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Spring 2012

Who Needs Thomas Pynchon? the Role of a Post-Foundational, Reader Response Author

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WHO NEEDS THOMAS PYNCHON?
THE ROLE OF A POST-FOUNDATIONAL, READER RESPONSE AUTHOR

A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For Graduation with Honors

By

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May 2012

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Preface

This thesis provides a survey of post-foundational philosophy and explains reader response theory as one possible application of its insights within the field of literary theory. The main premise which unites these two theories is that belief precedes inference. Before people encounter any element of their world or any literary work, they harbor certain presuppositions that influence how they perceive and interact with that subject. This thesis ultimately centers on the question of whether a postmodern author who buys into these theories can presume to influence readers or larger society. It asks whether people can overcome these prior beliefs in order to significantly change their worldview, interact with opposed ideologies, and ultimately alter society. Through a reader response analysis of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice*, I argue that post-foundationalism allows writers to influence readers in a manner that is neither specific nor direct but nonetheless valuable.

This project would not even exist as an idea without the efforts of my two co-advisors: Dr. Lara Narcisi and Dr. Scott Dimovitz. I approached Dr. Narcisi with a vague interest in postmodern philosophy, Thomas Pynchon, and his unique means of forcing readers into conscious constructions of the text. She introduced me to reader response theory, provided me a comprehensive introduction to the larger field of literary theory, and provided countless sessions of brainstorming and support. Dr. Dimovitz guided me through the incredible genre of postmodern literature while also forcing me to actually write the ideas then circulating in my head or on scraps of notebook paper. Through individual meetings and numerous reviews of my drafts, they both forced me to add a level of nuance and detail to my writing that I could not have imagined before. So, a final thank you to these brilliant and genuinely good people. I hope I can talk to you about Thomas Pynchon for years to come!

Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout Inherent Vice, Thomas Pynchon offers a sort of comedic release through his frequent use of deliberate and unintentional misinterpretations as when Doc warns, "You don't want to start smoking, Bigfoot, smokin's bad for your ass" only for Bigfoot to respond, "Yes well I wasn't planning to smoke it in my ass, was I?" (270). Though not necessarily the most high-brow of moments from Pynchon's repertoire, this turn of dialogue from appropriate and expected response actually seems to highlight a common human predicament. Such verbal disharmony alludes to a main contention of post-foundational philosophy and its derivative of reader response theory: belief precedes inference. In the case of post-foundational philosophy, scholars note how belief in the rightful dominance of some form of authority typically precedes and influences persons' processes of reaching conclusions. In the case of reader response theory, scholars note how readers' assumptions and expectations are formed prior to the act of reading by experience and environment which influence their processes of interpretation.

The original proponents of these theories--such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida--presented these revelations as liberating. Recognition of these authorities could allow for critique which might eventually free people from ideological constraints in embrace of a proliferation of difference. Reader response theory might similarly promote difference by liberating the individual reader from the interpretive restraints of authorial intent. However, more recent critics such as Stanley Fish complicate this exuberant optimism by noting how context-driven truth might actually result in people so embedded within their surrounding systems that radical critique and change proves highly complicated. For Fish, the influence and profusion of context appears so potent that people from different contextual backgrounds struggle to even

effectively engage with one another which lessens the likelihood of change resulting from newfound integration. Post-foundationalism and reader response theory seem to imply that interactions between separate parties break down (often without the parties' full knowledge) into a disjointed series of misinterpretations akin to the absurdity of Doc's and Bigfoot's interaction.

The subtle though crucial rift within the philosophical movement of postmodernism briefly mentioned before complicates any attempts to describe or unite such scholars under a single label. While "anti-foundationalist" seems an adequate term for early postmodern scholars such as Lyotard and Derrida, it seems problematic for scholars like Fish who still acknowledge restraints upon human thoughts and actions. Scholars such as Stanley Fish and Frederic Jameson have employed "anti-foundationalism" to refer to the works of Lyotard and Derrida because these scholars rejected foundationalist epistemologies which ground truth in a core, essential belief and hoped to demolish or challenge all such existing standards. While recent scholars like Fish similarly challenge foundational premises and other forms of authority as the basis for belief, they approach even their predecessors' confident efforts to liberate persons from all such thought with skepticism. In the case of Fish who rejects the possibility of people or society entirely diagnosing and dismantling presuppositions, "post-foundationalism" helps distinguish his works from the complete opposition entailed by the term "anti-foundationalism." Interestingly, the term "post-foundationalism" was first employed by the "postfoundationalist theology" movement which recognized the challenges thrust upon Christianity by a postmodern world-view and sought an alternative outside the binary of foundational versus anti-foundational thought[1]. Throughout this paper, the term serves two roles. In the context of discussions which regard the range of postmodern philosophy dating from Lyotard and Derrida all the way to Stanley Fish, "post-foundationalism" expresses the overall challenge raised against the

foundational past. In the context of discussions regarding Stanley Fish alone, it also contains this prior meaning--or connotation--of a third option beyond the restraints and expectations of these two competing philosophical groups. In an appropriately postmodern sense, this term could never hope to escape such complexity and multiplicity of meaning.

For a more concrete example of how such post-foundational and reader response approaches identify impediments to communication and change, one might turn towards many episodes of the parody news program *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*. During a recent episode wherein he describes the points of contention surrounding the Supreme Court's hearing on the Affordable Care Act, Stewart notes a divide so divergent that it hardly seems like a debate or a coherent discussion at all. Proponents of President Obama's healthcare reform identify themselves as advocates for quality and affordable healthcare for all members of society; opponents of President Obama's healthcare reform identify themselves as defenders of the American constitution and freedom. He comments that "those do not seem like two halves of the same argument" so that it feels as discordant as two sides proclaiming, "I'm team Jacob; I'm anti-tyranny." What Stewart describes as a disharmony amounts to a misunderstanding between people from two opposed worldviews. The former side rests upon the assumption that healthcare is a fundamental human right so that they envision the debate to center around prescriptive arguments concerning the best possible means to provide wider coverage. The latter side rests upon the assumption that governmental mandates (particularly concerning an issue as monumental as personal health) necessarily violates individual freedom so that they envision the debate to center around the right of government to involve itself in the economic choices of citizens at all. Both sides thus not only base their reasonings on entirely different assumptions: their divergent assumptions cause them to hold, or prioritize, entirely different values which

seem as natural and obvious to them as the ground they stand upon. Both sides seem so enveloped within the contexts that foster these assumptions that they cannot help but analyze the opposing side's messages through a distorting perspective. After all, how could any rational person stand against sick persons acquiring the help they need? How could any rational person oppose freedom? Because the assumptions prove so unbalanced, people from these opposing sides struggle to engage in any kind of responsive or constructive discourse which prevents them from combining their unique perspectives into a new policy or insight. The debate, the healthcare system, the political system, and most literally the legislative halls thus seem doomed to state of inaction and stasis.

A post-foundational reader response theory thus entails significant consequences for authors seeking to ignite or foster some sort of change in readers or larger society. Authors have traditionally written for a variety of reasons apart from attempts to so influence readers. The "Manifesto of the World" famously expressed a Modernist disregard for readers as he declared, "The plain reader be damned." However, certain authors and literary critics have harbored some hope and faith regarding the transformative power of words--particularly words in the form of literature. If a contemporary author buys into post-foundational theories, which claim people are too embedded within a context to allow any significant challenge towards their epistemological foundations, as well as reader response theory, which claims readers necessarily construct a text according to their own presuppositions, then must they forego this aspiration? Much like few people continue to expect wealth from alchemy, must authors demote literature as a vehicle for social change to the dustbins of failed aspirations?

My explorations of these postmodern themes and this conundrum of change consist of three chapters which examine the works of prominent postmodern critics before applying their

insights to the literary works of Thomas Pynchon. The second chapter offers a survey of post-foundational attempts to identify and challenge the various forms of authority which have traditionally served as the basis for past beliefs. This chapter illustrates the wide variety of such efforts ranging from modernist opposition to overt power structures to Jean Francois Lyotard's rejection of ideological systems to Derrida's deconstruction of language to Stanley Fish's recent campaign against principle. This chapter primarily explores the works of Fish who challenges the grand intentions of his predecessor claiming people can never find a transcendent view from which to critique all foundations. The third chapter provides a survey of reader response theory which I present as an application of post-foundational philosophy within the disciple of literary theory. Specifically, it challenges authorities which serve to ground or limit a text's interpretation: authorial intent and the text's language itself. I explore the two ends of a spectrum that instead recognize the less predictable presence of individual readers' interpretation: the works of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. I conclude the chapter by arguing that Iser's moderate theory, unlike Fish's radical approach, fails to respond to many of the post-foundational challenges raised against language and knowledge. The fourth chapter then offers a reader response analysis of Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Inherent Vice. Such analysis seeks to explore whether a post-foundational, reader response author can hope to identify and challenge societal standards of truth as well as provide readers with a clear message in the hopes of changing a social order.

Chapter 2

Post-foundationalism: Defending Doubt as Opposed to Certainty

Due to the emphasis post-foundationalism places upon difference, critics find it

challenging and awkward to condense the theory into one principle concept. However, post-

foundationalism most broadly and simply refers to a rejection of authority in its multitude of

forms as the basis for belief. Consequently, an exercise of chief interest and importance for post-

foundational theorists is the identification of these epistemological power structures--some of

which prove more obscure than others. One might reasonably identify the most explicit and thus

easily critiqued of such authorities as those entities or institutions which presume to embody or

somehow deliver truth. Such overt power structures have popularly taken the form of divine

beings such as God delivering his moral truths to Moses on stone tablets so as to illustrate their

universal and timeless resonance. For many, institutionalized faith serves as a simulacrum for

God's presence and thus adopts a similar role as an undisputed medium for truth. For others, an

indubitable state or governmental leader adopts this role as the values and practices it prescribes

seem as natural and superior as any system established by any God.

However, postmodern critics arguably dedicate less energy towards analyzing such overt

ideological authorities, presumably since their modernist forefathers already identified and

critiqued them resolutely. Kevin J.H Dettmar's and Jennifer Wicke's "The Twentieth Century"

identifies some of the most significant events and critiques which weakened the influence of

various ideological apparatuses. They note advances made throughout the later nineteenth and

twentieth centuries in the natural and physical sciences[2] which challenged narratives of

organized religions (2114). They explain the momentous upset of World War I which lasted four

years rather than the expected couple of weeks (2116). The Great War resulted in hundreds of

thousands of British casualties and a cost of over nine million combatant lives overall so that "notions of British invincibility, of honor, even of the viability of civilization weakened" (2116). Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* similarly describes the destabilizing influence of World War II. He claims the Holocaust upset for many critics the notion of Germany--and the European state in general--as the nucleus of advanced and proper social organization (64). This global conflict also increased the already considerable animosity towards England amongst its colonial territories as the state drafted millions of colonial subjects to augment its defenses. The world thus witnessed a surge of independence movements immediately following the war so that an empire, which at one point controlled one-fourth of the world, dramatically eroded (Dettmar and Wicke 2127). As new discoveries revealed the flaws of past ideological institutions and even the most imposing centers of power were reduced to fragments, many people began to doubt the ability for any all-encompassing authority.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, a groundbreaker for the anti-foundational movement, envisions and combats power in its slightly more opaque form as he focuses upon systems of thought rather than single figures or institutions of power. His seminal essay from 1982, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?," expresses this distinction as he encourages readers to reject "would-be authoritative 'overarching,' 'totalising' *explanations* of things" (emphasis mine, qtd by Barry 86). Integral to this understanding of authority as "systems of thought" is the notion of presuppositions, those beliefs often implicitly assumed as necessarily true which allow individuals to develop concomitant sequences of truths. Such assumptions have adopted a variety of forms such as belief in the basic goodness of humanity, belief in the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent divine creator, or even a belief as simple as the orderly and referential nature of

language. Lyotard disregards such a priori assertions as fallacious but mainly criticizes the systems of thought which post-foundationalists suspect to be their typical end products. Those who faithfully subscribe to such presuppositions necessarily also subscribe to their logical conclusions or extensions while at the same time instantly reject contradictory points as illogical. For Lyotard, such syllogistic reasoning eventually leads to "totalizing"[3] thought in that it produces "the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject" (87). If individuals subscribe to a presupposition and its subsequent system of truth wholeheartedly, then they assume its universal application and simplify the world accordingly. Such a theory proves "overarching" or "totalizing" (86) because it attempts to condense the enormity and complexity of the world and all human nature within one single explanation. To render this concept more comprehensible and less abstract, Lyotard provides "Christianity, Marxism, or the myth of scientific progress" (86) as three prominent examples. Christianity, Marxism, and faith in science might initially seem like entirely disparate world-views; however they relate through their common attempts to view the world comprehensively and systematically.

Jacques Derrida appropriated this post-foundational distrust of power yet arguably heightened its impact and scope by revealing language itself as an unreliable authority. Derrida profited immensely from the works of structuralist linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure who provided two momentous insights regarding language. First, structuralists believe language constructs individuals' perceptions of the world and thus--for all intents and purposes--the world itself. Barry summarizes this point well as he explains language actively creates the world of objects and experiences rather than simply "reflects" or "records" it for future posterity (59). An objective, external world may exist; however, humans' dependance upon their linguistic devices to comprehend such a reality necessarily renders it a human construct. Second, structuralists

argue that this architectural language is arbitrary in that it "isn't a reflection of the world and of experience, but a system which stands quite separate from it" (40). Essentially, structuralists established a sharp distinction between the "signifier" which refers to the word or symbol and the referent which refers to the subject as it actually exists in reality. The signifier is not necessarily connected to or originated from the referent but rather chosen by chance.

Identifying a randomly constructed and unstable language as the main determinant for individuals' worldview may seem disparaging or even unsound to some, but Derrida and his fellow deconstructionists felt as though such a move constituted the only way to accept the full implications of these structuralist insights. According to Barry, structuralists ultimately viewed language as an "orderly" system which allowed them to assume individuals could still employ words to attain stable meanings (62). On the contrary, Derrida views language as a "chaotic" system. He claims the signifier is "constantly floating free" from the referent (62) and thus language is constantly "floating free" from the speaker's initial meanings/ intentions. Derrida and fellow deconstructionists offer specific reasons for the inherent instability, or "slippage" (62), of language. First, they deny the ability of any word to contain one unadulterated meaning as they all are necessarily "'contaminated' by their opposites" (64). This point originates from the structuralist belief in the relational quality of words--the notion that a word's meaning is contingent upon its relation to other associated words (42) so that the signifier "teenager" only acquires meaning through its subtle differentiations from the signifiers "child" and "adult." According to post-structuralists, a word proves even more contaminated when it is part of a dyadic pair since people define the word mainly through its perceived opposition to its converse partner. Many persons thus consider "femininity" to be any traits supposedly dissimilar to "masculinity" while "good" only makes sense as contrary to "bad" and "falsity" is supposedly

that which lacks "truth." When a speaker employs a word, he or she thus inadvertently and unavoidably recalls its associates or opposites, which severely complicates the intended transfer of meaning. Deconstructionists diagnose etymology as a further contaminate of language as multiple separate meanings from the past and present reside within a single word. Barry playfully explains that seemingly dead usages of words retain a "ghostly presence within present-day usage, and are likely to materialize just when we thought it was safe to use them" (64). Employing the logic of this metaphor, this ghost of the word's past meaning might adopt the form of a connotation. This seems especially plausible in the case of poetic language which often chooses or rejects specific words based on such subtle or buried intimations. Finally and perhaps most critically, language necessarily involves omissions. No expression of language--no matter how intricately crafted--can foresee and settle all questions or uncertainty and thus cannot prevent ambiguity. Derrida thus ultimately rejects the possibility of any "pure performative," meaning any use of language which completely constrains interpretation and thus successfully transfers the source's intention without doubt or such ambiguity (Bennington 6). If individuals necessarily create and conceptualize the world through language, then such linguistic uncertainty precludes the possibility for any piece of stable meaning.

To this linguistic anxiety, many readers might ask, "But can't you just ask for clarification? Can't you simply ask someone what he or she *really* means?" The assumption underlying such a sentiment is one that Stanley Fish dedicates much effort to identity and challenge: belief in the presence--absence dyad. Post-foundationalists and post-structuralists often dedicate themselves to complicating, inverting, or overall demolishing the (in their opinions fallacious) dichotomies erected in attempts to establish order. For Fish, the presence--absence dyad seems the most powerful and encompassing of dyads. By "absence," Fish refers to

"a mode of knowing" which is "indirect, opaque, context-dependent, unconstrained, derivative, and full of risk" (Naturally 41). Examples include "metaphorical language" (40) such as that found in fiction or poetry. "Mediated" language also seems a powerful example such as conversation held over distance so that parties cannot read one another's non-verbal signals which help establish tone. "Absence" might also occur during speech between strangers or parties which, as of yet, know not what to expect from one another (38). By "presence," Fish refers to the converse of "a mode of knowing that is, at least relatively if not purely, direct, transparent, without difficulties, unmediated, independently verifiable, unproblematic, pre interpretive and sure" (41). Examples include "literal language" (40) as one might find in most everyday conversation, a scientific journal, or a news article. As Stanley Fish readily admits, this dyad seems to align with common sense and the evidence of people's own experiences. Some language is clearer, more direct, and more explicit than others. Are not Derrida and other post-structuralists merely lumping all forms of language together and carelessly pointing towards its less direct uses to discredit the entire system? If a friend approached you to say, "Ineluctable modality of the visible. At least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signature of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack. the nearing tide, that rusty boot," (Joyce 37) then could I not simply ask, "What do you mean? What do you mean to express by 'seaspawn' or 'rusty?'" Can the instability posited by post-structuralists be substantially curtailed simply by switching from metaphorical to direct language?

Post-structuralists repudiate the presence-absence binary and thus this hopeful solution to a realm of uncertainty. Barriers exist between all speech acts and the referents they hope to transparently express, and no forms of communication are more privileged than others. According to Fish, all speech is mediated by the beliefs and perspectives of the persons receiving

the message; consequently, they can never feel fully confident that what they receive is in fact the speaker's full intention. Imagine that I am friends with Stephen Dedalus and he responds to my question: "I mean that I cannot help but mainly experience my surroundings through the sense of vision.[4]" At first this explanation seems far more clear; however, the ultimate purpose or "spirit" (Naturally 42) of his message would remain as ambiguous as before. Meaning is not solely derived from words' common definitions found within dictionaries but mainly rests upon the speaker's underlying intent. Does Stephen intend to bemoan, celebrate, or simply acknowledge the dominant role of his sight? More importantly, does he intend to ignite an epistemological discussion between intellectual equals or illustrate his intellectual superiority? If I asked Stephen to elucidate these intentions, I might confidently accept his answer and experience a relatively successful transfer of meaning. However, it seems just as likely that I might distrust his response and remain uncertain due to prior feelings or preconceptions such as personal insecurities, doubts concerning his character, ext. Many people assume that their beliefs or understandings develop from others' words or phrases; however, beliefs precede interpretive efforts so that they actually determine the word's meanings. Individual beliefs/ presuppositions precede inference and meaning so that "communications of every kind are characterized by exactly the same conditions--the necessity of interpretive work, the unavoidability of perspective" (44). The result is what Eagleton refers to as the paradox of language: "the more information a [speech act] provides, the more indeterminate it becomes" (66). Because language is necessarily interpreted, more words seem to increase the amount of their recipient's interpretive work which increases rather than constrains the amount of misunderstanding.

Stanley Fish's works seem immensely influenced both by Lyotard's emphasis on larger systems of thought and Derrida's interest in the instability of language. However, his works

prove somewhat unique in that they focus upon broad concepts whose meanings are falsely assumed as explicit, universal, and constant rather than contextually constructed. Fish alludes to this focus most clearly as he claims to challenge "a vocabulary" which "stigmatizes counterarguments ('you mean you're against fairness?') even before they are heard" (Free Speech 16). One may reasonably summarize Fish's focus as the critical analysis of "principle," meaning the subtle, linguistic appeals to overarching standards or ethics. In The Trouble With Principle, Fish explains that "Each of these maxims, urges us to enter a perspective wider than that formed by our local affiliations and partisan goals; each gestures towards a morality more capacious than the morality of our tribe, or association, or profession, or religion" (2). According to Fish, individuals constantly employ terms such as "neutrality," "merit," "fairness," or "freedom" (16) as though they possess an inherent and indisputable meaning and thus an ideal to which everyone should aspire. Fish's careful description of these terms (or principles) as standards which rest apart from "religion" (2) seems particularly interesting, for it emphasizes how many individuals who reject overt power structures and even Lyotard's more subtle assumption-driven systems of belief (like religion) succumb to faith in these terms instead. Principle has proven a highly powerful appeal because of its reputation as something apart from all things idiosyncratic or contextual. Its stature seems further evident by peoples' willingness to even judge or critique their religious dictums and systems through appeals to such standards. People often presume to reject a religious policy by claiming it violates some standard of justice, love, or kindness because they assume these terms possess comprehensive meanings. Fish also finds proof of their potency in their frequent use by both conservative and socially liberal agendas such as those of radical free speech advocates and feminists (Free Speech 16).

Ultimately, such confidence in these terms' meanings produce more subtle though equally erroneous systems of thought. As Fish explains, these terms profess for many a "release from ideological gridlock by providing a means of adjudication" (17). If such terms are certain and thus "hostage to no ideology," then society may objectively "test the coherence of any ideology" (17) by erecting them as standards for judgment. It follows that through such principle-based logic, policies "favoring no one and respecting everyone can be identified and implemented" (3). However, faith that such terms possess universal and constant definitions (let alone reveal certain policies or beliefs as superior) proves disqualified by the legitimate doubts and debates constantly surrounding them. Like all else, these terms "will have different meanings in relation to different assumptions and background conditions." (4). Consequently, such terms "do not mark out an area quarantined from the pull of contending partisan agendas; they are among the prizes that are claimed" (4). As a result, much of Fish's work seems dedicated to pulling these individual terms apart in order to reveal their internal contradictions.

Because even Stanley Fish admits that his works mostly "reduce" to this basic argument, one might best illustrate his contribution to post-foundational thought by detailing his deconstruction of a specific principle: fairness. Individuals often appeal towards the notion of fairness (mainly from a stance of indignation) without consciously and critically examining their understanding of this broad term. However, this term cannot possess or express any semblance of meaning unless the speaker has "specified the background conditions in relation to which fairness has an operational sense" (Principle 3). The meaning of fairness is contingent upon a person's unique contextual environment because fairness is merely a judgement regarding an action's accordance with previously held expectations or interests (Free Speech 3). People navigate their social worlds with a set of assumptions regarding what will, should, or must

happen along the course of their ways. If some event or another person's actions violate these expectations, then they deem such occurrences "unfair." However, Fish skillfully notes how different environments and experiences instill people with drastically different expectations which lead to drastically different determinations of fair.

For example, he explains how recent equations between affirmative action and the racism for which it attempts to compensate result from such varied definitions. One side of the debate views fairness as a process whereby institutions base significant selections (such as college admittance) exclusively upon merit as determined by seemingly neutral and verifiable criteria like grade point averages or test scores. Fairness requires that such institutions do not take anything outside the control of the individual student into account such as race or a history of oppression (60). This standard seems obvious to many; thus, the conclusion that black and white students' applications receive the same treatment seems equally straightforward. However, this standard hardly proves the neutral guarantee against a privileging of one group over another that its advocates so imagine. A black student might counter by listing past efforts "to deprive [black] citizens of their voting rights, to limit access to an educational institution, to prevent entry into the economy except at the lowest and most menial levels" (Naturally 610) and countless other forms of stigmatization which have all combined to lessen his or her chance of acceptance at a desired university. Due to their experiences with these impediments, such students' definitions of fairness might likely include some means of accounting for a past which uniquely disadvantaged certain groups. To reach agreement, these students from different background conditions would thus find themselves forced to identify and argue the merit of each others' background conditions. Of course, the argument would likely fall upon even more maxims of principle so

that efforts to reach an entirely neutral--or inclusive--conclusion would prove complicated at best.

A common implication of such a post-foundational dismissal of authority--as previously alluded towards--is an emphasis upon (or recognition of) multiplicities of understanding and thus difference or contradiction. Foundationalists' belief in some overarching authority as the standard for truth encourages them to define "truth" as some premise with credence that extends beyond contextual, temporal, or personal circumstances. Essentially, truth is that which proves itself as universal. Consequently, those who fail or choose not to comply with such truths are stigmatized if not persecuted as immoral or insane. For post-foundationalists, individual context supplants transcendent authority as the source of truth which encourages them to view "truth" as a relative and disparate term. Stanley Fish speaks for most post-foundationalists as he contends that all aspects of life "will have different meanings in relation to different assumptions and background conditions" (4). Fish attempts to more clearly define these types of influential background conditions as he notes the importance of one's "political affiliation, educational experience, ethnic tradition, gender, class, institutional experience, etc." (4). Fish's use of "etc." proves especially appropriate, for the contingencies upon which an individual's perspective are based seem nearly endless. One might add religious affiliation to this list along with one's access to recreational drugs or even a significant neighbor across the street from one's childhood home. Post-foundationalists thus view the assumption that all individuals or societies could find unanimous agreement regarding any subject with fierce skepticism. Fish for one does not reject objective, universal truth as a theoretical concept but rather denies the potential of any humans to discover or recognize such a force due to the inherent limitations of any one person's or group's experience and perspective. Fish's There's No Such Thing As Free Speech (And It's a Good

Thing Too) dedicates significant effort to challenging politicians, educators, artists and others who profess to promote "common" values or overall "unity" by curtailing the "political" by which they refer to the fringe interests of a particular group. Fish explains that "While there are such truths, they could only be known from a god's-eye view. Since none of us occupies that view (because none of us is a god), the truths any of us find compelling will always be partial, which is to say they will be political" (8). No person or larger group possesses an omniscient perspective so that all world-views are limited and thus appear fringe to some separate person or group.

Of course, the astute reader will note how modernism also refuted the tendency of past philosophical traditions to develop comprehensive systems of thought from basic, core principles. Yeats offered the epiphany that "things fall apart; the center cannot hold" while Eliot mourned the "stony rubbish" to which roots cannot crutch--both of which seem like post-foundational sentiments. Various literary critics identify such modernist themes as evidence of the basic continuity between modernism and post-modernism; however, this shared theme actually highlights a critical distinction between the two movements. Modernism dismantled past traditions' ideological systems but anticipated and hoped desperately to replace them with a foundational truth undiscovered as of yet. On the contrary, postmodern anti-foundationalism disdains or distrusts all potential central premises of truth and the systematized thought they produce. Terry Eagleton summarizes this distinction well as he states, "postmodernity means the end of modernity, in the sense of those grand narratives of truth, reason, science, progress, and universal emancipation which are taken to characterize modern thought from the Enlightenment onwards" (200). For many, the natural corollary of this rejection of foundationalism as oppressive is the promotion of anti-foundationalism as necessarily liberating. When one speaks

of anti-foundationalim, he or she thus often recalls a tone of exhilaration or at least acceptance. Anti-foundational critics seem particularly fond of employing political tyrants or physical barriers as metaphors for past foundational thought. Recall, for example, Lyotard's description of foundational theory as "would-be authoritative" in his 1982 essay. Stanley Fish for one explicitly links foundational thinking with past and present discrimination against minority communities. He states in response to those like Lynne Cheney who fear that universal values and perspectives are curtailed by the addition of post-colonial works to core curriculum, "Our children...do not begin with shared perspectives; they are to be brought to the perspectives common to some of us by a process in which the perspectives they may have shared, had in common, with others of us, are either expunged or marginalized" (Free Speech 34). Eagleton expresses this sense of past restriction and current liberation as he mimics or parodies various postmodern prose: "these fond hopes have not only been historically discredited; they were dangerous illusions from the outset, bundling the rich contingencies of history into a conceptual straightjacket."

Many individuals who might likewise find themselves persuaded and exhilarated by post-foundationalism as an abstract concept often reject it on the basis of anecdotal objections. They ask themselves (quite reasonably), "how can I subscribe to a theory which seemingly equates Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies?"* More importantly, they question the validity of a theory which seems to rank women's equal opportunity movements on the same ethical level as bride burning. If contextual chance proves the source of a society's values and practices rather than an objective or benevolent source like science or God, then any belief seems as unrooted in truth as the next and thus as equally viable (or unviable) as the next. Past foundationalists have also framed the ethical dilemma as one between "civilization and order versus the anarchy of the individual will" (Fish,

Naturally 11). Many persons thus assume they must forego all opinions or cease all social activism once they enter a postmodern frame of mind.

However, Fish claims that the contextual nature of truth actually demands rather than prohibits judgment and prohibits rather than demands the so-called "anarchy of the individual" (11). A transcendental truth--by definition--must reside in some place or standard which stands apart from the individual, the local, and in some cases even the earthly. However, its privileged position apart from or beyond peoples' surrounding contexts increases the likelihood that they will overlook, misunderstand, or even ignore such a truth. If, for example, individuals depend upon a distant and otherworldly God to deliver notions of truth, then they in most likelihood will fail to receive the message. Even if an individual could receive this otherworldly truth, he or she could escape these standards in theory by simply refusing--by saying "no" to this divine figure and his law. Like Ivan of Fyodor Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, one might protest "I hasten to give back my entrance ticket" even if he or she one day clearly understood God's ultimate plan and edicts. Instead, principles of truth and standards of judgment pervade every facet of peoples' surroundings from their families, schools, and favorite television sitcoms to the structures of their language itself. Thus, these principles become implanted within and integral to the individual. Stanley Fish actually titles one of his most prominent works Doing What Comes Naturally to describe the "unreflective actions that follow from being embedded in a context of practice" (IX). He explains that if notions of truth and thus appropriate behavior are created by one's surroundings, then "what you think to do will not be calculated in relation to a higher law or an overarching theory but will issue from you as naturally as breathing" (IX). Just as people can neither choose to breathe nor choose to not breathe, they can neither choose the principles which govern their perspectives and daily behaviors nor reject the most omnipresent of underling

principles which govern their communities. In order to develop a revolutionary and genuinely subversive perspective or lifestyle, one must view and critique his or her current perspectives and their sources from a separate vantage point. If these present perspectives and their sources are independent and distinct from a person's immediate context, then he or she could challenge them from such an impartial/ objective frame of mind. If these sources are instead ubiquitous so that they surround and form us from the moment of consciousness, then people can never attain for even a moment the distance needed to launch such a monumental attack. When opponents warn against the complete chaos and insurrection which result from the postmodern reign of unfettered individual wills, Fish merely responds, "But how could such a personal preference even form apart from some conventional system of thought or mores in relation to which it was possible and thinkable?" since "anything that could be experienced as a preference will derive from the norms inherent in some community" (11). Post-foundational critics thus often emphasize a sharp distinction between themselves and anti-foundationalists, or "nihilists" as they are often pejoratively labeled.

Fish only seems to identify one distinct impact of note between a foundational and post-foundational conception of truth. Principles of truth are products of their historical and societal context; societal and historical contexts are not the products of some inherent principle of truth. Thus, many principles assumed as absolute and constant are actually contingent and thus challengeable. Post-foundationalist theory, according to Stanley Fish, thus allows for judgments though they are judgments which demand rather than terminate debate: "Nor am I denying the possibility of judgment...but merely observing that any judgment one might make in that direction is disputable, and disputable by persons no less well educated than you or I" (Free Speech 35). In fact, Stanley Fish himself frequently and unabashedly refers to his own points as

"right" though he prefaces these judgements not only with detailed and carefully developed logic but also with explanations of the circumstances and background conditions which lead him to accept such logic. While others purposefully hide or fail to consider the social origins of their beliefs, he emphasizes them as he claims, "My sense of the rightness of my arguments is no less strong...and is in no way diminished by my ability to give an account of its source" (Naturally 3). This unique view which defends the legitimacy of one's own views while simultaneously opening them up to challenge is well summarized as Fish reasons, "On the one hand, the condition of being without constraints is quite literally unimaginable and therefore need not be feared; but on the other, the constraints that are always in place are not fixed but interpretive-- forever being altered by the actions they make possible--and there is no danger that they will forever hold us in the same position" (27). Fish perhaps explains this seeming paradox best when he claims that "all preferences are principled" and "all principles are preferences" (11). Any individual person's belief or desire must derive from and function within the context (or community) from which he or she was formed. However, every principle is an "extension of a particular and *contestable* articulation of the world" (11) so that each community's beliefs or desires are not objectively verifiable or universally true but rather constructed and thus entirely debatable.

Critics holding viewpoints and agendas associated with leftist politics also raise objections against the perceived ramifications of post-foundational philosophy. Terry Eagleton, a critic with Marxist inclinations, fears that postmodern philosophy, if carried to its logical conclusions, often results in strict defense of the status quo. He specifically condemns what he refers to as "conservative" schools of postmodern thought including "American neo-pragmatists like Rorty and Fish" for whom "the collapse of transcendental viewpoints signals, in effect, the

collapse of the possibility of full-blooded political critique" (203). The argument follows that if objective truths separate from an individual's time, place, or experience do not exist, then individuals cannot find any autonomous place upon which to stand outside from their context as an impartial judge. Therefore, post-foundationalists commonly perceived as radicals might actually prove more reactionary than the staunchest of political conservatives. In a sense, Eagleton's critique proves well-founded and in fact finds support from Fish's logic and the language of his prose. Thus, a primary conflict within such versions of post-foundational philosophy is whether it can provide the sort of ideological freedom and differentiation promoted by previous scholars such as Lyotard and Derrida.

Chapter 3

Reader Response Theory: Exposing Interpretation as Opposed to Meaning

Former Republican Presidential candidate Michelle Bachman demonstrated a fairly typical mindset among the foundationalist, Christian community in a 2003 interview regarding birth control education in public schools. The debate seems a resolvable one for Bachman as she explains, "the Bible presents a standard to which everyone can repair, whether you are a believer or not" as opposed to "this new [postmodern] way of thinking [which] offers no standard." However, her appeal to the Bible during a recent primary debate reveals the complications which surround efforts to so elevate texts as a foundation or standard. Prior to this debate, Bachman noted that her choice to pursue tax law actually ran counter to her own desires. She chose to pursue tax law at her husband's recommendation because the Bible explicitly informs women to be subservient towards their husbands. When asked whether she would remain submissive towards her husband as president of the United States, Bachman shrewdly replied, "Both he and I--what submission means to us--if that's what your question is--it means respect. I respect my husband." The single word "submission" thus seems to embody multiple different connotations—or even meanings—for various readers so that one must adopt a highly active and unique interpretive role even when reading what seems the most straightforward or sacred of texts. Bachman's example reveals that texts and the language from which they are formed are uncertain and contingent whether one chooses to acknowledge that instability or not. Bachman's example thus illustrates how the uncertainty and contingency revealed by post-foundational philosophy entails significant implications for many peoples' primary means of accessing information: the process of reading.

Barry argues that postmodernists express the post-foundational repudiation of fundamental principles by discarding those components of various practices once considered essential. For example, he notes that "melody and harmony were put aside in music; perspective and direct pictorial representation were abandoned in painting" (81). Various schools of critics (most prominently New Historicists and Formalists) considered inherent, objective meaning equally essential to literary works as harmony to music; thus, reader response criticism amounts to as revolutionary a movement as abstraction for painting. Like post-foundational philosophy, the term "reader response theory" encompasses a multitude of varied interpretations; however, their common factor is an interest in the individual reader's unique role in the construction of a text's meaning. In general, reader response critics argue that texts inherently possess indeterminacies which require individual readers to produce what Terry Eagleton refers to as "inferences" (65). No matter how direct, detailed, transparent, or overall intricately constructed a text seems, its dependence upon language renders the message inherently indirect and influenced by the context of an individual reader.

Literary critics have identified many such textual indeterminacies which often correspond to the uncertainties posited by post-foundationalism against knowledge in general. Most broadly, reader response theory relates directly to the post-foundational distrust of authority. While post-foundational philosophy rejects authority as the basis for any system or tenet of belief, reader response theory rejects authority as the basis for a text's meaning. Literary critics have typically attempted to found a text's authoritative meaning in one of two sources: the author or the language of the text itself. The author seemed the favorite standard of meaning for the Romantic and Victorian periods while New Critics of the early twentieth century promoted the texts's language as most crucial (64). The emphasis placed upon close reading in contemporary

university settings reveals the lasting influence of this latter approach. Both sources seem to offer the text a comparative sense of stability as meaning is fixed in the single root of either an individual author or a language which reveals a sole, underlying intent through laborious and structured analysis. Through appeals to either of these sources, one may hold faith in the text as a unified or holistic entity which any and all readers might discover in unanimous agreement. A text becomes the transmitter or "standard" of meaning imagined and desired by Michelle Bachman and fellow foundationalists. However, reader response critics view such standards as implausible at their best and intellectually oppressive at their worst.

As previously mentioned, post-foundationalists reject figures or institutions which explicitly presume to supply truth such as a king or a divine figure. In similar manner, reader response critics reject authorial intent as the basis for a text's meaning. Roland Barthes's 1967 essay "The Death of the Author" expresses this connection well as he laments, "The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions;" specifically, "the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us" (1). The author thus adopts the role of a god figure in the sense that he/she "produces" or creates reality which he/she then reveals to the chosen few who are willing and able to understand. The author seems merely another figure or institution before which persons grovel or defer towards for meaning.

To recognize the severe (if not insurmountable) obstacles preventing readers from so discovering authorial intent, one need only recall the challenges which underlie any attempts to explain human behavior. If one recalls a writing exercise of his or her own--an essay, journal, creative piece, etc.--then he or she would most likely recall the difficulty of ascertaining (let

alone delivering) his or her full and clear meaning or intent. During any one moment of writing a single person can contain multiple intentions. Some of these intentions might contradict; some of these intentions might even remain hidden or unbeknownst to the author himself or herself. As Eagleton notes, authorial intent rests upon the assumption that writers "are always in full possession of their own meanings" (41)--an assumption which runs contrary to common experience.

Of course, this dilemma proves only more complicated as readers with personal biases and presuppositions attempt to objectively discern the internal intentions of a separate person. Recall Fish's argument against the presence--absence dyad which claims that assumptions and interpretation always precede reasoning and conclusions. For Fish, the same premise applies to readers' attempts to "understand" or "know" an author and his or her intent. Fish quotes Derrida who once defined writing as a form of language in which "the mark can do without the referent" (Naturally 46) which he interprets to mean that writing can--and indeed must--be understood by persons with no "independent" or transparent access either to the author or the initial, intended audience. Readers can never know an author "independently" or--in other words--impartially. Knowledge of an author and his/her intended meaning is preceded by, influenced by, and dependent upon the reader's previous assumptions regarding the author as a person and even authorship as a profession. The author as he/she actually exists in reality[5] essentially disappears "even in the original moment of [a work's] production" (46) because he/she is thereafter "never transparently present but must be interpreted or 'read' into being" (47). Barthes seems to offer a similar argument when he states that from the moment language is recorded and thus extends beyond its immediate context, "the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death,

writing occurs" (1). Because interpretation precedes understanding, the true author is never understood but constructed by each individual reader.

Readers can, and most likely will, continue to appeal to authorial intent as they promote certain interpretations of texts. However, such appeals seem mere rhetorical ploys since the author and his/her intent exists more as construct of the reader's mind than a concrete, autonomous person. Fish further illustrates this notion with an intriguing mental exercise, asking readers to imagine themselves as they attempt to uncover meaning from a written message delivered without any signature. The reader of this anonymous message would of course first enumerate a list of its potential writers. The reader would associate each of these separate writers with separate purposes for writing the letter; thus, the range of this one letter's meanings would seem exasperatingly expansive. Fish then encourages readers to imagine they acquire more information which reveals the author's identity so that ostensibly "the indeterminacy...would have been lessened and perhaps eliminated entirely" (Naturally 41). In actuality, Fish claims such uncertainty would hardly be lessened at all by the mere name of the author since "what I would want to know are his intentions, his purposes, his reasons" (42). Recall again Fish's previous argument against the presence--absence dyad which claims that meaning resides not in the surface meanings of words but in the underlying "spirit" through which they are spoken. Imagine once more that as you pass a man walking whom you consider rude or pretentious, he calls out "Good morning." You might think to yourself, "What a jerk. What's his problem?," though his words alone never implied such hostility. Since the reader interprets the writer's identity based on prior understandings or assumptions before he/she even encounters or analyzes the text, this underlying intent is necessarily mediated. Even if critics could presume to objectively navigate the complexities of the author's psyche at the precise moment of his/her

writing, they would likely still need to choose which of the multiple intentions to foreground or even which of the contradictory intentions to exclude altogether. The reader cannot escape his or her interpretive influence when considering the author so that the text seems more of his or her own creation.

If authorial intent fails and collapses as the source for a text's clear and universal meaning, then the language of the document itself might stand as a refuge. Language seems a promising alternative since the words are facts concretely present on the pages no matter who views or holds them. However, reader response critics appropriate much of the post-structuralists' linguistic suspicions so that the text instead seems a series of holes and ambiguities filled or solved by the reader. Eagleton explains that the reader often unconsciously makes "connections, fills in gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches" all of which force him or her to draw on "tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular" (66). Readers determine how individual words, sentences, and passages relate to one another and then create larger explanations to unite those connections. One might appeal to the opening passage of Bachman's preferred text—The Bible—to further demonstrate this point. The Book of Genesis begins the story of creation by describing the earth as "formless and empty" before claiming, "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Most readers will assume connections between these clauses and sentences; they will assume a chronological order between the events they describe. Many readers might further assume that the text implies immediacy or a very short timespan between these events. The clauses follow so quickly one after the other that it seems God demanded light and light existed where moments before there was only a "formless and empty" void. Upon further analysis, the text might not demand such a connection between phrases and sentences at all, but rather might prove the product of present

literary conventions. Scientific discoveries which suggest the Earth formed on a non-human, geologic timescale suggests readers may in fact connect these opening words in a variety of contradictory ways.

Eagleton's notion of "connections" and "gaps" (66) also correlates to Lyotard's and Fish's analyses of presuppositions. No text—regardless of how scrupulously constructed by an author—can explicitly inform readers of how each word is meant to be understood, let alone how each words is meant to be understood in relation to other words. For example, confusion often occurs as readers attempt to distinguish between a narrative and a free indirect voice. Readers must constantly ask, is the sentence which follows expressed by (and therefore expressive of) the same person? Essentially, readers possess presuppositions of how reality, literature, and even language itself functions based upon their individual and social experiences or contexts.

Fish's "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" claims that readers must begin the process of interpreting a piece of literature with the largest assumption of all: labeling the work as a piece of literature. Specifically, he explains that "the act of recognition" precedes any identification of the work's distinguishing features or the formulation of overall meaning (232). Once a reader presumes that the work before him or her is literary, he or she begins to analyze that work in a literary manner. The reader assumes that the words possess potent meanings for a larger community beyond the writer or an immediate audience, and he or she assumes meaningful connections between these words. As an example, Fish recalls an experiment wherein he wrote five random philosophers' names in vertical order upon a blackboard for a medieval religious poetry course. Once he told his class that the random assortment was a medieval religious poem, they were able to analyze it in a literary manner by ascribing larger religious meanings to words and their phonemes as well as by identifying suggestive connections

between these words. Fish claims readers must precede all literary interpretations with the same assumption regarding the text's literary potential.

For such various reasons, reader response critics argue that the reader is an active force rather than a merely passive vessel which receives meaning; thus, the reader's experiences and interpretive efforts become crucial for critics to acknowledge and study. All reader response critics agree that the reader is essential; however, they disagree as to the extent to which the author or text limits or constrains readers' possible—or acceptable—interpretations. One may thus view reader response theory as a spectrum. The Constace School of reader response theory-- most prominently represented by Wolfgang Iser--rests on the moderate end of the spectrum with its notion of "concretization" (Eagleton 67). According to this theory, meaning is less a stable force fixed in either the text or the reader but rather something which is created through the interactions of both parties (Fish, Naturally 69). According to Iser, both parties adopt crucial and distinct roles which together construct meaning. The text provides a set of instructions or "cues" which objectively and concretely exist for all readers despite their previous experiences and contexts. Most obviously, the text provides words on a page which are material "facts" or "data" (Eagleton 75). All literary critics can agree when a passage contains certain rhetorical devices such as caesuras, alliteration, or even seemingly opaque devices such as metaphor. Regardless of their deeper meanings, these devices possess a presence. However, Iser proves careful to clarify that these instructions are hardly "explicit in an exhaustive way" (69) since the text also contains "gaps" or "indeterminacies" in between (qtd by Fish 70). The text is much like a piece of matter which seems solid and unified yet--upon closer examination--is actually compiled of countless atoms each with gaps between their bonds. A piece of writing might seem a tightly constructed and harmonious unit, but crucial gaps exist between the comparatively solid and clear "cues."

Examples of such gaps include breaks between words, sentences, passages, and chapters which the readers must connect. Indeterminacies also refer to each of the other previously detailed ambiguities of language such as words with multiple meanings or connotations and general omissions. Such a qualification prevents Iser from promoting literary works as objective and complete which would reduce a reader to a purely submissive standing akin to a child dutifully adhering to a paint-by-number kit. Readers follow the text's instructions yet also fill these gaps according to their unique perspectives or positions in a process referred to as "concretization." The text thus provides a basic structure or skeleton similarly present for all persons; the reader then fills or completes this structure according to his or her own experience. The text therefore contains or allows for multiple positions and interpretations set "alongside one another" which the reader must choose from and organize.

According to Iser and his proponents, such a theory which affords different aspects of meaning to different parties renders any work an occurrence or a process rather than a concrete, stable artifact. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is not a single text but rather the continually evolving compilation of all the experiences developed between its words and its innumerable readers. Iser expresses this point himself as he explains, "the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity but a dynamic happening" (qtd by Fish 71). Iser even describes the general dynamics of this "dynamic" process through his notion of "defamiliarization" (Eagleton 68). According to Iser's *The Act of Reading*, this process begins with readers' "social and literary codes" (Eagleton 68) which are formed by individual experiences and contexts and which exist prior to any engagement with texts. As previously stated, these codes allow a reader to so concretize the text and derive any sense of meaning. However, the "facts" or "cues" of a literary work also possess the potential to deliver the reader "a new critical awareness of his or her customary codes and

expectations" (68) so as to "interrogate and transform" these presuppositions which he or she often unconsciously place upon the text. Literature thus provides more than simply a mimetic "mirroring" (Fish, Naturally 73) of the reader or the society which formed his or her perspective. In fact, literary works' fictive and creative qualities uniquely allow them to "achieve a distance" (73) from these norms which forces readers to question common depictions which typically naturalize these standards. Literary works remove these codes from their "functional" (73) context--the context designed in such a way that the norm seems not only practical and useful but perhaps even essential. For example, the reader might begin the process of interpreting Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* with the social and literary expectation that investigators can solve any mystery with enough attention to detail, proper analytical methods, and overall perseverance because s/he has absorbed an abundance of *Dateline* specials and Sherlock Holmes novels. However, Pynchon's text deviates from this norm as the main protagonist and the readers arguably struggle with more uncertainty by its end than at its outset. Thus, Pynchon deviates from this norm's previous position of legitimacy. Of course, such deviations produce an altered set of norms which readers now employ to reconsider the text which--of course--now holds the potential to deviate from a whole different set of norms so that a literary work is full of kinetic energy capable of igniting a continuing process of change.

Iser's theory thus adopts aspects of both foundational and post-foundational philosophy as meaning is neither universally concrete nor entirely contingent upon individual readers. Fish further suggests that Iser's theory adopts a middle ground as it "avoids identifying the aesthetic object either with the text, in its formal and objective self-sufficiency, or with the idiosyncratic experience of individual readers" (Fish, Naturally 69). The relationship between the reader and the text is viewed as "interactive" (69) and mutual which allows for the basic structure of

certainty found in the text while also allowing for the multiplicity of meanings found in readers. The text is neither an objectively understood and unified piece of language nor the subjective construct of an individual reader. Iser's theory entails individual interpretation though an interpretation with limits. Fish offers the imagery of celestial constellations to help explain this abstract concept as he states, "the stars in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable" (75). The individual facts of the text prove present and measurable such as the location of stars in a sky; however, gaps between these stars place the burden upon readers to construct patterns and propose meaningful forms. Most importantly, different people can connect these stars in a multitude of ways so as to produce unique, final images. Interestingly, multiple pieces of postmodern literature and criticism employs constellation imagery to describe reader response theory such as Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49. After watching a production of a Jacobean play, Oedipa Mass asks the director--named Driblette--for a copy of the script to which he responds, "You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words" (79). Driblette explains that the play actually resides in his own head, for "That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh[6]...I'm the projector at the planetarium" (79). The reader thus possesses the red laser pen which connects the scattered dots into Orion.

Some reader response theorists instead develop these reader-response observations to their most extreme conclusion which is that there exists not even a basic structure which readers may objectively agree upon; instead, a text is only the wide assemblage of divergent interpretations. Fish claims that readers cannot help but interpret every word of literature through what Iser refer to as their personal and social lenses or "codes"; thus, the text is less a stable artifact or "process" than one constructed in countless, contradictory ways (Naturally 66). Stanley Fish is arguably the most prominent—and thus the most controversial—of such critics

who claim that "the true writer is the reader" (74). Rather than receive objective facts or "cues" from a text, readers actually provide and construct so much information and meaning that they ultimately prove its true authors. Fish acknowledges the appeal of such a middle-road theory as Iser's yet ultimately claims, "in the end it falls apart, and it falls apart because the distinction on which it finally depends--the distinction between the determinate and the indeterminate--will not hold" (74). One might detect an allusion to William Butler Yeats's formative modernist poem "The Second Coming" throughout this passage. Fish seems to imply that Iser and other middle-road reader response critics rest their arguments upon a foundational premise that will prove as untenable as those dismantled in the past: the familiar presence--absence dichotomy.

Iser's version of reader response theory depends upon a distinction between clear and opaque language and thus arguably fails to contend with the full extent of post-foundational, post-structuralist views of knowledge and language. Without the distinction between direct and indirect language, Iser could not claim that certain pieces of the text concretely exist to limit or guide readers' interpretations (74). One could easily translate Iser's notion of facts or textual "cues" to mean "presence" (41) or "literal" (40) language while "indeterminacies" seem to refer to "absence" (41) or "metaphorical" (40) language. Essentially, Iser implicitly appeals to the assumption that some pieces of language exist beyond or prior to interpretation. Of course, post-foundationalists such as Fish cannot accept such an assumption as a firm theoretical basis. Instead, one might object that the post-structuralist emphasis upon the adulteration and overall slippage of words suggests no linguistic safe haven exists. Every delivered word holds the potential--arguably even the likelihood--for misinterpretation through its relation to associated or opposite terms, its past meanings, or its unforeseeable omissions. A single author cannot determine and control where such ambiguity lies nor how a widely diverse readership might fill

in/ guide such ambiguity; imagine now the difficulty of a reader attempting to determine where an author determined such ambiguity.

Furthermore, post-foundationalism challenges Iser's presence[7] of textual codes by explaining them as constructs available only to people informed by the same formative contexts. According to Fish, such codes only exist as a result of "interpretive strategies" formed by communities of readers. Many such interpretive communities exist including the communities of gender, race, nationality, social class, and profession. Notably, Fish's concept of interpretive communities seems the exact same as his notion of "background conditions[8]" (4) which precede meaning and necessitate difference. For Fish, interpretive communities structure every facet of one's perception which includes his or her understanding of the external, "real" world in addition to a literary work. Additionally, people's perspectives are formed by more than one interpretive community at any given time. Any single person is formed by a complex medley of interpretive communities simultaneously imposing their unique interpretive strategies[9]. In the case of reading, Fish identifies one community as particularly dominant and perhaps even inescapable for those sufficiently versed within its confines: post-secondary or higher education (Eagleton 75). According to this view, rhetorical strategies such as caesura only exist insofar as a network of literary academics claim they exist, train readers to detect them, and finally inform readers as to their underlying intent or effect. A caesura is present within a line of poetry and forces readers to slow down or pay greater notice to that line only because an institutionalized context claims as much. As often stated, post-foundationalists maintain that assumptions or preconceptions preexist and thus mediate meaning; in this case, those assumptions adopt the form of these interpretive communities.

Ultimately, Iser assumes that "gaps" or "indeterminacies" are "built into the text" (77) and thus confined to certain words or passages which all readers can identify, while Fish claims that indeterminacy is an inherent feature of all language. Any sense of determinacy is constructed by contexts--or communities--which predate individuals and thus form their perceptions. Agreement among readers regarding even these "cues" or skeletons of meaning proves impossible as individuals from separate communities will approach texts through drastically differently procedures. They will see extremely different works which will steer them towards extremely different "processes" or experiences. Indeterminacy is the natural state of language so that "there is no distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies; he supplies everything" (77). To return to the astrological metaphor, "the stars in a literary text are not fixed; they are just as variable as the lines that join them" (77). Iser attempts to quarantine the ambiguous sections of language so as to preserve the text's overall health and stability; however, ambiguity is arguably a natural and incurable state.

However, critics should not simply lament such a reader's influence over texts since texts arguably could not possess any meaning otherwise. Eagleton explains that "Literary texts do not exist on bookshelves; they are processes of signification materialized only in the practice of reading" (65). Thus, a primary distinction between reader response theorists and other critics is their embrace and celebration of a reader's active, interpretive efforts rather than a fear of the reader as interfering with the text's intended, pure meaning. On the contrary, reader response critics encourage readers to identify their initial assumptions or impressions regarding a text to subsequently develop into more intricate interpretations.

Chapter 4

Thomas Pynchon: A Recluse with a Social Impact

Besides two surprising voice appearances for episodes of The Simpsons which aired in

2003 and 2004, Thomas Pynchon communicates with his reading public only through his literary

works and the occasional essay (Royster 5). Compared to other contemporary authors such as

Sherman Alexie or Salman Rushdie, who each have Twitter accounts and make frequent public

appearances, he leads a borderline hermetic lifestyle. In fact, only a few photographs of Pynchon

from his high school and college years exist in public circulation[10]. Therefore, Pynchon severely

constrains readers' abilities to further explore his texts' meanings through analysis of his own

past or present life. He lives as an embodiment of Barthes's author who ceases to exist at the

moment of writing. His life seems a monumental metaphor for reader response theory which

hardly seems coincidental considering one may find a proliferation of post-foundational and

reader response themes throughout much of his works. A reader response criticism of these texts

may subsequently offer unique and valuable insights through which to consider some of post-

foundationalists' more distressing contradictions and social implications.

Post-foundational philosophers and reader response theorists--perhaps especially in the

case of Stanley Fish--often encounter difficulty while explaining their stances on the capacity for

individual or social change. If individuals' embedded positions within societal contexts prevent

them from raising unbiased critiques against the system, then are persons forever doomed to the

status quo? If so, then how can post-foundationalists reconcile that position with their exuberant

praise of difference or with proven social changes of the past? Can communication between

parties facilitate such change? In other words, can separate parties possess or develop the

potential to effectively communicate and thereby alter one another's epistemological

foundations? Of course, these questions entail significant consequences for authors (or any other artists) who seek to radically alter their audiences or larger social systems. Of course, people have found multiple reasons to write or produce art apart from this desire to ignite change including a sort of internal compulsion or catharsis. However, certain writers seek to use their literature as a vehicle for social change. If post-foundational philosophy challenges people's abilities to step outside their ideological systems while reader response theory challenges persons' abilities to transparently or effectively communicate, then this ambition might appear not only futile but presumptuous. As a reader invested in these postmodern theories and preoccupied by such complexities, I often seek their explication (or at least exploration) as I interpret the works of postmodern authors. Post-foundational philosophy and reader response theory define meaning (whether in regards to a concrete world or a literary text) as contingent upon the individual's experiences and proclivities which themselves are largely determined by context. My social and academic contexts have instilled me with a deep enthusiasm for literature and literary theory as well as an inclination towards skepticism. Reader response theory seems to best encompass these interests so that--appropriately enough--my response as a reader is dominated by reader response theory. Of course, my interpretation of any literary text is also influenced by my position within the major interpretive communities of the female gender and the Western tradition. I thus fully acknowledge that this exploration of the reader's experience while interpreting Pynchon's works primarily refers to a college educated, white, female reader.

According to Stanley Fish's understanding of reader response theory, readers begin their interpretations of Pynchon's works simply by recognizing them as literary. They precede interpretive efforts with such an assumption whether they consciously intend to or not, for this "act of recognition" (Recognize a Poem 232) occurs prior to any singling out of textual features

or any interpretative constructions of broader meaning. Specifically, I identify Pynchon's works as respectable and meaningful largely because I encountered one of his most recognizable texts--*The Crying of Lot 49*--during an upper-division undergraduate English course. Consequently, readers educated within a Western literary environment engage with this text in a literary manner, which means they employ the interpretative strategies demonstrated and instilled by the English academic community. For one, they assume (before even opening the front cover) that the words, syntax, images, verbal tense, punctuation, and most other features will lend themselves towards broader meanings. Of course, people can employ all language in such a manner. Even a "Stop" sign encompassed by a pragmatic context which seems to ground the message as a direct demand for a specific time and place can be read in a literary manner. Graffiti painters' frequent modifications of these signs with words like "War" or "Hatin'" illustrate this point well. However, the assumptions surrounding literature within the academic community render individuals more likely to read those texts deemed as "literary" for such general insights. Additionally, readers assume the existence of connections between these features and general insights which form even larger themes. Thus, the specific interpretations of Pynchon's works which readers construct from a multitude of interpretive communities and personal experiences often originate from this basic mindset.

For these readers, their analyses of obstacles to change as a postmodern theme might begin with a sense of familiarity with *The Crying of Lot 49*'s dissatisfied protagonist who seems fixed within a closed textual world. The first significant detail of this text which readers might note and foreground is that Oedipa Mass returns home "from a Tupperware party" (9), thus characterizing her as a woman stuck within the traditional role of a housewife. Readers with limited experience concerning such an event might simply focus upon the plastic containers

themselves which allude to a sense of artificiality. Readers might also recall Tupperware's use as storage which allows persons to reuse and re-consume the same foods night after night so that each evening seems identical to the next. But as a member of a female interpretive community who attended such social functions with my mother, my understanding of this line is further influenced by memories of women with uniformly styled sweaters sitting in a living room of neutral tones as they buy and sell various similar products. In a sense, these female friends and acquaintances sell one another the larger lifestyle associated with these products: days which revolve around the regular and expected work of a household. Oedipa's life has become a closed system dominated by constantly rotating, traditional routines. Readers might then note the passage in which Oedipa reflects upon her recent past only to recognize a "fat deckful of days which seemed...more or less identical, or all pointing the same way subtly like a conjurer's deck, any odd one readily clear to a trained eye" (11) as it seems to reinforce this point. John P. Leland's article "Pynchon's Linguistic Demon: *The Crying of Lot 49*" helps expand this interpretation as it suggests this metaphor seems applicable not only to most individual Americans' lives but also to the aggregate nation itself. He primarily argues that Pynchon "may view Western Civilization as a vast network of closed systems regressing endlessly upon themselves as they confront the task of existence" (45). Mucho Maas seems to recognize this national monotony during his time as a used car salesman, for he witnesses how "each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else's life" (14). A used car dealership seems an apt metaphor for this vision of the United States since consumers might feel as though they acquire new products (or identities) whereas they actually leave with old hand-me-downs. The United States thus becomes a closed system of "endless, convoluted incest" (14) as the

individuals within it constantly model their own actions, perceptions, and images off one another.

A reader's familiarity with post-foundationalists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard likely prompts them to diagnose dominant, foundational systems of thought as the main cause for such monotony. Lyotard's notion of meta-narratives suggest such stale, homogenous societies result from humans' tendency to organize the naturally random and convoluted world into common patterns. Oedipa's psychotherapist, Dr. Hilarius, attracts readers' notice as they consider this possibility since his obsession with Freudian theory illustrates how persons perceive the world through intricately comprehensive frameworks. While experiencing what many would label a nervous breakdown, he says, "I tried...to submit myself to that man...tried to cultivate a faith in the literal truth of everything he wrote, even the idiocies and contradictions" (134). This sentence relates nicely to Lyotard's "meta-narratives" (qtd by Barry 87) or Fish's analysis of super-narratives in which he explains that such thought in "its successive incarnations always deliver a fully articulated world, a world without gaps or spots of unintelligibility. (This doesn't mean that everything is understood, but that even what is puzzling and mysterious is so in ways specific to some elaborated system of thought" (Naturally 16). This is the equivalent of how a strict, fundamentalist Christian will use notions such as "free will" to help explain most forms of tragedy or evil which seemingly would not exist within a world created by a benevolent and omnipotent God. Any other "spots of unintelligibility" (16) are similarly explained as God testing persons to see whether they will freely choose the course of faith. Freudian psychoanalysis and other theoretical systems have developed into such sophisticated and intricate systems of thought that their internal logic can answer most challenges or even incorporate/explain uncertainty or inconsistency. Of course, Dr. Hilarius submitted himself to

Hitler and the Nazi party before these Freudian obsessions, so readers might consider a connection between theoretical systems and Nazism. Many people likely consider intellectual theorems, such as those of Freud, mostly innocuous. However, their authoritarian influence upon a person's range of thoughts and their intolerance towards dissent or contradiction render them at least comparable to the most fascist of systems.

As readers further analyze this theme of ontological nihilism, they might connect Dr. Hilarius's penchant for fascist figures and ideologies with references to the natural sciences--mainly with Pynchon's discussion of the second law of thermodynamics. Lyons and Franklin describe the second law of thermodynamics in laymen's terms, pointing out that molecules in a chamber naturally arrange themselves "in a completely random pattern" (196) and would only find order if man introduced a partition into the chamber and sorted the molecules through some mechanical device such as a pump. Readers could further associate this process with Maxwell's Demon which (allegedly) sits within Nefastis's device to sort his molecules into hot and cold categories (Lot 49 105). Readers might finally connect this scientific principle and this emphasis upon sorting with the overarching image of Oedipa Maas who embarks on a quest to organize her random inputs of information into a satisfying truth--the system of the Tristero (Lyons and Franklin198). Her entire journey thus mirrors individuals' tendency to organize data through popularly touted and intricately developed ideologies, such as that of Freud, so that they eventually perceive and act in the world in much the same way.

References to Remedio Varo's painting "Embroidering Earth's Mantle" provide readers with further opportunities to explain humanity's dependence upon pre-established patterns--perhaps opportunities which better appeal to those with intellectual backgrounds in the humanities. Oedipa recalls how she and Inverarity simultaneously viewed this image of

"prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking to fill the void" (Lot 49 21). This "void" refers to the painting's backdrop characterized by dark and formless clouds (or fog) which invites a menacing feeling in some viewers through their lack of expression. For the post-foundational reader, this backdrop recalls the natural order of the world; it is the molecules without the partition. The tapestry may then represent totalising theories which seek to "fill," or overcome, this sense of meaninglessness. As further support, Oedipa explains that the tapestry contained all of existence so that "the tapestry was the world" (21). As in the case of reading a text, viewers' interpretations of this painting are further influenced by their experience foregrounding and disregarding various details due to personal dispositions. I specifically note how the world inside this tapestry--composed of a bright gold and a comforting, silky texture--initially seems far more engrossing in comparison to the backdrop. In fact, I solely focused upon this design when I first viewed the painting until I forced myself to turn my attention to the reality behind. Like Oedipa, I completely ignored and nearly forgot the sinisterly robed figure meddling with some strange device which seems to bind the women in a hypnotic energy. For certain readers, such an experience lends itself to an emotional revelation which the scientific theorem cannot. Individuals adopt overarching explanations because they fear a world without any inherent truths with which to navigate. They keep their heads turned away from these narratives' sources in order to ignore the possibility that these narratives were in fact constructed. Encompassing ideologies, like the tapestry, allow people to feel safe in a world characterized by order and reliability. That this picture causes Oedipa to cry suggests she is among the majority who desires such ontological security. Even if people could step outside their contexts of faux orders and

false assumptions of truth, they would arguably prove unwilling to plunge into that ominous vacuum.

However, the second law of thermodynamics also suggests that the comfort provided by such closed systems cannot last. Instead, these closed systems will result in even greater levels of chaos. Stanley Koteks, an inventor at the company of Oedipa's former boyfriend, informs her of the term "entropy" which readers grasp onto as one of the few unifying concepts throughout the novel. The second law of thermodynamics informs us that all closed systems experience a gradual decline into disorder or chaos until they ultimately collapse. The devices which establish order (such as the pump) ultimately require energy themselves, and "the amount of disorder created by the action of the pump on the environment of the experiment is either equal to or greater than the amount of order created in the system" (Lyons and Franklin 196). Information theory appropriated this premise and presents it in more approachable terms. This theory suggests that humans "pay for the order we impose on experience" since "the gain in order arranged by the process never quite balances the disorder in the environment of the subject acquiring information by the endeavor" (198). Readers might interpret this statement to suggest that it requires much energy to create patterns where none naturally exist or, in other words, to organize our world according to a formula. Lyons and Franklin point out that Oedipa's initial reaction to Maxwell's Demon reaffirms the difficulty of sorting (201). Koteks explains to her that "since the demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have to put any real work into the system" (86) to which she responds, "Sorting isn't work?...Tell them down at the post office, you'll find yourself in a mailbag headed to Fairbanks, Alaska, without even a FRAGILE sticker going for you" (86). This notion also helps explain the exhaustion felt by Oedipa after she spends an entire night attempting to organize signs dispersed all over town into the single system or

explanation of the Tristero. This energy we exert through our sorting creates havoc since we must manipulate our world to fit within this predetermined pattern. As readers find later in the novel, our good friend Dr. Hilarius further illustrates this point as he grows insane attempting to structure his life in the "perfect safety" (135) of Freudian theory. He devolves from a strictly disciplined behavior and logic (one he dedicates his life towards instilling in others) to an unstable state in which he can acknowledge no form of reason and can only cause destruction

Thus, post-foundational theory can account for change in the form of devolution tending towards eventual destruction or chaos. A significant percentage of the population eventually grows bored, exhausted, or perhaps frustrated and disillusioned as they continually structure their understandings and lives to fit within an ideological system. Eventually, the pressures built up by such conformity reach such high levels that they must eventually escape through various acts of dissent. Individuals do not necessarily engage in conscious or articulate critiques but rather act upon an instinctual need to break down and thereby break free from the ideological patterns in which they are embedded.

In fact, postmodern countercultural movements often emphasize such forms of change as best exemplified by punk communities' appeals to "cultural resistance." Stephen Duncombe's *Cultural Resistance Reader* defines this movement as "culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic, and/or social structure" (5). Duncombe's personal experience as a punk rock activist helps further illustrate this process of destructive change as he recalls being raised and embedded within a white, suburban Post-World War II context until he encountered the vague feeling that "something was wrong" (3). He describes how the heterosexual, male, middle-class normative values seemed somehow insufficient and "to top it off, I was bored" (3). For him and many of his

contemporaries, punk seemed "a release, an escape valve for my political dissatisfaction" (5) with its debasement of social norms and cries of defiance such as "I am an anti-Christ/ I am an anarchist (Sex Pistols qtd by Duncombe 3). Punk rejects the embellishments of previous musical traditions by stripping songs down to simple beats and lyrics[11] as well as expresses an impassioned, disordered energy which relates particularly well to entropic decay. As Duncombe admits, Punk typically never presumes to prescribe alternative modes of knowing or social systems and thus never entails productive forms of change, but rather tears down previous assumptions and standards of conduct as a force of sweeping destruction. In this sense, change doesn't require individuals to consciously step outside their ideological systems. Fish notes such an unfettered critical position is a near impossibility; however, change can occur from individuals' unconscious (nearly visceral) needs to demolish certain aspects of the system. In other words, individuals do not need to gain an objective view from outside the system where they can launch a conscious, eloquent critique in order to enact change. Punk "had no strategic plan; it had no plan at all" (5) but proved able to engage in a spontaneous destruction of certain norms from within the system.

However, many people might find themselves less than satisfied or encouraged to know that they possess the capability for social demolition. Certain readers may then consider ways in which society can escape from banality through more productive means which stand apart from mere opposition to previous conventions. The second law of thermodynamics again proves relevant as it claims that closed systems prevent the course of entropy through new injections of energy. As readers question whether such injections are indeed possible, they may identify individuals' capacity for imagination as a possible solution. Oedipa's quest to uncover an underground postal conspiracy ends in uncertainty as data convincingly alludes to both its

existence and her own delusions; her findings point to "either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real "Tristero" (Pynchon, Lot 49 182). Whether or not Oedipa fantasizes the Tristero, falls for a hoax, or fantasizes a hoax is in some ways irrelevant. That she can even consider the possibility of this alternative system may prove enough to combat conformity and entropy. Oedipa asks Dr. Hilarius to "talk [her] out of [this] fantasy" (138) as one who treats mental disorders should do according to societal standards. Readers thus feel surprised and perhaps heartened as he responds, "Cherish it!...What else do any of you have?...don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you" (138). He explains that "when you lose it you go over by that much to the others" (138). If one acknowledges that all systematic explanations of reality are actually fictions, then he or she cannot fear risking or losing either stability or truth. One cannot lose the foundation which never existed in the first place. Thus, the post-foundationalist may find himself or herself liberated to serve as his or her own architect of reality.

However, readers may complicate this view as characters with the most unconventionally fanciful or avant-garde beliefs and lifestyles often seem the most constrained. Oedipa finds a variety of subcultures throughout the novel—the concealed populations perhaps too small and diminutive to even count as minorities—who most persons hear about yet fail to directly encounter. These characters model their lives around "calculated withdrawal," (124); they are disappointed that they cannot simply withdraw "into a vacuum," so they must exist in the "separate, silent, unsuspecting world" (125). They include rightwing extremists, a night watchmen who eats ivory soap, transexuals, and artists. However, their lives all seem as dull and unfulfilling as those who readers would associate with the dominant culture. Mr. Fresno proves especially pitiable. That he uses the WASTE system and abandoned his wife suggests he chose

the life of an outcast as an escape from the dominating patterns of mass society. However, he finds himself "huddled, shaking with grief" (125) as his life is reduced to the front step of his own building and the mattress which holds every "tearfully consummated wet dream" (126). His letter expresses his desire to reconnect. However, he has spent so much time in alienation--the only physical contact occurring in his own unconscious mind--that he no longer knows how to rejoin the outside world. He hands Oedipa the letter so she can mail it for him, explaining that he "can't go out there. It's too far now" (125). Oedipa seems to accept these words for their literal value; however, readers might assume that he has dedicated his life to escaping entropy only to find his own mind became a closed system which succumbed to the second law of thermodynamics. One thus cannot fight entropy by simply pulling out of a majority system. If one attempts to fight entropy simply through internalization or by attaching to reclusive counter systems, then he or she will simply become trapped within an alternative system of entropy.

Readers might thus hypothesize that interactions between separate individuals and groups can provide one another with the new injections of energy required to maintain ordinary levels of chaos. Jesus Arrabal, member of the Anarquistas, expresses this sentiment when he reflects upon his encounter with Inverarity. Arrabal, though a radical, holds some deep appreciation for this embodiment of the bourgeoisie as he says, "You know what a miracle is. Not what Bakunin said. But another world's intrusion into our own." (120). When members from highly different background conditions who interpret the world in highly different ways come into contact, a sort of "cataclysm" (120) might occur. Readers might interpret "cataclysm" in its literal as opposed to pejorative form, suggesting such contact produces a monumental event that transforms what persons considered the natural world. Even if such inter-world contact occurs in the form of aggression (as in the West's imperial interaction with colonized states), persons encounter

contrary and previously unimagined ways of thinking and existing in the world. What seemed natural and thus objectively true might now appear as an idiosyncrasy developed by specific persons in response to specific conditions in a specific time and place. Using the imagery of Remedio Varos, collision might produce at least small tears in one's tapestry which could allow him or her to look around themselves to catch a glimpse of these notions' human origins.

Persons might even find aspects of these contrary systems enlightening or applicable to their own situations, and these new insights might combine with aspects of their previous ideology to form something previously unimagined by any existing perspective. An example might include Anarcho-Syndicaism which combines the anarchist emphasis upon individualism and distrust towards authoritative systems with syndicalism's (somewhat Marxist) emphasis upon unions and cooperation to form the vision of voluntary and "spontaneous" systems of cooperation which avoid the abuses of hierarchy or power (121). Readers might connect Arrabal's miracle of worlds colliding with *Inherent Vice*'s references to Locard's Exchange Principle--a theorem from forensic science which claims "every contact leaves traces" (212). When persons come into physical contact, they both leave at least tiny traces of themselves upon one another in the form of small hairs, fibers from clothes, fingerprints, etc. Consequently, some sort of blending occurs when persons from different interpretive communities are brought into some association.

Despite such potential cases of significant social change, the reader's experience while interpreting Pynchon's most recent work--*Inherent Vice*--seems marked by a more skeptical approach. Readers' interpretations of this novel--set within the countercultural ambitions of 1960s Southern California--are heavily influenced by their twenty-first century perspective, which generally reflects back upon this period with a disillusioned sense of failure. Joseph

Heath's and Andrew Potter's Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture illustrates this defeatist outlook as it argues the 1960s countercultural movements proved insufficient to radically overturn most so-called mainstream orders. During the 1960s, baby boomers sought some alternative to the materialism of a capitalist society only for consumerism to "emerge from decades of countercultural rebellion much stronger than it was before" (5). Today, corporations possess more influence than ever before through deregulation and court rulings like Citizens United v. F.E.C; global distributions of wealth remain stubbornly disproportionate; and people remain saturated by the advertising which perpetuates their obsessive need for consumption (8). Baby boomers also hoped to dismantle the mass society which promoted the discriminatory norms and interests of its white, male, heterosexual, western, upper-class members. While recent decades have witnessed certain advancements for these oppressed groups, few would presume to describe this present period as fundamentally unique or free from these concerns of the past.

Of course, one who reads The Crying of Lot 49 in the present day is also influenced by this contemporary viewpoint. However, readers' perceptions of the conditions under which these novels were produced suggest a crucial distinction. The Crying of Lot 49 and Inherent Vice prove structurally similar as they are both set amongst countercultural movements of 1960s Southern California; however, Pynchon wrote the former during the 1960s in the midst of these revolutionary efforts whereas he wrote the latter during this present century in the midst of revolutionary disappointment and exhaustion. Most readers might thus assume that Pynchon writes the previous text from a more optimistic perspective or at least from an approach of greater uncertainty and curiosity regarding the capacity of these movements to enact their intended changes. Similarly, most readers will assume that Pynchon writes this latter text from a

more pessimistic perspective or at least from an awareness of certain countercultural disappointments. One might specifically expect Pynchon to grapple with or attempt to explain these perceived failures. Louis Menand's review for The New Yorker illustrates this assumption as he claims "the twist is the time period" since Pynchon sets the novel when "the sand is running out on the counterculture" (3). He concludes by proposing that the novel's "countercultural California is a lost continent of freedom and play, swallowed up by the faceless forces of co-optation and repression" (4). Of course, these identifications of Pynchon's perspectives are (like the texts) mere constructs based upon the reader's own assumptions. Readers cannot know for certain whether Pynchon actually viewed countercultural movements with a more favorable or optimistic lens as he wrote The Crying of Lot 49 nor whether he approached countercultural movements from a more cynical outlook as he wrote Inherent Vice. However, most readers will project the prevailing attitudes of these time periods upon Pynchon and interpret the texts accordingly.

At this point, readers might agree that such assumptions regarding Pynchon's perspective likely influence people from interpretive communities which value such pursuit of authorial intent; yet, they may argue that these assumptions cannot influence those guided by the community of reader response theory. If a reader response critic rejects the potential for readers to confidently identify authorial intent, then why would he or she even bother to speculate upon authors or their perspectives? Arguably, reader response critics prove similar to most other readers in that they find themselves interested in the text's production. Though they hold less faith then others in the ability for readers to fully understand the intent of an author or the pervading mood of a different time and/ or place integral to the text's composition, reader response critics arguably still find themselves interested in the text's source. In the absence of

objective means to understand the text's author or its original zeitgeist, reader response critics likely construct or imagine such origins. This point relates to Derrida's suggestion that the author as he/she actually exists disappears "even in the original moment of [a work's] production" (46) because he/she is thereafter "never transparently present but must be interpreted or 'read' into being" (47). Reader response critics might reasonably find themselves speculating as to the author or the milieu from which a text originates; however, they would recognize such understandings of textual sources as mere speculations.

Specifically, this skeptical and distrustful perspective might encourage readers to develop a sense of misgiving in response to the mysterious forces which seem to constantly lurk behind the scenes. From the novel's opening page, one might assume that these shadowy figures exist to curtail any unorthodox behaviors amongst its characters. In particular, the narrator first describes Doc's former girlfriend--Shasta--as "looking just like she swore she'd never look" (1). Readers might interpret her transformation as from a 1960s beach-bum with hippie sympathies to the trophy girlfriend of a real-estate mogul who embodies the dominant, mid-nineteenth century's definition of femininity. She previously donned bikini bottoms with a "Country Joe & The Fish T-shirt" which recalls the would-be-subversive 1960s rocks bands driven by anti-war themes and psychedelics. Presently, she dons a "flatland" (1) style and short hair which (in addition to allusions to her movie-star good looks and platinum coloring) allows readers to view her as a pinup girl created and displayed to fulfill the influential man's fantasy. Readers might reinforce such a perception as they encounter the painted image of Shasta on Mickey Wolfmann's silk tie "in a pose submissive enough to break an ex--old man's heart" (190). Shasta not only submits to Wolfmann's desires but to the expectations and demands of a traditional, patriarchal society. She changes from Jefferson Airplane's Grace Slick to Marilyn Monroe. Readers might respond to

this apparently sudden and dramatic shift with a considerable level of curiosity regarding its source or cause.

One might assume she voluntarily embraced the dominant culture--she simply "sold out." However, other readers might interpret her subtle allusions to surveillance to suggest that formidable guardians of the status quo compel her in some way towards conformity. Upon her reunion with Doc (who readers may view as her remaining link to counterculture), she nervously attempts to portray their meeting as non-subversive. She explains, "I thought, better for everybody if this looks like a secret rendezvous" (1) which suggests she hopes to portray their meeting as an illicit affair--more preferable to the powers-at-be than insurrection. Doc further asks, "Somebody's keepin a close eye?" to which she explains that she is "trying to make it look good" (1). Such desire to "look good" and maintain social pretenses even on a seemingly deserted street at the dead of night suggests people are never left truly alone. At the very least, people feel as though constantly under the authoritative gaze. Through such a perspective, this novel's narration adopts a particularly disturbing quality in readers' minds. A nameless, third-person narrative voice traces Shasta's steps as though from a discreet distance as when it notes, "She came along the alley and up the back steps" or "They stood in the street light through the kitchen window" (1). These lines recall the "stalker angle" often employed in slasher films which emphasize a woman's entrapment within a male gaze. (131) These vague allusions to surveillance thus instill readers with a sense of distrust and paranoia towards such overriding, authoritative control--including the control of the narration itself.

Readers--especially those with at least basic understandings of postmodern philosophy--might find themselves additionally surprised and confounded by these forces as Pynchon seems to describe them as somewhat foundational. These forces seem foundational in that they appear

both permanent and widespread as though part of an underlying and common condition of humanity. Puck Beaverton refers to these forces as the "Mob behind the Mob" (248) which one might interpret literally as the main criminal organization employing smaller organizations as shields or covers. However, readers might interpret this line as referring to a condition of human nature which underlies and prompts such efforts for control and domination over others. Readers might support this notion by referencing the novel's striking title--*Inherent Vice.* Sauncho--Doc's friend and a maritime lawyer--defines inherent vice as "what you can't avoid...stuff marine policies don't like to cover. Usually applies to cargo--like eggs break--but sometimes it's also the vessel carrying it" (351). Laura Miller's review expresses this interpretation as she points towards references to Charles Manson which disturb many as "evidence of the inherent vice in humanity itself, the seeds of violence, idolatry, and the abuse of power that no utopian plan can hope to eradicate" (2). Many readers know vice as a general "depravity or corruption of morals" as expressed by "indulgence in degrading pleasures or practices" (OED). However, readers with awareness of the word's wider etymology recognize that vice can also refer more specifically to the tendency of persons to treat others "arrogantly or oppressively" (OED). Thus, the novel's shadowy forces may appear to embody humans' long-standing tendency to "indulge in the degrading pleasure or practice" of treating others "arrogantly or oppressively."

Readers may further ground this human proclivity within the human desire for material items and pleasures obtained through the exploitation of disadvantaged populations. Pursuit of recreational drugs, food, money, and sex seem to dominate most of the characters' waking lives. Many characters--including the congenial hero-protagonist named Doc--additionally seem to revert to exploitive and demeaning behavior towards others in order to acquire such comforts. Female readers likely find Doc's seemingly carnal desire for sexual domination particularly

disturbing as when he hopes to reenact Charles Manson's master--slave relationship with his

hippie "chicks" (304). Readers from the female interpretive community might find Shasta

particularly insightful as she accuses Doc of desiring "Submissive, brainwashed, horny little

teenagers...who do exactly what you want before you even know what that is" (304). Perhaps

even more disturbing to readers, Doc finds himself aroused by Shasta's recollections of sexual

enslavement onboard the Golden Fang and readily accepts once she "presented herself" (307) in

a pose similar to the one he found so heartbreaking and offensive when displayed on Mickey's

tie.

A reader might reconcile this seemingly foundational vice with a postfoundational novel

through unique interpretation of the referenced Eastern philosophy. Readers encounter multiple

allusions to karma and karmic loops which some might interpret as appeals to a foundational

view of an orderly universe structured around necessary, direct relations between cause and

effect. However, readers influenced by a postfoundational community might interpret Pynchon's

use of karmic imagery solely as a reference to the expressions or outcomes of persons' acts and

choices. When discussing the Golden Fang, Sauncho describes the "Tentacles of sin and desire

and that strange world-bound karma which is of the essence of maritime law" (emphasis mine

91). Such depravity and desire seem the essence of maritime law (and society writ large) not

necessarily due to a transcendental system of truth or a basic human condition but because of a

worldly notion of karma in which human actions influence the shape of future people and the

societies they construct. So long as individuals seek to acquire desires through the subordination

of others--or even seek pleasure from the act of domination itself--human society will find itself

constantly shaped and controlled by these same, basic forces. So long as these desires reign over

humanity, the most powerful of individuals will continue to find the motives and justifications to

force the remainder of us into submissive and familiar molds. Ultimately, these forces of vice appear quite skilled at maintaining such influence.

Throughout Inherent Vice, various characters and systems engaged in rebellion often disappear only to return as proponents of these conventional systems, which prompts many readers' attempts to solve the mystery surrounding these reactionary forces' means of so regaining control. As previously mentioned, Shasta returns from over a year-long absence with a drastically de-radicalized appearance. Shortly after, a clandestine organization abducts her billionaire boyfriend (Mickey Wolfmann) while he is in the midst of a radical lifestyle change. Many of Mickey's acquaintances insinuate that this abduction was preceded and influenced by his desire to escape the bourgeoise worldview of a capitalist system by donating the bulk of his fortune. A former bodyguard recalls how Mickey intended to build a rent-free housing complex as he explained, "I wish I could undo what I did, I know I can't, but I bet I can make the money start to flow in a different direction" (150). Readers with a decent understanding of Marxist theory would recognize the revolutionary potential of this act, for Wolfmann's donations amount to not only a significant redistribution of wealth but also a major paradigm shift away from the exclusive concern over materialism and profit. However, Wolfmann returns from his hiatus "reprogrammed" (252) back into his previous, entrepreneurial self who immediately cancels the philanthropic project. Similarly, an electric surf[12] band known as The Boards begins as an expression of countercultural California only for various members to disappear so that the band "changed personnel so often that it...had evolved into pretty much a brand name" (126). Once certain members are isolated and de-neutralized, the band morphs from a subversive voice to a harmless product packaged and sold like everything else within the system. In particular, the saxophonist known as Coy Harlingen disappears by faking his own death only to reemerge as a

secret infiltrator and operative for a counter-subversive, conservative organization known as Vigilant California. Readers might seize upon this last example to note that enigmatic, traditionalist forces seize control in each of these cases through infiltration, which allows them to undermine these movements from the inside.

Thus, readers with knowledge of countercultural movements and concepts might explain the failures of radical change as the consequence of pervasive authorities' ability to de-radicalize countercultural symbols and systems in a process known as co-optation. Heath's and Potter's survey of countercultural movements defines co-option as the process whereby "the system tries merely to assimilate resistance by appropriating its symbols, evacuating their 'revolutionary' content and then selling them back to the masses as commodities" which results in neutralization (34). Through such subtle infiltration, reactionary powers can avoid direct and overt aggression. In fact, the system manages to hide behind a facade of tolerance so that failure of subversive movements appears due to their own shortcomings. With such a concept in mind, readers can interpret much of the novel's imagery accordingly. As previously noted, a reader instructed by the interpretive community of undergraduate literary studies assumes that the imagery within a text (at least one written by an author as well-reputed as Thomas Pynchon) alludes to some general significance. Such readers will likely to appeal towards the schooner known as The Golden Fang for such meaning since it dominates so many of the characters' lives or interests and seems one of the few images to circulate throughout the entire text. Because different owners employ the Golden Fang for multiple different purposes, different readers will necessarily associate this image with a multiplicity of separate meanings. For certain readers, the degeneration of the honest-working fishing boat known as The Preserved into a vehicle for counter-subversive activities seems a metaphor for the process of co-optation. Burke Stodger, a

famous film star labeled as a Marxist during the age of blacklisting, purchased the fishing vessel to escape public retribution (Pynchon *Inherent Vice* 92). Afterwards, counter-subversive organizations claimed the craft (renamed the Golden Fang) for various projects in Guatemala, West Africa, and other areas "whose names were blocked out" (95) from the official files. The Golden Fang delivers weapons to anti-Communist guerilla forces, monitors communist coastlines, and even transports "CIA heroin from the Golden Triangle" (95). A vessel which literally served as a haven for radical Marxist politics and therefore stood as a symbol for that subversive movement is seized by reactionary forces, stripped of its radical nature, and employed to defeat the very cause which it previously served. Readers might thus interpret *The Preserved* as an ironic title for this ship which cannot maintain its original state of opposition. If dominant authorities manage to gain internal access to these opposition movements, then their members lose control over their own efforts and watch as their subversions prove subverted.

Of course, readers might then ask themselves how such reactionary authorities manage to infiltrate opposition movements so effectively in the first place. Ultimately, the confusion of readers as they attempt to circumnavigate this complex text in which persons adopt multiple, contradictory roles alludes to some explanation. Throughout the novel, readers feel misled and ultimately disoriented as characters previously deemed innocent or even victimized later seem manipulative and disingenuous. In particular, readers might later interpret Shasta as a more informed and commanding figure than outward appearances initially suggest. Upon reuniting with Doc, Shasta portrays herself as powerless amidst the rumors of an attempted plot against Wolfmann as when she describes herself as "just the bait" (3). She likens herself to a trapped prey on the low end of the food chain--or hierarchy of power--involuntarily used for others' nefarious demands. After Wolfmann's disappearance, the LAPD spots Shasta leaving the

country aboard the Golden Fang, which some readers may interpret as an abduction and further proof of her role as damsel-in-distress. Doc initially interprets her disappearance in such a manner, and Shasta herself later corroborates this story. Even the District Attorneys' Office views her as merely another troubled girl who unwittingly walked into peril: "some hippy chick with boyfriend trouble, brains all discombobulated with dope sex rock 'n' roll" (69).

However, readers and Doc might also interpret her departure as voluntary and thus proof of many troubling possibilities including her cooperation with this commanding organization. Doc reasons she may have found herself involved in something "so heavy duty" (95) that betraying Wolfmann proved her only means of escape. Of course, Doc even complicates this interpretation as he thinks, "Assuming she even wanted out. Maybe she really wanted to remain *in* whatever it was, and Mickey stood in the way" (emphasis his 95). Later details indeed allow readers to interpret Shasta, not only as involved, but as a primary figure within the plot against Wolfmann and within even larger counter-subversive efforts. In particular, Shasta introduced Coy Harlingen to Vigilant California which alludes to her extended involvement and influence within its operations. Wolfmann's bodyguard further recalls how Shasta considered her boyfriend "crazy" for wanting to relinquish his fortune, and "for some reason it scared her" (150) which perhaps indicates her true, conservative nature. The bodyguard still maintains her innocence as he assumes she truly "was in love with him" (150) and consequently interprets her concern as regarding Mickey's own safety. How readers interpret Shasta proves highly instrumental for their interpretations of the larger text, for it calls into question why she engages in a relationship with Wolfmann and which of these parties actually co-opts the other. If readers interpret Shasta as the agent of co-optation, then the less conspicuous person of the pair proves the actual instrument of authority. Such reactionary forces gain their influence largely through

their ability to adopt more forms than the obvious white, male, elite symbol of patriarchy. Doc best reflects readers' sense of confusion and distrust one he discovers Shasta's picture within a Golden Fang building and thinks to himself, "The world had just been disassembled, anybody here could be working any hustle you could think of, and it was long past time to be, as Shaggy would say, like, getting out of here, Scoob" (190). In the end, co-optation proves such an effective defense against countercultural movements because people are largely incapable of piercing through the surface levels (or impressions) of others' words and actions.

In a similar manner, readers feel rather disconcerted as they largely fail in their attempts to specify a clear course or set of main features for this narrative. Menand notes this initial impression as he states, "Plotwise, there are probably too many pieces of the puzzle to hold in your head, and its not completely clear where, or whether, every piece fits" (2). The plot of *Inherent Vice* initially seems to revolve around a private investigator known as Doc while he inquires into the seemingly related crimes of kidnapping and murder at Wolfmann's latest development project. Thus, readers identify the genre as detective fiction and subsequently develop multiple assumptions. Readers mainly assume that a single, coherent mystery (some question or puzzle) lies at the center of this text which further details progressively clarify or resolve. However, readers struggle not only to solve this text's mystery but to even define the nature or crux of the mystery itself. Even Doc seems unable to clearly and simply define the central point--or essence--of the mystery in which he finds himself embroiled. He seems to find persons of interest either by pure chance or through their own efforts to locate him. These people's separate experiences and the cases for which they enlist Doc all seem to relate through either similar names or places; however, these connections seem so indeterminate and partial that neither Doc nor the readers can identify a main, unifying premise. The case seems to begin with

a coincidence: Shasta informs Doc of a plot construed by Mrs. Mickey Wolfmann to kidnap and commit her husband, and a separate client entreats Doc to visit a man named Glen Charlock at Wolfmann's latest construction site for some form of payment. Shortly after Doc arrives at Channel View Estates, he loses consciousness only to find Glen slaughtered and the billionaire developer missing. Readers thus identify the central point of the case (and thus the novel's plot) as "What happened to Glen Charlock and Mickey Wolfmann?" Once various associates and members of the community imply his connections (such as laundering) with the sinister organization known as the Golden Fang, the mystery seems to revolve around the question, "What is the Golden Fang?"

However, the case evolves to appear far more disparate and complex than originally assumed as the Golden Fang proves merely one component within a larger network of controlling, nefarious forces. Later developments unearth the existence of another clandestine, anti-subversive operation known as Vigilant California which seems at least as important as The Golden Fang. The text describes Vigilant California as a group of "GOP activists" (139); however, one might interpret this title ironically since the political and social change for which they campaign seems to merely reverse any countercultural gains in defense of the status quo. According to one of its operatives, they engage in a panoply of reactionary efforts ranging from the bribing of politicians to the infiltration of universities and other revolutionary hotspots. Arguably, the purposes and actions of Vigilant California only seem more opaque due to its vague connections with the Golden Fang, such as the common link of Chryskylodon. The Golden Fang appears to own and operate this upscale psychiatric and detoxification center; in fact, Doc translates its name to mean a "gold fang" in Greek (185). Doc later finds Coy Harlingen--a Vigilant California operative--within the confines of this facility, and Coy admits

that his bosses often channel him towards there for regular detoxification and indoctrination (301). To add to this confusion, scraps of evidence arise which suggest connections between the Golden Fang and Internal Affaires of the LAPD. For one, Doc encounters a photograph of men associated with the LAPD who are in possession of counterfeit currency printed by the Golden Fang. According to Doc's interpretation, the men in the photograph stand on a pier where they look as though "they just got off, or were maybe about to get on, the Golden Fang" (287). To complicate matters even further, the LAPD and Vigilant California also seem connected through Coy Harlingen who (according to police files) works as an undercover informant for "many far-flung outposts of law enforcement...and levels of power" (209-210). Finally, all three organizations seem united by Wolfmann's disappearance since investigations eventually reveal that a citizens' "counterguerrilla" (201) squad operated by Vigilant California directly carried out the kidnapping, yet delivered him to the Golden Fang's Chryskylodon for various forms of reprogramming. The LAPD seems implicated at least through association since the department often employs the same "counterguerrilla" squad for operations in which they either "can't commit the manpower" or cannot allow themselves to become implicated (201).

Because these institutions seem so convoluted, readers and characters encounter difficulty as they try to determine which organization or figure unites all of these activities as a premiere or guiding force. Coy himself seems unable to establish a hierarchy as the narrator explains, "It didn't take long for Coy to become aware that the patriots who were running him were being run themselves by another level of power altogether, which seemed entitled to fuck with the lives of all who weren't as good or bright as they were, which meant everybody" (301). Readers thus seem to directly encounter the limits of human logic and reason as they must default towards conjecture in their attempts to explain these connections. Each of the

organizations seems equally linked with the others and thus equally likely to stand as the head of this syndicate. Doc expresses this uncertainty well as he inspects photos of the raid at Channel View Estates and the faces of Glen's murderers with such intensity that they begin "to float apart into little blobs of color...as if whatever had happened had reached some kind of limit" (351). Doc concludes his investigation by affirming only that "built into the act of return finally was this glittering mosaic of doubt" (351). The more one investigates a case, the more initial patterns break down into individual pieces of data whose relations to one another seem increasingly uncertain or ambiguous. As Doc begins to realize the intensely intertwined nature of these various organizations, he exclaims, "now what the fuck?" which perhaps best expresses the reader's reaction. Readers ultimately find themselves frustrated and disappointed to realize that the novel's vice and co-optation reside not within some single, unified organization like the Golden Fang but rather within multiple organizations with uncertain connections and hierarchies. This lack of a clearly identified authority only erects another barrier for those readers seeking some radical change in the system. Ironically, the postmodern theory of interpretation and uncertainty seems to help hide and protect these secret sources of power. If sources of authority prove similar to all other matters in that they defy any objective or confident explanation, then dissidents find any attempts to combat their influence severely hindered just as Stanley Fish warned.

Finally, post-structuralist views of language which scholars like Fish develop into a radical, reader-response emphasis upon interpretation seem to complicate efforts for change even further. The most optimistic and productive stimuli for change uncovered through Pynchon's works--the "miracle" of worlds' collisions--relies upon human interaction. It depends upon the capacity for people from separate interpretive communities to understand each other (even if

under antagonistic conditions) well enough to have any hope for mutual influence; thus, it seemingly requires a certain level of transparency in language. John Nefastis expresses this point as he asserts, "Communication is the key" (Lot 49 105) to the successful application of his device. The "sensitive" must receive the demon's data and provide "something like the same quantity of information" (105) so that the separate parties provide one another with needed, new inputs. Unfortunately, this omnipresence[13] of authority severely subdues persons' willingness to even attempt such clarity as they monitor their own language by consciously relying upon insinuation or preterition. Throughout *Inherent Vice*, readers encounter a sense of distance from the scenes and characters as well as (once again) more confusion due to the vague nature of most dialogue. Characters seem unwilling to speak openly to persons outside themselves let alone outside an interpretive community due to the fear of some authoritative surveillance. For example, Doc finds Coy within his own home only for Coy to gesture towards some sound equipment while shaking his head (131). Their conversation thus deteriorates into an ambiguous collection of coded language in which the reader is uncertain as to whether or not the characters even understand the subject of their discussion.

As previously noted, members of countercultural communities seem especially likely to exclude perceived outsiders through such intentional obscurity. Oedipa faces such difficulty tracking the Tristero mainly because the communities she meets refuse to attempt any meaningful engagement with her. They offer summary mentions or hints of the Tristero but disregard or cease such statements immediately afterwards, such as during the Jacobean tragedy when "a gentle chill, an ambiguity begins to creep in among the words" in what Oedipa calls "a ritual reluctance" (71). She notes how "Certain things, it is made clear, will not be spoken aloud; certain events will not be shown onstage" (71) so that the act of omission speaks to the Tristero

though in an ultimately unclear and frustrating manner. In the end, countercultural communities seem so wary of external worlds (and perhaps even the threat of co-optation) that they employ language which can only engage persons of their own kind. Countercultural language often seems to allude to something only by professing that others cannot understand it such as the bulletin, "If you know what this means...you know where to find out more" (121-122). Such cryptic language ultimately seems to hinder subversive movements' capacity for change since it limits their effects to the small group of persons already prone to join such a community. The only change they enact in those they encounter is a growing sense of resentment as illustrated by Doc who finally launches into an uncharacteristic tirade: "somebody's gonna have to be less sensitive for a minute and wipe off their chin and stand up and deal with it, 'cause I'm tired of this being jacked around all the time, if there's something you need just come on out and say it, how hard can that be?" (270).

However, readers from a post-structuralist influence recognize better than Doc that barriers to such explicit, clear communication reside not only in persons' misgivings but in the structures of language itself. Readers often feel especially disoriented as they encounter the language within Pynchon's works. Specifically, they seem especially aware of the distance between signifiers and the referents they hope to express since this ambiguity prevents them from arriving at any confident conclusions regarding the main plot of the mystery or the novel itself. In fact, most of the pieces of data used earlier to develop a sensical description of the mystery and the theme of co-optation rest upon tenuous claims. For example, Doc and readers assert a connection between the Golden Fang and Chryskylodon mainly because he translates the latter to mean "gold fang" (185). This translation involves a small though significant level of doubt as the original translator--Tito--explains that "it's squashed together a little, but it means

like a gold [canine] tooth" (185). In fact, "gold" translates to "τοχρυσό" (chrysó) in Greek while "canine tooth" translates to "σκυλόδοντας" (skylódontas) so that Chryskylodon would amount to a modification and amalgamation of these words rather than a literal conversion. This translation loses only a few syllables; however, those syllables might amount to a fundamentally different meaning. In fact, other parties (including Doc's aunt) interpret Chryskylodon as a reference to an Old Indian word for "serenity" (185) which adds an entirely different level of uncertainty.

This case seems to demonstrate the complications which necessarily surround any transfer of meaning. Because different languages associate the same object or subject with drastically different words, foreign languages emphasize how signifiers prove more connected to the speaker's internal nature and context than any external or constant referent. If signifiers prove so disconnected from any concrete subject, then subtle (though pivotal) pieces of meaning are lost in the process of transference. Many people admit that pieces of meaning are left behind when language is transferred between languages, and the movement of words between parties who speak the same language can encounter the same problems. Even if Tito's translation proved certain and completely reliable, Doc must provide a further interpretive move to link Chryskylodon with the Golden Fang since the latter is referred to as just that--the "Golden Fang;" not the "Golden Canine Tooth." Ultimately, this ambiguity caused by the slightest presence of interpretation entails significant consequences for the overall case. If readers (including Doc) interpret Chryskylodon to signify the Golden Fang, then they can construct the connections and interpretations laid out earlier. However, readers who interpret Chryskylodon to signify "serenity" (185) or nothing at all might find these connections even more tenuous or develop entirely different conclusions altogether.

Because interpretation so precedes and substantially shapes meaning, people from different interpretive communities might only receive opposing worlds' messages from a distorting lens. The difference amounts to separate worldviews forced to engage and respond to one another or two proverbial ships passing in the night. Terry Eagleton explains the dilemma when he challenges Iser's notion of reader response theory wherein the readers' assumptions used to interpret the text are "defamiliarized" and brought into greater consciousness by the text which allows for self-criticism and transformation (68). As Eagleton explains, a reader with a "strong ideological commitment is likely to be an inadequate one" (68) since he or she would approach the text with a mind more closed to the "transformative power of literary works" (69). Those who could find themselves influenced or altered by the language of another world would have to "be flexible and open-minded, prepared to put [their] beliefs into question and allow them to be transformed" in the "liberal humanist" tradition (69). Otherwise, the individual would not even allow himself or herself the attempt to understand another community's language. Again, Nefastis supports this point as he claims the "sensitive" can only ignite motion in the device through a dispassionately unprejudiced state of mind; he instructs, "Leave your mind open, receptive to the Demon's message" (*Lot 49* 106). But one could hardly expect persons raised within an interpretive community that is formed in complete resistance to outside perspectives--even pre-supplied with answers and tactics which ward against such voices--to engage in the open-minded interaction necessary for such mutual transformation. Thus, a miracle could only occur between members of this overarching, liberal community which might not amount to as significant a change as direct engagement between radically opposed contexts.

Readers might corroborate this point by noting how Oedipa seems incapable of expelling or suspending her contextual and perceptual influences to the degree necessary for adequate

engagement with Nefastis's device. The narrative voice mentions how Oedipa sat through "two Yogi Bears, one Magilla Gorilla and a Peter Potamas" (106) while attempting such communion. Readers might recall the literary convention of free indirect speech to suggest that such lines actually refer to Oedipas's--at least unconscious--thoughts and perceptions. The old television cartoons subliminally present in the background thus amount to a metaphor for persons' saturation within their interpretive communities. Media, daily encounters, and a multiplicity of signals bombard persons constantly--though often without awareness or consent. These influences then occupy people's minds where they remain to disrupt, contaminate, and otherwise prevent open engagement with those from different communities. Oedipa continues to try desperately as she thinks, "I need you to show yourself" only to conclude, "But nothing happened" (107). Readers might similarly note how Arrabal's interaction with Inverarity might actually have served to "reassure him" (120) of his present commitments. So long as the judgments of interpretive communities reside unconsciously within our minds, communication between legitimate others will prove contaminated. Interpretation precedes meaning, and that interpretation is guided by interpretive communities, which only secures their lasting influence. And this conclusion directly relates to the main question of this paper: the capacity for authors to effectively transfer any meaning towards readers--especially readers from different interpretive communities--and thus the capacity for authors to impact others through their writings.

To note the role that their own prior interpretive communities and presuppositions play throughout their engagement with Pynchon's text, one might look towards Oedipa's pursuit of the Tristero as a model. Indeed, one might propose a sort of analogy between Oedipa's attempts to develop the explanation of the Tristero out of the data she encounters and readers' attempts to develop a thematic explanation of the data they encounter in a text. As Oedipa struggles to

determine the extent of interpretations' role in developing the Tristero, Fallopian offers some advice: "Write down what you can't deny. Your hard intelligence. But then write down what you've only speculated, assumed. See what you've got" (168). Readers might adopt these recommendations for their own interpretations of Pynchon's works. They might form a list of all the "hard intelligence," meaning what the text clearly and indisputably shows, as well as a separate list of every point that is potentially based on their own interpretive efforts. The list of certainties might begin within the most basic point: Thomas Pynchon wrote a novel. But I might include even this point on the interpretive side because its status as literary--composed of messages and connections with broad meanings beyond a certain pragmatic context--is an assumption. Readers arguably determined these texts as literary at the very beginning and developed literary meaning as a result which amounts to reaching a conclusion before even viewing the data[14]. I next presume to know that Oedipa Maas is trapped by foundational systems. But I then must acknowledge that "foundationalism" is never directly mentioned in the text. I assume it explains Oedipa's conventional and monotonous ways perhaps due to my interest in post-foundationalism and my assumption that an author so directly associated with postmodernism would harbor such an interest as well. At best, I know that Oedipa feels trapped by something. I know that Pynchon mentions fantasies and imagination, but I already acknowledged that one can interpret its use in the text as both a productive form of change and another subtle version of a closed, monotonous system. I know that Pynchon mentions the notion of a miracle as worlds colliding; however, one can interpret Pynchon to promote interaction as an impetus for hybridity as well as to reject the notion as fruitless optimism. I know that Pynchon provides references to shadowy forces of surveillance and co-optation, but he also contains multiple references to paranoia (221). A main point of my interpretation is that overarching

authorities' convoluted relations to one another further prevent change in the post-foundational sense that people cannot objectively explain such connections. But again, I know this stands as an assumption based mainly on Doc's conclusions which even he finally rejects as shoddy.

As readers further develop such a list, they recognize that the column of certainties is filled with basic observations or elements devoid of any obvious purpose while the list of interpretations is composed of these elements' underlying spirit or intent. The column of certainties contains the "so" while the column of readers' interpretive points contains the "so what." However, the binary need not prove so essentialist in order to promote Fish's extreme version of reader response theory in which the reader is the primary constructor of meaning in a text. The main revelation from the process of composing these lists may be not that all points of deeper meaning necessarily derive from readers' interpretive efforts but that each of these points was potentially derived through some degree of interpretation. Readers might indeed encounter textual cues and derive a meaning that aligns with some sort of authorial intention, and some form of effective communication might occur. But readers cannot know for certain what pieces of meaning derive from the author and which pieces of meaning derive from their own mind so that--for all practical purposes--meaning resides in the reader. One might relate this point again to Oedipa's search for meaning as she concludes by deducing four possibilities. The Tristero might actually exist in reality, or she might imagine its existence. The Tristero might amount to an elaborate "plot" with Inverarity planting cues for her to follow, or she might imagine such a plot (170). In the first set of options, Oedipa either views her world objectively, which uncovers a greater truth, or she interprets her world which leads to a subjective explanation. However, the second set of options might offer some correlation to the process of reading. Inverarity as the architect of a plot might represent the author as an architect of the novel, for both Oedipa and the

reader follow a series of events devised by an outside figure. The first option amounts to an Iserian notion of readers encountering and recognizing cues intentionally left by the author, while the second option amounts to Fish's view wherein readers construct these textual elements themselves. Oedipa finds herself incapable of resolving this dilemma as "she can never again call back any image of the dead man to dress up, pose, talk to and make answer" (178). Inverarity thus represents the dead author who is only an absence and an interpretive construction. So long as readers cannot determine which meanings result from the text or author and which meanings result from themselves, one may view any conclusions with a degree of skepticism.

As shown throughout this process, a reader response criticism of Pynchon's works--an attempt to identify the presence of one's own interpretation as well as imagine other readers' possible interpretive moves--finally reveals a text in which meaning is constantly undermined. It proves that any seemingly clear piece of the text used to construct an overall interpretation is itself interpreted and thus challengeable. Different readers from different background conditions will view those pieces of text in a myriad of different ways and thus reach different conclusions. Even if we attempt to debate our different perspectives--even if we haggle over each detail and challenge the different conditions or experiences which cause us to view them in such a way--we will find that our understandings of those conditions are themselves based on assumptions which are based on background conditions and so on and so forth so that the discourse seems endless and irresolvable. Authors have no control over their works which entails that they hold no chance to impact their readers, right? The "jig is up" sotospeak. The only attainable goal of writing can be some sort of internal satisfaction, so all you writers might as well fire your literary agents and store your writings in your bedroom cupboard. Well, not exactly. A less deterministic interpretation of Fish's reader response theory suggests not that readers construct every element

of text's meanings but rather that readers cannot determine which pieces of meaning might actually derive from the author. Thus, authors need not conclude that readers necessarily misinterpret every aspect of their text but that they can never control which elements of the text are available for divergent, contrary opinions. An author perhaps can influence his or her readers; however, an author cannot control or determine the nature of that influence.

To illustrate this notion further, one might point towards these texts' open endings which seem to frustrate readers as well as prompt them to acknowledge their own influence over the text. Many readers--especially those trained in the English discipline--look towards a text's ending to better resolve perceived conflicts. However, Pynchon's conclusions seem as ambiguous on the theme of authors' abilities to impact readers as any other portion of the novel. The rather bleak interpretation offered before thus remains incomplete as different readers will employ Pynchon to reach highly different conclusions regarding the capacity for different communities to influence one another and stimulate change. As with all other themes, the ideological leanings and general disposition of the reader ultimately determines his or her stance on this issue. The reader reaches different conclusions depending upon whether they hold a more optimistic or pessimistic outlook and, of course, depending upon what they consider satisfactory or significant change.

The final scene of *Inherent Vice* in particular include hints of both hope and hopefulness for the ability of separate parties to leave some sort of lasting change or influence upon one another. Doc's final situation seems bleak as he dejectedly forgoes all hopes to unravel any aspect of the novel's diffuse mystery and resorts to an aimless drive on the highway. An all-encompassing and impenetrable fog penetrates his view, which could further symbolize this post-foundational denial of the possibility to obtain clear or objective knowledge of a real world.

Doc finds himself in a "desert of perception" (368) which suggests he feels trapped within an uncertainty that will likely never dissolve to reveal a definite pathway. Thus, his endeavors seem as futile and unfruitful as the barren wasteland of a desert. In response to this revelation, he joins a "caravan" (368) of cars which entails lining up behind the dominant flow of traffic where he can "settle in" (368). Readers thus can interpret these lines to signify Doc's final conformity wherein he resides in a private sphere--no longer bothering to reach out towards those surrounding him--with the ultimate effect of stasis. Under such an interpretation, Doc arguably possessed a modernist outlook and ambition at the outset of the novel. Through his investigations, he seeks to uncover a world of authenticity and greater truth (the world of the Golden Fang) by interrogating the status quo or the surface appearance of his surroundings. However, he concludes that such efforts eventually reach "some kind of limit" as uncertainty seems built into the system[15]. If he can never find and steer society towards that authentic or true state, then he seems too discouraged to try and influence society any longer.

Other readers might identify positive cases of mutual influence throughout these same passages. The fog of postmodernism's mass uncertainty encourages persons to relinquish their previous, positive convictions which (as previously shown) have prevented them from engaging in the more open-minded manner that allows for cataclysmic collision. Once the fog dominates people's perspective so that they can find no spot of clarity (no epistemological premise) upon which to cling, the barriers between themselves and others seem less solid. The collective uncertainty--or widespread "blindness" (368)--challenges people's assurance in their principles to the extent that they practically lose previous assurances in their firm, solid identities. It encourages what Cahoone refers to as persons' ability to feel "'objective' about themselves" (5).

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[15] Notably, this seems highly similar to Oedipa Maas who seeks to find the authentic, buried reality of the Tristero only to find such a certain discovery impossible.

Previous distinctions between self and other thus seem less natural or obvious, which at least allows for more interaction. Without the fog, the cars on this major California highway would have continued on their own trajectories whilst generally unaware or uninterested in one another. The fog encourages these complete strangers--these others--to gather and pay close attention to one another. Furthermore, Doc supposes these cars might always "remember the night they set up a temporary commune to help each other home through the fog" which alludes to the moment's lasting impact. Doc decides to drive clear through to Mexico where he imagines the fog waiting for him "across a border where nobody could tell anymore in the fog who was Mexican, who was Anglo, who was anybody" (369). As persons' assurances in their beliefs and in themselves--their abilities to say "I'm American, and these are my American values"--is challenged, these worldviews can finally commingle enough to create something entirely different. Doc's final sentiment is hope in the possibility that the fog might then someday allow "for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead" (369). Stanley Fish's version of post-foundationalism seems to simply acknowledge the dominance of foundational premises that necessitate stasis. On the contrary, Pynchon allows readers to hope that an increased proliferation of post-foundational thought can encourage previously divided sectors to finally allow themselves to be influenced by one another so that the system is at least no longer a closed system.

A text's ending does not necessarily provide final, more transparent observations or uses of languages; however, readers often assume as much. Thus, readers might interpret clarity and closure where none objectively exits. They might appeal towards a novel's ending to falsely attribute their conclusions to some concrete, indisputable force such as the text or authorial intent. However, Pynchon's endings often feel incomplete or unsatisfying to readers. Inherent

Vice concludes with Doc driving aimlessly towards the great unknown in the hopes of eventually finding something new, and readers cannot know for certain whether he finds it. Readers who view their present zeitgeist unfavorably might first assume a pessimistic ending as persons have largely failed to erect something entirely different. However, the text never clarifies that Doc hopes to find that "something else" (369) by the twenty-first century. The text allows for a general appeal that persons will accomplish change sometime in the course of human history so that humanity's experience as a species seems one massive open ending. Similarly, The Crying of Lot 49's Oedipa Maas realizes the presence of a mystery bidder possibly connected with the Tristero which for a moment promises to clarify her own confusion as well the confusion of readers. However, the novel ends with Oedipa sitting "to await the crying of lot 49" (183). An open ending arguably prods readers to recognize that the text itself is irresolvable and thus allows them to acknowledge their active interpretive involvement throughout the entire process of reading and analyze the text through more of their own, personal insight. One might also interpret open endings as an intriguing metaphor for authors who so concede their inability to ensure that readers exactly follow intended cues to reach a clear, intended message. Open endings seem a way for authors to accept that they cannot control how readers ultimately walk away from the text.

If one adopts the second, more positive interpretation of Pynchon's Inherent Vice, then one might find the postmodern author uniquely capable of finding some means to influence readers. A more optimistic interpretation of post-foundationalism suggests that while people are presently embedded in epistemological frameworks that temper or suppress interaction, an increasing awareness of uncertainty might lessen those barriers. Thus, a postmodern author might achieve some sort of meaningful impact over readers and society by illustrating how

principles deemed "natural" might actually originate from a challengeable authority. By hoping only to express the difficulties surrounding meaning and expression, a reader response author can use the uncertain nature of language to his or her advantage. Each interpretation of a literary device seems to allow for a counter-interpretation; readers will interpret the characters' roles in a variety of ways; the mystery itself is disjointed and fractured; the text's meaning is ambiguous. As she ponders why Inverarity would go to the trouble of constructing such an elaborate hoax, she recalls his advice to "Keep it bouncing...that's all the secret, keep it bouncing" (178). Though Oedipa fails to extract a clear message from Inverarity's construction, she might at least escape from those mundane tupperware parties. By embarking on the attempt to solve a mystery and by constantly acknowledging the case's multiple possibilities, she escapes from the strict formulas of her previous life. Like Doc, her new awareness towards the plethora of perspectives and explanations might someday allow her the open engagement that ignites something new. Similarly, Pynchon might go to the trouble of constructing such elaborate texts with the hope to "keep [us] bouncing" (178). He constructs labyrinths like the mysteries of the Tristero and the Golden Fang not knowing exactly what turns of interpretation we might find, but hoping we can end somewhere less definite.

Conclusion

The post-foundational reader response author stands to signify all people living with the anxious feeling that an ideological, interpretive, or linguistic divide exists between them and those with whom they would interact. The insights of postmodern theories and the works of Thomas Pynchon need not merely augment these worries. Instead, they amount to a new goal and a new means for communication. Often, an individual communicates with the intent to transmit a particular message and induce a particular action. Like Congressman fighting in favor or in opposition to healthcare reform, we begin with a sense of certainty and seek only to convert others to that same belief. Like Michelle Bachman, we sell our certainty by attaching it to an authority whether it be God, an author's intent, or a transparent language. Through Thomas Pynchon, one might find a form of communication which seeks connection with others yet which begins with few other goals. Pynchon's works mainly express the instabilities of communication and the challenges to any positive meaning. But rather than forego the attempt to communicate altogether, Pynchon continues to produce meaning while gladly inviting readers to construct what they will. He reveal a communication in which one disseminates a message while accepting that readers might clearly receive certain meanings yet will interpret others in ways which seemed unimaginable. The goal of communication might be to foster and highlight the presence of diverse interpretation; the process may be to develop a message that refuses to hide behind pretenses of clarity and certainty. The final product is perhaps a message that weakens people's confidence in their ideologies and their words--confidence that serves as boundaries between opposed groups. By limiting people's confidence in the truth and coherence of their belief, we might reduce the gridlock of Congress or other venues for public change and discussion. We might "keep it bouncing" (178).

Of course, Pynchon is hardly the only voice to confront the postmodern dilemma which recognizes barriers to communication while also seeking to communicate. Even the early, more radical postmodern voices express the desire to reach their readership and spur some form of change. John Barth's 1988 story "Night-Sea Journey" illustrates the strength of this impulse--contradictory as it may seem--through the narrator who begins the story by professing, "One way or another, no matter which theory of our journey is correct, it's myself I address" (1) only to conclude with the appeal, "Whoever echoes these reflections, be more courageous than their author!" (4) The narrator begins by consciously refusing to attempt (or presume) to express himself and his thoughts to a separate reader. He too recalls Roland Barthes who claimed the act of writing is one of "inscription" or "performance" rather than "expression" (2). The author cannot record his/her experiences or thoughts for future generations to decipher and one day definitively determine. The author and his/her meaning cannot live eternally within the text so as to find resurrection from continually renewing readerships. Instead, the author exists in the moment as he/she places words onto a page and then disappears immediately afterwards. The reader necessarily interprets and constructs the text according to his/her own contexts, understandings, and experiences so that the text is constantly in the state of creation. Barth thus seems to view the present tense as the novel's natural state as it reflects its continual state of creation.

However, Barth's narrator concludes by desperately hoping a future reader will not only identify his meaning but produce a specific, intended act. The short story which initially defies both unitary, transferable meaning and ultimate purpose concludes with an appeal to be understood and the promotion of a specific cause. The narrator might find himself influenced by a desperate hope at the end of his journey, but this contradictory conclusion also aligns with his

dedication to paradox. This story rests upon an aporia, an irresolvable disjunction in logic, which prevents readers from totalizing this story. They must simultaneously accept multiple possibilities much as the narrator embodies contrary beliefs, expectations, and desires throughout his life-long journey. Early postmodern authors like Barth often rely upon aporia and meta-fictional stories which serve as an analogy for the writer's struggle in a postmodern world. An interesting extension of this project might consider the influence of those stories in literary and larger social spheres as well as the limitations. Do such stories necessarily result in the repetition and stasis they seek to challenge or can they evolve to consider a variety of styles and themes?

Certain post-foundational authors from historically disadvantaged minority groups are especially concerned with postmodernism's ability to promote social change. Angela Carter writes from a postmodern feminist perspective which seeks to liberate women from oppressive gender roles by challenging the ubiquitous social images that portray such standards as natural. Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* specifically claims that "A critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives" (6). Carter thus focuses on gender performativity--the notion that people find themselves saturated with images of gender from the moment of consciousness which subsequently act or perform. The images and performances prove so common and dominant that the performance appears natural. The character of Tristessa serves as a powerful illustration of this concept--a male actor who performs a woman so convincingly that he becomes the social standard for femininity. As the narrator explains, "You had turned yourself into an object as lucid as the object you made from glass; and this object was, itself, an idea. You were your own portrait, tragic and self-contradictory. Tristessa had no function in this world except as an ideal of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one" (129). Gender, and those who perform gender, hold no place in being or in nature but rather exist as ideas perpetuated by

repeated images or symbols. One might thus engage in a reader response analysis of Carter's works to see how one might uncover or challenge the specific images and narratives that construct gender.

Salman Rushdie engages in a similar critique by uncovering the historical narratives that naturalize a culture's ethical systems. By challenging the privileged position of historical narratives as objective truths, one might also challenge the standards and behaviors which they tacitly or explicitly promote. Multiple characters within The Moor's Last Sigh profess a moral righteousness which is later challenged through either newly uncovered pieces of history or new interpretations. One can even view the overall structure of The Moor's Last Sigh as Rushdie's attempt to construct such an alternative history for the whole of India. This novel inverts most readers' assumptions as they expect a novel set amongst India's major upheavals to center around the major events and parties of that time and place. Of course, the dominant figures and groups of a contemporary society tend to reflect back upon the past to decide what counts as most important; they decide which pieces of history to foreground and which pieces to shove aside as tangential anecdotes. In the case of Indian history since the turn of the century, the important issues relate to conflict between the majority parties of Hindus and Moslems. But Rushdie drolly admits that this story revolves around a family of "Christians, Portuguese, and Jews; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts not saris" (87). Rushdie seems to focus upon the most remote, idiosyncratic figures he can imagine--"the most eccentric of slices to extract from all that life" (87)--which renders the traditionally emphasized events and divisions a mere backdrop. Rushdie perhaps adopts such an approach to defamiliarize readers from their main perceptions of this massive historical event. People raised amongst one of those major groups involved in the partition and subsequent violence of India might struggle to view the conflict

with less of a bias. Their perspectives are so heavily influenced by the tales passed down from their families (much like the narrator) that they cannot look upon these events or their consequences with fresh eyes. By presenting well-known historical events through the allegory of a family which seems unrelated at the surface level, Rushdie perhaps allows readers to challenge their versions of history.

The simple act itself of constructing an alternative history might amount to a sufficient enough challenge against those narratives and ethical systems which cause people real, considerable damage. Granted, not all alternative histories prove inherently good. Nonetheless, the simple ability and willingness to enter into a view of the past structured in ways outside one's dominant personal or social patterns could have a profound affect on ethical systems. Towards the end of his confessional journey, the Moore asks, "How, when the past is gone, when all's exploded and in rags, may one apportion blame (418)? A new interpretation or construction of history might allow one to recognize the fictive qualities of all historical narratives so that all of history is reduced to "rags" and blame is no longer deemed determinable. In fact, the more absurd or nonsensical the history the better since comparison reveals these narratives as no more strange than the supposed truth. A toad-like man who knowingly instigates mass violence for the birthplace of an avatar who later finds himself consumed in the explosions of his own making hardly seems less likely than a fundamentalist Hindu leader who vehemently defends the birthplace of an avatar to the point of mass unrest.

Additionally, these alternatives can offer people a means of escape when present narratives no longer allow for human happiness or development. Vasco Miranda spent the final years of his life existing in his personal history of loss. As the narrator notes, "Fourteen years is a generation; or, enough time for a regeneration" so that "he could have cleansed his soul of

poisons and grown new crops. But he had mired himself in what he left behind, marinated himself in what had spurned him, and in his bile" (430). So long as fundamentalist communities remain within similar narratives of binary opposition and unforgivable mistreatment, they will exist in a negative feedback loop of deep despair and eventual destruction. While Narain points only towards logical narratives based on actual geopolitical possibilities, powerful alternative histories might exist within the merely different or even the fanciful. Histories of a young man in his wife's wedding dress, women in "skirts" rather than "saris" (87), a Jewish boy happening upon a Moorish crown, cartoons, or a historical mural which includes a "half-women half-tiger" and "sea-monsters" (59) might awaken people to additional possibilities of the past and thus additional possibilities of present ethical action. An incredible piece of literary criticism might involve reader response analysis from members of India's Hindu and Moslem cultures. They might explore how Rushdie's novel interacts with the historical narratives in which they were raised.

Each of these postmodern voices seems united in their ability to promote and foster critique. They seek to challenge the barriers erected by past foundations of thought whether they be barriers of gender, race, religion, or ideology. They seek not to offer didactic calls to specific actions not to present clear, objective views of reality. Pynchon, Barth, Carter, and Rushdie seek to simply express uncertainties and raise challenges which readers might interpret and employ in a multiplicity of ways. Post-foundational critics and authors are still products of society unable to consciously identify and challenge all of the foundations of their thought. They also reach inherent boundaries as they seek to subvert such authorities or otherwise enact change. However, they can all raise a general uncertainty which reduces one's sense of a natural and definite self. The true test of communication is thus not whether the recipient can rehearse a clear line of

meaning or even whether it changes their opinion on a specific issue. The true test is whether a message can allow someone to see possibility where they once saw impossibility or whether it can break into a closed system from any opening.

Endnotes

[1] Specifically, one would find this term within Wentzel Van Huyssteen's *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology*

[2] Like studies of fossils, Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity, or Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" (2115).

[3] Lyotard also commonly refers to such comprehensive doctrines of thought as "metanarratives" or "super-narratives" (86).

[4] Stephen of course would most likely never speak in such a seemingly clear manner, but for the sake of argument we can pretend.

[5] The author as "referent" in the words of Derrida

[6] This imagery also proves strikingly familiar to Iser's view of the text as a skeleton and the reader as the force which provides the fleshy filling.

[7] Present in the sense that they exist prior to interpretation which allows authors to employ them as constraints against readers' personal interpretations.

[8] See p. 9

[9] Another factor which complicates views of literary works as unified, harmonious products.

[10] However, CNN aired a crowd shot of a Manhattan street in 1997 which allegedly included an unidentified Pynchon (5).

[11] Such as The Ramones's "Two bar chord" (3) hit, Blitzrig Pop.

[12] Or "surfadelic" (36)

[13] Or at least the paranoia surrounding the possibility of omnipresent authority

[14] Or counting one's eggs before even knowing whether the bird is a chicken.

[15] Notably, this seems highly similar to Oedipa Maas who seeks to find the authentic, buried reality of the Tristero only to find such a certain discovery impossible.

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