Finding a Sense of Ease in the Creation: Or, Pynchon's Disinformational Map to the Stars

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FINDING A SENSE OF EASE IN THE CREATION
OR, PYNCHON'S DISINFORMATIONAL MAP TO THE STARS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to trace a common thematic link between three of Thomas Pynchon's novels. I shall define what I term disinformation, and expose its correlation to Pynchon's novels.

I find increasingly from V through The Crying of Lot 49 to Gravity's Rainbow, a burgeoning reliance on Pynchon's part to indulge in a stylistic form which invites the most intimate of reader responses.

With each successive novel, and through each successive protagonist the reader more closely understands and experiences the emotional journey Pynchon creates. We find, ultimately, words which hasten our entropy away from a static acceptance of the status quo.
FINDING A SENSE OF EASE IN THE CREATION

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INTRODUCTION

i. The Novel and the Reader

Thomas Pynchon's novels have elicited widely variant critical interpretations. A few critics have expounded on the causal nature of Pynchon's style, recognizing and documenting, to some extent, the link between his work, his style, and the reader's response (Patteson 30-44; Leland 45-53). However, these articles have not adequately covered Pynchon's novels. No critic, thus far, explicates the intense union Pynchon creates. I propose to extend our shared insights into Pynchon's world by addressing the extent and nature of the bond Pynchon forms between the reader and the novel's protagonist.

Although many critics have commented on Pynchon's lack of character development (Tanner 158-61), many have mistakenly assumed that without recognizably approachable characters, the reader cannot develop a strong emotional or intellectual bond to the work. Predominantly, this is true. We cannot relate to characters who emerge infrequently and manically. However, Pynchon does elicit a response from his reader. From the least tutored to the most scholastically disciplined audience comes an almost certain clinical disgust and bewilderment. However, Pynchon provides a wealth of information and insight for the reader who first allows himself a sensual reaction, and then investigates the dynamics of that reaction. Richard Poirer states, "The ideal reader of Pynchon probably would be more amateur than professional, but amateur in a positive sense -- capable of
unscheduled responses even while being generally learned and inquisitive" (154). Poirer's point, though, needs clarification and augmentation. The reader must allow himself unscheduled responses in order to emotionally immerse himself in the work. A great deal of the central themes must be experienced and not merely contemplated. But we must not take Poirer's point too far. For the Pynchon reader must be sophisticated in terms of literary analysis. The extreme complexities of style and substance will undoubtedly overwhelm a less tutored reader. Ironically, though, the disciplined reader must leave behind his standard tools of literary investigation when he enters Pynchon's world. For Pynchon repeatedly attempts to lure the reader into imposing modernist standards of interpretation on his works. When we fall prey to Pynchon's siren call and, in V for example, try to uncover the mystery of V, we find ourselves holding a set of antiquated literary maps, leading to nothing. The reader must, then, possess the sophistication to stay with Pynchon's multiple stylistic choices and convoluted plot line. But, in addition, we must hold in abeyance contemporary schools of interpretation and allow ourselves a less intellectual, more emotional response to the works at hand. For Pynchon creates immediate mental reactions which mirror the psychological and moral reactions we should have to the information he presents. In keeping with his integral standards of inversion, Pynchon plainly presents this information in the form of what I shall term disinformation. My task shall be to define and reveal said disinformation, and show the extent to which this literary technique sparks mental peregrinations which ultimately enfold us in the emotional truths of
the novels.

**ii. Disinformation**

Thomas Pynchon saturates his three novels with names, dates, places, events, dreams, desires, deaths, and rebirths. This plethora of information takes four forms. First, Pynchon includes facts which have a correspondent reality for the reader. For example, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa recalls viewing a painting by Remedios Varo. Both painting and artist exist in our world. The second form, static information, Pynchon creates and leaves constant throughout the work at hand. We find in *V*, for example, that Benny Profane not only undergoes no name changes, but remains a schlemiel throughout. The third mode of data I term flexible information. This material consistently eludes any attempts on the part of the reader to distinguish between literary fact and imaginative discourse. For example, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pokler questions the identity of the girl sent to him each year by the Gestapo. Although Major Weissmann would have Pokler believe that the young girl sent to him is his daughter, Ilse, Pokler remains sceptical: "Even as Pokler embraced her the perverse whispering began. Is it the same one? Have they sent you a different child?" (486). This "flexible information" allies the reader to one or another character in the novels, as Pynchon never resolves the inherent uncertainties of the scenes he creates. We suffer the same fate of helplessness as Pokler in discerning any verifiable "truth." Finally, Pynchon periodically draws the reader into false assumptions. He presents "facts" which turn out to be thoroughly inaccurate. The Bad Priest in *V*, for
example, we assume to be a man until Pynchon proves us incorrect.

### iii. A Joint Venture

The latter two forms of problematic data I group together under the heading "disinformation." In this treatise I shall examine Pynchon's disinformation campaign and reveal its crucial role in linking reader to protagonist -- a union whose reward is one of mutual disinheritance from the status quo. It does not matter whether the reader feels Pynchon's novels end either optimistically or pessimistically. For Pynchon primarily elicits a discordant mental response from his reader. That is, the reader cannot accept the information presented to him and feels, at the very least, annoyed, if not completely enraged. If the reader comes to side with Slothrop, or Pynchon's other protagonists, they can no longer accept the course of history, and must feel the impulse to redefine general codes of behavior.

In V Pynchon leads the reader into making inaccurate assumptions concerning the Bad Priest. These technical misreadings unite the reader and speaker, as an underlying pattern of metaphorical truth emerges. Pynchon, in this incident as throughout his novels, metaphorically displays the morally problematic nature of accepting the decisions of others. When the individual does not question the validity of his actions he allows for breaches of moral conduct. As the veil of conjecture falls incidents illuminate broader truths. And as a novel's protagonist might realize the certainty of his misassumptions, the reader begins to understand the significance of his own misreadings. Through The Crying of Lot 49 Pynchon solidifies the bond between reader and protagonist as the question of error
becomes moot. Overwhelmingly we find questions without answers and the pain of uncertainty without the promise of revelation. The journey eclipses the destination as we move toward Gravity's Rainbow. In Pynchon's final novel, the reader's mental quest continues as Pynchon inexorably links the reader to Tyrone Slothrop. Slothrop cements and enacts this mutual destiny by constantly questioning any incoming data and ultimately acting upon the metaphorical underpinnings. If accuracies allow for betrayal, Slothrop will misalign the social register. For Slothrop avoids betraying his fellow human beings by continually advancing false information. As Pynchon seeds a literary minefield of inaccuracies and uncertainable potentialities, he constructs a cryptic vision of the spiritual wasteland left in the wake of World War II. To combat this seemingly endless onslaught of misanthropic uncertainty, Slothrop, and hence the reader, finds a metaphorical relevance in the barrage of errant information. Through the process of disinformation, Pynchon transmogrifies reader into protagonist, and marries their causes into one of mutual search and, if not renewal, then at least a von Braunian transformation.

I / V

i. Fausto's Methodical Linguistic Madness

In his first novel, V, Pynchon unveils his ever-elusive linguistic realities. Words which define our past, present, and future become the intractable slaves of the constantly changing will or fancy of men. For Pynchon those who control the words control any ephemeral version of a reality. And, as Richard Patteson so bluntly states, "In V. what is
reported as fact often turns out to be mere hypothesis or rank fabrication" (42). To begin, Paola gives Herbert Stencil her father's journal to read. This diary depicts Fausto's life, diagrams his self-proclaimed succession of identities -- "We can justify any apologia simply by calling life a successive rejection of personalities" (286) -- and provides an overview of the island of Malta and her people. Fausto illuminates Pynchon's concern with disinformation as he frankly admits the potential inaccuracies of his journal: "Now memory is a traitor: gilding, altering. The word is, in sad fact, meaningless, based as it is on the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous" (287). Fausto's warning primarily addresses the problematic nature of personal viewpoints: a man's attitudes and experiences undoubtedly color his observations; however, it also signals the tenuous grip the reader holds on any fully ascertainable "facts." Although he addresses Stencil in the following quotation, Patteson could as easily refer to Fausto when he writes, "The narrator's reliability is consistently undermined by dream, disguise, and 'poetic license.' . . . The plot . . . is all that the case is. If a pattern, coherent story, or history exists, it must be put together by the reader, who, in a sense, mimics Stencil by supplying the pieces necessary to form a whole" (32). Additionally, we find in each of Pynchon's novels a marked vulnerability to disinformation on the part of characters who subscribe to the false assumption of singular continuous identity. For example, in The Crying of Lot 49, Oedipa deludes herself that her husband, Mucho, remains static, despite his spiritual depreciation at the used car lot. The danger of this mental myopia escalates as Oedipa eventually confronts a
drugged-out stranger in the body of her husband. Reflecting on an early prosaic endeavor, Fausto comments, "The date is of course 3 September 1939: the mixing of metaphors, crowding of detail, rhetoric-for-its-own-sake only one way of saying the balloon had gone up, illustrating again and certainly not for the last time the colorful whimsy of history" (287).

**ii. The Bad Priest**

The drama of the Bad Priest typifies Fausto's elusive presentation of facts. To summarize, during the Second World War, on the island of Malta, there lives a character known to the locals as "the Bad Priest." This shadowy figure avoids the common practices of priests and instead maintains a spectral aura as he avoids the light of public scrutiny while advising young women in darkened confessionals. The town assumes the priest is a man although many of the superstitious locals consider the priest to be the Devil himself.

Our first introduction to the Bad Priest takes place when Fausto describes Father Avalanche, another local holy man: "He appears infrequently in these journals, always faceless, serving more as foil to his opposite number the Bad Priest" (292). Fausto's reference to the Bad Priest is almost casual. We learn more of the Bad Priest from a distraught Elena:

No one knows his name or his parish. There is only superstitious rumor; ex-communicated, confederates with the Dark One. He lives in an old villa past Sliema, near the sea. Found E. one night alone in the street. Perhaps he's been out prowling for souls. A sinister figure, she said, but with the
mouth of a Christ. The eyes were shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat: all she could see were soft cheeks, even teeth (293).

Her description reveals the community's lack of solid information and draws the reader into a series of misconceptions. First we assume that the Bad Priest is a male: "his name."

Secondly Fausto tempts us to simply disregard the Bad Priest and greatly undercuts her significance by qualifying the incoming data as "superstitious rumor." Fausto then employs hyperbole as the Bad Priest "confederates with the Dark One."

Such description begs to be dismissed as imaginative folly. However, this description is not without truth. The metaphorical status that the Priest later gains, Fausto foreshadows with "a sinister figure, she said, but with the mouth of a Christ." For ultimately the character represents neither good nor evil, but the island itself, and the spirit of its people.

This retreat into metaphor Fausto climaxes with the dismemberment of the Priest. The train of symbolism begins with Elena's death: "The day after Elena's revelation the Luftwaffe came in thirteen times. Elena was killed in the early morning" (320). The women, like the island, fall under the weight of the German War Machine. The verity of incoming information loses its import as Fausto's spirit dies: "And then a blank space" (320). What appears to be a sinister male figure lies crushed, too: "The Bad Priest wedged under a fallen beam" (320). However, in this demise we find the metaphorical truth: "It's a lady" (320). Metaphorical, for although we find ourselves holding a bag full of incorrect notions, any newfound truths fit predominantly symbolic schemes of order. The "woman"
dies like the death of a people and a culture, "suffering Christ foreshortened, on the bare skull, one eye and one socket, staring up at me: a dark hole for a mouth, stumps at the bottom of the legs. And the blood which had formed a black sash across the waist, flowing down both sides from the navel" (322). And like the island the woman moans under Germany's force: "At the first bomb-bursts, she moaned . . . she began to cry. Tearless, half-nasal; more a curious succession of drawn-out wails, originating far back in the mouth cavity. All through the raid she cried" (322).

Fausto provides the reader with factual inaccuracies at the outset of his literary investigations, such as the unveiling of the Bad Priest. However, we merely suffer from the same misinterpretations that the momentary protagonist (in this case Fausto) falls prey to. Hence disinformation closely allies reader and protagonist. Secondly, the lack of specific truths reflects the scene of description: i.e. a war zone wherein the masses move and act according to the directives of an unapproachable or illusory source. Thirdly, as the "truth" comes out we find it more closely allied to metaphor than any static reality. The more we learn of the Bad Priest the more symbolic she becomes. Eventually she personifies the marriage of man and machine as she is dismantled. But as her demise occurs we see the self-destructive union of man and machine realizing its destiny. For the ultimate union, in which man becomes a vehicle of immense destructive capability, leads to the death of this creation, and hence the death of man. So disinformation changes the relationship between the reader and the novel as the novel itself shifts from the description
of a static reality to the description of a metaphorical reality.

**iii. Searching for the Light of Reason**

As Pynchon employs a wide variety of writing styles, he increasingly obscures the light of reason. We find plot lines and character delineations which fall ever further from a societal core of "normalcy." One critic accidentally provides insight into the literary entropy of *V*. In tracing much of *V*'s technique to Conrad and Woolf, Mark Siegel writes:

> Pynchon also examines the literary techniques, such as Conrad's impressionism and Woolf's interior monologue, by which writers have attempted to cope with the absence of shared values created by the collapse of culture. In *V*, images and allusions are manipulated cavalierly, often for the mere game of manipulation. (41)

Although the stylistic sources Siegel cites may be accurate, the important point is lost on him. Pynchon's manipulation of images and allusions draws the reader into the morally fragmented world of the novel. We begin to feel the collapse of a culture as we can no longer discern what values are left to share.

Throughout *V* Pynchon resolves the conflict of inaccurate static information by under-scoring these miscues with metaphorical truths. The overwhelming concern of the novel shifts from a grail-like search for a static *V* to the implications inherent in the act of searching. As we search for an approachable and comprehensible pattern of existence within the novel, we feel the moral malaise which affects those we read about. In a sense
we, too, fall victim to the war. In the incident concerning the Bad Priest, Pynchon offers disinformation clues which the reader may concentrate on. In the same fashion Pynchon constantly tempts the reader into trying to unlock the secret of V. He infuses the novel with V-nouns, all of which spark an intellectual involvement to some degree on our part. What does Veronica, the rat, symbolize? Is V a place to be found, such as Valletta? However, these "coincidences" can only taunt the reader, leaving him with the same unease that Stencil feels, for Pynchon never provides any definitive correlations or "answers." In conclusion, V's strength lies in its ability to invoke the need to search and reexamine the individual decision as it pertains to the larger canvas. In order to avoid a technological suicide we must divorce ourselves from the machinistic 20th century impulses we have been programmed to feel and allow for the inherent verity of nature.

Having impregnated the reader with such a desire to seek, we find, in this novel, and increasingly throughout the Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, that our very act of intellectual motion eclipses any would-be findings. Additionally, and ironically, this mental diffusion away from a core of oftentimes erroneous "facts" provides the sole abrogation against 20th century man's moral entropy. John Leland warns us that "Critics have made Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 an elaborate mystery to be de-coded, a task comparable to Oedipa's attempt to uncover the enigma of Tristero." However, we may heed his further advice, for "As readers we are like Oedipa, first overwhelmed with information and then denied pattern; and like her, we must become a fictional Maxwell's
Demon . . and attempt to sort of the information presented to us without--and such is impossible--increasing entropy, disorder, or ambiguity" (Leland 45-49).

II / The Crying of Lot 49
i. In Which Oedipa's World Turns Curious

In her attempts to uncover the Inverarity legacy, Oedipa Maas, in The Crying of Lot 49, stumbles upon a world which parallels her own. Physically this world takes the form of a non-governmental postal route which operates independently and illegally. Pynchon encapsulates Oedipa's history prior to the opening of the novel with the line, "One summer afternoon Mrs. Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue" (1). Unlike the well preserved existence of a Tupperware party, whose greatest threat and uncertainty lies in the fondue, the brave new world Oedipa faces offers little of certainty. This proves vastly ironic as the novel unfolds, for increasingly Oedipa must constantly question any information she uncovers, and evaluate not only its validity, but also its very existence. Near the outset of the story Oedipa comes upon a symbol in the women's bathroom of The Scope -- a loop, triangle, and trapezoid -- and as she copies it into her notebook she thinks, "God, hieroglyphics" (34). Her reaction indicates two important points. Most obviously, Oedipa cannot understand the significance of the image, in that it is as inscrutable as hieroglyphics. Secondly, Oedipa's mental remark reveals her assignation of meaning to the sign. She assumes that a loop, triangle, and trapezoid symbolize something and do not merely
represent the doodlings of a former patron. Also, she assumes that the drawing relates to the message by Kirby written above it. Oedipa's decision to annotate this message and the underlying symbol as opposed to any number of "lipsticked obscenities" reveals her desire to find something of significance, while her inclusion of two separate entities (words and drawing) underscores her willingness to create meaning -- to impose order onto chaotic patterns. This desire reasserts itself during the intermission of The Courier's Tragedy:

Oedipa headed for the ladies' room. She looked idly around for the symbol she'd seen the other night in The Scope, but all the walls, suprisingly, were blank. She could not say why, exactly, but felt threatened by this absense of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for. (48)

Oedipa not only searches for the sign, which might offer some connection for her to hold on to, but she feels "threatened" by a clean bathroom. Communication offers meaning and salvation from a chaotic existence, and thus far she finds none.

**ii. The Reader's World Turns Curious**

Until this point the reader may remain somewhat detached from Oedipa, for her notions appear glowingly self-imposed, as she amalgamates and interprets the influx of events and symbols which confront her. However, Pynchon cleverly begins to unite reader to protagonist in chapter four. We find that "under the symbol she'd copied off the latrine wall of The Scope into her memobook, she wrote *Shall I project a world?*" (59). The line obviously refers to her conversation with Driblette, who equates his directorial efforts with
the projector at the planetarium. Reality, he implies, whether it be of a play or another art form, lies inert in the written word, but comes to life under the mental control of a director or visionary. Oedipa's adoption of this viewpoint reinforces the reader's sense of her potential unreliability. As Jeffrey Meikle states, "the reader suspects not that Oedipa is imagining her pieces of evidence but that she is bringing them into existence, that she acts as a catalyst for their creation" (292). For if Oedipa knowingly takes on the mantle of projectionist, her world must be viewed as self-created and potentially solely self-satisfying, at the expense of alternative explanations. But immediately after he undercuts Oedipa, Pynchon introduces Stanley Koteks who, at his desk at Yoyodyne, "wasn't working, only doodling with a fat felt pencil this sign:" (60). The coincidence "arrests" Oedipa and exonerates her previously questionable projections as the reader too scrutinizes the possible connections. What Pynchon labels a "coincidence" inextricably links the reader to Oedipa.

Oedipa begins to think of the image as the "Waste symbol," and as Pynchon presaged, "Things then did not delay in turning curious" (28), for before she reaches John Nefastis she visits a home for senior citizens created by Inverarity. While speaking to Mr. Thoth she sees his grandfather's ring which bears the Waste symbol. The meanings multiply as Oedipa learns the grandfather cut the ring off of a member of Trystero. Although we can only guess at the significance herein, Pynchon prompts us to join Oedipa by rendering her reaction in a strongly emotive description: "She looked around, spooked at the sunlight
pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the center of some intricate crystal, and said, 'My God!' (67). Just as a mystery novelist offers clues to a crime, constantly tempting the reader into solving that crime, so Pynchon gives the reader and Oedipa just enough information or coincidences to create his/her own reality. Tony Tanner writes: "We are all of us 'synthesizing' one way or another, sensitively or crudely, to our confusion as the case may be, and Oedipa's plight is only an extension of our own" (180). And, to quote Meikle again:

In fact, by leading his reader to connect spatially and chronologically unrelated images and to track down sources, Pynchon forces the reader to assume, at least momentarily, her consciousness. His book becomes a sort of 'Necronomicon,' sensitizing the potential adept to a new mode of perception through which all discrete phenomena become interconnected parts of a synchronistic unity too vast for comprehension and thus threatening. Where Lovecraft concentrates on the result, Pynchon exposes the paranoid frame of mind that leads to it: form and content coalesce. (293)

Before we immerse ourselves too deeply in the mire of coincidence, Pynchon offers Metzger's comic appraisal of the symbol's inherent value: "'Women,' he only said, 'Who can tell what goes on with them?'" (68). Metzger's humorous, casual comment provides a temporary panacea against Oedipa's growing moral disturbance, for the reader may choose to adopt his comic cynicism and disregard Oedipa's developmental pilgrimage. However,
if the reader refutes Metzger's plebian dismissal, then Metzger's very casuality deepens the import of Oedipa's discoveries. For, through Metzger, Pynchon allows the reader a simplistic reading of the plot development. If we avoid such explanations we fall deeper into Pynchon's well of uncertainty.

After teasing the reader into a casual intellectual scrutiny of the symbol, an investigation which earmarks our growing communality of purpose with Oedipa, Pynchon cements that bond by bombarding us with "facts," or at least information which comes from what appears to be a reliable source. Oedipa visits Genghis Cohen, who shows her a watermark cancellation of a 1940 Pony Express stamp whose image resembles her Waste symbol. Cohen then reveals the origin of this symbol as he displays the Thurn and Taxis symbol - a post horn. Oedipa shares our confusion as she states, "Then the watermark you found is nearly the same thing, except for the extra little doojigger sort of coming out of the bell."

Cohen's reply, "It sounds ridiculous, but my guess is it's a mute," offers Oedipa and the reader a plausible connection: "She nodded. The black costumes, the silence, the secrecy. Whoever they were their aim was to mute the Thurn and Taxis post horn" (70).

iii. The Emergence of the Post Horn

Pynchon's final twist to this chapter deftly coalesces the patterns hitherto begun and opens the gate for Oedipa's journey through the second half of the novel. Perhaps Oedipa feels at ease with Cohen because he reveals such crucial data: material which, in our scheme of interpretation, is static reality. Spurred by Cohen's apparent insightfulness, she
"told him then all about old Mr. Thoth's signet ring, and the symbol she'd caught Stanley Koteks doodling, and the muted horn drawn in the ladies' room at The Scope" (71).

Cohen's reaction sets the stage for Oedipa's future findings: "'Whatever it is,' he hardly needed to say, 'they're apparently still quite active'" (71). Although Cohen "hardly needed to say" that, he did. His random remark makes all the more tempting our belief in the muted post horn. Additionally, when Oedipa proposes to inform the government, Cohen sounds "nervous, or suddenly in retreat" (71). His eerie response disallows any attempts on our part or Oedipa's to neatly dismiss the issue.

No one may dismiss the muted post horn, for we reach, at this point, a critical juncture. Oedipa's quest, thus far, provides her with a storehouse of information, the dissemination of which she avoids. With the advent of chapter five, however, her scrutiny begins.

Oedipa's subsequent pattern of action melds into a metaphorical response to her previous discoveries. Within the first four chapters she recognizes her Tupperware existence as a highly polished veneer. Her journey into Inverarity's world brings to light Oedipa's tenuous vision beyond that veneer. In a metaphorical reaction to this she visits John Nefastis and attempts to conquer her growing trend toward mental entropy by moving the piston in his Maxwell's Demon. Oedipa fears that she is losing her understanding of the parameters of her existence. As she fails to focus her mental camera, as the elements of her world appear too diffuse to collate, she tries to tunnel her mental energy into a small box. Her attempt fails, and so she tries to physically flee the looming spectre of her personal
dissolution, the post horn:

Either Trystero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpenetrated with the dead man's estate. Here in San Francisco, away from all tangible assets of that estate, there might still be a chance of getting the whole thing to go away and disintegrate quietly. She had only to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix. (80)

Oedipa, though, cannot escape: "it took her no more than an hour to catch sight of a muted post horn" (80).

Each horn she encounters this night broadens the metaphorical scheme until Oedipa's world offers no safe harbors of self-delusion. Previously, in her intellectually anti-prurient realm, Oedipa seals herself in a mentally airtight social canister. This visionary tupperware safely encloses Oedipa in an almost suburban colonialism in which Oedipa, as purveyor, cannot see beyond the limits of her domain's immediate, ephemeral needs. As the posthorn brands morally obscene the static realities of Oedipa's former life, she seeks aid from a man in a club. However, he merely typifies, both metaphorically and literally, the increasing unaccountability of Oedipa's men.

In the Greek Way she meets a member of the Inamorati Anonymous whose tale of the founder of his group signals the unreliability of romantic love in Oedipa's former world.
In addition, the story ironically links romantic love with suicide. This cannot escape notice as we find all of the men involved with Oedipa committing suicide of one fashion or another -- physical, mental, or spiritual. The horn continues to emerge:

And spent the rest of the night finding the image of the Trystero post horn.

In Chinatown, in the dark window of a herbalist, she thought she saw it on a sign among ideographs. But the streetlight was dim. Later, on a sidewalk, she saw two of them in chalk, 20 feet apart. Between them a complicated array of boxes, some with letters, some with numbers. A kid's game? Places on a map, dates from a secret history? (86)

At this point the horn announces yet another tint of disinformation. The reader cannot accept the overwhelming number of purported posthorns. And so we share in Oedipa's nightmare of uncertainty.

Oedipa's real or imagined visionary landscape begins to unfold as the symbol reaches out to communicate to her. Among ideographs, one of man's oldest means of communication, she spots it. And written in chalk, like hieroglyphics, the post horn makes a second primitive communicatory gesture. Perhaps all nations share in this recurrent nightmare in which not even a return to childhood offers safety:

In Golden Gate Park she came on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering . . . They knew about the post horn, but nothing of the chalked game Oedipa had seen on the
sidewalk. You used only one image and it was a jump-rope game, a little
girl explained: you stepped alternately in the loop, the bell, and the mute,
while your girlfriend sang:

  Tristoe, Tristoe, one two, three,

  Turning taxi from across the sea . . .

"Thurn and Taxis, you mean?"

They'd never heard it that way. Went on warming their hands at an
invisible fire. Oedipa, to retaliate, stopped believing in them. (87-89)

In this dream-like encounter Oedipa lightens the weighty presence of the symbol with the
innocence of childhood, as the symbol, at this point, becomes an emblem of youth.

Although she might achieve some degree of ease in this joining of past and present (her
past innocence vs. her present state of advanced paranoia), Oedipa pushes the illusion too
far and the children refute her attempts at a simple collective explanation: "They'd never
heard it that way" (88).

If Oedipa cannot return to childhood to find refuge, perhaps she can explicate her
growing deluge of flexible information by going back to its source -- Inverarity. Hence,
"In an all-night Mexican greasy spoon off 24th, she found a piece of her past, in the form
of one Jesus Arrabal... 'Hey,' he greeted Oedipa, 'you were the lady in Mazatlan... Are you still with that gringo who spent too much money on you? The oligarchist, the
miracle?" (88). Jesus brings back, momentarily, Pierce Inverarity to Oedipa's mind, and
absently touches upon Oedipa's growing illumination as he says, "You know what a miracle is . . . another world's intrusion into this one" (88). In a final stamp Pynchon inexorably links Oedipa's past and present as she finds handstruck on a 1904 copy of the anarcho-syndicalist paper, Regeneracion, the post horn.

This episode climaxes Oedipa's encounters with the symbol of her regeneration, and each subsequent sighting -- on gang jackets, on a Negro bus, in a laundromat, on a balance-book, in a latrine -- simply separates her further and further from the world she once inhabited: "Decorating each alienation, each species of withdrawl, as cufflink, decal, aimless doodling, there was somehow always the post horn. She grew so to expect it that perhaps she did not see it quite as often as she later was to remember seeing it. A couple or three times would really have been enough. Or too much" (91). "Too much" Pynchon writes, for every sighting symbolically articulates the growing dissolution of Oedipa's suburban paradise.

Oedipa finds the final post horn of her odyssey tattooed on the hand of an old sailor. Although the sailor spins no great tale for Oedipa, she leaves him as affected as the wedding guest in Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," because her momentary stay in his flop house offers her the chance to reflect upon her immersion in this separate reality of the Trystero. Pynchon's writing at this point lyrically mirrors Oedipa's chaotic mindset as he mixes memory and desire. The flexible information which bombarded Oedipa the previous night coalesces into a "music made purely of Antartic loneliness and fright" (96). For as
she travels ever-deeper into the Inverarity legacy, Oedipa realizes a growing isolation.

Like a lone polar explorer she searches the wasteland of her previous existence for patterns of meaning.

*iv. What the Horn Announces*

After following a carrier for the WASTE system Oedipa returns to Kinneret. But her confrontation with the disinformational network of the WASTE Empire forever alters Oedipa's life. To Oedipa this information either seems completely unbelievable or its existence appears to rely solely upon the belief of its followers, like some great mass of self-deception. Throughout his writings Pynchon employs disinformation in such a way as to ally reader and novel. We find at this point, in *Lot 49*, that our uncertainty concerning the WASTE system thwarts our understanding of the novel. This causes an entropy of focus, as our narrative vision chases variant schemes of understanding. However, the metaphorical truth inherent in this parallel world emerges as Oedipa finds her former world caught in a state of moral entropy which mirrors the reader's mental diffusion. Hilarius loses his mind as he feels the weight of his former crimes of profession crush him: "'I worked,' Hilarius told her, 'on experimentally-induced insanity'" (102). Her husband loses all objectivity as he drowns in a sea of LSD, while Metzger runs off with a teenage groupie. And Randolph Dribblette walks into the ocean. Oedipa begins to assess her situation:

They are stripping from me, she said subvocally -- feeling like a fluttering
curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss -- they are stripping away, one by one, my men. My shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved 15-year-old; my best guide back to the Trystero has taken a Brody. Where am I? (114)

Oedipa might confront this disinformational campaign by following Fallopian's advice and "Write down what you can't deny. Your hard intelligence. But then write down what you've only speculated, assumed" (126). However, her mental reexamination of her adventure, as depicted in the final pages of the novel, offers no positive explanation.

Pynchon presents Oedipa and the reader with a history of the Trystero, and it is within these pages that the answers to her quest may be found. The answers come in the form of metaphorical truths. Oedipa's wanderings leave her The Disinherited. She cannot inherit the world of any of her men, for she sees now, too clearly, the inherent moral malaise which plagues that world. Instead she finds herself in a metaphorical campaign of obstruction, terror, and depredation paralleling Trystero's political actions. Oedipa strives to refute the increasingly entropic nature of her universe. But when she sleeps the conflict looms ever larger on her horizon: "The toothaches got worse, she dreamed of disembodied voices from whose malignance there was no appeal, the soft dusk of mirrors
out of which something was about to walk, and empty rooms that waited for her. Your gynecologist has no test for what she was pregnant with" (131). Neither Oedipa nor we ever find out any static answers. Leland writes:

Oedipa's question reaches to the heart of the emptiness, yet her attempts to "fill" the void and purge the order of words of its essential ambiguity fail . . . Ultimately, the futility of Oedipa's interpretative task is shared by the reader who, in confronting Pynchon's fiction, feels compelled to impose patterns of allegory and symbolism on the "bits" of confusing data Pynchon gives us . . . these attempts to impose pattern are buried in "noise" (52-53)

We do not learn who will buy Lot 49, nor do we discern the extent to which Oedipa's journey is real or imagined. These questions Pynchon never answers. For Oedipa and the reader find the answers inherent in the act of questioning. No singular entity can explain the torrent of connected or disconnected information which overwhelms us daily. All that Oedipa can do is question, and hence, think. The reader must question as well. Pynchon continually forces us to question the plot line and character delineation. Additionally, through various stylistic choices we increasingly feel the plight of the protagonist. As emotion and intellect strive to achieve a harmony of understanding, we grow heavy with the knowledge of experience. And so the answers prove ever-elusive as the act of questioning impregnates Oedipa, the novel, and the reader with the child of a new vision. Her progeny is knowledge as Oedipa dares to question the nature of her world. The
existence of the Trystero ultimately will not affect Oedipa's destiny. However, her increasing questioning of her society and the role she chooses to play in that society will. No longer a slave to the will of her male companions, Oedipa realizes a growing freedom as she creates an identity which can exist as a parallel universe to that of her increasingly dissolute male contemporaries.

III / *Gravity's Rainbow*

In order to begin to fathom the limits of Pynchon's stylistic and expository constructs, we must canvas, as fully as possible, *Gravity's Rainbow*. Throughout the novel Pynchon includes disinformation which continues to unite reader and novel. With each successive section two things happen. First of all, disinformation grows ever larger, like a mutant communicatory vine on the walls of Babel. Characters lose what little sense of communication and communion they might feel at the outset. Secondly, Slothrop continually takes measure of the moral grace of his environment. And as the world runs backward toward chaos, Slothrop moves backward towards youth, innocence, and eventually a pre-birth state of natural dissemination. As the woof and weave of the world grows intractable, Slothrop fades away, and brings us with him.

*i. Tyrone Slothrop*

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's visions of uncertainty, disinherence, and self-absorbed examination amalgamate into a grand macabre portrait of post World War II western man. Tyrone Slothrop illuminates the growing psychological disorder of our
world as he confronts a panorama of sybaritic characters. Like Oedipa, Slothrop constantly questions the physical and psychological mechanisms of the world he encounters.

However, unlike Oedipa, who distances herself from her environment, Slothrop falls completely under the machinations of his world. In order to more fully examine man's scientific and societal constructs, Pynchon creates a character who can be seen as an elemental part of man's historical passage. In addition, Pynchon transforms Slothrop into a literary eyeglass through which we may witness the events of the novel. However, his form necessitates a parallel inspection, for he, at no time, remains the objective protagonist.

The quintessential 20th Century man, programmed from birth, Slothrop projects a world replete with characters who embody the demise of all that went before them. The evolution of countless cultures spins backward down the widening gyre, as man increasingly worships his baser instincts. The codes of behavior and physical, emotional, and moral survival laid down over countless generations fall prey to the cultural genocide wrought by the war.

While binding the audience to Slothrop, disinformation concurrently offers the reader an insight into the psychological groundwork of the text. However, in this, Pynchon's bleakest novel, disinformation's very presence damn both the reader and the nation of characters. For, ultimately, in his search for order, Slothrop finds only a morally entropic wasteland in which the vestiges of salvation lie dormant in the natural world and in the artifacts of our existence. Mark Siegel writes, "Gravity's Rainbow provides a wealth of
materials which, when extracted from the context of the novel, can be used to support conflicting interpretations” (39). The novel's riches compound the problems of approachability, which entrenches Pynchon's disinformatory scheme. Disinformation fuels western man's rapid journey toward moral dissolution. What we speculate or assume, indeed the entire overt pattern of information Pynchon presents, inherently lacks a moral foundation. Against the natural landscape of sky, earth, and water, man constructs a reality whose central precepts fall into disorder under the pressure of an ever-increasing weight of technological advancement and moral dissolution.

**ii. The Vestiges of an Ancient Civilization**

As Oedipa's knowledge and understanding of Inverarity come first through her investigation of his "estate," or the artifacts of his existence, such as his stamp collection, so too the reader's vision of *Gravity's Rainbow* stems, initially, from Pynchon's inventory and appraisal of the accoutrements of Slothrop's work. Pynchon introduces not Tyrone Slothrop, but his desk. We cannot dismiss the importance of that with which we surround ourselves. The artifacts with which man embroiders his life and times reveal his culture, desires, and fears. From the earliest paintings which edify the hunt, to the holistic visions of Brancusi, or the magically non-absorbent wax paper of Teddy Bloat, man creates an animate world which parallels his psychological and physical world. But like the Maxwell's Demon, which promises an eternity of sorts, but can never deliver, man's creations, throughout the novel, retain their structure but lose their essence. That is, the
spirit which born them can no longer drive them. Pynchon's description of Slothrop's desk begins:

tantivy's desk is neat, slothrop's is a godawful mess. it hasn't been cleaned down to the original wood surface since 1942. things have fallen roughly into layers, over a base of bureaucratic smegma that sifts steadily to the bottom, made up of millions of tiny red and brown curls of rubber eraser, pencil shavings, dried tea or coffee stains, traces of sugar and household milk, much cigarette ash, very fine black debris picked and flung from typewriter ribbons, decomposing library paste, broken aspirins ground to powder . . . a dictionary of technical german, an f.o. special handbook or town plan -- and usually, unless it's been pinched or thrown away, a news of the world somewhere too -- slothrop's a faithful reader.

(20-21)

the entire description fills more than a page of text. the items themselves recall the indolent, innocent life slothrop led before the war. they reveal his american ease in which the greatest threat is a sore throat. just as mucho finds revelations or recreations of former lives in the used cars he sells, strewn about in the iconographic form of combs and savings stamps, so may the reader see layers of a soon to be forgotten time or world on slothrop's desk. in introducing the theme of a world whose cultural signposts prove ever more hollow, pynchon includes artifacts which correlate to man's most basic actions. the work
a man must do to make a living. Pynchon reflects in the standard desk accoutrements. We
find pencil shavings, curls of eraser, and library paste. Phone numbers, unanswered
letters, music, and jigsaw puzzle pieces signal the pleasures of leisure time. And romantic
sunsets, sexy pin-ups, shoe polish and hair tonic comprise the standard press kit for sex.

Tragically these items appear as relics of a dwindling past. Pynchon linguistically
unearths these tokens of Slothrop's former concerns, as an anthropologist uncovers the
tools of ancient civilizations. As Slothrop faces the future these relics signal the end of his
personal ease. These most elementary of urges and necessities lose their importance as
Slothrop's physical and moral life comes under an escalating threat of extinction.

Technically this passage, through its volume of detail and careful stacking of items, reflects
the excessively layered and dense novel at large. Additionally, disinformation begins its
subtle threading of the text at this point, for when viewed objectively, that is, without a
sense of suspension of disbelief, we see too much. That is, the volume of items
supposedly piled on Slothrop's desk break all laws of gravity by not falling to the floor.
Pynchon creates an almost surrealistic vision of a cluttered desk, and then, lest we protest,
surrounds this image with the very static reality of Teddy Bloat, who collects information
on Slothrop. Pynchon pulls our attention away from this behemoth of a desk by focusing
Bloat's attention on the map.

iii. Casting our Lot with that of Slothrop

As Bloat studies the map the reader must carefully scrutinize the following pages. For
at this point Pynchon casts our lot with that of Slothrop. We cannot abandon his voyage for we, too, fall prey to paranoia. Bloat scrutinizes the pinpoints on Slothrop's map and ponders the relevance of his womanizing. We shift to our first glimpses of Slothrop who, while investigating a recent bombing, recalls seeing two of his former liaisons together at a club facing him:

\[\ldots\text{ and the strange events Saturday night at the Frick Frack Club in Soho, a haunt of low reputation with moving spotlights of many pastel hues }\ldots\]

\[\text{and where against all chance, through some horrible secret plot, Slothrop, who was to meet one, walks in sees who but both, lined up in a row, the angle deliberately just for him, over the blue wool shoulder of an engineman 3rd class, under the bare lovely armpit of a lindy-hopping girl swung and posed, skin stained lavender by the shifting light just there, and then paranoia flooding up, the two faces beginning to turn his way }\ldots\ (24-25)\]

We never discern whether the women in fact met, nor do we find anything in the instance beyond paranoia. However, we do learn, presently, that the scientists at the White Visitation search for a correlation between Slothrop's escapades and the subsequent bombing of those areas. The complete intangibility of the premise, combined with Slothrop's growing perception of being under scrutiny, leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty which parallels Slothrop's. While Slothrop feels a general paranoia of existence -- i.e. someone or something is monitoring his actions -- the reader begins to lose
any sense of a reliable source. As we find the standard machinations of the plot grow more opaque we question the existence of any usual novelistic methodology. Indeed, in direct contrast to his first two novels, Pynchon captures his reader with *Gravity's Rainbow* by running away from him. In *V* and *The Crying of Lot 49* Pynchon teases the reader into applying standard modes of novelistic scrutiny by creating mysteries to be solved. Whenever the plot line seems to run too far off path Pynchon includes a "coincidence" which allows the reader some measure of hope of clarity. Although he constantly avoids any ultimate clarifications in those two novels, he, nevertheless, continually affords his reader some measure of cohesion. Taking his art to a new epiphany with *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon so tangles his plot line, narrative voices, and character delineation, that we finally confront a text which, at every turn, dares us to disregard it. Pynchon ultimately insures our attention by offering us every chance to refute and escape his literary inferno.

Although we may question Slothrop's views and decisions, the very fact that the form of the novel forces us to question, allies us to some degree with Slothrop.

After a section of exposition, in which Pynchon draws his English landscape and fills it with characters, he reintroduces Slothrop. The brief scenarios which Pynchon presents, connect Slothrop's soon-to-be-forgotten past with the tide of the future. Roger and Jessica encapsulate Slothrop's notions of sex and romance. We find in their tale a traditional love triangle. Roger and Jessica feel and display great passion for one another, but the spectre of the third party always looms in the background. The simplistic love / sex drive of the
two connects with Slothrop's past. And the intrusion of a third element signals Slothrop's upcoming problems with Katje. For we realize, ultimately, that the third party for Roger and Jessica, as well as Slothrop and Katje, is the War. The White Visitation stands an institutional achievement, dedicated to the work ethic. And Pirate seems to almost enjoy the war as a fulfilling leisure-time activity. But the worlds these people inhabit, and their motions and decisions, subtly but effectively excommunicates them from Slothrop's ancient Massachusetts.

Pynchon finally allows us a greater view of his protagonist. Our initial sighting of Slothrop foreshadows our second introduction to him as Pynchon replays his earlier motifs on a grander scale. We view not Slothrop's desk but the contents of his mind. However, the vision he affords us signals the hysteria to come. Drugged and delirious, Slothrop spews forth a torrent of memories, desires, and nightmares. We see into his past, not through throat lozenges, but through his recollections of bars and music joints of old. His tormented desires begin to be realized as a woman gives him an identity: "Her eyes tell him, in the instant, what he is" (72). And then the weight of his fears turn the dream askew as he plunges into a sewer of immorality and scatalogical apocalypse. Everything which his pristine white upbringing strives to negate hurls at him with the force of an emotional drain finally unclogged:

The light down here is dark gray and rather faint. For some time he has been aware of shit, elaborately crusted along the sides of this ceramic (or
by now iron) tunnel he's in: shit nothing can flush away, mixed with hardwater minerals into a deliberate brown bamacling of his route, patterns thick with meaning . . . At which precise point there comes this godawful surge from up the line, noise growing like a tidal wave, a jam-packed wavefront of shit, vomit, toilet paper and dingleberries in mind-boggling mosaic, rushing down on panicky Slothrop like an MTA subway train on its own hapless victim. (74-76)

And after travelling into the crime of cultural massacre which his forefathers fed on (an act which evokes striking parallels throughout Gravity), Slothrop ends his journey in suburban Boston. He travels full circle and confronts a connection who, although not the Kenosha Kid, carries a message on his face: "In the shadows, black and white holding in a panda-pattern across his face, each of the regions a growth or mass of scar tissue, waits the connection he's traveled all this way to see" (81).

The thematic system continues on a like course, for after further exposing Slothrop in a treatise whose form might tempt the reader into distancing himself from the protagonist, Pynchon inserts more expository stability, as we learn more of the White Visitation and its inhabitants. This fairly staid exposition lulls the reader into a greater sense of acceptance of the narrative line; so when Pudding and Pointsman discuss the programming of Slothrop we begin to side, emotionally, with Slothrop, who seems controlled by untouchable forces. As insane as Slothrop's dreams might be, they cannot compare in
horror with what Pynchon presents as the cognizant shaping of a human being.

Pynchon's plot line fosters our commitment to the protagonist as his structure cements that commitment. Although the events of Slothrop's dreams have both a static and metaphorical reality, the absurdist element encircling the actions, the basic inane premise of falling down a toilet, tinges the section with the shade of disinformation. At no time during Slothrop's dream do we completely refute the extremities of moral or sanitary outrage we feel. The subtle tension Pynchon evokes in us, finding ourselves caught between a pristine abandonment of the filthy passage and an emotional involvement with the sufferer of this nightmare, leaves us as vulnerable as Slothrop to the apparent sanctuary offered by the perfect Proteus -- Katje.

iv. Katje - The Perfect Proteus

Pynchon's lens focuses first on Slothrop's desk, carefully exploring its many layers before it shifts to Slothrop himself. And before Pynchon's mental camera examines Katje it provides a superficial account -- a visual precursor:

In silence, hidden from her, the camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere longlegged about the rooms, an adolescent wideness and hunching to the shoulders, her hair not bluntly Dutch at all, but secured in a modish upsweep with an old, tarnished silver crown, yesterday's new perm leaving her very blonde hair frozen on top in a hundred vortices, shining through the dark filigree. (107)
We see the traces of Slothrop's former life because the novel's major journey takes Slothrop away from that world. Katje leaves no world of precious items behind. All that she carries, she carries on her long legs and in her hunched shoulders. Despite this difference, Slothrop and Katje enter the novel in a similar fashion. Slothrop dreams, and hence enters the novel mentally, and not just as a physical presence. Additionally, as we are allowed to see into Slothrop's mind we get a taste of the psychological vulnerability which Slothrop shall increasingly feel. Additionally, within the nightmare, external forces control his movements as he falls down the quintessential rabbit hole. Our burgeoning view of Katje stylistically recalls Slothrop's introduction. Katje travels back in time, so our vision of her parallels that of a dream as we see her thoughts. Within this series of images she appears almost as an omniscient narrator, viewing the spiritual horror that Blicero creates. Just as earlier, through Slothrop, we face images of America's attempts at mass extermination (of its native Indians), so through Katje do we travel into the mind of Blicero and witness a host of extinctions. Katje's almost transparent existence -- "when Katje passes before a window and the rainlight coming through changes it for a few brief unshutterings to murky glass, charcoal-saturated, antique and weather-worn, frock, face, hair, hands, slender calves all gone to glass and glazing, for the celluloid instant poised -- the translucent guardian of a rainfall" (109) -- allows her to shift from a veritable Kali for Blicero to a Devi for Slothrop.

Disinformation plays an apparently minor role in Katje's introduction. Stylistically
Pynchon avoids undercutting our certainty of her description. That is, the form of discourse Pynchon employs in no way imparts any sense of unreliability to the reader. However, the incidents in the northern woods take on a dream-like state, as they so closely approximate the Hansel and Gretel fairytale. In addition, Blicero's constant uncertainty as to Katje's true allegiance further envelops the scene in veils of flexible information. W.T. Lhamon's synthesis of Pynchon's style certainly applies to Pynchon's elusive portrayal of Katje: "Pynchon's verbal complexities astound and confound, amaze and bewilder, because his mixed moves concern the ultimate formlessness of a world that for a decade now he has urged as much as described . . . All these pressures make linear communication inadequate, chronology a joke, and organization destructive" (163). As the section ends we find Katje gone from Blicero, back to Pirate's room where we first encountered her, and then beyond into the streaming infinity of motion pictures thrown against a wall for the benefit of an enormous octopus named Grigori.

v. The Intrusion of One World Upon Another

Eventually Slothrop meets Katje, but first Pynchon draws them only as close as two successive paragraphs. And lest we lose our thread of mutual paranoia, Slothrop swears he is being followed:

"But something's different . . . something's . . . been changed . . . don't mean to bitch, folks, but -- well for instance he could almost swear he's being followed, or watched anyway . . . Things on his desk at
ACHTUNG seem not be be where they were. Girls have found excuses not to keep appointments. He feels he's being gently separated from the life he lived before going into St. Veronica's." (133)

However, Slothrop meets Darlene, who seems to exonerate him from any charges of falsely creating his map. So Slothrop acts in a manner which seems to dispel any notions of disinformation we might press him with. We need only ask, however, "And where, you keepers of maps, specialists at surveillance, would you say the next one will fall?" (140). The question is moot, for the pattern of eventual intercourse bring Katje and Slothrop together in the second chapter.

Katje, the pawn of the war, holds no shield nor spear as she cowers beneath the unforeseen forces above her, a plight which takes a very tangible form as Grigori attempts to drag her into the ocean. Slothrop, of course, saves her and immediately interweaves fact with conjecture. This results in an amalgam of disinformatory flexible information, rife with paranoia:

So it is here, grouped on the beach with strangers, that voices begin to take on a touch of metal, each word a hard-edged clap, and the light, though as bright as before, is less able to illuminate... it's a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia, filtering in. Pale lines of force whir in the sea air... pacts sworn to in rooms since shelled back to their plan views, not quite by accident of war, suggest themselves.
Oh, that was no "found" crab, Ace - no random octopus or girl, uh-uh.

Structure and detail come later, but the conniving around him now he feels instantly, in his heart. (219)

The elusive, romantic description echoes the uncertainty of interpretation as Pynchon turns words into metallic claps as the light of understanding fades. The very elements seem to conspire to thwart Slothrop's search for meaning as the sea air contains "pale lines of force." And the comical intonation behind the "Ace" signals a narrative swing into Slothrop's punchinellian consciousness, a movement which, while it draws the reader closer to Slothrop, concurrently distances him from an objective narrative voice. Hence, in one tight paragraph Pynchon fashions a concept which, in terms of plot we view as accurate (having learned of Grigori and Katje previously), while technically Pynchon strengthens our growing alliance with Slothrop. The end of the section coalesces Pynchon's comical employment of disinformation as "Katje squeezes Slothrop's arm and tells him just what he wants to hear about now: 'Perhaps, after all, we were meant to meet . . .'" (220). The hackneyed expression which Katje chooses combines with the narrative predisposition toward ironic superfluity to create a sense of unresolved intellectual paranoia on the part of the reader.

Slothrop's romantic liaison with Katje exacerbates his and our uncertainty. Extrinsically the scene parallels the basic Mata Hari format. However, Pynchon, in his perennial anti-elliptical style, infuses Katje with a subtle excess of description. Her sexually exploratory
gestures seem adequately typical; however, when denuded we see "Katje's skin is whiter than the white garment she rises from" (228). She literally transforms from the Kali Blicero made her, dripping with blood and encircled by the skulls of the war, into a Devi for Slothrop. This change, metaphorically non-cryptic, cannot pass without an almost smugly comical self-indulgent rejoinder as Pynchon italicizes "Born again" (228). However, even during her rebirth Pynchon never strays far from Katje's inherent moral dissolution. For example, although the moonlight fosters her spiritual illumination ("the moonlight only whitens her back"), nevertheless

there is still a dark side, her ventral side, her face, that he can no longer see,
a terrible beast-like change coming over muzzle and lower jaw, black pupils growing to cover the entire eye space till whites are gone and there's only the red animal reflection when the light comes to strike, no telling when the light (228)

Mixing European legends of werewolves and witches with 20th Century images of mass extinction via the oven (Hitler's, not the witch's), Pynchon transmogrifies the light from beacon of salvation to fire of destruction which shall, at no measurable instance, choose to strike, revealing a human turned beast by the horror of conscription. The disinformatory uncertainty of allegiance continues throughout the on-again, off-again sexual acts as Katje periodically quakes with emotive tintinnabulations. We find, for example, that "she will not surrender her face," and "for some reason now, she who never laughs has become the
top surface of a deep, rising balloon of laughter" (229). And so the comic undercurrent unifies the polar extremes Katje personifies as she chooses laughter as the only escape from the disinformational nightmare of flexible information; a style of communication which, despite its positive effects for the reader and Slothrop, concurrently signals and effects Katje's psychological destruction. Like Slothrop, Katje is overwhelmingly manipulated by external forces. These forces keep Katje unbalanced by never correctly informing her of their motives. She, then, remains a pawn, and never, as Slothrop does, uses the uncertainty of her existence to further her own best interests. She finds laughter as a temporary respite, but, as Pynchon warns, *there is no telling when the light . . . .

Katje's informational transience, reflected in her moral unaccountability, surfaces whenever she makes love to Slothrop. After their fight / rape, Slothrop lies on top of her, sweating, taking great breaths, watching her face turned 3/4 away, not even a profile, but the terrible Face That Is No Face, gone too abstract, unreachable: the notch of eye socket, but never the labile eye, only the anonymous curve of cheek, convexity of mouth, a noseless mask of the Other Order of Being, of Katje's being -- the lifeless nonface that is the only face of hers he really knows, or will ever remember. (258-59)

In addition, Katje's resemblance to the Bad Priest of V further undercuts her physical existence by correlating her with what proved to be an archetypal figure. The war disembodies and disseminates Katje, leaving her hollow -- all instinct and reaction. And in
their final encounter:

she lies propped on an elbow watching him, breathing deep, dark nipples riding with the swell, as buoys ride on the white sea. But a patina has formed on her eyes: he can't even see her accustomed retreat, this last time, dimmed graceful, to the corner of some inner room . . . (263)

And she leaves him. Although their relationship extends a mere fifty-two pages, Katje's presence promotes the formation of the reader / Slothrop bond. As Slothrop finds himself joined to an unfathomable distance, he can merely stare at the void. Our growing revulsion parallels Slothrop's as we witness the dissolution of a woman. Katje, sexuality incarnate, loses her lustre as an unknowable pin-up girl as we find her as hollow as those great icons of sex and longing. Her elusive persona broadens the scope of the growing disinformational network, as Katje's soul falls victim to the increasing diffusion of a static certainty. For Katje, without the certainty of love there can be no life in her love making with Slothrop. As Slothrop witnesses Katje's dissolution an illumination of sorts faintly glows. With her parting dies Slothrop's chances for maintaining any form of moral ambivalence.

vi. The Next Day

While in England, Slothrop engages in a sexual microcosm of America's isolationist policies. He plays the part of the Yankee rake, seducing a great number of women throughout London. However, his sexual colonialism results in eventual destruction,
herein in the form of subsequent bombings. He maintains records of his actions, in the form of his map. However, this information ultimately proves incomplete for Slothrop, as he never connects his actions with subsequent reactions. And so, guilty of a self-imposed disinformational vision, Slothrop, like America avoiding the reality of its slow moving defense of its allies, sees only the strategies for short term gain and ignores the final outcome. With Katje, though, the reality of the war and all its transmogrifying effects emblazon his hitherto obscure nighttime marketeering. What had previously passed, in Slothrop's mind, for the rakish behavior of an innocent abroad, suddenly culminates into a physical manifestation of sex without love. He sees a body whose spark of life fades under the weight of the morally entropic war and all its machinations. Sex becomes bestiality as only Katje's animal existence remains. No longer able to swap mere pantyhose for sex, Slothrop must exchange innocence for enlightenment, as he leaves behind a malleable Darlene for Katje, a brutal reminder of war's devastating power.

The old world, where romantic love offers a sense of ease, falls further away from Katje and Slothrop as she abandons him. In subsequent sightings Katje turns increasingly symbolic of her world. Pynchon initially elicits a sympathetic response on the part of the reader for Katje. Henceforth, however, Katje serves as a bitter reminder of a burgeoning mass psychosis. Like Slothrop, we care about Katje, and our journey with Slothrop seems bleaker by her absence. Slothrop's previous metaphorical enlightenment, and his inherent suffering, so hauntingly wrought by Katje's personal dissolution, revivifies initially in a
very literal pain of separation. The quality of his pain does not delay in turning curious as Slothrop slowly finds himself transforming into the "figurehead for the latest passage" (277). Slothrop must play witness to western man's loss of tradition as the disinformational influx continues. For example, love, courtship, and marriage prove archaic vestiges of a past Slothrop cannot know. Instead, he must witness the purely physical recreations of obsolete passions as written, no so subtly, in the "noseless mask of the Other Order of Being" (259). With Katje gone, Pynchon readies Slothrop for the Zone. Pynchon chooses disinformation as the language of choice for Slothrop's guide book, as we find the final pages of the second section replete with illusory messages.

The imminent death of western civilization stains Slothrop's hands as disinformation descends like the Erinyes upon his mind. As bombs ravage the physical landscape, spiritless missionaries roam the metaphorical landscape disseminating their message of nothingness: "This really happened tonight. But that octopus didn't . . . . I know a lot. Not everything, but a few things you don't" (289). Seemingly indefinite in origin, this bombardment of flexible information eventually arises from three main sources. The White Visitation acts as a Magaera of sorts which dispenses such data as the report on Impolex G. Although the "facts" concerning this substance seem clear enough, the auxiliary data brought forth raises unanswerable questions. And since the third proverb for paranoids states: "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers" (293), the White Visitation need never fully explicate their disinformational
memorandums.

The inhabitants of the Zone exacerbate Slothrop's confusion as Alecto's visage lurks beneath every wall and gutter, and every face Slothrop confronts in the Zone. This upcoming lack of certainty Pynchon foreshadows in Slothrop's night in the Rue Rossini in Nice. First Slothrop finds a place to sleep through connections who flash unintelligible signs at him: "She thumbs him upstairs and then gives him either the V-for-victory sign or some spell from distant countryside against the evil eye that sours the milk. Whichever it is, she is chuckling sarcastically" (296). And the ghost of a lost love affair murmurs in Slothrop's heart and his mind like the icy voice of Alecto promising only intractable suffering as he hears, "'No.' Only a whisper. . . . But it was her 'no' that stayed with him" (297). "What's wrong with her voice" Slothrop wonders. Alecto bends her voice like the notes on a harmonica and Slothrop hears the slightly out of pitch tone that arises from a growing hysteria. This influx of impressions and information never quite lose its tint of uncertainty. This errant deluge propels Slothrop further from the world he once knew and deeper into the Zone: "Is he off so quickly, like Katje on her wheel, off on a ratchet of rooms like this, to be in each one only long enough to gather wind or despair enough to move on to the next, but no way backward now, ever again?" (299). Yes, the journey continues.

Slothrop's mental and emotional reactions to the Zone and the communiques of the White Visitation coalesce into a paranoia of existence. This self-created fury acts as a form
of disinformation as it puts Slothrop and the reader into a continuous state of uncertainty.

This mental suffering Neil Schmitz accurately appraises when he writes:

> But the most intense suffering that occurs in his fiction is intellectual, not physical, and in this regard Pynchon is the most violent of our modern writers, typically amassing great volumes of knowledge in specific detail only to mystify and confound the obstinate knowers who search in his texts for the right readings, for the true interpretation. (113)

We must recognize the existence of this primary source of pain, and realize Slothrop's role in its creation. "You are the wave of the future" (300), Semyavin tells Slothrop. And like a great metaphorical wave, ever-gathering momentum throughout the work, Slothrop's imaginary creations constantly and increasingly misdirect the reader and Slothrop himself. As the avalanche of images tumbles over Slothrop in Zurich he loses himself and the reader in a cinematic short as he attempts to sort the "first wave of corporate spies from the 'Loonies on Leave!'" (301). Pynchon's anecdotal excursion primarily entertains and confuses the reader. We see humorous images; however, we cannot be sure of their existence or importance. This very uncertainty highlights Slothrop's imaginative self-disinformatory campaign. This gobbet mirrors his early drug-induced mental wanderings and foreshadows Pointsman's findings in the final section of this chapter. We learn, in a brief narrative transition to the White Visitation, that many, if not most of "the Slothropian stars are proved, in some distant day, to refer to sexual fantasies instead of real events"
(316) as Perdoo and Speed find that even Darlene seems fictionalized. As Pynchon once again undermines our faith in the certainty of the narrative line he leaves us as paranoid as Slothrop and as ready for the incredible, incredulous world of the Zone. Our state of complete mental uncertainty leaves us as innocent and impressionable as Dorothy when she enters the Land of Oz.

**vii. Into the Zone**

"Forget frontiers now. Forget subdivisions. There aren't any," Geli advises Slothrop (342). The Zone emerges as a cultural wasteland, bestrewn with the broken lives of its occupants. Throughout the German countryside Slothrop finds the natural world the only source of constancy. Nature, despite its usual proclivity toward a random impartiality of behavior, exhibits an inherent order of behavior which man increasingly lacks. When the clouds come rain generally follows. However, in Slothrop's world actions defy logical courses of behavior. Morality lies victim to the war, as the human jackals fight over its corpse.

Pynchon begins "The Zone" with exposition on the weather. The clouds he personifies as inscrutable saints, surveying the terra firma, as the earth moves to restore itself:

We are safely past the days of the Eis-Heiligen -- St. Pancratius, St. Servatius, St. Bonifacius, die kalte Sophie . . . they hover in clouds above the vineyards, holy beings of ice, ready with a breath, an intention, to ruin the year with frost and cold. . . . there's no telling how the ice-saints feel --
coarse laughter, pagan annoyance, who understands this rear-guard who preserve winter against the revolutionaries of May? . . . vines are beginning to grow back over dragon's teeth, fallen Stukas, burned tanks. The sun warms the hillsides, the rivers fall bright as wine. The saints have refrained. (327)

Ironically the ice-saints resemble the directors of the war, who assume unapproachable stances of decisiveness concerning the lives of others. However, throughout the war, and as we find throughout the Zone, after the war these men do not act in such a beneficient manner as the ice-saints. Their actions serve only to exacerbate the morally unfulfilling life which the occupants of the Zone find themselves living. Slothrop repeatedly clashes with the leaders of the Zone, and eventually returns to the natural world to find order. However, he must learn for himself (like Dorothy) that the key to his finding his way home lies under his feet the whole time. In a subtly comic creation / reversal of this parallel theme Slothrop enters the Zone shoeless. Whereas Dorothy enters the Land of Oz and finds herself the unwitting recipient of a pair of sparkling red shoes, Slothrop's "shoes got lifted by some DP with fingers lighter than dreams, on one of the many trains since the Swiss border, someplace rolling across Bavaria fast asleep. Whoever it was left a red tulip between Slothrop's toes. He has taken it for a sign. A reminder of Katje" (327). So bare feet and a red tulip replace red shoes as Slothrop is literally forced closer to nature. To finalize the ironic parallels, Slothrop feels a very physical pain as a result of his forced
return to nature: "Rain blows scattering out over the town as Slothrop comes in in the early morning, bare feet, blistering and reblistering, cooled here in the wet grass" (327).

Our ties with Slothrop continue as Pynchon wastes little time in leading us astray with a relatively slight disinformational insert. While travelling through the Zone Slothrop feeds a fire with the hair from a doll, and dances with a pariah who claims to own the doll. Slothrop subsequently trades the doll's eyes for a ride and half a boiled potato. The presence of a pariah, and the exchange of tokens, create a conflict in the reader's mind. For we cannot be sure of the limits of Slothrop's imagination and the correspondent reality of the novel's other characters. Our very uncertainty, though, dissuades us from venturing too far from Slothrop's reality, imagined or not.

Although Slothrop has obviously never shown too great a predilection towards remaining mentally within the confines of any sort of a static reality, his alternate realities realize an almost mystical self-fulfillment as they offer preferable alternatives to the available human landscape. Man's historical tradition dies in the war leaving only arrangements for existence: "It's an arrangement," Geli tells him. 'It's so unorganized out here. There have to be arrangements. You'll find out.' Indeed he will -- he'll find thousands of arrangements, for warmth, love, food, simple movement along roads, tracks and canals" (338). Cultural manifestations of man's codes of behavior prove elusive or simply defeated. The most basic of human requirements, for food, shelter, and emotional solace, must be dealt for on a moral and actual black market. Slothrop, ever the survivor,
follows the rules of the Zone, and bargains for his existence. In fact, as we learn more of Slothrop's past we see that the Zone comes as a pinnacle of 20th Century man's self-actualized behavior. Slothrop's father bargained for Slothrop's future before he was even born. So Slothrop in a sense comes full circle, starting life as a commodity, and ending in the Zone constantly trading in human commodities in order to survive. He will sleep with Geli even though she thinks of Tchitcherine while they make love. And he will continue to find women who serve as nothing more than a physical pleasure and a reminder of Katje.

Slothrop must come full circle, however, for only when he recognizes the morally corrupt patterns of existence, can he realize the deadening nature of the world he comes to know. His previous drug "trips" seem ultimately innocuous as they can be ascribed to the workings of synthetic chemical agents. However, the very real trip through the Zone cannot be written off as a "bad trip" for the journey only turns ever more curious.

"It's a Sunday-funnies dawn, very blue sky with gaudy pink clouds in it. Mud across the cobblestones is so slick it reflects light, so that you walk not streets but these long streaky cuts of raw meat, hock of werewolf, gammon of Beast" (343) Pynchon writes, describing the morning Slothrop leaves Geli. These two sentences encapsulate Slothrop's movement, as they provide a literary guidebook toward a Slothropian form of salvation. The dawn seems very promising, with the almost too bright colors of the Sunday-funny papers in the blue, blue sky and gaudy pink clouds. Upon reflection, though, the colors perhaps are too bright. Historically, when Slothrop saw colors that almost transcend the
limits of ordinary hues, he was experiencing a drug induced state of existence.

Unfortunately these trips result from others experimenting upon him, as opposed to self-induced states of euphoria. And his pharmaceutical benefactors seem to pay no heed to any notions of euphoria as the trips they send Slothrop on invariably leave him devastated.

Additionally, the term "Sunday-funnies" evokes images of a peace-time ease wherein the family can idly lounge around on Sundays reading the funny papers. Ironically any mental visions the reader may assign this scenario must wash into a miasma of intentions, for little Slothrop cannot idly read the funnies if Daddy is busy selling him to Dr. Lazlo Jamf.

In contrast to the apparently idyllic colors of the sky and the images they would evoke, Pynchon paints the streets a veritable slaughterhouse. Superficially the streets might reflect the ravages of the war. The dank mud is so slick it reflects light turning in the mind's eye to a knife edge. The cobblestones become raw meat like so many slaughtered innocents. However, this macabre vision of the natural world only threatens the day; for mud and stone are merely nature's harbingers of the coming spring. Just as the vines overcome the barbed wire, so too will the natural world replace the fallen scheme of values.

viii. Slothrop's Hidden Moral Baggage

The more we find out about Slothrop's past the more distressing we find that past to be. As nature provides an ever-widening circle of redemption for Slothrop, we see a separate source of renewal. Slothrop himself instinctively allows for his personal redemption. Pynchon seemingly disinherits Slothrop from the world of a static reality,
ming him in self-delusions of sexual and emotional grandeur (those stars proven at the future date to be fantasies). However, Pynchon later reveals the reason for Slothrop's imaginative follies: "It's not the gentlemanly reflex that made him edit, switch names, insert fantasies into the yarns he spun for Tantivy back in the ACHTUNG office, so much as the primitive fear of having a soul captured by a likeness of image or by a name" (352). Slothrop consciously creates a disinformational network for the spies at ACHTUNG to feed off of. He did not suffer from a wigged-out sensibility or inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Instead he acted upon primitive fears. He begins casting off the moral facades of his contemporaries before the reader realizes it, and disinforms both his fellow spies and us for the sake of saving what he feels is holy -- his love for woman. Pynchon uses the ironic term "gentlemanly" which seems grossly inappropriate for a character who almost rapes the woman he loves. But in contrast to the world of the post-war fallout, such tokens of grace take on a greater importance. Additionally, as Slothrop recalls his "gentlemanly reflexes," Pynchon binds the overt social gesture Slothrop made on behalf of his past women to the greater love he feels for Katje. Despite the machinations of the White Visitation and all its allies, an individual as paranoid as Slothrop can thwart the growing digitalization of the survivors of the War.

As we learn of Slothrop's previous statistical shenanigans, there surfaces a rising tide of correlation and anti-correlation. By engaging in disinformation himself, Slothrop knowingly alters his reality. His conscious romantic inaccuracies correlate to his eventual
love of Katje. This inversion, in which disinformation leads to an approachable end, allows for an inverse (or anti) correlation between fact and fantasy. Characters may follow the precepts of logical association and bring forth illusion. That is, by naming something characters create an existence of sorts, even if only a metaphorical one: "There may be no gods, but there is a pattern: names by themselves may have no magic, but the act of naming, the physical utterance, obeys the pattern" (374). With the false stars of his map Slothrop names imaginative partners, and so creates a reality for those who study him. This saves those whose reality is not in question from the scrutinious eyes of those who would sanctify by dissemination or dissection. Thus, the reality which Slothrop makes, serves as a temporary field laboratory for Pointsman and his compatriots. And as they study this false world "Slothrop feels his heart, out of control, inflate with love and rise quick as a balloon. It is taking him longer, the longer he's in the Zone, to remember to say aw quit being a sap. What is this place doing to his brain?" (387). Slothrop's brain proves ever more adept at surviving the wasteland as he reaps the rewards of his chosen path and finds love in the midst of continued convenience.

In "the Zone" Pynchon interweaves many variant plots canvassing the history and actions of various nations and governments as well as their effects on the characters who inhabit the Zone. Although not every incident affects Slothrop personally, the vast majority of material Pynchon presents reflects the journey Slothrop continuously makes. To understand the inherent patterns of correspondence between scenes we must, as Lance
Ozier recommends, "sort through the details of the novel for patterns rather than for answers" (194). Through the story of Tchitcherine and Enzian we recall the powerful effect of the act of naming. For the name given Enzian damns him to consider his half-brother an enemy throughout the novel. The overtly symbolic nature of the brotherly conflict, bringing to mind Cain and Able, pushes the novel further into the realm of flexible information.

ix. Slothrop the Quick Change Artist

Any sense of a static reality drifts further and further away as Slothrop journeys ever deeper into the Zone. Increasingly individuals set the standards for their own worlds of action. Slothrop revels in this self-actualized environment, for here he may select the reality of his choice. Although the White Visitation proves consistently inscrutable to Slothrop, Geli's sorceress lifestyle allows at least an intellectual candidness: "She's smiling at him so four-year-old happy and not holding a thing back, that Slothrop decides to believe everything she's been telling him. 'You are a witch.'" (343). As the chameleonic protagonist of the 20th Century, Slothrop assumes many mantles. For Saure Bummer, Slothrop becomes the Rocketman, although, "A day or two later, it will occur to Slothrop that what he should have said at that point was, 'But I wasn't Rocketman, until just a couple hours ago'" (432). Ironically, Slothrop, in the guise of Rocketman, embodies the union of man and machine. The almost religious fervor which attends the creation of the A-4 finds a suitable personificatory icon in the demeanor of one
Tyrone Slothrop. The irony is double edged, as Slothrop, ultimately the most humane character in the novel, epitomizes the anti-rocket. He allows the creative life of his peers to flourish as he acts as the manifestation of their individual creations. And yet at the outset of the novel Slothrop seems to sow a field of death in his nightly whorings. However, this too comes back upon itself, for we found that those actions were mostly imagined.

Additionally, for the inhabitants of a coastal town near Wismar, Slothrop assumes the mantle of the legendary Plechazunga. Assimilating Pynchon's motions of European mythical influences, Slothrop finds a temporary niche as a figure who refutes, through word and deed, the fatalistic visions of incarceration and death, so vividly enacted by Katje and Gottfried, as they perform the death ballet of Hanzel and Gretel for that wicked plum-offering-witch, Blicero. And finally, Slothrop's increasing metaphorical proximity to the natural world distances him from the destructive world of man made rockets.

Although "the act of naming" might link Slothrop to totalitarianistic visions of genocide, coming as "the wave of the future," Slothrop eventually personifies the blackened trees, and the black birds, and the coal tar carbonized message of cyclical redemption: "'All anyone knows about you is that you keep showing up.' Toward dusk, the black birds descend, millions of them, to sit in the branches of trees nearby. The trees grow heavy with black birds, branches like dendrites of the Nervous System fattening, deep in twittering nerve-dusk, in preparation for some important message. . . ." (423-24).

Slothrop engages in a continual active disinformationary scheme of behavior as he
fulfills the individual needs of the Zone inhabitants. For example, when Slothrop first awakens from Tchitcherine's sodium amytal session, he mentally moves closer to the natural world he eventually embraces: "He dozes off and dreams about birds, a close flock of snow buntingings, blown in a falling leaf of birds, among the thickly falling snow" (457). But when he finds Margherita in the abandoned movie set, Slothrop willingly participates in her spiritually self-destructive fantasies, as she asks him: "'Are you very cruel?' 'Don't know.' 'Could you be?'" (461). Pynchon displays Slothrop's reactions to the realities he assumes, and so our vision of him takes on the trappings of a theatre. We see an actor acting (or reacting), as opposed to a director creating his drama. Gerhardt von Goll states, "'It is my mission,' he announces to Squalidozzi, with the profound humility that only a German movie director can summon, 'to sow in the Zone seeds of reality'" (451). These seeds spring forth as Slothropian incarnations of rockets, pigs, and father figures. Each successive identity further reveals the entropic palette of the post-war moral paints.

Although superficially tinged by each color of dissemination, Slothrop's constant humanizing of the Zone, and his moral harmonization consecrates his actions in the church of the rain, mud, and blue, blue skies. For example, Slothrop psychologically marries Margherita's sexual frenzy with his own growing natural impulses when he dreams: "He is a classically-bearded Neptune figure with an old serene face. From out of her body streams a flood now of different creatures, octopuses, reindeer, kangaroos, 'Who can say all that life / That left her womb that day?"' (522).
Whereas Pokier hunts "across the Zero, between the two desires, personal identity and impersonal salvation" (473), Slothrop assumes a variety of personal identities. However, these identities cannot save the other inhabitants of the Zone. For example, as Margherita's lover, Slothrop cannot still the internal winds which blow through her soul. Instead he simply mirrors the moral obscenities which sexually crucified her, as he plays the part of dominator to her pleading victim. Also, he allows Bianca her personal tragedy by sexually investing in her drama himself. Slothrop has little chance of "saving" these women from their past, and his actions in no way foster any change in their self-destructive behavior. In fact, many of Slothrop's decisions seemingly reflect a moral ambivalence. However, Slothrop must repeatedly witness the effects of any form of moral casualness. As Lawrence Kappel writes so pointedly:

> After Slothrop discovers Bianca's corpse, he can no longer be the charming, innocent, Jamesian American because he has discovered his roots, his true identity, in European decadence. Slothrop's fall from innocence in the course of his journey is as certain as Goodman Brown's. Bianca's corpse shows Slothrop the sobering moral limits and the destructive capability of his compulsive sexuality and amorality, his Rockethood. (247)

Bringing America's belated defense of the "free" world to Europe, Slothrop might be the serpent of Jamf's visions when Jamf states, "Who sent this new serpent to our ruinous
garden, already too fouled, too crowded to qualify as any locus of innocence -- unless
innocence be our age's neutral, our silent passing into the machineries of indifference"
(482). Slothrop's silent purchase of Margherita and Bianca's madness disavows any
American claims he might make of the "innocent bystander." Salvation must come for
Tyrone; however, he can expect no prefabricated house of deliverance -- no, the earth itself
must take him back as its own and reveal its own personal mineralic discipline as Slothrop
slips, falls and sees finally, "not even black sky as the rain drives down his falling eyes
now in quick needlestrokes, and he hits, without a call for help, just a meek tearful oh
fuck, tears that will add nothing to the whipped white desolation that passes for the Oder
Haff tonight" (573).

Slothrop's movement toward a moral dissolution; his Brennsluss of passivity,
climaxes elliptically as Bianca falls "Alone, kneeling on the painted steel, like her mother
she knows how horror will come when the afternoon is brightest" (549). For although
Slothrop "creates a bureaucracy of departure, . . . (and) coming back is something he's
already forgotten about," he inadvertently loses his cocoon of indifference and ultimately
he feels the winds which torment her: "In her ruined towers now the bells gong back and
forth in the wind. Frayed ropes dangle or slap where her brown hoods no longer glide
above the stone. Her wind keeps even dust away. It is old daylight: late, and cold.
Horror in the brightest hour of afternoon . . . sails on the sea too small and distant to matter
. . . water too steel and cold" (549). The steel cold water melts Slothrop in a detumescence
of passivity. No longer may he casually subscribe to the moral shell-shock so vividly reflected in the halls of Bianca and Margherita's eyes. "Slothrop, as noted, at least as early as the Anubis era, has begun to thin, to scatter...The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are" (593).

x. Slothrop's Natural Dissolution

As Slothrop slowly disseminates across the wasteland of Europe he begins to see the parallel order of existence which affects, to an inordinate degree, his destiny. While Oedipa's intellectual scrutiny of a parallel world provides her insight into her own world, Slothrop's enlightenment marks an escape from the landscape of tragedy: "We have to look for power sources here, and distribution networks we were never taught, routes of power our teachers never imagined, or were encouraged to avoid...we have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function" (607-08). And like Slothrop, we, too, search for other orders. To quote Richard Patteson:

Pynchon's fictional territory might be said to lie along the perimeter which divides knowledge from non-knowledge. As long as the perimeter itself cannot be clearly defined, one cannot possibly distinguish between what is known and what is not known, since Pynchon clearly implies that we fill the void beyond the perimeter with illusions that pass for truth. (42)
Having relinquished the inherent moral decay of the Anubis and the black-market vagaries of Frau's boat, Slothrop begins to drift across the land of the Zone almost as a pariah, enshrouded in the fog of his own coming awareness of an underlying natural order; unapproachable by those he left behind. Pynchon accompanies Slothrop's movements from Zone to Zone (both literal and metaphorical) with water imagery of some sort. Slothrop must go into the river to retrieve the hashish from the Russian zone; he falls in the water trying to board the Anubis; he falls in the water prior to boarding Frau Gnahb's boat; and he leaves her boat in lamplight and rain. His final movement into the natural world of the Zone continues this metaphorical pattern of water imagery. The section begins: "Fog thickens down the throats of the narrow gassen. In the air is a smell of salt water. The cobbled streets are wet with last night's rain . . . (Slothrop) puts his head under the spout and pumps the pump, soaking his head for as long as he thinks he needs to" (639).

Having baptized himself Slothrop turns to the Zone of redemption to find it all turned to holy water:

This morning it looks like what Vikings must have seen, sailing this great water-meadow south, clear to Byzantium, all eastern Europe their open sea: the farmland rolls gray and green as waves . . . ponds and lakes seem to have no clear boundaries . . . (639)

Alan Friedman and Manfred Puetz state that, "Thomas Pynchon is an author in search of a metaphor, a fictional scheme to ask and answer the question of what prevails in the
physical and in the spiritual universe -- order or disorder, distinction or chaos, pattern or existential blur?" (345). Allowing us an archetypal metaphorical pattern, Pynchon, nevertheless, cannot merely plot one course. For Pynchon water may act as a standard metaphorical cleanser; a temporary brake against the growing moral entropy; just as life emerges from water in a natural refutation of physical entropy. However, never one to rely solely upon the most elemental of symbols, Pynchon furthers his metaphorical patterns by evoking images of time travel (Vikings) and even evolutionary transformation as Slothrop repeatedly emerges from the water in a form which, if not markedly evolved spiritually, at least allows him the ability to better adapt to his environment -- the ever elusive Zone.

Once Slothrop becomes enmeshed in the tide of the Zone a curious reversal takes place. At the outset of the novel Slothrop's desk vividly and categorically reveals the contents of Slothrop's past, and ironically signals the end of that past. As Slothrop, the wave of the future, rolls in to the Zone here we find that the men and women of Europe have tragically replaced a military desk, and in so doing have subsequently lost their past. Pynchon begins the description, "The Nationalities are on the move. It is a great frontierless streaming out here" (640). Over the course of two pages Pynchon describes the people and their actions and words. But most revealing is Pynchon's encyclopedic listing of the vestiges of their soon-to-be-forgotten past world:

"horns and violins in weathered black cases, bedspreads, harmoniums, grandfather clocks, kits full of tools for carpentry, watchmaking,
leatherwork, surgery paintings of pink daughters in white frocks . . .

deathless piano performances punched on Vorsetzer rolls, ribboned black
lingerie, flowered and grape-crested silverware, faceted lead-glass
decanters, tulip-shaped Jugendstil cups, strings of amber beads . . . so the
populations move, across the open meadow, limping, marching, shuffling,
carried, hauling along the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois
order they don't yet know is destroyed forever." (641)

Physically Slothrop discards the trappings of a now-rootless man as he moves ever-
closer to the land itself:

"Much of the time he's alone. He'll come on farmhouses, deserted in the
night, and will sleep in the hay . . . Wake to sun glittering off some small
lake surrounded by green salted with blossoms of thyme or mustard, a salad
hillside, sweeping up to pines in the mist . . . When he comes in among
trees he will spend time touching them, studying them, sitting very quietly
near them and understanding that each tree is a creature, carrying on its
individual life" (642-44)

Although cut off from his past by the war, Slothrop achieves a type of ancestral connection
with his predecessor, William Slothrop, who brought pigs from the hills of the Berkshire
to Boston. As William enjoyed the journey itself most of all, so too does Slothrop begin
the find a relevance in the act of moving through the land of the Zone, rediscovering a
world left behind by the age of the plastic rocket.

As the Zone and all its inhabitants assume the mantle of displacement, Slothrop continues his pilgrimage of self-actualization by mentally refuting his previous proclivities towards paranoia: "Zonal shapes he will allow to enter but won't interpret" (660). With a comic tinge Pynchon coalesces Slothrop's increasing metaphorical proximity to the natural world, and his progressive distancing from the mental world of paranoiac creationism. In a coastal town near Wismar children find Slothrop in a park and convince him to play the part of Plechazunga, a local pig deity, for their annual celebration. On one level Pynchon herein intertwines currents of a European mythological order onto the workings of the Zone -- as previously found in such episodes as Katje and Gottlieb in the woods with Blicero. This act brings Slothrop backward into the core of man's culture, which metaphorically hastens his divergence from the path of twentieth century man. Secondly, by donning the mask (indeed the whole suit) of the pig, Slothrop, iconically, reverts to a "lower" life form -- seemingly closer to nature. Pynchon then applies the final comic stroke by "marrying" Slothrop to a real pig as he flees from the pursuing Russians:

He keeps to open country, sleeping when he's too tired to walk, straw and velvet insulating him from the cold. One morning he wakes in a hollow between a stand of beech and a stream. It is sunrise and bitter cold, and there seems to be a warm tongue licking roughly at his face. He is looking here into the snout of another pig, very fat and pink pig. She grunts and smiles
amiably, blinking long eyelashes. (668)

Frieda, the pig, brings Slothrop to her owner, Pokler, who plays chess with Slothrop.

When Slothrop recognizes the name, Pokler nervously threatens him with a Luger.

However, Slothrop explains his recognition of Pokler's name and eases his fears.

Slothrop then asks Pokler what he knows about the S-gerat; however, at this point in the novel his intellectual meanderings are not tinted with the extremes of paranoia. Instead Slothrop calmly tries to amalgamate the information he has thus far gathered. Indeed, even when he meets with Krypton and Birdbury and the M.P.'s find him, Slothrop retains his composure and merely looks saddened that someone has "squealed" on him. The ordeal of transference of paranoid energy eventually takes its toll as "Bodine finds him sitting inside a coat closet, chewing on a velvet ear of his mask" (702), at Putzi's house. Despite his unavoidable nervousness, Slothrop realizes he can no longer respond paranoiacally to the hysteria which surrounds him. For when Bodine tells Slothrop in the stolen bus "if they do, well, catch up with you, I could get in touch with your Mom, or something", Slothrop returns, "no, no . . . Can't think of a soul"; to which Bodine replies hauntingly, "Wow, Rocketman . . ." (701).

xi. Disinformation - The Language of the Future

In The Counterforce, Pynchon's final section of Gravity's Rainbow, disinformation emerges as the language of the new world. Falling ever deeper into the arms of nature, and abandoning paranoiac responses to his environment, Slothrop realizes a growing personal
ease of existence. However, the other characters of the novel predominantly suffer Slothropian paranoiac failings. Their psychological and moral disintegration mirrors Slothrop's metaphorical entropy. While Slothrop's dissemination of persona allows for his increasing ease in the Creation, his counterparts experience nightmarish revelations of the unapproachability of hope. In addition, as the post-war landscape loses its borders of moral legitimacy, allowing for greater and greater moral degradation, the Zone overwhelmingly fosters personal interpretations of "reality."

Slothrop finds the reality of his unique motions slowly bending to the harmonic waves of a universal sonorous passage. Pynchon metaphorically speaks of Slothrop when he quotes Rilke who prophesied, "And though Earthliness forget you,/To the stilled Earth say: I flow/To the rushing water speak: I am" (724). For after Slothrop finds first a set of bagpipes, and later a harmonica in a river, he "is closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet, and he doesn't even know it" (725). And as Slothrop finds a musical relevance to his existence, he simultaneously adheres to the natural world: "he likes to spend whole days naked, ants crawling up his legs, butterflies lighting on his shoulders, watching the life on the mountain, getting to know shrikes and capercaillie, badgers and marmots" (725). In a eulogistic homage to his past strains toward linguistic or symbolic creationism (much in the style of Oedipa Maas), Slothrop now takes his signs from the natural world which increasingly envelops him:

Omens grow clearer, more specific. He watches flights of birds and
patterns in the ashes of his fire, he reads the guts of trout he's caught and cleaned, scraps of lost paper, graffiti on the broken walls where facing has been shot away to reveal the brick underneath -- broken in specific shapes that may also be read . . .. (726)

In addition, in a direct parallel to Oedipa's early wanderings, Pynchon allows Slothrop a final imaginative digression:

One night, on the wall of a public shithouse stinking and ripe with typhoid, he finds among initials, dates, hasty pictures of penises and mouths open to receive them, Werewolf stencils of the dark man with high shoulders and the Homburg hat, an official slogan: WILLST DU V-2, DANN ARBEITE. If you want the V-2, then work. Good Evening Tyrone Slothrop . . . (726)

But Pynchon immediately and comically undercuts his supposed allowance of creationism with:

"no, no, wait, it's O.K., over on the other wall they've also painted WO;;ST VI V-4. DAMM ARBEOTE. Lucky. The brimming voices recede, the joke clarifies, he is only back with Goebbels and the man's inability to let a good thing be. (726)

Although Slothrop finds slightly curious the graffitied statement "Rocketman Was Here," he nevertheless manages to cast away his temptations towards paranoia and school himself further in the language of the natural universe. There is no inherent "information" in this
world, and so there can be no disinformation. Existence is all. Indeed Slothrop eventually becomes sign and symbol as, "At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection" (728). Pynchon then summarizes Slothrop's lifelong search for order among the preterite wastes and motions of man's daily existence. However, this search finally ends as Slothrop is crucified by his search -- crucified and transformed to cross itself. But in this event Slothrop finds his existence:

   ... and now, in the Zone, later in the day he became a crossroad, after a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural . . . . (729)

As Slothrop moves beyond the need to explicate, Pynchon provides a deluge of characters who more than fill the paranoiac gap. These figures indulge in a variety of personal interpretations concerning the workings of the Zone. But overwhelmingly they share a paranoid refusal to allow for anything other than an ordered strike of intentions and actions. Roger Mexico not only heads the list of Slothropian successors, but he assumes the mantle of self-ordered psychological dismemberment which Slothrop casts off. The transition begins as Roger is fascinated by Slothrop, and the events which concern him: "Roger doesn't want to give him up" (731). In addition, paralleling Slothrop's heart-
wrenching loss of Katje, Roger loses the love of his life, Jessica. These factors combine to form a screen for Roger on which he sees only conspiracy and treachery: "There's something still on, don't call it "war" if it makes you nervous, maybe the death rate's gone down a point or two, beer in cans is back at last and there were a lot of people in Trafalgar Square one night not so long ago . . . but Their Enterprise goes on" (731). And while Slothrop achieves a form of self-immolation and expansion, Roger loses "a full range of life, of being for the first time at ease in the Creation" (733). In addition, Mexico manages to adopt Slothrop's penchant for gross hallucination as he envisions confronting Pointsman in Twelfth House. This extended digression allows Mexico an outlet for his frustrations as he upsets the order of existence carefully arranged by Them. As a disinformatory tract this passage initially confuses the reader as Pynchon offers no allowances for the insane behavior exhibited by Mexico. By the time the reader realizes that the actions cannot be justified in any sense of a traditional novelistic outlay, the action absorbs his attention and he loses a sense of outset. That is, we know not where the narrative stream goes awry. For we suddenly find Mexico refuting his superiors by urinating on them! This Mexican trip, then, allows Mexico to assume Slothrop's hallucinatory mantle, and in so doing, increases the reader's misunderstandings concerning the narrative line, thus creating a paranoia which we seek to assail.

Although Roger Mexico epitomizes the new world paranoid, replete with Slothropian indulgences in scatological penitence, the Zone at no time lacks for would-be visionaries.
Throughout the final section of the novel characters try desperately to create a personal order from the chaos they face daily. Pirate Prentice, for instance, feels the presence of Katje's ancestor, Frans van der Groov. Pynchon writes, "it's not the end of his psychic difficulties. He is still being 'haunted,' in the same marginal and uncertain way, by Katje's ancestor Frans van der Groov, dodo killer and soldier of fortune" (722). Slothrop makes his last attempt at an imposed reality in the outhouse previously discussed. Mexico creates his own euphoric apocalypse of rebellion. Eddie Pensiero, a new character, indulges in his own version of "color the Zone" as he explicates human reactions to cold: "Eddie is a connoisseur of shivers. He is even able, in some strange way, to read them, like Saure Bummer reads reefers, like Miklos Thanatz reads whip-scars. But the gift isn't limited just to Eddie's own shivers, oh no, they're other people's shivers, too" (746). And as Eddie cuts the colonel's hair (and indeed affects the history written in those strands) his friend Paddy McGonigle transmits messages written in the sinews of his muscle and core of his bones. "With his crank here young Paddy is practicing another form of Eddie's gift, though he's transmitting not receiving . . . The message is never conscious on Paddy's part. It is sent by muscles and skeleton, by that circuit of his body which has learned to work as source of electrical power" (747-48).

Katje, too, allows herself the luxury of mixing memory and desire as she mentally communicates the only way she knows how: sexually. She imagines that she fornicates with a sentry on the packed earth, consuming a passion sprung of a Slothropian desire to
cut away the accoutrements of her past marbled existence. And instead of a camera
recording her movements, capturing for the celluloid instant (and eternity) her existence,
slickly packaged and able to confront a man with his own paranoia, she imagines a tribe of
the African savages who promise so much terror, watching with an adolescent fondness for
overzealousness her barren attempts at a spiritual harvest:

The outermost sentry peers from his rusty-boned cement ruin, and for two
full pedal-swings they are both, he and Katje, out in the daylight, blending
with packed earth, rust, bobbing perforations of sunlight cold gold and slick
as glass, the fresh wind in the trees. Hyperthyroidal African eyes, their
irises besieged as early corn-flowers by the crowding fields of white (764-65)
And Katje's visions continue as a chorus-line of Herero men begin a show which
highlights the psychological burdens Katje must endure evermore:

What Pirate Prentice briefed her on was folklore, politics, Zonal strategies--
but not blackness. When that was what she most needed to know about.
How can she pass through so much blackness to redeem herself? . . .
comfortable in here at least, lotossnuggly, but disastrous out in the World of
Reality she still believes in and will never give up hoping to rejoin someday.
All that's not bad enough, no, now she must also endure blackness. Her
ignorance of it must see her through. (766)

Our final visions of Slothrop come through his final fantasy. Returning to a world
which would seemingly indicate a childhood innocence, Slothrop finds the very roots of his creation ultimately guilty of submission to the forces of the unapproachable conspiracy of trades. Slothrop fashions a comic book world wherein he fights the forces of evil with the help of his superhero companions, Myrtle Miraculous, Maximilian, and Marcel. Unfortunately Slothrop psychologically battles the world his father creates, as he finds his childhood a mosaic of deception. Pynchon only offers a song as refuge against the oh-so-slippery historical carpet which Slothrop finds himself on. The song itself enjoys Pynchon's comic wit with such banal bravado as, "Howdy neighbor, how-dy pard!" and such cereal box philosophy as, "Ain't it lone-ly, say ain't it hard, / Passin' by so silent, day-after-day, with-out, even a smile-or, a friendly word to say?" (789). And Pynchon's apparent recourse against this loss of grace seems equally banal: "Tell ya bud-dy, tell ya ace, / Things're fal-lin', on their face -- / Maybe we should stick together part o' the way, and / Skies' ll be bright-er some day!" (789). However, as Pynchon ends both this song and the novel with the line, "Now ev'rybody--" the song takes on a greater weight of metaphorical importance. Since Pynchon places the song in the middle of Slothrop's comic book reverie its style approximates the anecdotal nature of the comic book format. Additionally, although vastly simplified, this song incorporates William Slothrop's notions on preterition, and transforms them to fit the moment. Although Slothrop may return to his childhood in his mind and eradicate what haunts his future, this song crosses the barriers of time and foretells the eventual disintegration of Slothrop's world.
xii. The Fragmented Map of the Future

As the novel nears its inevitable end Pynchon begins to fragment *The Counterforce* into sections which stylistically resemble nothing so much as the Bible. But in the gospel according to Pynchon, the apocalypse takes many, many forms, all of which share a common thread of disinformation. In these sections characters increasingly lose the ability to communicate with each other and so they constantly present nothing but disinformation to one another. Pynchon barrages the reader with scurrilous vignettes which exacerbate the looming entropy. We find Tyrone's mother writing to Joe Kennedy. However, she asks Kennedy only for information concerning Tyrone. She offers no maternal pleas for his safety or well-being, and so the reader cannot be sure if she wants to know if Slothrop still lives or if her husband's dealings have proved fruitful in some grossly American way. Language itself falls prey to a confused dissection as Saure Bummer appeals to Tyrone and Seaman Bodine for explications of slang terminology. Although apparently harmless in form and content, the episodes magnify the increasing dissolution of a coherent text. Next we find Slothrop in a bathroom with transvestites and a sodium bomb. Although the events allow for little inspection as to their veracity or even existence, the telling comment comes at the end of the section when Pynchon writes, "dragging reluctantly, off of his grease-chevroned head, the shining wig of innocence" (804). Slothrop seems to have lost so much of his innocence during his time in the Zone that we can only guess what form of innocence Pynchon refers to. With no obvious reference to the novel at large, Pynchon
inserts a comical gobbet concerning the actions of the Komical Kamikazes. If any thread of purpose might be imposed upon this staging of events, one might view this scenario as the most smugly black comic precursor to the end of a people's hopes. For Pynchon follows the Japanese pilots' story with the chapter, Streets. H.P. Lovecraft, a potential source or influence for Pynchon, presages all too accurately: "the sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age" (288).

Nature and man's artifacts come in view as the day awakens. "Strips of insulation hang up in the morning fog, after a night of moon brightening and darkening as if by itself, because the blowing fog was so smooth, so hard to see. Now, when the wind blows, yellow sparks will spill away with a rattlesnake buzz from the black old fraying wires, against a sky gray as a hat" (807). Indeed the world appears ready to renew its patterns of existence, both on the natural cycles and man's movements: "As if it will really be a busy day" (807). Slothrop ultimately achieves salvation through his faith in restoration, for it is his voice which tells us: "But in each of these streets, some vestige of humanity, of Earth, has to remain. No matter what has been done to it, no matter what it's been used for" (807). Slothrop foreshadows Japan's destruction by gazing toward the heavens. However, he emblematically spends the whole of a morning looking downward, searching
for the promise of a cultural renewal: "At least one moment of passage, one it will hurt
to lose, ought to be found for every street now indifferently gray with commerce, with
war, with repression . . . finding it, learning to cherish what was lost, mightn't we find
some way back" (808)? Slothrop sits and stares at a scrap of newspaper as the
machinations of the day begin. Although Slothrop, who increasingly emerges as the mirror
of his time, feels the coming destruction of the people of Japan, he cannot forestall the
events of history. Instead he must entropically scatter ever further from the world he once
knew.

Slothrop finds no dramatic ending to his tortured existence. Instead he slowly
entropies into a cultural and metaphorical icon of the Zone while simultaneously embodying
his rejection of it. Bodine sees Slothrop longer than his peers: "He's looking straight at
Slothrop (being one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature
any more. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together, even as a
concept" (864). For the disinherited of the Zone, imagination, the well-spring of hope and
renewal, slowly passes away. And with this wearing away of vision goes Slothrop. R.G.
Collingwood's quotation applies, all too poignantly, to the fallen: "the web of imaginative
construction (is) something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So
far from relying for its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the
touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine" (244). However,
Slothrop increasingly simply extends further and further away from a central core of
existence; just as the war carries the tenets of civilization into an increasing abyss of horror.
And as the novel systematically disassembles its characters and its chapters into Biblical
transitory gobbets, to be read like Blicero's tarot cards, the rocket finds its course.

V / Conclusion

The rocket falls as rockets must when faced with gravity's undying rainbow.

However, perhaps if we follow the bouncing ball and sing the song of the preterite we can
forget, or at least ignore, the show which Pynchon opened and opens for us throughout his
novel. If we read the words then perhaps the meaning will become glaringly evident.

Perhaps, though, our attempts to read the words fail as we apply our traditional modes of
interpretation to them. What magic must we conjure in order to accept the world we find
ourselves facing at the end of the novel?

Despite critics' attempts to pigeonhole Thomas Pynchon's novels, an open-minded
examination of those works allows the reader a curious experience. Facing the vast horrors
of our present age, as well as taking stock of our heritage of destruction, we might easily
join the ranks of critics who overwhelmingly refute the wonders of the novels, and instead
concentrate on their entropic nature or their apocalyptic doomsaying. But to realize the
magic of his works we must allow Pynchon his creation. The act of creation affords
Pynchon a personal brake against the wearing down of the universe. And reading the
novels allows the innocent reader a chance to confront humanity's, and his own, past. In
this confrontation the reader, like Tyrone Slothrop, loses his innocence. And like Slothrop
we experience a mental agitation; a paranoiac response to the world Pynchon presents. As we grow increasingly Slothropian in our reactions to the novels, and to their place in our world, we perhaps scatter somewhat. Initially Pynchon diffuses our mental focus. And as we take stock of the horrors he reveals, we desperately grasp for spiritually accessible orders of existence. And we lose any center of historical, religious, or moral certainty, we may have had. But in this dispersal we may find a salvation of sorts. For we have felt the impact of the novel. And throughout Pynchon forces us to question his, and in turn our, world. With so much of our world beyond the perimeters of personal understanding, the act of questioning becomes supreme. We must come full circle and, as citizens of the state, and as readers of fiction, absolve ourselves of the guilt inherent in a world which rewards complaisance. If we struggle with the deluge of disinformation Pynchon, the media, governments, and businesses bombard us with, we can find a form of salvation. Then, and only then, may we find a sense of ease in the Creation.
Works Cited


VITA

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