attributed to him by others. If identity is
defined in terms of the roles which an individual plays, appearance, or official documentation, Slothrop is indeed a scattered concept, but these are only external means of establishing identity. The question "Who am I?" in Slothrop's case is answered by "I am what I feel." The exploration of these feelings includes his feelings about his father (G.R., 674-81) his repressed desire to be sodomised by a giant black ape (G.R., 689) and his feelings about the bombing of Hiroshima (G.R., 694), all of which leave him with a desire to get away (G.R., 699).

Although the narrator refers to Slothrop as a plucked albatross who can never be found again in the conventional sense of "positively identified and detained" (G.R., 712), it is Slothrop himself who has discarded his multiple identities and there is no suggestion that he wants to be found or identified or detained. The opinion that Slothrop is a victim is only the opinion of others, including the narrator (G.R., 738) and Bodine (G.R., 741). It is true that Slothrop's original identity was stripped from him, and that while in the Zone he became a scattered concept through the series of roles he played, but the reason why most people cannot see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature anymore could be that he does not want to be seen as such. Another reason may be that his identity, like that of Mucho in Lot 49 has become generic - fragments of him, some believe, have grown into consistent personae of their own (G.R., 742). Slothrop
begins as a specific identity, but by the end of the novel this identity is as shadowy as that of Bianca or Ilse and it is impossible to determine whether he exists or does not exist somewhere in the Zone or even in London (G.R., 742).

Although the question of identity is raised in each of Pynchon's novels, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the concept of a unified, individual and unique identity is continuously undermined. Specific identities fragment and double, fantasies slip from one mind to another, names and identities are interchangeable, appearance is no guarantee of identity, characters disappear, but their identities linger on, and psychological identity is collective rather than individual. This deconstruction of identity demonstrates that conventional assumptions about identity - that identity is continuous, defined by spatiotemporal dimensions and separates the self from the Other - can be questioned. In fiction, moreover, identity is an artificial construct, a fact which has been accepted for so long that it hardly seems necessary for the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* to labour the point.
CHAPTER 7

CATEGORIZATION: THE REAL/IMAGINARY

Reading Pynchon's novels with any degree of certainty about arriving at the "correct" reading is virtually impossible, not only because of the fragmentation of narrative positions, the amount of play in the gap between naming and identity and the fact that the text undermines assumptions which are made in the text, but because distinguishing between what is real and what is unreal at the intradiegetic level of the text is impossible.

In V. and The Crying of Lot 49 Pynchon already questions the relationship between the "real" and the "imaginary"; that which is said to exist and that which is thought to exist, presented not so much as opposites but as parallels. Herbert Stencil's V accounts and Oedipa's Systems (Trystero/WASTE) may lie in the realm of the imaginary, but are also / in addition / supplementary to the "real" in the sense that they exist as part of the text and inform the specific meanings given to the reading of the "text" by both Stencil and Oedipa. Even in his short stories Pynchon uses the imaginary as a "real" second dimension. Nerissa in "Lowlands" is to Flange the preferred alternative to his wife and "real" in a sense that his wife is not. Carl in "The Secret Integration" is to Grover and his friends a means of compensating for the rejections of the blacks by the adults in society and is "real" until, looking through the garbage on the
Barrington's front lawn, which has been deposited there by their families, the boys realise the futility of their attempts to create their own "reality" in opposition to that of the adult society around them. Determining what is more or less "real" is a process in which the "reality" of the minority group is frequently forced to disappear under the weight on the "reality" of the dominant group. (Dyer, 1982; Williamson, 1978:122:37; Barthes, 1977:32-51; Morley, 1980:16-24)

This is not the case in the novels, but instead there is an uneasy co-existence of the two sides of "reality", with no definitive conclusion about the ultimate meaning of "reality", only alternatives and individual choices based on need or desire. In the earlier novels the film / membrane / hymen between the two realities which is increasingly penetrated is the television screen. Benny Profane expresses a desire to exist on the right side of the screen for once (V., 359), a comment which implies that "reality" may be an inversion, that "real" existence is in fact no more "real" than that depicted on the television screen. Earlier in the novel Profane envies Randolph Scott, who always says and does the right thing while Profane has a vocabulary that is made up of "nothing but wrong words" (V., 137). Perhaps if Profane could get to the right side of the screen, penetrate the film, he could become as confident and self-assured as Randolph Scott, become a master of the inanimate (V., 288). Profane, of
course, does not succeed, in fact, scarcely makes a consistent effort at penetrating the screen. Perhaps, like Stencil, he cannot afford to. The imaginary remains as Other, co-existing perhaps, but different to the "real".

In *Lot 49* the other side of the television screen impinges on the actions of Oedipa and Metzger. The film *Cashiered* controls the game of Strip Botticelli (more than a hint of ironic humour in the name of the game which might well apply to the Pynchon critics stripping the last vestiges of meaning from the Birth of Venus painting by Botticelli in *V.*), only getting out of control when a can of hairspray goes berserk. Although the film is still on the other side of the screen, Metzger occupies the space between both sides of "reality"; he is both in the film and in the motel room, both actor as lawyer and lawyer as actor. The question is not either/or, but both. There is an endless convolution, a merging of realities. The problematic relationship between film and reality has been explored by many critics. Even documentaries and news reports obviously cannot be said to present an accurate version of "reality" as both what is selected for presentation and the manner in which it is selected reflect the preferences of the director of the film, the policies of the management or the politics of the government. It is by now also a critical commonplace that many films merely reflect the repressions, anxieties, hopes, dreams and fears of the viewing public, from superhero fantasies to sexual
fantasies to fantasies of wealth or fantasies of the supernatural as terrifying and evil. As Frye (1957:288) puts it:

Movies are bourgeois myth plays, as half a dozen critics suddenly and almost simultaneously discovered a few years ago.

The extent to which film reflects the concerns of a society or influences those concerns has, and continues to be, a subject for debate, a debate which has gained increasing publicity since the advent of television and claims that violence and pornography in film is one of the major causes of an increase in violence and rape in society. The issue is one which is pushed to its extremes in Gravity's Rainbow, but is also raised in V. when Profane takes his model of behaviour from Randolph Scott and in Lot 49 when Metzger raises the question of who is the "real" actor, Perry Mason, a lawyer, or an actor acting the part of a lawyer. This in itself is a different issue to that of the function of a film, which can be anything from informing, recording data, (historical or scientific) to propaganda or sexual arousal (issues which are also raised in Gravity's Rainbow).

The major difference (a deferral from the earlier novels) in which film is used in Gravity's Rainbow is that it is placed in a position which equalizes the distinction between "reality" and "imaginary" so they become part of the same thing, a point made by Cowart (1980: 61-2),
although Cowart's conclusion – that "reality" is less "real" than the "imaginary" - gives a priority to one over the other which his initial statement appears to contradict. Cowart's reading places the film at the position of phallocentric power (particularly in his explanation of the King Kong myth in archetypal terms) (Cowart: 46-48) and continually emphasizes the primary role of film in creating a "reality" in its image, so that despite the ostensible similarity, Cowart clearly maintains a distinction between the two. Such a reading ignores the fact that making distinctions presupposes that these distinctions exist, a possibility which within the context of Gravity's Rainbow is by no means a foregone conclusion.

The problem of determining what is "real" and what is "not real" is presented in the text in a film – a "screen test" which has been seen as a parody of the Warhol style movies (Cowart, 1980: 55). It also plays with the concerns of the cinéma vérité group of directors whose aim was to use film to capture "reality" and thus remove the barrier of artificiality which was employed in conventional film, (Mailer, 1963:146-53) either consciously through the use of scripted plot and professional actors, or unconsciously when the camera turned "real" people into actors simply through its presence (Mailer, 1963:109). The dialogue in Feel's film is played as a comedy, complete with fake Jewish accents, German-accented Westernisms (does the unreal in the unreal cancel itself out to make it real?)
and obvious puns like "joint hallucination" (G.R., 534) which seem to invite even more puns on "real" and "reel" (Cowart, 1980:36). The film is a confusion of realities. It is an artificial construct made by Osbie Feel and therefore obviously not "real"; the characters in the movie represent Basil Rathbone and S.Z. (Cuddles) Sakall and are not playing themselves but simply another "role", and are decoded by Katje as representing Osbie (who is "acting" Basil Rathbone) and Pointsman (who does not appear to be in the film as Sakall any more than the Scheme is present as the Midget) even though the scene is described as if the action is being filmed (G.R., 535). The film itself consists of Feel talking about the film so that the actual film is only present through its absence, doubly unreal. Despite this, the dialogue encapsulates the problem of determining what is real and what is unreal.

One argument is that of personal belief - "I know what's real, and what isn't real" (G.R., 534) which places reality on a purely personal plane, a position which cannot be undermined as long as "reality" is only a question of belief. The next argument is based on verification of "reality" by means of past experience - you can tell a "real" midget from a hallucinated one if you have had a lot of experience of one or the other types of midgets. As a basis for determining "reality" this is hardly satisfactory, as Rathbone points out, for it excludes any situation where such comparisons cannot be made - as
Rathbone has never seen either real or hallucinated midgets, Sakall could easily have invented the category. The final argument is that of consensus - if both believe that the midget is "real", he must be, but this argument is obviously as full of holes as the preceding arguments. In a brief comic scene the major problems of defining reality which have confronted philosophers and psychologists from the ancient Greeks to the twentieth century are not so much satirized as restated, in a manner and a medium which is itself "unreal". The only possible conclusion is that it is impossible to maintain the difference, except as a difference within the same.

The question therefore is not a matter of determining the degree of reality or of determining which came first, the film or the society projected by the film, the "dream" (individual or collective) or the "reality". As Feel's film frames the text of the single scene, so film in *Gravity's Rainbow* frames the text of the novel. From the opening paragraphs of the novel which project an image of the screaming of (the Rocket? the people? the absence?) and the image of the process of Evacuation to the blank screen of the concluding paragraphs where the audience watches the trajectories of the bouncing ball from word to word, the camera focuses on the text. To state that references to film in *Gravity's Rainbow* permeate the text is to state the obvious. (Cowart makes a rough count of twenty-nine movies, nine directors, and forty-eight actors and actresses and
there seems little point in quibbling over one or two more or less.) The mere presence of references to films, directors and actors and actresses, apart from establishing that Pynchon incorporates the names from film into his texts as much as he incorporates names from science, politics, myth, music or literature, does not explain the function of film in the text. Although there are many references to film, the films cited in the text are those which lie at the imaginary end of the spectrum - science fiction, sado-masochism, western, comedy - and not those which deal with social realism. In other words, films which deal with other people's fantasies in much the same way as Pirate Prentice projects other people's dreams. Such films do not make any pretense of realism in the sense of portraying aspects of society, although they may well reflect the repressed desires and fears of society at the psychological level, and therefore could be considered as another dimension of reality.

Within the text the prophetic function of film and the argument that film influences society is stretched to the limits of plausibility and beyond. The film critic, Michael Prettyplace, with his eighteen volume definitive study of King Kong (G.R.,275) may, like Cowart, read a great deal of psychological significance into the black scape-ape theme and regard the film as the genesis of the Schwarzkommando, but only megalomaniac film directors like von Göll believe that there is a cause-effect relationship
between a fiction on film created by Operation Black Wing, (with fake Schwarzkommando) and the existence of the Schwarzkommando in the Zone. And yet there is room for doubt. The sheer coincidence of the existence of the Schwarzkommando in the text appears to at least allow the possibility that von Göll's theories may be correct, even though logically (i.e. from a frame of reference outside the text) such a possibility is obviously ridiculous. Even if von Göll's film in no way brought about the existence of the Schwarzkommando, in the text the film creates the fiction of the Schwarzkommando, which anticipates the narrative of Enzian and his Hereros, so that within the text the film has a prophetic function similar to that of Slothrop's dreams (G.R.,447).

The Argentinians certainly subscribe to von Göll's theory, and although their belief is described as being "infected with von Göll's madness" (G.R.,388), the proposed film of the anarchist saint Martin Fierro, fake as it is - "even the freest of Gauchos end up selling out" (G.R.,388) - could perhaps capture the soul of the Gaucho and film could survive better than real villages (or towns or cities) did in times of war. As the narrator observes "There are worse foundations than a film" (G.R.,388). While in the course of the novel the film is never made, the Argentinians do end up inhabiting a set of "real" buildings and have formed a type of state. In the war/movie where "sets" have more reality than the Reichstag
building - "is that King Kong, or some creature closely allied, squatting down, evidently just, taking a shit" (G.R., 368) - who can separate the cinematic from the real? No wonder the war drives Slothrop to paranoia, the type learned in cinemas where:

there's always someone behind him being careful not to talk, rattle paper, laugh too loud: Slothrop has been to enough movies that he can pick up anomalies like that.

(G.R., 114)

For the purposes of propaganda it therefore matters little if the film is fact or fiction, particularly if there is nothing outside the film with which to compare what is real and what is not real. It may seem illogical to claim, as von Göll does, that his film caused the existence of the Schwarzkommando, but this is only an example of taking literally the content of propaganda movies and thus showing the fallacy of the belief that stereotypes created by film actually exist outside the film, as for example the Bosche, the Hun, or the inscrutable Jap, who were regarded as "real" people by a large number of those who believed in the reality of the movie image. Or even the belief that the blonde, blue-eyed image of the Germans which was projected onto a nation during the Third Reich, actually was the ideal German.

The war itself can (and frequently has been) projected as a film. Gravity's Rainbow explores the many dimensions of the war as a war movie (not like, but as) and not as a
documentary or "straight" war movie, but a "World War II situation comedy" (G.R.,692) with Slothrop and everyone else caught up in the machinations of the plot. The action of the movie of the Zone begins when Slothrop plays the role of hero by rescuing Katje from a giant octopus - "the biggest fucking octopus Slothrop has ever seen outside the movies, Jackson" (G.R.,186). The scene follows the conventional line of science fiction damsel in distress - overtones of Fay Wray and King Kong - who could believe this is happening for real? Back at the hotel Katje's wardrobe is mostly props (G.R.,195) and Slothrop starts to feel that the script for this movie has already been written, a suspicion which grows stronger as he discovers more props like the Selzer Bottle (G.R.,197) and wonders where "They've" put the cream pies (G.R.,332). Stripped of his clothes and the papers which establish his identity, Slothrop is chased from one film set to another, from one cinematic location to another. He is dressed by the studio's costume department (from Zoot Suit to Fay Wray) and has dialogue provided by a variety of movie stars (from W.C. Fields to Fred Astaire). The Zone becomes a series of movie sets, from the tunnels of the Mittlewerke to the Disneyland of Zwölfkinder and the streets of Berlin.

They must have the budget, all right. Look at this desolation, all built, then hammered back into pieces, ranging bodysize down to powder (please order by Gauge Number), as that well remembered fragrance Noon in Berlin, essence of human decay, is puffed on the set by a hand, lying big as a flabby horse up some alley, pumping its giant atomizer ...

(G.R.,374)
Even the Potsdam Peace Conference is a movie party on location, with movie actors in attendance and Mickey Rooney meeting Rocketman on the terrace (G.R., 382). By turning the Zone into a movie Pynchon demonstrates not so much that the theatre of war is a real and deadly form of theatre (Cowart, 1980:35), but that the process of production in film is the same as the process of production in "real" life. In both "sets" can be created or dismantled at the will of the director (Peenemünde or Berlin), props are supplied by the director (Seltzer bottles, custard pies or rockets and A Bombs) and people are only actors playing roles allocated by the director.

In the bigger film which is the novel even producers like Pointsman and directors like von Göll are framed by the lens of the camera. Pointsman appears in a "medium shot, himself backlit, alone at the high window" (G.R., 124) and von Göll strolls along the promenade with a supporting cast of Slothrop and Otto supplying harmony for his starring musical number "Bright Days" (G.R., 495). Mexico, who thought his love affair with Jessica was well beyond the range of the camera, finds out that Jessica's role may also have been scripted by Pointsman (G.R., 631), just as Katje discovers that she has been filmed for a specific purpose (G.R., 533). Who can tell how many others have been framed by the film?
If the Zone demonstrates the process of film production, von Göll’s other film, Alpdrücken takes to the literal extremes the process of reproduction. The film stars Margharita Erdmann, the "anti-Dietrich" (G.R.,394), perpetually passive victim in a series of pornographic horror movies created by von Göll. During the production of the movie, Erdmann is "ravished and dismembered" (G.R.,461) by jackal men wearing a black hood or an animal mask and although she claims that Max Schlepzig is the father of her daughter Bianca (G.R.,395), Stefania tells Slothrop that "it became an amusing party game to speculate on who the child's father was" (G.R.,461), while the narrator includes "you, who came in blinding color, slouched alone in your own seat" (G.R.,472) with those putative fathers of Bianca who exist on one side of the screen or the other. So the film's erotic content produces a child, literally, conceived on camera, while on the other side of the screen the film arouses the usually intermittent film viewer Pökler from his lethargy for long enough to impregnate his wife Leni (G.R.,347), another child produced by the film, along with who knows how many others.

While the effect of erotic movies on males may well be a sexual turn-on, both Ilse and Bianca appear to represent more than just the by-products of an erotic movie. Except
as a very young child, Ilse is scarcely present in the narrative and is replaced by a series of substitutes supplied by Weissmann who has created:

the moving image of a daughter, flashing him [Pökler] only these summertime frames of her, leaving him to build the illusion of a single child. 

(G.R., 422)

The illusion enables Pökler to suppress the suspicions that life for Leni and Ilse at their re-education camps is, if not idyllic, certainly bearable (G.R., 408-10). The reproduced image of Ilse fills a need for Pökler and he takes the Government at their word, believing that the camps are really "re-education" camps, even though he has seen the prisoners from Camp Dora with their starved bodies and eyes which are "swimming orbits of pain" (G.R., 428).

It is only when the Mittlewerke are abandoned that he actually faces the truth about Camp Dora, the "invisible kingdom" of death (G.R., 432).

Ilse, twice created by film, is used to construct a film between Pökler's preferred "reality" and that which he would rather not acknowledge. If her "shadow" exists, "the slender boy who flickered across her path, so blond, so white he was nearly invisible" (G.R., 429), it is the shadow of Abel, the memory of the dead outside all film, the trace of Ilse which cannot be framed by the film.

Bianca is also "more than an image, a product, a promise to pay" (G.R., 472) and lingers in the text as a shadow. Maybe she is hiding from Them, from Those who are
already dead (G.R., 482), for she knows how to hide. Maybe Slothrop does see her lose her footing on the deck of the Anubis, or maybe he only thinks he does (G.R., 491). Maybe he imagines the pointed toe of a dancing-pump kicking him under the chin (G.R., 531), or maybe it is Bianca down in the engine room. Or maybe it is again the shadow of Abel, the image of those no longer in the movie, those who have voluntarily or involuntarily given up their roles in the filthy movies of the war.

For some, like Greta Erdmann, there is no escape. She exists in the narrative as "less than the images of herself" (G.R., 364), an ageing actress with fading looks and a thickening neck. A failure in Hollywood and unable to cope with the failure, she absorbs all the malaise of a Europe dead and gone and cannot adjust to being alive while so many are dead. While she has a personal reason for feeling guilty (according to Ensign Morturi) (G.R., 474-478), having murdered a number of young boys, her crimes hardly amount to the level of genocide. But instead of rationalizing, she invites punishment, seeks comfort in whippings. Unable to escape the movie she hopes that someone else will provide the means of escape. Masochism is not enough - close, but not close enough (G.R., 446). Greta Erdmann wants to be killed and even Slothrop fears that he's catching it, escaping only by "murmuring Hauptstufe three times" (G.R., 446).
It is true that neither Schlepzig nor Erdmann are real names any more than "Grand Inquisitor" or "captive baroness" are real identities (Cowart, 1980:35) and that Slothrop and Greta's sado-masochism is only an imitation of that in the original film (though even in the original there is no clear line between what was simulation and what was actual ravishing), but Greta's need to be punished is real enough. The case for sado-anarchism as explained by Thanatz is illuminating:

Why will the Structure allow every other kind of sexual behaviour but that one? Because submission and dominance are resources it needs for its very survival. They cannot be wasted in private sex. In any kind of sex. It needs our submission so that it may remain in power. It needs our lusts after dominance so that it can co-opt us into its own power game.

(G.R., 737)

The explanation may be only a rationalization for Thanatz's own sexual preferences, but it also places in perspective the social aspects of dominance and submission which characterize the sado-masochistic tendencies of society as a whole. The sado-masochistic rituals in movies such as Alpdrücken therefore represent social attitudes which polarise victim and victimizer and presuppose that there will always be a need for a victim, a "scapeape", whether Jew, Schwarzkommando or woman. Thanatz's explanation suggests that the greater evil is when this occurs at the national or international level rather than at a personal level and that this is a possible explanation for the continuation of war. Greta is therefore unusual in
that she deliberately chooses the role of victim, but both Brigadier Pudding and (according to Weissmann) Katje also attempt to atone for their feelings of guilt and their inability to cope with the sado-masochism of the war by playing the role of victim at the personal level. Pudding manages to die as a result of his sado-masochistic sessions, but Katje, who has always known when to quit the game, escapes to join the Counterforce.

Von Göll's movies are therefore both obvious fictions and real, even though he himself is not aware that he has captured the shadow of shadows in his films. Whether film "creates" images of people that are more "real" than "real" people or whether film influences behaviour is hardly the point, when differences between "real" and "not real" are barely distinguishable.

In the last section of the novel the distinction between what is real, what is fantasy, what is narrative and what is film vanishes completely. At one stage the text appears to be completely directed by chase music (G.R., 751), the film catches as the rocket ascends (G.R., 759), characters are written out of the script (G.R., 723) and the text disintegrates into a montage of brief projections until the film simply runs out. It is impossible to determine which is real, the film or the narrative, or even to determine which is which. Tanner's comment (1978:51) that in Gravity's Rainbow we cannot tell "whether we are in a bombed out building or a bombed out
mind" seems particularly applicable to this section of the novel, although this would hardly seem to be a problem of competing realities - both a bombed out building and a bombed out mind could be equally "real", just as there is no reason to conclude that a film is any less "real" than any other perceived form of "reality". In fact, as the narrator points out, in many cases the only "reality" which remains available is that which has been recorded on film, particularly in the case of cities which were bombed out of existence during the Second World War (G.R., 372).

Pynchon's texts demonstrate the arbitrary nature of the system of classification which separates categories such as "real" and "imaginary". Critics such as McHale (1979: 114-20) attempt to solve the problem of competing realities by giving one preference over the other, as for example when he claims that the Mrs Quoad of the Disgusting English Candy Drill is part of Slothrop's fantasy while the Mrs Quoad located by Speed and Perdoo is part of "our reconstructed world" (McHale, 1979:95), but as the real/fantasy distinction is based on two third person narratives it is difficult to see why McHale should give one version preference over the other. McHale does admit that Speed and Perdoo could also be unreliable, but he still appears to prefer their account to that of Slothrop, a conclusion which is clearly based on a subjective preference for one "reality" rather than another.

The use of film in Gravity's Rainbow blurs the distinction between "reality" and "fantasy" even further.
The entire text of *Gravity's Rainbow* is framed by the film, so that the film precedes and is part of the text. "Real" and "unreal" are distinctions which simply do not apply, there is no either/or situation, just a number of equally "unreal" parallels. Unlike V. or *The Crying of Lot 49*, which suggest that somewhere just beyond the limitations of the text there may be a solution to the hermeneutic bind when the will to know comes up against the variations of a permanently assumed, but ceaselessly deferred truth, *Gravity's Rainbow* offers no such solution. The text is continually intercepted and rewritten, like the letter in *The Courier's Tragedy*, like Slothrop in the casino Hermann Goering.

This rewriting of the text is also accomplished through the use of film. Margharita and Ilse are rewritten through film; the Hereros and Argentinians are rewritten through film; and by the end of the novel the entire text is rewritten through film.

Which leaves the problem of which came first, the film or the text. At the level of common sense it could be maintained that the text, the event, the location, the actor, always precedes the film. Unlike a narrative which consists of words and therefore does not require prior existence of anything other than itself, film always involves the presentation of something other than itself, no matter how far this "other" may be from "reality" (as in fantasy films, cartoons). But in *Gravity's Rainbow* the
relationship between film and not-film is more complex - the Hereros, Margharita and Slothrop exist independently of the film, and yet are rewritten through film, so that the two merge and become part of the same thing. From the vantage point of a camera lens distinctions between "real" and "not real" do not apply - if something can be captured on film, judging whether it is real or not requires a point of reference somewhere outside the frame of the film. In Gravity's Rainbow no such points of reference are supplied, could in any case not be contained within the text. What remains is a levelling out of the differences between dualisms such as fantasy and reality, animate and inanimate, us and them. From the opening pages of the novel to the blank screen at the end, film covers the text, denying the possibility of an assumed truth which will provide a point of reference and thus enable judgements about which "reading" is correct to be made.
CHAPTER 8

CATEGORIZATION: COMIC/SERIOUS

If "seriousness" in fiction is determined by how the characters act in the presence of death and if joking about death and linking it to sex are pre-adult (S.L., 5), Pynchon's novels would appear to be, by his own definition, pre-adult. Death certainly hovers over each of Pynchon's novels and in *Gravity's Rainbow* references to death, direct or in the form of allusions, occur on almost every page of the novel. Are Pynchon's novels therefore "serious" because they deal with attitudes to death, or are they comedies? Attempting to distinguish between the serious and the comic in Pynchon's novels is no easy matter. The serious slides into the comic in mid-stream, and the comic has a habit of suddenly becoming serious. Early criticism of the novels tended to regard them as comic (Hunt, 1968:98-110; Feldman, 1963:258-60; Wood, 1963:4; Richardson, 1972:35-58; Plimpton, 1963:5; Lhamon, 1973:27; Meixner, 1963:729-34; Larner, 1963:273-6; Kirby, 1971:387-95; Hoffman, 1963-4:174-7; Hausdorff, 1966:258-69; Gold, 1963:3; Balliett, 1963:113-7), at least until such time as Pynchon was seen to be in the running for the award of "greatest American writer", a distinction which every "serious" critic from Mendelson, Poirier, Leverenz and Schaub to Tanner ("To argue on behalf of Pynchon's importance as a writer would be
supererogatory" 1980:90) seems determined to bestow on Pynchon.

Although at least one literary critic has claimed that humour is dead (Mikes, 1970), it would be difficult to deny that Pynchon's novels contain as much comedy as seriousness. In fact, one of the problems in reading Pynchon's novels is that the comic and the serious are merged. The reaction of the characters to threats of death is presented in sequences of action which are described in terms of comic farce, but does this make the novels comedies or not? Should we laugh at Slothrop's or Oedipa's or Profane's predicaments or not?

As we all know, humour is an elusive concept which defies definitive definition and which could not exist either in literature or life without the imaginative impulse of the reader. Maybe, as Freud (1963:181-236) claims, humour is a means of avoiding expenditure of the emotions which might threaten to throw the balance book of the psyche into the red and thus is an economic way of maintaining psychological equilibrium. Like madness, Freud claims, humour may be a way of avoiding the compulsion to suffer, a way of avoiding the censor of rationality and repression, with laughter a less painful substitute for tears. Maybe humour is indicative of a desire to humiliate our neighbour, as Bergson (1956:129) claims, which could be why he finds hunchbacks, Black and White Minstrels and people behaving in a repetitive, machine-like manner.
humorous (1956:61-103), although this hardly explains a vast quantity of humour which humiliates not our neighbour but ourself, or why heartbeats are not particularly amusing. Maybe humour is a transformed fertility rite, as Cornford (1961:106-112) claims, with the characters of comedy the successors of the pharmakoi, victims of humiliation, punishment and ridicule, but happy in the assurance that they were helping to give continued fertility to the tribe, hence the importance of the sexual characteristics of the mythic comic figures. Maybe, as Frye (1957:158) claims, comedy increasingly invokes the "green world" and represents a movement from decadence to renewal, from death to rebirth, from winter to spring, from darkness to a new dawn (shades of Cornford under a superstructure of Aristotle with Freudian implications of regression). Maybe comedy presents a world superior to its protagonists (Scholes, 1974:134), but maybe it doesn't if the protagonist can feel superior by laughing at this world. Maybe the comic hero only pretends to be inferior and is in fact ingenious, versatile and clever, like Socrates or Giles Goat-Boy (Barth, 1966) or Oskar Mazerath (Grass, 1965) to demonstrate the stupidity of social values and conventions. Maybe, as Grotjahn (1957) claims, humour is related to depression, narcissism and masochism, a projection of the author's conflict with authority onto a parental substitute in the form of a victim. Or maybe humour is the perception of a situation of idea L in two
self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference, $M_1$ and $M_2$, where the event $L$, in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths (Koestler, 1964:35). Or an incrustation of the mechanical on the living (Bergson). Or a sudden thwarting of expectations (Cicero, 1964; Kant, 1952; and Hegel, 1964). Or pleasure at replacing large expenditures of emotion with lesser expenditure of pleasure (Freud). Or a refusal to "grow up" (Mikes, Freud and by implication, Frye). Or the therapeutic defiance of the spirit of Gravity (Nietzsche, 1954:199).

Despite the difficulties of defining humour even within Western culture, all such attempts include an element of the irrational, an opposition to the system of logic which controls the individual in society. The discourse of humour plays with language, indulges in the pleasure of the text. Although Pynchon's novels deal with serious issues, they are also texts which defy gravity, although apart from a few of the initial reviews of Pynchon's novels, this would be difficult to tell from the bulk of Pynchon criticism in which the novels are treated with a great deal of gravity (not to mention gravidity) and which focuses almost exclusively on the "serious" aspects of Pynchon's novels. It almost seems as if Pynchon's texts, having been elevated to the status of the greatest American novels, can no longer also be comic. But to ignore the comic aspect of Pynchon's novels is to ignore a
large proportion of the text. In the rules of Pynchon's game there is no either/or choice about comic/serious any more than there is a choice about reality/fantasy. Distinctions such as these are refracted through the prism house of Pynchon's language until the spectrum broadens to include everything, the comic and the serious, reality and fantasy, inanimate and animate.

While it is certainly possible to have deadly serious readings of Pynchon's novels, even death (claimed by Pynchon to be the most serious of literary subjects) is generally associated more with comedy than with tragedy in his novels. On a number of occasions anti-gravity is related to the preservation of life. In V, Winsome Rooney, unable to tolerate a sick society, attempts to commit suicide by jumping out of the window of an apartment building. The incident has all the elements of a Laurel and Hardy farce, a performance played for the amusement of the audience down below, with action consisting of chases up and down the fire escape to the music of Elvis Presley singing "Don't be Cruel". As in the movie comedies, it is difficult to take the attempt at suicide seriously; the description is framed by the fantasy world of film where the hero always escapes the fate of death, and sure enough, the cops with their safety net arrive just in time for Winsome to make his dramatic dive into the net (V, 362-3).

The crucial point in the whole incident occurs when Pig Bodine tells a joke (and not exactly a new joke at that)
which causes Winsome to laugh, thus enabling Pig to pull him back from the rail of the fire escape and plunge to the pavement below. Laughing in this case provides a literal escape from the laws of gravity and the potentially serious threat of death is diverted into a comic routine.

Pig himself is also still alive because of a fortuitous and comical incident. Although there may be many ways in which the deadly effects of r-f energy could be dealt with by an author, Pynchon foregrounds the comical aspects. Hiroshima (!) tells Pig that one of the effects of r-f energy is to make him temporarily sterile, a state which would suit Pig, who wants to get laid, but is out of contraceptives. Profane's hamburger effectively demonstrates the more lethal aspects of r-f energy, but the whole incident is, like Winsome's attempted suicide, played as comedy and the implications of the uses of something as destructive as r-f energy are never followed up. Possible death is something amusing as long as it is only a possible death.

The possibility of death also surrounds Profane's attempts to gain entry to Eigenvalue's office in order to steal the set of dentures which Stencil wants to take to Malta:

Not that his mood tonight was suicidal. But with inanimate line antenna, building and street nine floors below, what common sense could he have?

(V., 390)
The narrator states that it is difficult to locate any "centre of gravity", a comment which could apply both literally and metaphorically. The image of a fat, shapeless Profane dangling from the end of a line nine floors above the street is straight out of comedy film, even to the minor touch of Profane covering his head with his jacket to hide from the people in the street down below. Throughout the scene the comic aspects are highlighted and the possibility of death is made to appear unlikely because the convention of film comedy does not allow the hero to die. In each incident, death is made to appear unreal, something which cannot be encompassed by the conventions of comedy, as if death can be avoided by not taking it seriously.

In *Lot 49* the serious issue of potential suicide is also turned into a comic routine. The redundant Yoyodyne executive who, since the age of seven, has been "rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death" (C.L.49,78) finds himself unable to commit suicide without first hearing the ideas of a committee. Not having a committee handy, he places an ad in the personal column of the LA Times, asking for responses from people who had found good reason for committing suicide, although he "shrewdly" figures that those with good reasons would already be dead, so that what he'll get are good reasons for staying alive. His prediction is not quite as shrewd as it appears, for those
who respond fail to give any compelling reason for staying alive. He goes on dithering, making lists of pros and cons and in the end decides to commit suicide not for any logical reason, but because he finds self-immolation a "groovy" method of committing suicide. The whole process of the executive's inability to make the final decision is described as comic satire rather than tragedy, culminating in the comments of the efficiency expert (who caused the executive's redundancy by replacing him with a computer) and who points out that the IBM 7094 could have made such a decision in twelve microseconds, whereas the executive took nearly three weeks to decide.

What saves the executive from death, however, is the fact that he sees the irony in a situation where the efficiency expert replaces him in a sexual encounter with his wife and rather than setting his petrol-soaked clothing alight with his trusty zippo lighter, he laughs (C.L.49,79). Given all the other reasons for his suicidal state of mind, it is difficult to see the logic behind his conclusion that his big mistake was love, except that this may be a means of suppressing the more valid grounds for his decision to commit suicide - if love is the cause, it is relatively simple to avoid this particular "addiction", even without the assistance of the Inamorati Anonymous, an association which is a contradiction in terms of itself and a comic parody of associations such as Alcoholics Anonymous.
in being a totally anti-social association with members who never communicate with each other more than once.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, a novel where death is named/called on almost every page of the text, death itself is conspicuous by its absence. Bombs and rockets fall on London, as death hovers on the periphery, present somewhere in the background, but never directly in focus. Even when Slothrop visits a bomb site, there is no mention of those who died, only an account of the little girl with the Shirley Temple smile given in exchange for a Slippery Elm (*G.R.*, 24). The death and destruction caused by the war in Europe is referred to, but not described and even the bombing of Hiroshima is dismissed in a bare half line of the text (*G.R.*, 693) just as in *V.* the decimation of the Hereros and Jews is passed over with the comment that von Trotha

is reckoned to have done away with about 60,000 people. This is only 1 per cent of six million, but still pretty good.

(*V.*, 245)

Instead, the means of large scale destruction are the subject of comic songs and limericks and the modes of such destruction are treated as farce. Although the rockets of Peenemunde are undoubtedly deadly weapons of war, the most sustained description of them occurs in a series of rocket limericks composed by "Marvy's Mothers" which reduce the rocket to a subject suitable for comic improvisation.
Limericks such as:

There once was a thing called a V-2
To pilot which you did not need to
You just pushed a button
And it would leave nuttin'  
But stiffs and big holes and debris too.

(G.R., 305)

Other references to the rocket emphasize the abstract, technical scientific or symbolic aspects of the rocket, but it is only in the rocket limericks that the function of the rocket as a means of causing death and destruction is mentioned directly. A case of deadly serious humour similar to the satiric "Glee" song of the Yoyodyne Corporation in Lot 49 which extols the virtues of private enterprise in the nuclear arms race (C.L. 49, 57).

Aerial combat is also reduced to a farce in Gravity's Rainbow, where Slothrop and Major Marvy conduct their battle with custard pies, aimed by Slothrop from his hot air balloon with remarkable accuracy while Marvy's drunken "Mothers" keep on singing rocket limericks until their plane disappears into the middle of a cloud. Similarly the Komical Kamikazes and their uproarious weekly adventures put the war in the Pacific into a context of a Hollywood cartoon comedy. Although Pynchon is hardly setting a precedent in treating the instruments and action of war as comedy, it seems unlikely that the above sequences are included in Gravity's Rainbow simply in order to satirize a specific Hollywood convention. By reducing war to slapstick, Pynchon creates a distancing effect which would
not be achieved through a more "realistic" description. If it is impossible to describe what events such as Hiroshima or the bombing of Europe were really like, at least a comic representation does not pretend to present anything but a fantasy.

The entire V-2 rocket attack on London is also turned into comedy through Slothrop and the Penis He Thought Was His Own. The two most frightening aspects of the rocket are that it cannot be heard until after it has reached its target and that predicting where the rocket will strike is impossible. Both aspects relate to the predictability of death and the research team at The White Visitation desperately attempt to find some way of controlling the fear of death by making it conform to the laws of logic, while the laws of probability theory, as Mexico points out, indicate only that the odds on being killed by a rocket always remain the same (G.R., 56). The explanation that the rockets fall where Slothrop fucks takes the beliefs of behaviorist psychology to ridiculous extremes. Even if baby Tyrone were conditioned by psychologist Jamf to respond sexually to the plastic Imipolex-G, a fact which remains open to question, the explanation that the random distribution of rocket strikes is somehow caused by Slothrop's erections is about as likely as Profane's chances of putting out the sun by pissing at it. Only someone desperate to find a cause for the pattern of rocket strikes and with an unshakeable faith in behaviorist
psychology like Pointsman could accept such an explanation, or Slothrop himself, who is also ready to grasp at any explanation which excludes the random possibility of death. Once death from the skies is put into the terms of erections, the threatening presence of the rocket is reduced to the more manageable proportions of the comic, a joke about death in the guise of a satire of behaviorist psychology.

Slothrop's other close encounters with death are also treated as comedy. In the tunnels of the Mittlewerke Major Marvy and his "Mothers" attempt to kill Slothrop, but the ensuing chase is presented as pure farce with Glimpf and Slothrop careering along the tunnels on a miniature train, while Slothrop shouts insults such as "Major Marvy sucks NIGGERS" (G.R., 309). Although Slothrop claims that he is scared shitless and the bullets used by Marvy's men are real, the comic aspects of the chase place the episode firmly within the conventions of the comic mode where heroes always escape. Death, within such a convention, can hardly be taken seriously. Similarly Slothrop and Närirsch's successful attempt to rescue der Springer from the Russians involves the use of real rifles shooting real bullets, but is described as a series of scenes from a comedy spy film so that the real threat of death appears unreal. The whole episode consists one ridiculous strategy after another, from the advance party of dancing girls who will distract the guards to fake Molotov cocktails (which
Slothrop forgets are fake) to an encounter with a homosexual guard, to complicated disguises and a last minute escape on Frau Gnahb's boat (G.R., 506-16). The emphasis on the comic aspects of the situation makes the whole episode seem like a movie in which nothing as unpleasant as death could have a place, as if death could be avoided by treating the threat of death as a comedy.

This is also the case when Roger Mexico and Pig Bodine attend the dinner party at the home of the Utgarthalokis (another reference to death through the naming process). Death surrounds the dinner, both in the form of those who produce the means and modes of death and through the "presence" of Brigadier Pudding, who was only too aware of the unpleasant aspects of death. Faced by those who have the power to distribute death, Roger sees the threat of death as directed at him personally, imagining that the guests at the "Kruppsfest" are waiting to devour the surprise roast which is Roger himself. (G.R., 714). The sombre dinner party is turned into a comic riot when Pig and Roger play alliterative games with items not on the menu such as "pus pudding", "menstrual marmalade", "cyst salad", "abortion aspic" or "fart fondue" (skilfully placed bubbles of anal gas rising slowly through a rich cheese viscosity) (G.R., 715-6). Apart from Connie the war correspondent and Gustav the musician, all the guests are nauseated by the items on the improvised menu and Pig and Roger march triumphantly out of the door, accompanied by
kazoos and string music supplied by Gustav and the Inner Voices. The flames in the pit which were waiting to roast Roger dwindle and the plot against Roger fails. Once again comedy is used to counter the threat of death.

In dealing with the horrors of death and particularly death in war, it may well be necessary to reduce death to comedy in order to cope with the feelings of guilt about surviving. Brigadier Pudding cannot erase the memories of the horrors of Passchendaele and is not protected by the distancing effect of comedy. His masochistic rituals include eating shit, the taste and smell of death (G.R., 235-6). In a novel permeated by death, Pudding is one of the very few characters who actually dies. It seems as if death is too serious to be taken seriously if you want to survive. Far better to piss on the boardroom table of those responsible for death (G.R., 636) than to die yourself, levity may well be the true counterforce to gravity.

Not all of the comedy in Pynchon's novels is related to death. Pynchon's high tolerance for low puns has long been noted by critics; puns such as "Don'tcha ephedrine of me, my honey" (G.R., 522) "one foot in the Grave" (V., 10), "making the unreal reel" (G.R., 689) "got the reels screwed up" (C.L. 49, 22) "young fur-henchmen can't be rowing" (G.R., 559). Particularly in respect to names, Pynchon obviously enjoys playing with words - names such as KCUF (the name of Mucho's radio station), Dr. Hilarious, the
Freudian psychologist, Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMingus (solicitors), Manny Di Presso (lawyer), Dribblette (actor and director), Slab (the painter who only paints cheese danishes), Schoenmaker (plastic surgeon), Pointsman (Pavlovian psychologist who uses dogs for his experiments which are conducted in the ARF wing of the White Visitation), Myron Grunton (radio announcer) and so on. Such semantic games are both humourous and, as indicated in Chapter five, deconstruct the process of naming. Pynchon's verbal humour is also satirical, for example the description of the alligator patrol in V. in military terms (V., 113-4), even though the Patrol consists of a ragged assortment of bums, or Gustav and Säure's discussion on "vintage" reefers in the pretentious terms of winetasting:

"Hübsch", allows Gustav. "A trifle stählig, and perhaps the infinitesimal hint of a Bodengenschmack behind its Körper, which is admittedly süffig."

(G.R., 442) ellipses in original

which concludes with the comment that they're both so blitzed that neither of them knows what he's talking about. Or plays, like Lewis Carroll, with the literal interpretation of metaphorical language as in "loving the people", which consists of a "master plan for sexual love with every individual one of the People in the World" (G.R., 547).
Like Carroll, Pynchon also uses songs for the purposes of humour, frequently reducing serious issues to comic routine through song. In *V.* for example, the opening scene of the novel presents an old man singing an ironic version of a Christmas carol in which Christmas is depicted as a vulgar dream of consumer delights (cheap, good quality beer and plenty of screwing), a song which could have been included purely for comic effect, but which anticipates the inversion of values where peace and goodwill is replaced by fighting over who gets to the breast-shaped beer taps at the Sailor's Grave first and where sentiment, as in the song, is obviously fake. Wittgenstein's philosophy is also satirized by means of song (*V.*, 288-9) which turns the philosophical debate of the *Tractatus* into a rationalization for a fast fuck, while Winsome Rooney presents his autobiography as a parody of Davey Crocket (*V.*, 220). As Winsome realises, popular songs distort the facts, they are fraudulent dreams (just as the song on which the street singer's Christmas carol is based - *Every Day's a Holiday in Old New York* - is a fraudulent dream) which are used to manipulate the sentiments of the listeners, particularly the "kids" who believe in the Davey Crocket of the song, or the Top 200 played by Mucho Maas in *Lot 49*, or the shareholders of Yoyodyne, who like University students singing their Alma Mater believe in the sentiments of loyalty and affection contained in the songs.
In *Gravity's Rainbow* the text contains so many songs that the novel has been described as a non-stop revue (Schickel, 1973:43-44). The war in prose is described as something which is fearful and horrifying, but the songs about the war, such as Osbie Feel's recruitment song (G.R., 8-9) the song sung by those on their way to "clear some ruin" (G.R., 11), or Slothrop's recruitment's song (G.R., 61-2) are music hall comedy, which only in the interrupted Hansel and Gretel pantomime are turned into something more sinister (G.R., 174-5). Even in this situation the audience goes along with music hall conventions and sings along with Gretel — after all, it's only a pantomime. At the Casino Hermann Goering the seriousness of Slothrop's involuntary recruitment to Pointsman's project is undermined by songs such as "The Englishman's Very Shy" (G.R., 182-3), The Ballad of Tantivy Mucker-Haffick (G.R., 191-2), Too soon to Know (G.R., 195-6), Vulgar Song (G.R., 213) and The Penis He Thought Was His Own (G.R., 216-7). The inclusion of the songs reduces the situation to that of a musical comedy, so that the serious issues such as Slothrop's loss of his own identity and his re-programming as an agent for the White Visitation appear to be part of the comic routine. Even the moment when Slothrop feels that he is in the presence of an order which "he has only lately begun to suspect" (G.R., 202), the moment when he senses intuitively the presence of some
powerful force which deals death, the tension of the experience is broken by a comic song -

Oh, THE WORLD OVER THERE, it's
So hard to explain!
Just-like, a dream's-got, lost in yer brain!
Dancin' like a fool through that Forbid-den Wing,
Waitin' fer th' light to start shiver-ing - well,
Who ev-ver said ya couldn't move that way,
Who ev-ver said ya couldn't try?
If-ya find-there's-a-lit-tle-pain,
Ya can al-ways-go-back-a-gain, cause
Ya don't-ev-er-real-ly-say, good-by!

(G.R.,203)

so that the contrasting effects of song and surrounding text break the sinister rhythm of the passage, and yet at the same time heighten the impression that the songs are a way of masking and expressing feelings which cannot be expressed adequately in prose.

Enzian's thoughts on suicide are also presented initially in a comic song (G.R.,320) which consists of a list of all the things which are disliked about the world. The serious question of suicide is turned into a comic situation not only through the song, but because the mechanism of the song (listing everything, revising, adding new items "which will surely have occurred to one"
(G.R.,320)) means that the actual suicide might have to be postponed indefinitely. Like the attempted suicide of the founder of Inamorati Anonymous in Lot 49, the discussion of suicide presented here is humorous rather than serious, even though the issue of suicide is serious both for the Empty Ones and Enzian.
Comic songs also deal with issues such as the Black Market (G.R., 495) Informers (G.R., 541), drugs (G.R., 522), and the revolutionary ideals of Byron the Lightbulb (G.R., 648). The most extended use of song and comic routines occurs in the narrative of Slothrop's hallucinations while under the influence of Sodium Amytal at The White Visitation. The sequence begins with a series of wordplays and jokes which continually change the emphasis in "You never did the Kenosha Kid" (G.R., 60-61), a playing with language apparently for its own sake, for language is a funny thing, and even the same words can have different meanings if they are given different intonations (as Schoenmaker in V. has demonstrated with Esther's "nos" (V., 109-10). The comic routine includes six songs covering subjects ranging from enlistment, jazz, toilets, Westerns and shit, to reductivism, which are interspersed in a narrative which is itself a parody of psychological interpretations of the unconscious, both individual and collective. Slothrop's hallucinations do reveal a deep-seated fear of blacks which may represent the subliminal fears of whites about the threat of domination by blacks, a lack of faith in the ability of political leaders to save society (G.R., 65), an extreme degree of alienation (G.R., 67, 70) and a faith in music as a means of retaining a link between human existence and the natural world (G.R., 63) which may represent the collective unconscious, but the fact that this journey through the collective
unconscious is described as a journey down the sewer suggests that the collective unconscious is a collection of shit and garbage. The inclusion of the songs and verbal play further undermines any seriousness which might be read into Slothrop's revelations and the potentially serious once again becomes comedy.

Verbal play is also used in a discussion of the illogical elements of American idiom. Säure questions Slothrop about the mysterious use of the phrase "ass backwards", which appears to be a self-contradiction as an "ass" is already backwards, so that the correct meaning would be more accurately expressed by saying "ass forwards". Slothrop is unable to clear up the mystery - language, especially idiomatic language, is hardly noted for its application of the laws of logic. Even in German misunderstandings can easily occur, as Säure's example of poor Minne who nearly OD'd because her cry of "Hübsch Rauber! Hübsch Rauber!" comes out as "Hubschrauber" which means not "cute-looking robber" but "helicopter", a word which nobody in the 1920's has heard of and therefore ignores. (G.R., 683-4). Pig Bodine tries to clarify the situation by explaining the "ass" is an intensifier, so that if something is very backwards you'd say "backwards ass" (G.R., 684), an explanation which does not exactly help Säure with his problems of idiomatic American language.
Although the verbal humour in Pynchon's novels takes the form of a game with language, the situational humour is almost always linked to the threat of death, the possibility of the animate succumbing to the forces of the inanimate world. The myth of Father Fairing in yet another sewer is an amusing parody of the evangelical policy of the Catholic Church taken to illogical extremes when Father Fairing applies the principle to rats rather than people. The humour is sustained by the pragmatic constraints of the situation, which force Father Fairing to eat a certain proportion of his flock in order to ensure his own survival. At one stage the rat Teresa is injured in a fight with another rat and Father Fairing records in his journal:

To spare her further pain, I put her to sleep and made a delicious meal of her remains, shortly after sext. I have discovered the tails, if boiled long enough, are quite agreeable.

(V.,119)

The description of Father Fairing's attempts to save Veronica rat's soul is also amusing, especially as recorded in the polite priestly prose of the journal, which records that:

V came to me tonight, upset. She and Paul have been at it again. The weight of guilt is so heavy on the child. She almost sees it: as a white lumbering beast pursuing her, wanting to devour her. We discussed Satan and his wiles for several hours.

(V.,121)
Surrounding the humour, however, is death. The death of those who committed suicide during the depression, the death of the rats, which despite personifying, Father Fairing is forced to eat, the death of Father Fairing himself, alone in the sewers with his rats, and finally the death of the alligators. Profane, hunting his alligators in Father Fairing's Parish, is more aware of the presence of death than amused at the details of the myth, sensing that in the sewers he inhabits a different world from that up above in the streets. A world where the animate returns to its natural state of inanimate, where there is peace (V., 120) and where killing requires an apology.

Though less pronounced, the threat of death is also present when Profane first meets Rachel Owlglass. Profane "garbage can and lettuce leaves flying ass over teakettle in a great green shower" (V., 23) may be a typical comic figure, but he was nearly killed by an inanimate object. Oedipa and Metzger cowering under the flightpath of a can of hairspray gone berserk may be comical figures, but the can is a dangerous projectile travelling at a hundred miles per hour (C.L. 49, 23-4). Slothrop may be another typical comic hero as he throws custard pies at Marvy's plane, but the bullets are real enough. Comedy and death are so closely linked in Pynchon's novels that it is impossible to separate the two. Distinguishing between what is serious in the novels and what is comic is a futile enterprise, but perhaps Pynchon, like Nietzsche (1954: 404) before him, has
pronounced laughter holy; the only means available to counter the destructive forces of Gravity.
That different cultural contexts influence the cognitive set of the reader has been demonstrated by the research of psycholinguists such as Steffenson, Jogdeo and Anderson (1978), Smith (1978), Holdaway (1979) and Campbell (1981 and 1984). In cases where the cognitive set of the reader has been firmly established by prior experience the text is processed in a manner which either conforms to the pre-existing cognitive set or those aspects of the text which conflict with the existing cognitive set are the source of confusion for the reader. Fijian readers of a text which was specifically constructed so that it contained elements which conflicted with the cognitive set of those from a Fijian background disregarded any information in the text which conflicted with the reader's cognitive set. For example, the information that a mountain would be more difficult to climb because there were no trees and it was therefore very hot conflicted with the reader's own experience and knowledge of the effect of trees on the ease or difficulty of climbing a mountain in a tropical country i.e., that the absence of trees on the slope of a steep mountain would make the climb easier because it would not be any cooler in a rainforest than in an unshaded area on the slope of a mountain and because trees would impede the progress of the climb. Almost without exception such readers reconstructed the text to
fit into their pre-existing cognitive set. (Campbell, 1984)

For any reader aware of recent changes in attitude regarding male and female sexuality and changes in the perception of the roles of male and female in society, Pynchon's novels present textual information which may conflict with the cognitive set of the reader. This is particularly the case in the presentation of the relationships between males and females in the novels, which as Simpson (1976:32) points out:

perpetuate the conventional conviction that women, both in sacred and secular realms, ought to be lovers and mothers.

The term "lovers" would appear to be something of a euphemism to describe the females in Pynchon's novels, as "lovers" implies that love is an important element in the relationship, which is not the case in most of the couplings that occur in the novels. Although Simpson does state that females "ought" to be lovers rather than they are lovers, there is as much evidence in the novels that the females ought to be sexual objects as there is that they ought to be lovers, particularly in V. where Rachel is virtually the only character to insist that love should be part of a sexual relationship (V., 383), even though she seems willing enough to continue to be both a sexual object for Profane ("a hole to let yourself come in" (V., 384)) and a substitute mother figure, not only for Profane but for the entire Whole Sick Crew. This may well be an image of the
female which has become a literary cliche (Dworkin, 1974) and may well have been inspired by Pynchon's reading of Graves (1959) and Adams (1931), but to a reader reading Pynchon's novels in the eighties the representation of the relationships between male and female raises problems of a conflicting cognitive set. This is not simply a question of whether the females in the novels are presented in a manner which conflicts with the cognitive set of the reader, (Simpson, 1976; Kaufmann, 1976) but also raises questions about the sexuality and roles of the males in the novels.

In the introduction to *Slow Learner* Pynchon comments:

> It is no secret nowadays, particularly to women, that many American males, even those of middle-aged appearance, wearing suits and holding down jobs, are in fact, incredible as it sounds, still small boys inside. (S.L., 10)

> It certainly isn't. Not to Pynchon, not to women, and not to those who control the media. Advertising campaigns exhort women to "look after" their males by keeping them clean, well-fed and comfortable, perpetuating the role of mother in that of the wife. (King and Stott, 1977:45-61). Advertising campaigns exhort males to indulge in fantasies (usually sexual) of the big spender who exists above the mundane levels of a life plagued by the problems of deciding which soap powder washes whitest. Escape through alcohol, cars, sport, new technological toys - the emphasis is always on the world outside the home; the little boys at play. (Campbell, 1980).
While opinions of women might vary on whether the "little boy" syndrome of the American (or for that matter, Australian) male is desirable or not (there are, after all, some advantages for the female in terms of power in having "adult" little boys, as Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1970) demonstrates only too clearly), it is fairly common knowledge that many men never relinquish their "little boy" roles (Lefrancoise, 1973:314-26). Of course, some of the characteristics of little boys might be considered rather endearing (if you like that sort of thing), such as the "naughtiness" of little boys, their tendency to get themselves into trouble (the female usually comes to the rescue before the situation gets completely out of hand, and the "naughtiness" is, of course, forgiven sooner or later), or their tendency to make mistakes (which the female will, of course, rectify) (King and Stott, 1977:42) or their beguiling helplessness in domestic matters (only the female can cope with the intricacies of preparing a meal or finding a matching pair of socks). This delightful, dependent, adult "little boy" is featured with all his endearing charm in numerous popular television situation comedy series - Darren in Bewitched is a typical example - the adult "little boy" who relies on the female for assistance, is totally dependent, but nevertheless a sweet, clean-cut, all American nice male; a perpetual Peter Pan without the freedom of not having to pretend that he is an adult.
Less endearing is the adult "little boys'" need to provide constant confirmation of his maleness, often through exaggerated accounts of sexual conquests presented for approval to his male peer group. The voyeuristic tendencies which establish sexuality without running the risks of failure to perform adequately; the avoidance of responsibility; the need to conform to the behaviour of the male peer group, to establish "adult" status by consuming excessive quantities of alcohol; the fear of being considered different (or even worse, "queer"). (Lefrancoise, 1973:20-6). These less endearing qualities of adult "little boys" are not to be found in the popular media. Such qualities are more likely to be hidden in the statistics of the divorce courts or the records of women's refuges.

It is by now a well-established cliche that females trap males into marriage. Males, as the cliche implies, would much prefer to remain free little boys forever, but it can be convenient to have someone to bear a male's children and sort his socks. In literature the sympathy of the author is generally on the side of the poor little trapped adult boys: the little Rabbits (Updike, 1964) or Portnoys (Roth, 1970) or Herzogs (Bellow, 1965) or Bob Slocums (Heller, 1975). Pynchon is no exception in this respect. Dennis Flange is the prototype of the adult little boy who escapes the responsibilities of sharing an adult relationship with an adult female by replacing the
adult female with one of more manageable proportions in the form of a prosthesis. One could romanticise about Flange's solution to his problem indefinitely, but it still amounts to a substitution of an artifice for a female and a reduction of female to little girl. If the male cannot grow up, one way of re-establishing male control is to reduce the female to something which is manageable.

Pynchon's texts abound with these middle-aged small boys who cannot (or do not wish to) establish any real life shared with an adult female. The males in Pynchon's novels who are married (and there are very few of these) cannot control their wives and prefer adolescent females to adult females (Mucho and his nymphets, Winsome and Paola, Pökler and his Ilse-substitutes). One could, as Pynchon does (S.L.,10), explain such preferences in terms of the prevailing male attitudes of the sixties which, encouraged by male magazines such as Playboy, (and possibly Nabokov's Lolita) valued the adolescent female as the ideal sexual partner. Such an explanation, however, takes into account neither the historical accounts of pederasty and paedophilia nor the underlying psychological explanations.

Pederasty and paedophilia are certainly not exclusively twentieth century phenomena. As Bryant's (1977:242) research indicates, the temple prostitutes in the Orient in 300B.C. were as young as six or seven years old and such temple prostitutes existed in Greece, India, Egypt and Babylon. In both England and America child prostitution was a social problem in the nineteenth century, although
statistics are difficult to assess given the nature of the offence and the fact that the legal system faced considerable difficulties in prosecuting offenders because while the prostitutes themselves were from the lower classes of society, the clients tended to be from the upper classes (Bryant, 1977:243-4). Even more significant is the fact that public attitudes to child prostitution, like public attitudes to pederasty, paedophilia and incest, were so negative that most people preferred to believe that such practices were either extremely rare or did not exist. As late as 1896 such attitudes prevailed to the extent that Sigmund Freud's professional colleagues exerted enough pressure on this most influential psychoanalyst to cause him to change his theory about the causes of hysteria lying in an actual traumatic sexual experience which occurred during the patient's childhood (specifically, a sexual assault by an adult, usually a parent or tutor) to a fantasized sexual experience which became known as the Oedipus complex.

While temple prostitutes of earlier centuries were highly esteemed and pederasty and paedophilia was not considered to be abnormal sexual behaviour, there was no need for the repression of such sexual activities, but the different moral codes in the industrialized societies meant that such practices were deemed either not to exist, or if they did, were regarded as isolated exceptions to the norm. In Post World War Two society there was little change in
public attitudes towards pederasty, paedophilia and incest from those of the preceding century, but there was a dramatic increase in the amount of attention given to the matter in the mass media (where reports were frequently ill-informed and highly speculative), in literature and pornography (implying that such practices were pleasurable) (Bryant, 1977:241) and in the professional journals of psychology and sociology (where the empirical data demonstrate that the extent of such practices is far wider than the general public was prepared to admit). In the sixties pederasty, paedophilia and incest, like a number of other "deviant" sexual practices came out of the closet.

It is only relatively recently, however, that any attempts have been made to explain the reasons for a sexual preference on the part of an adult for a child. Psychological analysis has revealed that such adults are not only inept in their sexual lives, but also regard themselves as inept in all respects. In fifty percent of the cases investigated in one study, the adults had themselves been sexually abused as children (Geiser, 1979:32) (a fact also noted by Freud in his study nearly a century earlier). (Freud, 1984:251-82) Very few of the adults with such sexual preferences were mentally ill, but they either suffered from a fixation caused by the arrestment of psychosexual development in childhood or a regression caused by complications in their adult relationships (not necessarily sexual), increased stress, anxiety or feelings of alienation. Pederasts and
paedophiles feel that they are unable to attract adult women because they perceive themselves as inferior and frequently show considerable immaturity, strong dependency needs, tend to identify with the child and feel a phallic inadequacy. (Geiser, 1979:32-7)

Winsome Rooney fits the description of the regressive male remarkably well. His adult relationship with Mafia is characterized by the fact that he cannot accept her independent status as a novelist. Mafia, at least from Winsome's point of view, is described as a caricature of an author of popular romances which are equated with sanitary napkins which had "gathered an immense and faithful sisterhood of consumers" (V., 125). A description not without humour, but which does not require an extensive knowledge of psychology to be interpreted as a means of reducing the creative efforts of his wife to a trivial catering to consumer needs, and to transfer his own inadequacy to Mafia. Whether Mafia's novels are trashy romances or not is hardly the point - as Winsome himself observes, the other so-called creative artists among the Whole Sick Crew scarcely make better use of their talents (V., 360-361) and Winsome is concerned more about his inability to cope with his marital situation than about the quality of Mafia's novels in particular. Far more important is the fact that Mafia does not need Winsome (the dependency need). Winsome's function is to provide Mafia with dialogue for her plots, provide a model for her
villains and act as reluctant host to her friends (V., 125-7). A male muse without any of the lofty sentiments usually associated with that role, and one who could easily be replaced by any other available male. Mafia, as her name implies, is presented as the villain of the piece. Shallow, racist, obsessed with acting out her theory of Heroic Love:

screwing five or six times a night, every night, with a great many half-sadistic wrestling holds thrown in (V., 125)

the description of Mafia is typical of that of the bitch wife and guaranteed to align the sympathy of the reader with the male even though it could equally well be an indication of Winsome's sexual inadequacy.

There is nothing very new about such descriptions of the wife in literature. From Rip Van Winkle to An American Dream the bitch wife is one of the favourite stereotypes of literature. Mafia is no more than the inheritor of a well-established American literary tradition. In fact, such stereotypes reinforce the traditional attitudes of males in a patriarchal society to females, particularly those females who are dominant, professional and independent and this attitude is by no means uncommon among authors of the sixties who regard females as either vapid, inferior and incompetent, or powerful, neurotic and destructive. The difference between Mafia and Nurse Ratched in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is one of degree, not kind. Both are
presented as abnormal, with unwarranted bases for their power, with which they abuse the male. Mafia, like Nurse Ratched, is a "bitch and a buzzard and a ball cutter" (Kesey, 1973:58). So says McMurphy and so says Winsome (not to mention Normal Mailer). Such descriptions play the game of blame the female, a popular activity ever since the Pandora or Adam and Eve myths and throughout history. (Trilling, 1964:52-71) Rather than accept his own inadequacy, the adult Winsome prefers to replace Mafia, at least in his fantasies, by a female who is everything you want her to be - Paola, who is "something we can look at and see whatever we want" (V., 350). The "whatever we want" in Winsome's case is not some mythical ideal of the perfect female, but

an object of sadism, something to be attired in various inanimate costumes and fetishes, tortured, subjected to the weird indignities of Pig's catalogue, have her smooth and, of course, virginal looking limbs twisted into attitudes to inflame a decadent taste.

(V., 221)

In other words, power restored to Winsome Rooney, Paola as passive object, submissive, control back in the hands of the male. Nothing new about these fantasies either, as any study of pornography (Faust, 1981) would reveal. Long live male domination.
While Winsome does not put his fantasies into practice, (though he does attempt to commit suicide and the state of his sanity is doubtful), Mucho Maas is a practising pederast.

Oedipa's relationship to Mucho Maas is described not so much in terms of sexual partnership as of maternal dependency. Oedipa cooks, cleans and comforts:

You comfort them when they wake pouring sweat or crying out in the language of bad dreams.

(C.L.49,9)

Sexually Mucho shows more interest in the "little chicks" who listen to his radio program than he does in Oedipa and even the possibility of legal prosecution does not prevent him from indulging in his paedophilic practices (C.L.49,30). Although Oedipa could hardly be described as a particularly dominant female, both Mucho and Metzger prefer more youthful sexual partners. Pynchon's own comments on such aspects of male behaviour are worth noting:

He (Flange) wants children, but not at the expense of developing any real life shared with an adult woman

(S.L.,10)

As Geiser's (1974:34-5) research indicates, paedophiles identify strongly with their young sexual partners and in the case of a male, the female substitute acts as both a replacement at the fixated level of psychosexual development and a substitute daughter. As long as Oedipa
occupies the maternal role. Mucho's sexual preferences do not disturb the relationship, but while she becomes increasingly independent, Mucho retreats to LSD fantasies and their relationship cannot continue. Both Mucho and Metzger are adult "little boys". Metzger, the child actor in the old movie, continues to exist long after the last film has been made and it is not so very surprising that he runs off to Mexico with a fifteen year old groupie (C.L.49,105).

In Gravity's Rainbow the relationship between Franz and Leni Pökler is one in which Leni is the dominant partner; the "embittered source of strength" (G.R.,397) which Franz resents but is too indecisive to do anything about. Ideological differences have driven Franz and Leni apart so that they "fucked so seldom anymore" (G.R.,397). When they do, Franz, inspired by Margharita Erdmann in one of her many helpless victim roles, imagines that he is victimizer and Leni the victim. The use of the term "fucking her into submission" (G.R.,397) aptly captures the need for dominance of the male over the female. Although Leni submits, she does not become subservient or less independent. Franz does not have the power to control her and she leaves him. Much more successful is the relationship Franz has with the series of "daughters" provided for him by Weissmann. The creation of the image of a young, dependent female satisfies his desires and although he plays by the rules of the fatherly "game", his
thoughts about "Ilse" are always incestuous. The young, (8)
it is implied, are the ideal victims of the old.

In each case the "adult" male substitutes either in
fantasy or in practice a young, manipulable female for the
adult female. In Pökler's case the acceptance of the young
females as a single identity - that of his daughter Ilse -
requires a considerable degree of self-delusion, but
ultimately it is more important for him to focus his sexual
desires on the continuous single identity of a Leni
replacement than to admit that the young girls sent to him
every year by Weissmann are not the same, not Ilse at all.
Pökler prefers the prosthesis, the artificial supplement,
to the absence of both his wife and daughter. At least
with the prosthetic Ilses he can retain the fiction of
dominance.

Although Pynchon satirizes the worship and exploitation
of youth which is characteristic of American society with
its Disneylands, Playboy magazines and advertisements
extolling the beauty of youth in both the Zwölfkinder
(G.R., 419) and City of the Future episodes in the novel -
"In a corporate State, a place must be made for innocence
and its many uses" (G.R., 419) - the text operates against
itself when the relationship between adult male and female
is continually displaced by a relationship between adult
male and a youthful prosthesis of copula.

Slothrop couples with a great many women in the course
of Gravity's Rainbow. Not perhaps as many as Pointsman
gives him credit for, but still a reasonable tally. The only relationship which is mentioned as more than a casual coupling is his relationship with Katje Borgesius. While Katje could scarcely be described as old, she is an adult female and the dominant partner in the relationship. Her youthful prosthesis of copula, Bianca, is a child of fourteen. Beautiful, of course, as one of the prerequisites for a female sexual partner in Pynchon's novels is that she be physically attractive (a convention so well established in literary tradition that even the innovative Pynchon does not challenge it). After all, you fuck the body, not the mind. Bianca, as her name implies, also represents a youthful purity and innocence, even though she is neither virginal nor inexperienced in the ways of a corrupt world. She does, however, play the role of victim with convincing authenticity, and the female as victim has, as Pööler could testify, enormous powers of sexual arousal. The sight of Bianca's bare buttocks being beaten by her mother, stimulates the guests aboard the Anubis into a frenzy of random copulation. (G.R.,465-8) So far so good. The scene could be interpreted as a satire of sublimated desire, a corollary for the violence perpetrated by one generation on another, a displacement of the perverted couplings in Post-War Europe. But Slothrop goes further, and with Bianca achieves a sexual climax unique in the many couplings between male and female presented in the course of Pynchon's novels. (G.R.,469-460). Great for Slothrop, but if Bianca experienced any sexual climax
herself, it is not recorded in the text. Like the other substitutes for adult females she is a projection of a female on a scale which is manageable for the "little boy" masquerading as an adult male. Insofar as Slothrop is capable of feeling love, he does seem to care for Bianca, but this does not prevent him from leaving her as he has left all the other women with whom he has been in contact. (G.R., 470). Slothrop, like Profane before him, avoids permanent relationships with females. Even the child substitute for the adult female cannot suffice for someone concerned primarily with his own sexual satisfaction. In a vague way Slothrop feels guilty about Bianca's subsequent disappearance (she has presumably fallen overboard) and remains aware of her presence through absence, a state which might, however, be preferable to having to cope with her continued presence.

The avoidance of responsibility is typical not only of Slothrop, but also of Profane, whose relationship to the females he encounters is one of alternating avoidance and approach. On the one hand Profane is wary of being responsible for "dependants" such as Paola and Josefina and on the other he is concerned about becoming dependent on females such as Rachel. The prosthetic function in either case is obvious; a mixture of substitute daughters and substitute mothers. To rationalize, as Profane does, that females are aligned with the inanimate and therefore threaten his own animate state is to avoid the issue of
dominance and subservience. It suits Profane to categorize all females as the ultimate consumers who turn males into possessions, when in fact it is Profane who rejects females as anything other than "a hole to let yourself come in" (V., 126) and regards work as merely a means of raising enough money to "get laid steadily, with whomever he chooses" (V., 198). Implied in his attitude is the issue of who is in control and this is not so much a question of animate versus inanimate, as of male versus female domination. Mobility to Profane is the confirmation of his animate status. To stop moving, to develop a permanent relationship, is to become inanimate, an assumption which his own mechanical movements show to be false. Profane relegates coupling to the structure of the prosthetic. Rachel to her car (V., 29) and Profane to Rachel (V., 358-59). Automated sex. Any hole will suffice. "A cavity is a cavity after all" (V., 109) as Schoenmaker could tell you.

The remodelling of Esther's "nos" "No meaning yes .. No .. Different .. No .. Again .. No " (V., 109-10) and Esther's nose also functions within the structure of the prosthetic. Schoenmaker subtracts a part of Esther and replaces it with part of himself, but she is sexually aroused by the inanimate objects inserted into one cavity rather than the animate object inserted into another. (V., 109). If coupling is all that is desired, the nature of that which is coupled matters little. It can be a car, or a gun or a female, and the ideal female in this system would be the mechanical female whose parts could simply be
replaced in case of a malfunction; the ultimate prosthetic. Even more manageable than a child substituted for an adult female or remodelling a female to suit your own preferences.

There are, of course, alternatives to heterosexual relationships - masturbation, for example, as Roth's characters discover. But despite a comprehensive coverage of divergent sexual practices, masturbation is never mentioned in Pynchon's texts. Whatever it is that must be done, must be done to others. Connections must be made. Coupling, in whatever form, must continue. Apart from the fact that Pynchon's representation of male and female roles in sex is far more traditional than the "unconventional" "post-modernist" labels given to his novels might suggest, it would be difficult to account for the total contrast between the female and male homosexual relationships presented in the text of V. and Gravity's Rainbow. True, both Gottfried and Melanie die in the course of their respective relationships with Weissmann and V, (could Pynchon be a Puritan moralist after all?), but while Melanie functions purely as prosthesis, Gottfried is pure innocence and ignorance, with Weissmann as the wise man doing what is best for the young person he cares about most. Of course, not everyone may relish the idea of being sent up to one's death in a Rocket, even with a nice shroud of erectile plastic, but the language used to describe the launching elevates the occasion to a reverent ritual marriage (G.R., 750), rich in symbolism and with suggestions
of the ultimate sexual consumation. Lucky Liebchen Gottfried to have a Weissmann/Blicero as master, concerned only for his Liebchen's welfare. Much better for Gottfried to die than for him to have to (eventually) live without his master, lover and protector Weissmann, for despite the sadistic homosexual rituals in which Weissmann indulges, Gottfried cannot envisage life outside the cage formed by his relationship with Weissmann. Maybe this is true, but in the event he does not get an opportunity of discovering whether it is or is not, and yet seems thoroughly content with his lot.

In contrast to the relationship between Weissmann and Gottfried which is elevated to a mystical level by the narrator who never questions Weissmann's motives, the relationship between V and Melanie is described as vulgar joint fetishism, an extension of the prosthetics of the body outside the frame of the body. A body of replaceable parts, suggested many times in V, is now complemented by a body which is pure supplement, both replacing and adding to a larger machine. No noble sentiments of love for V, just voyeurism. No sincere emotions, but only a projection of self-love onto another of the same species, a worshipping in one's own image. No elevated language to describe Melanie's transition from life to death and although the symbolism as Melanie is penetrated by a large pole is just as heavily suggestive of sexual consumation as Gottfried's enclosure in the womb of the Rocket, there is no suggestion of peace and tranquillity, only of violence. The whole
affair is depicted as the coupling of inanimate objects; V's fetish and Melanie's fetish become one in the mirror which reflects them both. No mystical principles in this description, but instead the derogatory tone of the narrator as he describes the "loveplay" as a banal rehearsal of the theme that love and death are one (V.,410) and that "Dead at last, they would be at one with the inanimate universe and with each other" (V.,410). Hardly a noble transformation, and one which the narrator mocks.

The tone of the chapter "V in love" is that of condescending mockery; amusement at the Freudian explanations of lesbianism and lighthearted public speculation about the possible combinations of social and sexual roles which might be practiced by V and Melanie. (V.,408). V's grand passion is reduced to the superficial shallowness of mere tourism, joint narcissism, a ludicrous reflection of self-love in mirrors. In the lesbian relationship there is no suggestion of the mythical, God-like qualities which accompany descriptions of Weissmann's acts of sodomy (G.R.,100). V is no Ndjambi Karunga, buggering a boy under the resonance of a sacred name. V is no God, either creator or destroyer, and the relationship between V and Melanie is not shrouded in noble sentiments of the coupling of light and darkness, all sets of opposites being brought together.
Nor is Melanie's death the subject of prolonged, meticulous planning as is the case in Weissmann's construction of the Rocket which will carry Gottfried to his death. On the contrary, Melanie dies as the result of an accident which may well be her own fault. Either sheer carelessness or an unspecified death wish. In either case not very enobling.

The differences in the description of male and female homosexual relationships are indicative of a sexist attitude which is also present in the way implicit approval is given to the prosthetic function of females in Pynchon's novels. Little boys will be little boys, and if this means substituting little females for the adult version, that's quite acceptable, for as everyone knows, it's the satisfaction of the male which matters.

Female readers of Pynchon's novels are not likely to lie in their beds turning pages with one hand and reaching for the box of chocolates with the other. Far more likely is the possibility that female readers of Pynchon's novels will question the assumptions made about male-female relationships in the novels and ask themselves whether these assumptions are valid as generalizations or whether they reflect a peculiarly limited personal opinion of the narrator or author. Pynchon's novels may have gathered a faithful brotherhood of consumers, but it is unlikely that they will ever gather a similarly faithful sisterhood.
CONCLUSION

From the relatively straightforward narratives of his short stories to the complexity of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's fictions increasingly challenge the concept of the process of reading as a process of closure, of definitions of the reading process which claim that reading comprehension is the reduction of uncertainty. As Cowart's (1977:157-69) analysis of the changes between the short story "Under the Rose" (Pynchon, 1961:223-51) and chapter three of *V.* has demonstrated, although the story and the chapter of the novel contain almost identical characters and events and are set in the same location, chapter three of *V.* is a deliberate fragmentation of the text of the earlier story which increases ambiguity and uncertainty. In "Under the Rose", an omniscient narrator presents a chronological series of events centred on Porpentine. In *V.* the narration is fragmented among eight different narrators, each of whom is only peripherally involved in the events which occur during the narrative and who may be no more than the products of Stencil's imagination. The various narrators glimpse only fragments of the series of events and interpret differently the motives of the characters they observe. Rather than a narrator observing Porpentine as in "Under the Rose", in *V.* the narrator presents Stencil imagining, for example, Hanne the barmaid overhearing fragments of a conversation between Porpentine and Victoria without even revealing the names of the
characters she is observing (V., 91). The multiplication of intradiegetic and metadiegetic levels clouds plot and character, while the layers within layers of refracting consciousness throw the reality of events and the validity of interpretations into question. In place of the transitions between scenes that unify the narrative, the text is fragmented and withholds the connectives that are supplied in "Under the Rose". In the story, when the group of "tourists" leave the restaurant, "the party arose, paid and left" (Under the Rose: 237); that they paid functions only to connect "arose" and "left" plausibly. In V., the group is not shown arriving or leaving, while the paying receives more emphasis because the observer, Maxwell Rowley-Bugge is about to cadge a loan (V., 76). Connections between the fragments of the narrative are not made, but simply move from one spatio-temporal location to another, with only minor references being made to the attributes of those observed which might serve to provide links of identity. The identity of the man Porpentine, for example, when he is observed by the narrators but not named, can only be established by references to his sunburnt appearance (V., 65, 80) and then that his face is peeling (V., 83, 85, 87, 91, 93, 94). The lack of transitions between events, the unconnectedness of the observers, the absence of proper names and the differences in spatio-temporal locations form effective barriers for a reader seeking closure and the reduction of uncertainty. The changes from
the short story to the chapter in the novel indicate that Pynchon has deliberately created a text which undermines the process of reading in the conventional sense of a search for unity and cohesion. Chapter three in V. anticipates Pynchon's use of narrative techniques which create barriers to clozure and coherence at the global level in Gravity's Rainbow.

Describing Pynchon's last novel has posed problems for literary critics, who generally agree that it cannot easily be confined to a specific genre, even though the traces of other literary work are clearly discernible in it. Gravity's Rainbow is, however, more than a parody of other literary styles or a re-working of the themes of other novels. It has been described as a picaresque novel, a comic novel, a satirical novel, an encyclopedic novel and a gigantic puzzle. But Borges may have captured the essence of Gravity's Rainbow better than any literary critic.

In The Book of Sand Borges (1980:87-91) describes a book which has no beginning and no end. The first page of the book cannot be found, nor can the last, and the number of pages in the book is no more and no less than infinite. It is an "impossible" book, which because it is impossible begins to dominate the life of the owner of the book. Suspecting the power of the book, the owner eventually decides to discard it among other books in the basement of the Argentine National Library. Borges' short story captures the power of an infinite book, a book which can be read and re-read but which can never be contained by the
reader. The only thing which can be done by the reader of such a book is to stop reading, to put the book into the library. Borges' description of *The Book of Sand* is similar to Mendelson's description of *Gravity's Rainbow* (1976:161-95) as an encyclopedic narrative. As the critical analyses of Pynchon's novels have demonstrated, there is always more to be found in the novels, the number of pages seems infinite, the novels have no beginning and no end. The power of the book lies in the fact that it cannot be contained, there are always more literary or non-literary allusions to trace, scientific, mathematical or religious images to explore. But Pynchon's novels also deconstruct the power of the book by fragmenting the prism house of language. To use Borges' analogy:

The line is made up of an infinite number of points; the plane of an infinite number of lines; the volume of an infinite number of planes; the hypervolume of an infinite number of volumes.

(1980:87)

By continually fragmenting the text, Pynchon's novels shatter the illusion of unity which the conventions of the narrative (and the process of history) have established. In a period when the amount of information available to any individual is virtually infinite, it becomes impossible for any one individual to be at all confident that there is not some essential piece of information which has been overlooked. No-one can ever be sure that she/he is in the possession of all the available information. The problem
of dealing with too much information and yet, at the same time, the concern that because there is so much information which is available there may somewhere exist the essential piece of information which would provide the key to meaning is Oedipa's problem. Although she discovers much information in the course of her search, she is constantly aware that there may be still more, "if only she'd looked" (C.L.49,124). Stencil also suspects that there is no end to the information that he may discover. Attempting to force an overload of information into a pattern means making judgements about what is relevant and what is not relevant, a decision which makes the interpretation of information into a very subjective act. Patterns may appear to exist, but these patterns may also be paranoid delusions. As the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow states, the need to establish a pattern or to establish connections exists in the mind, not necessarily in the information which is discovered.

Gravity's Rainbow presents just such an overload of information. While V. and Lot 49 both show and tell the effects of an overload of information on the reader, in Gravity's Rainbow the overload is shown to an extent which exceeds the demands of the narrative. Information is presented on a range of different subjects which include science, physics, music, film, metaphysics, astrology, psychology, tarot, myth and literature. The overload is such that the text demonstrates the futility of attempting
to sort information into a unified pattern. As Poirier (1975:155) observes:

Really to read Pynchon properly you would have to be astonishingly learned not only about literature but about a vast number of other subjects belonging to the disciplines and to popular culture.

"Really read" in Poirier's context implies closure, a state of complete comprehension, where all the information can be processed. It is not possible for anyone to "really read" Pynchon's novels in this sense. Even if such a "proper" reader existed, the fragmentation of the text, the parallel and contradictory versions of events and the ambiguity would stand in the way of a "proper" reading.

The excess in Pynchon's novels may well make them popular among the academic elite (Poirier, 1975:156) and cause those who feel that their knowledge of the "other subjects" in Pynchon's novels to abandon the attempt to read them, but the reason for the excesses of the novels, and in particular Gravity's Rainbow, seems not to lie in the fact that Pynchon wishes to demonstrate his superior command of a wide range of knowledge (as he admits in the introduction to Slow Learner, this knowledge is available to anyone with access to bookshops or libraries or computers) but in demonstrating through the text itself the infinity of the amount of information available and the futility of attempts to impose a structure onto this information.

The fact that Pynchon's novels are highly entropic (in the sense of this term as used in communication theory to denote texts which are unpredictable because the
conventions of the signifying system are not adhered to) means that the reader is forced to adjust the process of reading itself. At the global level the novels defy the conventions of the genre. There is nothing very novel about this - Sterne, Borges, Burroughs, Barth, Gass or Barthelme also defy these conventions. The fact that Pynchon's novels are entropic at the global level, however, means that the reader is forced to dispense with intertextual referents. Comparing the novels of Pynchon to those of Joyce (Solberg, 1979:33-40) or Nabokov (Strehle, 1983:30-50) or Hawkes, Gaddis and Barth (Guzlowski, 1981:48-60) establishes little more than the fact that Pynchon's novels contain traces of the novels of other authors (no great discovery, since Pynchon has admitted that he is a dedicated borrower from other sources, both literary and non-literary: S.L., 12-17). Despite these borrowings, the novels are not like the works of other authors and intertextual referents are of little use in an approach to Pynchon's texts except to establish that they are different in form, style and structure from the conventional novel.

The text of Pynchon's novels is also entropic at the local level. In Gravity's Rainbow sentences break off in mid-stream, paragraphs on one topic slide into a totally different topic, prose is interrupted by verse or song, italics and capitals permeate the text, a reference to a character occurs while the character is not introduced till
much later in the text, passing references are made to characters who are never mentioned again and the whole process of predicting is undermined. From *V.* to *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon's texts become increasingly entropic at the local level because the conventions of language use are abandoned. If prediction is one of the essential components of the reading process, as psycholinguists claim, Pynchon's novels are unreadable because the text is unpredictable.

To read and comprehend is also to establish some relationship, no matter how personal or idiosyncratic, between signifier and signified. A word must mean something, even if it only means whatever you want it to mean. Pynchon's novels demonstrate just how arbitrary is the relationship between signifier and signified, that the search for the meaning of a word leads only to more meanings, that there is in fact no ultimate transcendental signified. Meaning in Pynchon's novels is fragmented into meanings, differences in meaning but no single meaning. As the text is fragmented into texts, the word is fragmented into words. There is no end to this process, just repetition, an endless chain of signifiers. The only end is to stop the search for meaning, to accept that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Because Pynchon's novels prevent any association from being made between signifier and signified with any degree of certainty, knowing what a word means is impossible; a word can mean everything or nothing. If this is the case, then
it is senseless to speak of reading or comprehending a text, for the process of reading (or any form of communication) is based on the assumption that words are different from each other and that different words have different meanings.

Reading also involves making judgements about whether a text contains information which is valid or not valid. Inconsistency in a text, as psycholinguistic research has indicated, causes confusion among readers which leads ultimately to frustration. Pynchon's novels contain not only a great deal of information which cannot be forced into a structure, but also information which contradicts other information supplied within the same text. Pynchon's unreliable narrators present so many different versions of events that judgements about the validity of any one version are impossible to make. The resultant ambiguity has been well documented by Schaub (1981), but the implications of such textual ambiguity in relation to the reading process are that the power of the narrative is undermined and that reading is revealed as a process which always involves making choices about validity. In a society where the printed word is frequently the signifier for truth (the belief that if it's down in black and white it must be true; the "evidence" of the cited text, even despite evidence to the contrary), it is perhaps not before time that an author such as Pynchon should undermine the belief in the truth of the printed word. Documentary
evidence can be "faked" in Pynchon's novels just as easily as any other kind of evidence, and this is particularly the case in records of the past.

It is also appropriate that a post-modernist author should question the power inherent in the act of naming, for the process of naming is a process of classifying and structuring the world. Pynchon's novels raise questions about the validity of such systems of classification, in particular in relation to identity and the use of proper names. To name something or someone does not mean that the reader understands what the name means, and in Pynchon's novels proper names as signifiers of identity are as misleading as any other kinds of names as signifiers of a specific thing or concept. The narrators of the novels may mock those who search for their identity, but the novels themselves demonstrate that the concept of a single, unified and individual identity is extremely difficult to define. In terms of the reading process this means that yet another fixed point of reference has become a fluid movement, a merging and mixing of differences, just as the comic merges with the serious or the animate with the inanimate, or the imaginary with the real. By merging such distinctions Pynchon's novels demonstrate just how arbitrary are decisions about what is real and what is imagined, what is comic and what is serious, what is animate and what is inanimate. Such distinctions are ultimately only subjective systems of classification,
convenient structures imposed on the text by the reader.

That Pynchon deliberately builds into his later fiction elements which increase entropy and prevent readings of the novels in terms of closure and cohesion is obvious from the comparison of his earlier fiction with his novels. A possible reason for this change may be the one suggested by Pynchon himself, that he is consciously trying to make his texts "literary" (S.L.,12). Another may be the influence of Surrealist painting, as Pynchon also suggests (S.L.,20), although as he points out, the effective use of Surrealist techniques does not consist of simply constructing a text composed of random pieces of material which are put together in the same frame to produce startling and illogical effects. Instead, the Surrealist text is composed of elements which have a metaphorical relationship which is not necessarily constant or fixed, but which can change according to the perspective of the perceiver/reader, and which have meaning at the psychological rather than the logical level.

Another reason could be that concepts of "reality" have changed radically in the late twentieth century, especially in the areas of physics theory. As Mellard (1980:30) suggests:

for as long as it (the novel) could count upon the changelessness of nature as viewed by empirical science, it had an authority that could counter any combination of the other modes of thought. But when the new science exploded the world, it exploded with it the novel as well.
Whereas the traditional historical or scientific view of the world in the nineteenth or earlier twentieth century was based on the theories of scientists such as Newton and the belief in continuity, causality, objectivity and certainty, since Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg the view of the world is based on theories which emphasize uncertainty, relativity, the limitations of all knowledge, the subjectivity of all observers, the absence of causal laws so that predictions can only be made on the probability of occurrences, and the dynamic nature of the physical world, which is not regarded as a fixed, definite and knowable entity, but something which is constantly changing, as is the perception of the world. (Heisenberg, 1971; Stableford, 1977; Bernstein, 1973). Even in areas such as literary criticism and literary theory writers such as Barthes or Derrida share the world view of the physicists in regarding the interpretation of texts as an act which will not reveal the definitive truth, but a different perspective of the text.

Although Pynchon's novels could not be described as "realistic" novels in the conventional meaning of the term where the concept of "reality" is already defined in the mind of the reader and where this concept is seen as different to the fictional world described in the novels, it could also be argued that the novels are "realistic", but are presenting a post-modernist perception of reality similar to that of the scientists and physicists.
Determining whether a novel is realistic or not is therefore obviously based on the subjective judgements of the reader about both "reality" and a novel's reflection of that "reality". If the beliefs of the scientists are accepted as an accurate theory of the nature of the world, Pynchon's novels certainly reflect the lack of belief in cause and effect, the subjectivity of observers, uncertainty, the limitations of knowledge and the futility of attempting to impose a structure on the random occurrences in the natural world, and could thus be said to be "realistic".

Pynchon's novels, however, do not simply reflect "reality", no matter how "reality" is defined, for the texts undermine the assumption that a novel can reflect "reality"; they demonstrate the fictionality of fiction, that the text cannot be taken as an accurate record of events. More than this, they demonstrate that the process of reading a text is simply the creation of another fiction. This creation of fiction by the reader in the case of Pynchon's novels becomes impossible because the categorizing and sorting process which would enable a reader to make decisions about which perception of the text is the "true" reading is undermined by the text itself. Pynchon's novels cannot be read if to read is to reduce uncertainty, to find coherence, to search for clozure. The novels may contain descriptions of the relationships between males and females which invite feminist readings, imagery from physics and mathematics which invite
mathematical or scientific readings, and allusions to literary and non-literary subjects which invite readings which are tracings of other works, but above all they challenge the power of the printed word. To reduce uncertainty, find coherence and search for closure is to confirm the power of the written word, the belief that the text contains a knowable truth. This cannot be done by a reader of Pynchon's novels. In Pynchon's novels such beliefs are shown to be delusions, psychological needs of the reader perhaps, but based on false assumptions about the reading process, for reading always leaves gaps and spaces and no reader can ever be completely certain that a text has been definitively, finally and completely closed.
Prediction for Pynchon's next novel:

The blank page. The blank page can be interpreted in any way you please, An ideal Fishing ground. You can see in the blank page the void of nothingness, Of Steiny silence, Or an infinite number of possibilities. A blank page can mean everything or nothing The purity of a blank page can represent the primal state of being (if you're so inclined, or Jung enough) or the whiteness of death (a whale of a tale) or the absence of the presence of words (Derrilicked) or the state of the novel after Babel; the abyss beyond the edge of the alphabet; the ultimate defeat of the power of the word; the freedom to soar where Eaglets fly; a symbol of female creativity (hurrah Gubar) a Lacanic statement of the pre-word womb. There's room on a blank page To escape from the prison house of language or page a thousand scholarly footnotes to wallow in a Barth of proairetic codes and see a whole landscape in a "might have been".
NOTES - PREFACE


*Date of original publication indicated thus*
(1) Fish (1973:148-53) claims that a description of genre can and should be regarded as a prediction of the shape of the response. My own research (1981:10-14; 1984) confirms that readers have formed opinions about the type of text they encounter before they begin reading and develop a cognitive set which influences the type of reading act which they assume is most appropriate for the perceived reading task. Simply by giving readers an instruction to read a poem (or a novel, or a list of instructions) such a cognitive set would be induced, and this would affect the way in which the text was processed.

(2) See also Benveniste (1971:55-64) and Derrida's critique of Benveniste's argument in Textual Strategies, (Harari, ed.), 1980:82-120).

(3) See Eco (1980:131-49) for a discussion of the relationship between the cultural frames of reference of transmitter and receiver and preferred, aberrant or oppositional responses. Also Hall (1973:51-94). Hall's interpretation is based on an elaboration of Parkin's theory (Parkin, 1972). Morley's (1980) empirical investigation of audience readings of two television programmes of "Nationwide" provides supporting evidence for the above theories, although social class was not found to be the dominant factor it had previously been assumed to be. While these theories of interpretation are primarily concerned with the "reading" of visual media, they also apply to the written text. See for example the oppositional readings of texts by feminist critics such as Millett (1966) or Dworkin (1974).

(4) I use the terms "author" and "audience" as defined by Little (1979) and as used throughout my own research (Campbell, 1979, 1981, 1984) as the equivalent of the terms "transmitter" and "receiver" in communications theory, except that "author" and "audience" excludes the technological meaning of "transmitter" and "receiver".

(6) The distinction between "literary" and "non-literary" text is by no means clearcut, but generally refers to either a difference in function of the text (poetic rather than informational) or the use of unconventional syntagmatic and/or paradigmatic associations. Formalists such as Shklovsky insist that there is such a difference, while deconstructionists such as Derrida deny the distinction. Other attempts to distinguish between literary and non-literary texts tend to degenerate into arguments about the aesthetic and moral justifications of literature (the Coleridge-Johnson - Arnold school, implicitly reinforced by what is or is not included in literature courses in educational institutions).

(7) See Barthes, Roland, *S/Z*, (trans. Richard Miller), (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975:4-5). Barthes ascribes the "readerly" quality to the text itself which is complete and can only be accepted or rejected, but the extent to which any text is "readerly" depends on how "writerly" the reader of the text is, or is allowed to be by "literary institutions".

(8) I use this term as defined in communication theory to describe signifying practices which do not conform to existing conventions, (Fiske, 1982:10-16) and not in the sense of the term as employed in physics or literary criticism.
CHAPTER 1 NOTES

INTERTEXTUAL REFERENTS: MODERNISM AND POST-MODERNISM

(1) See Tanner, Tony, *City of Words*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), for a comprehensive overview of the American novel of the fifties and sixties. Tanner claims that the American author's problematic attitude to control and "patterning" is the basis for the anti-patterning features of the novel of this period (p.15).

(2) Novels such as those of Scott, Austen, Dickens, or Eliot which adhere to the form of historical narrative if not necessarily the historical facts.

(3) Barthelme's narratives (and those of a number of other modernist authors, as Freedman points out), fuse the "inner" and "outer" so that the two are indistinguishable. See Freedman, Ralph, *The Lyrical Novel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

(4) Tanner, (1978:16-17) makes a similar point regarding the author's consciousness of the limitations of language.

(5) Barthelme has stated that fragments are the only form he trusts and his narratives turn the suspicion of conventional patterning into an aesthetic principle so that most of his prose consists of fragments. (Cited in Tanner, 1978:400). The concluding section of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* also consists entirely of fragments.

(7) See for example Lodge, David, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977)


CHAPTER 2 - NOTES

READERS IN/OF PYNCHON


Tanner, Tony, City of Words, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976)


(2) Barth, John, Lost in the Funhouse, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 120-131. The story "Title" (Ibid, 109-117) also deals with the writing process, virtually excluding any other content. Barth indulges in describing the agonies of the birth of a story more than most other post-modernist authors, who tend to content themselves with presenting the baby.

*1970

(3) Barthes, R. (1977:146-8). Bennett in his unpublished paper "Parody, postmodernism and the politics of reading", finds the connection significant, and implies that the events in Paris in 1968 were responsible for the changing attitudes towards the role of the reader, but it should be noted that the role of the reader is an issue which is raised in modern fiction itself by authors such as Borges, Barth or Pynchon well before it became an issue for literary theorists and psycholinguists.

(4) Miller, J.H., (1975:31) comments that great works of literature are likely to be ahead of their critics and Pynchon himself has indicated that he is well aware of trends in literary theory (S.L., 4).
(5) Solberg (1979:37) points out that Pynchon undermines his own innuendoes about V being Stencil's mother as, given the normal gestation period, the dates of V's seduction of Sidney Stencil and Herbert Stencil's birth do not quite fit. Even assuming that Herbert Stencil's accounts of V are accurate (and there is no reason to suppose that they are), Sidney Stencil's first encounter with Victoria occurs in Venice in July, 1899 while Herbert Stencil is born in 1901. Assuming that Sidney Stencil changed his mind about meeting Victoria, the possibility that V is Stencil's mother is not ruled out, but neither is it confirmed. Solberg's claim that V is not Herbert Stencil's mother assumes that the meeting occurred and that the seduction of Sidney Stencil was immediate. This is not confirmed in the text, so that it is impossible to determine whether V is or is not Stencil's mother.

(6) Although V is described throughout by Stencil as a female, he states that he doesn't know what sex V might be (V.,226). Literary critics, however, have accepted without question Stencil's representation of V as female, with the possible exception of Lhamon (1975) whose reading of V is less specifically sex oriented.
CHAPTER 3 - NOTES

THE PROSTHESIS OF COPULA

(1) There are obviously many meanings of V which are not referred to specifically in the novel. Some of these which relate to the content of the novel V, are:

V-letter, devised to facilitate correspondence between World War Two soldiers and their wives, sweethearts and families. These V-letters were written on special stationery and were microfilmed. In the United States the film was "blown up" and printed before delivery. (Blair, W., Hornberger, T., Stewart, R., and Miller, J.E. Jr., Literature of the United States, Vol. 2 (3rd Ed., Scott Foresman & Co., 1970:1437).

V-1 Rocket - Hitler's secret weapon during World War Two. The initial V stood for "Vergeltungswaffe" (vengeance weapon). Winston (1975:285-6) notes that an article on the V-1 appeared in the Oyster Bay Guardian (Pynchon's local paper) on July 2, 1954 while Pynchon was at home working for the Nassau County Department of Public Works.

Graves (1959) notes that the letter V replaced the letter U as one of the five vowels which represented the threshold of the dolmen (womb of rock), also representing the five senses; the five fingers and the five ages of man - A = birth; O = initiation; U (later V) = love; E = repose; I = death.

In electronics V is the symbol for voltage (if constants).
In physics V is the symbol for volume.
In mathematics V is the symbol for vector (magnitude and direction).

Although Pynchon could have selected any initial as the title for his novel, the symbol V, especially to someone with Pynchon's background in physics and mathematics, is an excellent choice as a means of demonstrating the arbitrariness of a signifier.
LIES, LIES AND MORE LIES

(1) Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, (London: Pan, 1973) also has an insane narrator. This has not prevented critics such as Martin Terrence from reading the novel as if the insane narrator were in fact sane. See Terrence, Martin, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and The high cost of living", Modern Fiction Studies, 19 (Spring, 1973), 43-55. Despite narrators confessing their insanity, whether what they say is regarded as "sane" or "insane" seems to depend on whether the reader agrees with the opinions of the narrator or not, an issue which Grass deals with in considerable detail in The Tin Drum.

(2) Booth (1973:325-6) clearly disapproves of such authors as Joyce whose novels give no indication of how the reader is to interpret the text, although he does not appear to have similar reservations about texts which are less complex than Ulysses. Booth's criticism contains more than a hint of disapproval of those modern and post-modern authors who write novels which are difficult to understand (loc.cit.,371-4).


(4) Speculations about the significance of Oedipa's name, as Tanner has pointed out, range from the ridiculous to the even more ridiculous - from Maas as symbol of "mass" suggesting Newton's second law of motion (which ignores other connotations of both Maas and mass) to Oedipa my ass (which Tanner claims is nearer the mark) see Tanner, Tony, Pynchon, (London and New York: Methuen, 1982) p.60.

Although Pynchon deconstructs the relationship between signifier and signified throughout his novels, including the relationship between name and identity (an aspect which will be dealt with in more detail later) the effect of the narrative on both Oedipus and Oedipa is similar insofar as both are subject to the power of the narrative. The fact that Oedipa's quest does not resemble Oedipus's quest does not detract from the similarity of their reactions to this fictional force.

(6) Pynchon admits that in the short story "The Small Rain" he added imagery and literary allusions to make it "literary" (S.L., 4), so that it is certainly possible that he might have applied the motto "make it literary" to his other works, a piece of advice which Pynchon might regard as "bad", but which has kept the industry of Pynchon criticism going - see for example Fowler (1980) or Cowart (1980) or Schaub (1981).
CHAPTER 5 - NOTES

THE READING OF NAMES

(1) Carroll (1964:106-10) states that psychological research has provided little convincing support for the "prison house" concept of language, but Lacan (1977:54-65) places language in the central position, claiming that it is "the world of words which creates the world of things" (65).

(2) Lacan's redefinition of Freud's theories may have been acceptable to French feminists, but at least one American critic has pointed out that Lacan is not only phallocentric, but also "phallo-eccentric. Or in more pointed language, he is a prick" (Gallop, 1976:31). Ruthven (1984:53-5) describes the mixed reception Lacan's theories have received among feminist critics, and it would certainly be difficult to deny that Lacan's theories reinforce the dominant and central position of the male when the phallus takes the place of "logos" as privileged signifier. (See also Derrida, 1975:95-7)

(3) See Gordon (1917:3-35) for an analysis of the function of names in Dickens. Bodelson (1961:39-42) makes the distinction between functions of naming randomly, naming in order to represent the personality of the character and naming to suggest association with other words. Pynchon uses all of the above functions, but with his own variations.

(4) Winston (1976:251-63) states that Pynchon's ancestor, William Pynchon came to America in 1630. The history of the Slothrop family is very similar to that of the Pynchon family as described by Winston. The name "William" may therefore be based on the name of William Pynchon. In Slow Learner Pynchon states that the name Pig Bodine was the name of one of his colleagues in the navy (S.L.,10-11), a person for whom Pynchon had a great deal of admiration. Pynchon also states that the character Pig Bodine in "The Wasteland" represents Pynchon's own voice (racist, sexist and proto-Fascist - S.L.,11). While determining who speaks in Pynchon's voice in the novels would be difficult, if not impossible, given the range of different "voices", Pynchon clearly does not hesitate to use the names of his acquaintances as well as the names of well known public figures such as Kennedy or Rathenau for the "characters" in his novels.
Schaub (1981:71) points out the association between Slothrop's pig costume and that of the mythological figure who shares a similar fate to Slothrop. My reading suggests that Slothrop is stripped of his roles rather than being dismembered (except in the sense of no longer a member of society) or stripped of his identity.
(1) Prince analyses the case of Miss Beauchamp who exhibited radically different and distinct patterns of behaviour and could not remember the activities and thoughts she had when she was behaving in some (but not all) of these distinctive ways. Whether schizophrenic behaviour is or is not an indication of separate identities despite bodily unity is a question which has intrigued psychologists and philosophers for many years. Logical argument (Harre, 1983) denies the possibility that these are separate identities because there could be no limits to the number of different identities which could be distributed among any number of physical bodies. If two (or more) people both claimed to be Napoleon, for example, and if it were accepted that they were indeed Napoleon, it would follow that there could no longer be any specific identity named Napoleon. 

\[ V. \text{ contains a reference to one of the popular books on the question of identity -- The Search for Bridey Murphy -- (V., 95). The description of the book is anything other than flattering "a weird canon of twentieth-century metaphysics" (V., 95) and the motives for the publication of the book attributed to the author even less so. That it is Esther Harvitz, on her way to get a nose job which she hopes will change her identity, who is reading the book underlines the satire.} \]

(2) McHale (1979:86, 97-8) suggests that Pirate Prentice may be responsible for producing all of the passages in the novel -- "any passage whatsoever may be a candidate for the internal world of Pirate's managed fantasies" (97), but this cannot be substantiated within the novel. As McHale admits, quite a number of the other characters are also capable of producing fantasies, and there is in any case no way of establishing who is responsible for producing many of the passages in the novel, including the opening section which McHale claims is one of Pirate's fantasies. Siegel (1976:52) suggests that the opening section in Pynchon's own personal nightmare as taken over by Pirate. Maybe it is, but Siegel's theory can hardly be substantiated within the text.
Greta Erdmann (also referred to as Gretel, which couples her to Katje through the role in the fairytale) is always told by men "who to be" (G.R., 482). She feels that she has more identities than she knows what to do with, but these identities are all roles that she has played, "chromatic images" (G.R., 482) and she has no individual identity apart from these roles. When Slothrop encounters her she has been stripped of her roles, and she immediately re-enacts the role of passive victim as if this would restore a sense of identity. As Max Gillies (1985) observed, the question "Who are you really?" is particularly difficult to answer for actors who spend much of their lives impersonating other identities. See McHale (1979:104-6) for further examples of names which "map" onto other identities.
CHAPTER 7 - NOTES

CATEGORIZATION: THE REAL/IMAGINARY

(1) See for example Mailer (1963:112-4); Lewis (1968); Ravage (1978); Newcombe and Alley (1983); Hanet (1981).


(3) De Lauretis (1983:44-7) points out that "reality" in many cases consists of that which is presented on the television screen; reality is only accessible as televised, captured by the action camera, so that the very terms of the reality-illusion dichotomy have been displaced. She also suggests that where "real" worlds have been replaced by the advances of technology (cities where there was once a natural landscape) the only "reality" which still exists is the reality recorded on film.
CHAPTER 8 - NOTES

CATEGORIZATION - COMIC/SERIOUS

(1) Charney (1978:39) notes the origin of this joke during the Nixon administration when Nixon's dismissal of Archibald Cox during the "Saturday Night Massacre" earned him the title of "Nixon the Cox Sacker". The reference in V. to the joke about the coke sacker, the cork soaker and the sock tucker (V., 361) could therefore be a play on a well publicized political joke of the period in which the novel was written, although obviously not of the fifties. Similarly in Lot 49 the play on the slogan of the postal campaign to stamp out obscene mail "Report Obscene Mail to Your Postmaster" suggests the variations of this slogan which appeared during the sixties such as "Report Obscene Mail to Your Postmistress" or "Use Erogenous Zone Numbers" (Charney, 1978:37).

(2) See for example Schwarzbach, (1978:58); Levine (1978:178); Balliett (1963:113-7); Plimpton (1963:5).

(3) The dramatic build up to this particular line and the use of the unusual word "fur-henchmen" to describe the young children who collect furs for Marvy and Chiclitz strongly suggests a pun, possibly on the statement by Texas Guinan (21 March 1931) that "Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong".


CHAPTER 9 – NOTES

CONFLICTING COGNITIVE SETS: SEXUAL PROSTHESIS OF COPULA

(1) Mary Allen in The Necessary Blankness (1976: 70-5), provides a detailed analysis of the maternal role in Portnoy's Complaint. Dworkin (1974) strongly objects to the way in which the maternal role in fairytales is always associated with wickedness, destructiveness and evil, but does not deny the power associated with this role. Dworkin does point out that in the traditional fairytales, mothers who are not powerful and evil are usually good and dead.

(2) See Tanner (1982:30-1). Tanner emphasizes the mystical descent of Flange and regards Nerissa as a symbol of possible regeneration and redemption. While this is an interpretation which is certainly possible in the context of the story, it ignores the psychological implications of the male-female relationships and romanticizes Flange's inadequacies as an adult male.

(3) Masson (1984) provides a convincingly documented and thoroughly researched account of Freud's submission to public pressure regarding paedophilia and incest which led to a major change in the direction of Freud's research and the development of psycho-analytical theory based on sexual fantasies rather than recollections of actual sexual experiences.


(5) See Fetterley (1978) for an historical analysis of the "bitch" stereotype in American literature.

(6) See Russ (1972); Gubar (1982); Springer (1977); Hardwick (1974) for an analysis of feminine stereotypes in literature.

(7) Millett (1966) was one of the first, but certainly not the last, feminist literary critic to analyse Mailer's attitude to women. See also Fetterley (1977:154-89).
Tanner (1982:32) observes that children are always a source of value in Pynchon, indicative of something positive or negative in an adult. This does not contradict the fact that children in Pynchon's novels are always dominated by adults (either willingly or through force of circumstances). As Thanatz explains to the boy Ludwig, the structure of society depends on submission and dominance (G.R., 737) and children are ideal for the purposes of domination. On a number of occasions reference is made to the conspiracy of fathers and mothers against their children (G.R., 505:674-81) in which children are described as the victims of the adults.

Allen (1976:44-7) points out that Pynchon does not damn male homosexuality with the same violence as female homosexuality and presents male homosexuality as mere foolishness. In Gravity's Rainbow, however, male homosexuality is not presented as mere foolishness, but elevated to a mythical level, not damned, but given mystical dimensions.


BENNETT, J. et.al., *In Search of Identity*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958).


CALVINO, I., If on a winter's night a Traveller, (trans. W. Weaver), (London: Picador, 1982).


CAMPBELL, A.J., Communication in the Classroom, (Canberra, Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1982).


DALY, M., Beyond God the Father, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).


FELDMAN, Irving, "Keeping Cool", Commentary, 36 (September, 1963), 258-60.


GILLIES, M., National Press Club address, (Canberra, Channel 7 T.V., October 31, 1985).


GUINAN, T., "Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong", *New York World - Telegram*, (21 March, 1931).


LITTLE, G., Content, function, wording and word processing, (Canberra: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1979).


STREHLE, S., "Actualism; Pynchon's Debt to Nabokov", Contemporary Literature, 24:1 (Spring, 1983), 30-50.


TANNER, T., City of Words, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976).

TANNER, T., Pynchon, (London & New York: Methuen, 1982).


TERRENCE, M., "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the high cost of living", Modern Fiction Studies, 19 (Spring, 1973), 43-55.


THORDNIEKE, E.L., "Reading as reasoning: a study of mistakes in paragraph reading", Journal of Educational Psychology, 8 (1917), 312-328.


TÖLÖLYAN, K., Pynchon Notes, Names in Gravity's Rainbow, Special issue, 1984.


WILLS, D., & McHOUL, A.W., "Die Welt ist alles was der Fall ist/ Le signe est toujours le signe de la chute", Southern Review, 16:2 (1983), 274-91.


WINSTON, M., "The Quest for Pynchon", Twentieth Century Literature, 21:3 (October, 1978), 278-87.


* denotes year of original publication.