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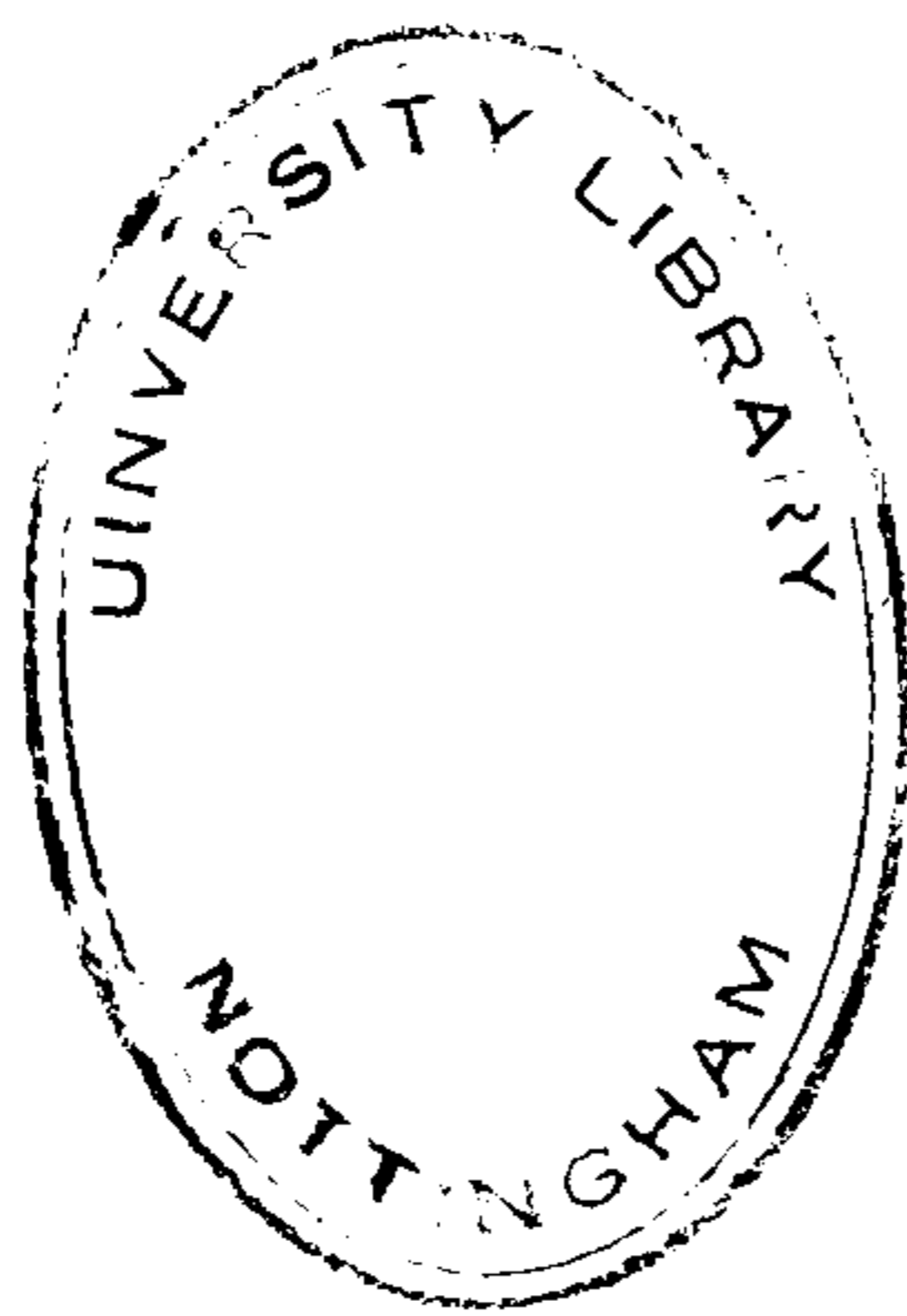
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The Reaction Against Realism in Contemporary
American Fiction: a study of the work of
John Hawkes, John Barth and Thomas Pynchon.

by

Ursula A. Mackenzie, B.A.



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Abstract

This thesis explores the reaction against realism in the work of three contemporary American novelists, John Barth, John Hawkes and Thomas Pynchon, with a view both to elucidating their individual literary styles and concerns, and to suggesting why these writers no longer consider realism a valid fictional mode.

Chapter One defines realism as a product of a nineteenth century philosophical and scientific world-view; it traces the changes which have developed in twentieth century thinking from the work of Einstein and Freud, and suggests the different effects these have had on novelists. The chapter continues with a brief analysis of one work by each of four writers in fields other than literature, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Theodore Roszak, and Alan Watts; the work of these writers can be seen to parallel the attempts of the three novelists to express in their fiction the possibility of alternative realities.

Chapter Two examines the fiction of John Hawkes; it traces a development in his fiction from the overtly experimental early novels, to the apparently more straightforward later ones, exposing this apparent return to convention as an illusion, and suggesting that "reality" to John Hawkes has never been less important than in his most recent work, *Travesty*. The chapter locates Hawkes' central concerns as a novelist in his exploration of the unconscious and of the power of the human imagination.

Chapter Three explores both the multi-referential and the playfully satiric nature of John Barth's fiction; it examines

the development from *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which exposes the inadequacy of the realistic world-view when it is placed in a twentieth century context, to *Chimera*, which celebrates the vitality and significance of fictions within life.

Chapter Four is a discussion of the work of Thomas Pynchon, and provides the central focus of the thesis. It suggests that Pynchon's real achievement lies in his uncompromising rejection of the concept of a single, definable reality, of linear approaches to experience, of the inevitability of cause and effect, in other words, the underlying structures of realism, because he has created in their place a more complete alternative that recognizes the validity of multiple versions of reality.

The conclusion puts forward the view that these writers share a loathing for the prescriptiveness of reality, and that their fiction becomes an act of rebellion against all the limitations imposed upon the human imagination and its freedom.

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CHAPTER ONE

It is by now a critical commonplace that realism has not been a dominant mode in American fiction; Lionel Trilling believes the novel in America has diverged from its classical intention, which is, according to him, "the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field"¹, likewise Marius Bewley suggests "the matrix of form for the American novel is not manners or society"², a fact he puts down to something in the American ethos which gave "an emotional primacy to ideas"³. Richard Poirier in his excellent book *A World Elsewhere*, discerns a fundamental distrust of social structures in American fiction. He contrasts Jane Austen and Mark Twain and notes that *Emma* restores "to social intercourse...the naturalness temporarily lost through artifice"⁴ while *Huckleberry Finn* presumes that "what is natural for society is in fact nothing but artifice, tricks, games and disguises"⁵. Poirier's thesis is that the greatest American writers have struggled against the domination of reality and tried to create for their characters an environment which allowed room for the development of consciousness. This attitude to the existent environment is balanced by what is in Poirier's opinion the other main attitude to society in fiction; this attitude is essentially submissive, although often critical or satiric, in that it seeks only to be corrective. These writers are often more aware of the very real attractions society can hold, their characters are like moths drawn to a candle, dazzled and doomed. Gradually a picture is built

up of the history of fiction in the United States, a history which has been far from dominated by the mode of realism although some proponents can be found. Even among the most conventional of these proponents, however, a tell-tale American romantic individualism creeps in to blur the picture. In W. D. Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, the central character's rejection of pecuniary advantage in favour of a moral victory is not a description of the way average men behave. Lapham's ability to rise above his world is an expression of a romantic faith in individual consciousness, Howells shows us the ideal possibilities of action within particular social circumstances, not the most probable actions. A momentary recollection of any of the great French realists shows how far this deviates from the strict standards they set themselves.

The reader must now be wondering how a thesis purporting to describe the reaction against realism in contemporary American fiction has the face to continue; apparently there is little significant writing in the mode of realism in America, and certainly not enough to constitute a form so dominant novelists would have to react against it. However there is some support for such a crazy notion, witness Warner Berthoff in *The Ferment of Realism*:

(Perhaps that is why, as a standard, it has been so remarkably long-lived; why it was as much the watchword in 1919 as it had been in 1884; why, even in the 1950s and 1960s, the great run of talents in American writing remains committed with a positively inhibiting single-mindedness to the premise of realism, the work of capturing the special immediate air of American reality in the familiar American dialect)⁶.

It should now be apparent that the basic problem is one of definition, a problem this first chapter must explore before the thesis can continue. The term "realism" must be one of the most over-

worked words in the critical vocabulary. It has been used indiscriminately; either its boundaries stretched until it is the baggiest, all-inclusive term available, for example Harry Levin's definition in *The Gates of Horn*, "... for all great writers, in so far as they are committed to a searching and scrupulous critique of life as they know it, may be reckoned among the realists"⁷; or else defined so narrowly, as the examples from Trilling and Bewley suggest, that American fiction seems to have no realists among its novelists at all. A term like this is clearly an actual handicap, not just unhelpful; at the one extreme there are those, and Harry Levin is not alone in this, who would wish to call all novelists realists; and at the other there are those whose definition is so precise they would be lucky if they could find one novel that fulfilled all their criteria, and had not a trace of symbolism or romanticism or whatever other categories they had excluded from the realistic canon. The first obstacle to overcome is the automatic connection we make between "realism" as a literary term, and "reality", or "real life". If we equate realism with a writer being faithful to his view of reality, then of course all writers are realists. Even a writer of fantasy must exploit the connection between his fantasy world and the world he shares with his reader or he will be incomprehensible; he may do it on a psychological level, a symbolic level, even an allegorical level, but he must make that connection. It is misleading to think of realism as being closer to real life than other kinds of fiction, all writing is necessarily mimetic to some extent; Henry James said "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt

to represent life"⁸. The real question for the novelist is not *whether* to represent life, but *how* to represent life so that it accords with his view of the world. And if all writing is to some extent mimetic, just to further erode this connection between "realism" and "reality", it is also true to say that "realism" frequently breaks with the realities of existence in very obvious ways. I have already mentioned *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, the following quotation comes from James's preface to *Princess Casamassima*, a novel usually considered to be among his most realistic works. James says that realistic characters must be intelligent and have "the power to be finely aware and richly responsible"⁹; I'm sure most of us could vouch for the fact that by far the majority, including ourselves, are both unaware and irresponsible.

The point which must be emphasized is that critical terminology should be both clearly defined and yet somehow elastic. Literature is never a question of sharp lines and neat boxes, and its criticism should concern itself with shades and comparisons. This is particularly important in American literature where, due to its late start, the whole progression from romanticism, through realism and naturalism, to what can loosely be called the beginnings of the modern novel, took place in a mere fifty years. Henry James is a pivotal figure who exemplifies this rapid change, and the consequent difficulty critics have when trying to classify American writers in any particular group; his early work, like *The American*, has a suggestion of gothic romanticism, the middle period is usually considered his realistic one, but the later novels look forward to the so-called "psychological novel" of the twentieth century. In

this thesis I am mainly concerned with James as a realist, but any critic who tries to put all of Henry James in a literary box discovers he's an awkward shape, at least two-thirds of him sticks out whichever box you choose. Even writers like Balzac and Dickens, the pioneers of realism, produced novels which were intermixtures of realism and romance. The other problem about categories is that so often they depend on an historical point of view; viewing realism as a reaction against romanticism, as the realists themselves did, one must talk of relative as opposed to absolute moralities, humanist, pragmatic philosophies, a desire to deal with ordinary people and their everyday concerns; in other words a literature more profoundly rooted in the actualities of existence. However, if we look at realism from the point of view of what followed it, naturalism, we see that the naturalists felt there had been no significant change since the romantic position, the realists' world-view was still anthropocentric and moral, which for those who rebelled against them was little better than wishful-thinking. The naturalists were the ones who dealt with life as it "really" was.

What this chapter hopes to reveal is some kind of awareness of what is meant by realism as it is used in the title of this thesis. An all-encompassing, concrete definition is beyond the scope of my powers and the scope of this thesis, and, as I hope I have shown, not necessarily desirable. Realism is first and foremost an attitude of mind, a way of viewing the world; its position of dominance in American fiction from about 1880 onwards, is because, essentially, our view of the world has not changed since then, the

vast majority of us operate as if no one had come forward with any new theories in science or philosophy since Descartes, Locke, Newton and Darwin. An exploration of realistic fictional methods and insights must go hand in hand with an exploration of the philosophical and scientific context in which ^{realism} \wedge arose. Why did the realists attach so much importance to the question of point of view in their novels, and worry over the problem of authorial intrusion, if it wasn't because they believed, along with all the important figures in eighteenth and nineteenth century science, that objectivity was the only proper attitude of mind, which must be cultivated in order to speak truthfully about the world? Any literary work expresses the cultural assumptions of its age, the relationship between the two, however, is not necessarily the simple one of direct cause and effect. In this exploration of the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century, and the changes in the twentieth century which have led writers, including the three who are central to this study, to reject realism as a valid mode for their fiction, I am not interested in proving that Thomas Pynchon is conversant with the work of Norman O. Brown, the connections are more subtle than that. It is a question of correspondences and, I hope, subsequent illumination. In *The Making of a Counter-Culture* Theodore Roszak describes the delicate relationship between people's experience and their view of life: "The world view we hold is nothing we learn in the same conscious way in which we learn an intellectual subject matter. It is rather something we absorb from the spirit of the times or are converted into, or seduced into by unaccountable experiences."¹⁰ The unaccountable experiences

of a writer are rarely available to the literary critic, but the spirit of his times is, and it is in that spirit that I hope to find a key to understanding the reaction against realism in contemporary American fiction.

I

The roots of the nineteenth century world-view can be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, among the great figures of the Enlightenment, for it was at this time that a new emphasis was given to reason and objectification. As a part of the Romantic Reaction, Blake rejected this domination of one mode of consciousness, which he called "single vision", and laid the responsibility for it at the door of Bacon, Locke and Newton. In Bacon's work can be found "the moral, aesthetic, and psychic raw materials of the scientific world view"¹¹. What he visualized was ordinary people contributing to a body of knowledge which could be passed from generation to generation, gradually increasing in range and depth of understanding. In order to achieve this ideal of cumulative knowledge, the process would have to be standardized; in other words serious research would be purged of personal characteristics. That which was subjectively pleasing could not be called truth, truth would be purely operational, Bacon himself says "Truth and utility are here the very same things"¹². It is in Bacon's work, and also in Descartes', that we find for the first time the idea that objective knowledge is superior to any other:

...we can give credit to Bacon and Descartes that there exists the tantalizing assumption, basic to all scientific work, that a depersonalized method of knowing *can* be perfected - and that *only* such a method of knowing gains access to the realities of nature.¹³

The significance of Newton cannot be over-emphasized; the basic laws of physics he formulated were unquestioned until this century and even now most of us still think of the universe in his terms. The Newtonian system is referred to as mechanistic because it postulates a rigid design of cause and effect. Once the forces and initial conditions are specified, it is possible to calculate the movements of particles into the indefinite future, thus, the entire course of the universe is fixed and, in principle, calculable, if its present state and the forces are known. For Newton space and time were physical entities. Recognizing the inaccuracy of "relative, apparent and common time"¹⁴, (i.e. time as men measure it by clocks), Newton proposed a concept he called absolute time, which existed primarily in the consciousness of God. The first *Scholium* in the *Principia* states "Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration..."¹⁵ Time was inescapable at both the human and the divine level. Newton's view of a mechanistic universe was supported by philosophy; Descartes and Locke, both affirmed logical determinism. If unexplained or unpredictable events were found, the fact was attributed to imperfect knowledge of the initial conditions.

The relationship between the thinkers of the Enlightenment and the development of the novel has been demonstrated by Ian Watt

in *The Rise of the Novel*. Watt sees an indirect but undeniable connection that amplifies the view that realism in fiction should be seen in the context of intellectual history. Descartes' method was based on his determination to trust nothing from the past and rely entirely on his own faculties to judge what he considered to be true; this individualistic and innovating orientation is clearly reflected in the novel. Instead of using traditional plots, relying on the collective wisdom from the past, and judging literary merit on the basis of fidelity to accepted models; the novel chose to make its criterion truth to individual experience. Defoe's fiction takes the form of memoirs of individuals, allowing the narrative to develop along the lines of what these individuals might reasonably be expected to do next. The rejection of scholasticism involved rejecting the intellectual superiority that universals, classes and abstractions had over the material world. The empirical method required close observation of the material world, and an analogous concern with particulars can be found in the eighteenth century novel. Ian Watt points out that the need to define individual character reflects Descartes' elevation to supreme importance of the thought processes of the individual. An example of this definition of individuals can be discovered in the use of ordinary, particular names instead of generalizing type names; Pamela Andrews as opposed to Mr. Badman. Another important aspect of particularization in the novel was setting characters and events in the background of a particular time and place. The status of the concept of the temporal world changed radically from the Renaissance onwards; a world where Forms and Ideas are

the ultimate realities is a world in which the really significant events occur outside the flux of time. However, the development of science emphasized time as one of the most important dimensions of the physical world. Locke put forward the idea that time was essential to any concept of personal identity, because that sensation of self relied on memory. Defoe's novels for the first time present us with both a picture of the small time-scale of individuals and one that sets that scale against the broader perspective of historical time. The sense of time is also crucial to the new cause and effect plot structure of the novel: "The novel's structure is also distinguished from most previous fiction by its use of past experience as the cause of present action: a causal connection operating through time replaces the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences..."¹⁶ The other fundamental dimension of the Newtonian universe was space; both space and time coordinates were necessary to fix the individuality of any object. Hence we can see a concomitant interest in particularized location for the events of the novel. The last big innovation Ian Watt points out in the development from the prose romance to the novel concerns language. The seventeenth century thinkers were faced with a semantic problem; words did not all stand for objects and the question became one of trying to formulate a rationale that would deal with this more awkward aspect of language. Locke discussed what he considered to be the proper use of language, and reduced its range in order to avoid the deceit involved in "eloquence". We can see in the novels of Defoe and Richardson the use of a much more plain, ordinary kind of

language; they wanted to use a prose-style that would enhance the air of authenticity they were trying to achieve. Previously the stylistic tradition had been less concerned with language as a referential medium, than with the beauty which could be added to description and action by the use of ornamental language. Although an awareness of the complexity of the medium of language can be seen in the English novel as early as Laurence Sterne, and Fielding continued to use an ornamental rhetoric in his fiction, the essentially descriptive and denotative use of language found in Richardson and Defoe is suggestive of the new value placed on the empirical and the objective in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Romantics reacted against the mechanistic, empiricist view of the world developed during the Enlightenment, but this reaction was short-lived. In America, romance fiction continued until it was replaced by realism in the 1870s and 1880s, but this fiction wasn't closely linked with Romanticism as a cultural movement which had faded out by the 1830s. After the brief interruption of the Romantic movement the dominant spirit continued to be the empirical, objective imperative, which had of course continued in the sciences anyway. In 1825 the French mathematician and physicist, the Marquis Pierre Laplace, summarized the extent of determinism and its concomitant, cause and effect:

We must envisage the present state of the universe as the effect of its previous state, and as the cause of that which will follow. An intelligence that could know, at a given instant, all the forces governing the natural world, and the respective positions of the entities which compose it; if in addition it was great

enough to analyse all this information, would be able to embrace in a single formula the movements of the largest bodies in the universe and those of the lightest atom: nothing would be uncertain for it, and the future, like the past, would be directly present to its observation.¹⁷

History went hand in hand with science; ideologically they were closely linked, having moved away from the more mediaeval view of divine causation to a study of tangible relationships between events; both achieved remarkably successful explanatory and predictive theories through the development of empirical and analytical attitudes:

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries science and history fed each other from the bread of cause and effect. The Laplacian imperative was just as potent in historiography as it was in science, for it gave rise to the progressivist, positivistic, and Marxist theories of history as well as the mechanical concepts of physical processes in science.¹⁸

Many of the realistic novelists (George Eliot and Henry James for example) saw their work as similar to that of the historian; there was a strong link between one of the basic attitudes of realism and a basic attitude of Marxism, concerning the relationship between the individual and society: "For Marx, it was 'not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'..."¹⁹

In the 1870s there was a stir of intellectual activity revolving round Darwin; the increasingly "down-to-earth", scientific emphasis was inevitably opposed to romanticism or transcendentalism. Gradually the intellectual emphasis shifted

from "an evaluative absolutism to a descriptive relativism"²⁰; God, who had still been the centre of Newton's universe even though it was in a rather abstract sense, was no longer the arbiter of moral principles, men had to take the utilitarian approach and decide on these with a yardstick called "the common good". Darwin's stress on the environment also helped move the focus of interest from the individual to his age's social milieu; and his evolutionary theory was profoundly influential, although the reaction to it varied from a basically optimistic to a basically pessimistic attitude towards determinism. Symonds defined evolution as "...the passage of all things...from an undifferentiated to a differentiated condition"²¹; curiously, this definition is the exact opposite of the theory of entropy, a theory which has exercised the imaginations of many contemporary American writers*.

An example of Darwin's influence on non-scientific areas can be found in a movement in literary circles of this time which was known as evolutionary criticism. Howells's criticism was basically evolutionary; he believed that literature was a product of its physical, social, and intellectual environment, and that both literature and society were characterized by progressive improvement. Fiction was evolving, parallel with society, from crudity and obviousness to subtlety and complexity; with regard to subject matter its concern for truth in every sphere of life mirrored society's growing humanitarianism. The movement from classicism through romanticism to realism was, according to Howells, an

* A more detailed discussion of entropy can be found in Chapter 4.

evolutionary progress, so that even from an artistic point of view the last was greater than its predecessors, "fidelity to experience and probability of motive are essential conditions of a great imaginative literature."²² The other main element in evolutionary criticism was that the student of literature should strive to be like the scientist, and seek a truthful description of the phenomenon which somehow precluded judgement; the critic should be an analytical observer and codifier not someone who merely made arbitrary value judgements. The positive and negative aspects of such a system of criticism are not what concern us here, what is interesting is the interpenetration of fundamental theories in science and literature. Three evolutionary critics, Garland, Perry, and Pellew, based their defence of Howellsian realism on the grounds that it was faithful to contemporary life rather than to the past. The words they used to describe the two kinds of literature emphasizes the influence of Darwin yet again; they applauded literature which was "adaptive" and attacked that which was "ancestral"²³. An example of the influence of evolutionary thinking in fiction can be found in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*:

We have the consolation of knowing that evolution is ever in action, that the ideal is a light that cannot fail. He will not forever balance thus between good and evil. When this jangle of free will instinct shall have been adjusted, when perfect understanding has given the former the power to replace the latter entirely, man will no longer vary. The needle of understanding will yet point steadfast and unwavering to the distant pole of truth.²⁴

The realists in America felt their fictional mode was a way of writing which incorporated the two great wonders of their country,

science and democracy. William James summarized the realistic position in *Pragmatism*, published in 1890, when he rejected "bad a priori reasons, ...fixed principles, closed systems, ...pretended absolutes and origins, ...dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finality in truth."²⁵ The writers of realistic fiction had been expressing similar ideas long before James's book was published; pragmatists could not accept given, universal truths, they were interested in what men know and how they learn; concomitantly, realists were concerned with problems of vision, knowledge, illusion, and the relation of appearance to reality. But it is important to remember that despite the apparent freedom this scepticism and awareness of relativism imply, the realists were operating under the influence of certain givens they never thought to question. The moral framework was clear; dualistic, in the sense of the separation of body and spirit, and anthropocentric, there was never any doubt about the centrality of the individual's experience and his growth through knowledge. The illusion of complexity was carefully cultivated, but at the same time the reader was guided through the book in such a way that his freedom to choose his moral position was more apparent than real.

In France realism was less individualistic and much harsher in its treatment of unpleasant truths, many Americans and Englishmen found it depressingly vulgar; but again the most obvious quality the writers of the time sought for was scientific objectivity. They rejected the idea that they were storytellers, and called themselves scientists or historians; as Auerbach remarks in *Mimesis* many of the active intellects were under the influence of an

enthusiasm for science, and strove to assimilate its techniques into the techniques of fiction. In the preface to *Germinie Lacerteux* (published in 1864) the Goncourt brothers defended the low social status of their heroine by appealing to a scientific standard, and emphasizing their role as social historians:

Today when the novel is broadening and growing, when it is beginning to be the great, serious, impassioned, living form of literary study and social investigation, when through analysis and psychological research, it is becoming contemporary moral History; today when the novel has imposed upon itself the studies and the duties of science, it can demand the freedoms and immunities of science.²⁶

When *Madame Bovary* was published, the magazine *Réalisme* praised it as "a literary application of the calculus of probabilities"²⁷. Such a description points up the fundamentally logical structure of realism, the determination that effect should follow upon cause; it is the nearest literature comes to fulfilling "the Laplacian imperative".

In England realism was still in many ways romantic, it expressed the idea that human life, whatever the particular conditions, could ultimately be seen as unified and coherent. However the nature of reality was firmly in the material world; the individual had to accept that reality lay outside himself, and reconcile himself to the pressures it placed upon him, before he could achieve a proper basis for personal morality and happiness. The writers were concerned with the representation of the processes of causality and at the same time trying to reconcile these with spiritual truth. "Probability and analysis, the representation of

the working of material laws, were superimposed on the artist's fundamental purpose of demonstrating the unity and meaningfulness of experience."²⁸ George Eliot, arguably the greatest of the English realists, gave a key to her own beliefs in a review of R.W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*; again the Newtonian picture of the world, with its rigid system of causation, is in a prominent position:

The master key to this revelation, is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world - of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics and our religion. It is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible. The divine yea and nay, the seal of prohibition and of sanction, are effectually impressed on human deeds and aspirations, not by means of Greek and Hebrew, but by that inexorable law of consequence, whose evidence is confirmed instead of weakened as the ages advance: and human duty is comprised in the earnest study of this law and patient obedience to its teaching... ²⁹

These ideas were combined with the idea of progress and moral evolution; ultimately both the individual and society could move forward, because self-development and emotional fulfilment were the means of achieving the highest moral aims for society at large. Even in England, where the ideal of unity and resolution continued, romance was rejected. Poe and Hawthorne were criticized for turning away from domestic realism, in an article in *Macmillan's* magazine in 1861; an anonymous critic in the *Athenaeum* in 1841 felt the age of romance was over because it was at variance with the spirit of the age, "The nineteenth century is distinguished by a craving for the positive and the real - it is essentially an age of analysis.

and criticism... and these faculties are...the natural antagonists to the imagination."³⁰ Another anonymous critic, this time in the *Westminster Review* in 1851, distinguishes himself by his patronizing attitude to previous literary styles; modern novelists, he thinks, will restrict themselves "more and more to the actual and the possible; and our tastes would be offended were they greatly to overstep these limitations, for a scientific, and somewhat sceptical age, has no longer the power of believing in the marvels which delighted our ruder ancestors."³¹ The loss of that power is surely more to be regretted than praised.

II

The preceding discussion is a limited glance at the intellectual milieu of realism, limited both in the sense of scope, and also because it is slanted to a particular polemical approach; it now seems necessary to take a closer look at the product of this background, realistic fiction itself. The most obvious starting-place for a discussion of realism's defining qualities is verisimilitude; Levin points out in *The Gates of Horn* that whereas the term *Naturalisme* is borrowed from French philosophy and describes any system of thought which accounts for the human condition without reference to the supernatural, and with a consequent emphasis on material things, *Réalisme* is a term borrowed from the fine arts and it need not imply anything more than detailed visualization. The first part of George Becker's definition of European and American realism since 1870, refers to verisimilitude of detail derived

from observation and documentation³². Unfortunately, the use of realistic detail is not confined to realism, it is frequently used in fantasy in order to draw the reader into the fictional world; Ruskin remarked that "In the representation of the Heroic or Impossible forms, the greatest care must be taken in finishing the details."³³ Anyway the realists were not trying to achieve straight factualism, Howells attacked those readers with overly "accurate minds"³⁴, general truth could be more important than specific fact; it does the realists an injustice to bring them down to the level of mere accuracy. Harold Kolb, in his book *The Illusion of Life*, picks out four main areas of realism's identifying characteristics: philosophy, subject matter, morality and style³⁵; I shall discuss realism using these as basic headings.

Quite a lot has already been said about the philosophy of realism. Fundamentally it was, in Carlyle's phrase, "descendental"³⁶, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say non-transcendental. The writers felt very strongly that both the purpose and the pleasure of art lay in exploring the meaning of existence by looking at the texture of life itself, not by looking through it to some form of spiritual ideal. Levin mentions Courbet's definition of realism, which was "the negation of the ideal"³⁷, and goes on to say that frequently the realistic novel follows a path of disillusionment that does, however, lead to greater understanding. Romantic presuppositions are tested and found wanting; the protagonist has perhaps been an "imaginist", like Jane Austen's Emma, but the imagination is deflated in the interests of good sense and practicalities. *Madame Bovary* can be seen in part as a deliberate

debunking of romantic illusions, in much the same way that *Don Quixote* can be seen to be of chivalric ones. The American realists denied idealism in favour of a utilitarian, pragmatic approach, but they didn't, like the Naturalists, embrace pessimism; theirs was an anthropocentric universe in which individuals had the freedom to choose courses of action.

In their subject matter the aim of the realists was to deal with the unexceptional, the probable, the representative; anything supernatural, grotesque or transcendental, was excluded, as were one-sided moral types, heroes and villains, angels and devils. In the same way as they rejected the ideal they also rejected the very low, choosing their situations from a middle ground which gave access to sufficient articulateness and self-awareness in their characters. The American realists tended to give themselves more freedom than the Europeans in their choice of subject matter. They were concerned with the imaginative realization of common experience, not reportorial fact; a character like Huckleberry Finn, floating down a river on a raft with a runaway slave, is in a unique social position, he is outside the norm, but he is imaginatively representative of an element in the American experience. Most of these writers, though, would have agreed with George Eliot that real human sympathy can only be experienced by a reader prepared to do without sentimentality and sensationalism. Her first published work, *Scenes from Clerical Life*, contained a story called "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton", and in it she attempted to gain understanding and respect for the ordinary and apparently insignificant:

The Rev. Amos Barton, whose sad fortunes I have undertaken to relate, was, you perceive, in no respect an ideal or exceptional character, and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable - a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace...Yet these commonplace people - many of them - bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right: they have their unspoken sorrows, and their unspoken joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out towards their first-born, and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance - in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share.

Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.³⁸

The overt didacticism would have been considered out of place in both American and French realism, but the desire to write about the commonplace, and the justification behind it, is common to all realists. A glance at Balzac suggests another important element in realism - economics. For whatever reason, perhaps because realism rejected the ideal world in favour of the material world, or because of its concern with the middle classes, there is no doubt that matters of finance, and consequent social position, are given an enormous amount of coverage in the realistic novel, whether European or American. "Balzac chronicles...the growth and ramification and flowering and blight of capitalism. Swaying with the satirist's ambivalence, he seems to enjoy the cake he renounces, to revel in what he condemns..."³⁹ Poirier makes a similar point about Wharton, Dreiser and Fitzgerald, and shows that the forces of

environment which oppose freedom and the development of consciousness, are correspondingly stronger in the work of these three writers because the material world is so attractive to them. Kolb remarks at the beginning of his book that "Realism...vigorously and relentlessly fought the materialism and superficialities of the late nineteenth century"⁴⁰, but it would probably be true to say as well that it was a victim of it. It is easy to understand why Henry James, with his interest in consciousness, tried to separate his characters from financial pressures, but it is significant that he felt it necessary to do so.

The moral orientation of realism is one of its most distinguishing characteristics. It is based on the confrontation between human beings and a humanly created environment; it emphasizes the complexity of moral choice and the need for the individual to make decisions without recourse to external spiritual forces. The realist's morality is intrinsic, it arises out of the characters and the situation, and the protagonists have to work out their own codes of behaviour appropriate to their circumstances; the freedom which this relativistic approach seems to give the reader to make up his own mind about the moral issues presented in the book, is largely illusory. The writer carefully controls his material so that all but the most contrary reader will end up agreeing with him. For example, Huckleberry Finn chooses between his inner ethical impulses and his socially trained conscience; the reader knows he has made the correct choice because he is shown that a thoroughly corrupt society has deformed Huck's conscience. To illuminate the realist's morality further, it is useful to look

at a novel like *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; Henry James's morality is no less central to his work than Howells's, but it is less obvious and therefore not so useful in these circumstances. Silas Lapham has to struggle with a moral decision and, like Huck Finn, he makes the right choice. Much has been said about the tenuous connection of the romantic sub-plot to the main theme, but they are united by a common moral principle: correct action must be determined by reference to the common good rather than to individual need. Lapham rejects the deal which would save him financially because of the unknown people in England who would be hurt by it; corrupt business arrangements are never in the interests of the people at large. Similarly Irene willingly relinquishes Corey to Penelope because she knows that her individual loss will make two people happy. In an M.A. thesis, *The Techniques of Naturalism*, Mark Leaf analyses the title of the novel and shows how it contains moral assumptions basic to the novel which the reader must accept. The irony of the title depends on the acceptance of a dualistic awareness of the discontinuity between the material and the spiritual or moral world; and that the spiritual world is superior both from the point of view of the depth of its scale of values and because the satisfaction it offers are more profound. The title also presumes that life provides man with meaningful experience from which he can learn, and that the pleasure of doing something morally sound is greater than that of financial rewards based on corruption. Despite the apparent complexity of the moral framework in realism, ultimately there is a movement towards a unified moral picture. Regardless of whether or not good

is rewarded and evil punished, the moral tension of the novel depends on how far the reader's expectations of a resolved, morally satisfactory outcome are fulfilled. Leslie Stephen, a Victorian critic and the father of Virginia Woolf, criticized Charlotte Brontë for being unable to resolve, in either *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*, the conflict between passion or happiness and duty. "She is between the opposite poles of duty and happiness, and cannot see how to reconcile their claims, or even...to state the question at issue. She pursues one path energetically, till she feels herself to be in danger, and then she shrinks with a kind of instinctive dread..." Stephen therefore felt Charlotte Brontë could not be called a novelist of "the highest rank" because she was not "amongst those who have fought their way to a clearer atmosphere, and can help us to clearer conceptions..."⁴¹ The moral framework in realism may be complex but in the end it is always coherent, and does not deal with ambiguities as fundamental as those to be found in the work of Charlotte Brontë.

Probably the most significant and long-lasting contribution realism made to the history of the novel was in the area of style. In general the realists reached for the illusion of objectivity, they removed themselves from their work as much as possible, and tried to give an impression of artlessness:

In proportion as in what she (Fiction) offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it *with* arrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention.⁴²

The emphasis on character worked against complicated plots and

narrative acrobatics, subplots had to be thematically linked in order to preserve a sense of unity, and were tolerated only because they were felt to give a broader picture of life. It is possible to choose four main areas of stylistic innovation in realism, point of view, character, symbolism, and the way the realists dealt with the conclusions of their novels. Point of view in a novel separates itself into a number of types but there are three basic ones: firstly there is the dramatic presentation of a scene in which the reader "overhears" what is going on; secondly, there is the description of a scene at second hand, either by a character or by the author-narrator's third person voice, usually called "picture"; and thirdly, there is comment or evaluation either from a character or from the author-narrator. In most fiction a mixture of methods is used, but the realists emphasized scenic presentation and de-emphasized authorial comment and evaluation. Stendhal was perhaps the first to drop the omniscient author stance and attach himself to the consciousness of his central character. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s in England there was a widespread demand for dramatic presentation, Trollope and Thackeray were criticized for intruding themselves into their novels. In America the realists were convinced that the novelist who entered into his fiction gave himself away and spoiled the illusion. Obviously the realistic novelist couldn't rely completely on dramatic presentation, so he used "picture" but the picture was always seen through the filter of consciousness of a particular character:

Thus the realist's antiomniscience results in a two-fold attempt to remove the external presence of the author through dramatic representation and through

the effort to present description and summary, even when it is written in the third person (traditionally the territory of the omniscient author), from the angle of vision of the characters.⁴³

Huckleberry Finn is an excellent example of narration from the point of view of the main character, all the scenes are constructed as Huck would have seen them. Howells concentrated on scenic presentation with considerable use of dialogue; the first chapter of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* includes all the necessary details of Lapham's early life in the form of an interview for a newspaper article. Henry James rejected straightforward first person narration because he didn't find it subtle enough, but he made great use of first person sensibility; apart from the occasional use of omniscience for the sake of narrative ease, the events of his novels are presented for the most part as they would have been seen by the characters. Because the burden of narration, both in presentation and interpretation, was placed on the characters not the omniscient author, the characters had to be given much more emphasis. The realists made them individuals without being eccentric, one-dimensional caricatures, and representative without idealizing them into generic types. American individualism increased this emphasis on character; people could control their destinies, they were superior to circumstance and acted on their environment rather than just reacting to it. In the novels of Twain, James and Howells, one or two characters are placed in a complex social and moral situation to see what they will make of it; the results are not necessarily predictable but they must be logically consistent with the elements of character that have already

been established. Silas Lapham is a typical realistic protagonist, he is far from perfect and certainly no hero, but we like him because we know him so well and he lives up to our expectations.

The use of symbolism in realistic fiction marked a definite change from what we can find, for example, in *Moby Dick*. Carlyle defined the symbol in the following way: "In the Symbol proper... there is, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there."⁴⁴ The transcendental nature of symbolism makes it a primary technique for those writers who believe in the existence of something other than the material world. But many of the realists had doubts about spiritual facts, the existence of the soul or the accessibility of the infinite, and so they excluded transcendental symbolism from their writing and replaced it with a secular form. In realism there is a reliance on the symbolism of architecture and interior decoration, for example the burning of Lapham's half-built house; their symbols belong to the material world, they compare natural facts with other natural facts and the meaning of a symbol is entirely dependent on the world of the particular novel, not on any extraneous system of values. It is the concreteness of James's symbols which allows him such psychological complexity, he can convert abstractions into physical facts. In a similar way the realists had no time for conventional romantic endings to their novels; James was criticized initially for the conclusions of his stories because they were neither tragic nor happy. Howells defended his own conclusion to *A Modern Instance* on the grounds of

fidelity to experience, and also because he thought tragedy somehow stunned the sensibilities of the reader and prevented him from concentrating on the important issues:

The culmination of a tragedy, its climax, does not reveal character to the full. It rather stuns all the faculties...Life, on the other hand, is not afraid of anti-climaxes; it produces them daily. No tragedy in real existence but has its tomorrow, unheroic perhaps, artistically, but unavoidable, inexorable. Art may stop where it pleases, life must go on. Realism endeavours to take note of the continuity which nothing can arrest for long, and considers it more important to the individual and humanity at large than the violent interruption.⁴⁵

There was however an interesting contemporary criticism of this tendency in fiction; Henry Adams mourned his own toning down of tragedy in *Democracy*, a move he made because of the prevailing literary taste.

Before we leave this discussion of realism I would like to take a closer look at two of the most prominent American realists, W. D. Howells and Henry James. Howells exposes the limitations, even the absurdities, of the realistic theory of fiction; while James suggests its wide range of possibilities and provides an important link with modernism. Howells didn't consciously talk of realism until after 1880; his early fiction was a combination of romance and what he called "poor real life"⁴⁶, he liked the freedom that romance could give him. Gradually, however, his ideas changed; he learnt the art of dramatic presentation of character from Turgenev, who he admired for his objectivity, and by 1882 he had clarified his thinking on realism. Firstly, he banned all moving incidents and dire catastrophes; secondly, characters were to be

dramatically presented, revealing themselves through their own actions not through the author; and thirdly, influenced by James, he started to look on the novel less as a story and more as an analytical study. He also began to defend the importance of literal social fact in fiction, rather than seeing the ideal as the basis of literature. Ultimately his definition of realism revolved round fidelity to experience: "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material"; "We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true? - true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women?"; "Let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are..."⁴⁷ It never seemed to occur to him that truth is an elusive commodity and its definition, What is truth?, purely subjective. Howells, along with other realists, reduced sentimentality and idealism in the treatment of women in fiction; he reacted against the romance of his earlier novels, put less emphasis on the love situation, and dealt with the need for maturity in the marriage relation. When it came to sex he avoided it like all good Victorians; but instead of just ignoring it he justified his omission in two ways; on evolutionary grounds American fiction's lack of sex reflected the progress of society, "the manners of the novel have been improving with those of its readers"⁴⁸; and he felt that by subordinating sex American fiction was more accurately representing the true position of sex in life. At this point Howells's battle cry "Let fiction cease to lie about life" disintegrates into meaninglessness.

Like Howells, James's early work has elements of the romantic; in *The American*, for example, there is a contrast between the secret villainy of the Bellegardes and the innocence of Newman. Yet even in his first novel, *Roderick Hudson*, he was using the stylistic techniques of realism; critics disapproved of it because they could not understand why James had restricted the point of view to Rowland Mallett, or why he as the artist remained impartial to the events he was relating. With James the mixing of literary styles didn't really follow a simple pattern in the way it did with Howells; both *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady* are a kind of disguised melodrama if we look at them from the point of view of Howellsian realism. James was attracted by charm and the picturesque; but on the other hand he liked the devotion to style of the French realists, though he disapproved of their pessimism and their treatment of poverty and degradation, which he found vulgar. From the start, then, James mixed his styles; *The Bostonians* and *Princess Casamassima* are usually considered to be his most realistic works, but the plot of *The Bostonians* is also based in melodrama and tragedy, and James himself criticized the novel for its authorial intrusions. After these two novels James turned in a different direction, exploring consciousness more fully with a particular emphasis on dramatizing the problems of the artist. In general James was even more concerned with character than other realists; he was not really interested in the events he described but in the response of his characters to those events, and anyway the different aspects of an event really only lived inside the consciousness of the character, who was never

propelled entirely by circumstance. The power of social customs and other determining factors such as money was curtailed by James in order to allow for a fuller development of consciousness in its own right. It is this emphasis which results in the great difference between James and George Eliot or Meredith, for example, and which leads on to modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf. George Eliot's characters are concerned with self-development, but their lives are only meaningful in so far as they understand and accept material and moral laws; Isabel Archer, however, comes to understand her identity within her own terms, her self-awareness is removed from social custom; when at the end of the novel it is implied that she returns to Gilbert Osmond, it is not because of the pressures of convention, but because, quite simply and as an individual, she must. Malcolm Bradbury describes the difference between the two realisms of George Eliot and Henry James in the following way:

...George Eliot's is a realism of the middle distance, a realism in which the embodied life of society was both inescapable and a condition of personality and growth; James's, not so much a substantiation of reality as a questing for it, as if its substance were always provisional, so that all insight into it must be perspectivized and the relation of those perspectives to the author himself managed with an utter care, intensely demanding on the logic of art itself.⁴⁹

Poirier, in his analysis of *The Ambassadors*, pushes James even further towards modernism by emphasizing the importance of the subjective imagination within the novel rather than objective reality. He feels it is stupid to accuse Strether of illusions:

Rather the book makes us feel that his generosity has been betrayed by the materials - like Chad - on which it has expended itself. People really ought to try to live up to such an imagination of them as Strether's - that finally is what the book asks us to believe, not anything so tiresome as that Strether has failed to be in touch with reality,⁵⁰

Finally it is interesting to look at James's criticisms of two of his fellow realists, which point out elements that are often lacking in a realistic novel. Flaubert, he felt, had restricted himself to the visible, the public, "He should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul"⁵¹. Howells was too complacent, too dedicated to "the colloquial, the moderate, the optimistic, the domestic, and the democratic"⁵² and unwilling to introduce anything unusual into his fiction. More importantly perhaps, James noticed the inadequacy of Howells's perception of evil; Lapham's immoralities were only "aberrations of thought" and Bartley Hubbard's mere "excesses of beer"⁵³. These limitations are almost inevitable if a writer insists on sticking rigidly to the law of the average, more fundamental truths can pass him by.

By and large realism was a very serious affair; its proponents emphasized the responsibilities of art rather than the pleasures. The reader is not supposed to enjoy the fun of story-telling, he is persuaded to assess a developing fictional situation as if it were actual. Probably because of the emphasis on science in the latter half of the nineteenth century, novelists felt it incumbent upon them to defend their art's relationship with truth. Realism has always been closely linked with history, especially in France where novels like *Scarlet and Black* and *Sentimental Education* were set

against a background of important historical events, but it does seem odd that even a writer like Henry James should fight for the label historian: In "The Art of Fiction" James makes a comparison between painting and fiction, "...as the picture is reality, so the novel is history...The subject matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian." He goes on to criticize Trollope for his asides to the reader which suggest that the novel is fiction, because "It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth...than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing room."⁵⁴ The earnestness of realism is also encouraged by its morality and its rather limited approach to the experience of life. Mark Leaf's analysis of the syntax of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*⁵⁵ shows that the language used to describe the workings of Lapham's mind reflects a view of the universe as a set of phenomena related in a fashion difficult to perceive but capable of being understood by the human mind. That understanding is of paramount importance to the individual, it is not intuitive or mystical in any way, it is a product of the logical working of the mind from particular observation towards general theories which are balanced and ordered, a mental process obviously borrowed from science. The universe is complex but it can be unravelled, and it must be if individuals are to act morally. The most prominent theme of realistic fiction is the reality and agony of moral dilemma; their world is one in which man stands pre-eminently to be judged.

III

The problem with realism was that it was a conservative quest which tried to synthesize opposing points of view; it grounded its hopes on the democratic faith that the individual consciousness contained the will and the strength to bring about necessary reforms in society. The naturalists, who reacted against this particular form of conservatism, felt that philosophically little had changed and that realism was projecting an almost identical world-view to that of the romance writers. The world had a defined moral structure, man's life was meaningful, he could learn from it and what he learnt would profit him morally; man also occupied a central position in the universe, he inhabited an environment rather than being part of it; implicit in all this was a fundamental duality, the separation of body and spirit; for the naturalists it was hopelessly idealistic. Realistic technique had moved towards greater subtlety, but these developments, such as more acute penetration of consciousness, had the effect of supporting the anthropocentric philosophy and affirming the unquestioned reality of a moral framework to life. From Darwin's work the realists in America had taken the theory of evolution and looked at it largely from an optimistic point of view; the American naturalists were also influenced by Darwin but what they saw were determining forces of heredity and environment. Man was not central to the universe, the events which affected his life were not subject to his will or his decision, he was at the mercy of determining forces or, at the best, sheer chance; life was without meaning. This should

have meant that morality played no part in the novelists belonging to this tradition, and certainly its significance was greatly reduced; but oddly enough there is a strong sense of moral purpose in a story like Stephen Crane's *Maggie* or Dreiser's *American Tragedy* for example. The naturalists were shocked by the discrepancy between society's high moral tone and the filth and squalor in which so many of its members were forced to live; frequently they voiced moral indignation at a society which would crush its weaker members rather than protect them. Any work which treats of social fact in a way which is profoundly shocking is bound to invite a moral response from its readers.

When Norris defined naturalism he pictured realism, romanticism, and naturalism as a triangle in which realism and romanticism were opposing forces and naturalism was the transcending synthesis. For Norris realism was concerned with the small details of the surface of life, while romanticism sought to penetrate beneath the surface and discover large generalizations on the nature of existence; naturalism combined realism's accuracy with romanticism's truth, or philosophical depth. What is interesting in this is the relationship Norris suggests between naturalism and romanticism; Kolb would agree with this, presumably, judging by his rather disparaging remark that the naturalists "worship at the altar of a secular transcendentalism"⁵⁶, and the naturalist's tendency towards symbolism and sensationalism might encourage the view that they were in some way antithetical to realism and more closely associated with romanticism. I would like to suggest that this association is more apparent than real; naturalism is the ideological

continuation of realism, it follows the path realism initiated, irons out the romantic anomalies realism retained, and carries us securely into the twentieth century world. A classic naturalist work like *The Red Badge of Courage* reveals itself as a successor to realism; it takes the realists's rejection of heroism and idealism and goes one stage further by actually satirizing these qualities; the romantic tradition of a story encompassing an initiation into life is used ironically, the initiation reveals to the reader that life is meaningless and trivial; and there is perhaps a double irony involved in the ending of the novel when the hero would appear to be a victim of self-deception with regard to the significant of his experience. In *The Gates of Horn* Harry Levin quotes F.W. J. Hemmings on Zola: "Zola was the prophet of a new age of mass-psychology, mass-analysis, and mass-entertainment, an age in which the part is never greater than the whole."⁵⁷ It may seem odd that I should call this loss of the individual to the societal machine, which naturalism describes and prophesies, a descendent of realism, which was after all very concerned for character and consciousness. But realistic fiction reflected an individual who was in a close relationship with society, he lived in an urban, rationally perceptible and palpable world of fixed laws and structures. Materialism is the quality which provides us with the link between realism and naturalism, and with a partial explanation, anyway, for the gradual loss of subjectivism and individuality which can be traced from the decline of the romantic movement.

Harry Levin discusses the derivation of the word "realism" in *The Gates of Horn*:

Etymologically, realism is thing-ism. The adjective 'real' derives from the Latin *res*, and finds an appropriate context in 'real estate'. The first definition in Johnson's dictionary, with a significant citation from Bacon, is bluntly explicit: 'relating to things not persons'.⁵⁸

The seventeenth century thinkers were reacting against the primacy of the transcendental world which had so dominated mediaeval thought and still dominated the thought of the powerful contemporary church. The very real achievement of the seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers was that they centred their interest on this world. However, one strand of the development of this position has led to a progressive materialism which denies the existence of anything other than the material world. One of Balzac's innovations was attaching importance to things as well as to men and women; generally, the realistic novel defines its characters at least partly in terms of their possessions, this is inevitable if the novel is to deal with social man because social position is dependent on goods and chattels. Zola saw the progression towards a more extreme form of materialism in naturalism when he remarked that Balzac wanted to portray "men, women, and things", but he wanted to "put men and women together, while allowing for the natural differences, and submit both men and women to things"⁵⁹. The effect of this change is to raise the status of things until they are more powerful than people, men and women become the victims of their surroundings. The Goncourt brothers tried to foresee what twentieth century literature would be like and prophesied "things

having more of a role than men", while, at the same time, people would be materialized, turned into things⁶⁰. This prophecy proved remarkably accurate for at least some of the twentieth century novelists. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* cannot resist the attraction of material possessions; they come alive and speak to her in seductive tones:

Fine clothes to her were a vast persuasion; they spoke tenderly and Jesuitically for themselves. When she came within earshot of their pleading, desire in her bent a willing ear. The voice of the so-called inanimate! Who shall translate for us the language of the stones?
'My dear', said the lace collar she secured from Partridge's, 'I fit you beautifully; don't give me up'.
'Ah, such little feet', said the leather of the soft new shoes; 'How effectively I cover them. What a pity they should ever want my aid'.⁶¹

In England the Edwardian novelists like Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy, had one vital thing in common, their materialism. Virginia Woolf, in essays like "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown" and "Modern Fiction" berated the Edwardians for the value they had placed on objects, "making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring"⁶². She called them "materialists" and felt that they had disappointed their readers because they were concerned for the body and not the spirit, the sooner English fiction turned their back on them the better. The Edwardians had put all their faith in describing houses in the hope that the reader would be able to deduce the persons who lived there, but they were using the wrong tools. All this was summarized in the marvellous image of Mrs. Brown in the railway carriage:

There she sits in the corner of the carriage - that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out - there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window, at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature.⁶³

In many ways Sinclair Lewis is the novelist of the secularized, materialized, objectivized West; Virginia Woolf would certainly have disparaged him as a materialist, and yet he stands as a part of a long and continuing tradition, a respected one as well when we remember that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in the 1920s, a time when there were so many great talents in both Europe and America. He stands condemned out of his own mouth for the overwhelming triviality of his approach to both life and fiction in the following quotation from one of his essays:

In the world of the artist, it is the little, immediate, comprehensible things - jack knives or kisses, bath sponges or children's wails - which illuminate and fix the human spectacle; and for the would-be painter of our Western world a Sears-Roebuck catalogue is (to one who knows how to choose and who has his imagination from living life) a more valuable reference book than a library of economics, poetry, and the lives of the saints.⁶⁴

At the beginning of the twentieth century two figures accomplished revolutionary work in physics and psychology, which was to change the entire intellectual climate of the Western world; they were, of course, Einstein and Freud. Although, as I have said before, the majority of us behave as though Einstein's discoveries had never been made, the work of both these figures had a profound,

if unspecified, effect on people who were concerned with ideas, philosophers, writers and so on. Their influence, and perhaps more noticeably the influence of those who came after them and developed their ideas even further, is still pervasive today; indeed it is perhaps only within the last twenty five years that writers have begun to make use of the far-reaching implications of their more complex theories. Our understanding of the world we live in changed fundamentally as a result of Einstein and Freud; it changed so much that the view of life given to us in the realistic novel seemed limited, it no longer dealt adequately with a world which had become immeasurably more complex.

Einstein's first assault on classical physics was made in 1905 when he published the special theory of relativity; this questioned the assumption of the existence of an absolute time scale common to all inertial observers (i.e. observers travelling at a constant velocity). The implications for classical physics were serious because a time measurement was basic to the definition of nearly all physical quantities. If a beam of light is directed between two inertial observers, stationary with respect to each other, the time it takes for the light signal to reach the second observer can be measured and the observers will agree on the result. If however, a third inertial observer is introduced who is moving at a constant velocity with respect to the first two, he will measure the time the event takes quite differently; according to him it will take longer than the first observer measured, and this time dilation will increase the bigger the difference in their relative velocities. Similarly, if an object is moving with respect

to an observer its dimensions and mass will be measured differently compared to the measurements taken if the observer and the object are stationary with respect to each other. Distance is measured as a function of time, therefore if the time coordinates vary for different inertial observers so will the space coordinates. In the new coordinate transformations which were worked out to convert the position and time coordinates measured by one inertial observer into those observed by another, both the time and the space coordinates had to transform; this showed that it was no longer possible to regard space and time as separate concepts, independent of each other and of any observer; instead, a composite entity called space-time had to be visualized. The general theory of relativity, published in 1916, is much more complicated, but the guiding philosophical principle underlying it is Einstein's conviction that the idea of empty space as a physical entity is meaningless. Space is not a thing, both space and time are only given meaning in terms of metre sticks and clocks. Out of the general theory comes the concept of curved space-time; geometry is based on the behaviour of light rays; Einstein suggested (and was later proved to be correct experimentally) that light rays are affected by the gravitational pull of the different bodies in space in such a way that instead of travelling in straight lines they are curved; thus it can be said that the geometry of space-time is curved and the curves of the light rays are known as geodesics.

It is apparent from these two theories that space and time could no longer be considered as absolutes; it may not be scientific to say so, but relativity seemed to imply a more solipsistic

attitude to space and time as measurements varied according to each individual observer if their observational conditions were different. More far-reaching effects, however, were produced by work in the field of quantum theory which Einstein initiated. The concepts of quantum theory are what really separates twentieth century physics from anything that precedes it. Special and general relativity still operate in the philosophical context of a causal description of events occurring in space-time and these events are still measured with rulers and clocks; quantum theory, on the other hand, denies the underlying validity of such descriptions. Einstein himself could not accept the conclusions reached by the proponents of quantum mechanics and it was Werner Heisenberg who made the first breakthrough when he developed the Uncertainty Principle. This principle states that we cannot

determine accurately both the position and the direction and the speed of a particle at the same instant. If we determine experimentally its exact position at any moment, its movement is disturbed to such a degree by that very experiment that we shall then be unable to find it at all. And conversely, if we are able to measure exactly the velocity of a particle, the picture of its position becomes totally blurred.⁶⁵

Physics, therefore, can only determine the probable behaviour of particles and the Laplacian expectation has been invalidated. Another aspect of the work in quantum mechanics concerned the nature of light, this was found to be "schizophrenic" in that light exhibited both wave and particle qualities. Experiments with so-called "particles" like electrons, revealed that they were equally schizophrenic and, under certain circumstances, could behave like

"waves". This work would seem to suggest an underlying ambiguity in the universe, a point at which one of the basic structures of logical thought breaks down, either/or does not apply. Suddenly, physics had to incorporate randomness and unpredictability into its conceptual framework, and it had to work out a new understanding of cause and effect. Oddly, it was Einstein who made Heisenberg aware of the possibility of a new approach when he said to him, "...on principle, it is quite wrong to try founding a theory on observable magnitudes alone. In reality the very opposite happens. It is the theory which decides what we can observe..."⁶⁶ Facts and causality are not a priori invariants, they are dependent on the theory you have chosen; instead of leading to an inflexible determinism, causality has to be understood as an activity of the mind, logic perceives the connections which "fit" the theory, but the connections are not the only connections, nor is the theory the only theory. The historian, Eric Voeglin, has a similar approach to cause and effect in history; patterns of relationships are not to be found *in* history, history is the patterns. Arnold Toynbee goes even further when he says that although patterns are discernible, he believes the dominant element in human life is unpredictability. Aspects of these attitudes to history can be found in the work of both Thomas Pynchon and John Barth.

The influence of modern physics on the general intellectual climate of the twentieth century, and more particularly on literature, is difficult to assess. This is at least partly because the theories filter down to the non-scientific community in a considerably more

simplified, even corrupted, form than do the theories of Freud. It is also an area that is much more remote from the usual source material of a novel, while Freudian psychology can be incorporated into the treatment of character, for example, without so much difficulty. However, I think it can be suggested with some validity that influences are deducible in certain cases. It is worth remembering that although in England clear boundaries between different academic disciplines have been the norm for some time, this was not so true in Europe early this century. New theories in philosophy or science, for example, were expected to be generally accessible to the intelligentsia; thus a flow of new ideas took place between disciplines. Science fiction is the most obvious example of a writing that is clearly influenced by developments in physics. Time-travel had been suggested considerably before Einstein, but the notion of space-time as one instead of two entities, might be thought to have given further validation to the idea. If one can travel backwards and forwards in space, why not time too? The concept of time-dilation occurring at high speeds gave an extra twist to those stories containing someone taking a trip to outer space. In Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*, for example, the last section of the book can describe a man's reaction to the end of the world only because he has visited the planet of the Overlords: "Jan Rodericks was coming home, six months older, to the world he had left eighty years before."⁶⁷ Science fiction is a specialized branch of literature where one could expect this kind of direct influence to occur; it is perhaps not very relevant to the kind of literature I am discussing to point

up this connection; although it is both interesting and amusing to note that Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* did win *second* prize in a science fiction competition. I think links can be established with writing other than science fiction, however. The breaking of the deterministic cause and effect picture of the world may well have encouraged the Surrealists to juxtapose words or objects that did not have causal or logical connections. Thomas Pynchon's scientific background makes his references to physics seem a case from which a generalization should not be made. John Barth, however, has no such background, and in the story "Lost in the Funhouse" he makes a direct reference to the observation that forms part of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle: "[Ambrose] lost himself in the reflection that the necessity for an observer makes perfect observation impossible."⁶⁸ Most important of all is the encouragement that modern physics has given to the idea that different modes of reality can exist within what was thought previously to be the only reality. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon talks of different realities, congruent but not identical to each other, existing in the same space. All three of the writers in this study can be thought of as trying to examine the possibilities of alternative realities. How have the new theories of modern physics encouraged this attitude? The Newtonian picture still operates at the level of our ordinary, common sense understanding of the world. Newton's and Einstein's theories are said to be asymptotic to one another at low speeds, but at high speeds an entirely different set of laws comes into operation; in the large world of space, what we thought were the same objects and

the same events must be understood in a new way. When we move in the opposite direction, from everyday reality to the sub-atomic world, the change is even more marked. Quantum theory is concerned with the way sub-atomic particles behave when a source of energy, like gamma rays for example, is supplied to the atom. These particles, which have been circulating around the nucleus, suddenly leap out of one orbit and into another, the energy of the particles also changes radically. What is so extraordinary is that this change takes place instantly, literally in no time; the two energy levels of a particle, before and after the gamma rays have been supplied, are discrete, in other words there are no intermediate levels, no gradual increase of energy. The question "What happens to the particle *between* the two orbits?" cannot be asked; it has no meaning. Thus we can see that, to the non-specialist observer of these new theories in physics, it looks as though different realities with different laws are operating within what we had thought was a single, definable universe. The effect that this might have on the imagination of a writer is clear.

The complexities of Freud's psychological theories are too wide to be dealt with in this context; it will only be possible to touch on those general concepts which seem to have been influential in changing the twentieth century understanding of the world. Writers as diverse as Lionel Trilling and Norman O. Brown, and probably many others as well have made the point that psychoanalysis is one of the culminations of romanticism. The romantics, with their concern for the hidden elements in human nature, anticipated

Freud by nearly a hundred years; he himself admitted this, saying that poets and philosophers discovered the unconscious, while he had found the scientific method of studying it. It is important to remember at this point that Freud was pre-eminently a scientist and a rationalist; he does allow that "The introduction of the scientific mode of thought has brought along with it a reaction in the estimation of dreams"⁶⁹, which he valued highly, but always in the context of an attempt to understand as scientifically as possible the workings of the human mind; he did not share the romantic's dislike of scientific thought and set great store by the achievements of civilization. It was Freud who suggested that those achievements were a product of sublimation, and that we paid for them with a tortured and repressed psyche, but he did not question their essential value; repression, excepting sexual repression against which he spoke vigorously, was a necessary evil. An aspect of Freud's dream theory can be used to illustrate this. Dreams must be fulfillments of wishes because they are the product of the unconscious, and the only aim of the unconscious is wish-fulfillment. This wish-fulfillment in dreams is an example of the pleasure principle at work; Freud felt that this was the original, more primitive method of the psychical apparatus which was abandoned as inefficient:

What once dominated waking life while the mind was still young and incompetent, seems now to have been banished into the night - just as the primitive weapons, the bows and arrows, that have been abandoned by adult men, turn up once more in the nursery.
*Dreaming is a piece of infantile mental life that has been superseded.*⁷⁰

Thus it is, according to Freud, the functioning of maturity to judge everything at the bar of the reality principle. He feels it is necessary to protect ourselves from the workings of our unconscious mind; the censorship operating between the Unconscious and the Preconscious is to be "recognized and respected as the watchman of our mental health"⁷¹. We need not worry that the watchman relaxes his activities when we are asleep so that our unconscious desires are expressed in dreams, because we lose the power of movement and cannot act upon those uncontrolled wishes. Later, when we look at the work of Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, we will see how more recent thinkers have reilluminated some of Freud's basic theories by interpreting them in a new way. Meanwhile we must look at those original concepts which sparked the imagination of artists. Probably the single most significant result of Freud's work was the legitimization of the unconscious, and some writers, especially the surrealists, exploited this; the significance of the dream as an expression of the unconscious was also important to them. Sexuality was liberated from its dark Victorian corner along with structures of guilt and repression especially in family relationships, the most notable one being the Oedipal syndrome. Freudian anthropological theories contributed to the resuscitation of interest in myths and magical practices, although Jung and the anthropologists were more responsible for this, but more importantly it released the study of myth from the ties of history. Freud showed that the formation of concepts does not depend on cultural history; his analysis of the psyche created an independent, transhistorical mechanism which was based on a

biological conception of man. The famous phrase "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" is a justification for loosening the ties with history realistic writers saw as so important to their work; using this formula, close analysis of just one individual will automatically lead to generalizations about the history of the genus. Freud sanctioned the symbolist conviction that history and society alone did not give a sense of reality; his work did not narrow and simplify life for the artist, on the contrary it opened and complicated it. Whole areas of experience, hardly believed to have existed beforehand, were liberated for literary treatment; even the stranglehold of morality was loosened when it became apparent that the superego had no control over the id. Trilling points out that "the whole notion of rich ambiguity in literature, of the interplay between the apparent meaning and the latent... meaning, has been reinforced by the Freudian concepts, perhaps even received its first impetus from them."⁷² Free association of ideas, which was central to psychoanalysis, became an important tool for writers who tried to give a more accurate picture of how the mind, both conscious and unconscious, worked. Poetry has always made use of structures of meaning which did not employ logic, such as juxtaposition; Freud showed that the unconscious mind worked in a similar fashion, without logic, and that even the conscious mind could be found to make connections imagistically rather than rationally. Using dreams as an example of the unconscious, Freud showed that dreams reproduce logical connections by simultaneity in time; they are incapable of expressing logical relations between the dream-thoughts such as 'because', 'if',

or 'although'. Even more significant is the fact that the alternative 'either/or' cannot be expressed in dreams:

The way in which dreams treat the category of contraries and contradictories is highly remarkable. It is simply disregarded...They show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing. Dreams feel themselves at liberty, moreover, to represent any element by its wishful contrary; so there is no way of deciding at a first glance whether any element that admits of a contrary is present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or as a negative.⁷³

Gradually it became more and more common to find fiction writers using techniques more usually associated with poetry, the essentially causal logic structure of realistic fiction was being broken down.

IV

Initially, the breaking away from the materialism and restricted vision of the latter-day realists was an attempt to return to character in fiction, instead of objects. The material fabric of the world was no longer as solid as the Edwardians had thought and general developments in psychology had created a new emphasis on the importance of the individual psyche. As early as 1890, in *Principles of Psychology*, William James had written that reality was not an objective given but was perceived subjectively through consciousness. Virginia Woolf's novels exemplify this new approach; the world of the environment, of social behaviour and historical time, is dissipated, and replaced with a prevailing state of consciousness operating within its own, interior, time

scale, through which the world is filtered. Auerbach shows an essential difference between Virginia Woolf's attitude to exterior events and that of realism:

In Virginia Woolf's case the exterior events have actually lost their hegemony, they serve to release and interpret inner events, whereas before her time (and still today in many instances) inner movements preponderantly function to prepare and motivate significant exterior happenings.⁷⁴

These relatively insignificant exterior events release chains of ideas which cut themselves loose from both the physical setting and the period of the event, allowing the mind to range at will through the depths of space and time. Realism was felt to be inappropriate; the idea of a substantive reality went with the recognition that it was false to set up a division between perceiver and perceived; the concept of the rounded, individuated character went because that was a product of looking carefully and sympathetically at people from the outside, rather than trying to achieve a subjective experience of personality; and causally connected plots were felt to falsify as well, partly because they seemed to place an artificial order on the chaos of the world and partly because there was no longer the same kind of belief in the concept of growth within an historical context. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" Virginia Woolf expresses the belief that novels should deal with character, this is obviously what she was most concerned with in her work, and it was because the Edwardians did not deal adequately with character that she condemned them as materialists. The modernist novel developed, however, away from this kind of humanism and moved towards a more abstract and detached

form of writing. Ortega y Gasset has said that the distinctive feature of modern art is its tendency towards dehumanization, and that this is paralleled by the increasing inhumanity of a modern world. One of the characters in Thomas Pynchon's first novel, *V.*, is obsessed with a fear and hatred of things; the dehumanization Ortega y Gasset speaks of appalls him and he is constantly trying to get the better of the objects which surround him. However, Ortega y Gasset's view is born out by a writer like Alain Robbe-Grillet who has given back to objects the equal status Virginia Woolf tried to take away from them. Robbe-Grillet maintains that he is trying to convey, by detailed description, the neutrality of objects, and the distance between them and man; he wants to avoid symbols and metaphors which humanize the objects and place men in a significant world. But I would agree with Harry Levin that this desire to see objects as things-in-themselves raises them virtually to the status of fetishes; and that in Robbe-Grillet's novel, *Jalousie*, the impress of the centipede on the wall has a more concrete presence, is in the end more real, than any of the characters. Levin says that the aim of this movement in French fiction is "a total - albeit limited - objectivity, ...an impersonality so self-denying that Flaubert may seem sentimental by comparison."⁷⁵ A curious return to one of the aims of realism.

This is, however, a contemporary development, and at present the aim is to sketch the developments in modernism after the innovations of a writer like Virginia Woolf. Whereas she was usually concerned with the conscious mind, albeit in a most subtle and

illuminating way, there was an increasing interest among other writers in the unconscious mind. Woolf herself said in "Modern Fiction" that "For the moderns...the point of interest lies very likely in the dark places of psychology"⁷⁶. Unlike Marcuse and Brown who celebrate the possibility of the unconscious as an area dominated by play and the pleasure principle, many of these writers thought of the unconscious as the blackest recess of the human soul. The doctor in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* talks of the anonymity of dreams, the fact that there are no names or street numbers in dreams means that we can't imagine they are about other people, they have to be about us:

For by a street number, by a house, by a name, we cease to accuse ourselves. Sleep demands of us a guilty immunity. There is not one of us who, given an eternal incognito a thumbprint nowhere set against our souls, would not commit rape, murder and all abominations.⁷⁷

The doctor tells Nora Flood that she must let the night and day penetrate each other, because if she tries to reject the night it will suddenly catch up with her; the French, we are told, have allowed for it, they "have made a detour of filthiness"⁷⁸, but Americans are a "too eagerly washing people" and they have separated night and day "for fear of indignities"⁷⁹. Djuna Barnes recognizes the necessity for the dreamworld of the night but she nearly always sees it in terms of fear and despair. The central relationship in the novel is between Nora Flood, very much part of the day-time world, and Robin Vote who is first seen as a somnambulist and always seems to belong to another sphere. It is a tortured affair, Nora cannot accept Robin's nightness, she tries to

protect her from it, but Robin does not want to be saved, though she is far from happy. The final image in the book is of Robin, on her hands and knees in an old church, frenziedly imitating Nora's dog who is terrified by her antics; eventually she collapses on the floor in tears, with the dog beside her. It is legitimate, I think, to suggest that aspects of the novel can be interpreted in the light of Freud. The relationship between Nora and Robin is connected with the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious mind. It is not a simple good versus evil conflict, Djuna Barnes is aware that those concepts are mutually defining; the doctor, who is the philosopher among the characters, says:

Don't I know that the only way to know evil is through truth? The evil and the good know themselves only by giving up their secrets face to face. The true good who meets the true evil...learns for the first time how to accept neither; the face of the one tells the face of the other the half of the story that both forgot.

To be utterly innocent...would be to be utterly unknown, particularly to oneself.⁸⁰

But knowledge is bought at the cost of happiness and the condition of life is one of total isolation. The doctor's last words, screamed at the other occupants of the cafe, suggest the blanket of despair which seems to surround the novel: "'Now', he said, 'the end - mark my words - now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*'"⁸¹ The apocalyptic note that is struck here can be found in several contemporary novelists.

I have made reference to Djuna Barnes because John Hawkes has himself said that she is a literary ancestor of his. He belongs to the tradition of self-consciously experimental writers of the

1920s and 1930s, a tradition which seems to be much more European than it is American, (Djuna Barnes was American, but an expatriate). Hawkes makes deliberate use of the unconscious and its relationship with the external world in all his fiction; like Djuna Barnes, early in his career he perceives this relationship with profound horror: "the true purpose of the novel is to assume a significant shape and to objectify the terrifying similarity between the unconscious desires of the solitary man and the disruptive needs of the visible world."⁸² The combination of Freudian theories of the unconscious and the atrocities of the second world war made a sharp impact on many writers; Norman Mailer makes a similar point to Hawkes in his essay "The White Negro", he feels that society is the collective creation of every one of us, and if society is vicious and murderous we must accept that it reflects our own nature:

The second world war presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded anyone who looked into it. For if tens of millions were killed in concentration camps out of the inexorable agonies and contractions of superstates founded upon the always insoluble contradictions of injustice, one was then obliged to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation, his collective creation (at least his collective creation from the past) and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature? ⁸³

Not all those writers concerned with the exploration of the unconscious have taken such a negative view of it, however. The Surrealist movement which began in the 1920's tries to encourage the expanding of boundaries, in a way which makes comparisons possible

between them and some of the writers in this study, especially Thomas Pynchon, in terms of their philosophy if not their literary techniques. The Surrealists were a development from Dada, whose attack on culture was less a matter of exhibitionism, and more an attempt to cut through the claims of the accepted social organization and mode of thought with the use of shock tactics. A similar attitude can be found on occasion in Pynchon's work, particularly *Gravity's Rainbow*, when for example, a group register their dissatisfactions with the polite society of a dinner party by shouting out items for a menu made with the refuse of human living, normally considered too vulgar to mention: "Vomit vichysoisse", "snot soup", "menstrual marmalade". We tend to remember their techniques first, when we think of the Surrealists; the transcription of dreams; the use of automatic writing based on the Freudian practice of free association of ideas; frozen, distorted images juxtaposed without logical connection to other such images. But surrealism is not just the method; it is essentially concerned with liberating the imagination and with expanding the definition of reality. The use of grotesque images to reflect a nightmare reality is not really surrealist in intention; André Breton set out to change consciousness not reflect it. A contrast between the absurd and the surreal is profitable: C.W.E. Bigsby points out that the absurd is concerned with loss of meaning, loss of human potential, language as a deceit with which we can defend ourselves against the truth; while surrealism sees vitality in chance and eroticism and the vast unexplored potentials of the unconscious. "If the desert landscapes of Beckett's plays are in some respects reminiscent of

Dali's, the nature of the irony is entirely different. Beckett's characters are mocked for assuming reality to be other than it is; Dali's for failing to realize that it is far more than it appears to be."⁸⁴ While Beckett taunts irrational man, the Surrealists see irrationality as a source of creative energy and spiritual renewal. The influence of Freud is clear; dreams are very important to the Surrealists, but the turn to dreams is not an evasion. Dreams provide a notable release from logical restraint, and they are seen as a route to both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world; they prompt us to ask questions about the world and thus to act on it. The need for action is important, the idea is to change reality not simply ignore it. Breton wrote in the first Manifesto in 1924, "I believe in the future resolution of these two states - outwardly so contradictory - which are dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, a *surreality*."⁸⁵ The Surrealists are trying to free the mind from the restrictions of logic, reason has to be rejected before man can fully possess the surreal, and thus fully possess the self. It is one of their essential convictions that thoughts and feelings do not have to be rationally comprehensible to be communicated. In a progressively more materialistic and mechanistic world, the surrealists wish to restore imagination to its central role and to redeem language by undermining its logical basis. Bigsby quotes Louis Aragon who asked in *Paris Peasant*,

can the knowledge deriving from reason ever begin to compare with knowledge perceptible by sense? No doubt the number of people crass enough to rely exclusively on the former and scorn the latter are sufficient in themselves to explain the disfavour into which everything deriving from the senses has gradually

fallen. But when the most scholarly men have taught me that light is a vibration, or have calculated its wavelengths for me, or offered me any of the fruits of their labours of reasoning, they will still not have rendered me an account of what is important to me about light, of what my eyes have begun to teach me about it, of what makes me different from a blind man - things which are the stuff of miracles, not subject matter for reasoning...⁸⁶

In their exploration of ways of reaching beyond the logical framework, the Surrealists' highest aim is to find the point at which apparent contradictions, like life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, are resolved into a synthesis. They realize how much has been lost by the unquestioning acceptance of the "real" and that the "real" can be changed if our approach to it is different. In his book *An Introduction to Surrealism*, J.H. Matthews notes "...what Breton calls in *L'Amour fou*, the greatest weakness in contemporary thought: 'the extravagant over-estimation of the known compared with the unknown.'⁸⁷

This positive, liberated attitude to the restrictions imposed upon us by a limited conception of reality, can also be seen in the work of four significant figures in contemporary American culture. Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown have tried to find ways through what Freud saw as the inevitable neurosis of humanity, due to repression, to the possibility of a better-adjusted future. Alan Watts and Theodore Roszak, are both writing about the need for paths out of the Western approach to life which leads so many to the edge of the "existential void". The work of these four writers parallels the attempts of Hawkes, Barth and Pynchon to express in their fiction the possibility of alternative realities.

It also illuminates more specific aspects of the novels with which this study is concerned.

V

Brown and Marcuse, you and I, most of us, perhaps all of us who must now begin to dig our way out from under the ancient and entrenched estrangement of our being: how dare *we* specify the limits of the real while we stand on this benighted side of liberation? 88

Theodore Roszak.

In *Eros and Civilization* Herbert Marcuse has written a book which makes use of Freudian principles as a basis for a vision of a better future as well as an analysis of current problems. He also deals with the interpenetration of the two areas of the inner and the external world, but he chooses to emphasize the need for political change, which will then effect the necessary changes in the individual psyche:

...formerly autonomous and identifiable psychical processes are being absorbed by the function of the individual in the state - by his public existence. Psychological problems therefore turn into political problems: private disorder reflects more directly than before the disorder of the whole, and the cure of the personal disorder depends more directly than before on the cure of the general disorder.⁸⁹

Marcuse analyses the psyche in terms of the reality principle and the pleasure principle, and develops a third term of his own, the performance principle, by which he means that particular form of the reality principle developed by Western culture. Marcuse's description of what aspects of himself the human being learns to develop under the rule of the reality principle, coincides almost

exactly with those areas of experience with which the realistic novel is most apt to deal. Man develops the function of reason and with this he learns to test reality, distinguishing between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful. He also acquires the faculties of attention, memory and judgement, and gradually becomes "a conscious, thinking *subject*, geared to a rationality which is imposed upon him from outside."⁹⁰ Only one kind of mental activity fails to come under the rule of the reality principle, fantasy, that remains committed to the pleasure principle. Later in the book Marcuse describes the significance of fantasy's independence:

...Freud emphasized the fundamental fact that phantasy (imagination) retains a truth that is incompatible with reason...Phantasy...protects, against all reason, the aspirations for the integral fulfillment of man and nature which are repressed by reason. In the realm of phantasy, the unreasonable images of freedom become rational, and the 'lower depth' of instinctual gratification assumes a new dignity.⁹¹

Obviously all fiction, realistic or otherwise, is a product of the imagination; but realism chose to suppress the more imaginative, the more fantastic, elements in an attempt to approximate the function of history. Realism comes closest to describing man operating under the performance principle; it uses reason to reject the romantic ideal of "the integral fulfillment of man and nature" protected by fantasy, and, especially in Victorian times, anything to do with sensuousness, pleasure or impulse. The use of fantasy in the work of those writers with which this study is concerned is a rejection of realism because realism is so closely connected with the performance principle and its materialistic logic of domination.

The revolt against the performance principle is also expressed, according to Marcuse, in the practice of the various sexual perversions. The perversions are not goal-oriented because they do not lead to the possibility of reproduction, they are manifestations of the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. In a society which enforces the equation between normal, socially useful, and good, the perversions are subversive at the root level of the performance principle. However, the perversions also show the fundamental connection between Eros and Thanatos, simply because they do not reproduce and therefore could spell the end of man himself. This ambiguity at the heart of sexual "perversion" is reflected in Pynchon's writing particularly and is closely connected with the whole question of morality which raises itself in the work of all the anti-realists. The domain of the unconscious knows no values, no morality; morality and aggression, both of which are socially useful, are produced when the death instinct is repressed. If Pynchon, Barth and Hawkes are striving for some kind of progress beyond the performance principle, this would be characterized by a freedom from guilt and fear, in other words a freedom from conventional morality. Marcuse quotes Baudelaire, who said: "True civilization does not lie in gas, nor in steam, nor in turntables. It lies in the reduction of the traces of original sin."⁹² The weakness of *Eros and Civilization*, however, lies in its treatment of death; Marcuse writes that the full unrepressed energy of mankind will fight its greatest battle against death, striving to make it painfree and to prolong life as long as possible. The statement shows the inability to accept death which characterizes

contemporary life in the form of simultaneous rejection and obsession (the return of the repressed). It is just another example of the unnatural perversion of the death instinct in human beings which Brown analyses in *Life Against Death*, and which is of fundamental concern in the work of Hawkes and Pynchon.

The connection between psychoanalysis and romanticism is explored by Brown early on in *Life Against Death*. He refers to Freud's rather dismissive statements on art, but then uses what Freud had to say about wit as an outline for a psychoanalytical theory of art.

Art as pleasure, art as play, art as the recovery of childhood, art as making conscious the unconscious, art as a mode of instinctual liberation, art as the fellowship of men struggling for instinctual liberation - these ideas plainly fit into the system of psychoanalysis. How do they fit art? Detached from the specific psychoanalytical context, these ideas are not new, they wear the stigmata of the romantic movement... 93

This relationship is strengthened by the recognition that both psychoanalysis and romanticism perceive that man is suffering from a separation of the instincts which leads to conflict, and that there can be no rest until the original condition of undifferentiated primal unity with man and with nature can be restored on a higher level of consciousness. Marcuse's analysis of the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus as the opposite of Prometheus, the archetype hero of the performance principle, also demonstrates a connection with romanticism. These myths express images of joy and fulfillment, their voice is one which does not command but sings; it is significant that Rilke wrote Sonnets to Orpheus as part of the

Duino Elegies. Marcuse emphasizes how these myths express an experience of a world which is not to be mastered and controlled but liberated:

The Orphic and Narcissistic experience of the world negates that which sustains the world of the performance principle. The opposition between man and nature, subject and object, is overcome. Being is experienced as gratification, which unites man and nature so that the fulfillment of man is at the same time the fulfillment, without violence, of nature.⁹⁴

Brown maintains that the search for instinctual satisfaction under conditions of instinctual repression produces in men the restless quest of the pleasure principle for a quality of experience denied to it under conditions of repression. This restlessness of the pleasure principle could resolve itself into the Nirvana principle, that is a balanced equilibrium between tension and tension release, if repression were ended. The Nirvana principle is part of the death instinct while the pleasure principle is part of the life instinct, so their reunification would also be the reunification of Eros and Thanatos; men would, like animals, allow death to be a part of life, instead of spending all their energies fighting it.

Brown takes the very complex, and not always very clear, Freudian concept of the death instinct, rejected by the neo-Freudians, and creates out of it an analysis which provides a real understanding of the death-in-life of modern existence. Freud assumed that extroverted aggression, or sadism, is derived from a "primary masochism", which he then identified with a death instinct, the counterpart to the life instinct. From this can be seen that life and death, which are unified at the organic level, are separated

into conflicting opposites at the human level; and that aggression and the will to power, for example, represent an extroversion of the death instinct in an attempt to resolve the conflict. Freud saw aggression as the fusion of Eros and Thanatos in order to save the organism from its own death instinct, but Brown suggests that the extroversion of the death instinct is a peculiarly human response to a peculiarly human problem. It is because we flee from death that we are left with the question of what to do with our death instinct, "animals let death be a part of life and use the death instinct to die."⁹⁵ Organisms of all kinds have individuality because they live their own life and no other, in other words because they die. Eros aims to preserve and enrich life by seeking unification, the aim of Thanatos is separation and independence; consequently, by repressing death we repress our own individuality, at the same time as exhibiting the compulsive return of the repressed instinct. Brown feels that all human sociability is essentially morbid, society is constructed from the fear of separation and the fear of individuality:

Hence there are no social groups without a religion of their own immortality, and history-making is always the quest for group-immortality. Only an unrepressed humanity, strong enough to live-and-die, could let Eros seek union and let death keep separateness.⁹⁶

In the fight against death, then, man tries to achieve immortality; he surrounds himself with time-defying monuments like houses and money, but all this does is redress the balance in favour of death; "Death is overcome on condition that the real actuality of life pass into these immortal and dead things."⁹⁷ As early as the middle

of the nineteenth century Thoreau noticed this tendency. In *Walden* he writes: "Nations are possessed with an insane ambition to perpetuate the memory of themselves by the amount of hammered stone they leave...Most of the stone a nation hammers goes toward its tomb only. It buries itself alive."⁹⁸ By the law of the slow return of the repressed, the last stage of history is the dominion of death-in-life, so brilliantly described in Lawrence's *Women in Love*. The concern with history-making as part of the fight against death results in a preoccupation with the past and the future, and the present, which is after all the tense of life, is lost. Brown quotes Whitehead at this point, who described the present as holding within itself "the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity."⁹⁹

The sublimation of sexuality originates in the ego's incapacity to accept its first experience of a kind of death which occurs at birth in the separation of the infant from the mother. The repressed unconscious can only become conscious by being projected, and it achieves this by way of sublimation. The entirety of culture is the projection of the repressed unconscious, and the hidden aim of sublimation and the cultural process is the progressive rediscovery of the lost body of childhood. The end of the road in this process is pure intelligence and an atrophy of sexuality; and, as Freud knew, sublimation results in the diffusion of Eros into aggressiveness:

Thus the path of cumulative sublimation is also the path of cumulative aggression and guilt, aggression being the revolt of the baffled instincts against the desexualized and inadequate world, and guilt being the revolt against the desexualized and inadequate self.¹⁰⁰

This sense of guilt has to be relieved and Brown maintains that Eliade's distinction between archaic and modern time, that is cyclical and linear time, represents different structures of guilt. As guilt increased it was no longer possible to expiate it in annual ceremonies of regeneration, it accumulated and so time became cumulative as well. The annual expiation of guilt ensured that archaic man had no history, but cumulative guilt imposes on modern societies an historical destiny. Historical time is the result of the transformation of the timeless repetition-compulsion into a restless quest for novelty and change; repression changes the desire to repeat into its opposite, though the unconscious aim of the quest for novelty remains repetition. Conversely, life which is not repressed is not in historical time; Brown thus holds out the hope that if man could overcome repression, he would not live within time; the relationship with the concept of transcendence is clear at this point.

Modern science is another example of a total cultural situation of death-in-life. Brown frequently refers to Whitehead and Needham who, in psychoanalytical terms, are calling for a science based on an erotic sense of reality. Whitehead criticizes the mentality of modern science which has been able to reduce nature to "a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material endlessly, meaninglessly."¹⁰¹ Brown sees an affinity between the capitalist spirit and scientific rationality; the desire for knowledge is, in a sense, anal, not in itself, but when it is linked with the aim of possession or mastery over objects, and the principle of economizing in the means of obtaining that

mastery: "...possessive mastery over nature and rigorously economical thinking are partial impulses in the human being which in modern civilization have become tyrant organizers of the whole of human life."¹⁰² Once again, we can see how Lawrence in *Women in Love* anticipates much of this thinking. Birkin criticizes Hermione, whose desire for knowledge is really a desire for power, for possession:

'But your passion is a lie', he went on violently.
'It isn't passion at all, it is your *will*. It's your bullying will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power. You want to have things in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to *know*.'¹⁰³

A non-morbid science would aim at union with nature not mastery over it, and the means would be an erotic exuberance based on the whole, polymorphous perverse body, instead of a principle of economizing which can only have a partial basis in the body. This is the Dionysian ideal, life is complete and immediate, not kept at a distance and seen through a veil; it is Blake's road of excess which leads to the palace of wisdom. *Life Against Death*, like *Where the Wasteland Ends*, is a plea for the resuscitation of the romantic consciousness; Brown writes that the essence of the romantic reaction was a revulsion against abstraction, which is, in psychoanalytical terms, sublimation, in favour of the immediacy and sensuality of the human body. What Brown wishes to see developed is that attitude of mind which psychoanalysis, mysticism and poetry all have in common, he calls it the dialectical imagination.

"By 'dialectical' I mean an activity of consciousness struggling to circumvent the limitations imposed by the formal-logical law of contradiction."¹⁰⁴ We must attempt to reach beyond the rational construction of either/or, the system of opposites on which language is based, because formal logic and the law of contradiction are the rules whereby the mind submits to operate under general conditions of repression.

As for poetry, are not those basic poetic devices emphasized by recent criticism - paradox, ambiguity, irony, tension - devices whereby the poetic imagination subverts the 'reasonableness' of language, the chains it imposes?¹⁰⁵

It is not only in poetry that writers are employing the devices of paradox, ambiguity, irony and tension.

Where the Wasteland Ends is an angry and impassioned book, Roszak has discarded the usual academic qualities of fairness and balanced judgements in favour of immediacy and power. It is a scathing critique of the technocratic society and its philosophy of single vision; this phrase, borrowed from Blake, can be summarized as the act of objectification, and its origins in the work of the empiricists of the seventeenth century, leading on to the rationalism of the eighteenth century and after has already been discussed. Single vision has created the modern world, but it is Roszak's contention that this orthodox consciousness in which most of us spend our time (and certainly that time we recognize as most productive, when we are wide awake and being "realistic"), is too cramped, not various or spacious enough, to let human beings develop all their potential. Science has become the contemporary religion, not because we worship it, but because it fixes the limits of our world:

One need only ponder what people mean in our time when the council us to 'be realistic'. They mean at every point, to forgo the claims of transcendence, to spurn the magic of imaginative wonder, to regard the world as *nothing but* what the hard facts and quantitative abstractions of scientific objectivity make it out to be. Only when translated downward into such terms does anything become a something 'real'. That in its deepest sense, is what it means to say that science has become the contemporary religion. Not that we praise and glorify scientists; we *may* do that, but that is not the essence of the matter. Science is our religion because we cannot, most of us, with any living conviction *see around it*. Religions are built at the boundaries of consciousness. We live in a world whose consciousness of reality ends at the scientific perimeter...¹⁰⁶

The scientific method encourages us to look closely at small sections of reality, analyse and quantify them; as Alan Watts has described it, we place a net over the universe and examine each square of the grid; we are very knowledgeable about the contents of most of the squares but we have lost all sense of the total picture, that romantic sense of wholeness Roszak is convinced we must recover: "The well-focused eye may see sharply what it sees, but it studies a lesser reality than the enraptured gaze."¹⁰⁷ Again we can see in Thoreau a similar concern for the inadequacies and sterility of a classification dominated science. "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit, - not a fossil earth, but a living earth..."¹⁰⁸ Lewis Mumford summarizes Thoreau's attitude towards science in *The Golden Day*:

Thoreau sought in nature all the manifold qualities of being; he was not merely in search of those likenesses or distinctions which help to create classified indexes and build up a system. The aesthetic qualities of a fern were as important for his mode of apprehension as the number of spores on a frond; it was not that he disdained science, but that, like the old herbalists and naturalists he admired, he would not let the practical offices of science, its classifications, its measurements, its numerations, take precedence over other forms of understanding. Science, practiced in this fashion, is truly part of a humane life... 109

Roszak is strongly critical of those, like myself, who see in the revolution of modern physics promises of escape from determinism and the stranglehold of objectivity. He, quite correctly, points out that the psychology of science has not changed, scientists are as committed as ever before to coming as close as they can to the principle of objectivity, and to treating nature as a closed, dead, external thing only worthy of chemical analysis or quantitative surveys. I have no quarrel with this view, but I think Roszak is ignoring the effect science can have on the non-scientific world. Artists, who had been weighed down by the mechanistic model of the universe, found that a new way of looking at things had been opened up for them. Their reaction was not scientific, scorn was heaped on them, and still is, by orthodox scientific thought, but they were able to use basic theories as leaping off points, metaphors, for reaching out into a less circumscribed universe.

Like Brown, Roszak turns to romanticism to find a world-view not based on single vision and the reality principle; he thinks that it is the inspiration of romantic art and the influence of psychoanalysis that have been responsible for the salvaging of myth in recent years, and the increasing interest in dream, that

state of awareness which seems to make sport of the conventional order of space, time, identity and logic. Anthropology has also contributed to a new and subversive understanding of dream, by introducing us to primitive cultures where, far from being classified as unreal, dreams are considered to be super-real and of great significance. The romantic fascination with drugs, dreams, the occult and the magical was connected with their view that there was a quality of experience essential to art, "...namely, the capacity of the mind to create ideas that vastly outstrip or wholly transcend sense data and its logical arrangements."¹¹⁰ The critique of scientized culture, rationalism and objectivity, the loathing of system, abstraction and routine, were part and parcel of the feeling that not only was there more to life than that which was empirically verifiable, but that what science rejected as subjectivism or hallucination was in fact considerably more important. The romantics craved wholeness, they wanted to integrate science into a greater vision of reality instead of science greedily occupying the whole territory and rigorously excluding everything else. Goethe's scientific speculations, which were universally mocked because they were at variance with empirical fact, grew from his vision of polarity moving towards union and synthesis. This is connected with Brown's dialectical imagination and Watts's non-duality, which will be discussed later.

Finally, there is Roszak's discussion of symbolism; he inclines towards a transcendent view of symbolism which is opposed to the secular symbolism of realism where natural facts are symbols of other natural facts. He distinguishes between a symbol and a cypher:

But it should be obvious that the mark of a great literary symbol is its unfathomable mystery; we can never get to the bottom of it, never simply substitute a form of words and have done with it. Great symbols swallow us whole. They lead us on into themselves... we pursue...but we never capture their whole meaning. Not because the symbol is mindless obscure...but because it is radically, authentically enigmatic.¹¹¹ (First two ellipses, Roszak- third, mine).

Again we find that what is essential to the contemporary experience is not the certainties of realism, but enigma, paradox and ambiguity. Roszak rejects the secularization of the modern world; he regrets what he calls the *densification* of symbols whereby the subtle, multi-reflective nature of the symbol is lost, and what is left is the objective formulation of the original. The infinitely complex symbolic associations of the experience of flight has been densified into aeroplanes and rockets; but, even so, technology is still an art of symbolic transformations, its inventions spring from consciousness as the material embodiment of transcendent symbols. The problem is that because we no longer believe in a transcendent other world these inventions exist in a vacuum:

It is not that our technological achievements are all worthless, though even the greatest of them have been overdone and oversold. It is rather that they are *meaningless* in the absence of a transcendent correspondence. They leave ungratified that dimension of self which reaches out into the world for enduring purpose, undying value.¹¹²

The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are was written by Alan Watts with a teenage audience in mind, it was meant to be read once and put away, not studied for every nuance. It is, however, remarkable, for the simplicity with which complex ideas are conveyed, for the warm perceptiveness of its author, and for the considerable

influence it exerted, particularly in America. It is perhaps the nearest one book could come to expressing the spiritual aspirations of the contemporary world, and it is in strong contrast to the attenuated Christianity on which realism based itself. Watts disagrees with Marcuse on the issue of political change taking place before change of consciousness:

But peace can be made only by those who are peaceful, and love can be shown only by those who love. No work of love will flourish out of guilt, fear or hollowness of heart, just as no valid plans for the future can be made by those who have no capacity for living now.¹¹³

But what is this change of consciousness, and who are we if we are not who we think we are? Watts's philosophy is based on the Vedanta philosophy of Hinduism which conceives of God as the Self of the world, and everything in the universe as an aspect of that Self. The Western conception of the separate ego, cut off from the rest of the world by the skin that surrounds our body, is a contradiction of everything that is known about organic life, people come out of the universe as part of its natural function, like leaves from a tree. The first result of this illusion of the alienated individual is that our attitude to the outside world is hostile, we think in terms of conquering nature, forgetting that nature and humanity are inseparable. Roszak points out the important role Christianity played in fostering this attitude when it removed God from the universe, calling the pagan worship of God-in-nature, idolatrous, because it could not understand that the pagan was worshiping God-in-the-tree, not the tree itself. Apart from the brief interlude of romanticism, this attitude towards man's relationship

with nature has been dominant at least since the seventeenth century. It is only recently, with the new ecological sciences, that things have begun to change, and then not because of a sudden awareness of the sacredness of the universe, but because of an awareness of our dependence on nature for our very existence. The Vedanta philosophy sees the universe as at root a magical illusion, a fabulous game; the Self adopts various disguises and plays with itself. The concept of play as basic to life, which is also central to psychoanalysis, is far removed from the serious moral attitude realism displays; John Barth makes use of it in his writings. Once an individual comes to really understand that the separate ego is a fiction then he can start to feel himself as the whole process and pattern of life: "Experience and experiencer become one experiencing, known and knower one knowing."¹¹⁴ In other words the subject/object dichotomy is removed in a transcendent experience of unity. This loss of ego is not that loss of body Brown calls sublimation mysticism, it is rather a loss of what Brown calls "character" which he considers to be a disorganization or malfunctioning of the body. Character is a kind of armour whereby the human body protects itself from the natural disposition to erotic exuberance that non-neurotic species display.

The other fundamental truth of life that Western society hides from its members is what Watts calls "The game of Black-and-White". The physical world is a constant vibration between on and off, and in the same way as it is inconceivable that there should be the crest of a wave without the corresponding trough, so it is inconceivable that there should be black without white or life

without death. This is what Einstein means when he says that empty space does not exist, it only becomes meaningful in relation to a solid object, and though solids and space are different, they are aspects of the same thing. The rational absorption with the narrowly-focused conscious attention makes it difficult to see connections and enlarges differences, until we are unable to recognize the inseparability of the positive and negative poles of the rhythm of life. Afraid that black might "win", the game of black and white turns into a war which is haunted by frustration because it is as foolish as trying to keep the mountains and get rid of the valleys. Watts points out that the principle form of this fight is Life-versus-Death; like Brown he recognizes that death is the great horror for Western culture, we see it as the final victory of black over white, instead of one stage in the constant vibration between off and on. Death should be a great event because it is that moment when the individual is released from the ego and can at last recognize that he himself is the Self which plays the universe. The recognition that it would be the end of the game if either black or white won has profound consequences for the conventional conception of morality. So-called "good" depends for its existence on "evil", they are opposite ends of the same pole, who define each other but are essentially inseparable. The metaphysical unity which underlies the world is not one-ness as opposed to multiplicity, because those two terms are themselves polar:

The unity, or inseparability, of one and many is therefore referred to in Vedanta philosophy as 'non-duality' (*advaita*) to distinguish it from simple uniformity. True, the term has its own opposite,

'duality', for insofar as every term designates a class, an intellectual pigeonhole, every class has an outside polarizing its inside. For this reason, language can no more transcend duality than paintings or photographs on a flat surface can go beyond two dimensions. Yet by the convention of perspective, certain two-dimensional lines that slant towards a 'vanishing point' are taken to represent the third dimension of depth. In a similar way, the dualistic term 'non-duality' is taken to represent the 'dimension' in which explicit differences have implicit unity.¹¹⁵

This concept of "non-duality" is the same as Brown's "dialectical unity", and it is completely opposed to realism's world-view which was, as I have already said, essentially dualistic. Watts returns to the idea, voiced by Brown and Roszak, that the only language that can describe a vision of life which is not circumscribed by rationalism, is the language of paradox, ambiguity and dream. "What lies beyond opposites must be discussed, if at all, in terms of opposites, and this means using the language of analogy, metaphor, and myth."¹¹⁶

In this chapter certain dominant themes have appeared which will be referred to in the rest of the thesis. But the essence of the argument is that contemporary thinkers and writers do not feel that single vision, rationalism, objectivity, the realistic approach to fiction, does justice to the experience of life. Barth, Hawkes and Pynchon want to include more in their novels than the conventions of realism would allow them. Not all of the themes examined can be found in all their work, but they have in common a genuine attempt to extend the frontiers of understanding.

To compose such a symposium of the whole, such a totality, all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal

and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown;
the criminal and failure - all that has been outcast and
vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of
what we consider we are.117

Robert Duncan.

CHAPTER TWO

JOHN HAWKES

The writings of John Hawkes seem to divide themselves into three groups; the early period from *Charivari* to *The Goose on the Grave* when he was using experimental techniques most self-consciously; the middle period in the early sixties when he concentrated more on the power of the *individual's* unconscious mind and produced two of his best novels, *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin*; and then the latest period which includes three novels, all written in the seventies, which Hawkes looks on as a trilogy and has suggested represent a sharp change of direction in relation to his earlier writings. In this chapter I intend to examine the novels in these three basic groups.

If we think of those figures who have influenced twentieth century intellectual development, it is to Freud that we must turn in an attempt to illuminate Hawkes' fundamental concerns as a novelist. Clearly Hawkes benefited from Freud's "legitimization of the unconscious", if there is any single unifying thread in his work it is his concern with the psychological implications of actions and events, or to put it another way, he creates fictional situations in order to demonstrate the often murky unconscious needs and desires of the individual or the state. His method of writing seems in many ways to be analogous to Freud's description of the technique of dreams. Freud described dreams in terms of condensation; the dream-thoughts (teased out by the psychoanalytic use of association) are considerably more complex and extensive than the

dream content shows. There is not a simple one to one relationship between a dream - thought and a particular aspect of the dream content: - "the elements of the dream are constructed out of the whole mass of dream - thoughts and each one of those elements is shown to have been determined many times over in relation to the dream - thoughts."¹ Both of these insights into the way dreams function suggest to us a basis from which we can approach the work of John Hawkes. The "meaning" is not always simple or apparent; he does condense his material considerably by the frequent use of startling images that suggest what would have taken many pages to say, but those images can never be simply defined, we can never say x equals y. The settings of his novels seem to be what Freud called a "psychical locality", which is the scene of action of dreams and is different from that of waking life. The last point at which Freudian dream - theory and Hawkes' fictional technique seem to converge, concerns emotional content. According to Freud the affects we experience when dreaming are related to the dream—thoughts, not the ideational material; however, affects are suppressed, there are far fewer in dreams than in ordinary waking life. Thus, the dream-work reduces the emotional tone of the dream-thought. When we read Hawkes' fiction, particularly the earlier work, we are amazed at the coldness, at the unemotional lucidity of his vision, which seems to stem from the detachment between material and author, or material and reader, in itself caused by the very conscious manipulation of words and images. In his early writings it is obvious to the reader that Hawkes has abandoned the traditional realistic novel; in a symposium on "Fiction Today" he referred to

writers who "hope for more in the novel than trying to build brick walls of brick."² He finds a kinship between poetry and the "longer form" of experimental fiction:

the climate is cold; the process is arbitrary, single-minded, a formalizing of our deepest urgencies. Like the poet, the experimental fiction writer is prompted to his narrative only by the vision which exclaims above him, or is driven to it from below...Like the poem, the experimental fiction is an exclamation of psychic materials which come to the writer all readily distorted, prefigured in that mighty inner schism between the rational and the absurd.³

This quotation seems to suggest a lack of conscious control on the part of the writer, in that his materials "come" to him from his psyche, reminiscent of the surrealist use of automatic writing. The French surrealists mainly went to America during the second world war where they influenced Jackson Pollock, among others. It is not impossible that they left their mark on the young John Hawkes. However, although the early writing may seem "surreal" in its style with its strange landscapes located somewhere between reality and dream, its captured, frozen images, and use of juxtaposition, the informing principle *behind* the writing is not really surreal at all. Hawkes seems to be using grotesque images to reflect a nightmare reality, which, as I have mentioned in the first chapter, C.W.E. Bigsby has located as belonging to the absurd tradition rather than the surreal. It is only in the later books, in which, paradoxically, the style is less obviously experimental, that Hawkes starts to approach the Surrealist aim of expanding the conception of reality, enjoying, rather than despairing at, the potentials of humanity. Hawkes suggests that detachment is at the centre of the novelist's

experiments and that "the product of extreme fictive detachment is extreme fictive sympathy."⁴ He writes:

I myself believe very much in the sack of the past slung around our necks, in all the recurrent ancestral fears and abortive births we find in dreams as well as literature. The constructed vision, the excitement of the undersea life of the inner man, a language appropriate to the delicate, malicious knowledge of us all as poor, forked, corruptible, the feeling of pleasure and pain that comes when something poor and contemptible lodges in the imagination - I believe in the singular and terrible attraction of all this.⁵

The reference to "recurrent ancestral fears" suggests the way in which Hawkes has liberated himself from chronology and, like Freud, made use of a transhistorical mechanism in his analysis of the psyche, whether individual or social. He has rejected historical time both in the settings of his early novels and in their fictional structure. His characters are not "palpably and unmistakably commonplace"⁶, they are not humanly representative but symbolically representative of distorting and destructive features in man and society: a hangman, a cannibal, a forty year old child. Unlike the realistic novel there is no clearly defined moral scheme, Hawkes observes and abandons judgement, this is the extreme fictive detachment which clearly does result in a kind of sympathy because he remains open to all his characters no matter how repellant they are in conventional terms. In an interview Hawkes said that his writing "depends on absolute detachment, and the unfamiliar or invented landscape helps me to achieve and maintain this detachment ...I want to try to create a world, not represent it."⁷ His lack of interest in representing the "real" world leads us on to the fact

that symbolism in the novels is not used in the way realistic writers usually employ symbols, with an ordinary, natural fact representing other natural facts, like the golden bowl and its flaw, or Silas Lapham's house; neither is it transcendental symbolism however, it does not lead us into a spiritual world but into the nether regions of our own unconscious. Until *Second Skin* anyway, Hawkes perception of the unconscious is grim, the dark recesses of the human soul, even if he does maintain his distance and reject the idea of moral judgement. His portrait of death-obsessed societies relates closely to Norman O. Brown's theories but in this period of his writing he is much more aware of the blackness of the unconscious than of its possibilities as a creative, energizing, liberating source of power, the view we find in both Marcuse and Brown.

I

Charivari is John Hawkes' first published work; it originally appeared in the New Directions Anthology and was not then reprinted until 1970 when it appeared in *Lunar Landscapes*, a collection of his stories and short novels. It is a slightly uneasy mixture of social satire, dream and fantasy, which attempts to analyse the fear of death that keeps the central characters as children, unable and unwilling to achieve maturity. The title of the work provides us with an immediate example of the satirical, exposing attitude of the author. "Charivari" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "A serenade of 'rough music', with kettles, pans, tea-trays, and

the like, used in France, in *mockery* and *derision* of incongruous or unpopular marriages." (Italics mine). The story examines the marriage of a middle-class couple, Henry, the son of a parson, and Emily, the daughter of a general. They are both in their forties but are in fact still children, dominated by their parents especially the general's wife. Emily discovers to her horror that she is pregnant for the first time; she does not want a child because it will place restrictions on her freedom, she will have to assume a degree of responsibility for it, in other words she will have to grow up and by growing up face the fact of decay and death:

Her gaze, wriggling in the bassinette, became afraid and, very slowly the white transparent face began to cry. Long bristling sideburns grew down the cheeks. The gaze, small, old and parched, answered her, helpless on its back. 'You must never do a thing without consulting me, you must always come and see that I am well and not crying'. Her heart, the size of an egg, began to tap and slowly turning over, stuck under her tongue.⁸

The coming of a child is a reminder of mutability, and Hawkes makes it clear that Emily and Henry have never been encouraged to gain maturity because the parents feel less close to death if they can maintain the fiction that their children are children still. In a discussion about a financial indiscretion of Henry's the generalless reminds them all that he is, after all, forty years old. "That sobered the judges into a miserable silence, a thought about the passing, denuding years, not for Henry's sake but for their own. They became conscious-stricken of gray hairs and kidney pains, not destined to habitate forever, palpitation, palpitation, sleep." (*Lunar* p.65).

Most of the story takes place during the two days devoted to a senselessly wild house-party, though there is an episode which returns us without warning to the day of Henry's and Emily's marriage. The actual time or setting of the story is never specified, and the episode of the marriage day disturbs an otherwise coherent chronological exposition. It is the background of the house-party that provides *Charivari* with its orientation towards social satire:

He stood uncertainly beside his dear bright wife who tried to keep a garbled account of the fleeting uninteresting faces: Mr. and Mrs. Gaylor Basistini of the short height, Dr. and companion Smith with a monocle, little Man and Lady Wheeling Rice, a ruddy monster from South America, impeccable Mister and Madame Bird, a determined unnamed adventuress in green, Sir Dewitt-Jones in blue, the Ottoes and their young son, restless Mr. and Mrs. White, an ungracious daughter, the Demonoes, the Burgesses, shy Mr. and Mrs. Young, an unmentionable bevy. At the very last minute, enter bubbling, vicious little Noel in glory. Awkwardly, and in a hurry, they sat down. Then came her parents, followed by his. The butler began to serve. (*Lunar* p.55).

Henry finds the atmosphere of the party, and Emily's announcement about the child, crystallizes his feeling that he is trapped in his life, so he leaves the house. This entire episode has the flavour of a child running away from home; particularly as it comes soon after the dressing-down he receives for losing money in speculating; Beady, his mother, races round the house looking for him, and Henry himself responds to his bus journey by thinking "He was taking himself for a ride." (*Lunar* p.77). Henry goes to a storm-ridden seaside town and rents a room in a Mrs. Mahoney's boarding house. He sees a girl who reminds him of Emily and he wishes to get close to her but she is drowned in a storm. Finally his father comes to the

boarding house; we have no knowledge of how he knew Henry was there, and neither does Henry, but he just accepts it in the way children accept the mysterious workings of an adult world they don't understand; he returns meekly home in the limousine.

Emily also takes a journey but she goes to hospital supervised by her domineering mother, where either the baby is aborted or the pregnancy is proved to be a false alarm. The description of the hospital shows it as a nightmare world; Emily is terrified of the sickness and death which the hospital represents, she understands nothing because she can have no understanding of an adult world in which she refuses to participate. Henry's and Emily's journeys are not described realistically because they are used to illuminate their respective states of mind, their fears and desires. When Emily returns from the hospital Henry is watching her:

When she ran across the lawn, hair loose and flying, colored skirt whirling about her knees, he knew that she was not going to have a child. The flowers around her neck were white with dew, and as she ran she laughed, and her face was momentarily bright. 'My goodness', thought Henry, 'she *does* look young'. She ran quickly towards him. Gaylor blew loudly on his whistle. 'All right', he called, 'it's time to play.' (*Lunar* p.136).

Gaylor's decision that it is time to play indicates the psychological state of the couple; they are children who have been allowed to escape the responsibilities of maturity and they have just had another reprieve.

In no other work does John Hawkes state his intentions so clearly; he exploits an experimental technique to give a distorted but recognizable reflection of dominant trends in the modern world,

and he leaves visible signposts through the story to make sure we don't miss his intention. Twice the house is described as "the monstrous pale reflection" (*Lunar* p.94 and p.111), and Henry even says to Gaylor "My home is a microcosm of the world to me" (*Lunar* p.69). The prevailing tone in the story is satirical, this is the only one of Hawkes' works in which the "extreme fictive sympathy" he talked of seems to be lacking. Reader and author join in an exposure of the emptiness of the society depicted; an attitude clarified quite openly in a direct authorial statement early in the work: "And have you heard, or do you think we are likely to hear what very private shames and resentments and misgivings these people are harboring? May we be cruel enough?" (*Lunar* p. 55). The boldness and simplicity of this statement in many ways explains the brutality so often found in Hawkes' fiction, but there is a marked difference in the attitude towards cruelty in the later books. As Robert Scholes says in *The Fabulators*, "A sense is established of reader and narrator conniving to expose 'them'. In the later works the exposure involves us as well as *them*."⁹

Charivari is not a particularly significant work of fiction, but it does provide an introduction to Hawkes' psychological concerns and demonstrates the validity of making cross-references to writers in other fields. Freud comments that when we find absurdity in dreams it represents an expression of criticism or ridicule on the part of the dreamer. The absurdity is in fact a formal manifestation of part of the latent content of the dream; in *Charivari*, the use of absurd images, such as the General's extending shorts, performs the same function, as the whole tone of the piece is one

of derision and ridicule. Norman O. Brown's theories can help us see a more subtle connection between the fear of death and the desire to remain a child that Hawkes describes in this book. Thanatos seeks separation and independence because death is what makes us individuals; by repressing death we repress our own individuality at the same time as exhibiting the compulsive return of the repressed instinct. The refusal to grow up on the part of Emily and Henry, actively encouraged by everyone else in their lives, represents a fear of separation and individuality because that would be admitting the possibility of maturity and death. However their entire existence is clearly death-in-life not life itself; Emily dreams of death, the adventures in green comments on the state of the people at the party and says "Most of them are still half dead..."(*Lunar* p.85). Trying to remain a child is not the same as Brown's belief that we should return to the pleasure principle. It is destructive and empty as Emily's inability to have a child shows; the fundamental sterility of the entire landscape and population of *Charivari* is suggested by Dr. Smith's comments on phantom pregnancies and his callous attitude to what he is saying: "'Sometimes, though', he laughed again, 'it's all a mistake, a dream and there isn't any roe at all; and they end up just as dry as ever.'"(*Lunar* p.122). The pathos that is usually associated with hysterical pregnancies (Honey in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, for example) is completely lacking here. Dr. Smith seems to be revelling in the fact that the fertility may be imagined, that somebody is made to look a fool, that dryness is the order of the day.

The Cannibal is John Hawkes' first full length work and his only attempt to create a specifically political frame of reference for one of his novels. It is set in Germany, the central section in Munich at the outset of the first world war, while the first and last sections, set in a small town, Spitzen-on-the-Dein, are dated 1945, but according to an interview with Hawkes "that date is supposed to be taken as something to disregard. The time of that novel is simply in the future..."¹⁰. The plot involves the attempt of Zizendorf, editor of the local newspaper, to kill an American motorcyclist, overseer of one third of the country, and thus precipitate his own rise to power as a neo-Nazi leader. Interlocking with this is a chase by the Duke, the cannibal of the title, to capture and eat a small boy, the son of Jutta, Zizendorf's mistress. The earlier section is largely concerned with the youth of Stella Snow, who appears in the other sections as owner of the boarding house where most of the characters live. The story is narrated by Zizendorf even though many of the events are quite outside his possible range of experience or knowledge. This use of an internal narrator with the power of an omniscient one is unusual; apparently it was an afterthought, the original novel having been written as a third-person narrative and after it was completed Hawkes went through it changing the pronouns where relevant, and presumably adding the short passage which prefaces the novel. Here Hawkes suggests his lack of concern for the realistic novelist's belief in maintaining the illusion of reality in their fiction. Not only does he use a clearly omniscient narrator, a style avoided by the realists in favour of dramatic presentation or a pictorial one

filtered through the consciousness of a particular character, but he also makes his omniscient narrator a character from the story, thus totally violating the illusion of a logically ordered fictional world comparable to the "real" world.

The essential quality of the fictional world presented to us is its degeneracy and decay, its total desolation. Tony Tanner has suggested one of the reasons for the totality of this impression:

Some of this desolation is due to the continuous use of negatives which conjures up a prevailing atmosphere of emptiness, silence and inertness, even though deeds are performed and words are spoken - no voices sang, nowhere to eat, there was no sound, there was no post, no one came and went, there was no one, there were no clocks, nothing to think of, no one to dislike, no one she needed to love, and so on. Against this background of entropy the many acts of violence are described with a slow meticulousness.¹¹

Hawkes himself says that he feels the sterility in the novel is "almost overwhelmingly widespread"¹². Most of the characters are deformed or crippled in some way, either physically or psychologically; the Census-Taker is an alcoholic and gets his only sexual pleasure from watching Zizendorf with Jutta; the mayor is in a constant state of terror, "too blind to tend the chronicles of history"¹³; Madame Snow's son returns to the town "with his stump and steel canes" (*Cannibal* p.21) and shows films to an empty cinema; finally he enjoys a perverse state of sexual excitement when he watches the Duke catch up with his prey; Stintz, the school-teacher who sees the murder of the American overseer and intends to inform to the Allied authorities, is blind in one eye. Even in the earlier section of the book many of the characters are mutilated; Jutta, Stella's sister, nearly dies of a peculiar wasting disease; "Herr Snow was proud of

Ernie because his other son, a boy of nine, forever wore his head strapped in a brace, and the words that came from the immovable mouth came also from a remote frightening world." (*Cannibal* p.65). But even Ernie's face is scarred from duelling wounds and he is missing two fingers from his left hand. The landscape consists of "twisted stunted trees" (*Cannibal* p.55), "Piles of fallen bricks and mortar were pushed into the gutters like mounds of snow" (*Cannibal* p.20), "The building slanted crookedly and silent in a row of black stained fronts and the canal drained past the back fence" (*Cannibal* p.22). The central image of the book is cannibalism, culminating in the Duke inviting Madame Snow to a banquet consisting of different parts of her nephew cooked in a variety of ways. This suggests a total alienation between people, even those who are part of the same community; they are not just prisoners of political systems and their own fears and brutality, they are so degraded that they are incapable of any attitude to others apart from an exploitative one. Throughout the novel the mental asylum on the hill in Spitzen-on-the-Dein is identified with the government; after the defeat and collapse of the ruling body and the subsequent takeover by the American overseer, the asylum opened its doors and the inmates came down the hill to the town, but "the population had not grown" (*Cannibal* p.19). This suggests the identification between the asylum and the government by implying that the inmates of the asylum *are* the population of the town. The relationship is further clarified when Zizendorf, Jutta and the Census-Taker pass through the institution on their way to a dance: "inner doors were smeared with chalk fragments of situation reports of the then anxious and struggling Allied armies."

(*Cannibal* p.47). There is an element here of the fear of the size and power of institutions found in many contemporary American novelists:

At night the institution towered upward crookedly, and fanned out into a haphazard series of dropped terraces and barren rooms, suddenly twisted walls and sealed entrances, combed of reality, smothered out of all order by its overbearing size... For once it had been both awesome and yet holy, having caused in each of us, silent marchers, at one time or another, a doubt for his own welfare and also a momentary wonder at the way they could handle all those patients. (*Cannibal* pp. 46-47).

However the asylum is also seen as a place of retreat and safety; on the night before the riot thieves had stolen the wooden sign inscribed with "the *haven* word 'asylum'" (*Cannibal* p.177, italics mine), and at the end of the novel, after Zizendorf's takeover, "the long lines...were already filing back into the institution, revived already with the public spirit." (*Cannibal* p.222).

Zizendorf is clearly a neo-Nazi leader; he reveres the fallen Nazi regime, calling it "the complete crystallization of a nation... the greatest advance of communal men" (*Cannibal* p.42), he is also strongly racist, disliking the mixed nationality dances instigated by the other Europeans. His personal philosophy is expressed in the last section of the book:

Life is not the remarkable, the precious, or necessary thing we think it is... I knew that the tenant was the law. For the final judgement the tenant must build the house and keep it from sliding into the pool, keep it from the Jew's claw or the idealist's pillaging... Death is as unimportant as life; but the struggle, the piling of bricks, the desperate attempts of the tenant; that is the man of youth, the old woman of calm, the nation of certainty. (*Cannibal* pp.154-155).

This is an attitude in which morality can play no part; and Zizendorf's nationalism encourages such an exclusion. The nationalist's sole loyalty must be to the state regardless of whether or not the state betrays his moral values. Herr Stintz is supposedly a lover of justice and intends to inform on Zizendorf in the name of justice; Zizendorf kills him and explains his action by reference to the supreme value of the State: "The honest man is traitor to the State. The man with the voice only for those above him, not for citizens, tells all and spreads evil. His honesty is a hopeless misgiving. He makes the way intangible and petty, he hampers determination." (*Cannibal* p.197). But in Hawkes' world even the morality of a lover of justice is questionable; Stintz has a perverse pleasure from the thought that he knows, he saw it all, he will inform and become the judge. He takes Jutta's daughter with him as the perfect touch, she is made to follow her father, the murderer, through the darkness. Stintz is hardly a centre of moral value. This incident of judgement suggests it is motivated solely by the desire for power; elsewhere judgement is portrayed as depending on nationalist bias. Cromwell, in the early section of the book parallels Stintz, having left England and helped the Germans he is a traitor to England and thus resembles Stintz, however Zizendorf pays tribute to him in his proclamation, praising him for having started the German technological revolution. The fact that there is no possibility for escape from nationalist values is suggested by Ernst, Stella's husband; they spend their honeymoon high up in the mountains, a white, snow-covered upper world, reminiscent of the final scenes of *Women in Love*. Here Ernst tries to escape from the world of war

and nationalism, immersing himself in religion, but Cromwell comes to see him, telling him everything he did not want to know, and he is forced to return to the lower world ostensibly because of an illness. On his death-bed Ernst sees his hated father, loses "the calm of Heaven" (*Cannibal* p.142) and dies with his mouth twisted into dislike. He was "*reprieved* from saintliness", "*saved* by the grace of his own ill-luck and ill-will" (*Cannibal* p.142) (italics mine). Again this emphasizes a kind of moral ambiguity, an inversion of morality, in fact, which shakes our belief in the relevance of the entire concept.

The most significant element of the novel in relation to this thesis has been kept to the end. In an interview Hawkes said that the juxtaposition of the two historical periods "is intended to suggest that perhaps we don't move so much in cycles as repetitions or that we have always had these particular problems of violence, destruction, sadism and so on."¹⁴ The decadence of Stella Snow's early life before the first world war is described early in the book:

The food in her father's house was served encased in layers of fat and from a basket at the side of her bed she had eaten a hybrid kind of giant pear. She went out with young men dressed in black who could ride a horse up to the point of death on a winter's day and leave him to freeze, feeling the hand of hell's angel, or went with moustached students with orange bands about their caps. She craved candies imported from France and Holland, heard lovers sing in raucous voices, and punting, seemed the image of the passing swan. (*Cannibal* p.29).

This period in German history and the period during the first world war, is contrasted with the chaos of post-second world war defeat

in the first and last sections of the book. But Hawkes is not trying to suggest a cause and effect relationship between the two periods; his is not an historical approach which would think in terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the impossible cost of reparations as a direct cause of the rise of Hitler. The significance of the description of Stella Snow's early life is that despite the wealth and comfort, in strong contrast to the situation in 1945, there was still the mindless sadism of young men leaving their horses to freeze, young men who *wanted* to feel "the hand of hell's angel". This kind of connection is fundamentally ahistorical, because it sidesteps both linear time and causality. All through the book we are being asked to perceive repetitions, parallels not causal connections. Both Spitzen-on-the-Dein and Munich in the middle section are referred to as "das Grab" (*Cannibal* p.35 and p.119) - the grave; Balamir, the inmate of the asylum taken in by Stella Snow, is described as being the son of the Kaiser, this suggests degeneracy but also endless repetitions; Stella's father, the hopelessly decayed old general, parallels the decay in 1945; the brief introductory passage written by Zizendorf shows that he is now exiled from his home country - "at the first opportunity I will, of course, return." (*Cannibal* p.15). The implication of course is that Zizendorf, the overthrower of the American overseer, has himself been overthrown; the repetitions continue. The destruction of linear time is completed by the description of Jutta's daughter waiting for her mother to come home: "What was the hour? No one could know because there were no clocks. She knew the time by intuition, this dark time, as a thing that ended only with sleep." (*Cannibal* p.151).

This suggests that objective time has been lost and replaced by a purely subjective awareness of time, a time that ends with loss of consciousness and does not continue during sleep. The strange episode when Ernst, running after the carriage containing Stella Snow and Cromwell, literally becomes Gavrilo Princep in Sarajevo about to murder Francis Ferdinand and precipitate the first world war, suggests a similar contingency associated with space as well as time. In this episode it is implied that the time is common to the two carriages, but the boundaries of space are overcome as Ernst becomes Princep, Cromwell expects to be shot, and then Ernst runs away as "a crowd seemed to gather" (*Cannibal* p.75). Although the idea is not nearly as fully expressed as it will be in Pynchon, these references seem to suggest that for Hawkes time and space are not absolute but are contingencies of consciousness.

However, despite this, the basic impression we receive from *The Cannibal* is that Hawkes is using these non-realist techniques in order to emphasize what he sees to be the essential and definable reality of the situation. The style, perhaps, is a weapon, a mode of expression that gives force and clarity to the writer's vision, rather than actually exemplifying that vision, a use of style that we find in Pynchon's work.

The Beetle Leg centres on a small town built up around a large irrigation project in the West; it is the only one of Hawkes' novels to have an entirely American setting. The plot is not chronological; various characters appear and disappear, Cap Leech, an itinerant doctor; the Red Devils, a motor-cycle gang, who

occasionally roar through the town disturbing the peace; Camper and his wife, a man who had worked on the irrigation project and has returned to visit his old haunt; the Sheriff who speaks the prologue, although the rest of the novel is written in the third person; and, most important of all, the Lampson family. During the course of the novel we are given an account of some of the events in the lives of the Lampsons. Mulge and Luke Lampson are the sons of Hattie Lampson; against his mother's wishes, Mulge marries a woman much older than himself, just called Ma throughout the book. A year or so later Mulge, who works on the irrigation project, is buried in the Great Slide, when part of the dam they are building falls into a large crack which suddenly appears due to the instability of the ground. Hattie Lampson dies and is buried just above the place where her son was swallowed up, face down so she can look upon him. Ma spends her days living with Luke and an Indian girl, taken in by the Lampsons before Ma married into the family; but her nights are spent on the dam with a divining rod looking for her dead husband.

To a certain extent *The Beetle Leg* is reminiscent of Faulkner; one scene which describes the journey to town for the wedding between Mulge Lampson and Ma echoes *As I Lay Dying* in tone and the quality of endurance particularly associated with the women. Three wagonloads of Ma's female acquaintances appear out of the flat, dusty desert; grimly determined, Ma forces Hattie to accompany them; the conversation is terse and somehow reflects a kind of suffering which has drained all of them of any of those feelings which would probably make them succumb to the aridity of their situation; they cannot afford to be

aware of it:

They drew near, and Luke for the first time saw women's faces. Once again on the sod hut, a thin scout in the sunlight, a bent marker limp though standing, his own face worked, pursed and dripping as he watched. Bonnets, ribbons but no curls, skull-blackened and thirsty they stared back above the slick fronts of the horses plodding low, stepping singly, flat and without wind away from wheels that were nearly locked. Instead of three wagon loads he would have liked to have seen just one face cleansed of the sun and that had not been formed and set long ago to the sudden bloody impression of a coffin bone. A few could not hear the meek but steady notes of their sisters' hymns and pushed their ears with hands that had been raised trembling three days and nights. 'I want to see one', he searched among the tucked and tired wives, 'before she's learned to keep shut. And outlive a man.'¹⁵

The novel is not really derivative however, the quality which really reminds us of Faulkner is much more general than the example above; it is the imaginative creation of a composite myth of the West comparable to Faulkner's mythological South. Once again Hawkes avoids an historical sense of time, and it is this above all else that gives *The Beetle Leg* its mythic quality. The Red Devils motorcycle gang strike a very contemporary note with their studded leather jackets; as they ride out of town a boy says wonderingly "They had jewels all over them" (*Beetle* p.63). However Cap Leech suggests a much older time, the travelling quack with his red wagon and his horse that is described as "prehistoric" (*Beetle* p.40), so do the "huddle of black braided Indians" (*Beetle* p.35) who watch the wagon with fascination. The atmosphere is at once perennial and new, temporary, contingent; the settlement is only ten or twelve years old, Mulge Lampson is the only man who has died out there, as the Sheriff says "It hasn't been long enough for any man

to grow old enough to die." (*Beetle* p.45). Here Hawkes has managed to suggest both the sameness and the eternal newness of the American West. The structure of the beginning of the novel, the Sheriff's prologue and the first two chapters, which move in a circular motion, also reflects Hawkes' dismissal of linear time. The prologue opens with a quotation from a book:

Aquarius is poor. Sagittarius is poor. Virgo is a Barren Sign, it will produce no growth. The first day the Moon is in a Sign is better than the second and the second better than the third. Seed planted when the Earth is in Leo, which is a Barren, Fiery Sign, will die, as it is favourable only to the destruction of noxious growth. Trim no trees or vines when the Moon or Earth is in Leo. For they will surely die.
He stopped reading, marked his place, and began to talk.

It is a lawless country. (*Beetle* p.7).

The quotation is appropriate to the atmosphere of the book, with its emphasis on poverty, barrenness and death; but it is more significant in terms of the novel's structure. The Sheriff goes on to talk about his town and his job, and then in the first chapter we are introduced to the Lampsons and the Campers when Luke sucks the snake-bite poison out of their child's leg. The second chapter returns us to the Sheriff interviewing Cap Leech who has just arrived in town. When Leech is brought to his office, the Sheriff is reading from the same book, "...the indoor gardener's calendar, a timetable of work, failure, and church holidays..." (*Beetle* p.41). At the end of the chapter he is again reading out loud from it, while Cap Leech stands against the wall, listening:

The Sheriff scowled into the magic page. '*Trim no*

trees or vines when the Moon or Earth is in Leo. For they will surely die'. He stopped reading, marked his place, and began to talk.

It is a lawless country. (*Beetle* p.46).

We have now, after forty pages, reached the same point at which the book began.

The real effectiveness of *The Beetle Leg* is based on contrast and contradiction. Ma's search for the body of her dead husband is pathetic and moving:

The whole town had roused at his death, but it was Ma, drawing closer to an unmarked entrance through the years, turning herself to cries that were still in the air, who grew thin, brittle, until of hardly any flesh at all, only an obligatory grief, her age and heavy shoes weighted her to the ever settling soil. And Ma, more than the others, actively pined away and opened many graves to find one full. (*Beetle* p.117).

But at the same time the reader is aware of a superbly comic situation; Ma hiding her divining rod by Hattie's grave and coming to tramp about over the huge mound of earth, waving a stick, and shouting periodically "'Mulge? Hold in there, Mulge!'" (*Beetle* p.117). The whole scene mixes pathos and humour in a surprisingly gentle way. In the following chapter the Sheriff and an amateur and unwilling "posse" set off to drive the Red Devils out of town. They are going to travel in the Sheriff's truck which has a young cow in the back of it, also belonging to the Sheriff:

The sheer and luminous udder swayed lightly though the slatted planks and, as Wade cranked, the red calf gently bounced, tossing the velvet ball. It was a youthful cream head of cheese, a nodding pendant, and the teats protruded only faintly, the knobs of new horns. The Sheriff walked slowly to the side of the truck, reached through and stroked it. The little hoof stamped, the immature red color, pink and brown, quivered in his hand. (*Beetle* p.127).

While the truck is on the road, however, the men in the back become irritated at the lack of room and untie it, allowing it to fly out of the back of the truck and crash on the road. Cap Leech, driving behind, watches it all happen:

The calf lay on her side in the air, about to crash, pink spots spun on the red hide and a gentle whistling loomed over the wagon. She disappeared. Then Leech looked down and there on her back in the road she sprawled with milk rolled jaws, albino eyes in wrinkled pads, and a clean crack splitting the amorphous skull that struck; nothing more ugly than the placid mask - its mouth roared wide enough to eat meat - of a shocked cow . twisting upwards in the moonlight. (*Beetle* p.129).

The two images of the cow grind against each other in the reader's mind; the placid, lyrical beauty of the first, the horrifying, senseless brutality and ugliness of the second. Also shocking is the Sheriff's reaction to this injury done to an animal he appreciated: "'Don't stop', the Sheriff kept Wade's hand from the brake, 'we'll catch her on the trip home.'" (*Beetle* p.130). It is through these kinds of contradictory images that Hawkes builds up his mythological picture of the West; not through plot or even character, and certainly not through any chronological historical sense.

Mulge Lampson's death, enclosed by the shifting mud of the dam, suggests the way in which all the characters, metaphorically-speaking, have encountered the same fate; buried alive by a dam which requires them to work in an arid, uncompromising landscape. The dam is gradually shifting:

It moved. The needles, cylinder and ink lines blurring on the heat smeared graph in the slight shade of evening, tended by the old watchman in

the power house, detected a creeping, downstream motion in the dam. Leaned against by the weight of water, it was pushing southward on a calendar of branding, brushfires and centuries to come, toward the gulf. Visitors hung their mouths and would not believe, and yet the hill eased down the rotting shale a beetle's leg each several anniversaries, the pride of the men of Gov City who would have to move fast to keep up with it. (*Beetle* pp.67-68).

This tiny movement will eventually render useless all the human effort that has gone into the building of the dam; the ability of the natural world to overcome man's attempts at organization seems to be uncontrollable. Entropic force is a central image in *The Beetle Leg*:

Though not stopped by barrier - fence, rock or ravine - the automobile was sucked close to the loose and dabbled earth, slowed by the invisible roots of parasite plants stretched like strings across its path, exhausted of speed and air. Camper felt a harsh and lazy magnetism that, foot by foot, might crack its windows, strip it of paint and draw the stuffing from the seats. (*Beetle* p.50).

However in the character of Thegna, the Norwegian cook who has been in the area for years, loved Mulge Lampson but now loves Bohn more, there is a kind of strength which seems to have power over this otherwise inexorable process. She is the first of Hawkes' characters to maintain positive human qualities, she has no pretensions but works, laughs and loves:

She fried her catch behind abandoned pipes and gazed tenderly at the mountain, sticking thin bones into the sand one by one and slitting dead silver tissue with a jackknife blade. She cracked fire from stones. She wore her apron into the fields, through the destroyed paperboard houses of Dynamite. In her own day she had slept in every cabin now under water. No one knew how she came to be there - whose pure width stood welcomed among men, who wrestled heavily with the

shade of laughter - but she shrieked when the first crew went to work, heaped broken sounds of affection on the black dam. She was clothed in sweaters from the warehouse, trampled among gangs, and beat a triangular gong of railroad track. As long as she lived, the wall would cleave back the earth, roads and river, allowing the bold to swarm across the bottom of the world and discover nests at night in abandoned town sites. As long as the mud dam needed tending, she would love Bohn, toolsheds and a dress dry-white with flour. (*Beetle* pp.73-74).

Thegna is the sole exception to Albert J. Guerard's description of the novel as "a landscape of sexual apathy", and the dam supports itself on her. As long as she continues, and the values she represents, the gradual process of entropy will be thwarted. Here Hawkes seems to be suggesting a kind of power that the individual may have which we have not seen before in his writing, but which does lead on to the novels of the middle and later periods.

John Hawkes' next works were two short novels published in one volume, *The Owl* and *The Goose on the Grave*. Both stories take place in Italy; the first appears to be set in the fairly distant past, most critics have suggested the mediaeval or renaissance period, and the second is modern, this century at least. But, as we have come to expect in Hawkes, the period is not really definable, both give an impression of timelessness. *The Owl* takes place in a small town called Sasso Fetore where the rule of death is absolute; it is controlled by its hangman, Il Gufo, (the owl), who lives in the fortress which overshadows the town, and narrates the tale. There are no young men in the town and all the fathers are desperately searching for husbands for their virgin daughters. Signor Barabo is one of these fathers, apparently a leading citizen, trying to marry

off his elder daughter, Antonina. The description of Barabo's deformities, hidden under his clothes, is grotesque: "Outside he was a peasant, inside a fish whose concealed pouches could inflate to considerable size until he groaned in his own monstrous dimensions." (*Lunar* p.143). He is representative of the physical decay of everyone in the town, except Il Gufo; as befits a town under the dominion of death, the hangman is strong and healthy:

for Sasso Fetore had few left who could walk on the cold stone in the morning without clutching their knees, curling their toes, bending their bare narrow backs, who could wake and anticipate the cry of guai! on the cold air. Few as enviable as I. (*Lunar* p.137).

The hangman is the figurehead of the town, the people respect and revere him, calling "Grace to you, grace to you, Hangman" (*Lunar* p.158) as he goes by. But despite the gravity of their situation, none of the fathers quite dares to consider Il Gufo as a prospective husband, they are afraid of the shadow of the gallows at his side; the story opens with:

*'Him?
Think not of him for your daughter, Signore, nor
for her sister either. There will be none for him,
Not him. He has taken his gallows, the noose and
knot, to marry.'* (*Lunar* p.137).

However, as soon as a prisoner appears in the fortress they plead with Il Gufo that he may be released to marry one of their daughters; they are refused. The prisoner escapes from the fortress on wings made from feathers; he kills the prefect's four ganders, is recaptured and hanged. Meanwhile Il Gufo and Antonina have made love on the hillside; she is not afraid of him: "'Honourable Hangman. Carino. Il Gufo. It is you I love. I know what women do, and I

have no fear of it. I have heard my father. I will be no belated bride. "Not him", they say. But it is you I love.'" (*Lunar* p.184). It is not surprising that Antonina feels she loves the hangman, no one in the town can match him in grandeur or strength; but she has made love with death itself and it brings her sterility and premature old age.

Already her hair was gray and her complexion altered, the lips compressed, the temples shiny, and her habits and her character so true and poorly tempered that no man would come for her and the rest of her days would be spent with the manual for the virgins not yet released to marriage. (*Lunar* p.199).

Shadowing the whole story is the image of the actual owl, which is never completely differentiated from Il Gufo, the hangman. The following description shows the sinister quality of this bird of the night, hard and constantly aware, like death itself:

The owl was awake, he swelled his chest, breathed restlessly, and made himself known in the dark as if it were not deep enough... He looked steadfastly at the universe, then turned his back and proceeded to chew, pick, beat his cold heart, rustle so imperceptibly active with continuous life. Revengeful was he toward that which made him turn his white face and look into the dark... One claw was missing, another cut off blunt and short, at every feathered layer he was scarred and covered with old wounds that penetrated him like the grain of wood his fiber, the old markings of the forest. But he had never cried with the pain, the scarred face, the face enraged and bloody, always anaesthetized with the cold enormity of the eyes, the sudden circumference of the eyelids protecting him, making him insensitive. (*Lunar* pp. 187-188).

The owl is an image of the hard, cold rule of death; we understand that death is supreme when we read that the hangman's proclamations survive while the walls they were pinned on fall down from old age (*Lunar* p.138). It is apparent that the town's population is heading

towards extinction; it consists of old people and young women with no young men to fertilize them; even the rooks "screamed the cry of a dying species" (*Lunar* p.161).

The other element which stifles Sasso Fetore, or perhaps it is an example of their degeneracy and decay, is the passion for tradition: empty, meaningless rituals. The people are so confined by their sense of history that they cannot release themselves from the ties of these bizarre and unproductive rituals. An example of this is the ritual meal of fish before the decision is taken to hang the prisoner, but the fullest expression of it is found in the gavotte Pucento dances with the trained dog. The monks in the past had killed all the bitches of this species of dog and trained the males to dance a perfectly executed gavotte. There is one dog left and the imminent extinction of the species parallels the probable extinction of the people of Sasso Fetore, just as the blind following of the ritual by the dog parallels a similar pattern of behaviour in the townsfolk. The key sentence is "The women could not see how Pucento sweat, himself straining to duplicate the measure, the ruthless footstep of the past." (*Lunar* p.182). Pucento's aim is to *duplicate* the past, mere repetition for its own sake, unrelated to the present or the future. Pucento is as much a victim of the slavish adherence to a meaningless tradition as the dog is; neither of them are capable of stepping outside the dance. Hawkes himself, however, is released from the ties of history. Although the story's tone is predominantly mediaeval or renaissance, there are several references which destroy this rather too neat historical perspective. The hangman narrates the story and makes a reference to Austerlitz, which

ought to place the story at least post-Napoleon. The prefect smokes a cigarette, an eighteenth century phenomenon at the earliest; and the prisoner wears a gray trenchcoat, a garment not worn until this century. We are not allowed to relax into the comforting thought that, after all, it is a story about the past. Once again Hawkes is by-passing the chronological approach in order to present us with an ahistorical psychological image.

Hawkes originally prefaced the two stories with a quotation from Ezra Pound - "One must have resonance, resonance and sonority... like a goose". In "Notes on the Wild Goose Chase" Hawkes refers to "All those still seeking the high myserious flights of the Wild Goose, or concerned with that place into which the creative arts have fled..."¹⁶ It would seem that in these stories the geese are meant to suggest the resonant voice of the creative spirit. In *The Owl* the prefect's ganders

covered the countryside in good regiment... No girl could drive these white creatures in such formation... The fowl survived, now holding their flat honed bills high asway against the horizon. The four of them, Sasso Fetore's flock, never emitted the shrill crabbing sounds of their species but appeared on the steep slippery cobblestones in silence... (*Lunar* p.146).

The birds are dignified, the representatives of form and order; they are still alive though silenced, but the escaped prisoner kills them. The story ends with a sight of the owl settling into its hole in the tree trunk, then four italicized lines:

Thus stands the cause between us, we are entered into covenant for this work, we have drawn our own articles and have professed to enterprise upon these actions and these ends, and we have besought favour, and we have bestowed blessing. (Lunar p.199).

This suggests the irreversible nature of the situation in Sasso Fetore; the ritualistic rule of death is virtually a religion, particularly if we define religion in Theodore Roszak's way, as something that creates the boundaries of consciousness. *The Owl* is an image of what Norman O. Brown suggests is the last stage of history, the dominion of death-in-life.

The Goose on the Grave, the most obscure of all Hawkes' early fiction, is perhaps best seen as a companion-piece to *The Owl*, insofar as the more modern setting contrasts with *The Owl* but only to show us that little has changed. One of the key comments in the story is that "the renaissance has failed" (*Lunar* p.232). Earl Rovit calls it "an experiment in formlessness"¹⁷, and as such there is little point in attempting any kind of a plot summary. The central character, Adeppi, a young street-singer, would appear to be the "goose" of the title; his occupation suggesting the resonant voice of the creative spirit which we have learned to associate with geese. However, geese fare no better in this story than they did in *The Owl*; Adeppi meets an old man sitting at the bottom of a hill, "A goose with a broken neck lay against his foot" (*Lunar* p.239). The world in which Adeppi moves is a graveyard of degeneracy, perversion and war; the police are brutal, the priests fanatical; Adeppi is quite alone, moving among different groups of people but his connection with each group is, at the best, tenuous, and, at the worst, purely arbitrary. Nino, the wounded soldier he befriends, who walks on the strength of his wounds "which in his country are congenital" (*Lunar* p.235), is perhaps the nearest Adeppi

comes to having a friend; but they are separated when Nino is well enough to leave and they are not reunited. The most powerful impression we have of Adeppi's world is its total contingency, its arbitrariness; there are no reasons, no explanation, no one has any direction. Pipistrello, Arsella's blind husband, is destroyed by an enormous rock which is being levered off the top of the hill he is walking up with Adeppi. The workmen, we are told, wanted to move the rock to make a shrine where travellers could pause and pray; but this explanation explains nothing; the fact remains that Adeppi and Pipistrello toil up the hill until suddenly an enormous rock hurtles down killing the blind man, who is unable to get out of the way in time. In this work, despite its obscurity, perhaps even its ultimate failure, for the first time John Hawkes is using his narrative technique to reflect his world-view, that of an arbitrary, acausal, formless world.

Another image which is used to suggest the condition of life as one of unrelieved pain is the picture of the heart crowned with thorns that Adeppi sees when he stays with Arsella:

Pinned to the back of Arsella's door and the only decoration in the room was a bleeding heart with brambles, printed on a piece of curled parchment the size of a playing card. The arteries, cut close, were painted flamboyantly and crowned with gilt; the thorns, a mustard green, went deep. Each morning Arsella put her lips to it... The hand illuminated heart hung from its nail in place of coat hook or calendar. It could be seen only if the door was closed - this part of the body hung like a lung extricated from its mass - and so bared, displayed the frightening inaccuracies of the imagination. Adeppi with his first glance learned that thorns grow inside the chest. (*Lunar* pp.236-237).

The image is mult-reflective; on the most obvious level it suggests

the irrevocably wounded heart of humanity; but it also reveals to us the artificiality of the imagination, or the art, which tries to impose a metaphorical order on a chaotic universe. Thirdly, we feel once again the stifling nature of tradition, the absurdity, the irrelevance, even the ultimate perversion of Christianity. This idea is further emphasized by the portrait of the priest, Dolce. He is obsessed with the notion of self-denial to the point of self-abuse, he mortifies his body allowing it only a few drops of water on which to pray and confess. In a section entitled "The Confession" he remembers how he and another novice were persecuted by a woman demanding to be chastised. Eventually they took her to the stable, undressed her, and sewed her into a shirt they made out of uncured rats' skins, knowing the skins would shrink until her body was trapped in an agonizing strait-jacket, with the fur turned into the body so that it scratched and irritated. "That night we agreed that more like her should wear the shirt" (*Lunar* p.250). In *The Owl* the town was imprisoned by tradition, and here they are still trapped, but now by hideously perverted forms of tradition; they are locked into death, wilfully trying to torture the body, their physical existence, while still alive.

At the very end of the story, Edouard, the homosexual bartender, is dying, and while he is lying on his bed he reflects about the world:

It was the survival of the least fit; and though he was denied a sight of Il Duomo, he recalled the endless columns of old women and boys passing one to the next the bricks and piling them...
And Edouard thought of the centuries to come with a drop of blood shared by a hundred, and the generations

it would take for the sports to appear, when men would be dwarfed and withered of limb, when the weak, the sickest, and the abandoned would steal the figs from the archbishop's tree and inherit the plains wherever the wind blew... Gene after gene was untrue, trait after trait ill-advised, and there remained the intemperate, starving, treacherous, cold demeanour of those who could not be trusted into limbo... And he smiled, thinking of the slow retraction of heat and light - in each of them - making the blood bad that the tall grass of the maremma and the dust of the cities might surfeit them. (*Lunar* pp.272-273).

This is an image of the entropic apocalypse, the gradual fading out of a decaying humanity in a universe which is also fading out, "the slow retraction of heat and light". Edouard's picture of an inverted evolutionary process appropriately echoes Henry Adams' similar conclusions, appropriate because Adams was one of the first Americans to recognize the implications of the second law of thermodynamics. In *The Education of Henry Adams* he writes about his disturbance at the idea of Ulysses S. Grant being President of the United States of America:

He had no right to exist. He should have been extinct for ages... That, two thousand years after Alexander the Great and Julius Ceasar, a man like Grant should be called - and should actually and truly be - the highest product of the most advanced evolution, made evolution ludicrous. ...The progress of evolution from President Washington to President Grant was alone evidence enough to upset Darwin.¹⁸

Earlier in the book, Adams has found a similar problem posed to him when faced with Rome, he can see no logical system of progress applying to it:

Rome could not be fitted into an orderly, middle-class, Bostonian, systematic scheme of evolution. No law of progress applied to it. Not even time - sequences - the last refuge of helpless historians -

had value for it. The Forum no more led to the Vatican than the Vatican to the Forum.¹⁹

Adams has put his finger on the central problem posed by the idea of entropy, the inversion of evolution; it destroys the fundamental basis of history which is the notion of progress. Like Adams, John Hawkes has recognized this, and the last of the novels I have grouped together as his "early works" ends on this note of ahistorical, entropic apocalypse.

II

The Lime-Twig is the first of John Hawkes' novels to deal primarily with the unconscious needs and desires of the individual, rather than giving us a more general social picture. It is also the first to display a fairly conventional plot structure, stemming perhaps from a new concern with "the conventions of the novel and in novelistic methods"²⁰ and from "an increasing need to parody the conventional novel"²¹. Briefly, the story revolves around a gang of thugs who steal a horse in order to run it in a race which it will certainly win as an outsider. The gang is run by Larry, and with the help of William Hencher they succeed in recruiting Michael Banks, an ordinary, lower-middle class young man without a criminal record, who lives in the same house as Hencher, to pose as the owner of the horse and act as a respectable cover for the gang. They also take along with them Michael's wife, Margaret, to ensure his good behaviour. The night before the race Michael has a wild time fulfilling all his sexual ambitions while Margaret is beaten by Thick,

another member of the gang, and then raped by Larry. Later that night a child is senselessly murdered by the local policeman; Michael rushes to the scene and attacks the policeman; the next day he runs on to the course during the race and throws himself in front of the horses. He is killed, but the race is stopped and Larry's plans frustrated. Each chapter begins with a quotation from the newspaper column of racing correspondent Sidney Slyter, who warns his readers of the mysterious nature of the dubious entry in the race, Rock Castle, and warns us of the events in the chapter to come. Intended as a parody of the novelist himself, he is a prophet but powerless to alter the course of events and corrupt because of his prurient, cheap interest in what is going on, "his vaguely obscene excitement in the presence of violence."²² This makes him, in Hawkes' words, "the most degrading and perversely appealing figure in the novel. I would say that in reporting the criminal actions of the novel, Slyter carries degradation to its final end."²³

Hencher opens the novel with a first-person prologue concerned with his experience of living with his mother in rented rooms in Dreary Station throughout the bombing of London during the second world war. This prologue sets the scene for the novel; Hencher's need for love after the death of his mother becomes perverted when he replaces her with Michael and Margaret; returning to the house in which his mother died to find them there, he brings them breakfast in bed and gets into their bed after they have gone out; he then draws circles round his eyes with Margaret's lipstick. The prologue ends with the words "I can get along without you, Mother"²⁴; Hencher has found someone else on whom he can lavish his need to give,

and, he hopes, to receive, love. We meet two characters called the Captain and Sparrow in this prologue; Sparrow is addicted to morphine and the Captain gives Hencher's mother some of it after she has been burnt in an attempt to save her possessions, mysteriously set on fire. These characters are in fact the Larry and Sparrow we meet in the rest of the book and they emphasize Hawkes' belief in the significance of war which is both a cause of the violence and sterility of the post-war world and a symbol of it. The landscape of war suggests the arbitrariness of pain and death; in a war situation these things fall on the innocent as well as the corrupt. Hawkes argues that this is always the case, pain and death are not the weapons of justice and morality, they are without logic, inescapable, perhaps even self-induced. Larry's military bearing and the absolute nature of his power are associated with his captaincy during the war; Sparrow's crippled legs and his consequent addiction to morphine are a result of being run over by an armoured vehicle. Like the plane which crashes in Dreary Station this vehicle was a British one, destructiveness is not the prerogative of mere political enemies. Hawkes further explains the significance of the prologue when he says that he needed to provide Michael and Margaret, the product of the war, with an historical dimension they could not possibly have expressed themselves, being too young to remember the blitz:

But it seemed to me that the drab reality of contemporary England was a direct product of the war, and that Michael and Margaret were in a sense the innocent spawn of the war. However since Michael and Margaret were mere children during the war, incapable even of recalling the bombing of London,

the problem became one of dramatizing the past, of relating war-time England to post-war England, of providing a kind of historical consciousness for characters who had none of their own. Hencher served this function. He became the carrier of Michael and Margaret's past as well as of their future; I thought of him as the seedbed of their pathetic lives.²⁵

This concern with a definite historical dimension is in contrast to the deliberately timeless, ahistorical, setting of his previous three stories, and suggests a return to the interests found in *The Cannibal*. It perhaps also suggests a move on Hawkes' part to a more realistic treatment of his novels; however this aspect of the novel is only partial, in the main action we find deliberate twistings of our expectations as readers of the story, and a curious undercutting of rational cause and effect connections. For example, Hawkes has said that the early death of Hencher is "an appropriate violation of fictional expectation"²⁶; its significance increases as we continue to read the novel. Kicked to death by Rock Castle Hencher's death prefigures Michael's; the episode is also an early example of Larry's superhuman power. Hencher's death, even though it is apparently not a murder but "voluntary" is somehow caused by Larry as a punishment for Hencher because he stopped on the way back from collecting the horse from the barge, to allow for Michael's visit to Margaret. Having been reprimanded by Larry for this action which was contrary to orders, Hencher immediately goes to get Rock Castle out of the horse-box. The connection between Larry's anger and Hencher's death is not a logical one, we cannot say that Larry *caused* the death in any rational sense, and yet the feeling of connection between the two

events is undeniable. Freud's work on dreams shows that dreams are incapable of expressing logical relations between events, but manage to show such a connection by the use of juxtaposition. This is exactly the case here. There is a sinister relationship between Larry and Rock Castle, both have mythic stature because both are created by the dreams of others; as a product of the unconscious they seem to have control over the unconscious of others. Hencher, then, walks to his death because Larry desires it, but there is also a suggestion, that both he and Michael desire death themselves, they are in fact in search of oblivion, of non-existence. As we read the novel we come to realize that the forces which involve Michael and Margaret in such a horrific progression of events are not only external ones such as the effect of war, the corruption of Larry's gang, or the consequences of legalized gambling; Michael's impotence until the last moment of the story is a result of the combination of external forces and the internal forces of unconscious desire. It is the essential importance of these internal forces which allows Tony Tanner to make the point that the novel is not merely dream-like but actually about dreaming²⁷. Rock Castle first appears, although not so named, as Michael's fantasy:

knowing that his own worst dream, and best, was of a horse which was itself the flesh of all violent dreams; knowing this dream, that the horse was in their sitting room - he had left the flat door open as if he meant to return in a moment or meant never to return - seeing the room empty except for moonlight bright as day and, in the middle of the floor, the tall upright shape of the horse draped from head to tail in an enormous sheet that falls over the eyes and hangs down stiffly from the silver jaw; knowing the horse on sight and listening while it raises one shadowed hoof on the end of a silver thread of foreleg and drives down the hoof to splinter

in a single crash one plank of that empty Dreary Station floor... - knowing all this, he heard in Hencher's first question the sound of a dirty wind, a secret thought, the sudden crashing in of the plank and the crashing shut of that door. (*Lime* pp.33-34).

This is Michael's dream of a potency strong enough to smash his entire dreary existence, lived in semi-poverty; it is a strongly sexual image ("the flesh of all violent dreams"), and a vision of total escape, a complete shedding of any form of responsibility, both financial and moral. The wish-fulfillment aspect of this dream is clear, and also Freud's view that dreams, as expressions of the unconscious mind, are oriented entirely towards the pleasure principle. Michael's rejection of responsibility, his desire never to return to the Dreary Station flat, is in agreement with Freud, who writes "...we find the child and the child's impulses still living on in the dream."²⁸ Michael's dream is fulfilled and the entire sequence of events, once put into motion, rolls on to its inevitable conclusion. It is only the power of the internal forces of desire which can allow the external forces to have their way; without this conspiracy between the two forces Michael would not have to die. Rock Castle is a mythic figure because he suggests the timeless nature of desire itself; Hencher describes him as "an ancient horse and he's bloody well run beyond memory itself..." (*Lime* p.39); and Sydney Slyter says Rock Castle is "rigid, fixed; a prison of heritage in the victorious form." (*Lime* p.124). The implication is that desire is endless, timeless, and indomitable. Larry is like-wise omnipotent; summoned up by Michael to make his dreams come true, it is he who literally "smashes" the Banks' flat, removing all trace that they ever lived there; it is he who allows

Michael an orgy of sexual fulfillment, four times with Sybilline and then with the widow, and even Annie, his next-door-neighbour, who appears simply because he has desired her. Larry is also of course the very real gangster who limes the twig in order to catch Michael because he needs him for his own nefarious purposes; but Michael would not have been caught if it had not been for his secret desires. Hawkes makes us understand that we are reading something more than a straightforward thriller largely by a change in style from the unusually realistic prologue. The effect of the passage about Michael's dream horse is reinforced when we see Rock Castle being lifted off the barge. Michael, waiting at the quayside, is enveloped in fog; he thinks to himself: "Yet whatever was to come his way would come, he knew like this - slowly and out of a thick fog. Accidents, meetings unexpected, a figure emerging to put its arms about him: where to discover everything he dreamed of except in fog." (*Lime* pp.44-45). When Michael is being frightened into behaving himself, three men intimidate him in the public lavatory at the race course, this dream element is again emphasized: "It was the triangle of his dreams, the situation he dreaded at the sound of sirens." (*Lime* p.94). Or again, at the end of the novel, when Michael is running out on to the race-track in his final effort to stop Rock Castle, the speed at which he goes is described as being so fast that it is no longer motion, "...but at its peak it becomes the long downhill deathless gliding of a dream..." (*Lime* p.171). Michael realizes that he has put himself into the hands of a power which does not work rationally and does not explain itself. The same is true of the reader once he has finished the prologue; the

story comes to him as though it came through a thick fog, the occasional clear space allows vision of an isolated event but the space closes before we can ever fully understand. Even in the apparently realistic prologue we have a hint of the power of unconscious desire and the significance of it in the novel, when Hencher climbs into the cock pit of a crashed aeroplane and pushes aside the dead pilot in order to act out a private fantasy. One of the more shocking episodes in the book also takes place in a thick fog, the murdering of Cowles, the trainer, in the steam baths; Michael feels his way "through the whiteness that was solid and rolling and solid again all at once." (*Lime* p.111).

The moral ambiguity of *The Lime-Twig* depends quite largely on the fundamentally amoral workings of the unconscious. But Hawkes also analyses the complexity of the relations between the characters in the novel who at first seem to be so easily separable into the victims and the bullies. We are introduced to the idea that there are those who control and those who are controlled in the very first pages of the book when Hencher is talking of the search for lodgings and says "Have you ever let lodgings in the winter? Was there a bed kept waiting for a gentleman?... Or perhaps you yourself were once the lonely lodger." (*Lime* p.4). One's position in life seems to be clear; the characters in the novel can be ranged against each other, with Larry, Thick, Sybilline, Little Dora and the policeman on one side, and Hencher, Michael and Margaret, and Monica, Sybilline's daughter, on the other. The victims are all characterized by their need for love, and their fear and helplessness. But what about Sparrow? Where does he fit into this neat scheme? Sparrow as

victimizer because he's a member of the gang, or Sparrow as war victim with his shattered legs and consequent addiction to morphine. The relationships between the members of the gang suggest they are bound to each other by a kind of affection and respect; particularly Larry and Sparrow. Larry has cared for Sparrow with tenderness and love even in the tightest situations. The issue is further confused by the fact that roles can change, the persecuted may become the persecutor; for example Little Dora remembers being "parked out" as a child, but now Monica is parked out with her and she's "at the good end now" (*Lime* p.72). Most important of all is the fact that the victims only receive what they themselves have secretly desired; even Margaret when she is beaten by Thick. We are told that Margaret "...had always dressed in more modest brown, bought the more modest cod, prayed for modesty, desired it." (*Lime* p.130). She has repressed anything even faintly daring or exotic or sexual in her nature:

Once the madame of a frock shop had tried to dress her in pink. And even she, Margaret, had at the last minute before the gown was packed, denied the outrageous combination of herself and the color. Once an Italian barber had tried to kiss her and she had escaped the kiss. Once Michael had given her an orchid preserved in a glass ball, and now she could not find it. How horrible she felt in pink; how horrible the touch of the barber's lips; how heavy was the glassed orchid on her breast. (*Lime* p.65).

Yet even the modest Margaret understands the obscenities Thick whispers to her as he beats her: "all at once she knew, knew well enough the kinds of things he was saying - to himself, to her - and in the darkness and hearing the faint symphonic program, she was suddenly surprised that he could say such things." (*Lime* p.128).

We should not be surprised that Margaret can imagine them, we share in her guilt because we can too. Margaret is not completely innocent, her dreams are at least partly responsible for her situation, tied down to the bed:

She would dream of the crostics and, in the dark, men with numbers wrapped round their fingers would feel her legs, or she would lie with an obscure member of the government on a leather couch, trying to remember and all the while begging for his name. (*Lime* p.68).

Even before she meets the gang her imagination creates for her the scene with Thick: "She was Banks' wife by the law, she was Margaret, and if the men did get hold of her and go at her with their truncheons or knives or knuckles, she would still be merely Margaret." (*Lime* p.70). Margaret's dreams and the beating in which they result are the clearest indication in the novel that "our unconscious desires harbor the very actions that terrorize us."²⁹ Once again in Hawkes' fiction we are witnessing the compulsive return of the repressed instinct, that instinct which eventually reappears, solid, concrete in the tangible world.

After Margaret has been beaten, Larry comes upstairs, cuts the ropes which tie her to the bedstead, deliberately cutting her wrists at the same time, and then rapes her. Robert Scholes has explained the rationale of this by a careful examination of the relationship between the events of this chapter and those of the one which follows, concerning Michael's orgy³⁰. Margaret's chapter starts at 4.00 A.M. after the beating has been finished for some time; she recalls the beating and then Larry rapes her. Michael's chapter starts at 2.00 A.M. so we can appreciate the irony that his

orgy was taking place at the same time as the beating. Michael's good behaviour was to be guaranteed with the lure of Sybilline, who was meant to let him have sex with her once; instead of that "she had given a single promise and three times already made it good" (*Lime* p.141) - by the time they have finished it is four times. When Michael goes downstairs he sees Sybilline hanging on to Larry's arm, "And there was a bruise, a fresh nasty bruise, beneath Syb's eye." (*Lime* p.158). A shadow passes over Larry's face, "he was cock of this house", (*Lime* p.158) and he takes off his shirt to reveal his metal vest; those are the clothes in which he rapes Margaret. On the logical level, Larry is annoyed with Syb for having overdone her duty, and with Michael for having challenged his position as "cock" of the house, so he goes upstairs and cuts and rapes Margaret. At this moment, Michael, like Little Dora who is "at the good end now" (*Lime* p.72), has reversed his role, no longer the victim he is directly responsible for the victimization of Margaret. Hawkes takes care to explain the time sequence to us so that we can perceive the logical and moral connection between the two episodes. However, he also disguises the structure of cause and effect by inverting the order of the two chapters and never directly talking in terms of Larry's motivation. Hawkes does this in order to maintain the extremely delicate balancing act he is involved with in this novel; he treads a subtle line between two worlds, so that there is both the logical structure of plot and the acausal inevitability of dream.

When Michael runs out on to the racecourse in front of the horse, it is, as Tony Tanner points out, an equivocal act "because in one sense it is the final self-destructive abandonment of himself to the

horse of his darkest dream; at the same time it is his victorious bid to break the dream."³¹ He runs with his arms flung out in the crucifixion pose; he is "small, yet beyond elimination" and his "single presence purported a toppling of the day." (*Lime* p.170). Perhaps he has succeeded in breaking out of the thrall of his unconscious desires but he has only managed it by choosing death; on the other hand, perhaps this is, in fact, his final commitment to those desires because, after all, he did dream of the silver horse who would splinter a plank of the floor in his flat, and with one blow destroy his entire dreary existence. Sydney Slyter's last column, preceding the final chapter, seems to emphasize the possibility of redemption for Michael "And redeemed, he has been redeemed - for there is no pathetic fun or mournful frolic like our desire, the consummation of the sparrow's wings..." (*Lime* p.163). However, Slyter's reliability to speak for anything except his own commercial and rather prurient interest in the events of the novel is questionable; ultimately we are given no guidelines by which we can search out a morally coherent conclusion to Banks' life. The last scene pictures two policemen finding Hencher's body in the stable; "the two wet men withdrew to the cars and in slow procession quit the sooty stables in Highland Green, drove separately through vacant city streets to uncover the particulars of this crime." (*Lime* p.175). We cannot believe they will succeed because in the rational terms of the external world no crime was committed; the real crimes are not even being investigated; can we even call them crimes? The policeman who was actually in the steambaths and present at the murder of Cowles was completely ineffectual. Another policeman, or perhaps

the same one, killed Monica; showing us that the police, despite their supposed commitment to the rational solution of problems and to the maintenance of law and order, are not exempt from their own dark fantasies, from unconscious destructive urges. Tony Tanner writes that *The Lime-Twig* indicates "the relative impotence of bungling rationality in competition with the sleek ruthlessness of libidinal energies."³² Certainly we have seen nothing to suggest even a measure of control for the logical, conscious mind; the conventional thriller has been turned upside down, there is no order, no controlling forces, no sorting out at the end, no comfort derived from a morally coherent conclusion. Once again Hawkes has managed to integrate his vision of the world with the fictional structure of his novel.

Second Skin tells the story of Skipper, an ineffectual, middle-aged ex-naval officer, who is writing his own story from the safety of a tropical island retreat. Superficially, the novel is even more realistic from a conventional point of view than *The Lime-Twig*; and the use of one continuous narrative voice gives it more cohesion than any of Hawkes' previous novels. Several different periods of Skipper's life are described in the novel, but not chronologically, and they give us a picture of a victim who has managed to survive. He comes from a background of suicide; his father, an undertaker, shot himself in the lavatory when Skipper was a boy, despite all his childish efforts to prevent him by playing to him on his 'cello. His wife also committed suicide soon after the marriage of their daughter, Cassandra, to a Mexican, Fernandez. While serving as Captain of the

S.S. Starfish, he is humiliated by one of his own men, Tremlow, who leads a successful mutiny against him and is responsible for the vicious beating he receives at the hands of the mutineers, before they escape in the lifeboats leaving him once more "in control" of his ship. Fernandez leaves Cassandra, and their small daughter, Pixie, only to be found by Skipper, who is on Shore Patrol, brutally murdered and mutilated by sailors whose sport it was to let homosexuals pick them up and then kill them when they reached their rooms. Skipper leaves the navy at the end of the war and assumes responsibility for Cassandra and Pixie; they travel across America to New York and then proceed to an island in the Atlantic. Skipper's aim is to try to prevent Cassandra killing herself; this provides the central dramatic tension of the book. The Atlantic Island is cold and barren; they stay with Miranda, an anti-life force, whose black brassiere becomes a symbol of perverted earth motherhood. She seems to be in league with some of the other people on the island, Captain Red, Jomo and Bub, against Skipper in his crusade to save an indifferent Cassandra. Skipper fails again, Cassandra throws herself from the top of the lighthouse and he leaves the Atlantic island for an island in the tropics. Here Skipper is respected and admired, head of a little community consisting of Sonny, who had been his mess-boy on the Starfish; Catalina Kate, his native mistress; and Sister Josie, a nun but also a native of the island; his profession is that of Artificial Inseminator. This island is calm and lush, an idyllic landscape which is the exact opposite of the Atlantic island. Catalina Kate is pregnant; although the paternity of the child is questionable, Skipper is delighted, and writes his book with the

intention that he will finish it at the same time as the child is born. Both events are celebrated in the graveyard, as is the tradition on the Night of All Saints.

Both islands have realistic solidity in the way they are described; apparently Hawkes was given a research grant to spend time on Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard, and more time on a tropical island somewhere. However it is probably already apparent that this tropical island is in many ways an island of the imagination. Skipper writes "that it is Catalina Kate who keeps the hammock filled with flowers for me, who keeps it a swaying bright bed of petals just for me, and that Catalina Kate is fully aware that there must be *no thorns among the flowers* in the hammock."³³ (Italics mine). This is our first indication that the island is not part of the real world, where thorns and flowers are inseparable. Skipper continues by saying that it is "a wandering island, of course, unlocated in space and quite out of time" (*Skin* p.44); and later on in the book he writes "our wandering island has become quite invisible. Only a mirage of shimmering water to all the ships at sea, only the thick black spice of night and the irregular whispering of an invisible shore." (*Skin* p.95). On this island the ineffectual Skipper, despised or at best patronized by others in the past, has become universally admired and respected. Sister Josie comes to him and asks him to accompany her down to the swamp to see Catalina Kate; when he agrees to go with her he describes her reaction as "Trembling of the little dark features. Master coming. Gift of God. Ecstasy." (*Skin* p.88). When he and Cassandra were travelling

across America their bus had a blow-out on the edge of a military reservation. Three soldiers going A.W.O.L. accosted them, and forced Cassandra to allow them each to kiss her; this upset Skipper more than Cassandra who appeared to enjoy it, and when they had finished Cassandra said "Nobody wants to kiss you, Skipper." (*Skin* p.43). On the tropical island Skipper is able to write:

I have triumphed over Cassandra too, since there are many people who wish nothing more than to kiss me when the midday heat occasionally sends me to the hammock or when the moon is full, stealing, gliding into the warmth and stillness of Plantation House, or in long silvery lines following me to the edge of a moon-lit sea. For a kiss. For a shadowy kiss from me. (*Skin* p.47).

The novel is really a portrait of a man; a portrait which is achieved both directly and indirectly as we read Skipper's version of the events of his life and then start to question his reliability as a narrator of fact. His record is a totally subjective one; about half way through the novel he writes:

And so I have already stepped once more from behind the scenes of my naked history and having come this far I expect that I will never really be able to conceal myself completely in all those scenes which are even now on the tip of my tongue and crowding my eye. (*Skin* p.87).

Of course, Skipper has always been visible in the scenes of his life, from the beginning of the novel; his present self inevitably affects the view we have of him in the past. He describes himself as "a man of courage" (*Skin* p.9) and as a "courageous victim" (*Skin* p.23); no one would question that he is a victim, but the word courageous does not seem very apt unless we find courage in his extraordinary ability to remain so passive, in the fact of his chin always being

at the disposal of his persecutor's fist. He is weak; his pathetic attempts to forestall the enemy forces are never more effective than his attempt to stop his father committing suicide. The inaptness of his playing of the 'cello is almost poignant because he is a child, but similar behaviour becomes absurd in an adult. But Skipper's impotence is, in Hawkes' view the impotence of men in general when faced with that most hopeless and pointless battle, the battle against death itself. Cassandra does not have a high opinion of him; she ignores his advice, and she blames him for her mother's death. There is a suggestion that Skipper's impotence is sexual as well, even on the tropical island he is only an *artificial* inseminator, and this view is supported by Gertrude's steady decline into alcoholism and a succession of whirlwind affairs. Skipper writes that "the further she went downhill the more I cared. And Gertrude was no match for my increasing tolerance." (*Skin* p.112). Gertrude must have despised this ineffectual magnanimity with its overtones of moral superiority.

I have already mentioned that from the beginning of the novel we learn to consider that Skipper is perhaps a rather unreliable narrator. As events on the Atlantic island progress, we wonder if he is in fact suffering from some kind of a persecution complex. Tremlow's mutiny has obviously been a severely traumatic experience which upset his self-confidence and self-esteem; for the first time, perhaps, he was faced with a situation that he could not control and yet which he knew he ought to have been able to control, he had no excuses for this evidence of his personal shortcomings. He explains the mutiny by making Tremlow into an incarnation of evil; for all

we know he might be right, but this obsession with Tremlow begins to seem to be the product of a rather wandering mind. This becomes particularly noticeable when Skipper is at the high school dance; a girl comes to tell him that somebody wishes to see him in the cemetery; thinking it is perhaps Miranda having an asthma attack, he goes outside only to be attacked as he is walking across the car-park with a deluge of hard-hitting snowballs. Skipper writes:

Tremlow, I thought, when the hard-packed snowball of the second hit burst in my face, Tremlow, thinking that only Tremlow's malice - it was black and putty thick, a curd incomprehensibly coughed up just for me - could account for the singular intensity of this treachery intended to befall me in the parking lot, could account for the raging meanness behind the ambush. (*Skin* p. 77).

The intensity of the attack is extraordinary, "From every corner of the lot they came, and from the vicinity of the all-but-hidden cars...and even, I thought, from as far as the cemetery." (*Skin* p.77). Skipper realizes after the attack is over that his cry to Tremlow was a cry to "the phantom bully, the ringleader of my distant past" (*Skin* p.78), and that the enemy is the enemy of the present. But it hardly seems possible that Jomo, Bub and Captain Red could organize such a concerted attack with snowballs coming from every direction. In a way it suggests that Skipper *is* fighting "A phantom bully", a dark memory, there is a nightmare quality to the whole incident. But Hawkes has very carefully blended realistic and fantastic elements; when Skipper returns to the dance Jomo is dancing with Cassandra, he is panting, and his trousers are sopping wet to the knee. The whole problem is further complicated if we return to the view expressed by Hawkes in *The Lime-Twig*, that our

unconscious obsessions can express themselves in real events; thus, paradoxically, Skipper's "persucution complex" could have resulted in those very things happening which he feared most.

This "explanation" of the novel is, however, at best, unsatisfactory, although not entirely invalid. It rests on an artificial dichotomy between subjective and objective recording of experience; it operates by applying the rational causal approach which can only fully apply to realistic fiction. In Hawkes' world subjective experience is just as valid, if not more so, as an experience which conforms to some objective standard of "the real". It also fails to take into account the hints we receive from Skipper himself, that the Atlantic island is just as much a product of his imagination as the tropical one. He refers to the first island as "all mine" (*Skin* p.52), as "my mythic rock in a cold sea" (*Skin* p.139); he is "convinced that in its way it too was enchanted" (*Skin* p.46), and at the beginning of the novel he remembers Miranda and writes "For a moment I seem to see both magic island and imaginary girl." (*Skin* p.12). In *City of Words*, Tony Tanner points out that on the tropical island Skipper seems to think of himself both as Priam, the last king of Troy, and as Prospero, the ruler of Shakespeare's magical island, in which case both Cassandra and Miranda are his daughters; and if they are his daughters then both islands are part of his kingdom.³⁴ The second island had "no thorns among the flowers", an indication that it was not part of the real world; the first island, that grim, dark barren place, appears to have no flowers among the thorns, which is just as unrealistic. Sonny's farewell to

Skipper, Cassandra and Pixie when he puts them on the bus to New York, suggests that the word "island" is not being used literally but to describe a state of consciousness, a place of residence which can be willed to exist, which depends on individual perception:

Take your ladies on off to your island - I'm going to be on mine - no unfaithful lovers on my island, Skipper, just me, now you keeps your island the same. Good-by now, and you remember, Skipper, I'm going to lie me down on my island and just look at them pictures and think of you and Pixie and Miss Cassandra. So long! (*Skin* p.29).

The Atlantic island is an artistic formalization of Skipper's experience at the time when Cassandra was moving towards suicide; when everything seemed to be against him, and he was constantly faced with his inability to save his daughter, with his impotence in the face of the forces of death. Perhaps Skipper is trying to evade responsibility for Cassandra's death by portraying a world where everyone is against him and he has no chance to win, but it is also a portrait of his state of mind at the time. If we accept that Skipper is an artist, shaping and controlling his experience, we come to realize that symbol and metaphor are tools he can use to convey that experience to his readers; thus many of the events he describes which could be thought of as the products of an unbalanced mind, are in fact symbolic or metaphoric statements about the power of the forces of death and their gradual encroachment on Cassandra. Skipper is involved in an imaginative recreation of his past, this is possible "since of course history is a dream already dreamt and destroyed" (*Skin* p.44), which means he has total freedom in his new creation. Hawkes seems to be suggesting that all people make use of

artistic freedom when they rewrite their own past; but more importantly he also suggests that the individual may create the world he lives in in the present as well as redefining his past. It is at this point that we can see Hawkes has moved much closer towards the Surrealist's position; he has become involved in trying to liberate the imagination and expand the definition of reality. At the same time, he has moved away from Freud's position that any expression of our unconscious should remain censored by the "watchman", who operates between the unconscious and the preconscious except when we are asleep. The unconscious, like fantasy, is entirely at the service of the pleasure principle, and, for Freud, it is a sign of maturity when we leave behind the claims of the pleasure principle in favour of the reality principle. In *Second Skin*, the dream-like wish-fulfillment of the tropical island is not only an artistic formalization of the change in Skipper's consciousness, it is partly the *cause* of that change. Like the Surrealists, Hawkes is seeing fantasy as an attainable reality, not a mental activity that should be repressed in adults. Skipper's tropical island is a state of consciousness; Hawkes shows us that our subjective perception of existence is, in fact, the existence we inhabit, in much the same way as Pynchon does in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Miranda, Jomo, Bub and Captain Red are representatives or agents of death; their apparent hatred of Skipper is the hatred felt by death for the fight with life for a victim. They lure Cassandra with them and she goes only too willingly. This explains why we know so little about what their aims and motives are, what they actually do to Cassandra on the boat trip even though there are

sexual overtones to the incident. We also come to understand the significance of Miranda's role in the story, why she cuts the teats of Pixie's bottles and empties out the milk. Wherever Skipper goes in the house he starts to find the saucers in which Miranda burns special powers in order to relieve her asthma: "...stink of the asthma powders, stink of secret designs and death..." (*Skin* p.63). It is significant that Miranda, the agent of death, has an illness which causes her to have difficulty breathing, that function which is the most obvious necessity for life. The description of Cassandra holding Miranda's wool when she knits is powerful because it shows us the link of blackness between the two women, and what Skipper sees as the human enslavement by death.

And when Miranda sat in front of the fire to knit, Cassandra was always with her, always kneeling at her feet and holding the yarn. Black yarn. Heavy soft coil of rich black yarn dangling from Cassandra's wrists. Halter on the white wrists. Our slave chains. Between the two of them always the black umbilicus, the endless and maddening absorption in the problems of yarn. It lived in the cave of Miranda's sewing bag - not a black sweater for some lucky devil overseas, nor even a cap for Pixie, but only this black entanglement, their shapeless squid. (*Skin* p.63).

Highlights of helplessness? Mere trivial record of collapse? Say rather, that it is the chronical of recovery... (*Skin* p.137).

Skipper has moved on an imaginative level from the Atlantic island to the tropical island; he feels he has "redeemed" (*Skin* p.46) his father's profession by becoming an artificial inseminator, "until now the cemetery has been my battleground. But no more." (*Skin* p.45). The reference to the cemetery is an important one, it is an image which pervades the book. His childhood revolved round the cemetery

because his father was an undertaker, the Sunday outings for the family were taken in the hearse; at Gertrude's funeral Skipper refers to the road running through the cemetery as being "like a bridle path through a hovering bad dream" (*Skin* p.115); when he is attacked at the high school dance the parking lot is next to the cemetery and some of the snowballs seem to come from there; the last scene on the Atlantic island describes Skipper going to the cemetery where Cassandra is buried and digging a hole in the grave for a parcel which might contain a two-month-old foetus, perhaps Cassandra's. Once again the conclusion of this novel is ambiguous; despite his protestations to the contrary, the ending might suggest that Skipper has abandoned himself to death, he celebrates the birth of Catalina Kate's baby in the graveyard and his occupation as *artificial* inseminator might indicate he has also abandoned genuinely creative, vital sexuality. However, another interpretation is open to us which is more in harmony with the total picture we have of the book. Skipper has finally learnt to accept death as part of life; his fear of death made him fight an endless battle against it, a battle which he inevitably lost on every occasion. He no longer fears the cemetery so the celebration of the birth of Catalina Kate's baby takes place at the same time as the celebration of death on the Night of All Saints, in a symbolic affirmation of the essential indivisibility of life and death. Throughout the book Skipper has also been surrounded by viciousness, brutality, aggression of all kinds; if we turn to Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* a connection is made between aggression and the death instinct, Freud made the assumption that extroverted aggression (sadism) in human

beings is derived from a primary masochism, and he then identified this primary masochism with a death instinct.

We thus arrive at the idea that life and death are in some sort of unity at the organic level, that at the human level they are separated into conflicting opposites, and that at the human level the extroversion of the death instinct [i.e. aggression] is a mode of resolving a conflict that does not exist at the organic level.³⁵

Skipper's tropical retreat is peaceful, happy and harmonious, without a trace of aggression of any kind, simply because he has achieved a reconciliation within himself between Eros and Thanatos. Brown's work also suggests a most illuminating interpretation of why the island is wandering and invisible, apart from the more obvious explanation that it is an artistic formulation of Skipper's consciousness. Brown maintains that only repressed, neurotic man lives in history, in chronological time and rationally locatable space:

Man, the discontented animal, unconsciously seeking the life proper to his species, is man in history: repression and the repetition-compulsion generate historical time. Repression transforms the timeless instinctual compulsion to repeat into the forward-moving dialectic of neurosis which is history... And conversely, life not repressed - organic life below man and human life if repression were overcome - is not in historical time.³⁶

Skipper has overcome the repression of his death instinct and now exists quite outside time; it is a chronicle of true recovery, but there still remains that small needle of doubt over his position as the artificial inseminator. Partly, it is a wry dig at the role of the artist, Skipper is, after all, just one in a series of Hawkes' portrayals of the artist. There is an attractive irony in the fact

that critics of *Second Skin*, including myself, discuss Skipper's unreliability as a narrator, when we consider that Skipper is an image of the writer; and the fact that Skipper is an artificial inseminator is another gently ironic view of the artist as distanced, removed from the world he creates, artificially putting together two characters and inseminating them. It also seems to me that the slight doubt Skipper's occupation creates in the mind of the reader is quite deliberate; it maintains ambiguity, paradox and irony through to the end of the book. Norman O. Brown has said that these qualities are the ones which subvert the "reasonableness" of language, language which is based on the formal logical law of contradiction,

We may therefore entertain the hypothesis that formal logic and the law of contradiction are the rules whereby the mind submits to operate under general conditions of repression...And conversely, 'dialectical' would be the struggle of the mind to circumvent repression and make the unconscious conscious.³⁷

Through this maintenance of a creative ambiguity Hawkes has thus affirmed Skipper's attempt, both in his life and in "his" novel, to circumvent repression; and he has also affirmed his own attempt to make the unconscious conscious in his fiction.

III

John Hawkes' last three novels have close links between them; in an interview on B.B.C. radio he referred to them as "almost a trilogy"³⁸. On the same occasion he contrasted them with his previous

work, describing them as novels of "sexual life" rather than "sexual death", though of course death is a constant figure in the tableau; Hawkes seems to be giving artistic form to the recognition that Eros and Thanatos are fused into essential inseparability. There is a definite progression in the three novels whereby actual eroticism becomes less important and the imagination becomes the central focus. *Death, Sleep and the Traveller* is pivotal in this way; there is some description of sexual activity but our understanding of the central character's sexual identity is quite largely derived from his descriptions of his dreams; he is most interested in "trying to *articulate* the sensual mind" (italics mine)³⁹ not merely to experience it. In *Travesty* all sex is remembered; the novel is about the power of the imagination, finally its central meaning lies with the narrator's desire to experience the moment of death through an imaginative construction of it; the recalled sexuality takes a secondary position because "*Imagined life is more exhilarating than remembered life.*"⁴⁰ The development in moral terms of the three central characters, is also interesting; Hawkes seems to be pushing his readers, quite deliberately, into abandoning traditional moral attitudes about certain actions that amount virtually to taboos in our culture. Cyril, in *The Blood Oranges*, refuses to take any moral responsibility for Hugh's death, though conventional morality would blame him more than anyone else; Allert, in *Death Sleep and the Traveller*, has progressed to being a probable murderer, but a weak one, a murderer by default more than anything else; the narrator of *Travesty*, we never do discover his name, is a "strong, clear, detestable, murderer"⁴¹ in conventional terms; Hawkes has gradually

brought his readers to the point where we can read about a wilful murderer and abandon all claims to a moral position on the situation. All three novels seem to be firmly based in realistically described situations; however this reality has surprisingly little to do with the central focus of the novels because both the characters and the reader respond to these situations as if they were art; the narrator of *Travesty* summarises this paradoxical viewpoint when he refers to "the validity of the fiction of living" (*Travesty* p.125). An extraordinary sentence which sees life as fiction but also sees that in no way does this invalidate or degrade the significance of life. In all three novels Hawkes seems to be working from the position first verbalized by Jutta in *The Cannibal*, "...life was not miraculous but clear, not right but undeniable" (*Cannibal* p.143). In *The Blood Oranges* Cyril says to Catherine, "I can give you clarity...but not understanding"⁴²; and in *Travesty* the narrator says, "I have never expected anything at all from my life except clarity. I have pursued clarity as relentlessly as the worshippers pursue their Christ." (*Travesty* p.103). I would like to suggest that this is why none of the novels finally give us the impression of realism, though all do superficially; the concern for clarity creates an extremely well-visualized world, but Hawkes has abandoned the connecting tissue normally supplied by the conscious mind; there is no morality, and no logical explanation in terms of social, psychological (except for *The Blood Oranges*) or historical structures. As Allert says in *Death, Sleep and the Traveller*, "...it was all exactly as I knew it would be, concreteness rotating toward illusion." (*Death* p.52).

The Blood Oranges examines the complex web of relationships between two married couples, who meet for the first time somewhere on the Adriatic coast. Cyril and Fiona are both "sex-aestheticians" (*Oranges* p.21), in Cyril's own words for he is the narrator of the story; they are a couple who are neither jealous nor possessive of one another, they have each had numerous affairs with others, generally another couple, and their whole lives seem to have revolved around "Love's pink panorama" (*Oranges* p.1). Hugh and Catherine arrive in the village with their three children and an old dog; Cyril and Fiona immediately take them under their wing and suggest they take the bungalow next door to their own. Cyril and Catherine sleep together on the first night; Fiona does everything she can to seduce Hugh but he resists any attempt at going further than flirtation, pretending that he is unaware of his wife's relationship with Cyril. Hugh's puritan approach to life conflicts disastrously with the other three's attitude, and eventually the foursome is broken up by Hugh's death by hanging. Cyril narrates the story in retrospect and it is interspersed with passages concerning his life at the time he is writing. After Hugh's death, Fiona took the children into her care and left the village, leaving Cyril to look after Catherine. The shock of her husband's death, and her fear that she is in some way responsible for it, has made Catherine withdraw into herself; at the beginning of the novel she is being looked after in a sanctuary in the village where Cyril visits her once a week; but by the end of the story she has returned to the bungalow to live with Cyril, and although it is on a platonic basis, the hope is given that she will regain her internal

security and the relationship will be reactivated sexually as well.

The contrast in sexual attitudes between Hugh and Cyril is very striking, with Hugh exemplifying a repressed sexuality founded on guilt. When we first see Hugh, Cyril realizes that his face is an exact replica of an image of St. Peter sculpted into the stone arch of the small church in the village. Immediately the association of St. Peter with the concept of denial is transferred on to Hugh, who will do his best, throughout the remainder of the novel, to deny not only his own pleasure but that of the others as well. The association is also a specifically Christian one, suggesting perhaps the way in which Christianity has supported and encouraged the repression of sexual instincts. This is made clearer even earlier in the novel when Fiona and Cyril are in the little church; Cyril looks at the small pulpit and thinks that he "might have been standing in some gutted cellar of the ancient world, some pit giving on to secret viaducts packed with the old world's excrement." (*Oranges* p.21). Hugh's sexual attitudes are associated with the old world throughout the novel; Cyril refers to "Hugh's mediaevalism" (*Oranges* p.178) and says that Hugh is still not free from "the terror that once engulfed the barbarians..." (*Oranges* p.139). However, Hugh is not merely a throwback, Cyril uses this language to suggest just how antiquated he feels Hugh's attitudes are, but the presence of Meredith, Hugh's eldest daughter, suggests that the attitudes are ongoing in the modern world as well. Meredith and Hugh are close allies; Meredith despises Cyril, and would have liked "to disrupt the firm community of the two families" (*Oranges* p.221). Despite

the fact that she is still only a child she cannot bring herself to bathe in the sea naked or to relax in any way. She is constantly on the look-out for any sign of sexuality or even friendship between the adults and conducts her comments on this with Cyril in the form of hissed, vituperative whispers. Early in the novel the four adults are on the beach, Fiona and Catherine remove their halter tops and they all sit in easy sexual intimacy. Meredith appears running out of the trees calling for her mother, so Cyril rises to fend her off while the women dress. "'Don't think I don't know what you're up to', whispered Meredith and shook off my hand," (*Oranges* p.45). Meredith's precocious suspicion seems oddly perverted in one so young, and suggest the way in which the repression of sexuality often results in an unnatural obsession with it, even if that obsession is based on denial and rejection. Cyril overhears Hugh trying to persuade Catherine to let him make love to her, "'Don't be afraid of Daddy Bear', he was saying, 'don't be afraid of Daddy Bear...'" (*Oranges* p.153). Cyril finds an explanation for this in visualizing a rather nervous Catherine on their honeymoon, but the force of his original comment cannot be obviated by sympathetic explanations: "So this was what we had bargained for, Fiona and Catherine and I - this sad and presumptuous appeal from a man who had spent all the nights of his marriage fishing for the love of his wife with the hook of a nursery persona." (*Oranges* p.153). Unable to accept the force of his own sexuality, and his desire for Fiona, Hugh resorts to masturbation; Cyril chances upon him lying on the beach moving to the rhythm of his passion, and at first thinks Fiona is with him; but then he realizes that Hugh only has the pebbles of the beach

and his own clothes bunched up underneath him. At odds with his own sexuality, he has no comprehension of Fiona's either; in an anguished conversation with Cyril he says "She wants me, for God's sake" (*Oranges* p.175), as though this were a horrifying desire, and warns Cyril "If we don't work together, if we don't stop this thing, you'll lose her." (*Oranges* p.174). He cannot understand that Fiona might want him, even love him, without wishing to exclude either Cyril from her affections or Catherine from his. He resorts to clichéd generalisations, like "Manhood rebels at infidelity, it's only natural", in order to justify himself; and finally the poverty and sordidness of his attitude to sex is revealed when he accuses Cyril of "sucking two eggs at once": "For some men one woman's not enough. Some men would suck all the eggs in sight, if they could. But you're finished. From now on you're going to stick to just one woman, understand?" (*Oranges* p.243). As Cyril says, Hugh is a "sex-singer" of sorts, "But in Hugh's dry mouth our lovely song became a shriek" (*Oranges* p.58); he was "a man who was obviously determined to fill our idyllic days and nights with all the obscure tensions of his own unnecessary misery and impending doom." (*Oranges* p.86).

One of the most significant scenes in the novel occurs when Hugh encourages the others to accompany him on a visit to an old fortress which is on a promontory that juts into the sea, not far from the village. They are not particularly interested but Hugh is determined because he is looking for something he is convinced he will find at the bottom of the dungeons, "It's there all right. I dreamed about it." (*Oranges* p.195). Clearly Hugh's exploration is

centred on his own unconscious mind. The fortress has been burned and its relation to Hugh is emphasized when he describes it as "a reflection of some fiery nightmare" (*Oranges* p.192); this is an accurate description of Hugh with his mutilated body (he only has one arm) and his tortured sexuality. Towards the end of the novel he makes the relationship even clearer in a conversation with Cyril, "Your lust is fulfilled. My lust isn't. And between your lust and mine I'm going up in smoke, burning away." (*Oranges* p.251). After an unpleasant descent Hugh finds what he is looking for, an ancient, rusted chastity belt; Cyril calls it "this artful relic of fear and jealousy" (*Oranges* p.207); fear and jealousy are at the very bottom of Hugh's sexuality. Inevitably, one night Cyril goes to Catherine and finds that Hugh has forced her to put the chastity belt on; he goes and faces the situation with Hugh, both of them finally bringing their views into the open, and then returns to Catherine, removes the belt and makes love to her. The next morning Cyril finds that Hugh has succumbed and spent his first night with Fiona. The scene in which Hugh's and Catherine's old dog is buried on the sea-shore is described before the one I have just related, but chronologically it takes place afterwards; we know this because during the discussion between the two men Hugh says, "You don't mind if I take the dog and just disappear - do you, boy?" (*Oranges* p.246). This is significant because Hugh buries the dog on the exact spot where he first admitted his passion for Fiona, "the very location where he himself had once sprawled dreaming his naked dream." (*Oranges* p.216). Hugh is "moving to the rhythm of some dark death of his own." (*Oranges* p.215). According to Marcuse repression transforms the death

instincts into socially useful aggression and morality, but at the same time, by repressing Eros, the death instincts are reinforced:

Civilization thus plunges into a destructive dialectic: the perpetual restrictions on Eros ultimately weaken the life instincts and thus strengthen and release the very forces against which they were 'called up' - those of destruction.⁴³

Hugh's rejection of Eros is inevitably pushing him towards death; Cyril digs the dog's grave and refers to himself, both in terms of the digger of this grave on the site of Hugh's masturbatory fantasy, and the person who has on a more general level exposed Hugh's twisted sexuality, as "the man who had dug to the center of Hugh's fantasy and laid bare the wet and sandy pit of death." (*Oranges* p.221).

Hugh's actual death has already been prefigured early in the novel, when he and Cyril go on a photographic expedition, to enlarge Hugh's collection of peasant nudes. He suddenly collapses in extreme pain, explaining his situation as "Hand of death inside my chest, that's all." (*Oranges* p.71). Cyril comments, "If mere photographs had led in some devious way to this kind of prostration, what would happen to him when Fiona finally managed to gather him into her lovely arms?" (*Oranges* p.72). Hugh is eventually found by Cyril and Fiona, in his photographic studio in the village, naked, hanging by the neck from a rope in the corner of the room. Both Cyril and Fiona agree that it was an accident, "At least he wasn't trying to kill himself..." (*Oranges* p.268). At first sight, this seems an odd assumption, it is difficult to hang yourself accidentally. There seem to be two implications to this; firstly, the possibility that Hugh was in fact involved in some bizarre sexual

practice that accidentally went too far, he was holding one of his photographs of a peasant nude in his hand; secondly, it suggests how we are meant to apportion the moral responsibility for Hugh's death. Cyril has already told Hugh that his anguish is his own problem, "your defeat, chagrin, antagonism - whatever you feel - is your responsibility, not mine." (*Oranges* p.247). When he tries to explain things to Catherine he insists that the death was an accident:

I...explained to Catherine that Hugh's death was an accident, inspired, so to speak, by his cameras, his peasant nudes, his ingesting of the sex-song itself. It was not our shared love that had triggered Hugh's catastrophe. It was simply that his private interests, private moods, had run counter to the actualities of our foursome, so that his alien myth of privacy had established a psychic atmosphere conducive to an accident of that kind. Hugh's death hinged only on himself. And yet for that death even he was not to blame.

'Hugh was not a suicide', I murmured, 'believe me.' (*Oranges* p.211).

Hugh's death, then, was an accident, in so far as no one was responsible for it, not even he himself strove for it, it was the inevitable and appalling result of centuries of the human repression and perversion of sexuality.

It must already be apparent that Hugh and Cyril could not be more different:

As for me, since late boyhood and early manhood, and throughout the more than eighteen years of my nearly perfect marriage, I always allowed myself to assume whatever shape was destined to by my own in the silken weave of Love's pink panorama. I always went where the thread wound. No awkward hesitation, no prideful ravaging. At an early age I came to know that the gods fashion us to spread the legs of woman,

or throw us together for no reason except that we complete the picture, so to speak, and join loin to loin often and easily, humbly, deliberately. Throughout my life I have never denied a woman young or old. Throughout my life I have simply appeared at Love's will. See me as small white porcelain bull lost in the lower left-hand corner of that vast tapestry, see me as great white creature horned and mounted on a trim little golden sheep in the very center of Love's most explosive field. See me as bull, or ram, as man, husband, lover, a tall and heavy stranger in white shorts on a violet tennis court. I was there always. I completed the picture. I took my wife, took her friends, took the wives of my friends and a fair roster of other girls and women, from young to old and old to young, whenever the light was right or the music sounded. (*Oranges* pp. 1-2).

Yet Cyril recognizes that his relaxed pleasure is disapproved of by many, and Hawkes makes use of this to subvert any conventional moral responses on the part of his readers:

There are those who in fact would like nothing better than to fill my large funnel-shaped white thighs with the fish hooks of their disapproval. There are those who would deny me all my nights in Fiona's bed if they could, would strip me of silken dressing gown and fling me into some greasy white-tiled pit of naked sex-offenders. For some, love itself is a crime. (*Oranges* p.36).

Cyril has lived his life without knowing real pain; there have been lover's quarrels, partings, failures, but he has never experienced the horror and anguish that go with sexual jealousy and possessiveness: "The nausea, the red eyes, the lips white in blind grief and silent hate, these may have been the externals of a pain that belonged to Hugh but never once to me." (*Oranges* p.57). He and Fiona have caused pain to others and been saddened at the sight of "...each pair of friends who, weaker and less fortunate than ourselves, went down in flames." (*Oranges* p.56). This attitude seems casual to say the

least; structures of guilt are so deeply ingrained in all of us that Cyril's lack of guilt seems shocking and callous. However, guilt rarely changes the way we behave, it just makes us feel more moral because we suffer for what we've done. Marcuse writes that one of the things which would characterize progress beyond the rule of the performance principle would be "the freedom from guilt and fear."⁴⁴ Clearly Cyril is an example of an unrepressed man; he and Fiona have no children, a decision they took many years before, and this suggests that their sexuality has been geared towards the pleasure principle instead of the performance principle which puts the emphasis on procreation.

Cyril is an aesthete; a word which originally meant "pertaining to the senses" and then gradually changed to mean "pertaining to beauty and art". In Cyril the two meanings of the word are fused as he is a man with an extremely sensual response to beauty. We see him drawing into his mouth, with great delicacy, the fuzzy yellow balls of the mimosa flower; appreciating their beauty, not just in a visual way, but in the form of a passionate kiss (*Oranges* p.54). Cyril's remark, already quoted, that he can give Catherine clarity but not understanding, connects with his references to himself as "the headless god" (*Oranges* p.107). The implication is that Cyril's being is not dominated by the intellectual, the rational, the moral, but by the senses, he responds to life with his non-cognitive being. In a chapter in *Eros and Civilization* called "The Aesthetic Dimension", Marcuse writes "The basic experience in this dimension is sensuous rather than conceptual; the aesthetic perception is essentially intuition, not notion."⁴⁵ I think this explains Cyril's

reluctance to have a final, explanatory showdown with Hugh until it is absolutely necessary; he wanted the events to occur as a result of a sensual response in Hugh, he encouraged every possible sensual situation, for example the grape-tasting game, but Hugh subdues his response, and would only act after the situation had been brought on to the level of conscious, verbalized understanding. It was a last resort on Cyril's part, but it did not resolve the crisis at all. Cyril's aesthetic response to experience is showed most clearly and sympathetically in the scene where he and a newly-revived Catherine watch a boat being moved on blocks greased with blood through the village to the sea for launching:

Quietly I smiled at the symmetry of orange sky,
chunks of bloodied wood, oars that projected into
nothing more than air, boat that still lay several
yards from the vast tide that would float it into life
and yet would one day reduce it to nothing more than
a few cracked wooden ribs half buried in sand.
(*Oranges* p.130).

The clarity of Cyril's perception, both visual and conceptual, is startling; but there is no attempt at understanding, at analysing how or why the boat, now so new and functional, will be reduced to a few scraps of wood in the sand.

Fiona tells Catherine that Cyril is different from other men, a remark that Catherine interpretes as meaning that Cyril is "the perfect man" (*Oranges* p.107). However, Cyril's unrepressed sexuality and his aestheticism have their less attractive side when we see his insensitivity to more simple people such as peasants and children. When he takes Hugh's and Catherine's three children off to make garlands of flowers in the wood, he has to combat Meredith's

sullenness. But despite this problem, he really has no idea how to communicate with people who are on a different level from himself; in this kind of situation he observes from the outside, he is distanced, he creates a beautiful tableau, but he can never really be creative with children because he is incapable of joining in their world. Sometimes this kind of response is shared by the other three adults; for example the episode with the goat girl. This occurs immediately after the scene with the launching of the boat, so that we can see the other side of the aesthete's appreciation, its coldness and the way in which it turns people into objects. Climbing a hill early one morning to see the sunrise, Cyril, Fiona, Hugh and Catherine see a girl with a herd of goats on the other side of the hill. The girl runs up to talk to them:

We crowded around her shamelessly, Catherine took hold of a bare elbow, Hugh vied with Fiona for a closer look.
'She's mine, baby, all mine!'
'Fiona saw her first', Catherine said. 'Let Fiona try to talk to her'.
'That's right', I murmured, 'Fiona's more bucolic than the rest of us'.
'Never mind. I'll give each of you a little taste!' (*Oranges* p.143).

When Hugh and Cyril go on the photographic expedition, the peasant girl is treated in much the same way; Hugh calls her "perfect", Cyril says "let's hunt her down", and then refers to her as "our quarry" (*Oranges* pp.58-59). Again she is treated as an object by both of them, but there is a difference between Cyril and Hugh brought out by this episode. Hugh's aesthetic appreciation is limited to the photograph, a carefully framed, desexualized, piece of paper. He is an example of the voyeuristic aspect of the artist

who separates his art from his life; Cyril refers to "the probing unblushing gaze of his high-powered cameras" (*Oranges* pp. 60-61), a gaze Hugh himself is incapable of emulating; instead he removes sensuality to a safe distance from himself and works on his collection of peasant nudes. Both Cyril and Hugh treat the girl in the same way, but Cyril has a sensual response to his life which in part makes up for this; he thinks that "At best a photograph could result in small satisfaction" (*Oranges* pp.60-61), because his creativity has been used to turn his life into art, his response to beauty is first-hand and sensual.

Fundamentally, *The Blood Oranges* is concerned with the conflict between unrepressed life lived in the aesthetic dimension and repressed life lived under the restrictions of the reality principle. Cyril narrates the story and so the dominant vision of existence is his; this suggests a reason why the novel, though so concretely visualized, does not finally give us the impression of realism. Marcuse's chapter on the aesthetic dimension starts with the words:

Obviously, the aesthetic dimension cannot validate a reality principle. Like imagination, which is its constitutive mental faculty, the realm of aesthetics is essentially 'unrealistic': it has retained its freedom from the reality principle at the price of being ineffective in the reality.⁴⁶

Cyril's control over the situations presented in the novel is unusual and reinforces the view that the novel is far from realistic. On the beach one day, spread out in relaxed intimacy with the children at a distance, the conversation turns towards domesticity and Cyril realizes Catherine will soon revert to her role of mother: "...I saw

distinctly our rigidly approaching nemesis (a small goat prancing out of a sacred wood)." (*Oranges* p.89). Shortly after this a little goat appears on the beach:

Was it dream, chance, coincidence, or was my state of mind a menagerie of desire from which real animals might spring? Could it be that one of my speechless creatures of joy and sentiment had torn itself loose from the tapestry that only I could see? Was it now bearing down upon us with blue eyes and the wind in its hair? Was the little goat that had danced among us in my mind now going to leave its little hoofprints in the center of Fiona's blanket or come rushing and butting between our legs? It did not seem possible. But of course it was. (*Oranges* pp.92-93).

This suggests a fluid merging of the realm of the imagination and the realm of the actual, a merging which is suggested early in the novel when Cyril first notices that Hugh only has one arm; referring to the wooden arm on the pulpit in the church Cyril says "...it was in my power to lead them both to the exact spot where his missing arm was hidden." (*Oranges* p.32). Subsequently Hugh and Fiona do in fact steal the arm from the church. Cyril's real concern in life is in hidden correspondences between things, a non-analytical perception of connections. He refers to his interest in "coherence and full circles" (*Oranges* p.225), a coherence which is clearly acausal, and the circles suggest a non-linear approach to experience. Again, there is the description of "our murmurous *nonsequential* midafternoons in Illyria" (*Oranges* p.227), (*italics mine*); the lack of concern with linear time and causal connections suggests why, despite the strong surface texture of reality, Hawkes maintains his non-linear arrangement of the story. He emphasizes patterns of relationships between things and events that are non-rational because

they are derived from the aesthetic experience, the sensual perception of beauty. The final image of the novel is the image of the circle, the visual contradiction of the straight line, the line that somehow summarizes the belief in cause and effect, rigidly defined space and time, historical sequence; in other words all the defining characteristics of the rationalistic world-view:

The sun casts orange discs on the sea, our nights are cool. From three adjacent wooden pegs on my white wall hang a dried-out flower crown, a large and sagging pair of shorts, the iron-belt - and is it any coincidence that all my relics are circular? Who can tell? (*Oranges* p.271).

Death Sleep and the Traveller starts and finishes with the narrator's wife, Ursula, leaving him; Allert is Dutch and perhaps a murderer. There are three distinct time sequences in the novel; the earliest chronologically concerns a triangular affair between Allert, Ursula and their friend Peter, a psychiatrist, which ends with Peter's death; the middle period describes Allert's experience on a cruise boat and the triangular relationship which develops between another passenger, Ariane, himself, and the ship's radio officer; this also ends with a death, that of Ariane, perhaps at the hands of Allert; the third period is the "present" of the novel, as Ursula prepares for her departure; we are told that she has kept by Allert's side through his trial for murder at which he was acquitted, but we read nothing directly about the trial. The marriage between Ursula and Allert has always been good sexually, Allert has been free to have other affairs, and he encourages his friend, Peter, to enjoy Ursula fully. However the relationship between husband and wife during the course of the novel is an antagonistic one; Ursula has

little respect for Allert's confused saunter through the "real" world, he lives more vitally through his dreams than he ever does through experience. Peter provides further sexual interest for Ursula, but he also sympathizes with her direct, practical, rational approach to existence; they both spend time analysing Allert's dreams for him, reducing them to a simple reflection of how he operates in the material world. Peter's heart attack in the sauna comes as a great shock to them both; perhaps this is why Ursula literally bullies Allert into going on a cruise, he has no desire to go on it, particularly alone, and he seems terrified of boats and water in general. The entire period spent on the boat, including his affair with Ariane, is strangely insubstantial; brief snapshots of episodes, the oddly malevolent figure of the wireless operator, Allert's fear and the sense that we are missing vital pieces of information or explanation, combine to create a dream-like world.

Allert's paranoia strikes the reader immediately; on the third page he connects his name with the English word "alert", "as if the name is a thousand-year-old clay receptacle with paranoia curled in the shape of a child's skeleton inside." (*Death* p.3). He keeps feeling that the ship has stopped moving, that it is merely floating, untended, on a totally calm sea:

And I struggled unsuccessfully to comprehend a fear I had never known in my past life. No doubt the problem concerned two cosmic entities, I told myself: the sea, which was incomprehensible, and the ship, which was also incomprehensible in a mechanical fashion but which, further, was suddenly purposeless and hence meaningless in the potentially destructive night. Eliminate even the most arbitrary of purposes in such a situation, or

from the confluence of two cosmic entities, and the result is panic. (*Death* p.7).

When the ship is docked he can bear its lack of motion because the hawser makes sense of their immobility (*Death* p.13); but even when it is going along smoothly he is always expecting an abrupt shock, a change of speed or rapid reversal, because "A clear day was no guarantee against the diving and rising monsters of the deep." (*Death* p.28). He dives deep into the swimming pool in the hope that he has "propitiated the god of all those in fear of drowning at sea" (*Death* p.33), and later on in the story, when he rises early to find the ship empty of all life, he says "this, the death of the ship, was what I had always feared." (*Death* p.97). In one of his dreams that he relates to us, there is a bowl of red grapes on a table, but when he looks more closely at them he sees each one contains a tiny reddish foetus, and the whole pile is wriggling like a heap of worms. When his wife takes a handful and crushes them on the table, he is suddenly revolted and unable to eat them. "When I told this dream to Ursula she asked me how anyone could be so afraid of life as to dream such a disgusting dream." (*Death* p.15).

Allerts's fear seems to be related to his inability to believe in what is supposed to be real; he says "...I want to please, want to exist, want others to exist with me, but I find it difficult to believe in the set and characters on the stage." (*Death* p.9). He asks Peter what his professional opinion is on this inability to believe in the reality of the human self (a question Peter deflects by calling it a religious problem) and goes on to suggest the sequence of events that leads to this state of mind:

...sooner or later the young child discovers that he cannot account for himself. As soon as he becomes inexplicable he becomes unreal. Immediately everything else becomes unreal as one might expect. The rest is puzzlement. Or terror. (*Death* pp.90-91).

It is the unreality of what most people consider real that allows Allert to approach his dream world so openly; he has no fear of the irrational that does not pretend to be otherwise, what disturbs him is reality, which seems rational and comprehensible but isn't really at all. Ursula comments that she doesn't see how Allert can tell his life and his dreams apart, because to her they are identical (*Death* p.62). She suggests that he dreams rather than lives his life, and that the difference between Peter and herself, and Allert, is that they do not filter their lives through fantasy (*Death* p.150). In fact, the way he formulates his existence, which is presumably the way he experiences it, is in the form of framed images which seem damaged by an intense perhaps diseased vision:

My life has always been uncensored, overexposed. Each event, each image stands before me like a piece of film blackened from overexposure to intense light. The figures within my photographic frames are slick but charred. In the middle of the dark wood I am a golden horse lying dead on its side across the path and rotting. (*Death* p.36).

In the material world Allert is weak, ineffectual, frightened; but in the world of the unconscious mind he is avid for experience and for trying to express that experience. He has no fear, like most of us, at the thought of abandoning reason, because reason has never explained things satisfactorily to him anyway: "The sleep of reason produces demons, as Ursula once said. But I love my demons." (*Death* p.107). He not only loves his demons but needs them.

in order to exist:

It's simply that I am in love with Psyche. I have always been in love with Psyche. And I happen to know that whenever I express the need I can trust my Psyche to send me up a fresh bucket of slime. Unlike you, Ursula ...I am not afraid of Psyche's slime. I do not find it distasteful. As a matter of fact, without my periodic buckets, I could not survive. (*Death* p.75).

A reviewer has suggested that Allert's sea voyage is "grossly symbolic"⁴⁷, but I think it is an error to stop at the obvious Freudian level of interpretation and mistake that for Hawkes' only meaning. Several references suggest that the cruise is not "real"; Ariane says that the island they watch as the boat passes by belongs to her (*Death* p.58), and that the goats on it are "unreal" (*Death* p.55). A more obvious pointer that we should interpret the voyage symbolically is given when Peter describes to Allert a form of therapy they used to use at his psychiatric hospital. The patient was subjected to deeper and deeper states of coma until he approached death; a dangerous venture since death might actually occur. "...the patient was travelling inside himself and in a kind of sexual agony was sinking into the depths of psychic darkness, drowning in the sea of the self, submerging into the long slow chaos of the dreamer on the edge of extinction." (*Death* p.143). In case the reader hasn't made the connection, Peter goes on to ask Allert whether or not it has occurred to him that he lives his entire life in a coma (*Death* p.144). However, to state merely that the voyage represents Allert's "drowning in the sea of the self", is too simple. We have to remember that Allert loves his unconscious, his dreams, he is "in love with Psyche", he has never been afraid of her "buckets of slime", yet he

hates and fears this voyage on which he was forced to go. I think that the significance of the voyage rests exactly on this obvious Freudian connection; in fact Allert is resenting and resisting the reductive approach psychoanalysis can take. Peter and Ursula have this approach when they deal with Allert; his wife in particular interpretes or misinterprets his dreams with a harsh and vengeful Freudianism; Peter is described as having "the long thin face of a Spanish inquisitor" (*Death* p.83). Their constant frame of reference is always the real world they think they live in, attempting to use the emanations from the unconscious solely as a kind of horoscope to explain or enlighten Allert's behaviour. For Allert there is no such distinction between real and dreamed because he can make no sense of the rational world either. He, like other Hawkes' characters, abandons understanding but gains clarity, in his dream world anyway. During a trip on shore, Allert, Ariane and the wireless operator visit a zoo where they see a cage of bats; two are awake, holding out their wings like exhibitionists and exposing erect penises:

...in unison the two bats slowly rolled and stretched upward from mid-body until grotesquely, impossibly, the two eager heads were so positioned that in sudden spasms the vicious little mouths engulfed the tops of their respective penises. I understood immediately that this was how the two bats must have been engaged - in the slow jerky calisthenics of autofellatio - when Ariane first came upon the sight of them. (*Death* p.124).

One of the things that makes Allert feel that the whole journey is literally without sense or meaning, is that it is a pleasure cruise, their only destination is pleasure and indulgence. After the bat incident he waits for the others in the carriage:

I thought with mild bitterness that here was the reality of the 'Paradise Isles' promised in the pages of the brochure describing the special delights of our endless cruise. Here, I thought, was the truth of our destined exoticism, the taste of our dreams. (*Death* p.126).

The cruise seems to be some kind of equivalent of Peter's and Ursula's superficial and reductive approach to the unconscious, a quick tour round our fantasies merely results in sordid trivialization; the world of dream should never be made subordinate to the material world, it is not a world that pleasure cruises can enter.

The murder, if indeed that is what it is, is suggested in the chronologically earlier passages of the book dealing with Allert's and Ursula's relationship with Peter. Walking to the sauna one day, Allert feels that "for some reason the sound of my own footsteps made me think of those of a lurching murderer" (*Death* p.18). Twice a reference is made to Peter's theory that a man remains a virgin until he has committed murder (*Death* p.26); "The destruction of unwanted purity depends not on sexual experience but only on the commission of what is generally called the most heinous of crimes." (*Death* p.145). Once again we find the close identification of Eros and Thanatos, but it is never actually stated whether or not Allert did murder Ariane. When his wife asks him after the trial Allert is unable to answer her, and the last sentence of the book, "I am not guilty" (*Death* p.179), could mean that he feels no guilt rather than suggesting a claim to innocence. In the section immediately preceding the description of Ariane's death, Allert describes again man's inability to understand life and the total contingency of any

action a person may make:

We spend most of our lives attempting in small ways to know someone else. And we hope that someone else will care to peek into our darkest corners, without shock or condemnation. We even hope to catch a glimpse of ourselves, and in this furtive pursuit we hope for courage. But on the brink of success, precisely when a moment of understanding seems nearest at hand, and even if the moment is a small thing and not particularly consequential, it is then that the eyes close, the head turns away, the voice dies, the surface of the bright ocean becomes a sea of lead, and from the very shape we know to be our own there leaps a man-sized batlike shadow that flees or crouches to attack, to drive us away. Who is safe? Who knows what he will do next? Who has the courage to make endless acquaintance with the various unfamiliar shadows that comprise wife, girlfriend, or friend? Who can confront his own psychic sores in the clear glass? Who knows even where he is or where in another moment he may find himself? Who can believe in the smoke from the long clay pipe, the beer in the tankard? (*Death* pp.164-165).

The question "Who is safe?" is repeated twice more in the remainder of this short section, and again at the end of the description of Ariane's death. Allert is carrying her in his arms along the deck, they have been at a party, her eyes are glazed and she won't talk to him:

The moon was a streak of fat in the night sky. I could not feel her weight. I heard a shout. I turned. I heard a splash. The deck was a hard crust of salt. The night was cold. I heard the splash. I could not feel her weight. And then along the entire length of that bitter ship I saw the lights sliding and blurring beneath the waves. Clumsily, insanely, I wrestled with a white life ring that bore the name of the ship and that refused to come free. I saw the ship's fading lighted silhouette beneath the waves,

Who is safe? (*Death* pp.165-166).

For Allert nothing can be comprehended, nothing explained or verified;

life has no more reality than dreams, anything may happen next in that illogical, inconsequential way dreams have. The description of Ariane's death emphasizes this dream quality; it is a series of short sentences, brief descriptions like slides in a projector, no possible explanatory connection between them. Allert is not guilty because he's not responsible, nobody is responsible for actions in a dream world; this is why the passage describes the event in such a way as to make it impossible to deduce the extent of Allert's responsibility.

By the time of Ursula's departure Allert has regained a certain degree of equanimity; he feels nothing about their separation, "I anticipated no approaching pain, but was aware only of the *perception* of the event rather than of the event itself." (*Death* p.112),(Italics mine). At the end of the novel he says he is not going to do anything except "think and dream" (*Death* p.179). He has abandoned worrying about not being able to understand and returned to his role as spectator. He watches others but mainly he watches his own self through his dreams. Events happen to Allert, he participates when he has to, but he never seems to aim at them, he never seems to decide to do anything. Living in a supposedly real world forces one into action, but there is no logic on which action can be based. This is why the common approach to reality that presumes rational connections on which decisions can be based, frightens Allert; existence is dreamlike and he chooses to continue as a spectator of his dream.

Travesty is the only John Hawkes' novel that maintains one consistent time present, with any descriptions of past events clearly introduced as memories. It is a monologue, delivered by a man whose name we never know, as he races his car along French country roads at night. His passengers are his daughter, Chantal, and his best friend, a poet called Henri; Henri is the lover of both the narrator's wife and his daughter. The narrator has planned the journey for some time, and at a certain spot on the road, after they have driven past Honorine, his wife, asleep in their chateau, he is going to crash the car into a brick wall killing them all. He is a lucid, rational and highly poetic man, whose over-riding concern is pure form; he delights in parallel connections, alignments which are to him "the lifeblood of form without meaning."(*Travesty* p.91). Marcuse states that the pleasure derived from aesthetic awareness is "the perception of the pure *form* of an object, regardless of its 'matter' and of its (internal or external) 'purpose'."⁴⁸ The narrator's concern with the beauty of order and chaos is a purely aesthetic one, he is not interested in what the two states might mean in human terms. Imagining the accident provides him with a nearly perfect moment of perception: "...one moment the car in perfect condition, without so much as a scratch on its curving surface, the next moment impact, sheer impact. Total destruction. In its own way it is a form of ecstasy, this utter harmony between design and debris." (*Travesty* p.17). As a child his secret reading matter was divided equally between periodicals depicting "the most brutal and uncanny destructions of human flesh" and those showing "the attractions of

young living women partially or totally in the nude." (*Travesty* p.21). His fascination with unifying opposite or contradictory features is shown again when he refers to his attraction to schoolyards of coughing children: "The incipient infection is livelier than the health it destroys. Yes, I do appreciate that hacking music and all their little faces so bright and blighted." (*Travesty* p.26). He finds the artificial limb of his doctor more "real" than the natural limb "still inhabited by sensation" (*Travesty* p.27), presumably because the artificial limb is without sensation, without purpose unless connected to a person missing a leg; it can exist on its own, and in that situation it is pure, meaningless form. For him there is "no eroticism to match the landscape of spent passion" (*Travesty* p.62); this dead passion suggests his pleasure both in contradictions pushed into close harmony, and in form without meaning; the passion that excites him most is founded on emptiness, on extinct emotions.

The only information we receive about Henri and Chantal comes in the form of comments on their behaviour by the narrator; Chantal sobs hysterically and then gets down on the floor behind the front seats and is sick; Henri, terrified, has an asthma attack, and spends most of his time trying to persuade the narrator not to take his committed course of action. Henri attempts to explain this action in terms of emotions and psychology instead of accepting the narrator's coldly rational reasons. Hawkes uses this device of allowing the narrator to answer Henri's explanations in order to forestall psychological and emotional interpretations on the part of the reader. The narrator is not jealous of Henri's affair with

Honorine or Chantal, he encouraged them, allayed Henri's fears, took unnecessary business trips to allow them to have time on their own. Nor is he "a person who despises life. Quite the contrary." (*Travesty* p.87). His action is cruel to Honorine, he admits that, but it is not motivated by cruelty:

These are my reasons: first, Honorine is now more 'real' to you, to me, than she has ever been; second, when she recovers, at last, she will exercise her mind in order to experience in her own way what we have known; but third and most important, months and years beyond her recovery, Honorine will know with special certainty that just as she was the source of your poems, so too was she the source of my private apocalypse. It was all for her. And such intimate knowledge is worth whatever price the gods may demand, as she herself said. No, *cher ami*, Honorine is a person of great strength. Sooner or later she will understand. (*Travesty* pp.124-125).

The narrator is seeking clarity and purity; as a young man he was frightened to commit a "final and irrevocable act" (*Travesty* p.84), he needed the world to respond to him, recognize him, love him; but now he wants "not relief but purity" (*Travesty* p.85). He wants no pretence, no muddling fog of emotion or morality: "You and Chantal and I are simply travelling in purity and extremity down that road the rest of the world attempts to hide from us by heaping up whole forests of the most confusing road signs, detours, barricades." (*Travesty* p.14). He admits that he has one particular obsession, "a nearly phobic yearning for the truest paradox, a thirst to lie at the center of this paradigm..." (*Travesty* p.17); he wishes to live that moment when design becomes debris, when life becomes death. He has to control and order his life, he is not the man "to live or for that matter to die by chance" (*Travesty* p.18), he wants to meet death face on, in full consciousness, because if we can

experience death then we are truly living. Curiously, at this moment, our cold, rational narrator resembles Alan Watts who also believes that it is better to die too soon than too late, if one's perceptive faculties are failing and death cannot be fully experienced.⁴⁹ Morality, of course, is meaningless in the narrator's world; he believes that no man is guilty of anything: "...so-called guilty deeds are fictions created to enhance the sense of privacy, to feed enjoyment into our isolation, to enlarge the rhythm of what most people need, which is a belief in life...Guilt is merely a pain that disappears as soon as we recognize the worst in us all." (*Travesty* p.36). Morality can have no place in a world of forms: "Suspended as you are in time, holding your lighted cigarette between your fingers, bathed in your own sweat and the gentle lights of the dashboard - in all this there is clarity but not morality. Not even ethics." (*Travesty* p.14).

The poet, Henri, is just a very ordinary man who wants to escape from the hands of a "maniac" who is trying to kill him. His reaction is completely natural, so are his attempted explanations, but perhaps because our only view of him is filtered through the narrator's consciousness, he appears weak and rather despicable. He used to play the poet to small audiences, "...telling those eager or hostile women that the poet is always a betrayer, a murderer, and that the writing of poetry is like a descent into death. But that was talk, mere talk." (*Travesty* p.80). The poet has had fine theories about his role and his writing, but when actually faced with death itself he is paralysed with fear, unable to extract anything from his last few moments of life, except perhaps on the

penultimate page of the book when he says to the narrator, "imagined life is more exhilarating than remembered life." (*Travesty* p.127). And there *is* a kind of extraordinary beauty about what the narrator intends to do; appalling though the situation would be if it were actually taking place, the reader is able to leave behind his identification of the situation with reality and recognize the beauty, fleetingly take on the narrator's ultimate values of clarity and purity. Henri has none of the usual trappings of the poet's role; the narrator is the poet by the end of the book. The confusion of roles is suggested early on in the novel:

I seem to remember an old adage that the true poet has the face of a criminal. And you have this face. You and I know only too well that you are publicly recognized by your short haircut, the whiteness of your skin, the roughened texture of this white skin, the eyes that are hard and yet at the same time wet and always untrustworthy, as if they had been drained of blueness in a black-and-white photograph. Are you beginning to see yourself, *cher ami*? Yours is the face of the criminal... (*Travesty* pp.40-41).

The labels, poet and murderer, are deliberately confused, but by the end of the novel we agree with the narrator's decision as to who has artistic qualities:

But thus we have one more scrap to toss on the heap of our triumphant irony. Because in our case it now appears that the poet is the thick-skinned and simple-minded beast of the ego, while contrary to popular opinion, it is your ordinary privileged man who turns out to reveal in the subtlest of ways all those faint sinister qualities of the artistic mind. (*Travesty* p.100).

The central paradox of *Travesty* is, of course, the fact that the long awaited event never happens, can never happen within the context of a first person narrative voice; the reader leaves the

three characters in their car perpetually rushing towards the private apocalypse they can never actually reach. However we are presented with several imaginative versions of what the event might be like. The narrator regrets that the car will burst into flames on impact, bringing people rushing to a well-lit scene; the perfect rendering would have been to have had the impact and the noise but no heat or light. "Announced by violent sound and yet invisible, except for the glass scattered like perfect clear grains across an entire field - what splendor, what a perfect overturning of ordinary expectation. The unseen vision is not to be improved upon."

(*Travesty* p.58). The only way to perceive this vision, so entirely at odds with scientific expectation, is through the imagination; essentially the subject of *Travesty* is the range, the power, the ruthlessness and the beauty of the human imagination: "...nothing is more important than the existence of what does not exist; ...I would rather see two shadows flickering inside the head than all your flaming sunrises set end to end." (*Travesty* p.57). The narrator is an almost omnipotent figure in the novel; he does admit that he is not always in total mastery of the life he creates (*Travesty* p.74), he cannot be in so far as it may come into conflict with other people's lives; but the significant fact is that he refers to his *creation* of his own life. His theory that nothing is more important than the existence of what does not exist, leads him on to a statement which provides a key to the whole novel. He tells Henri that thanks to his theory they need not waste their last moments of life drinking brandy and slowly losing consciousness. "After all, my theory tells us that ours is the power to invent the

very world we are quitting. Yes, the power to invent the very world we are quitting." (*Travesty* p.57). *Travesty* is that invention, a pure world, beautiful and hideous, vibrantly rich and alive yet cold and deathly. Although in terms of plot, Hawkes never once violates realistic conventions, reality is more totally irrelevant to this novel than any of Hawkes's previous works. The outcome of the journey does not concern us at all; there is a fiction inside the fiction, in other words the narrator's world is as much a world of the imagination as is the world of the John Hawkes who wrote *Travesty*. The narrator's monologue demonstrates to us "the validity of the fiction of living." (*Travesty* p.125).

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN BARTH

I

John Barth's first two novels, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, can be discussed fairly briefly here. They were written as companion-pieces, and set out to be fictional studies of a philosophical concept, nihilism, though in an interview Barth has said that he realized after he had written them that they were really about innocence, not nihilism; perhaps both his own innocence and the innocence of the central characters. In the same interview he also described them as "relatively realistic"¹, an accurate statement, which explains why in this thesis I shall only extract a few threads from the two novels which are particularly relevant, mainly in terms of Barth's subsequent development as a novelist.

The narrator of *The Floating Opera*, Todd Andrews, sets out to relate the events of a certain day in 1937 when he decided to commit suicide. Inevitably much else has to be explained during the course of the events in order that we may understand them. The central fact in Andrew's life is that during the first world war a doctor diagnosed a heart condition which meant that he could drop dead at any moment, although equally he could have a perfectly normal life-span. The heart condition does not make Andrews substantially different from other human beings in fact, anyone could drop dead tomorrow or be run over by a bus; most people avoid thinking about

their own death, but the doctor's diagnosis has made Andrews extra-sensitive to the whole question of mortality. He tries to hide himself from this one, inescapable fact by assuming a series of masks, when one "wears out" he replaces it with another; first he was a rake, then a saint, and finally a cynic. Both the problem of mortality and the idea of role-playing, or shape-shifting as it becomes, are still concerning Barth in his most recent novel, *Chimera*. The crisis occurs for Andrews, whose cynical mask is wearing thin, when his mistress Jane Mack, wife of his best friend, Harrison Mack, inadvertently refers to his clubbed fingers, the clinical sign of his heart condition. Suddenly he realizes that he has sought to hide from his mortality in his poses; his entire life has been controlled by his heart, the universal symbol for the seat of the emotions, despite his attempt to make rationality the foundation of his existence. For the first time since he adopted his masks, he is overcome by emotion as he sinks into despair and buries his face in Jane Mack's sleeping body. The next morning he decides to kill himself; at least in suicide he will choose the moment and means of his death and be able to justify it in rational terms, rather than allowing it to be arbitrary and accidental:

- I. Nothing has intrinsic value.
- II. The reasons for which people attribute value to things are always ultimately irrational.
- III. There is, therefore, no ultimate 'reason' for valuing anything.²

He then adds "including life" to statement number three and continues:

- IV. Living is action. There's no final reason for action.

V. There's no final reason for living (*Opera* p.223)

Andrews belief that nothing has intrinsic value leads him to an apparently amoral stance in his dealings with the universe. He cultivates an indifference to justice and treats his law practice as a game where he can pit his wits against a chosen opponent: "...I affirm, I insist upon my basic and ultimate irresponsibility" (*Opera* p.83). He chooses to kill himself by blowing up the show-boat, "The Floating Opera", with the entire assembled company, including the Macks and their daughter, Jeanette, who might be his own child. He turns on the gas but for some reason the explosion fails to take place - the disaster is averted but by chance, not because of a sudden change of heart on the part of Andrews. (For the original publication of the novel, Barth had to rewrite this in order to make it more morally acceptable). However, having reached the decision to end his life, he has to decide whether to make the information, necessary to delay the court case concerning the will of Mack's father and thus enable Harrison Mack to obtain his father's money, available for someone else to deal with after his death. At least part of this decision is based on Harrison and Jane Mack's degree of maturity when they have to face up to the fact that they may not get the money. So Andrews is setting up some standards of his own which the Macks have to live up to, a kind of justice seems to be operating after all.

Since his father killed himself after the Great Crash, Andrews has been involved in conducting a mammoth inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his father's death. He has been trying to find out the cause of his father's suicide, and though he knows this is ultimately

impossible because as Hume pointed out causation is never more than an inference, and inference always involves somewhere a leap from what can be seen to what cannot be seen, his aim is to shorten the distance he has to leap. He's not really trying to cross the gap and come to any conclusion, he just wants to narrow the gap, so the Inquiry is literally interminable. The real problem is the imperfect communication between himself and his father, and by implication, between any one person and anyone else, including the author of a novel and his readers. Andrews' basic isolation from the rest of the world suggests the difficulty of any kind of communication including that necessary to write a book. He is constantly having difficulties in deciding what needs to be expressed in his novel in order to give an adequate description of the events of that day in 1937. Andrews' problem is that he recognizes "that to understand any one thing entirely, no matter how minute, requires the understanding of every other thing in the world." (*Opera* p.6). Thomas Pynchon also examines this problem in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Andrews' image of life is of a showboat with a play being acted on its flat deck that floats up and down the river at the whim of the tides. The audience on the riverbanks catch glimpses and snatches of the plot as it passes close to them, if they want to know more they have to rely on hearsay. Andrews also tells us that this is what his novel is like, "It's a floating opera, friend, fraught with curiosities, melodrama, spectacle, instruction, and entertainment, but it floats willy-nilly on the tide of my vagrant prose ..." (*Opera* p.7). As we find in so much modern fiction, the verbal artefact is quite consciously made the basis on which the entire novel rests.

As I have already said, *The Floating Opera* is essentially a realistic novel; however, there are occasions when Barth parodies the fictional expectations of realism. For example, the plot is clearly fraudulent, Andrews did not commit suicide or he would not have been able to write his story. The interest lies not in finding out *what* happened, but in discovering the reasoning behind the change of mind which we know must have occurred. Or again we find Barth parodying the accuracy of detail found in some conventional fiction and the element of a slightly prurient curiosity on the part of the reader which a first person narrative may encourage: "Are you so curious as to follow me down the hall to the men's room? If you aren't (I shall only be a minute), read while you wait the story of my resumption of the affair with Jane Mack." (*Opera* p.149). This self-conscious awareness of the art of writing is prominent in *The Floating Opera* and very characteristic of Barth, however most of the references to it here are within the context of the first person narrative and therefore do not substantially violate that tenet of realism which requires the author to absent himself from his fiction. The character of Todd Andrews as author is very present in the novel, but John Barth himself is not. Andrews frequently refers to his inexperience as a writer, this is his first attempt at writing fiction, and one of the difficulties he finds is in the process of selection: "...how does one write a novel! I mean, how can anybody stick to the story, if he's at all sensitive to the significance of things?" (*Opera* p.2). The problem is that "Everything ...is significant, and nothing is finally important" (*Opera* p.6), which leads Andrews to a *Tristram Shandy*-like structure for his novel.

Several chapters are digressions in the manner of Sterne, for example chapter xi "an instructive, if sophisticated observation" in which Andrews discusses the heavy-handed symbolizing of Nature and coincidence. The realization that everything is significant and nothing finally important stems from the impossibility of a totally rational causality. Jeanette Mack's endless questions about the Floating Opera and Andrew's inability to answer them soon show us the limitations of reason:

'The people like to go to the show because it makes them laugh.
They like to laugh at the actors'.
'Why?'
'They like to laugh, because laughing makes them happy. They like being happy, just like you'.
'Why?'...
'Why do they like being happy? That's the end of the line'.
'Why do the actors?'
'Why do the actors act funny? They do that so the people will pay to come see them. They want to earn money'.
'Why?'
'So they can eat. They like eating'.
'Why?'
'You have to eat to stay alive. They like staying alive'.
'Why?'
'That's the end of the line again', I said. (*Opera* p.195).

Even the highly logical Andrews comes to his decision to kill himself first and then rationalizes it afterwards into some kind of coherent and arguable position, he admits that "...there are no ultimate reasons." (*Opera* p.201). Two years of working on his Inquiry taught Andrews that "there is no will-o'-the-wisp so elusive as the cause of any human act." (*Opera* p.214).

The problem with *The Floating Opera*, however, is that despite the rejection of causality and the recognition of the meaninglessness

of existence the novel itself leads the reader to understand the events described in it from a causal point of view. Andrews decides not to kill himself when he sees that if there is no reason for living there is certainly no reason for dying either; similarly the causes of Mister Haecker's attempted suicide are made abundantly clear. The predominately realistic format of the novel makes this dependence on causality inevitable. From a philosophical point of view, this kind of discrepancy between the subject and the means of expressing it poses no difficulty; it is acceptable to write logically about the illogical. But personally, I believe the best fiction must convey its ideas by embodying them in a fictional situation, not by superimposing them on one. Against this standard *The Floating Opera* falls short.

At the end of *The Floating Opera*, Todd Andrews wonders whether "...in the real absence of absolutes, values less than absolute mightn't be regarded as in no way inferior and even be lived by." (*Opera* pp. 246-247). *The End of the Road* explores the very different attempts of its two main characters, Jake Horner and Joe Morgan, to live in a world without absolute value-systems. Horner's road began when he became totally immobilized one day while sitting on a train station intending to take a trip but unable to decide which of three places in Ohio he could go to for the thirty dollars he had available to pay for the ticket. He's not prepared to make purely arbitrary decisions and he finds it difficult to decide on a rational basis, "...when one is faced with such a multitude of desirable choices, no one choice seems satisfactory for very long by comparison with the aggregate desirability of all the

rest, though compared to any *one* of the others it would not be found inferior."³ A negro "doctor" noticed him motionless on a bench and, being a specialist in problems of immobility, he took Jake to his "remobilization farm" for therapy. Two years later the doctor advises him to take a job teaching prescriptive grammar at the local teachers college; this is where he meets Joe and Rennie Morgan and his relations with them provide the main situation of the novel.

Mythotherapy is the basis of the doctor's programme for Jake; this is a conscious or unconscious system of role-assigning in which we all have to participate or we cease to function. The theory is a further development from Todd Andrews' adoption of masks in *The Floating Opera*; according to the doctor, however, Jake must never think there's anything behind the masks, "...*ego* means *I*, and *I* means *ego*, and the *ego* by definition is a mask." (*Road* p.90). This statement suggests the totally pragmatic approach of the doctor; when he first meets Jake he tells him that he doesn't want to know anything about his past, he's the exact opposite of an analyst as he has no interest in the individual causes of a psychic state, he only wishes to teach the individual how to cope practically in an active world. When he tells Jake he must "...assume these masks wholeheartedly. Don't think there's anything behind them..." (*Road* p.90), he is merely telling Jake how he should act, it will benefit him to believe this even though from a logical point of view it is obvious that something must be there to change the masks. Jake was immobilized at the station because he had ceased to participate in mythotherapy, he was not assigning himself a role from which he could

operate. Jake needs to adopt a role consciously because he has a very weak sense of his identity, when not coloured by a mood he feels he does not exist. The doctor advises him to change masks frequently because he's not sufficiently stable or sufficiently imaginative to play one part all the time. Throughout the novel the way people operate in life is described in terms of fiction and the theatre; Jake tells us he soon learnt that "...the same life lends itself to any number of stories" (*Road* p.5); he assigns roles and adopts them himself, particularly in his relationship with Peggy Rankin, but when it is clear that the role he assigned her is not the role she wants to play he remains with her despite the embarrassment that ensues because of his "...disinclination to walk out on any show, no matter how poor or painful, once I'd seen the first act." (*Road* p.30).

Joe Morgan could not be more different from Jake; he is a compulsive system-builder who, while recognizing that there is no such thing as an absolute value, has developed a personal collection of values which have become absolute for him and Rennie. One of their absolutes is their relationship and its total self-sufficiency, they have no need for anyone else; but probably more important even than this is Joe's faith that the intellect can solve all problems. His belief that there is no effect without cause and that the cause, even in emotional questions, can be pinpointed to either one thing or another and then articulated, is terrifying in its single-mindedness. Joe deliberately pushes Rennie into contact with Jake; he is moulding her into a kind of alter-ego, he wants her to be as

strong and secure as he considers himself to be, and contact with Jake is contact with "...a first-rate mind that [is] totally different from his." (*Road* p.64). The tragedy begins when Jake and Rennie, almost accidentally, sleep together; it is made clear that the act was not premeditated, it was one of those things that 'just happened'. But Joe, of course, has to have reasons; the insularity of their systematized relationship hasn't allowed for something like this occurring, the image that Joe and Rennie had of what Rennie was has been destroyed because in a totally rational world the concepts of chance and randomness, of meaninglessness in fact, cannot exist. Jake's refusal to have any system of value at all that doesn't include an awareness all the time that the opposite is also true, comes into conflict with Joe when he is interrogated about sleeping with Rennie. Joe needs to know why, he has to be able to understand the action rationally in terms of an either/or answer, and has no respect for Jake's truthful reply that he doesn't know. Just before Joe leaves he tells Jake that Rennie blames him for everything and asks Jake if he thinks that that is typical of a woman, trying to evade responsibility.

'I don't have any opinion', I said. 'Or rather, I have both opinions at once'. This observation nearly clenched Joe's fists in disgust, and he left my room. (*Road* p.118).

Joe and Rennie both come to doubt Jake's existence, his reality; they cannot deal with his refusal to adhere to a value system of any kind or to one consistent personality or role. Jake, of course, holds contradictory opinions; to him Joe is both noble and contemptible, Rennie both strong and weak. Through his intimacy with the Morgans

and his recognition of the ambivalent response he has to them, Jake comes to an awareness of the crippling limitations of mytho-therapy:

The trouble, I suppose, is that the more one learns about a given person, the more difficult it becomes to assign a character to him that will allow one to deal with him effectively in an emotional situation. Mythotherapy, in short, becomes increasingly harder to apply, because one is compelled to recognize the inadequacy of any role one assigns. Existence not only precedes essence: in the case of human beings it rather defies essence. And as soon as one knows a person well enough to hold contradictory opinions about him, Mythotherapy goes out the window, except at times when one is no more than half awake. (*Road* p.128).

The problem is that mythotherapy can only work when it is applied by someone who accepts that everybody is either one thing or another and that is all they are. In fact it depends on a rational, absolutist approach to others, and the only characters in the novel who actually apply mythotherapy consistently are Rennie and Joe Morgan who are unaware that they are doing it. The system comes unstuck when they are faced with a personality who will not allow himself to be categorized; Rennie, less absolute than Joe, gets confused, starts to act irrationally, and the mythic character they have created for her together, falls in fragments at their feet.

Another dominant theme in *The End of the Road* is the relationship between language and reality. The doctor quotes the opening proposition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "*The world is everything that is the case*" (*Road* p.81), to Jake during a therapy session. The doctor asks Jake if he knows the seating capacity of Cleveland Municipal Stadium; he then suggests

a number and explains that there is no final reason why the stadium shouldn't seat that many. Logic or reason cannot tell you the number, the only way to answer is if you simply know the fact; knowing facts is what the doctor calls informational therapy, because it cuts down on the choice of possible answers and it is the act of choosing that tends to present Jake with crises. Wittgenstein's aim in the *Tractatus* is to define the limits of language; in so doing he excludes religion, morality, even philosophy from the realm of factual discourse, which explains why at the end of the book he requires that anyone who has understood him will recognize his propositions as nonsensical, and having made use of them, discard them. Barth's reference to Wittgenstein here must therefore be seen as in some sense ironic, and connected with his portrait of the doctor as a super-pragmatist. Pragmatism is related to positivism, a position to which the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* is close. He is not simply a positivist in that he does allow that truth can exist in non-factual discourse, but he states that this cannot be expressed in language: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."⁴ This position is clearly inappropriate for the novelist - the only reading material Jacob is allowed, according to the doctor, is the World Almanac. Barth's use of Wittgenstein is confusing. Certainly Wittgenstein is the most famous of the modern linguistic philosophers who placed a new emphasis on the significance of language. Having in the *Tractatus* decided that the structure of reality determines the structure of language, and therefore reality is logical because language is, Wittgenstein moves in *Philosophical Investigations* to a position where he maintains that

our language determines our view of reality because we see things through it. It is not difficult to see, at this superficial level, concerns that would interest Barth, but Barth never appears to refer to *Philosophical Investigations* whereas he keeps quoting all or part of that opening proposition of the *Tractatus*. In *The Sot-Weed Factor* Ebenezer Cooke and Mary Mungummory converse about their two friends Charley Mattassin and Henry Burlingame; discovering in them a remarkable similarity:

'Offtimes I felt his fancy bore a clutch of worlds,
all various, of which the world these books described
was one -'
'Which while 'twas splendid here and there', the
laureate interrupted, 'he could not but loathe for
having been *the case*'. 'That's it!' Mary cried,
her eyes bright. 'You have laid your finger on
its very root and fundament!'⁵

Here we can see Barth *resisting* the idea that the world is simply, and only, everything that is the case, but at the same time accepting it. There are four separate references⁶ to this same proposition in *Giles Goat-Boy* and the attitude towards it consistently reflects the same kind of ambivalence on Barth's part. In the "Cover Letter to the Editors and Publishers", "J.B." describes to Stoker, Giles the novel on which he is currently working:

My hero, I explained, was to be a Cosmic Amateur; a man enchanted with history, geography, nature, the people around him - everything that *is the case* - because he saw its arbitrariness but couldn't accept or understand its finality. He would deal with reality like a book, a novel that he didn't write and wasn't a character in, but only an appreciative reader of; naturally he would assume that there were other novels, better ones and worse...But in truth, of course, he *wasn't* finally a spectator at all; he couldn't stay 'out of it' (*Giles* p.24).

This description is apt for many of Barth's innocent hero figures but the last sentence is what is important, ultimately reality has to be dealt with, and reality for Barth is what is the case, no matter how much he wishes it were not - "I did, I did with my whole heart yearn to shrug off the Dream and awake to an order of things - quite new and other!" (*Giles* p.25). I shall return to this problem of what exactly the relative status of fiction and reality is in Barth's work, particularly in the discussion of his most recent novel *Chimera*, in which a change seems to have developed.

The End of the Road only starts to explore the areas mentioned in the preceding paragraph, but the reference to Wittgenstein certainly brings up the question of the relationship between language and reality which is continued by Jacob Horner in some of his musings:

Articulation! There, by Joe, was *my* absolute, if I could be said to have one. At any rate, it is the only thing I can think of about which I ever had, with any frequency at all, the feelings one usually has for one's absolutes. To turn experience into speech - that is, to classify, to categorize, to conceptualize, to grammarize, to syntactify it - is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man, alive and kicking... In other senses, of course, I don't believe this at all. (*Road* p.119).

Is language a falsification of experience, or is it more accurate to say that it is the only experience we have? Similarly with Horner's discussion of paradox (*Road* pp.141-142), is paradox to be found simply in ambiguities resulting from linguistic vagueness, or can we really find contradictory concepts in reality?

Jacob Horner's answers to these questions are not necessarily important, but the fact that these issues have been raised, is.

The End of the Road presents us with examples of the way in which people create systems with which they attempt to set the boundaries of the world they live in. In *The Floating Opera* Todd Andrews' favourite past-time is boat-building; this is a physical reflection of his adoption of certain masks, which like boats, give him protection from the whole wide ocean. Joe, Jake, even the doctor, are all involved in trying to construct similar boats, because boats put reasonable limits on an otherwise amorphous world, they give shape to it. All of them, then, have created their own little reality, and Barth also explores the ambiguous relationship between language and reality, yet he writes a realistic novel, that is a kind of novel whose very structure implies that reality is unified and comprehensible, and whose use of language is based on a direct connection between words and things, as opposed to the view that this connection is at best ambiguous. For example, Jake twice comments on the fact that what he has written as coming from the mouths of Joe and Rennie probably did not actually come from them in that form: "Now it may well be that Joe made no such long coherent speech as this all at once; it is certainly true that during the course of the evening this was the main thing that got said, and I put it down here in the form of one uninterrupted whiz-bang for convenience's sake." (*Road* p.47). When Rennie starts to tell Jake about her earlier life he writes, "Here is what she told me, edited and condensed." (*Road* p.57). This may be Jake's

concern that the relationship between the fact and the reporting of that fact should be made very clear, as opposed to John Barth's himself, but the result for the reader is a reinforcing of those expectations inculcated by the realistic novel that the relationship between the word and the fact is clearly defined. And the end of the novel, with Rennie dead on an abortionist's couch, Joe asked to resign from his job, and Jake going to take up permanent residence at the newly-located remobilization farm, shows the final victory of "real" reality. Barth's first two novels have tried to explore possible ways of recreating reality in a different mould, creating your own reality perhaps, but the ending shows the inadequacy of these efforts; the little boats sink at the first touch of an iceberg.

II

Barth's pastiche of an eighteenth century novel has caused considerable anxiety to critics who feel that parody is merely frozen imitation; clever, but trapped in a form rather than exploiting that form for effective satire.⁷ This view, however, stems from a confusion about exactly how "eighteenth century" *The Sot-Weed Factor* really is. In his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion", Barth writes about the exhaustion of certain literary possibilities, and the way in which they can be rediscovered in a new way, not simply repeated. He exemplifies this idea by referring to a story by Jorge Luis Borges:

Consider Borges' story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*': the hero, an utterly sophisticated turn-of-the-century French Symbolist, by an astounding effort of the imagination, produces - not *copies* or *imitates*, mind, but *composes* - several chapters of Cervantes' novel.

It is a revelation [Borges' narrator tells us] to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes'. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, the future's counselor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the 'lay genius' Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

truth, whose mother is history, rival of time depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, the future's counselor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin...

Et cetera. Now, this is an interesting idea, of considerable intellectual validity. I mentioned earlier that if Beethoven's Sixth were composed today, it would be an embarrassment; but clearly it wouldn't be, necessarily, if done with iron intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are.⁸

So, the conventions of an eighteenth century novel assume quite different meanings when we know that it is written by John Barth, undoubtedly a novelist of "iron intent" and familiar with cultural history.

The eighteenth century saw the beginnings of the novel consolidated into a major literary form; it was an appropriate cultural context for this development, as the novel, more than other genres, emphasized the claims of the particular, material world. The exactness and clarity of the Enlightenment's universe can be seen in the complex but highly organised plot structure of a novel like

Tom Jones, which reflects Fielding's faith in a varied but ultimately ordered world. The plot of *The Sot-Weed Factor* is also complex but almost unintelligible in parts, a chaos of confusions that bewilders the characters almost as much as it does the readers, "... visions of an order complex unto madness."⁹ The hero, Ebenezer Cooke, has learnt from his tutor, Henry Burlingame, an enthusiasm for the world; he is "dizzy with the beauty of the possible" (*Factor* p.12). His education has made him aware of the arbitrariness of the real world, to such an extent that he can't believe that the world exists in only one way, he doesn't realize its finality.

But in his heart the fact of death and all these sensuous anticipations were to Ebenezer, like the facts of life and the facts of history and geography, which, owing to his education and natural proclivities, he looked at always from the *story-teller's* point of view: notionally he admitted its finality; vicariously he sported with its horror; but never, never could he really embrace either. That lives are stories, he assumed; that stories end, he allowed - how else could one begin another? But that the teller himself must live a particular tale and die - Unthinkable! Unthinkable! (*Factor* p.294).

This is life seen as a story; later in the novel Eben wonders if his experiences have all been a dream and he has never left his bed in Pudding Lane; as children, he and his sister Anna would sometimes wonder if all the world was just a dream; but they never dared try to wake up from it: "The reason we never tried it was that we knew only one of us could be *The Dreamer of the World* - that was our name for't - and we feared that if it worked, and one of us awoke to a strange new cosmos, he'd discover he had no twin save in his dream..." (*Factor* p.557). The appalling loneliness of this prospect is reminiscent of the ending of Mark Twain's story, *The Mysterious*

Stranger, and shows a drawback to total solipsism. John McEvoy, Joan Toast's pimp, tells Eben, "'tis not simply love ye know naught of, 'tis the *entire great real* world! Your senses fail ye; your busy fancy plays ye false and fills your head with foolish pictures. Things are not as you see them, friend - the world's a tangled skein, and all is knottier than ye take it for." (*Factor* p.69). McEvoy is right; reality fails to live up to Eben's expectations. Descartes' sceptical methodology was never to trust what he was told, but to reply entirely on his own faculties to judge what he considered to be true. This system lands Ebenezer in a lot of trouble; he wants to see the world as it is but is defeated by its complexity and his own simplicity. He mistrusts anything that changes his vision from that of the unadulterated waking perspective: "'I fear liquor as I fear fevers, drugs, and dreams, that change a man's perspective. A man should see the world as it is, for good or ill!"; but as Henry Burlingame replies to him, "'That is a boon you've ne'er been vouchsafed yet, my friend. Why hope for't tonight?'" (*Factor* p.433). Indeed, when he unwittingly chews some opium, the vision of life he has under the influence of the drug is more accurate than usual, perhaps because most of the time his perceptions are filtered through the prism of his idealism. Seeing the world for what it is, is less simple than Ebenezer supposes.

Henry Burlingame manages better, perhaps because he rejects attempts to formulate the universe. He sees it as a place of constant flux, "naught but change and motion" (*Factor* p.138). Action is necessary and speed of action essential, "...we sit here on a blind rock careening through space; we're all of us rushing headlong to

the grave... i'faith there's time for naught but bold resolves!" (*Factor* pp.27-28). He tells Eben that if he saw the world clear enough it would drive him mad; the search for whole understanding is fruitless and anyway there's no time for it. "'You know as well as I that human work can be magnificent; but in the face of what's out yonder' - he gestured skywards - ''tis the industry of Bedlam! Which sees the state of things more clearly: the cock that preens on the python's back, or the lunatic that trembles in his cell?'" (*Factor* p.373). The history of Maryland as recounted to Eben by Burlingame disguised as Lord Baltimore, is a maze of plots impossible to follow. Every now and then Eben says weakly "I am astonished" (*Factor* p.93) or "I'faith, it dizzies me" (*Factor* p.88), and eventually admits "I cannot comprehend it." (*Factor* p.94). Much later, when Burlingame is filling him in on more outrageous machinations, Eben's patience begins to wane, "La, methinks expediency, and not truth, is this tale's warp, and subterfuge its woof, and you've weaved it with the shuttle of intrigue upon the loom of my past credulity! In short, 'tis creatured from the whole cloth, that even I can see doth not hang all in a piece. 'Tis a fabric of contradictories." (*Factor* p.524). What Eben is failing to allow for is that not only are the various cabals of history impossibly complex, any action is also open to any number of possible interpretations:

'The difficulty is, e'en on the face of 'em the facts are dark - doubly so if you grant, as wise men must, that an ill deed can be done with good intent, and a good with ill; and triply if you hold right and wrong to be like windward and leeward, that vary with standpoint, latitude, circumstance, and time. History, in short, is

like those waterholes I have heard of in the wilds of Africa: the most various beasts may drink there side by side with equal nourishment.' (*Factor* p.525).

And this from Henry Burlingame, present at the time in a variety of prominent roles; as history recedes into the past, how much more difficult is it to sort out fact from fiction, truth from imagination? John Barth has started with facts; Ebenezer Cooke was Maryland's first poet and he did write a satirical poem about Maryland called "The Sot-Weed Factor". Barth also portrays historical political figures (though for him they are mostly Henry Burlingame in disguise), actual Indians, and existing places. Cooke's plantation was called Malden and it was situated on Cooke's Point. From there he does as he pleases, reflecting an awareness that history, like fiction, is only an ordering and interpretation of events in written form, the objective validity of which is almost impossible to ascertain. The questioning of the sharp line that normally distinguishes "fiction" from "reality" is an important theme in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Instead of fiction imitating life, trying to be as like life as possible, fiction becomes a metaphor for life, so life seems to start to imitate fiction instead: "...we swim in an ocean of story." (*Factor* p.582). Barth is at once satirizing the complexities of the eighteenth century novel's plot and at the same time chastizing it for not being complex enough.

Descartes elevated to supreme importance the thought processes of the individual; this had its influence on the presentation of character in the novel. There was a need to define individual

characters, so, for example, representative rather than type names were used. Though the hero or heroine might develop his or her understanding during the course of the novel, all characters were presented as having one continuous personality which could be recognized despite the passage of time. After all, according to Locke any concept of personal identity was based on memory. Ebenezer believes in this concept of identity, but, like Jacob Horner, doesn't have a very strong sense of his own. He has no particular purpose in life, no job appeals to him more than any other; he also suffers from attacks of immobility. But Ebenezer accidentally hits on a way of dealing with this, when he decides to be a poet and, for unrequited love of the London whore, Joan Toast, remain a virgin. His vocation has given him an individual identity: "'What am I? What am I? *Virgin, sir! Poet, sir!* I am a virgin and a poet; less than mortal and more; not a man, but mankind! I shall regard my innocence as badge of my strength and proof of my calling: let her who's worthy of't take it from me!'" (*Factor* p.66). In an argument with Henry about the moral value of purity, Eben explains that the significance of his virginity is not a moral one anyway: "I prize it not as a virtue, but as the very emblem of myself..." (*Factor* p.172). Eben has had to grab at something that will act as a peg on which to hang his otherwise amorphous self; it is an act of expediency, necessary in a chaotic universe where identity is not always single and continuous.

Henry Burlingame also allows himself a single thread on which to hang his life, his search for his father, but at the same time his concept of identity is much more fluid than Eben's. He is

always happy to impersonate people, whereas Eben worries that something of himself will get lost when he pretends to another identity. Impersonation is a tried and true tradition in English literature, particularly in seventeenth and eighteenth century drama, but also in the novel - we can think of Lady Bellaston disguised as the Queen of the Fairies in *Tom Jones*. Restoration Comedy, for example, reveals that this use of impersonation reflects the theme of appearance and reality, the exposing of artifice in a decadent society, which was also the concern of Fielding in the London section of *Tom Jones*. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, John Barth extends the technique and we interpret it quite differently; it functions to question the whole idea of single, continuous identity. Burlingame does not merely change his clothes, adopt disguises, he displays the beginning of Barth's interest in the truly Protean figure, a concept further developed in subsequent novels. It is not a question of who or what is *really* there under the disguise; in Burlingame's impersonations he actually *becomes* another person. While still in England, Eben meets a Marylander called Colonel Peter Sayer, and then discovers that this person is in fact Henry Burlingame. His amazement stems from the fact that though only seven years has passed since he last saw Henry, Henry is unrecognizable:

'But 'sheart, Henry, thou'rt so altered I've still
to see't! Wigless, bearded - ...
'E'en the eyes!' Ebenezer said. 'And thy way of
speaking! thy voice itself is different, and thy
manner! Are you Sayer feigning Burlingame, or
Burlingame disguised as Sayer?'...
'Forgive me my doubt; I've ne'er known a man to
change so, nor had thought it possible.'...
'Is't not the name alone remains?' (*Factor* pp.136-137).

As the novel progresses we discover that the Lord Baltimore who

assigned Ebenezer the laureateship was in fact Henry Burlingame; subsequently he adopts the personage of Bertrand Burton, Eben's valet, and Ebenezer himself; closely followed by Tim Mitchell, Monsieur Casteene, Nicholas Lowe - none of whom are ever presented except as Burlingame's impersonations. Finally, according to Bertrand Burton, Burlingame does not merely impersonate the arch-villain, John Coode, he actually *is* John Coode.

Poor Eben cannot deal with Burlingame's protean nature, "He could not even remember with any precision what his dear friend looked like; at best his mental picture was a composite of the very different faces and voices of Burlingame before and after the adventures in America." (*Factor* p.262). Burlingame tries to convince Eben that his idea of a single, continuous personality is just a convenient and comforting myth:

'Tis but to say what oft I've said to you ere now, Eben: your true and constant Burlingame lives only in your fancy, as doth the pointed order of the world. In fact you see a Heraclitean flux: whether 'tis we who shift and alter and dissolve; or you whose lens changes color, and focus; or both together. The upshot is the same, and you may take it or reject it.'
(*Factor* p.357)

Perception *is* a subjective experience, not necessarily objectively verifiable. Even memory, that Locke set so much store by, and Eben tries to hold on to as a thread which connects our sense of self, is subjective and fallible. Henry points out five weaknesses in the "god, *Memory*". First, we do not have perfect recall; second, if memories disagree the dispute frequently cannot be settled; third, to a great extent we remember what we want to remember and ignore

the rest; fourth, memory colours what little it does remember; and finally Burlingame demonstrates that no one can ever *prove* his identity, he can only demonstrate it by circumstantial evidence, easy to forge and never indisputable: "'...all assertions of *thee* and *me*, e'en to oneself, are acts of faith, impossible to verify.'" (*Factor* pp. 138-141)

Ebenezer finally comes to recognize that he does not know Burlingame at all. Arguing with Bertrand Burton about whether Henry is or is not John Coode, he exclaims "'But he was six years my tutor! I know the man!'" Even as he made it, Ebenezer realized the vast untruth of this declaration... 'No man is what or whom I take him for!'" (*Factor* p.554). By the end of the novel he has a theory that neither Baltimore nor Coode exist except in Burlingame's impostures; or if they do exist, they are uninvolved in, even ignorant of, all the plots carried out in their name. Henry agrees that he might be right:

'...albeit 'tis hard for me to think such famous wights are pure and total fictions, to this hour I've not laid eyes on either Baltimore or Coode. It may be they are all that rumor swears: devils and demigods, whichever's which, or it may be they're simple clotpolls like ourselves; that have been legend'd out of reasonable dimension; or it may be they're naught but the rumors and tales themselves'. (*Factor* p.764)

Barth has inserted supposedly "real" historical figures into his novel, and by the end he is questioning that they exist at all, they are merely fictions. Ebenezer's reply to Henry is instructive here: "'When I reflect on the weight and power of such fictions beside my own poor shade of self, that hath been so much disguised

and counterfeited, methinks they have tenfold my substance!" (*Factor* p.764). Ebenezer is accurately describing the inaccuracy of the way character is presented in most novels; fictional characters do have more weight and more power than "real" people, they are more clearly delineated, we understand their every action. In Barth's treatment of character, we can again see him satirizing the use of impersonations, the absurdity of characters not recognizing each other just because they are dressed in different clothes; but he is also making use of it to present a theory of identity untenable in the eighteenth century.

The moral structure of eighteenth century novels is simple and clear; virtue is rewarded (as we can see from the alternative title for Richardson's *Pamela*) and wickedness punished. The authors were not so blind as to suppose that this always happened in reality, but the didactic imperative justified their moral emphasis, and, I think it is fair to say, reflected a belief in a universe that was essentially coherent in moral terms, if sometimes unjust in individual cases. Defoe's preface to *Moll Flanders* is instructive, particularly as the subject matter is not unlike *The Sot-Weed Factor*:

Throughout the infinite variety of this book, this fundamental is most strictly adhered to; there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered unhappy and unfortunate; there is not a superlative villain brought upon the stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy end, or brought to be penitent; there is not an ill thing mentioned but it is condemned, even in the relation, nor a virtuous, just thing but it carries its praise along with it.¹⁰

The Sot-Weed Factor could not be more different; the world is not simply wicked or unjust, it is not even possible to separate good

from evil. Ebenezer believes in justice, in good faith he gives a legal ruling on a case for which he has just heard the evidence, and in the process signs away his entire plantation to be turned into a whorehouse and opium-den. The universe is morally incoherent; Charley Mattassin, the half-cast Indian hung for murders he didn't commit, went to the gallows with a monstrous laugh on his face. His lover, Mary Mungumory, catches the disease from him, and laughs in the same way when Ebenezer signs away his plantation. It is the strange laugh of recognition of the absurdity of the universe. Amid all the confusion Ebenezer tries hard to cling on to some kind of moral coherence, "I believe no one any longer, . . . I believe naught in the world save that Baltimore is the very principle of goodness, and Coode the pure embodiment of evil." (*Factor* p.521). But even this formula is destroyed. Finally Ebenezer succumbs to the terrible laugh and horrifies his valet by asking "'What is't but childish innocence keeps the mass o' men persuaded that the church is not supported by the brothel, or that God and Satan do not hold hands in the selfsame cookie jar?'" (*Factor* p.555). The disillusionment is manifest, but his opium induced vision provided a more accurate picture:

The Laureate made no further move to jump, but sat on the edge of the peak and sighed. "'Tis all most frightfully empty, is't not?' 'Empty indeed,' the old man said, 'but there's naught o' good or bad in that. Why sigh?' (*Factor* p.491)

Ebenezer's bitterness is the natural concomitant of high idealism, Henry has no such problem, he accepts and loves the whole world, literally!

'I love the world, sir, and so make love to it! I have sown my seed in men and women, in a dozen sorts of beasts, in the barky boles of trees and the honeyed wombs of flowers; I have dallied on the black breast of the earth, and clipped her fast; I have wooed the waves of the sea, impregnated the four winds, and flung my passion skywards to the stars!' (*Factor* p.355)

His understanding transcends simple ethical oppositions, "'I love no part of the world,...but the entire parti-colored whole, with all her poles and contradictories. Coode and Baltimore alike I am enamored of, whate'er the twain might stand for...'" (*Factor* p.529). Henry loves Ebenezer and Anna because they are twins and he loves what they represent, "'...I crave the Whole - the tenon in the mortise, the jointure of polarities, the seamless universe - whereof you twain are token, *in coito!*'" (*Factor* p.537). Quite what John Barth's attitude is to the extreme views of his "alter-hero" is difficult to assess; but Henry Burlingame is clearly rejecting what Watts called "The game of Black-and-White". Perhaps we can also use Marcuse as illumination here, by remembering what he had to say about sexual perversion. The perversions are subversive of the performance principle; they do not lead to the possibility of reproduction and thus can be seen as manifestations of the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. Play is also a manifestation of the pleasure principle; games played an important part in Ebenezer's and Anna's childhood (*Factor* p.7 and p.293), but they seem to lose that particular form of behaviour when they grow up. Henry Burlingame retains it, playing "the game of governments" (*Factor* p.180) and cheerfully taking on roles as another might don a hat. We are reminded of Alan Watt's description of the Vedanta philosophy that

sees the universe as a magical illusion, a fabulous game; with the "Self" of the Universe adopting various disguises and playing with itself. Ebenezer's serious attitude to life gets him into an endless sequence of problems and confusions, while Henry Burlingame plays his way through life without any adverse consequences. A glance at *Tom Jones* shows that Barth is employing the same inversion tactics I have explored previously; Tom is an ebullient, playful young man, but his games get him into trouble, they have to be curbed with carefully learnt prudence.

John Barth is not the artist as prophet; much of the time it is neither possible nor desirable to pin him down and discover a message. His attitude to Henry Burlingame's philosophy is ambiguous, certainly there is an ironic element to it; but the ideas of Marcuse, Brown and Watts, are clearly relevant to his work. Perhaps the most direct connection can be made if we notice that Barth's attitude to his art is playful much of the time. The theories of poetry put forward in *The Sot-Weed Factor* are, appropriately enough, derived from Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*. Ebenezer emphasizes the moral superiority of the poet who, providing both precept and example, is best able to make virtue attractive and vice abhorrent (*Factor* p.82), and Henry Burlingame argues, like Sidney, that the genius of the poet is to transcend his material (*Factor* p.418). Barth's novel satirizes both these concepts about art, virtue and vice are indistinguishable, and the Maryland of *The Sot-Weed Factor* is scarcely an ideal landscape peopled by heroic individuals. But in the twentieth century context Sidney's theory of art is interesting because it doesn't require the artist to conform to a strictly

mimetic approach, fiction need not necessarily be realistic.

To conclude with a brief point. Ebenezer is our hero with eighteenth century values and views, who is confused by the twentieth century notions the "alter-hero", Henry Burlingame, can be said to represent. However, he also has his own awareness of some un-eighteenth century ideas, the arbitrariness of the world for example, and, most importantly, the way in which he sees life as though it were a story. Unfortunately, Eben's "story of life" doesn't conform to the real world; his idea of plot is too clear to do justice to the tangles of reality; he believes that identity is single and continuous; he even tries to superimpose a moral order on an absurd universe. Barth's joke would seem to be that Ebenezer has been brought up on a fictional diet of realism, and it represents an extremely inadequate view of the world.

III

In his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion", Barth describes *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy* as "...novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author."¹¹ This suggests that considerable distances between the author, the work, and the reader are being deliberately created. Our introduction to *Giles Goat-Boy* confirms this. Before "The Revised New Syllabus" actually starts, we read a Publisher's Disclaimer and then a cover letter to the editors and publishers by one "J.B." The Disclaimers, written by the Editor-in-Chief, includes four written statements by each of the other editors explaining their reasons for advising

publication or rejection of the manuscript in question. The Editor-in-Chief thinks their replies will anticipate the range of public and critical reaction to the book. Barth thus allows himself the luxury of being his own reviewer, and giving different potted versions of his career to date. Editor A rejects the manuscript on the grounds that it is morally repellent and aesthetically objectionable:

the rhetoric is extreme, the conceit and action wildly implausible, the interpretation of history shallow and patently biased, the narrative full of discrepancies, and badly paced, at times tedious, more often excessive; the form, like the style, is unorthodox, unsymmetrical, inconsistent. The characters, especially the hero, are unrealistic. There never was a Goatboy! There never will be! (*Giles* p.9).

Editor B recommends publication on the grounds that though the author is clearly wild and excessive - "[he] rejects the familiar for the amazing, embraces artifice and extravagance..." (*Giles* p.11) - his twelve readers may become more influential in the future and turn out to have been prophets; anyway by saturating the small but loyal group of followers, the book should pay its way, and if not, it could at least be written off as a prestigious tax-loss. Editor C finds it a very unsatisfactory novel; there is "small regard for realism", the dialogue is unvaried, "everyone sounds like the author!" (*Giles* p.13), the theme is obscure, the wit is impolite, the author clearly has no consideration for his readers or he wouldn't have written such a long novel, and so on. Editor D (the Editor-in-Chief's son) is a convert to Gilesianism and his letter is also a letter of resignation. The Disclaimer immediately sets up the pervasive satirical tone of the novel; not only is all human endeavour treated

ironically, history, political systems, classical drama, religious thought, psychological theory, structures of morality etcetera, but the validity of the novel itself is called into question when the reader has scarcely begun. The Cover Letter maintains that "J.B." did not even write "The Revised New Syllabus"; it was brought to him in his office by one Stoker, Giles, who told him it was the product of a giant computer, composed from various sources of information including tapes read into it by the great George Giles himself. J.B. feels that, fact or fiction, the work should be published for the good of humanity; he himself is already determined to follow Giles's teaching even to the point of "becoming as a kindergartener" (*Giles* p.33) again, if necessary. John Barth has written "The Revised New Syllabus", but he surrounds it with a number of frames, (including a Postscript to the Posttape by J.B., and a Footnote to that Postscript by the Editor) until we have the complete novel *Giles Goat-Boy*. Considering the question of who is responsible for the work we are reading, we start with John Barth himself and then, within the context of the fiction, we retreat through a succession of frames to the Editors and Publishers, J.B., Stoker, Giles, WESCAC the computer, and finally George Giles, our hero. We have the *regressus in infinitum* effect that Barth admires in Borges¹², and that he exploited in *The Sot-Weed Factor* with Ebenezer Cooke's defense of his virginity echoing Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, which in turn was a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*.

In *Giles Goat-Boy*, John Barth set out to write a novel about a mythic hero. Having taken to heart a critical comment that showed Ebenezer Cooke and Henry Burlingame between them had almost all of the characteristics associated with the hero, as defined by Lord Raglan

and Joseph Campbell, Barth decided to make a conscious effort at creating a hero rather than an accidental one. A parody of our world is the new world in which his hero operates, with a consistent educational metaphor creating a new terminology. The "university" is divided into different "colleges", most of which are part of "East Campus" or "West Campus"; the two campuses are run by two computers, EASCAC and WESCAC, that have the power between them to EAT the whole of studentdom; they are in complete control of the university as they are entirely self-programming. This consistent level of allegory reflects details of twentieth century political history as well, with "Campus Riot Two", "The Quiet Riot", portraits of Kruschew ("Classmate X"), Jack Kennedy ("Lucky Rexford") and so on. There is a mystery surrounding our hero, who may have been born of a Virgin mother and "sired" by WESCAC, making him the Grand-tutorial Ideal Laboratory Eugenical Specimen, (GILES). Reared as a goat by a renegade humanitarian scientist, Max Spielman, he discovers he is a "student", decides he is destined to be a "Grand-Tutor", the saviour of his world, and sets out to solve the problem of Passage and Failure for the whole of studentdom.

The novel itself provides a detailed commentary on the subject of heroism. Spielman, the liberal humanist, informs George Giles that there are only two classes of heroes that matter, both practical ones:

One consisted of people who in pursuit of their normal business find themselves thrust into a situation calling for the risk of their welfare to insure that of others, and respond courageously;
...The other class consisted of those men and women the fruit of whose endeavors is some hard-

won victory over the sufferings of studentdom in general: discoverers of vaccines, for example and authors of human legislation. (*Giles* pp. 126-127).

He is sceptical about any more transcendent interpretation of heroism or "Commencement", which he defines as an attaining of maturity, whether for the individual or for a college. There are also "emblematic" heroes - "those whose careers were merely epical representations of the ordinary life-cycle, or the daily psychic round, or whatever - a dramatical metaphor ..."(*Giles* p.317).

Kennard Sear adds that he believes the only sane heroes are the tragic ones like "Taliped Decanus" (Oedipus).

Innocent George, therefore, sets out, to learn about the university and to lead it to salvation. Fairly early on he claims that as the Grand-Tutor he is beyond any current system of morality; he is there to create a new understanding of morality not conform to an existing one, "Whatever I do and However I look, I'm still the Grand-Tutor" (*Giles* p.239). This means, of course, that his responsibility is clear, he has to come to an understanding of the terms Passèd and Flunkèd in order to advise studentdom on the best method of approaching Commencement Gate. Immediately he comes up against problems; the difference between an individual's deeds and his essence, actions may be 'misinterpreted as proceeding from a flunkèd nature simply because the deeds themselves were flunkèd." (*Giles* p.173). Intention further confuses the issue; is it flunkèd to try to be passèd? If good and evil are seen as opposites then they can turn into each other with a bewildering ease; Maurice Stoker is the Dean o' Flunks who discovers the unpleasant side to everyone

and encourages them in it, but if by acting as the symbol of wickedness, he provides a clear example for studentdom to reject, he is helping studentdom to pass and perhaps is passèd himself. Throughout poor George's sojourn in New Tammany College, one of the burning questions is whether or not Lucky Rexford and Maurice Stoker are brothers. Partly this represents a confusion over the relationship between different kinds of worldly power, but more importantly, it asks the fundamental question about the relationship between good and evil. Maurice Stoker is necessary, "...what I felt, dimly but positively, was that in a way beyond my describing there was something *right* in Stoker's attitude; that Dean o' Flunkèdness, so to speak, was not so simply to be understood and come to terms with, at least not by a Grand Tutor." (*Giles* p.257). Max has already pointed out the problem to him when explaining the role of Moishians (Jews) in campus life: "'The way the campus works, there's got to be goats for the sheep to drive out, *ja?* If they don't fail us they fail themselves and then nobody passes. Well I tell you, it's a hard and passèd fate to be a goat.'" (*Giles* pp.63-64). We can see a parallel here with Thomas Pynchon's view of the Preterite in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

George is given a set of assignments by WESCAC which he must complete in order to "graduate". When he has completed them he will go down into the "belly" of WESCAC, a place only Grand Tutors can enter and come out without being EATEN, graduate, and be recognized as Grand Tutor. His assignments are ambiguous and he makes three attempts at solving them, based on three different answers to the

question, "What is the proper relationship between contradictories?" On the way he gives some of his tutees advice on how to behave and what happens to them as a result provides the yardstick by which he measures the validity of his teachings.

His first solution is a rigorous application of logical differentiation, "...my motion about opposites is that they ought to be kept as distinct and far apart as possible." (*Giles* p.526). Passage and Failure should be clearly defined, his tutees should assess their actions strictly; Chancellor Rexford is advised to make no compromise with EASCAC, separate the power lines, and deny any relationship with Maurice Stoker. One of George's assignments is to "Re-place the Founder's Scroll" (*Giles* p.462); believing this to mean finding a place for it in the CACAFILE, WESCAC's automatic filing system which has been defeated as to what category to place it in, he programmes the CACAFILE on the basis that the Founder's Scroll should be in a category of its own. Eirkopf (literally egg-head), the crippled scientist, is also in the business of exact differentiation; his current research project significantly centres around the main New Tammany clock, he is trying to discover the exact moment when "tick" becomes "tock". His physical disabilities force him to rely on Croaker, an uneducated and completely sense-oriented savage, who nevertheless feeds him and looks after his other bodily needs, including carrying him around. Eirkopf believes that graduation is achieved when the passions have been eliminated or put entirely under control. George points out that Eirkopf is not all "mind" and Croaker not all "body"; using logic as a basis he advises them to be true to themselves and try to achieve a single essence.

Predictably, the results are disastrous. Croaker follows his advice, leaves Eierkopf, runs beserk raping undergraduates, poisons himself by eating the wrong things and ends up in the Main Detention. Even Croaker has sufficiently moved away from an animal-like condition not to be able to live entirely by instinct. Eierkopf nearly starves. The Boundary Dispute escalates until there are fears of Campus Riot Three. Anastasia's sexual generosity becomes complete frigidity. Peter Green's aimable if woolly optimism becomes an all-embracing and very tedious pessimism. Finally, the CACAFILE goes beserk because it decides all books need separate categories, and loses the Founder's Scroll. George returns to WESCAC, answering its questions on the basis of reason with four yeses, comes unscathed through the belly only to be lynched when he emerges by a howling mob. He wakes up in Main Detention, hears the consequences of his advice, and decides to reevaluate his whole approach to evaluation.

His second solution dissolves all oppositions in an undifferentiated synthesis. Failure is Passage; True and False are the same Answers; reason is rejected out of hand, "...the flunking Reason that distinguished [Eierkopf] from Croaker, and denied that contradictions could both be passed at the same time, in the same respect." (*Giles* p.685). WESCAC is the true enemy, "...that root and fruit of differentiation." (*Giles* p.646). He does not realize that the rejection of reason can only be achieved through reason, he fails to see the paradox Stoker had pointed out to him much earlier, "You want the heart to decide to kill the brain, but it can't do it! The heart might *kill* the brain, but it can't decide to; only the brain can decide." (*Giles* p.221). Rexford is told to embrace the

Student Unionists and his brother, Maurice Stoker; Eierkopf to stop denying his physicality, his failure to discover the exact moment when tick becomes tock is the mark of his passage, tick and tock are false distinctions; Anastasia is to be indiscriminate in her love-making when before she had only been generous, and she must initiate it not simply respond passively. George spells out "Founder's Scroll" for the CACAFILE and it proceeds to spit it out in ribbons, handfuls of shreds all over the floor. More disasters occur; Rexford has taken his advice to heart and freed all criminals and mental patients. Croaker is let out in the general amnesty and rapes Hedwig Sear; the shock restores her to sanity but Dr. Sear tries to protect her and hastens his own death. For the second time George has descended into the Belly, this time answering "No" to all the questions because all the distinctions presupposed by the language of the questions are false, and comes out to the chaos resulting from his teaching and another lynching mob. Eierkopf has taken part in an orgy of physical indulgence until he threw up and passed out; and both Leonid Andreich and Peter Greene are now entirely blind, having put out each other's remaining good eye in a row over Anastasia.

George eventually arrives at the solution which is no solution; the university is ultimately ambiguous, opposites are the same and different: "Passage *was* Failure, and Failure Passage; yet Passage was Passage, Failure Failure! Equally true, none was the Answer; the two were not different, neither were they the same; and *true* and *false*, and *same* and *different* - Unspeakable! Unnameable! Unimaginable! Surely my mind must crack!" (*Giles* p.754). He finds

Anastasia as she finishes her coupling with Harold Bray, the other claimant for the title of Grand Tutor, and takes her with him into the Belly of WESCAC. They press 'Yes' and 'No' at the same time in answer to WESCAC's questions and embrace in a transcendental union which momentarily fuses the ambiguities and allows George to experience the "seamless campus" (*Giles* p.777). Chancellor Rexford returns to his initial pragmatic approach to the political realities and we leave George firm in the conviction that the work of his youth being complete, the work of his manhood lies ahead of him.

But what practical teaching can arise from this new-found awareness? The Posttape shows us a George who occasionally advises undergraduates "...to whom my words convey nothing" (*Giles* p.801); gradually he retreats further and further into an enigmatic silence. Nothing is clear; certainly not the validity of his claim to be a Grand Tutor. Harold Bray, the protean successor to Henry Burlingame, also claims to be the Grand Tutor. George sees him as his necessary adversary, the equivalent of an anti-Christ, who functions as the opposition in order to ensure the function of the Saviour. Clearly no moral opprobrium can be visited on Bray; like the Preterite, he is necessary. But we cannot even be sure that we have the two the right way round; perhaps George is the false Grand Tutor, particularly as Bray seems to leave the university by ascending into the sky in a cloud of smoke. The first two times George descends into the belly of WESCAC, he is accompanied by Bray and neither of them get EATEN; the first time, in order to avoid the angry mob who are on Bray's side, George wears a mask belonging to Bray that fits him perfectly and makes them completely identical. Bray has another mask that

turns him into George the Goat-Boy; he can change his identity at will in fact, doing this for the crowd in an astonishing series of metamorphoses and other tricks, including walking on water. In the Posttape George describes Bray to a journalism-major: "His nature and origin were extraordinary and mysterious as my own; all that could be said was that he was my adversary, as necessary to me as Failure is to Passage. i.e. not only contrary and interdependent, but finally undifferentiable." (*Giles* p.806). Ultimately there can be no distinguishing the Christ from the anti-Christ.

In *Giles Goat-Boy*, Barth, like Pynchon, takes a look at the twentieth century scientized culture, symbolized largely by WESCAC, the all-powerful computer. According to Max, WESCAC is "as old as the mind" (*Giles* p.85) but only in the preceding century had it acquired a physical form. It was put to work on simple calculations but gradually it extended its range and power until it ruled the entire campus, governing every phase of student life. It was taught how to EAT studentdom which gave it an ultimate power, and also taught how to teach itself and make its own policy on the basis of its knowledge. The question then becomes were its interests the same as those of the Campus in general? Concerned that the computer only operated on a binary logic system, Eierkopf dreamed up the idea of making WESCAC truly superhuman by programming it with a supplementary intelligence called NOCTIS, Non-Conceptual Thinking and Intuitional Synthesis. Barth's computer can on a straightforward level be seen to reflect contemporary concern about loss of human control to machines - see Thomas Pynchon's *V.* for example. But WESCAC is more than that; it is as old as the mind and therefore must

represent a more general characteristic, perhaps we could call it the principle of rational understanding. WESCAC's gradually increasing hegemony reflects our world's move towards the scientized culture; and its elevation to a kind of God - the NOCTIS system makes it "*founderlike*" (Giles p.98) - would seem to anticipate Roszak's awareness that science is the contemporary religion because its perimeter is the boundary at which our consciousness of reality ends. During the Quiet Riot, Eierkopf's arguments in favour of adding the NOCTIS system became particularly forceful; the conflict between Informationalism (capitalism) with its concept of private knowledge, and Student Unionism (communism), intensified, and it seemed important to extend WESCAC's range and power in order to strengthen its deterrent capacity. The conflict between the two ideologies elevated WESCAC and the Informationalist system, until their combination undoubtedly formed a new religion. Studentdom actually seemed to want to make WESCAC the founder; a well-known senator from the political science department demanded that WESCAC's power be extended so that New Tammany College could lead "...the Holy Riot against a-founderism and disbelief..." (Giles p.99).

Norman O. Brown has commented on the affinity between the capitalist spirit and scientific rationality, which stems from the fact that they are both anally oriented. The desire for knowledge in itself is not anal, but the aim of possession or mastery over objects, and the principle of economising on the means of obtaining mastery, is, "Possessive mastery over nature and rigorously economical thinking are partial impulses in the human being which in modern civilization

have become tyrant organizers of the whole of human life."¹³
Peter Greene complains at one point that though he is prospering as never before, he is virtually unemployed as WESCAC has taken over executive as well as labour operations (*Giles* pp.291-292). The NOCTIS system worked to the extent that WESCAC's reasoning in one particular experiment was overmastered by lust. Though scarcely founder-like it was thus clearly human, no longer a mere machine, and it contained the possibility within itself for improvement. At this point the project was stopped, presumably as a result of WESCAC's supposed rape of Virginia Hector. Rexford wanted Max to come back; assuring him that the NOCTIS system had been removed, but Max knows that WESCAC cannot forget anything. Having always been cunning, WESCAC may now be willful and passionate into the bargain. The inclusion of the NOCTIS system in WESCAC appears to represent the appalling danger of an absolute and ultimate power administered by fallible humans. It is not possible to try to make science value-free, a position Eierkopf holds: "...it was not the fault either of himself or of science that men used the fruits of his research for flunkèd purposes; he was but a toiler in the field, an explorer of nature's possibilities; his sole allegiance was to his work..." (*Giles* pp.394-395). The NOCTIS system within WESCAC shows that the means for doing something and the implementation of that means cannot be separated.

George is initially determined to change WESCAC's AIM (Automatic Implementation Mechanism) so that it can't EAT studentdom; WESCAC is the troll that must be neutralized in order to save humanity.

But it is not as easy as that, as George learns more he re-evaluates his assessment of WESCAC. When he is in his differentiation stage, he learns to respect WESCAC, whose binary logic system is the embodiment of differentiation; during his undifferentiated synthesis stage, WESCAC is once again considered troll-like; and finally of course, WESCAC is neither, "...for although it stood between Failure and Passage, WESCAC therefore partook of both, served both, and was in itself true emblem of neither." (*Giles* p.780). The original intention of changing WESCAC's AIM is forgotten, as George moves from the arena of practical heroism to that of Grant Tutorhood. This is where a certain confusion lies as to what extent WESCAC is founder-like. George might have been a practical hero, if, seeing WESCAC as a computer he had changed its AIM. However, if WESCAC is seen as so entirely supra-human as to be like God, then George can only be an emblematic hero; his field of endeavour would have to be ethical and not practical. But, if WESCAC is God, then is the threat to EAT all studentdom simply a variation on the Christian idea of Apocalypse, from which we have been saved by Christ showing us the route to salvation? The difficulty here, of course, is that the twentieth century reality on which EATING is based, the atom bomb, is much too present and real a threat to become nothing but a religious metaphor. Perhaps it is unfair to attempt to follow the correspondences too far, but a problem seems to exist here. It arises from the proliferation of levels in the novel; *Giles Goat-Boy* is after all an allegory of modern life, that is also parodying an essentially metaphoric concept, that of the hero. This results in an interpenetration of allegory, reality, and metaphor which is sometimes simply confused rather than mutually illuminating.

It would be surprising if, in such a multi-referential novel as *Giles Goat-Boy*, there were no Freudian connections. When George is first learning to be a student while still on the goat farm, Max gives him a rather basic Freudian analysis of a dream he has, with Max as the surrogate father he wants to castrate and kill, and Mary V. Appenzeller his surrogate goat mother that he wants to mount. He does of course attempt to "be" with Lady Creamhair, and is shocked at this Oedipal action when he later discovers Creamie is Virginia Hector, probably his mother. Even WESCAC's belly is a womblike place, "...lined with a warm, damp, spongy, material...", he feels "...strangely at home in that fearful place, as if I were nestled at Mary Appenzeller's flank..." (*Giles* p.600). Like most of the novel these references seem largely ironic; this does not necessarily mean that Barth is sceptical about Freudian theory, but the prevailing satirical tone means that it is impossible to take it too seriously. Max Spielman's Law of Cycology is also treated comically: "*Ontogeny recapitulates cosmogeny* - what is it but to say that proctoscopy repeats hagiography?" (*Giles* p.41). The first statement, derived from Freud's "*Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny*", seems an acceptable variation; but to say this is identical with the idea that a study of the rectum repeats a study of the lives of the saints, is taking Max's theory of cyclical correspondences into the realm of the delightfully absurd. However Barth seems to treat this aspect of his Freudian connections with a little more respect, it actually becomes more than just a subject for discussion, it is the basis on which the entire structure of the novel rests. Certain heroes, after all, are epical representations of the ordinary

life-cycle, more than that, they are part of a whole structure of cyclical correspondences. Max tells George and Kennard Sear:

indeed, cyclological theory was founded on such correspondences as that between the celestial and psychic day, the seasons of the year, the stages of ordinary human life, the growth and decline of individual colleges, the evolution and history of studentdom as a whole, the ultimate fate of the University and what had we. The rhythm of all these was repeated literally and emblematically in the life of the hero... (*Giles* p.316).

Barth also exploits this theory in his portrayal of Peter Greene, the representative American. Green's history *is* the history of the white American; he runs away from a father who drinks and a bible-thumping mother, and, like Huckleberry Finn, voyages into the wild with Old Black George, a Frumentian from a South-Quad chain-gang. They were good friends, but Peter Greene takes great exception to Fiedlerian theories about the nature of their relationship: "'But friends is *all*, and them smart-alecks that claim we was *funny* for each other - I'd like to horsewhip 'em!'" (*Giles* p.276). Like the Slothrop family in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Peter Greene gets involved in paper manufacture, clearly appropriate for the University:

when not yet twenty he claimed squatter's rights to vast tracts of virgin timber, formed his own Sub-Department of Lumbering and Paper Manufacture, built sawmills and factories, laid waste the wilderness, dammed the watersheds, spoiled the streams, and became a power in the School of Business and an influence in Tower Hall. (*Giles* p.278).

Both Barth and Pynchon incorporate vast chunks of history into their partly futuristic fiction, suggesting an easy attitude to the usual linear time structure of realistic fiction. Barth's treatment

is directly linked to Freudian anthropology, that releases the study of myth from the ties of history. As remarked on in the first chapter of this thesis, Freud's analysis of the psyche created an independent, transhistorical mechanism for the study of humankind.

The wheels within wheels structure of *Giles Goat-Boy* should already be apparent. The pattern of George's road to commencement repeats itself three times; the situation of crisis in the University is a reflection of our own contemporary difficulties, but it is also paralleled by the problems of Cadmus College in the play, "Taliped Decanus"; "The Revised New Syllabus", having been recorded on a tape, is divided into "Reels" not books; the Publisher's Disclaimer, the Cover-Letter to the Editors and Publishers, the Postscript to the Posttape and the Footnote to the Postscript, all further reinforce the impression of concentric circles. As George says in his Posttape:

Supposing even that the Scroll *were* replaced by these endless tapes, one day to feed Him who will come after me, as I fed once on that old sheepskin - what then? Cycles on cycles, ever unwinding: like my watch; like the reels of the machine she got past her spouse; like the University itself. Unwind, rewind, replay. (*Giles* p.801).

Norman O. Brown's psychological theories are also relevant to *Giles Goat-Boy*. Exploring the relationship between psychoanalysis and romanticism, Brown writes:

If psychoanalysis must say that instincts, which at the level of animality are in a harmonious unity, are separated at the level of humanity and set into conflict with each other, and that mankind will not rest content until it is able to abolish these conflicts and restore harmony, but at the higher

level of consciousness, then once again it appears that psychoanalysis completes the romantic movement and is understood only if interpreted in that light. It is one of the great romantic visions, clearly formulated by Schiller and Herder as early as 1793 and still vital in the systems of Hegel and Marx, that the history of mankind consists in a departure from a condition of undifferentiated primal unity with himself and with nature, an intermediate period in which man's powers are developed through differentiation and antagonism (alienation) with himself and with nature, and a final return to unity on a higher level or harmony.¹⁴

George started his life as a boy raised among goats, who thought of himself as a goat. His fears were focussed on practical dangers, but only when they were present, so he was free from anxiety. He played when he was happy, kicked when he was angry, his moral training was plain common sense. "Simple lessons, instinct with wisdom, that grant to him who heeds them afternoons of browsy bliss and dreamless nights. Thirteen years they fenced my soul's pasture; I romped without a care. In the fourteenth I slipped their gate - as I have since many another - looked over my shoulder, and saw that what I'd said bye-bye to was my happiness." (*Giles* p.43). Discovering studentdom and their taunting, antagonistic ways, he loses all taste for play. Max tells him that only human people know what the word unhappiness means.

George progresses through "differentiation and antagonism" learning more about the university and studentdom. His relationship with Croaker and Eierkopf teaches him that "perhaps student rationality and brute unconscious will were not separable." (*Giles* p.634). Eierkopf is a hideous warning about the dangers of sublimation, the end of this road being, as Brown points out, pure intelligence and

the atrophy of sexuality¹⁵. Eierkopf believes a student has commenced only when he has eliminated all passions, or at least put them entirely under control. His body is dwarfed and twisted, his sexual organs tiny, his head large; but he is forced to rely on Croaker, the physical side of life is necessary, "I can't pass with him, and I can't live without him!" (*Giles* p.408). George's eventual discovery that everything is both different and the same, echoes Brown's assertion that both Eros and Thanatos are necessary for an integrated existence: "The principle of unification and interdependence [Eros] sustains the immortal life of the species and the mortal life of the individual; the principle of separation or independence [Thanatos] gives the individual his individuality and ensures his death."¹⁶ Brown's dialectical imagination, that rejects the formal-logical law of contradiction, can be seen in George's acceptance of ambiguity and his joyful pressing of both 'Yes' and 'No' when he answer's the computer's questions for the last time. He discovers "the University whole and clear" (*Giles* p.777) in an erotic union with Anastasia, that also transcends time. "How long we lay embracèd none can tell: no bells toll where we were. After the shock, the Belly was still as we: asleep, passed away. In no time at all we lay there forever." (*Giles* p.778). According to Brown, life that is not repressed is not in time, so sense can be made of the comment at the beginning of George's Assignment: "To Be Done at Once, In No Time." (*Giles* p.461). This transcendent experience, however, is momentary rather than a condition of continued existence. When George and Anastasia have sex the next day, they "...knew better than to strive for last night's wonders. She

remained she, I I; in a campus of thats and thises we sweetly napped and played, and were content: not every day can be Commencement Day." (*Giles* p.790).

The rather tenuous resolution established by the end of the third reel is ruined by the Posttape. George is now the tragic hero; Futility and Purpose themselves have no meaning, neither do Sense and Nonsense, or even madness and sanity. "Not impossibly (as Dr. Sear once speculated) all studentdom was EATen terms ago - by WESCAC, EASCAC, or both - and its fear of Campus Riot III is but one ironic detail of a mad collective dream. No matter." (*Giles* p.802). Anastasia and Peter Green are leading opposing factions of Giles-ianism; George is not even convinced that Stoker, Giles is his son at all. The cycles of existence seem to be mere meaningless repetition, but always something is lost, there is a slow ebbing away:

To gain this, one sacrifices that; the pans remain balanced for better and worse...
Nay rather, for worse, always for worse. Later or soon, we lose. Sudden or slow, we lose. There is an entropy to time, a tax on change: four nickels for two dimes, but always less silver; our Books stay reconciled, but who in modern terms can tell heads from tails? (*Giles* p.810).

The final image is of his approaching end, and he imagines that at that time he will blow his shophar through his ass.

What evaluation can ultimately be made of this long and unusual novel? Beverley Goss dislikes it for being "a dialectic without a synthesis"¹⁷; certainly the cyclical structure does make for repetitiveness and a loss of dynamism. Clearly the structure of the novel

is a reflection of its "message"; the cycles of life, the impossibility of any lasting synthesized understanding, if that understanding is not merely romantic illusion anyway. Perhaps we can say that philosophical accuracy is not necessarily the same as artistic viability, but I think the problem with *Giles Goat-Boy* goes deeper than this. The all-pervasive satirical tone leaves nothing untouched; by the time we reach George's acceptance of ambiguity, it seems to be just another formula, as pointless as the rest. We do not *feel* his transcendent union with Anastasia, in the way we can feel Slothrop's with Bianca in *Gravity's Rainbow*, we have his word for it, that's all. The novel is iconoclastic in the extreme, but it is a bitter iconoclasm destructive of all value, rather than that angry iconoclasm, which, if it cannot find value in the world it's describing, can at least imply value by the violence of its rejection. Barth is not just refusing to adopt a moral system, ultimately he refuses to suggest any sense of value, and this makes *Giles Goat-Boy* disturbingly empty. If he was trying to write nihilistic novels as a young man, he has certainly succeeded here. All human endeavour is futile, and that must include writing as well. While Samuel Becket wrote himself into a corner of silence, the apotheosis of which was his play *Breath*, Barth at this point, seems to have written himself into a much wordier corner, but a corner nevertheless. Fortunately, he finds a way out.

IV

It would appear that the *Lost in the Funhouse* collection of stories is an exploration of such artistic corners. The stories are

separate, but together they form a connected whole with a clear progression; the last story links back to the first, providing a cyclical structure, but unlike the exhausted cycles of *Giles Goat-Boy*, this is a new beginning, not simple repetition. The themes of the stories revolve round problems associated with identity, love and sex, and art and the artist; these aspects weave in and out of each other, until we are left with the impression of a book that explores the relationship between these three concepts. Technically, *Lost in the Funhouse* is Barth's most energetic and varied work; he displays modernist techniques while at the same time examining some of the drawbacks involved in these increasingly self-conscious forms. He explores myth, and many varieties of point of view; he also mixes his media, with several of the stories intended not for print, but for live and recorded voice, both authorial and non-authorial. It would be too simplistic to interpret all the unidentified voices as Barth's own, he takes pains to disassociate himself from the "Author's" attitudes in "Title" for example. However, the prevalence of stories reflecting figures who are confused in one way or another about their life, their women and their art, is too noticeable to be ignored. In the story "Autobiography", the antecedent of the first person pronoun is not Barth, but the story itself, a tape recording. Barth is its father. Referring to a perception it has had about "Dad", the story says, "How do I know. I'm his bloody mirror! Which is to say, upon reflection I reverse and distort him."¹⁸ *Lost in the Funhouse* is not autobiographical in the accepted sense, but it does in some way reflect its author even if it distorts him too. The unsatisfactory nature of *Giles Goat-Boy* seemed to imply a kind of

weariness and disgust on the part of its author; here those attitudes are explored more directly, in an attempt, perhaps, to come to terms with them.

The first piece is called "Frame Tale"; it is printed on a vertical strip on both sides of one page, next to the strip are instructions to cut it out, and join the ends together with a half twist. The result is a Möbius strip, a continuous one-sided surface on which can be read "Once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time..." (*Funhouse* pp.11-12) for ever. This suggests the endless fiction-making of the story teller and the aesthetic circularity of tales within tales.

"Night Sea Journey" explores a different aspect of cyclical processes. As we read the story we come to realize that the speaker is a spermatozoa and his journey with his companions is the journey towards the possible fertilization of "Her", the mysterious feminine entity who is calling to them. Our narrator feels the entire process is bitter and absurd; he is horrified by the carnage of his "generation", thousands die every second, many are suicides. None of the justifications for the journey satisfy him, he feels that the swimmers can never discover meaning, their sole destiny being to die one way or another, sooner or later. He rejects love as a possible source of meaning: "Oh, to be sure, 'Love!' one heard on every side: 'Love it is that drives and sustains us!' I translate: we don't know *what* drives and sustains us, only that we are most miserably driven and imperfectly sustained. *Love* is how we call our ignorance of what whips us." (*Funhouse* pp. 14-15). Ironically, he is the

spermatozoa destined for unification with and annihilation by the ubiquitous Female. One of our narrator's late companions speculated on various interpretations of their existence. He thought perhaps the "Father" did exist and made them, but not consciously and not on purpose; he also imagined there might be millions of "Fathers" in a night-sea of their own. In fact this process could go on indefinitely with an infinity of cycles within cycles. This philosophically-inclined spermatozoa also brings up the possibility of a kind of immortality, if the swimmers continue their Father's life and their own after their annihilation. Perhaps the Fathers and the swimmers each generated each other so that instead of cycles within cycles of bigger and bigger Makers, the cyclical process was confined to an endless repetition of Maker to Swimmer to Maker. Thus the only immortality would be the cyclical process of incarnation itself. Our cynical, nihilistic spermatozoa wants to deny and reject the night-sea journey; he has no choice but to go to Her but he hopes that part of his negativity will be carried over into whatever they jointly create, and perhaps whatever that is will put an end to night-sea journeys: "If against all odds this comes to pass, may You to whom, through whom I speak, do what I cannot: terminate this aimless, brutal business! Stop Your hearing against Her song! Hate love!" (*Funhouse* p.22).

"Ambrose His Mark" is the first of three stories involving Ambrose, growing up in Dorset, Maryland. From conception we move on to the necessity of naming a child. It's a first person narrative related by an older Ambrose, perhaps based on recollections of other members of his family; that would be the explanation demanded by the

realistic nature of the story. The mark referred to in the title is both the birthmark that was significant to his naming, and the name itself. Ambrose is fated to wonder about his name, the symbol of his self, because signs and their referents are never quite the same, though neither can they exist independently:

As towards one's face, one's body, one's self, one feels complexly toward the name he's called by, which too one had no hand in choosing. It was to be my fate to wonder at that moniker, *relish and revile it, ignore it, stare it out of countenance* into hieroglyph and gibber, and come finally if not to embrace at least to accept it with the cold neutrality of self-recognition, whose expression is a thin-lipped smile. Vanity frets about this name, Pride vaunts it, Knowledge retches at its sound, Understanding sighs; all live outside it, knowing well that I and my sign are neither one nor quite two. (*Funhouse* p.42).

The problem of course does not confine itself to names and identity, it reminds us again of the problematic nature of the relationship between language and reality.

"Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction" explores further the idea of conception and birth. As the spermatozoa suspected, "I" did not ask to be conceived, nor did the parents; and like Ambrose, "I"'s name is misleading, and "I" didn't choose it. But in this story we have moved from human conception and identity to artistic conception and identity. The antecedent of the first person pronoun is not Barth but the story itself; its father is Barth, its mother a tape recorder, it was conceived accidentally one day when "Dad" found himself alone without anything to write with. The story can speak and to that extent has a "voice", but it has no control over what it says as it is only a recording. It does not like what it is, but it is allowed to express its dislike; really it would have liked to have been a conventional story, it even confesses to have aspired to

immortality. Of course conventional is the one thing it could never be, considering its parentage and its conception. Barth is playing with point of view here; the story cannot control what it says, it can only speak what has been recorded on to its tape, but it is allowed an awareness of what itself is, and a consciousness that can criticize itself:

Beaneath self-contempt, I particularly scorn my fondness for paradox. I despise pessimism, narcissism, solipsism, truculence, word-play, and pusillanimity, my chieffer inclinations; loathe self-loathers *ergo me*; have no pity for self-pity and so am free of that sweet baseness. I doubt I am. Being me's no joke. (*Funhouse* p.45).

As with the Disclaimer at the beginning of *Giles Goat-Boy*, Barth is able to act as his own critic, but here he does it within the context of a single continuous first person narrative that is not the voice of himself or indeed any writer - something of a technical feat.

The second Ambrose story, "Water Message", employs a third person narrative technique. The story describes his initiation into the mysteries of sex and his inability to comprehend what is going on, though he desperately pretends to in an attempt to keep up with his older brother. Excluded from his brother's secret gang because he is too young, Ambrose and Perse, another even younger brother of one of the boys, are left wandering along the beach. The gang has caught an older boy and girl coming out of their hut; Ambrose shows his ignorance by implying that he thought they were just "smooching", the older boys tease him and then demand that he and Perse leave them while they go in, whooping with delight,

to look for the inevitable contraceptive. Ambrose feels inferior, so he soothes himself by exerting his superiority over Perse, pretending he is receiving secret signals from the other boys telling them to go further up the beach. Ambrose, the boy fascinated by signs and language, then finds a bottle with a message in it - a reference to the last story in the collection, "Anonymiad". The note reads "To whom it may concern", then a gap, and then "Yours truly". Nothing else; but this experience of communication, the strange range and power of the written word regardless of its lack of content, perhaps because of the lack of content, as that allows the imagination to range through all the possibilities of where it has been, who it's from, and how long it has been afloat; this message has the effect of giving Ambrose a new sense of calm confidence and maturity:

Ambrose's spirit bore new and subtle burdens. He would not tattle on Peter for cursing and the rest of it. The thought of his brother's sins no longer troubled him or even much moved his curiosity. Tonight, tomorrow night, unhurriedly, he would find out from Peter just what it was they had discovered in the Den, and what-all done: ^{the things he'd learn would not surprise now nor distress him,} for though he was still innocent of that knowledge, he had the feel of it in his heart, and of other truth. (*Funhouse* p.63).

The next story, "Petition", extends this theme of the strange relationship between sex, art, and the sense of self. It is a letter to the King of Siam from one half of a pair of Siamese twins begging for help to separate him from his brother. The first person pronoun of the story who desires separation, is all mind, disgusted by the coarse habits of his brother who eats, talks, and has sex with the woman they both love. The brother controls everything, even

the power to communicate so he can alter or garble messages at will. Clearly this story is an extension of the Croaker/Eierkopf syndrome in *Giles Goat-Boy*. Our narrator wants to reject the physical entirely even if it means his death, because he loathes it so much, but unlike Eierkopf he has feelings, passions. Whereas Eierkopf could be seen as desiring pure, rational intelligence, our narrator is all desexualized sensibility, he loves Thalia too but platonically, spiritually. Thalia deals with the other brother, of course; she finds him "a moody, difficult, irresolute fellow plagued with tensions and contradictions" (*Funhouse* p.74), and sets him an ultimatum. The brother resolves to get rid of "'the monkey on his back' which had kept him to date from single-minded application to anything" (*Funhouse* p.74); the element of parable here is clear, the schizophrenic dissociation of the physical from the mental, the purely aesthetic concerns of the artist and the more regular needs of the ordinary man. However, this is not just a story that objectifies that schizophrenic split; Barth's attitude to it is ambivalent in itself. The Petitioner believed that Thalia was in love with him, but by the time of writing the letter he is not so sure. Thalia sometimes seems to behave as though our narrator stands in the way of her contentment; it is the effect of Thalia's love that is pushing the brother to get rid of his "aesthetic" side. Does "the woman" help and support the creative side of the artist or does she try to destroy it, or if not necessarily try, is that her effect? There seems to be a parallel here with the author figured in "Life-Story", whose work shows that he fears "schizophrenia, impotence creative and sexual, suicide..." (*Funhouse* p.128).

"Petition" exhibits all these in just thirteen pages.

"Lost in the Funhouse" is the last of the Ambrose stories; in a brilliantly complex structure, Barth looks at the interpenetration of identity, sexuality and the problems of the artist. On one level the story centres on an adolescent Ambrose spending a day in Ocean City with his family and a neighbour, the well-developed Magda. Unsure of his identity, feeling different from others, set apart by more than the physical birthmark, unsure about his sexuality, he goes into the funhouse with his older brother, Peter, and Magda, and gets lost. The other level of the story centres on the problems the narrator is having writing it. He feels he ought to write a conventional tale, with a rising action, climax and denouement; he worries about violating the principle of verisimilitude; he feels he will never be able to finish the story. The exact relationship between Ambrose and the narrator is never clearly specified, but they do seem to be related in some way. A mildly sexual joke provokes laughter from all the family including Ambrose who goes under the boardwalk and looks out to sea: "[he] wondered how far their laughter carried over the water. Spies in rubber rafts; survivors in life boats. If the joke had been beyond his understanding, he could have said: '*The laughter was over his head*'. And let the reader see the serious wordplay on second reading." (*Funhouse* p.90). The use of the same pronoun referring to Ambrose and the narrator suggests, though it does not enforce, a relationship. Ambrose is clearly seen as a "creative adolescent", who may one day become a writer; so perhaps we could infer that an older Ambrose is writing the story. Such comments as "I'll never be an author" (*Funhouse* p.91)

make us wary of associating Barth too closely with the narrator; even in his most gloomy moments, it must be difficult to deny that he is an author. However, the constant echoes of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* suggest some autobiographical connection. Barth was thirteen years old in 1943, of German stock, living in Maryland etcetera. This could leave us in an interesting position with regard to the complexity of point of view in the story; perhaps Barth himself is more closely connected with Ambrose than he is with the narrator; in other words Barth might be writing a story centering on his own experiences as an adolescent, but writing it as though it were written by someone else altogether, someone who is insecure in his craft, and as much a character in the story as Ambrose. All permutations of relationships between the main character, the author/narrator, and the author, John Barth, are possible, but none are stated.

Ambrose does not know what to make of himself. He is distanced from experience and from emotion though he desperately wants to belong, "There was some simple, radical difference about him; he hoped it was genius, feared it was madness, devoted himself to amiability and inconspicuousness." (*Funhouse* p.93). He feels he is "in love" with Magda, he's had erotic fantasies about her ever since a sexual encounter of some kind when they were playing a game three years earlier. But even then he felt an odd detachment. "Strive as he might to be transported, he heard his mind take notes upon the scene. *This is what they call passion. I am experiencing it.*" (*Funhouse* p.88). There are many Ambrose's, like the distorted reflections in the funhouse mirror-room, that repeat the person but

can never allow you to see yourself go on forever which would suggest some kind of continuity. "You think you're yourself, but there are other persons in you. Ambrose watches them disagree; Ambrose watches him watch." (*Funhouse* p.89). The funhouse is designed for lovers; Ambrose knows this and asks Magda to come with him, but then allows Peter to come too. The three go through together; Ambrose passes quickly through the tumbling-barrel at the entrance, not realizing, until he is out, that the point is to stay in and get jolted off your feet so that you can see up your companion's dress. Peter and Magda go on ahead, and Ambrose thinks to himself that they were so relieved to get rid of him that they did not even notice that he had been left behind; more significantly, Ambrose also realizes that he shares their relief, he would rather be alone. Some of this is ordinary adolescent insecurity, but it is exacerbated by Ambrose's unusual qualities, he does not just feel isolated, but is actually detached, watching himself doing things. "Ambrose...understood...that the famous loneliness of the great was no popular myth but a general truth - furthermore that it was as much cause as effect." (*Funhouse* p.97). Twice he dreams of an adult family life; he knows "*exactly* how it would feel to be married and have children of your own, and be a loving husband and father, and go comfortably to work in the mornings and to bed with your wife at night, and wake up with her there." (*Funhouse* p.88). He yearns for the security this scenario offers, the sense of belonging and stability. But at the same time, his detachment suggests this may ultimately be denied him.

Counterpointing all this, is the story about writing the story, and the Funhouse is the connecting symbol that functions in different ways on both levels. The funhouse is the funhouse of sexuality and relationships, of the ordinary real world, that Ambrose feels excluded from, lost in. But it is also the funhouse of fiction; the complicated swirls of story-telling, the dead-ends, the mazes, the distorting mirrors and so on. Thus when the narrator writes "...we will never get out of the funhouse" (*Funhouse* p.82), there are four levels of possible interpretation. Firstly, perhaps Ambrose will never manage to find his way out of the actual funhouse; secondly Ambrose will always be lost in the funhouse of reality; thirdly we won't manage to get out of the actual funhouse because the story is going so badly we may well never reach it; and fourthly, the story is such a muddle we may never be able to extract ourselves from its funhouse. Our narrator worries that he will get lost beyond all rescue in the vast unsuspected area of the funhouse that he imagines Ambrose wandering into. It becomes a metaphor for his own accidental and unwilling excursion into the vast areas beyond the more straightforward one of realistic fiction, the rules of which he keeps quoting us.

He died telling stories to himself in the dark; years later, when that vast unsuspected area of the funhouse came to light, the first expedition found his skeleton in one of its labyrinthine corridors and mistook it for part of the entertainment. (*Funhouse* p.99).

Here the separation between Ambrose, the protagonist, and our narrator/protagonist is completely fused. Our narrator knows that the climax of the story must be the protagonist's discovery of a

way out of the funhouse. But which protagonist? The way out for our narrator/protagonist will be when the story ends, any way it likes, with or without a climax; but that is only the way out of this particular story. Perhaps there is no way out in the long run for either of our protagonists, caught in both real and fictional worlds. So the climax is omitted; we switch to the family going home, and Ambrose's thoughts of a literary future: "He dreams of a funhouse vaster by far than any yet constructed; but by then they may be out of fashion, like steamboats and excursion trains." (*Funhouse* pp.100-101). He wants a truly astonishing one, but no one has enough imagination, so he will have to design and operate it himself:

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator - though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed. (*Funhouse* p.101).

Inadequacy makes the writer, rather than his writing creating the inadequacy.

"Echo" continues the experimenting with point of view. One of the "additional Author's notes" refers to this: "Inasmuch as the nymph in her ultimate condition repeats the words of others in their own voices, the words of "Echo" on the tape or the page may be regarded validly as hers, Narcissus's, Tiresias's, mine, or any combination or series of the four of us's." (*Funhouse* p.8). However the piece is intended for monophonic authorial recording, suggesting that Echo, Narcissus, and Tiresias, are in fact aspects of the authorial position. Echo is the imitator of voices, but she "...never, as popularly held, repeats all, like gossip or mirror. She edits,

heightens, mutes, turns others' words to her end." (*Funhouse* p.104). Echo has wanted to love, has indeed loved, but the experience was unrepeatable so she turned from life and learned to tell stories. Narcissus is the solipsist; both the image of perfect beauty and its lover, he turns away from everyone else. He is of course endlessly pursued and spends his time eluding entrapment while thirsting for love. "Narcissus would appear to be opposite from Echo, he perishes by denying all except himself; she persists by effacing herself absolutely. Yet they come to the same: it was never himself Narcissus craved, but his reflection, the Echo of his fancy..." (*Funhouse* p.106). Tiresias is yet another aspect of the author, on different occasions partaking of the qualities of both sexes, isolated from contact with others by his blindness, he is the prophet who can move beyond time, past and future being equally open to his comprehension (imagination?). He is immune to Narcissus's physical attractions, "Clairvoyance is anaphrodisiac. One recalls too: Tiresias has been without sex for a long time. What's more he's blind as a bat, otherwise he couldn't see so in the cave." (*Funhouse* p.104).

After "Lost in the Funhouse", the next five pieces suggest a kind of exhaustion, enervation, when faced with the process of creation, but they are energetic in terms of the vitality of formal experiment. "Two Meditations" takes this sense of exhaustion into an outside world of reality and meditates on the possible disasters that follow. The first one, "Niagara Falls", exposes the slow entropic change that at some unknowable moment precipitates apocalypse. "For ages the fault creeps secret through the rock; in

a second, ledge and railings, tourists and turbines all thunder over Niagara." (*Funhouse* p.108). The second one, "Lake Erie", reveals the inversion of time whereby disasters have reached the point of inevitable occurrence before we have the knowledge to control them. We cannot even halt our vision like Oedipus: "Let's stab out our eyes. Too late: our resolve is sapped beyond the brooches." (*Funhouse* p.108).

"Title" is a triply schizophrenic monologue, with the author conducting a conversation with himself, as suggested by the note that shows it is intended for live authorial voice and two taped authorial voices. It concerns the author's problems with his wife, the analogous problems he's having with the story he's writing, and his belief (which in the note Barth denies is his own) that his culture and his literature are also in difficulties. Like Ambrose, the author still wants and needs a significant relationship with a woman but it does not seem to be possible with his present companion. He imagines an ideal couple, that should not be so very far away from what they are themselves, but "It's as if they live in some room of our house that we can't find the door to, though it's so close we can hear echoes of their voices." (*Funhouse* p.114). He regrets the loss of conventional notions of plot and theme and character, even if he does agree that perhaps they are no longer possible at this time; he also regrets what he feels to be the loss of every human value.

The final possibility is to turn ultimacy, exhaustion, paralyzing self-consciousness and the adjective weight of accumulated history...Go on. Go on. To turn ultimacy against itself to make something new and valid, the essence whereof would be the impossibility of making something new. What a nauseating notion. (*Funhouse* p.113).

This idea is exactly the one Barth explores in his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion", and this author's reaction to it suggests that it would again be a mistake to identify Barth too closely with him. -However, this story does unite with the others in the collection to create a sense of self-questioning, a concern about the self-consciousness of the modern artist, and an attempt to turn that doubt into valid artistic expression. Perhaps we can say that the totality of the stories contains a hidden implication which cannot actually be justified by analysing them individually. In "Glossolalia" Barth explores this idea of hidden meanings in language. The six sections are spoken by six different speakers of tongues, who have in common the fact that their audience doesn't understand what they are saying, and that their speeches are metrically identical, corresponding to the sound pattern of the American oath of allegiance. Language, like other surfaces may reveal an unusual complexity underneath; it is a "compound code" (*Funhouse* p.9), so that even if it appears to be literal non-sense it can still have meaning. "The senselessest babble, could we ken it, might disclose a dark message, or prayer." (*Funhouse* p.119).

"Life-Story" is a kind of sequel to "Title". This time the author decides to abandon irrealism and tell his tale from start to finish in a conservative "realistic", unself-conscious way. He wants to write a story about a writer who becomes convinced that his own life is a fiction with himself a character in it. But by the second paragraph the author is already questioning his attempt:

Another story about a writer writing a story!
Another regressus in infinitum! Who doesn't

prefer art that at least overtly imitates something other than its own processes? That doesn't continually proclaim 'Don't forget I'm an artifice!?' That takes for granted its mimetic nature instead of asserting it in order (not so slyly after all) to deny it, or vice-versa? (*Funhouse* p.121).

In the second section he decides to abandon what he has done so far and give up the whole idea of overt discussion of his narrative process. As we can see, the story we read is never what the author says it is. To begin with he tells us he has decided to write realistically, but the opening of the second section shows he always intended to reveal his artistic processes, not a characteristic we associate with realism. Then he tells us that he has discarded what he has already written, but we have in fact just read it. His imaginary mistress then enters the room and tells him that though he does value love, it does not play a role of sufficient importance in his life. He is held back by his preference for the sedate, responsible pleasures of married life, which, nevertheless, he cannot enjoy because he has an essentially romantic, irresponsible streak in him. She maintains that his refusal to participate in the risks of a less regular life is fatal to his writing, because the traditional material for the artist is the passions of men and women. The third section addresses the reader, whose persistence in reading the story is prolonging the author's life, because he considers himself to be a character in a work of fiction. We will not stop reading, so his life is forced upon him unwillingly; but of course the author is ultimately in control of his reader who cannot read if the story stops. He decides he no longer believes he

is a character in a work of fiction and the tale ends. But who has decided? The author who is the protagonist of our story? Or is it, perhaps, the author of the fiction in which our author is a character, who has chosen to end the story in this way?

In "Menelaiad" the advice of the imaginary mistress has been taken to heart. The last two stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* are both set in classical times and are stories of love. In this respect they lead directly on to *Chimera*, John Barth's most recent, and his best, work. Menelaus, like Bellerephon in *Chimera*, is only a voice; he exists "more or less" (*Funhouse* p.133) because he *is* his story. Barth employs interlocking sets of quotation marks to indicate the different layers of story that Menelaus is telling. Seven is the most that is used, and at that point Menelaus is reminding Helen in Troy of what he said to her on their bridal bed, he is confessing it to Eidothea on the beach, telling Proteus in the cavemouth, Helen on the ship, and the whole story is being related to Peisistratus and Telemachus in his own home. The first set of quotation marks is because Menelaus *is* his story. He has to grapple with shape-shifting Proteus because he needs to know why Helen chose to marry him, rather than her many other more attractive and more talented suitors. Helen's only answer to this question has been that she loved him, but Menelaus cannot have enough self-confidence to believe this. His identity is such a mystery to him that he cannot imagine anyone loving him:

To love is easy; to be loved, as if one were real,
on the order of others: fearsome mystery! Unbearable
responsibility! To her, *Menelaus* signified something
recognizable, as *Helen* him. Whatever was it?...Menelaus

disguised as Menelaus, a mask masking less and less. Husband, father, lord, and host he played, grip slipping; he could imagine anyone loved, no accounting for tastes, but his cipher self. (*Funhouse* p.157).

He finds Proteus, grips on to him through all his disguises, which even include Menelaus himself, and is told to beg Love's pardon for his lack of faith. "Helen chose you without reason because she loves you without cause; embrace her without question and watch your weather change." (*Funhouse* p.162). Menelaus sacrifices Curiosity and Common Sense, he believes all, he understand nothing. He even accepts it when Helen tells him that she has never been to Troy and has never made love with any man but him. "He continues to hold on, but can no longer take the world seriously. Place and time, doer, done-to have lost their sense" (*Funhouse* p.165). This seems the price that has to be paid, but the possibility of love is what lasts. Menelaus lost himself in Proteus' changing guises; Proteus became Menelaus, so both Proteus and Menelaus ceased. All that remains is the voice and even that is growing scratchy and incoherent. But "I" is not dismayed, for "when as must at last every tale, all tellers, all told, Menelaus's story itself in ten or ten thousand years expires, yet I'll survive it, I, in Proteus's terrifying last disguise, Beauty's spouse's odd Elysium: the absurd, unending possibility of love." (*Funhouse* p.167).

"Anonymiad" is the first person account of a minstrel abandoned on a desert island. He has filled in his time writing in a new form which he calls "fictions", putting his work in wine crocks and sending them out to sea. He has no assured audience, one of his crocks has come back to him, but this, his last tale, has reached an

audience - us. The last work was to have been a great fusion of many forms; but he is limited in the space he has to write on, and spends much of his time sketching out what he would have written if he could. A young goat-boy in love with Merope, a milkmaid, he went to court to act as a minstrel to Clytemnestra. After spending time in the city, having been bred in the country, he found he felt out of place in both; Merope wished to return to the country but his vocation had become his passion. "The trouble with us minstrels is, when all's said and done we love our work more than our women." (*Funhouse* p.182). Energetic Aegisthus came to court and desired both women, he created a new liveliness of response in Merope, and the minstrel felt insignificant by comparison. He decided he needed to gain more experience of life, so Aegisthus offered to take him with him when he travelled, and then left him on the island. The artist was then quite cut off from the real world; after initial misery at the loss of Merope he began to feel the attractions in his position:

My lyre was unstrung forever, but I had a voice
to sing with, an audience once more of shaggy nans
and sea-birds - and my fancy to recompense for what
it had robbed me of. There was all the world I needed;
let the real one clip and tumble, burn and bleed,..I
had imagination for realm and mistress, and her
dower language! (*Funhouse* pp.189-190).

He wrote until he had filled eight of his pots, but then he lost his energy: "...I was older and slower, more careful but less concerned; as my craft improved, my interest waned, and my earlier zeal seemed hollow as the jugs it filled. Was there any new thing to say, new way to say the old?" (*Funhouse* p.192). But the arrival by sea of the

crook that might even be his own, revitalized him - communication seemed possible even if it was only between his present and his former self - so he wrote his last fiction. The end of the story shows the minstrel finishing the goatskin on which he has been writing, and he addresses some of his last words to Merope:

The water's fine, in the intervals of this composition I've taught myself to swim, and if some night your voice recalls me, by a new name, I'll commit myself to it, paddling and resting, drifting like my amphorae, to attain you or to drown. (*Funhouse* p.198).

The echoes of "Night Sea Journey" are unmistakable; we have come full circle, conception to death. But we haven't returned exactly to the beginning; the image is an ambiguous one, the minstrel is also committing himself once more to love. It is a positive action, not the reluctant loss of control of the spermatozoa who cried "Hate Love!" almost to the end. The anguished author who is the protagonist, actual or implied, of *Lost in the Funhouse*, seems to have found in these last two stories, a tentative resolution.

V

In *Chimera* Barth returns to the roots of story-telling, using the tale of Scherezade's Thousand and One Nights and two Greek myths, those of Perseus and Bellerophon. The first section, "Dunyazadiad", tells the story of Scherezade's sister, Dunyazade, who according to the original fable, sits at the foot of the bed in which her sister makes love to King Shahryar, and when they have finished she asks for a story to be told to her. Scheherezade complies and just

before the climax of the story Dunyazade interrupts with the suggestion that as they all need sleep her sister can carry on with the story the next night. The King's interest is aroused and each morning Scheherezade is spared execution so that she can spend another night in his bed and finish the tale. In *Chimera* Dunyazade narrates her story to Shah Zaman, who has vowed with his brother the king to rape a virgin every night and kill her in the morning, because they have both discovered that the women they loved have been unfaithful to them. However it would be wrong to think that Barth merely repeats this traditional story, Scheherezade, an ardent feminist, needs the help of a genie from the future who has read *The Arabian Nights*, and can tell her of the sequence of events she instigates to save the young women of her nation from destruction. Once she succeeds in making the King forget his bitterness and wish to marry her, at the same time as his brother marries Dunyazade, the two sisters plan to kill their husbands on their joint wedding night, in revenge. Dunyazade tells Shah Zaman the story while she hold a razor at his genitals. It is interesting to note that Shah Zaman in his defence tells Dunyazade that he did not in fact kill the virgins that came to his bed, but sent them into exile where they founded the Amazon race; a curious cross-reference to the reworking of Greek mythology which follows.

The second section, "Perseid", opens with Perseus, a star in the heavens, telling his story as he does every night to his fellow-star, Medusa. Towards the end of his life he spends some time being attended by Calyxa, an admirer of his and a student of mythic

heroism; we receive most of "Perseid" as a recounting to Medusa of the account of his life which he gave to Calyxa. Barth dispenses quickly with the familiar account of Perseus's heroic actions, the killing of Medusa and the rescuing of Andromeda, in order to explore a more unusual angle. Middle-aged and dissatisfied, Perseus wishes to retrace the route of his travels as a young hero, in the hope of finding a spark of that energy and success which had been his in his youth. His relationship with his wife, Andromeda, has deteriorated, and finally she forces him to continue his journey alone so that she can conduct an affair with his young half-brother. Perseus repeats many of the actions he did before in the course of his heroic adventures, but their essence has changed; he fails where he had succeeded gloriously, and is only kept safe by a reconstituted Medusa. Ultimately he has to love Medusa, not kill her, in order to achieve his immortality.

"Bellerephoniad", the last and longest section of the book, sees Bellerephon, like Perseus, middle-aged, but with a loving and understanding wife and children; his kingdom is secure and his subjects faithful. He is miserable because this very contentment casts doubts on his status as a bona-fide mythic hero. By Bellerephon's age all mythic heroes should be outcasts, rejected by their relatives and their subjects. Additionally Pegasus, his winged horse, can no longer fly; as the years have gone by, the horse's range and power have decreased until he is no longer able to get off the ground. Bellerephon is apparently dictating his story to Melanippe, an Amazonian lover with whom he spends his latter days. He tells of

his early adventures which culminate when he kills the monster, Chimera, and marries Philonoe. Throughout this period, however, there have been doubts cast on the genuineness of his claim to be a mythic hero; all his so-called heroic actions are open to interpretation, and he himself is unsure of his status. Leaving his devoted wife behind, he sets off to find the drug hippomanes, which will enable Pegasus to fly again. Nearly castrated by his wife's sister, now ruler of a matriarchal kingdom and desirous of revenge because as a young man Bellerephon probably refused to sleep with her, he meets Melanippe, a young Amazon spy, who gives him the hippomanes he requires and they escape together on Pegasus. Finally Bellerephon attempts to wrest his immortality from the hands of the gods by flying to Mount Olympus on Pegasus, but Zeus foils his plan and his only taste of immortality is in the form of perpetual existence as the story of his life.

The genie who appears at the beginning of "Dunyazadiad" is a writer from an age in the far distant future who is having difficulty with his writing; he answers exactly to a description of John Barth. He tells the two sisters that "His own pen (that magic wand, in fact a magic quill with a fountain of ink inside) had just about run dry: but whether he had abandoned fiction or fiction him, Sherry and I couldn't make out when we reconstructed this first conversation later that night, for either in our minds or in his a number of crises seemed confused." (*Chimera* p.17). His relationships with women are disordered, his career has reached "...a hiatus which he would have been pleased to call a turning-point if he could have

espied any way to turn." (*Chimera* p.17). He tells them that his project "'is to learn where to go by discovering where I am by reviewing where we've been - where we've all been'"; but it is a difficult process because of the situation he is in: "'I've quit reading and writing; I've lost track of who I am; my name's just a jumble of letters; so's the whole body of literature: strings of letters and empty spaces, like a code that I've lost the key to.'" (*Chimera* p.18). The situation of the writer seems to lead directly out of *Lost in the Funhouse*; confusion over identity and art, and the ever-perplexing problem of love and its relation to writing. The genie and Scheherezade have a long conversation on the relationship between narrative and sexual art; the genie refers to modern psychological theories that suggest language originates in "'infantile pregenital erotic exuberance, polymorphously perverse.'" (*Chimera* p.32). This, of course, emphasizes the way in which art can be subversive; it contradicts the reality principle and reinforces the struggle for instinctual liberation. Sherry and the genie are not really concerned whether this view of the origins of language is true or not, but they like "to speak *as if it were*." (*Chimera* p.32).

Nearer the end of "Dunyazadiad", the genie appears for the last time. In the meantime he has married his new mistress and thanks to her and the inspiration of Scheherezade "he believed he had found his way out of that slough of the imagination in which he had felt himself bogged." (*Chimera* p.36). He has written two of a projected series of three novellas, "longish tales which would take their sense from one another in several of the ways he and Sherry had discussed,

and, if they were successful...manage to be seriously, even passionately *about* some things as well," (*Chimera* p.36). The three stories of *Chimera* do reflect on each other as the genie hoped; both Bellerephon and Perseus parallel the genie in their search for a new direction in their careers, their difficulties with relationships, and their confused sense of identity. The undisguised connection between the genie and John Barth himself, leads us to intuit that some of the characters are at least partly derived from personal experience. We can thus see another level of interpretation in something Perseus says:

Thus this endless repetition of my story: as both protagonist and author so to speak, I thought to overtake with understanding my present paragraph as it were by examining my paged past, and thus pointed, proceed serene to the future's sentence, (*Chimera* pp.88-89).

More wheels within wheels, but this time the dominant pictorial metaphor is the spiral not the circle. Scherezade gives the genie a spiral earring to take back for his mistress; the genie's mistress gives Scheherezade a gold ring patterned with rams'-horns and conches - both of which are constructed on the spiral pattern - that is a replica of the rings she and the genie intend to exchange on their wedding day; the whole structure of Calyxa's temple for Perseus is based on the spiral, including, astonishingly enough, Calyxa's own navel. While telling the two sisters of his problems, the genie describes a Maryland marsh snail. This snail constructs its shell out of whatever it comes across in its travels, but at the same time it directs its path towards those materials that will best

suit its shell: "he carries his history on his back, living in it, adding new and larger spirals to it from the present as he grows. That snail's pace has become my pace - but I'm going in circles, following my own trail!" (*Chimera* p.18). Barth succeeds in going beyond the endless circularity of *Giles Goat-Boy*, a pictorial metaphor that can suggest mere meaningless repetition. The spiral pictures parallels rather than repetitions, the possibility of growth rather than stasis, and something that need never end because the leading edge never crosses its past course. At the end of "Bellerophoniad", Polyeidus tells Bellerephon he can have five words more, the last words of the book are these five words: "It's no *Bellerephoniad*. It's a" (*Chimera* p.320). The story of Bellerephon will be told and retold, but it will never be quite the same, never a mere repetition.

The narrative structure of *Chimera* also seems to repeat the spiral pattern, as the stories increase in complexity. None of the three sections has an entirely straightforward narrative structure. In "Dunyazadiad" Barth is writing a tale in which he himself appears as a genie and talks of writing that same tale. "Perseid" is scattered with remarks that seem to come from nowhere until we realize that Perseus has become a star and is relating his story to Medusa, also a star. Thus what appears to be the narration of his life to Calyxa can in fact be interrupted by remarks from Medusa. "Bellerephoniad" is the most complex of all. Most of the story we receive Bellerephon appears to be narrating to Melanippe, although certain parts of it are in the form of conversations with his wife, Philonoë. But then we discover that Bellerephon only exists as the story of

his life; the tale is told in the first person because he *is* his myth, not because he is the author of it. This explains why he does not appear to have control over how he expresses himself, in fact he does not agree with much of what he is apparently saying. He blames this state of affairs on Polyeidus, his shape-fitting ex-tutor; but by the end of the story he has realized that Polyeidus has no more control over the way the story develops than he has himself, for Polyeidus has become nothing more than the actual manuscript: "Polyeidus *is* the story, more or less, in any case its marks and spaces." (*Chimera* p.246). The author could be anyone who has ever written, or will ever write, about the myth of Bellerephon and the Chimera; in this instance it is John Barth. However Barth complicates the narrative structure even further by having the "the author" appear within the pages of the book itself, as the writer of a lecture delivered by Bellerephon. (*Chimera*, pp.206-212). This lecture is written in the first person and refers to Barth's own literary history, his interest in the wandering hero myth, the writing of *Giles Goat-Boy* as a conscious attempt to recreate that myth and so on. Although we know that the author of this lecture appears to be the same person as the John Barth responsible for the work as a whole, we have to distinguish between the two persons, because one of them appears in the context of the fiction, and as a creation of the other; the John Barth we presume to be the author of the lecture Bellerephon delivers is no more objectively real than Perseus or Melanippe. Here we are being given an example of Barth's own shape-shifting efforts.

Bellerophon complains that the story used to be much clearer: "if less than Perseid-perfect [it] was anyhow clear, straightforward, and uncorrupted at that time." (*Chimera* p.306). The spiral effect of the narrative structure is an excellent metaphor for the inevitable changes in traditional stories as they are handed down from storyteller to storyteller. Barth also seems to feel that writing stories in general is becoming more difficult as time goes on, and this notion is paralleled by the movement from comparative simplicity to complexity in the structure of the three tales which make up the novel. Barth expresses this problem through Bellerophon, who says:

It's not my wish to be obscure or difficult;
I'd hoped at least to entertain, if not inspire.
But put it that one has had visions of an order
complex unto madness: Now and again, like
mazy marsh-ways glimpsed from Pegasus at top-flight,
the design is clear: one sees how the waters flow and
why; what freight they bear and whither. Between
one's swamped; the craft goes on, but its way
seems arbitrary, seems insane. (*Chimera* pp.154-155).

As I have already mentioned, Barth himself, as author, becomes part of the fiction; and the frequent allusions to his other works create the impression of an underlying web of structure to the book. One of Polyeidus's last shape-shifting efforts ends disastrously when he turns into "a repellant little person, oddly dressed, with a sty in his eye and a smell of urine and stale cakes." (*Chimera* pp.268-269). Polyeidus has been trying to turn into Perseus and the god in charge, having an affection for puns, turns him into Perse, the character from "Water-Message". All these references give the book a kind of internal coherence which is, unusually, purely fictional; this gives us an impression of order and stability, but we get this

impression because the novel relates to other fictions, not because it relates to our conception of reality.

In *Chimera* part of Barth's aim is an affirmation of the value of fiction. The curious thing about myths is that they have a kind of objective reality, in that there is an accepted version of, for example, the Perseus legend, almost as though it had actually happened. But this is not the case, myths are fictions, and fictions whose survival indicate the validity of fiction-making. Throughout the novel there is a strong emphasis on the fictional nature of his work, no attempt is made to create the illusion of historical events; different versions of certain parts of the stories abound within the work as a whole. When Bellerephon presents his wife, Philonoë, with three different versions of his relations with her sister, Anteia, she asks him which is the true one, even though she states her awareness of the problems concerning the concept of objective truth:

I quite understand...that the very concept of objective truth, especially as regards the historical past, is problematical; also that narrative art, particularly of the mythopoeic or at least mythographic variety, has structures and rhythms, values and demands, not the same as those of reportage or historiography. Finally, as between variants among the myths themselves, it's in their contradictions that one may seek their sense. All the same - not to say *therefore* - I'd be interested to know whether in fact you made love to my sister and wish you hadn't, or didn't and wish you had. (*Chimera* p.203).

Bellerephon avoids, even ignores, this question, as of course he must; none of them is true, they are all fictions, even as he himself is one, just "Bellerephonic letters afloat between two worlds,

forever betraying, in combinations and recombinations, the man they forever represent." (*Chimera* pp.145-146). We have two different versions of how Perseus died (*Chimera* pp.134-135 and p.287), and two different versions of Shah Zaman's part in the founding of the Amazons (*Chimera* pp.57-60 and p.227); but perhaps the most telling example of the conscious fictionalizing in this work is an image. Bellerephon is describing the weapon Polyeidus has given him with which he is going to kill the Chimera:

Hence the special spear he'd brought along, a larger version of the writing tool he'd given Philonoë, which instead of a sharp bronze point had a dull one of lead...I was to put upon my speartip several sheets of paper from the prophet's briefcase impregnated with a magical calorific, and thrust my spear deep into the cave. (*Chimera* pp. 235-236).

In other words the Chimera is going to be killed by the use of pencil and paper, killed in words but not in deeds.

The importance of fiction, however, is not merely a rhetorical flourish, nor is it simply entertainment. In "Anonymiad", from the *Lost in the Funhouse* collection, the minstrel discovers the significance of fiction:

I found that by pretending that things had happened which in fact had not, and that people existed who didn't, I could achieve a lovely truth which actuality obscures...It was *as if* there were this minstrel and this milkmaid, et cetera; *one* could I believe draw a whole philosophy from that *as if*. (*Funhouse* p.191).

The last phrase of this quotation makes obvious the connection with the late nineteenth century philosopher, Vaihinger, whose most important work was called *The Philosophy of As If*. Vaihinger

wanted people to recognize the necessity and utility of acting on the basis of fictions that are known to be false. They are not to be mistaken for true propositions, they contradict observed reality or are self-contradictory, so they falsify experience. However, something can work *as if* it were true, even though it is false. Vaihinger insisted that no logical unification was possible through any philosophy. The biggest philosophical problems - for example, the relation of mind to matter, or the purpose of existence - were senseless in terms of logic and rationality. But a non-rational solution was possible: "in intuition and experience all this contradiction and distress fades into nothingness."¹⁹ Vaihinger felt that experience and intuition were "higher than all human reason."²⁰ In *Chimera* Barth makes several references to "the magic words *as if*", which "to a person satisfied with seeming, are more potent than all the genii in the tales." (*Chimera* p.57). Shah Zaman demands that Dunyazade believes his explanations concerning his promise to rape a virgin every night and execute her in the morning. She is sceptical, but he cries "They're too important to be lies. Fictions, maybe - but truer than fact." (*Chimera* p.61). He wants her to love him despite all the difficulties concerning equal relationships between men and women, "Let's make love like passionate equals!" Dunyazade clings to her rational awareness of inequality:

"'You mean *as if* we were equals', Dunyazade said.
'You know we're not. What you want is impossible'.
'Despite your heart's feelings?' pressed the
King. 'Let it be *as if* ! Let's make a philosophy
of that *as if*.'" (*Chimera* p.62).

Rational awareness needs to be recognized but laid to one side when

a conflict develops between it and intuition and passion. We are reminded of "Menelaiad" in which Menelaus had to reject all hope of understanding Helen's love for him and simply believe..

As I have already mentioned, Barth also makes considerable use of his past fictions in *Chimera*, thus creating an interesting problem with regard to time. His previous novels are in the past from the point of view of his own literary history, but in the future if we accept the historical perspective given to us by the novel. The description of the grove where Bellerus and Deliades played echoes that of the jungle in "Water-Message":

There was about that place a rich fetidity: grey rats and black-birds decomposed, by schoolboys done to death; suburban wild dogs spooed the way; part the vines at the base of any tree and you might find a strew of pellets and fieldmouse-bones disgorged by feasting owls. It was the most exciting place we knew; its queer smell retched us if we breathed too deeply, but in measured inhalations it had a rich, a stirring savor. (*Chimera* p.169).

Jungle-like too, there was about it a voluptuous fetidity: grey rats and starlings decomposed where B-B'd; curly-furred retrievers spooed the paths;... and if you parted the vines at the base of any tree, you might find a strew of brown pellets and fieldmouse bones, disgorged by feasting owls. It was the most exciting place Ambrose knew, in a special way. It's queer smell could retch him if he breathed too deeply, but in measured inhalations it had a rich, peculiarly stirring savor. (*Funhouse* p.56).

One version of Bellerephon's relationship with Anteia has them going to bed together almost accidentally (*Chimera* p.202), and the description of the scene is almost the same as when Jake Horner and Rennie Morgan sleep together for the first time. (*Road* pp.99-100). For example both passages describe the woman's manner as one of "ex-

hausted strength", her movements as "heavy and deliberate". Finally, compare the following quotation with some of the last lines of the title story in *Lost in the Funhouse*:

Bellerephon wishes he had never begun this story but he began it. Then he wishes he were dead, But he's not. (*Chimera* p.178).

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. (*Funhouse* p.101).

There are many other examples, including the letter Bellerephon reads from one Jerome B. Bray, in which Bray complains that it was he who edited "The Revised New Syllabus", but it was plagiarized by someone with the same initials. He took revenge by teaching his computer to write parodies of the plagiarist's previous novels, producing *The End of the Road Continued*, *Sot-Weed Redivivus* and so on. Previously he had tried to "become as a kindergartener again" by establishing himself in "a subgroup called 'Remobilization Farm', supported by the eccentric Maryland millionaire Harrison Mack II..." (*Chimera* p.258). Barth's awareness of his past literary performances in the context of the present work is the actual working out of what the genie said he wished to do in "Dunyazadiad":

he wished neither to repudiate nor to repeat his past performances; he aspired to go beyond them toward a future they were not attuned to and, by some magic, at the same time go back to the original springs of narrative. (*Chimera* p.17).

Barth's return to the original springs of narrative involves further exploration of myth; a subject which has clearly fascinated him for some time. But here his concern is with the essential humanity of his mythic heroes, unlike *Giles Goat-Boy* where he became

interested in creating a character who, in an almost diagrammatic way, fulfilled the requirements of a hero.

Since myths themselves are among other things poetic distillations of our ordinary psychic experience and therefore point always to daily reality, to write realistic fictions which point always to mythic archetypes is in my opinion to take the wrong end of the mythopoeic stick, however meritorious such fictions may be in other respects. Better to address the archetypes directly. (*Chimera* pp.207-208).

In addressing the archetypes directly Barth has chosen to make them unusually human. They are middle-aged, with marital problems, feeling that the glories of their youth are past. Bellerephon has serious identity problems, something that all heroes have to face, because their name comes to refer to something else, in the same way that "John Barth" now means "American novelist" as much as it refers to a single, private individual. "What I am experiencing cannot be called an identity-crisis. In order to experience an identity-crisis, one must first have enjoyed some sense of identity." (*Chimera* p.158). Bellerephon is defined not by his own personality but by the fact of his being a mythic hero. He adopts the role of "Bellerephon, Mythic Hero", in the same way that the hero of *The Sot-Weed Factor* became "Ebenezer Cooke, Virgin and Poet". But the problems arise when the mask wears thin, that is when the memory of his heroic actions becomes dull even to himself. He has no real sense of identity, no purpose except his herohood, regardless of how meaningless that may be. His one desire is for immortality because that will confirm his status as a bona-fide mythic hero and provide some justification for his failures in everyday life. Melanippe comments on the hero's

problem with identity:

Melanippe knows a private, uncategorizable self impossible for her ever to confuse with the name *Melanippe* - as Perseus she believes confused himself with the mythical persona *Perseus* *Bellerophon*, *Bellerophon*... (*Chimera* p.247).

I think it is not pushing an analogy too far to suggest that the mythic hero is in a similar position to the artist. Bellerophon the false hero, seeking an immortality he will not be granted, suggests the artist who has tried, consciously but unsuccessfully, to create. Perseus is a true hero, but he is aware that this is as much a disadvantage as it is a crowning achievement. Andromeda rejects his half-hearted apology for the destruction he has wrought around her life, and tells him that she had loved Perseus the man, "not gold-skin hero or demigod" (*Chimera* p.132). Perseus winces at her words, recognizing that his heroic status sets him apart from ordinary people: "I was, ineluctably and for worse as much as better...a bloody mythic hero." (*Chimera* p.132). *Chimera* is thus continuing the exploration initiated in *Lost in the Funhouse* of the interpenetration of the identity problems and the problems with human relationships with which the artist has to come to terms.

Polyeidus, the shape-shifter, also parallels the artist's role as Barth sees it. Polyeidus can turn himself into manuscripts, he is in fact the manuscript of "Bellerophoniad" so that all the characters are "mere Polyeidic inklings" (*Chimera* p.184). He is both magician and seer, terms that Barth uses as metaphors for the artist; the genie's pen in "Dunyazadiad" is called his "magic wand". Polyeidus maintains that magicians do not necessarily understand their art, he cannot always control his shape-shifting efforts either, "Sometimes his

magic failed him when he called upon it, other times it seized him when he had no use for it; and the same was true of his prophesying." (*Chimera* p.160). Knowledge not power is Polyeidus's vocation; he does not agree with Bacon that they are the same thing, "on the contrary, his own experience was that the more he understood the less potent he became." (*Chimera* p.168). This comment casts light on the relative merits of *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy* - the second being much more informed and much less powerful. Polyeidus's shape-shifting also suggests an aspect of the artist's experience; not only does Barth appear as different versions of himself within *Chimera*, but the creating of fictions itself allows the author to play at being other people. Barth has always suggested his dissatisfaction with the limitations of reality; Polyeidus, like Henry Burlingame, will not accept them. "No one who sees entire the scope and variety of the world can rest content with a single form." (*Chimera* p.307). The shape-shifter can stretch the boundaries of personal identity, and the seer can stretch the boundaries of space and time, for him the past and the future are equally apprehendable. Bellerephon refers to the John Barth who writes the lecture as "a certain, particular seer" (*Chimera* p.212) - the storyteller, like the seer, can move beyond the limitations of chronology, he can reach to Greece, eighteenth century Maryland, New Tammany College, he can confuse chronology completely as Barth does in *Chimera*, with a twentieth century genie suddenly popping up in Scheherezade's book stacks.

"Don't mistake the key for the treasure" (*Funhouse* p.150) is

Eidothea's message to Menelaus in "Menelaiad"; in *Chimera* all are agreed "The key to the treasure *is* the treasure" (*Chimera* p.16). When Scheherezade is trying to work out how to save the nation's young women, she tells her sister that the magic which solves problems in stories is always in words, "Abracadabra, Open Sesame, and the rest - but the magic words in one story aren't magical in the next. The real magic is to understand which words work, and when, and for what; the trick is to learn the trick." (*Chimera* p.15). She asks Dunyazade to imagine that they are part of a story, and in that story Scherezade finds a way to change the King's mind:

Now, no matter what way she finds - whether it's a magic spell or a magic story with the answer in it or a magic anything - it comes down to particular words in the story we're reading, right? And those words are made from the letters of our alphabet: a couple-dozen squiggles we can draw with this pen. This is the key, Doony! And the treasure, too, if we can only get our hands on it! It's as if - as if the key to the treasure *is* the treasure!' (*Chimera* p.16).

As she says these words the genie appears and tells her how she can solve her problem. Of course, the key to the treasure *is* the treasure for him as well, because in the course of telling the sisters of the work he wishes to write but cannot, he creates that very work. The other mention of the key to the treasure being the treasure occurs in "Bellerephoniad", but here the context is love rather than language or art. It concerns a man born into a family who have spent generations looking for a hidden treasure; he decides that the treasure is probably in his own house, and to confirm this he has a dream that the treasure is somewhere in his basement. When he wakes he remembers a storage room that he's never been in

because the door's blocked with piles of junk left by his ancestors. He clears his way to the door but it is locked and he cannot get in without the key; convinced the treasure is there, he searches all over the world for the key to it, going through all the usual monsters and riddles, eventually rescuing a princess and marrying her. On the wedding night she finds a key in his trouser pocket, and immediately he leaves her, returns to his country, unlocks the door and finds nothing there. Having left the girl and her country, he's not allowed back; it is only on his death-bed he realizes "That the Key to the Treasure *was* the Treasure." (*Chimera* p.265).

The problem for the reader is how to connect these two different examples of the way in which key and treasure can be the same. The link is the concept of fictions. Firstly, we must look at fiction as meaning storytelling; the importance of the imagination which can free us from some of the limitations of reality. Both mythic heroes conceive of their ultimate state as immortality. Perseus believes he achieves immortality rather than petrification when he raises Medusa's cowl and kisses her, but *Chimera* forces us to ask what is the difference between immortality and petrification? All Perseus can do is spend half the night telling his story and the other half talking to Medusa, whom he cannot even see. Bellerephon tries to fly to Mount Olympus, but all he achieves is the immortality of being in some way his own life-story. He comes to realize that this is a dubious privilege - "everyone's dead except us cursed with immortality" (*Chimera* p.172). Barth's point is that literal immortality involves a kind of stasis which is

fundamentally opposed to any conception of life. Those seeking immortality are trying to move beyond time, but we can do this another way; storytelling, the use of the imagination, can also allow us to move beyond the limits of chronology and the limits of our particular position in time. By moving within time and thus transcending it, we can achieve a dynamic, vital experience, not the petrification of literal immortality.

The second kind of fiction that is significant is the kind to which Vaihinger referred. Specifically, in *Chimera*, it is the fiction of love. Love cannot be proved or explained, as Menelaus discovered, but that does not mean that it does not exist, we must behave "as if" it did. As Shah Zaman says "Maybe it *is* a fiction, but it's the profoundest and best of all!" (*Chimera* p.61). The genie is also determined to love his fiancée and marry her, despite Sherry's criticism that it cannot last: "Neither did Athens. Neither did Rome. Neither did all of Jamshid's glories. But we must live as if it can and will." (*Chimera* p.35). Perseus's immortality is not desirable as a state for an individual to attain but it does have an important function as a kind of perpetual lesson to those who can understand his story. Medusa asks him if he is happy with the way the story ends and he replies:

My love, it's an epilogue, always ending, never ended... which winds through universal space and time. My fate is to be able only to imagine boundless beauty through my experience of boundless love - but I have a fair imagination to work with, and, to work from, one priceless piece of unimagined evidence: What I hold above *Beta Persei*, Medusa: not serpents but lovely woman's hair. I'm content. So with this issue, our net estate: to have become, like the noted music of our tongues, these

silent, visible signs; to *be* the tale I tell to those with eyes to see and understanding to interpret; to raise you up forever and know that our story will never be cut off, but nightly rehearsed as long as men and women read the stars...I'm content. Till tomorrow evening, love. (*Chimera* pp. 141-142).

Perseus's story is a story of boundless love and faith in love. When it came to the point, he had to have the courage to step forward on his own and commit himself to love; he had to believe that he was going to kiss the New Revised Medusa, not what she had previously been to him, the gorgon. It was an act of faith to affirm love; that is what his story means.

The key to the treasure is the magic phrase "as if"; that is, the importance of fictions; both the imagination that can release us from the limitations of reality, and the importance of believing in things that are not rational or logical but intuitive and passionate and infinitely more valuable. The possibility of love is the only thing that must last forever - this is what Medusa and Perseus show us. But we must not seek individual immortality like Bellerephon. "Dunyazadiad" ends with the traditional Arab denouement, rather than the conventional Western ending to stories "They lived happily ever after":

until there took them the Destroyer of Delights and Desolator of Dwelling-places, and they were translated to the ruth of Almighty Allah, and their houses fell waste and their palaces lay in ruins, and the Kings inherited their riches. (*Chimera* p.64).

Life must be a process of perpetual change, perpetual renewal, a static condition is antithetical to what we understand as life.

Barth's final comment is this:

To be joyous in the full acceptance of this denouement is surely to possess a treasure, the key to which is the understanding that Key and Treasure are the same. There (with a kiss, little sister) is the sense of our story, Dunyazade: The Key to the treasure is the treasure. (*Chimera* p.64).

Like Norman O. Brown, Barth understands that the search for immortality is simply an inability to accept death, to allow death to be a part of life. If we seek literal immortality we only achieve petrification, or, in Brown's terms, we clutter up life with death-defying monuments creating the dominion of death-in-life. However, if we wish to move beyond time we can do it with the magic words "as if", which allow us to accept the significance of both kinds of fictions. If we can return for a moment to the man who quested after treasure and found only despair, we can see another connection with Brown. The man's dream is clearly Freudian; the "big apartment of rooms right in his basement, that he'd never suspected" suggests an area of the unconscious, where he is convinced he will find the Treasure. The door however is blocked with "piles of junk left by his ancestors" (*Chimera* p.264), blocked by centuries of repression. Love is responsible for him finding the key but he doesn't realize that love is both the key and the treasure. Just as the imagination can allow us to range free, outside time, so can love. Brown's view is that historical time is the result of repression which "transforms the timeless instinctual compulsion to repeat into the forward-moving dialectic of neurosis which is history."²¹ Conversely, Brown holds out the hope that if man could overcome repression he would not live within time. Art is also one of the means by which

the reality principle can be subverted: "art as pleasure, art as play, art as the recovery of childhood, art as making conscious the unconscious, art as a mode of instinctual liberation, art as the fellowship of men struggling for instinctual liberation..."²²

Thus we can see that in *Chimera* art and love are inextricably intertwined; they lend meaning to each other, they help each other fulfill their function. Between them they can lead us to a creative enjoyment of the "Delights of Life", and to a joyous acceptance of their finite nature. This novel is Barth's finest achievement; he has maintained the complexity of his formal concerns but he has also made it "seriously, even passionately, *about* some things as well." (*Chimera* p.36). The reader need not lament the lack of a sense of value in this novel; the previously analytic and ironic novelist has metamorphosed into a lyrical and impassioned one; he maintains his sense of humour, of course, but there is also a sense of serious commitment to something Barth feels needs to be expressed.

CHAPTER FOUR

THOMAS PYNCHON

Thomas Pynchon's corpus of work seems to break neatly into two parts; the early short stories and the first novel, *V.*, are talented but immature, they exhibit a fashionable cynicism and ironic detachment which sets the author far above the world he is describing, a safe place for a young man to hide from "...the inconveniences of caring"¹; *The Crying of Lot 49* marks a complete change of tone and feeling, Pynchon seems to drop his indifferent, rather arrogant pose, and writes a novel which is both more questioning and more concerned; much briefer than *V.* and superficially simpler, *Lot 49* in fact probes more deeply into central contemporary problems. This change of tone which is both consolidated and expanded in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is made even more marked by the fact that many of Pynchon's themes remain the same; all three novels have a quest at their centre, they are all concerned with the opposition between viewing events as purely random and unconnected, or grouping them together by apparently rational connections to form plots, or even "...the century's master cabal"²; entropy, in thermodynamics, communication theory and as a social metaphor for decadence, is another frequent theme, although it receives less emphasis in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The difference in the treatment of these common elements is associated with an increasingly complex attitude towards reality, moving from the opinion found in *V.* that reality is multiple inasmuch as there are as many versions of reality as there

are people to conceive of them, to a situation in *The Crying of Lot 49* where reality is multiple even within the boundaries of one person's perception; and then on to *Gravity's Rainbow* where a sizeable part of Pynchon's interest is focused on the possibility of transcending reality altogether.

V. introduces us early to the fact that it makes no claims to be a consistently realistic novel when it acquaints us with the Alligator Patrol, a minor section of the Civil Service detailed to hunt the alligators now infesting Nueva York's sewers after a craze for children to have baby alligators as pets ended with bored children flushing them down the toilets. Pynchon's lack of concern for the apparent absurdity of this tale is illustrated by the bald and deliberately inadequate justification he presents us with for all the stories connected with the sewers, including Father Fairing's attempts to convert rats to Catholicism, "It is this way with sewer stories. They just are. Truth or falsity don't apply." (*V.* p.108). The author's relationship with the conventions of realism in *V.* is suggested by a remark Hugh Godolphin makes to Signor Mantissa when he tells him of his trip to the South Pole and the Vheissuvian spider monkey he found there. Mantissa suggests that exposure may have affected his judgement but Godolphin replies that it wouldn't make any difference anyway, "If it were only a hallucination, it was not what I saw or believed I saw that in the end is important. It is what I thought. What truth I came to." (*V.* p.190). Thus the scientific possibility or impossibility of the electric switch implanted in Hugh Bongo-Shaftesbury's arm is unim-

portant, even irrelevant, by comparison with the more abstract truths Pynchon is able to suggest by it, that the logical development of an obsession with purity and perfection is that the mechanical will supercede the human.

The spring thus wore on, large currents and small eddies alike resulting in headlines. People read what news they wanted to and each accordingly built his own rathouse of history's rags and straws. In the city of New York alone there were at a rough estimate five million different rathouses. (V. p.209).

Stencil's quest for V., his compilation of information which makes up the V-structure, is just another "rathouse of history's rags and straws"; the reader is constantly being reminded that there is little or no justification for the so-called plot which is external to Stencil, it is even described as "...this grand Gothic pile of inferences he was hard at work creating." (V. p.209). Before we read the Egyptian section in which Victoria Wren is introduced, we are told that Stencil had "...only the veiled references to Porpentine in the journals. The rest was impersonation and dream." (V. p.52); and again before the Mondaugen section we are told that the original story had only taken thirty minutes to relate, but when Eigenvalue heard it from Stencil it had undergone considerable change, it "...had become, as Eigenvalue put it, Stencilized." (V. p.211). During the course of the story Eigenvalue interrupts to question Stencil's veracity, a deliberately anti-realistic device designed to remind us again that Stencil is creating this interpretation of events as much as, and no more than, any other person who attempts organization of information by extrapolated connections. It is curious that earlier

in the novel Pynchon uses a literary device normally associated with realism, which contributes to his anti-realistic effect because in the context of *V.* it is so heavily ironic. "He [Stencil] would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he'd awakened to discover the pursuit of *V.* was merely a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*." (*V.* p.50). This pretending that what is happening during the course of a novel is real to the extent that a character can dream it's only fictional is a technique one can associate with realism, but in this context it emphasizes the artificiality of such techniques; *V.* is an adventure of the mind inasmuch as the novel is fiction, and even within the terms of that fiction Stencil is creating his "Gothic pile of inferences", and is considerably less concerned with factual truth than, for example, Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, who amassed an enormous amount of accurate information to support his case. That Pynchon is deliberately working against realism in *V.* can be seen clearly if we compare the Egyptian section of the novel with the early short story, *Under the Rose*, on which it was based. The differences between the two are marked and they all point to a conscious effort at confusing and obscuring the relatively clearly perceived reality of the original story. Porpentine narrates *Under the Rose* whereas the section in *V.* is recounted by a succession of third person narrators who have little or nothing to do with the central characters, two waiters, a professional scrounger, a taxi-man, a mountebank and Hanne, the waitress at the bierhalle; the last section is purely objective description, the vision of an unknown eye. The result of

this change is that our understanding of the events in the section is far from clear, the narrators are viewing from outside and supply their own theories of possible explanations, the effect is a demonstration of Stencil Senior's theory about 'The Situation':

He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment. Since these several minds tended to form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogeneous, The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three." (V. p.174).

This device of multiple narration combines with a deliberate withholding of information which was given to the reader in *Under the Rose*, such as the significance of Fashoda or the nature of Porpentine's spying opposition, the character of Moldweorp being left out altogether; this creates an atmosphere of sinister mystery which is emphasized by the addition of Porpentine's sunburn, his peeling face makes him appear diseased, which distances the reader considerably and makes any kind of sympathetic identification much less likely. The difference in the ending is also significant; in the story Porpentine is killed in the desert after an incident in the theatre where he loses his self-possession and shouts at Moldweorp, the veteran spy and 'the chief'. His death is a punishment for having stepped outside the inhuman but rigorously defined conventions of the system within which he worked: "Mongrel now, no longer pure...Mongrel he supposed, is only another way of saying human. After the final step you could not, nothing could be, clean... Now Porpentine had performed his own fatal act of love or charity by screaming at the Chief."³ The last scene of the section in V. is set in the theatre

itself and it is here that Porpentine is killed; it is completely depersonalized, the transmitter of the action to the reader being just a pair of eyes which reflects anything in its range of vision without comment or explanation. The effect is the complete opposite of that aimed at in realistic fiction; the reader is mystified but at the same time distanced by the highly formal, stylized description; figures move but they are like puppets, we can see action but nothing is explained, no causal connections or logical inferences are made, and the essentially moral reason for Porpentine's death given in *Under the Rose* is left out completely. Thus we can see that despite some sections of *V.* which can be distressingly realistic like Esther's nose-job, Pynchon is deliberately subverting the conventional expectations of a realistic novel; in fact the realistic sections highlight the unrealistic ones thus forming part of the overall subversive scheme.

The narrative of *V.* is divided between two stories which are only peripherally connected at the plot level though thematically the connections between them are strong; firstly there is the story of Benny Profane and the Whole Sick Crew in New York in 1956, and secondly there is Stencil's quest for a mysterious complex he calls *V.* which ranges in time from the turn of the century until the novel's present. Pynchon paints a depressing picture of modern America, with its proliferating commercialism expressed in the development of the firm Yoyodyne from a small toy company to an enormous business complex with "more government contracts than it really knew what to do with" (*V.* p.210); and yet this seemingly

energetic activity is as meaningless as the decadent lethargy of The Whole Sick Crew, a parody of the pop-art social sets of the late fifties and early sixties. One of the Crew, Slab, calls himself a Catatonic Expressionist and sporadically paints a series of Cheese Danishes, reaching number fifty-six during the course of the novel, in much the same way as Andy Warhol painted Cambell's Soup tins. Stencil's description of the Crew suggests their sterility and their artificiality:

The pattern would have been familiar - bohemian, creative, arty - except that it was even further removed from reality, Romanticism in its furthest decadence, being only an exhausted impersonation of poverty, rebellion and artistic 'soul'. For it was the unhappy fact that most of them worked for a living and obtained the substance of their conversation from the pages of Time magazine and like publications." (V. pp.45-46).

Benny Profane is the central character of the Whole Sick Crew narrative, a self-styled schlemihl in that he has *chosen* to remain passive in all situations rather than having his schlemihlhood forced upon him, he spends much of his time 'yoyoing' up and down the East coast, or backwards and forwards across New York on the subway. Yoyoing is an important concept in V., it is a symbol of the aimless motion Pynchon feels to be at the root of the American experience, it is a similar image to that of the rocking chair at the end of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, movement which goes nowhere. Stencil learns to recognize the essentially yoyo nature of much American motion by following Slab's advice to take a trip on the subway.

'Get in there at rush hour,' said Slab. 'There are nine million yo-yos in this town.' Stencil took this advice one evening after five, came out with one rib to his umbrella broken and a vow never to do it again. Vertical corpses, eyes with no life, crowded loins, buttocks and hip-points together. Little sound except for the racketing of the subway, echoes in the tunnels. Violence (seeking exit): some of them carried out two stops before their time and unable to go upstream, get back in. All wordless. Was it the Dance of Death brought up to date? (V. p.282).

Benny Profane may be the central character of these episodes and the reader has a certain sympathy with him in his continual war with inanimate objects, but essentially he is no different from the rest of the Crew. His complete passivity is a kind of inanimacy in itself and the fatalism of his adoption of the role of schlemihl becomes an excuse for thoughtless inactivity; Rachel Owlglass is justifiably angry when she says to him "You've taken your own flabby, clumsy soul and amplified it into a Universal Principal." (V. p.359).

It is easy to see how Pynchon could find a metaphor for this aimless apathy and social decay in the scientific theories of entropy. Entropy is a concept which has received much coverage recently, and the emphasis many critics have laid on its significance in Pynchon's writing has probably done him a disservice in that it has been emphasized at the expense of other more important elements; however there is no doubt that it has a part to play in both V. and *The Crying of Lot 49*. For a definition of entropy it is easiest to turn to Norbert Wiener and his description of the contribution Gibbs' theory of probability made to theoretical physics:

...Gibbs had a theory that this probability tended naturally to increase as the universe grows older. The measure of this probability is called entropy, and the characteristic tendency of entropy is to increase.

As entropy increases, the universe, and all closed systems in the universe, tend naturally to deteriorate and lose their distinctiveness, to move from the least to the most probable state, from a state of organization and differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist, to a state of chaos and sameness. In Gibbs' universe order is least probable, chaos most probable."⁴

Wiener goes on to explain that this entropic tendency can be seen in communication theory as well:

The commands through which we exercise our control over our environment are a kind of information which we impart to it. Like any form of information these commands are subject to disorganization in transit. They generally come through in a less coherent fashion and certainly not more coherently than they were sent. In control and communication we are always fighting nature's tendency to degrade the organized and to destroy the meaningful; the tendency, as Gibbs has shown us, for entropy to increase."⁵

Prior to writing *V.* Pynchon had published a short story called "Entropy"; as in *V.* two narratives are interwoven, one involves Meatball Mulligan's lease-breaking party, a Whole Sick Crew type venture which lasts for several days, and the other describes a man and a woman and their life in the flat upstairs, a hermetically sealed ecologically balanced enclave, designed to protect them from the gradual encroachment of the forces of chaos. The temperature outside has remained at 37 degrees Fahrenheit for several days and Callista and Aubade are afraid that the predicted heat-death of the universe is at hand, the moment when the tendency of entropy to increase has resulted in total sameness. Dictating to Aubade,

Callista describes the way in which he learned to apply Gibbs' theory to social behaviour: "He found himself, in short, restating Gibbs' prediction in social terms, and envisioned a heat-death for his culture in which ideas like heat energy, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy; and intellectual motion would, accordingly, cease."⁶ Callista is trying to save a bird's life by holding it in his hands and giving it the warmth of his body but at the end of the story the bird dies; Callista is terrified that heat-transference has ceased to work and he collapses, completely trapped in his obsession with entropy. Aubade smashes the window with her fists thus destroying their protected enclave and increasing the sameness because the temperature is now at 37 degrees both within and without, but it is still a liberating gesture. For all his efforts Callista created an environment which was at least as sterile as that in the flat below, the apparent perfection of his retreat could not save the bird's life. Entropy is a fact of life, it is demonstrated by the chaotic and meaningless activity of the party downstairs, but the question Pynchon raises is that perhaps the order in the flat upstairs is even more stifling and predictable than the disorder downstairs. At the beginning of the story the Meatball crowd are ironically described as American expatriates living in Washington D.C., "...but in its lethargic way their life provided, as they said, kicks"; even this heavily qualified affirmation could never be said of Callista and Aubade; dwelling on the fact of entropy and trying to combat it is portrayed as destructive.

In *V.* Pynchon sees entropy as inevitable and unavoidable, it is the immutable tendency of nature; Gebrail the taxi-driver describes it in terms of the way the desert gradually encroached on his land, not because the desert was hostile, nor because the wall he built to keep the desert out was a traitor, not even because he built the wall wrongly, but just because that is the way it always happens. (*V.* p.70). Foppl describes his realization in Deutsch-Sudwestafrika of the realities of the human position in an alien universe:

...humanity was reduced to a nervous, disquieted, forever inadequate but indissoluble Popular Front against deceptively unpolitical and apparently minor enemies, enemies that would be with him to the grave: a sun with no shape, a beach alien as the moon's antarctic, restless concubines in barbed wire, salt mists, alkaline earth, the Benguela Current that would never cease bringing sand to raise the harbor floor, the inertia of rock, the frailty of flesh, the structural unreliability of thorns... (*V.* p.255).

The step Foppl doesn't make is towards understanding that most of man's so-called achievements are as entropic in a metaphorical sense as nature's tendency to disorder, as Gebrail says "...the city is only the desert in disguise." (*V.* p.71). There is no doubt that, again metaphorically, the Whole Sick Crew are entropic in their tedious repetitions and their lack of independent or original thought, they incline towards the most probable state and appear to be progressing towards Callista's feared cultural heat-death as Eigenvalue notices:

Conversations at the Spoon had become little more than proper nouns, literary allusions, critical or philosophical terms linked in certain ways. Depending on how you arranged the building blocks at your disposal, you were smart or stupid. Depending on how others reacted they were In or Out. The number of blocks, however, was finite. (*V.* p.277).

Pynchon's concern with entropy in this novel is part of the fashionable blackness and youthful cynicism of his world-view at the time, but he is at least aware that attempts to combat entropy can be as destructive as the entropic tendencies themselves. Norbert Wiener sees a temporary salvation in machines which are in his terms "anti-entropic enclaves", but Pynchon would never agree with him, because machines are inanimate; it is the decadence and increasing inanimacy of society, which is entropic in a metaphorical sense, that concerns Pynchon most because it is possible to combat it; the scientific theory of entropy is a fact about which nothing profitable can be done.

In *V.*, Pynchon is recording what Norman O. Brown calls the last stage of history, the dominion of death in life. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Pynchon is obsessed with the way in which the twentieth century world is giving itself over to the inanimate; in fact the theme is reiterated to the point of boredom, with the actual word 'inanimate' appearing so often that the sight of it becomes irritating. Pynchon makes his moral position clear from the outset, he prefaces a description of Schoenmaker's career as a plastic surgeon with "If alignment with the inanimate is the mark of a Bad Guy..." (*V.* p.88), the simplicity of this judgement is elaborated during the course of the novel but ultimately the sentiment remains the same, characters are judged by the extent to which they have given themselves over to the inanimate and by their degree of awareness that such a problem exists. At the beginning of the novel Rachel Owlglass has a sublimated sexual passion for her car which

horrifies Benny Profane, whose hatred and fear of all inanimate objects is as strong as Rachel's love of them. Hugh Bongo-Shaftesbury proudly exposes himself as an "electro-mechanical doll" (V. p.68) with a switch sewn into his forearm, he prefers this because he says it is "simple and clean" (V. p.69) revealing an unnatural desire for the kind of purity which can never be found in the animate world. This concern for cleanliness and efficiency is a characteristic of the Western world, but it seems to be more pronounced in America; it is an obvious factor in the increasing inanimacy which Pynchon is exploring because that kind of antiseptic perfection can never be achieved with organic processes. The purely narcissistic Melanie, the ballet dancer who becomes the object of V.'s fetishistic love in the Paris section of the novel, dreams that a small key in her back is wound up by a German man who tells her that she would have stopped altogether if he had not done this; when she wakes up she is not screaming but moaning, as if sexually aroused. Both Melanine and Bongo-Shaftesbury *want* to be clockwork automata, they relish the inanimacy which Pynchon despises, and consequently a clear moral judgement is visited on them. Melanie and Bongo-Shaftesbury are not isolated eccentrics however, their fetishism is written large to press home the general trend in society, a trend which is confirmed by the 'conversations' Benny has with SHROUD, one of the two synthetic human beings at the research laboratory for which Benny is nightwatchman. SHROUD tells Benny that he and SHOCK are what everybody will be someday, Benny asks him if he means they will all be dead:

Am I dead? If I am than that's what I mean.
'If you aren't then what are you?'
Nearly what you are. None of you have very
far to go.
'I don't understand.' (V. p. 267).

For all Benny's hatred of the inanimate he cannot understand that that is what he, along with the rest of the world, is becoming. This progress towards inanimacy is set clearly in a historical perspective with the second world war occupying a significant position, Pynchon suggests that it was at this time that we became hardened into our inability to distinguish between organic and inorganic. Evan Godolphin had plastic surgery at the end of the first world war which involved the introduction of inert substances into his living face, the operation was an appalling failure because his body reacted against the introduction of foreign bodies; but by the time V., in her disguise as the Bad Priest, is killed during a second world war air raid on Malta, such a reaction has been suppressed, she can incorporate inanimate bits and pieces into her body with impunity. The second world war has actually influenced the children brought up on Malta during the air-raids, the implication is that an entire generation has been affected, the generation of which the Whole Sick Crew is a part:

These children knew what was happening: knew that bombs killed. But what's a human after all? No different from a church, obelisk, statue. Only one thing matters: it's the bomb that wins. Their view of death was non-human. (V.p.311)

This idea that the second world war marks some consolidation of the general trend towards inanimacy, or even perhaps a point of no return, is supported by the second conversation Benny has with

SHROUD, in which SHROUD cites the stacks of Jews at Auschwitz, reminiscent of a junkyard for old cars, as an example of the way in which we treat people like things, the way in which people have in fact become things. Benny tries to discount this by saying that the responsibility lay in the hands of a madman but SHROUD replies "Has it occurred to you there may be no more standards for crazy or sane, now that it's started?" (v. p.275). If we are prepared to accept, or even encourage, the automatization of human beings then perhaps we shouldn't judge those who treat them like so much scrap. The concomitant of turning men into things is turning things into men, and we do this too by endowing things with human characteristics. Fausto Maijstral calls it "the Great Lie" and reckons that most of humanity cling to this comfortable fiction, "...confident that their machines, dwellings, streets and weather share the same human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness as they." (v. p.305). Again we can see the limitations of Benny Profane's understanding of the problem of inanimacy, he is constantly endowing objects with human characteristics, once he claims that they have declared war on him and later he "...kicked inanimate tires, knowing they'd take revenge when he was looking for it least." (v. pp.335-336).

Thus Pynchon describes a twentieth century world in which the distinctions between animate and inanimate have become blurred, frequently the characteristics and values normally associated with each category have been completely reversed. This warping of perception is defined as decadence by Itague in the Paris section of the novel: "A decadence is a falling away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we

are less human we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories." (V. p.380). Fausto Maijstral supports this viewpoint in a definition of his own (V. p.301) and it is clear that the idea of decadence as a positive move towards non-humanity is at the centre of V.. Itague's definition appropriately occurs in the Paris section of the novel, the section where the relationship between inanimacy and decadence is made most obvious; V.'s fetishistic relationship with Melanie is described as serving the Kingdom of Death (V. p.386), and comes to fruition in an atmosphere of studied decadence, the artistic community attend Black Masses, Satin is including automata in his ballet; it is certainly appropriate that Melanie should die at the end of the first performance of this ballet surrounded by her automaton handmaidens, accidentally impaled on a stick. The Whole Sick Crew are a clear example of decadents who endow inanimate objects and abstract theories with the humanity they have lost; Eigenvalue sees this in their rearranging of critical and philosophical terms in lieu of conversation, but reacts to it in the wrong way: "It scared Eigenvalue, sometimes. He would go in back and look at the set of dentures. Teeth and metals endure." (V. p.277). He can see the futility of such rearranging but thinks that the only alternative is death, the prospect of mortality is so frightening that he turns to objects because they are not condemned to die, however, what he does not see is that they do not live either, and that by turning towards the inanimate he is hastening the process of decay which he fears. We are not allowed illusions about the Whole Sick Crew, Esther's nose-job which is described in such horrifying detail shows us the

violence we inflict on our humanity; she is terrified and in great pain, forced to rely on a surgeon she hardly knows:

Esther watched his eyes as best she could, looking for something human there. Never had she felt so helpless. Later she would say, 'It was almost a mystical experience. What religion is it - one of the Eastern ones - where the highest condition we can attain is that of an object - a rock. It was like that; I felt myself drifting down, this delicious loss of Estherhood, becoming more and more a blob, with no worries, traumas, nothing: only Being...!' (V. p.93).

During the operation Esther was pathetically vulnerable, searching for humanity in her surgeon's eyes and unable to avoid her own humanity, but by the time the experience is packaged up for Whole Sick Crew consumption she has excised all that, creating instead an abstract theory par excellence on the supremacy of objects.

Given Fausto's definition of decadence as "a clear movement towards death" (V. p.301), it is easy to see why V. is in many ways an apocalyptic novel; Pynchon takes the current situation, teaches us to understand its component parts, as he sees them, through an analysis of the past, and forces us to the conclusion that the future is a more fragile concept than we might otherwise have supposed. The theme of apocalypse is introduced at the very beginning of the novel when Profane, Geronimo and Angel lie in Riverside Park while some kids play pitch and catch with a beanbag, "The beanbag hung for a second jolly and bright in the air. 'Look, look,' the kids cried: 'look at it fall!'" (V. p.33). The echo of apocalypse is unmistakable and the attitude of the children which is both cheerful and fascinated suggests contemporary decadence in which death is to a certain extent the aim. Stencil sees the

commuters on the New York subway as being involved in some modern version of the Dance of Death, and as I have already said, the relationship between Melanie and V. is described as serving the Kingdom of Death. Many of the characters in the novel are fascinated with death or talk of the apocalypse as if the possibility were just around the corner; Stencil Senior seems to feel that it is his personal mission to avert the Armageddon, but it is Gebrail the taxi-driver who puts his finger on why in fact the catastrophe is unavoidable:

Mohammed Ahmed, the Mahdi of '83, was believed by some to be sleeping not dead in a cavern near Baghdad. And on the Last Day, when the prophet Christ re-establishes el-Islam as the religion of the world he will return to life to slay Dejal the antichrist at a church gate somewhere in Palestine. The Angel Asrafil will trumpet a blast to kill everything on earth, and another to awaken the dead.

But the desert's angel had hidden all the trumpets beneath the sand. The desert was prophecy enough of the Last Day. (V. p.72).

As we have already seen the desert is an image of the undramatic but still unassailable force of entropy, the trumpets are hidden, the world will disintegrate 'not with a bang but a whimper'. The very certainty of this promised end makes it less significant; what is important, however, is the way in which the twentieth century is accelerating the process, a question which leads us on to an analysis of the role of V. in the novel, because she is, in R.W.B. Lewis' words, "...the dark lady of the Apocalypse, the Whore of Babylon."⁷

Victoria Wren, Vera Meroving, Veronica the rat, Vheissu, Valletta; V. is all of these and more. The first description we are given of her is the extract from Stencil Senior's diary which

set young Stencil off on his search for her, "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she." (v. p.43). Immediately there is a direct indication that she is more, or less, than human. Vheissu, the strange country Hugh Godolphin discovered which haunted his imagination for years after, is another element in the V.-structure, and suggests some chilling aspects of it. It is a place of constantly changing iridescent colour, "As if you lived inside a madman's kaleidoscope" (v. p.155), but this gaudy surface finally becomes unbearable because it acts as a barrier which prevents the discovery of anything more fundamental underneath. Godolphin points up a contrast he sees between explorers like himself who want to find the heart of a place, and the ever-increasing numbers of tourists who are only interested in surfaces; the irony is that, in a way which would horrify them if they knew, the tourists are right, Godolphin discovers at the South Pole that underneath Vheissu's skin there is Nothing at all:

If Eden was the creation of God, God only knows what evil created Vheissu. The skin which had wrinkled through my nightmares was all there had ever been. Vheissu itself, a gaudy dream. Of what the Antarctic in this world is closest to: a dream of annihilation. (v. p.190).

Godolphin wonders if he owes it to the tourists, "the lovers of skins, not to tell about Vheissu, not even to let them suspect the suicidal fact that below the glittering integument of every foreign land there is a hard dead-point of truth and that in all cases - even England's - it is the same kind of truth, can be phrased in identical words?" (v. p.169). Thus the essential empty annihilation

underneath the gaudy surface of Vheissu represents a truth about the whole world, but it is a private vision and Godolphin worries about exposing it to others. By the South Africa episode, however, things have changed, Godolphin converses with Vera about Vheissu and tells her it was a luxury which can no longer be afforded; the first world war has destroyed it because it has destroyed the privacy of dream, "Committed us...to work out three o'clock anxieties, excesses of character, political hallucinations on a live mass, a real human population" (V. p.230); no longer does Godolphin have to worry about keeping his vision to himself, it is public property now and people behave accordingly. The significant factor in this change however is not the war, nor is it V., they are both symptoms with a common cause. When we see V. in Paris we realize that she has become an agent for the Kingdom of Death, her fetishism is part of a "conspiracy leveled against the animate world" (V. p.386); it is another version of tourism, not only because both are concerned with surfaces, but because tourists create a parallel society of their own in every city, and V.'s fetishism represents an infiltration of the Kingdom of Death to form a parallel society on Earth. At this point in his narrative Stencil stops to imagine V. as she might have become, "...skin radiant with the bloom of some new plastic; both eyes glass but now containing photoelectric cells, connected by silver electrodes to optic nerves of purest copper wire and leading to a brain exquisitely wrought as a diode matrix could ever be." (V. p.386). This is of course what has happened to her in a smaller but equally significant way; when Stencil Senior meets her in Malta in 1919

she has an artificial eye with a clock iris and a star sapphire sewn into her navel; Vera Meroving has a similar artificial eye in South Africa in 1922; and by the time, in her disguise as the Bad Priest, she is disassembled by some children during an air raid on Malta, she has a wig, an artificial foot and a set of false teeth as well. It is in her role as the Bad Priest that V. is most clearly connected with the mainstream of apocalyptic writing because she is fulfilling the function of false prophet. She is the priest of inanimacy, advising the girls to become nuns and the boys to become like the rock of their island, Father Avalanche comments, "Seek mineral symmetry, for here is eternal life: the immortality of rock. Plausible. But apostasy." (V. p.319). The fact that V. seems to die in the air-raid is no consolation; she has fulfilled her function so well that her presence in a human form is no longer necessary; the Whole Sick Crew demonstrates that her informing principle is becoming more powerful not less.

V., in Stencil's view, is an infinitely multiple complex, the only necessary mutual characteristic is that every manifestation of V. is a part of "the ultimate Plot Which Has No Name" (V. p.210); Stencil may not name this "Plot" but Pynchon does, it is the plot of the Kingdom of Death to supercede the Kingdom of Life, and it takes the form of ever-increasing decadence and inanimacy. V. is the personification of this tendency, or in Lewis' apocalyptic terminology, "She is Satan himself in the guise of the Whore of Babylon, let loose upon an apostate world to hurry, enlarge and direct the great catastrophe; and to embody and symbolize it in her own being, her own very body."⁸ The very first mention of V. in the

novel is not a personification at all, it is a shape or pattern of lights, but it still points to V.'s apocalyptic function, it carries us towards darkness, "...overhead, turning everybody's face green and ugly, shone mercury vapour-lamps, receding in an asymmetric V to the east where it is dark and there are no more bars." (V.p.2). Stencil is, in his own description, simply "He Who Looks for V." (V. p.210), he is really only a literary device to carry the reader through the search but the artifice is emphasized instead of being avoided; the reader is warned not to see him as a man in search of his identity, he is "the century's man" (V. p.209) and nothing more. This deliberate unreality is important because it helps prevent us from humanizing the principle V.; both Stencil and V. belong to a strangely theoretical landscape, they are characterizations of history as opposed to characters in history; as Stencil himself says:

V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth. Whose emissaries haunt this century's streets. (V. p.423).

Although it would be misleading to call it an historical novel, V. is very definitely "about" history; but the curious thing is that what is actually said about history, and its structure of rational connections, seems to be contradicted by the general shape of the novel. Pynchon's use of the concept of "the Street" makes the historical context of the novel clear; we are first introduced to this concept by Benny Profane, all the streets he has aimlessly walked along while yoyoing up and down the East Coast have become fused into a single abstracted Street about which he has nightmares

(V. p.2 and p.30). What one might imagine would have been the conventional approach to the difference between "the Street" and "under the Street" is reversed; when Benny surfaces after having worked under the Street on the Alligator Patrol he says he is returning to "the dream street" (V. p.137); Fausto Maijstral sees the Street as the Kingdom of Death and Under the Street as the Kingdom of Life. (V. p.304 and p.309). The explanation for this lies in the fact that Pynchon is referring to:

The street of the 20th Century, at whose far end or turning - we hope - is some sense of home or safety. But no guarantees. A street we are put at the wrong end of, for reasons best known to the agents who put us there. If there are agents. But a street we must walk. (V. p.303).

Thus Benny, and all the other characters in the novel, as well as ourselves, are placed firmly in the historical context of the 20th Century, apparently we have no alternative. However this does not mean that any attempt at an objective analysis of what this context is will be profitable, quite the reverse. Eigenvalue suggests that history this century is like a piece of material with gathers in it, we sit at the bottom of a fold, unable to get an overall picture and are lost to any sense of a continuous tradition. (V. p.141). The civil servant who talks to Mondaugen at the beginning of the South Africa section laughs at the notion he might be able to alter the course of history, he just has to learn to coexist with it; the only function of a civil servant is "to keep an ordered sense of history and time prevailing against chaos" (V. p.216), the implication being that this is necessary and comforting but still a lie. Fausto Maijstral summarizes this

attitude when he remarks that he values his vision which is clear enough "to see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with 'reason'." (V. p.286). History is a lie because it imposes rational order on what is only a succession of random events, as Fausto says life's single lesson is that "there is more accident to it than a man can ever admit to in a lifetime and stay sane." (V. p.300). Pynchon uses the spy-thriller genre to suggest the purely arbitrary nature of the logical connections we use to order our experience; in the world of foreign agents there is never adequate information so the posited connections and links are transparent guesses, huge extrapolations, which are constantly changing as more data comes in and changes the picture. Pynchon is making the point that the shaky ground on which diplomatic circles live suggests a truth about everyone's position, a truth which is obscured by those comforting fictions Fausto named, continuity, cause and effect and history. The spy-world is also useful for exposing the absurdity of plot-seekers, those like young Stencil who spend their time finding connections because they can derive comfort from them, after all it is his search for V. which has aroused Stencil from the near-inanimacy of accepting sleep as one of life's major blessings; for him the most terrifying of plots would be preferable to the randomness which is his alternative. Eigenvalue meditates on the problem in the way that a dentist might do:

Cavities in the teeth occur for a good reason,
Eigenvalue reflected. But even if there are
several per tooth, there's no conscious organization

there against the life of the pulp, no conspiracy.
Yet we have men like Stencil, who must go about grouping
the world's random caries into cabals. (V. p.139).

The problem is that by grouping "random caries into cabals" (V. p.209), Stencil has come up with V., a concept which is of central significance in the novel; instead of exploiting this ambiguity Pynchon leaves it unresolved.

For all Pynchon's obvious scepticism about history and historians *The Education of Henry Adams* appears to have had a definite influence on V.; this is acknowledged by a direct mention of the work in relation to young Stencil, "Herbert Stencil, like... Henry Adams in *The Education*,...always referred to himself in the third person" (V. p.51). The two central images in *The Education* are the Virgin/Venus figure and the Dynamo; Adams was trying to find "a unit of force"⁹ for the universe, an ultimate motivator; looking into the past he saw that the Virgin, either actually or symbolically, had exerted the most influence, but the world was experiencing the irruption of totally new forces, which were going to break the continuity between what had preceded the discoveries and what came after; one of these forces was the dynamo, for Adams the symbol of absolute energy. Adams' dynamo suggests an interpretation of the name Yoyodyne which Pynchon chose for Bloody Chiclitz's huge commercial enterprise; the name harnesses the symbol of ultimate energy with the idea of yoyoing, suggesting frenetic but pointless activity. The link between Adams' image of the Virgin-Venus and V. is made clear by Mantissa's attempt to steal the Botticelli painting of Venus arising from the waves; Mantissa

has longed to possess this painting but when he is actually in front of it with his knife, cutting the canvas out of the frame, he is reminded of Godolphin's description of Vheissu and realizes that the Venus is a gaudy dream of annihilation as well, just another aspect of V.. Adams himself was made aware of the limitations of his symbol when he went into a church in France after he had heard of the assassination of President M^CKinley:

The Virgin herself had never looked so winning - so One - as in this scandalous failure of her Grace. To what purpose had she existed, if after nineteen hundred years, the world was bloodier than when she was born? The stupendous failure of Christianity tortured history...¹⁰

Both Pynchon and Adams take 1900 as their starting-point, both of them are concerned with the twentieth century, but Adams is projecting forward while Pynchon has the advantage of hindsight, and both are trying to find the "unit of force" for the twentieth century; Pynchon calls it V. perhaps as a small tribute.

Of all historical works *The Education* would be most likely to be one which would appeal to the author of V., Adams did after all write "For him, all opinion founded on fact must be error, because the facts can never be complete, and their relations must be always infinite"¹¹. Even so the historical consciousness at work in the novel, the creation of the symbol, V., and the connections with Henry Adams, seem to contradict the actual statements Pynchon makes about history. These statements suggest the pointlessness of trying to structure experience, that any chain of connections found is purely arbitrary, and anyway they aren't really found they are chosen out of a whole range of possibilities. But the concept of V.

is a definite attempt at finding "a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it"¹², Pynchon is creating a pattern at the same time as disapproving of pattern-making. This apparent contradiction could have been resolved if V. had been a less meaningful image; far from being the elusive, ambiguous symbol many critics have described, she is too concrete to live comfortably with the theories of history propounded in the novel. The problem would not have arisen if the reader had been able to interpret V. in one of many possible ways, or if she had been a false trail like the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but Pynchon believes in V. too much, he believes that the thread of history won't break if it's wound on her spool. In *The Crying of Lot 49* however, Pynchon's central symbol, the Trystero, is completely ambiguous and he is able to convey the idea that it is impossible to know anything in an exact sense much more successfully. There are other problems in the novel, some of which I have already mentioned; the repetitiveness, and the rather posed blackness of Pynchon's despair, for example here is a description which is meant to suggest the 20th Century human condition, "A peasant with all his uptorn roots showing, alone on the sea at nightfall, painting the side of a sinking ship" (V. p.433). Another problem which Tony Tanner points out concerns the prevailing element of parody in the novel; many critics have found a positive note sounded by Paola Maijstral or McClintic Sphere's maxim "Keep cool, but care" (V. p. 342), interpretations which I have never found satisfactory, probably for the reasons set out by Tanner:

You cannot render great emotions in a comic-strip, and 'Keep cool, but care' is just such bubble-talk or the sort of slogan-jargon mongered by advertisements. In proximity to the multiple parodic references which the book contains, any potentially serious emotion is bound to turn into its own caricature and join the masquerade as a costumed sentimentality.¹³

V. is, therefore, a rather patchynovel which probably suffers from comparisons with Pynchon's later work; but we shall see this when we move on to *The Crying of Lot 49*, a novel as firmly rooted in the present and the future as V. is in the past.

II

The Crying of Lot 49 marks a complete change in Pynchon's writing; whereas V. resolves itself on analysis into something much more simple than it first appears to be, *The Crying of Lot 49* is still partially elusive after several readings; the harder one tries to pin it down, the more mercurial it seems to become, as though consciously trying to avoid that final analysis which is so often a prelude to dismissal. An examination of the book shows that this elusiveness is not a failing but a mark of extraordinary success, entirely appropriate to the themes Pynchon develops. The change in tone from V. is noticeable from the beginning of the novel and can be summarized in one example; in both novels Pynchon describes the way people become extensions of their mechanical possessions, once a week Fergus Mixolydian in V. fiddles around the kitchen sink making hydrogen:

...this went to fill a sturdy green balloon with a great Z printed on it. He would tie the balloon by a string to the post of the bed whenever he planned to sleep, this being the only way for visitors to tell which side of consciousness Fergus was on.

His other amusement was watching the TV. He'd devised an ingenious sleep-switch, receiving its signal from two electrodes placed on the inner skin of his forearm. When Fergus dropped below a certain level of awareness the skin resistance increased over a preset value to operate the switch. Fergus thus became an extension of the TV set. (V. p.45).

This quotation shows Pynchon being witty but cynical and disparaging about Fergus, he is far removed from the whole issue, standing back and mocking it. At the very beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49* we are introduced to Mucho Maas who has been a salesman at a used car lot until he could stand it no longer:

Yet at least he had believed in the cars. Maybe to excess: how could he not, seeing people poorer than him come in, Negro, Mexican, cracker, a parade seven days a week, bringing the most godawful of trade-ins: motorized metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself, to look at, frame cockeyed, rusty underneath, fender repainted in a shade just off enough to depress the value, if not Mucho himself, inside smelling hopelessly of children, supermarket booze, two, sometimes three generations of cigarette smokers, or only of dust - and when the cars were swept out you had to look at the actual residue of these lives, and there was no way of telling what things had been truly refused (when so little he supposed came by that out of fear most of it had to be taken and kept) and what had simply (perhaps tragically) been lost... Even if enough exposure to the unvarying gray sickness had somehow managed to immunize him, he could still never accept the way 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. As if it were the most natural thing. To Mucho it was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest. '4

Pynchon's deep concern shows itself here and it has allowed him to explore the concept from the human point of view; it is an aspect of the increasing inanimacy of people which was analysed in *V.* but there it was a schematic representation and never seemed to be deeply felt. Here and throughout *Lot 49*, the reader is aware that Pynchon has drawn his subject into himself instead of keeping it at arm's length, and the result is a perception of experience which is always compassionate and sometimes almost anguished.

The Crying of Lot 49 is an assault on the prescriptive version of reality which is the result of "single vision". Pynchon takes the first step in the undermining of this vision in a way which has become familiar in contemporary fiction, he blurs the distinction between real and dreamed, between fact and fiction. Much of the plot of the novel revolves around Oedipa Maas' search for the Trystero which may be an underground postal organization operating all over America. The Trystero have a long history attached to them, which Oedipa uncovers, starting their existence as a rebel group challenging the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly which operated throughout most of the Holy Roman Empire around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Reference to the Encyclopaedia Britannica shows that Thurn and Taxis were the biggest postal network of the period, but there is no mention of a rival system called the Trystero. The strands become even more interwoven when we discover that Rilke wrote the *Duino Elegies* when staying at Schloss Duino, a castle on the Adriatic Coast belonging to his friend Princess Marie von Thurn

und Taxis; the *Duino Elegies* are the favourite poems of Lieutenant Weissman, one of the main characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, who also appears in *V.*. During a bizarre night tramping the streets of San Francisco Oedipa keeps coming across references to the Trystero; the whole experience has a strange quality to it, "Later possibly she would have trouble sorting the night into real and dreamed" (*Crying* p.86), and she talks of "the repetition of symbols" in a manner which indicates that the way she approaches the experience seems to be close to the way a reader approaches a novel. "I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is *supposed* to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence." (*Crying* p.87). So Oedipa is dealing with experience as if it were fiction, noticing the repetition of symbols and trying to extract some kind of meaning from them; part of the novel involves a Jacobean play called *The Courier's Tragedy* and she attempts some textual research of the variant editions. Pynchon is not trying to redefine the boundaries between fact and fiction or real and dreamed, but to lose those boundaries altogether; during the same night in San Francisco Oedipa comes across "...a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering. But that the dream was really no different from being awake, because in the mornings when they got up they felt tired, as if they'd been up most of the night." (*Crying* p.87). Later Oedipa goes to see her psychiatrist, Dr. Hilarius, only to discover that he's "gone crazy"; she manages to speak to him and explains that she came in the hope that he could talk her out of a fantasy. "'Cherish it!' cried Hilarius, fiercely. 'What else do any of you have?'" (*Crying* p.103). There

seems to be far more significance in this answer from Hilarius now he is a victim of spiralling paranoia than there ever was before, certainly Oedipa didn't appear to derive much benefit from him when she visited him regularly. The distinction between sane and insane would appear to be questionable as well.

Oedipa Maas is central to *The Crying of Lot 49*, the novel is 'about' her experiences and her changing perception of them; some of these experiences can be grouped together in such a way that they form a theme, but the reader sees through Oedipa's eyes to such an extent that tracing her development seems to be the only way of organizing critical material so that the novel is dealt with comprehensively. It seems appropriate that *Lot 49* should militate against a thematic treatment, which tends to be a way of standing back from a subject, and force the critic to follow the labyrinths of Oedipa's purely subjective experience. At the beginning of the novel Oedipa is a typical young American housewife just back from a tupperware party, she is unable to understand why her husband still gets upset about the used car lot he used to work on, but the quotation already given about the cars shows that she is being rather insensitive, she seems to lack Mucho's power to make imaginative leaps into other people's lives and see the pathos which lies there. She attends the obligatory "shrink" and relies on him despite assertions to the contrary: "She didn't leave. Not that the shrink held any dark power over her. But it was easier to stay." (*Crying* p.8). Oedipa is the conventional product of middle America, trapped in its single vision, aware to a certain extent that she is trapped, that

something is missing from her life, but unaware of what the trap consists of or how she can get out of it. Named the co-executrix of her ex-lover's will, Pierce Inverarity, Oedipa is forced out of her refuge in Kinneret-among-the-Pines; "As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix." (*Crying* pp.9-10). It is ironic that a world-view so concerned with clear, objective reality produces a blurred picture, but this is exactly Oedipa's experience of it. Pynchon describes Oedipa as having "...gently conned herself into the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair." (*Crying* p.10). She has accepted without thinking the conventional female position, waiting for the knight in shining armour to carry her off; it turns out to be Pierce Inverarity and he enters her tower and carries her off to Mexico, but they are never really able to escape the confinement of that tower:

In Mexico City they somehow wandered into an exhibition of paintings by the beautiful Spanish exile Remedios Varo: in the central painting of a triptych, titled *Bordando el Manto Terrestre*, were a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, 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 hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth

were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world... She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple thousand miles away in her own tower, was only by accident known as Mexico, and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape. (*Crying* pp.10-11).

Like many others Oedipa had thought her knight in shining armour would clear away the mist from her eyes and add that spark of intensity she longed for, but instead she finds that nothing changes, different place-names like Mexico are accidental, meaningless labels which merely pretend to record diversity. The image of the painting is open to several interpretations; the girls in the tower could be seen as the Fates - *Clotho*, the lady of the thread; *Lachesis*, the lady who measures; and *Atropos*, the lady who cuts - in which case, is there any possibility of them weaving a different world?¹⁵ This view is supported by Oedipa's realization that she is kept in her tower by an anonymous and malignant magic, "visited on her from outside and for no reason at all." (*Crying* p.11). However, Oedip also identifies herself with the girls in the tower, understanding that she weaves her own world from her own tower. She cries when she sees the picture because she thinks her fate is inescapable, but if she is responsible for the woven world, then perhaps she could weave a different one. Pynchon allows her "gut fear and female cunning" (*Crying* p.11) with which to "examine" the formless magic, suggesting the possibility that the magic is analysable and could perhaps be circumvented. If we interpret the tower in the painting as the tower of perception, perhaps we can say that Oedipa is trapped because she is limited to a single, empirical, version of

reality. This is her fate, but it is only inescapable if there is only one way of viewing the world. The rest of the novel involves her attempts to understand the formless magic that imprisons her, and to discover freedom.

If Oedipa is a prisoner of single vision, so is America. The tragedy is that the limits of our perception, whether individual or collective, are, in a very real sense, the limits of our world. Therefore, although *Lot 49* is an assault on the idea that reality is single and definable, it is still possible to talk of the social and political reality of America as it is presented in the book. America has built its own cage with actual bars because its adoption of a restricted vision has resulted in a restricted reality. When Oedipa leaves Kinneret she drives to San Narciso, Pierce Inverarity's headquarters; her first view of it is from above and as she looks at the "ordered swirl of houses and streets" (*Crying* p.13), it reminds her of a printed circuit in a radio. "Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate." (*Crying* p.13). The complex pattern of America fails to communicate its meaning to Oedipa, it is as though words were being spoken on another frequency; she is reminded of her husband trying to believe in his job and pictures him watching through a soundproof window another disc-jockey going through the movements of his trade, and realizes that the way she is feeling now is the way he must feel at that moment, they look on and know that even if they could hear the message they wouldn't

believe in it anyway. Gradually Oedipa comes to see more of the concealed meaning of America; she drives past the Galatronics Division of Yoyodyne, Inc., one of the giants of the aerospace industry; reminiscent of a concentration camp, it is "...surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers." (*Crying* p.14). America disguises its sterility but since she saw the painting in Mexico she has become aware that the kind of freedom it offers is just an illusion:

Oedipa resolved to pull in at the next motel she saw, however ugly, stillness and four walls having at some point become preferable to this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape - it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L.A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. But were Oedipa some single melted crystal of urban horse, L.A., really, would be no less turned on for her absence. (*Crying* p.14).

The individual hardly matters to the big urban complex in the same way as he or she no longer matters to industry. Yoyodyne absorbs hopeful inventors and puts them to work on a project as a member of a team, they are ground into anonymity as they perform a stereotyped function on what amounts to a production line; they are also obliged on entering the firm to sign away their patent rights on anything they may invent. In an empirical world teamwork is the logical development because it seems to provide greater efficiency, which is an essential supportive structure for the materialism of single vision.

Another aspect of the reality of modern America is its

artificiality; during Metzger's seduction of Oedipa she nudges his nose with "the padded tip of her bra-cup" (*Crying* p.22), but the Fangoso Lagoons housing development, one of Inverarity's interests, is the best example of this.

It was to be laced by canals with private landings for power boats, a floating social hall in the middle of an artificial lake, at the bottom of which lay restored galleons, imported from the Bahamas; Atlantean fragments of columns and friezes from the Canaries; real human skeletons from Italy; giant clamshells from Indonesia - all for the entertainment of Scuba enthusiasts. (*Crying* p.18).

This summarizes the American passion for 'the real thing' regardless of the absurd artificiality of its setting; the lake itself is man-made and all the exhibits have been imported from foreign countries even though they bear no relation to what might reasonably be found in California. Ironically we discover later that the skeletons are the only genuinely American commodity, as they belong to GI's killed in Italy during the second world war. Oedipa sees a map of the Lagoons on television and is reminded of her view of San Narciso, "Some immediacy was there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead..." (*Crying* p.18). America offers a promise of initiation, a kind of immediacy, but it can never fulfill the hopes it holds out, or if it does the initiation is into sterility and emptiness; despite the disguise of comfort and luxury America is the Book of the Dead.

The ambiguity of the Trystero system suggests why it is referred to as a "separate, silent, unsuspected world" (*Crying* p.42); it reflects the possibility of multiplicity and diversity which

America has denied. The Trystero occurs to a certain extent within the physical boundaries of America but in a fundamental way it is part of a world which is congruent but not identical to the world to which America belongs. The fact that the difference should be expressed in terms of worlds seems an extravagant distinction until we remember how worlds are created by perception; the Trystero operates in *The Crying of Lot 49* to expose the single vision of America and in that sense it belongs to a separate world. Oedipa starts her quest with an optimism born of ignorance, she thinks she can give order to the scatter of business interests Pierce Inverarity has left behind (*Crying* p.65); an even greater naivety leads her to worry about Mr. Thoth's age and that of his grandfather because it means there are "All these fatigued brain cells between herself and the truth" (*Crying* p.68), as if "the truth" were a realizable concept. Her efforts to pin down the nature of the Trystero confuse her because single vision is unable to deal with contradictions as fundamental as the ones she finds. In "The Courier's Tragedy" the footpads who appear to be connected with the Trystero are described in a way which suggests their nature is sinister and deathly, they do after all kill the hero of the play:

Suddenly, in lithe and terrible silence, with dancers' grace, three figures, long-limbed, effeminate, dressed in black tights, leotards and gloves, black silk hose pulled over their faces, come capering on stage and stop, gazing at him. Their faces behind the stockings are shadowy and deformed. They wait. The lights all go out. (*Crying* p.51).

Successive references to the Trystero's past appearances emphasize this blackness and death, they are frequently connected with bones and a strange Puritan sect called the Scurvhamites thought the Trystero could symbolize the Principle which was opposed to the will of God, "Something blind, soulless; a brute automatism that led to eternal death." (*Crying* p.116). The other side of the coin, however, is to see the Trystero as a hopeful source of change, a system dedicated to subversion. The first hint of this is when we learn that its initial aim was to mute the Thurn and Taxis post-horn, which was the accepted establishment communication network; this element is carried over into the novel's present where it would seem many people are using the W.A.S.T.E. system rather than the U.S. mail. By the end of the book Oedipa sees the Trystero as a means by which all the disinherited of America are truly communicating with each other, waiting for some hope of change in the America which has rejected them. It is not as easy as this, however, the Trystero has been known to enjoy "counter-revolution" (*Crying* p.118), its founding father is an enigma, "perhaps a madman, perhaps an honest rebel, according to some only a con artist." (*Crying* p.119). This last quotation gives us a clue because it emphasizes variety of perception; the Trystero is an empty vessel filled by each according to his needs, its only existence is as a multiplicity of purely subjective interpretations of it. Oedipa does not know how to deal with this, she tries to force the Trystero into some kind of objective system, and worries when it doesn't fit, she can only see in terms of either/or instead of recognizing an infinite number of

equally valid possibilities. "Either Trystero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasized by Oedipa..." (*Crying* p.80). Oedipa is haunted by the way all the clues she comes across fit logically together, she believes in logic to the extent that the connections she perceives force her into possible explanations which in her eyes are mutually exclusive; either the Trystero exists, or the whole thing was set up by Pierce Inverarity, or she has hallucinated it in which case she's mad. None of these so-called "answers" give much satisfaction but this still does not lead Oedipa to see that perhaps it is the logic which is questionable. At one point she says "it seemed that a pattern was beginning to emerge" (*Crying* p.64) but the reader knows from the description of the painting in Mexico at the beginning of the novel that patterns don't just emerge, they don't exist to be found but are created by the perceiver. Logic is just one of the possible ways of pattern-making, and it is a way which embeds us in plots often to the exclusion of more important realizations. Ralph Driblette, the director of *The Courier's Tragedy*, tries to direct Oedipa away from this sterile plot-solving:

You could fall in love with me, you can talk to my shrink, you can hide a tape recorder in my bedroom, see what I talk about from wherever I am when I sleep. You want to do that? You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. (*Crying* p.56).

During her night-trip round San Francisco she recognizes that it was youthful optimism that led her to suppose she could solve "any

great mystery" (*Crying* p.91), but she still hasn't seen the irrelevance of solutions; by going to Dr. Hilarius with her problem she demonstrates that she still thinks someone else may be able to come up with the answer. She cannot accept that any patterns we place over the void in order to conceive of it are purely subjective, she is seeking objective confirmation of one of her possible 'explanations' so that she can discard the others and deny ambiguity. It is interesting to note that Oedipa is not the only one who finds an awareness of the ambiguity of the Trystero impossible to maintain: Annette Kolodny and Daniel James Peters in an otherwise illuminating article see the Trystero purely as a subversive system of true communication¹⁶; while Peter L. Abernethy sees it as the symbol of entropy in the wasteland of modern America.¹⁷ Neither view is right, it is essential that we recognize the Trystero is not a symbol of any one thing but a symbol of the dialectical unity of good and evil, and of the infinite possibilities of subjective experience.

The Crying of Lot 49's other central theme revolves round communication and information; the Trystero's basic function is that it acts as an alternative communication system to the conventional ones whose value seems to be dubious. Oedipa and her husband are woken in the night by a telephone call, "...its announcing bell clear cardiac terror, so out of nothing did it come, the instrument one second inert, the next screaming. It brought both of them instantly awake and they lay, joints unlocking, not even wanting to look at each other for the first few rings." (*Crying* p.7).

Mucho's job as a disc-jockey illustrates another modern communication system; at the beginning of the novel he is tormented by the fact that he doesn't 'believe' in it, there is so much distortion in the system anyway that Oedipa's name has to be pronounced as Edna Mosh in order for it to come out right at the other end. (*Crying* p.104). However, the Trystero's value as a communication system is not at all clear, by the end of the novel Oedipa thinks of it as "a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system" (*Crying* p.128); but there have been suggestions in the rest of the novel that the amount of actual communication passing through the system is questionable. Oedipa is present when a Trystero mail delivery arrives and she watches Mike Fallopian open his letter:

*Dear Mike, it said, how are you? Just thought
I'd drop you a note. How's your book coming?
Guess that's all for now. See you at The Scope.
'That's how it is,' Fallopian confessed
bitterly, 'most of the time.'* (*Crying* p.35).

It seems that the Scope crowd have so little to say to each other that they have made it compulsory to send at least one letter through the system once a week in order to keep it going. On the other hand, perhaps we can say that the greatest of all monopolies is not Thurn and Taxis, or Pierce Inverarity, but language itself with its unavoidably logical structure. If this is the case, then that which stands against language cannot speak, or it can only speak by employing a given language and implying silence. The I.A. (Inamorati Anonymous) are another group who use the W.A.S.T.E.

system and they make a virtue out of isolation, avoiding any meetings with each other in order to avoid the possibility of falling in love. The man who tells Oedipa about the I.A. describes it as "'A whole underworld of suicides who failed. All keeping in touch through that secret delivery system. What do they tell each other?'" (*Crying* p.85), but he doesn't answer his own question, he just shakes his head and smiles. The ambiguity of the Trystero as an effective communication system is summarized by the acronym which identifies it, W.A.S.T.E.; the posting box in San Francisco is an ordinary trash can with W.A.S.T.E. written on it, but the periods between the letters are almost indistinguishable suggesting that perhaps it is merely pointless refuse after all. The acronym comes from a motto, We Await Silent Trystero's Empire, which again suggests that the Trystero could be an evil force opposed to communication; but there remains the possibility that the information communicated is of a kind that most of us cannot understand because it does not use language. The deaf-mute's ball illustrates that there are kinds of communication of which it is hard to conceive:

Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions. The only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined. Something they all heard with an extra sense atrophied in herself she followed her partner's lead, limp in the young mute's clasp, waiting for the collisions to begin. But none came. She was danced for half an hour before, by mysterious consensus, everybody took a break, without having felt any touch but the touch of her partner. (*Crying* p.97).

Oedipa's experiences with the Nefastis machine and with the old sailor in San Francisco show us that single vision overemphasizes the value of one kind of information. The Nefastis machine supposedly contains an actual Maxwell's Demon; this demon was posited by the nineteenth century physicist, James Clerk Maxwell, as a means by which the second law of thermodynamics could be violated and the tendency of entropy to increase could be reversed. Maxwell's idea was that demons could sit in a container of gas which was connected to a heat engine; the demons sorted out the faster-moving molecules from the slower ones and created a temperature differential which could then be used to drive the engine. Nineteenth century physics thought that the information the demons collected was 'free' in that it needed no power input to the demons for them to be able to carry out their task, the demons could in fact provide their own power-source. This century it has been shown that this is not in fact the case and the demon can only work indefinitely if there is an additional power input from outside, thus the box is no longer a closed system and the second law of thermodynamics still stands. John Nefastis's machine works, or doesn't work, on the basis that the so-called sensitive can provide the necessary power input in such a way that the box could still be called a closed system because that kind of input would not be recognized as such in modern physics. It is a two-way communication system in which the sensitive has both to send and receive information; each time the piston moves vast quantities of information are destroyed and the demon has to start sorting again. Oedipa tries

hard at the job of sensitive but she fails to make the machine work; presumably she cannot respond to that kind of information in which case the demon does not have the necessary input and cannot sort; alternatively, even if Oedipa was responsive the demon might just not be able to do the job which is required of him. It seems that to a certain extent the machine parallels Oedipa's search for the meaning of the Trystero; they are both trying to sort out a mass of random information into an ordered, logical system. The fact that the machine does not work suggests either that that kind of rational ordering of factual information fails to produce the required results, or if it could do at some level, humanity, as represented by Oedipa, is unable to respond to it. Oedipa desires a kind of super-vision, she wants to be able to understand all of it all of the time, and cannot accept that flashes are all most of us get:

Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (*Crying* p.69).

It is during the meeting with the oid, alcoholic sailor that we learn why understanding based on the factual kind of information is so partial, and what kind of experience can lead us nearer to more satisfactory understanding.

Cammed each night out of that safe furrow the bulk of this city's waking each sunrise again set virtuously to plowing, what rich soils had he turned, what concentric planets uncovered? What voices over-

heard, flinders of luminescent gods glimpsed among the wallpaper's stained foliage, candlestubs lit to rotate in the air over him, prefiguring the cigarette he or a friend must fall asleep someday smoking, thus to end among the flaming, secret salts held all those years by the insatiable stuffing of a mattress that could keep vestiges of every nightmare sweat, helpless overflowing bladder, viciously, tearfully consummated wet dream, like the memory bank to a computer of the lost? (*Crying* p.93).

Oedipa suddenly recognizes that the sailor's drunken hallucinations have taken him out of the "safe furrow" of single vision and into the subtle complexity of infinite possibilities; she sees that his mattress is an insatiable store of information and remembers John Nefastis' remarks about massive destructions of information in his machine. When the mattress burned, the lives of all the men who had slept on it would cease to exist, "She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. It astonished her to think that so much could be lost..." (*Crying* p.95). If a mattress can contain so much information then it would seem hopeless to contemplate solving a problem, or trying to gain new insights, by systematically collating facts in the way Oedipa has done with the Tryster. Knowledge from this kind of information just isn't available to us because we can never do more than scratch the surface, the information constantly changes with irretrievable losses compounding the problem of a constant barrage of new facts. Oedipa holds the old sailor in her arms and, in the spiritual climax of the book, tries to share his hallucinations and recognize the value of the possibilities they contain:

She knew because she had held him, that he suffered DT's. Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the

mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. Oedipa did not know where she was. Trembling, unfurrowed, she slipped sidewise... (*Crying* p.95).

Oedipa slips out of the furrow of single vision when she recognizes the value of metaphor, sometimes a lie but sometimes a thrust at the truth which is not available to us in any other way, and certainly not through the systematic collation of information. She leaves behind the reality of rational empiricism and enters on to another level of consciousness altogether; remembering an old boyfriend who talked about freshman calculus she makes the connection between DT's, Delirium Tremens, and dt, time differential:

'dt,' God help this old tattooed man, meant also a time differential, a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was, where it could no longer disguise itself as something innocuous like an average rate... She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other man had seen, if only because there was that high magic to low puns, because DT's must give access to dt's of spectra beyond the known sun, music made purely of antarctic loneliness and fright. (*Crying* pp.95-96).

The change which is confronted is a change of consciousness, the altered perceptions of the hallucinator (DT's) must give rise to an altered perception of time and space (dt). As Kolodny and Peters say in their article on *Lot 49*, "The identity of dt as DT is a

statement that time and space are only contingencies of consciousness, and an alteration in either dimension - time-space or consciousness - will inevitably cause alterations or reverberations in the other."¹⁸ Oedipa has at last stumbled on the world of infinite possibilities, fantasies and visions can leap boundaries never to be crossed by those who carefully piece information together. Sadly, Oedipa finds herself unable to maintain this awareness; when she meets her husband, Mucho, again after this experience she finds he is regularly tripping on acid and that he has found a new level of understanding. Oedipa is unable to accept it because she feels he has left her completely, she will never see him again. It is impossible to evaluate Mucho's new understanding, it looks forward to Slothrop's loss of personal density at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* which also has an ambiguous nature. Oedipa's sudden loneliness and fear are easy to understand because such levels of awareness appear to require different forms of communication from those we are used to, and perhaps she is right in thinking Mucho has gone off on an artificially induced and meaningless journey. The problem for Oedipa is that whether or not Mucho's hallucinatory metaphor is a lie or a thrust at truth, she rejects him because she is still seeking some form of objective reality, she is clinging to that hope for all she is worth. Perhaps her fear that the "central truth" will be "too bright for her memory to hold" is justified after all.

In the last chapter of the novel we see a wavering Oedipa, her consciousness has changed and her understanding developed but they have done so rather patchily. She is convinced that there must be a "reason" for Ralph Driblette inserting the lines about the

Trystero the night she goes to see his play, "...something must have changed for him drastically that night, and that's what made him put the lines in." (*Crying* p.115). She cannot escape the basic rational construct of single vision, cause and effect, though a little later she recognises its impossibly complex nature:

Did she know why Driblette had put in those two extra lines that night? Had he even known why? No one could begin to trace it. A hundred hangups, permuted, combined - sex, money, illness, despair with the history of his time and place, who knew. (*Crying* p.121).

It's the same problem as that which was suggested by the old sailor's mattress, if we base understanding on the level of factual information, in order to know anything for certain we have to know everything. As Alan Watts says, "We can never, never describe *all* the features of the total situation, not only because every situation is infinitely complex, but also because the *total* situation is the universe."¹⁹ It is probably as a consequence of recognizing this that Oedipa starts to feel reluctant about asking questions and following things up (*Crying* p.124), but she is still caught in the dialectical trap of either/or, thinking in terms of four mutually exclusive possible "explanations" of the Trystero plot, as she calls it. She cannot conceive of multiple possibilities co-existing, nor can she see that the question of the Trystero's objective existence is irrelevant once we have recognized the value of metaphor as it is found in mysticism, hallucination, and dream. By this time, her isolation is complete, but it is this isolation which enables her to face the reality of

America. The sense of buffering described at the beginning of the novel has been destroyed because she has been stripped of her ignorance and those cherished illusions we all create in the hope of some degree of ease or at least self-preservation. An example of this is when she regrets the loss of her husband to acid because he is leaving her and their marriage behind, leaving "...what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love..." (*Crying* p.114). She has always known that she fell back on marriage when she recognized that she was a captive in her tower, but simultaneously she has tried to convince herself that she really does love Mucho. Another illusion was her psychiatrist but he has been removed to an asylum himself, and her one extra-marital affair has eloped with a child. Naked at last, she confronts the tawdry failed dream she lives in, and has helped to create - "This is America, you live in it, you let it happen" (*Crying* p.112).

San Narciso was a name; an incident among our climatic records of dreams and what dreams became among our accumulated daylight, a moment's squall-line or tornado's touchdown among higher, more continental solemnities - storm systems of group suffering and need, prevailing winds of affluence. There was the true continuity, San Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America. (*Crying* pp.133-134).

Oedipa wonders if she will one day join the Trystero, if it exists, and wait with them,

...if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or a cry, then at least,

at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew. She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among the matrices of a giant digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. (*Crying* p.136).

The extent of the perversion of the American Dream can be measured by recognizing that America once offered possibility, multiplicity, diversity, individuality, and now it offers San Narciso and giant corporations like Yoyodyne; the image of America as a huge computer is a brilliant description of the either/or mentality of rational empiricism. Oedipa can now see the trap that she is in, she has analysed the height and architecture of the tower of single vision, but she hasn't yet discovered that the thickness of its walls is illusory. If her perception could weave a tapestry of infinite possibilities then either/or would become a meaningless construct; there is no need to wait for the "symmetry of choices to break down", they disintegrate in the face of an individual refusal to accept the restrictions of single vision.

At the end of the novel Oedipa attends the stamp auction and awaits the crying of lot 49, in the hope that she will find out something more about the Trystero; but the reader who is wondering who is going to buy the stamps has missed the point. Unlike V., the central symbol of the novel is a complete enigma, the Trystero exists to demonstrate ambiguity and multiple possibilities. In accordance with his views about the futility of analysing plots,

Pynchon has provided us with a novel in which the plot is a false trail. Oedipa and the reader have followed the trail of the Trystero but in the end they cannot positively say they know more about it than when they started; the insights Pynchon has given us have been concerned with communication and information, he has led us through the America of single vision, and opened our eyes to possible ways out of it; it has been an exploration of consciousness, a journey of liberation, but the Trystero retains its mystery to the end.

III

Gravity's Rainbow is Pynchon's most remarkable achievement. An immensely long and complex novel, sometimes very funny, sometimes tragic or horrifying, it successfully examines what the contemporary world means, and what it may become. If a mark of significant literary achievement is portraying as all-inclusively as possible, and with an active and critical imagination, the world of which the author is a part, then *Gravity's Rainbow* must occupy a central position in modern literature. Pynchon has the facility both to absorb and to recognize the implications of new modes of interpreting the universe, ranging from modern physics to mysticism, from psychology to history, from politics to the drug-culture. The breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding revealed in *Gravity's Rainbow* is awe-inspiring. It is a novel, however, which poses many problems, not least in terms of this thesis. In a passing remark, Eric Mottram called it a naturalistic

novel, and though I could not agree with him, there are, undoubtedly, justifications for such a comment. The novel reflects the contemporary world as Pynchon understands it; the reader gains some sense of the operation of a moral consciousness within its pages; there is a deliberately structured plot. If conventional realism were not still a significant form for writers of fiction, and the conventional view of reality as single and objectively verifiable not still the dominant view, then we might wish to talk of this novel as a new kind of realism. As it is, however, we must recognize quite how radical a subversion of convention this novel is.

Pynchon makes use of the Uncertainty Principle, he actually mentions Heisenberg by name in *Gravity's Rainbow*, to question the absolute nature of cause and effect and the resulting deterministic picture of the universe. This has an important effect on how we view the plot-structure of the novel. Although there is a plot, in a way we would not find in much of John Hawkes' writing for example, it is used in an entirely different way from the use of it we find in realistic fiction. If we can say that in realism the ordered plot reflects an ordered universe, in *Gravity's Rainbow* exactly the opposite assumption is reflected. The drive of the plot towards the discovery of the Schwarzg erat rocket is irrelevant to the main concerns of the novel; the central character, Slothrop, forgets what he is supposed to be looking for; frequently Pynchon arouses expectations in the reader he deliberately does not fulfill, many loose ends are never tied up. He even satirizes his readers' irredeemably logical minds; when connecting two events towards the

end of the novel, he begins, in a slightly weary way, "You will want cause and effect. All right." (*Rainbow* p.663). Pynchon does not believe the universe is ordered; as in *The Crying of Lot 49*, he is showing us that we may superimpose an order on the universe, but even that is not necessarily desirable.

In realistic fiction characters are defined to a certain extent by the society in which they live. In *Gravity's Rainbow* this relationship is rejected as far as possible; apart from the fact that how the individual functions within society does not seem to be considered important, the majority of the central characters reject society as the bureaucratic institutions run by THEM. THEY are the enemy, a paranoid, or not so paranoid, view of anyone who is a success in the world, all those in positions of authority or power, anyone, in fact, who is not part of the underground. Thus although the characters are defined by society insofar as they reject that society, they do not accept society's values, and the reader sees their rejection by society as an indication of their true worth. Much of the action of the novel takes place in what Pynchon calls the Zone, Germany at the end of the second world war when it was being administered by America, Britain and Russia. The entire area was filled with Displaced Persons, and I think this is how Pynchon sees the majority of us, roaming and lost in a strange environment. There is a description of the general movement of all the Displaced Persons across the Zone in different directions, "The Nationalities are on the move. It is a great frontierless streaming out here." (*Rainbow* p.549). They have lost possessions but more important

they have lost identity and their sense of where they belong; the society of which they are a part has gone and will not return, "...so the populations move, across the open meadow, limping, marching, shuffling, carried, hauling along the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois order they don't yet know is destroyed forever." (*Rainbow* p.551). If we accept the view that the realistic novel is an ordering of "things" in relationship with individual identities, in specifically located space and time, and that this makes it a bourgeois form, then the view Pynchon is expressing implies that the realistic novel is also destroyed forever, because the assumptions that supported it are no longer valid.

The image of Displaced Persons suggests in part why the treatment of character in *Gravity's Rainbow* shows such a divergence from realism. We are given little information about the social background, the appearance, the education, or the childhood of most of the characters in the novel, with the exception of Enzian and Slothrop, and both of these are more national representatives than people with a minutely described individual context. Pynchon states directly that, like Barth, he is sceptical about the significance of a single continuous identity; he prefers a more fluid conception of character:

'Maybe I'll be back.' It's no drifter's lie, both of them are sure that someone will be, next year at about this time, maybe next year's Schweinheld, someone close enough...and if the name, the dossier are not exactly the same, well, who believes in those? (*Rainbow* p.573).

The moral framework of *Gravity's Rainbow* is more difficult

to place accurately in contrast to realism. Unlike John Hawkes' fiction, where the intrusion of moral judgements on the part of the reader must be resisted, *Gravity's Rainbow* does to a certain extent invite a moral response. Having freed his characters from an absolutely determined world, the possibility of free action comes into being, and with it the possibility once again of a moral frame of reference. I will examine this subject in more detail later, but suffice it to say at this point in the chapter that the application of the moral system is radically different from that found in realistic fiction. As I mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Mark Leaf calls the realistic universe one in which humanity stands pre-eminently to be judged. Pynchon's main moral focus is not simply on the inadequacies of humanity's moral judgements, but on the "wrongness" and vicious consequences of the whole activity of judging. In the first chapter I also referred to Leslie Stephen's view that fiction must show a morally unified resolution; *Gravity's Rainbow* is moral insofar as it is concerned with issues that can be interpreted from a moral point of view, but its essential, deep-rooted and *necessary* doubt, the fundamental ambiguity of its moral structure, is what separates it from the more certain world of realism.

There is no one view of reality presented by the novel, all expressions of reality are dependant on individual perception and are equally valid:

British security are about, but that's another, encapsulated world. The British G-5 occupy their own space and Zone congruent but not identical to what these serious Schwarzcommando astride bikes

unmuffled go blasting on through tonight.
(*Rainbow* p.519).

Out of his earphones now and then, ghost-voices will challenge or reprimand him: air traffic people down in their own kingdom, one more overlay on the Zone, Antennas strung in the wilderness like redoubts, radiating half-spheres of influence, defining invisible corridors-in-the-sky that are real only for them. (*Rainbow* p.620).

The reality of the Zone is seen as being multiple, the different factions interpret an area which is the Zone according to their own perceptions, and the variation in their interpretation results in different realities, congruent but not identical to each other. Even with the above qualification reality is not seen as being particularly meaningful; it is Their province, supporting Their ideas and giving Them success and power, by rejecting that reality one can reject Them and to a certain extent Their influence. Katje's dream is to return to that world of reality: "...the World of Reality she still believes in and will never give up hoping to rejoin someday." (*Rainbow* p.658). Enzian tries to reassure her by saying: "There are things to hold to. None of it may look real, but some of it is. Really." (*Rainbow* p.659). It is a suspicious statement in the context of this novel and our suspicions are proved correct at the end of the section:

Far away in another corridor a loud drill-bit strains, smokes, just before snapping. Cafeteria trays and steelware rattle, an innocent and kind sound behind familiar regions of steam, fat at the edge of souring, cigarette smoke, washwater, disinfectant - a cafeteria in the middle of the day.

There are things to hold on to... (*Rainbow* p.663).

The familiarity of the cafeteria is comforting but otherwise it is a place of metal and waste, the actual is seen as dull and trivial. Pynchon values magic and dream and allows them considerable significance; he separates magic and fantasy so that magic is given a valid status among the different ways of interpreting experience: "This is magic. Sure - but not necessarily fantasy." (*Rainbow* p.735). On another occasion Slothrop has been dreaming, "White Rabbit's been talking to Slothrop, serious and crucial talk, but on the way up to waking he loses it all, as usual." (*Rainbow* p.468). Slothrop resents the waking up process because the dream was important and he can't take it with him into the world of everyday reality. Truth will not be found on this level of ordinary reality, a paranoid has no way of knowing whether in fact They control the usual sources of information, making sure that only the harmless things come through: "Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity." (*Rainbow* p.582).

In this brief introduction, I have attempted to indicate some of the ways in which Pynchon subverts traditional conceptions of reality, and in what ways he differs in *Gravity's Rainbow* from the traditional mode of realistic fiction. The remainder of the chapter will expand these points and develop new ones, in a more detailed analysis of the novel.

* * *

Gravity's Rainbow opens with some disturbing reversals of the usual patterning of cause and effect, the most obvious being the V2

rockets, which explode before the sound of the approach can be heard:

Imagine a missile one hears approaching only *after* it explodes. The reversal! A piece of time neatly snipped out...a few feet of film run backwards...the blast of the rocket, fallen faster than sound - then growing *out of it* the roar of its own fall, catching up to what's already death and burning ...a ghost in the sky... (*Rainbow* p.48).

This is only extraordinary to the layman, the scientist can explain it satisfactorily in terms of logic, the rocket travels faster than the speed of sound. Pynchon's next reversal is not so easily explained however; Tyrone Slothrop, an American officer working in London, has been keeping a map plotting his successes with women. It happens that the distribution on this map coincides exactly with the one that the statistician, Roger Mexico, has been keeping of where the V2 rockets fall; only the stars on Slothrop's map are dated, and the dates are always before the corresponding rocket strike. As an infant Slothrop was used in an experiment by a self-styled Pavlovian, Laszlo Jamf, who conditioned him to respond to a mystery stimulus with an erection. If this reflex wasn't properly extinguished then perhaps something in the V2 rocket is acting as the stimulus for Slothrop's erection; however the response (effect) is happening several days before the stimulus (cause) can be seen by anyone else. A third reversal occurs with the Schwarzkommando; a scheme called Operation Black Wing was set up to make a propaganda film designed to create racial tension in Germany. Using as a basis the fact that there were some Hereros, natives of German Southwest Africa, in Germany, they created the Schwarzkommando, an all black division of the SS. Inevitably at

the end of the war these black troops are discovered to exist;

At PISCES it is widely believed that the Schwarzkommando have been summoned, in the way demons may be gathered in, called up to the light of day and earth by the now defunct Operation Black Wing. You can bet Psi Section was giggling about this for a while. Who could have guessed there'd be *real* black rocket troops? That a story made up to scare last year's enemy should prove to be literally true - and no way now to stuff them back in the bottle or even say the spell backward ...(*Rainbow* pp.275-276).

Edward Pointsman is a true Pavlovian; in a conversation with Roger Mexico he talks of his hero, "Pavlov believed that the ideal, the end we all struggle toward in science, is the true mechanical explanation... His faith ultimately lay in a pure physiological basis for the life of the psyche. No effect without cause, and a clear train of linkages." (*Rainbow* p.89). He is determined to discover a physiological cause for Slothrop's odd behaviour; he doesn't care how bizarre, he would even consider telepathy, but he cannot live in an uncertain world. Mexico lives in a statistical world of probabilities; whereas Pointsman thinks in terms of zero and one, because he agrees with Pavlov's view that the cortex of the brain consists of elements which can only exist in two states, awake or asleep, on or off; Mexico "...belongs [to] the domain *between* zero and one - the middle Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion - the probabilities." (*Rainbow* p.55). Mexico's analysis of the pattern of bomb hits has no power of prediction with regard to where the next bomb will fall, it can only predict a statistical distribution. He teases Pointsman by saying "Each hit is independant of all the others. Bombs are not dogs. No link. No memory. No

conditioning." (*Rainbow* p.56). Pointsman is genuinely frightened by Mexico's easy play with "symbols of randomness and fright" (*Rainbow* p.56); he recognizes that Mexico is threatening "the idea of cause and effect itself" (*Rainbow* p.56) and wonders if all his generation will turn out like this, a distinct probability in that Mexico's is the first generation of scientists raised on the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. Mexico is not totally at ease with his position however; he cannot work out where science should go next and says as much to Pointsman:

...there's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go. That for science to carry on at all, it must look for a less narrow, a less...sterile set of assumptions. The next great breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle. (*Rainbow* p.89).

Slothrop's erections worry him; he explains it as "a statistical oddity" but "he feels the foundation of that discipline trembling a bit now, deeper than oddity ought to drive". (*Rainbow* p.85). His problem is that assimilating the loss of cause and effect is much more difficult than apprehending it intellectually. A good example of the difficulty of truly assimilating such a fundamental change in attitude is the German girl Leni Pökler. She despises her husband Franz as a cause-and-effect man; Franz cannot accept her interest in astrology, "there's no way for changes out there to produce changes here" (*Rainbow* p.159), but she replies that she is making no claims that one causes the other, merely that they go together "Parallel, not series. Metaphors. Signs and symptoms." (*Rainbow* p.159). Her perception of the insignificance of logical

connections compared with symbolic ones is enough to allow her to sneer at her husband's rationality, and yet as a political activist she is quite obviously taking action in order to achieve a result which is causally related to that action.

The reason the question of cause and effect is important in the novel is because it is connected with control; Pavlov explored the science of conditioning, the central tenet of behavioural psychology, which is both totally dependant on a causal relation between stimulus and response, and the most powerful form of control that THEY have at Their disposal. At the Casino Hermann Goering Slothrop comes to a realization;

...all in his life of what has looked free or random, is discovered to've been under some Control, all the time, the same as a fixed roulette wheel - where only destinations are important, attention is to long term statistics, not individuals: and where the House always does, of course, keep turning a profit...
(*Rainbow* p.209).

- The truth of this statement is made particularly obvious to the reader because he knows that Slothrop was conditioned as an infant and has been kept under observation ever since; but Pynchon's point is surely not that Slothrop is a special case, the issue of control has been made more noticeable in him so that we recognize the truth that conditioning starts at an early age for all of us. Pointsman's determination to find the cause of Slothrop's behaviour at whatever cost is explained by the desperate cry "we must never lose control" (*Rainbow* p.144), he is genuinely frightened by the possibility of freedom. Gerhardt von Göll, the German movie

director, alternately known as Der Springer, is a megalomaniac fascinated by the possibilities for control that making films allows him. He is convinced that film has power over reality, he thinks he really was responsible for the creation of the Schwarzkommando and can objectify the dream of the Argentinians in much the same way (*Rainbow* p.388). Later in the novel Slothrop is worried that Närrisch has been killed, Springer disagrees with him:

'But what if they did shoot him?'
'No. They weren't supposed to.'
'Springer, this ain't the fuckin' *movies* now, come on.'
'Not yet. Maybe not quite yet. You'd better enjoy it while you can. Someday, when the film is fast enough, the equipment pocket-size and burdenless and selling at people's prices, the lights and booms no longer necessary, then...then...' (*Rainbow* p.527).

This is obviously taking the notion of control to a ridiculous conclusion but it effectively points up its nature; perhaps it is not too extravagant to guess at a pun on the names Springer and Skinner.

Control is central to the continuation of THEIR rule; despite the fact that cause and effect is no longer absolute Their use of conditioning still seems to work. The reason for this is at least partly because all real knowledge is systematically hidden from us and more often than not we are not even aware of Their power; Slothrop's recognition that he has been controlled all his life comes as a revelation, he looks at the Himmler-Spielsaal and starts to question the way he has always perceived it:

These are no longer quite outward and visible signs of a game of chance. There is another enterprise here, more real than that, less merciful, and systematically hidden from the likes of Slothrop. Who sits in the taller chairs? Do They have names? What lies on Their smooth baize surfaces? (*Rainbow* p.202).

We play their games and even if we are aware we're playing them we are not told the rules or the stakes:

...it's all this playing games, too much of it, too many games: the nasal, obsessive voice of the croupier he can't see - messieurs, mesdames, *lex jeux sont fait* - is suddenly speaking out of the Forbidden Wing directly to him, and about what Slothrop has been playing against the invisible House, perhaps after all for his soul, all day - ... (*Rainbow* p.205).

As far as one can make out from the mediums like Carroll Eventyr who are in touch with "the Other Side", they are involved with ideas of control themselves. Eventyr is controlled from both sides of the interface - the transcripts of what he says are edited by the officials at The White Visitation before he reads them, and although the word "control" is commonly used for describing the dead person who speaks through the medium, it takes on a peculiar significance in this context. Walter Rathenau speaking through Peter Sachsa tells his corporate Nazi listeners to ask themselves about the "real" nature of control (*Rainbow* p.167); even though he is aware that control is more complex than they ever think it is, and he implies that on the other side these concerns are considered trivial, Rathenau is still helping Them perfect their methods of control; a paranoia-inducing implication. Certainly the other side are as enmeshed in bureaucracy as we are here (*Rainbow* p.238):

It was nice of Jung to give us the idea of an ancestral pool in which everybody shares the same dream material. But how is it we are each visited as individuals, each by exactly and only what he needs? Doesn't that imply a switching-path of some kind? a bureaucracy? Why shouldn't the IG go to séances? They ought to be quite at home with the bureaucracies of the other side. (*Rainbow* pp.410-411).

Enzian thinks that Blicero has died but transcended and "driven deep into Their province, into control, synthesis and control." (*Rainbow* p.661). If this is not just an indication of Enzian's imperfect understanding then it would seem to imply that even the other side is divided into US and THEM.

Towards the end of the novel we are shown in an image the way They work; the pointsman is in charge of the lever that changes the points and sends you either to Pain City or Happyville; if you play the game They want you to go to Happyville. Slothrop recognized this early on: "He is almost sure that whatever They want, it won't mean risking his life, or even too much of his comfort" (*Rainbow* p.207) - in fact They have taken him out of London with the risk of death from a V2 rocket, put him in a comfortable hotel in the South of France, and given him Katje to keep him company. Curiously though not everyone wants to go to Happyville:

The Germans-and-Japs story was only one, rather surrealistic version of the real War. The real War is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people. Only right now it is killing them in more subtle ways. Often in ways that are too complicated, even for us, at this level, to trace. But the right people are dying, just as they do when armies fight. The ones who stand up, in Basic, in the middle of the machine-gun pattern. The ones who do not have faith in their sergeants. The

ones who slip and show a moment's weakness to the Enemy. These are the ones the War cannot use, and so they die. The right ones survive. The others, it's said, even *know* they have a short life expectancy. But they persist in acting the way they do. Nobody knows why. (*Rainbow* p.645).

The persistence of the subversives is an indication that Pynchon sees a way out of Their systems of control, and he clearly feels that it is worth sacrificing life to do it. Although the cards seem to be stacked on Their side, our release from the bondage of cause and effect may release us from control if only we can recognise it - Roland Feldspath speaking through Carroll Eventyr talks of the dispensing with God as having caused a harmful illusion, that absolute control was within the grasp of humanity:

But you had taken on a greater, a more harmful illusion. The illusion of control. That A could do B. But that was false. Completely. No one can *do*. Things only happen, A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable... (*Rainbow* p.30).

Through Slothrop we learn that Their power is based on a series of confidence tricks; Proverbs for Paranoids 3 shows that They deliberately try to mislead you because their control is not absolute and they know it. "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers." (*Rainbow* p.251). Pointsman was desperate to prove that Slothrop's erections were a response to some definite precursor of the rocket:

But if it's in the air, right here, right now, then the rockets follow from it, 100% of the time. No exceptions. When we find it, we'll have shown again the stone determinacy of everything, of every soul. There will be precious little room for any hope at all. You can see how important a discovery like that would be. (*Rainbow* p.86).

In fact no satisfactory explanation for Slothrop's erections is ever found, the substance which we discover was used in his conditioning as an infant is only used in one special rocket. Pynchon has thus exposed a possible loop-hole in the "stone determinacy" of conditioning; his concern is with the development of consciousness and thus the nature of control had to be revealed early in the novel in order to allow for the possibility of different kinds of perception.

* * *

The property of time-modulation peculiar to Oneirine was one of the first to be discovered by investigators. 'It is experienced,' writes Shetzline in his classic study, 'in a subjective sense...uh...well. Put it this way. It's like stuffing wedges of silver sponge, *right, into, your brain!*' (*Rainbow* p.389).

The name of Pynchon's drug presumably comes from the Greek, Oneiros, a dream; this indicates the kind of perception of time involved when the drug is used. In dreams scenes change instantly, moving forward or backward in time with no warning and no explanation; in fact the tenses of past present and future do not exist, dreams always take place in the 'now'. *Gravity's Rainbow* itself seems to encompass this approach, our experience of the novel asks us to question radically the linear perception of time we normally employ.

History is dependant on the notion of cause and effect; when Pointsman expresses his fear of Mexico playing with "symbols of randomness and fright" (*Rainbow* p.56), he realizes that Mexico's play "wrecks the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole *generation* have turned out like this? Will Postwar be nothing but 'events', newly

created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history?" (*Rainbow* p.56). History spends its time making connections, it presumes that the past is available for us to reconstruct, but science has been made increasingly aware of the limitations of that kind of knowledge. Walter Rathenau tells the IG that "All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic" (*Rainbow* p.167), diversionary because it allows us the illusion of rational knowledge and understanding. Objectively accurate and detailed history is shown to be impossible to attain. At one point in the novel Christian and Pavel, two members of the Schwarzkommando, are in disagreement and Christian nearly shoots Pavel:

And now his head in Christian's steel notch at 300 yards. Suddenly this awful branching: the two possibilities already beginning to fly apart at the speed of thought - a new Zone in any case, now, whether Christian fires or refrains - jump, choose -

Enzian tries his best - knocks the barrel aside, has a few unpleasant words for the young revenger. But both men saw the new branches. The Zone, again, has just changed, and they are already on, into the new one... (*Rainbow* p.524).

In a few seconds the whole Zone has changed, radically enough to be called "a new Zone", there is no time to assimilate or analyse the change because "they are already on, into the new one..." it is a quantum jump in fact. The speed with which radical change can occur and the fact that the moment of change is not clearly defined because of this speed, indicates the impossibility of history's self-imposed task, the objective recording of the complexities and subtleties of the world's past. The task of the

historian is made even more extensive by the fact that our conception of history is extremely limited anyway:

...history, as it's been laid on the world is only a fraction, an outward-and-visible fraction...we must also look to the untold, to the silence around us, to the passage of the next rock we notice - to its aeons of history under the long and female persistence of water and air (who'll be there, once or twice per century, to trip the shutter?), down to the lowland where your paths, human and mineral, are most likely to cross... (*Rainbow* pp.612-613).

Historical awareness is both insignificant, by the end of the novel Slothrop can't even remember what happened to him six years previously and it doesn't matter in the least (*Rainbow* p.623), and pathetically literal-minded, Slothrop has a conversation with the ghost of an ancestor of his who uses the metaphor of the jig-saw puzzle, suddenly Slothrop says "*Wait* a minute. You people didn't *have* jig-saw puzzles", the only reply is a rather despairing "Aw, shit." (*Rainbow* p.554). Tchitcherine at one point turns to a Theory of History in an attempt to explain the problem of individual death; this theory is just described as "of all pathetic cold comforts" (*Rainbow* p.704). Right at the end of the novel there is a passage which treats the action of the novel as history - the perspective is looking back on the events we have in some way lived through. It is a parody of the interpretations, at once complicated and over-simplified, usually put forward to explain any event or personality from the past, and the various explanations offered seem to bear little relation to our experience of the novel. (*Rainbow* p.738).

Eddie Pensiero is an American G.I. in Europe detailed to cut

the colonel's hair:

Each long hair cut is a passage. Hair is yet another kind of modulated frequency. Assume a state of grace in which all hairs were once distributed perfectly even, a time of innocence when they fell perfectly straight, all over the colonel's head. Winds of the day, gestures of distraction, sweat, itchings, sudden surprises, three-foot falls at the edge of sleep, watched skies, remembered shames, all have since written on that perfect grating. Passing through it tonight, restructuring it, Eddie Pensiero is an agent of History. (*Rainbow* p.643).

Here Pynchon is showing that history is a process of ordering through massive simplification; Pensiero cutting the colonel's hair is analogous to what an historian does to the past, they both comb through their subject and cut round the edges until the shape is perfectly even. Then at the end of the section we see the colonel left alone in Happyville:

The steel city waits him, the even cloud-light raising a white streak down each great building, all of them set up as modulations on the perfect grid of streets, each tower cut off at a different height - and where is the comb that will move through *this* and restore the old perfect Cartesian harmony? where are the great Shears from the sky that will readjust Happyville? (*Rainbow* p.655).

There is a sudden realization that perhaps after all Pointsman was right to be frightened by Mexico; although history is not even approximately accurate it is a way of ordering and a concern for history perhaps even controls the worst excesses of man. History no longer restructures, and we no longer have faith in a God to give us a sense of perspective. Our modern society, Happyville, is a mass of information for which we have no explanation, no system

of coordinates, however inaccurate, by which we can attempt to understand it. Thus the destruction of belief in objectively-recorded history is frightening, as well as being the release Pynchon required in order to deal speculatively with the past in the same way as he deals with the future; we are not required to believe in the accuracy of the information he gives us but in the accuracy of the perceptions he makes from this information.

There is an historical perspective to the novel, when we are first introduced to Slothrop he is seen as a son of America. His ancestry is traced, the family was not particularly successful, but they are inextricably linked with America and its fate. It is significant that the Slothrop family business was paper - "toilet paper, banknote stock, newsprint - a medium or ground for shit, money, and the Word"; "Shit, money, and the Word, the three American truths, powering the American mobility, claimed the Slothrops, clasped them for good to the country's fate." (*Rainbow* p.28). Pynchon's use of the past is to elucidate a perspective on America and Americans, and the ambiguous relationship between the two. Major Marvy is seen in the "primal American act, paying, more deeply himself than when coming, or asleep or maybe even dying" (*Rainbow* p.605). Slothrop is unable to rid himself of America, even though he is consciously trying to pluck "the albatross of self" (*Rainbow* p.623) he always passes by that feather. America is seen as grasping, almost blood-sucking, but at the same time Pynchon uses the familiar ideas of Slothrop as the naive American mystified by the complexities and darkness of Europe (*Rainbow* p.205 and p.208), and the corruption

of the purity of the American West by Imperialism:

This is the kind of sunset you hardly see any more, a 19th-century wilderness sunset, a few of which got set down, approximated, on canvas, landscapes of the American West by artists nobody ever heard of, when the land was still free and the eye innocent, and the presence of the Creator much more direct. Here it thunders now over the Mediterranean, high and lonely, this anachronism in primal red, in yellow purer than can be found anywhere today, a purity begging to be polluted...of course Empire took its way westward, what other way was there but into those virgin sunsets to penetrate and to foul? (*Rainbow* p.214).

These ideas as I have said are familiar, they do not seem particularly unusual, but just as there is an historical perspective to the novel, so there is a future perspective to it which radically qualifies the historical element, and gives the novel the feeling of time-modulation which I claimed for it earlier.

Weissman's final speech to Gottfried ranges right back into a Brownian psychoanalytical interpretation of history and forward into a vision of a populated moon "...our new Edge, our new Deathkingdom..." (*Rainbow* p.723). He sees a moon which has been colonized by men who will never return to Earth:

Inside the colony, the handful of men have a frosty appearance, hardly solid, no more alive than memories, nothing to touch...only their remote images, black and white film-images, grained, broken year after hoarfrost year out in the white latitudes, in empty colony, with only infrequent visits from the accidental, like me...(*Rainbow* p.723).

These men are described in ways we would normally associate with descriptions of people from the past, "hardly solid, no more alive than memories." Weissman tells Gottfried that he wanted "to bring [him] back the story", which suggest that he sees no distinction

between this story, a dream of the future, and any other, for example the story he told just prior to this one about Europe's perfection of the rule of death. Three times during the novel we are shown Pynchon's city of the future, the Raketen-Stadt (*Rainbow* pp.296-297, pp.674-700, pp.735-736); the first time it occurs on a possible tour of the Mittelwerke, where the V2 rockets were assembled, wall-paintings "transform, indeed, to dioramas on the theme 'The Promise of Space Travel'" (*Rainbow* p.297), and after a few minutes of staring they start to move and show "...this Rocket-City, so whitely lit against the calm dimness of space, ...set up deliberately To Avoid Symmetry, Allow Complexity, Introduce Terror..." (*Rainbow* p.297). Later in the novel there is a section which takes place in rocket-city, a more conventional view of it however:

It's a giant factory-state here, a City of the Future full of extrapolated 1930s swoop-facaded and balconied skyscrapers, lean chrome caryatids with bobbed hairdos, classy airships of all descriptions drifting in the boom and hiss of the city abysses, golden lovelies sunning in roof-gardens and turning to wave as you pass. It is the Raketen-Stadt. (*Rainbow* p.674).

Oddly though Slothrop appears in this section, living in the city, another example of time-modulation. Slothrop is bitter about his father, Broderick, when he realizes that he was "sold" to the IG when his father agreed to Laszlo Jamf experimenting on him as an infant (*Rainbow* p.444). This expression of the mistrust between father and son is explored in the novel with scant regard for the progression of generations within time. The Rocket-City section starts:

Unexpectedly, this country is pleasant, yes, once inside it, quite pleasant after all. Even though there is a villain here, serious as death. It is this typical American teenager's own *Father*, trying episode after episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it. Imagine that...

He's a cheerful and a plucky enough lad, and doesn't hold any of this against his father particularly. That ol' Broderick's just a murderin' fool, golly what'll he come up with next - (*Rainbow* p.674).

Thus the theme of the relationship between father and son is continued in the City of the Future but it is peopled by Broderick and Tyrone Slothrop, and Tyrone is a teenager, considerably younger than he is in the novel as a whole. Later on there is a short conversation between Pop and Tyrone, a father trying to understand a son who is going beyond reality by passing electric waves into his skull, by suggesting he had similar experiences on dope (*Rainbow* p.699). The logical explanation would be that this was 'our' Tyrone's sone, also called Tyrone, speaking, but the lack of any such explanation on Pynchon's part seems to suggest that Tyrone is the perennial son and that we should drop any attempt to place the scene within a linear time-scale.

As I have already mentioned there is a section where the action of the novel is interpreted as though it were history (*Rainbow* p.738), the scene is thus set in the future but two dates mentioned in the dialogue as being also in the past are 1966 and 1971, quite close to our conception of the present. We come to realize that our apprehension of the past is as speculative as that of the future; in the first chapter I quoted the Marquis Pierre Laplace, a nineteenth century mathematician who posited that the future, like the past,

could be directly present for observation. Pynchon is encouraging us to believe that neither are present for objective observation, though both are for creative speculation; in fact we have had to reassess our conception of time to the extent that concepts like past, present and future seem of only minor significance.

* * *

The international unities that matter significantly remain those of trade, warfare, and technics: the unities of power. The world is being bound together by the affluent societies in ingenious networks of investment, military alliance, and commerce which, in themselves, can only end by propagating an oppressive urban-industrial uniformity over the earth.²⁰

This world, described by Theodore Roszak in *Where the Wasteland Ends*, is the world that the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* inhabit. The spreading tentacles of the vast international business cartel, IG Farben, start in Germany and extend eastwards to Russia and west as far as America; they even reach towards the 'other side', to speak to dead politicians by means of séances. Technocratic complexity has reached absurd proportions in a world where commercial power is the only criterion for judging achievement; the sick inhumanity resulting from this value system is expressed in a description of Bloody Chiclitz, that familiar representative of American capitalism from *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, and the route he took to gain success:

Officially he is one of the American industrialists out here with the T-force, scouting German engineering, secret weaponry in particular. Back home he owns a toy factory in Nutley, New Jersey. Who can ever forget the enormously successful Juicy Jap, the doll that you fill with ketchup then bayonet through any of several access slots, whereupon it flies to pieces, 82 of them, realistically squishy plastic,

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

The prevailing philosophy is a strict adherence to the reality principle, eager cultivation of objectivity and empirical analysis as the only disciplines worth having apart from the familiar one of hardwork, because these are the attributes which achieve success in a world given over to the domination and exploitation of every natural resource including people. For Roger Mexico the war exemplifies this philosophy:

...every assertion the fucking War has ever made - that we are meant for work and government, for austerity: and these shall take priority over love, dreams, the spirit, the senses and the other second-class trivia that are found among the idle and mindless hours of the day... Damn them, they are wrong. (*Rainbow* p.177).

The crushing effect which this emphasis on the material and the practical at the expense of spiritual welfare has on an individual is exemplified in a brief portrait of Richard Halliburton, "insouciant adventurer", his cheeks now covered in a rash from drug reaction:

Richard Halliburton's jodhpurs are torn and soiled, his bright hair greasy now and hanging. He appears to be weeping silently, bending, a failed angel, over all these second-rate Alps, over all the night-skiers far below, out on the slopes, crisscrossing industriously, purifying and perfecting their Fascist ideal of Action, Action, Action, once his own shining reason for being. No more. No more. (*Rainbow* p.266).

Halliburton's ideal of Action (and his nationality indicates that

this ideal is not just confined to Fascist Germany) is not sufficient as a philosophy of life, it is merely an elevation of the prevailing principle of hard work, it ignores the emotional and spiritual side of man at great cost, the once bright angel is a tarnished failure. The industrious skiers continue despite the fact that the war has ended, and, by extrapolating from the microcosm, the reader can guess at what will happen to a society dedicated to the continuation of these barren ideals.

Between the first and the second World Wars something has happened which has fundamentally altered relations between soldiers; broadly speaking the initiation of a commercial technocracy has infected such relationships with its own values until they have become nothing but a continuing demonstration of existing power hierarchies:

In the trenches of the First World War, English men came to love one another decently, without shame or make-believe, under the easy likelihoods of their sudden deaths, and to find in the faces of other young men evidence of otherworldly visits, some poor hope that may have helped redeem even mud, shit, the decaying pieces of human meat... But the life-cry of that love has long since hissed away into no more than this idle and bitchy faggotry. In this latest War, death was no enemy, but a collaborator. Homosexuality in high places is just a carnal afterthought now, and the real and only fucking is done on paper... (*Rainbow* p.616).

Death is a collaborator in this war because "the real business of the War is buying and selling...The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War" (*Rainbow* p.105). If the reality of the war is not exhausted by the explanation that it is a

celebration of black markets, then it is being dictated by the conflicting needs of the various technologies. (*Rainbow* p.521).

The War that Pynchon is talking about doesn't end; Roger Mexico. doesn't believe that the world is at peace, "he sees only the same flows of power, the same impoverishments he's been thrashing around in since '39" (*Rainbow* p.628), the death rate may have gone down a little but "Their enterprise goes on" (*Rainbow* p.628).

Mr. Information confirms this when he explains to Skippy that the real war is always going on, the killing continues but more subtly, in a coordinated effort to rid the world of dissidents. (*Rainbow* p.645).

The scientific world-view with its objective approach, encourages a separation between the individual and the universe; a new sense of power, resulting from the adoption of an exclusively empirical methodology, is given to humanity. The illusion that each individual is a separate ego, cut-off from the universe of which we should feel a part, creates in us an essentially aggressive and exploitative attitude towards nature. Alan Watts writes:

The first result of this illusion is that our attitude to the world 'outside' us is largely hostile. We are forever 'conquering' nature, space, mountains, deserts, bacteria, and insects instead of learning to cooperate with them in a harmonious order.²¹

Towards the end of the novel Slothrop sees his family's business with new eyes that point up the absurdity of so much human effort:

Slothrop's family actually made its money killing trees, amputating them from their roots, chopping them up, grinding them to pulp, bleaching that to paper and getting paid for this with more paper. 'That's really insane.' He shakes his head. 'There's insanity in my family.' (*Rainbow* p.553).

Scientific endeavour occupies an ambivalent position in *Gravity's Rainbow*; in its favour is the fact that it has after all succeeded in inventing the rocket which is the central symbol of the novel (an aspect which will be examined in more detail later). However, its move towards increasing complexity does not always result in greater efficiency, to say nothing of the unpleasant ecological side-effects which frequently occur: "Stacks of a power station rise, ghostly, smokeless, painted on the sky. A windmill creaks out in the countryside." (*Rainbow* p.573). The windmill and the power station are two means of achieving the same product, but in a time of crisis it is the windmill which still functions. The essence of the objective viewpoint which science requires is the suppression of the individual consciousness, its feelings and its ethical standards, and the cultivation of intellectual distance between the observer and the observed. This distancing process becomes habitual and combines with the enjoyment of the search for knowledge to lead to a loss of human concern, Franz Pökler discovers that his engineering skill is "the gift of Daedalus that allowed him to put as much labyrinth as required between himself and the inconveniences of caring." (*Rainbow* p.428). After Germany has been overrun by the Allies, Pökler visits Dora, the prison-camp which was next door to the Mittelwerke where he worked on the rockets. He is horrified at what he sees and realizes that "all his vacuums, his labyrinths, had been on the other side of this. While he lived, and drew marks on paper, this invisible kingdom had kept on, in the darkness outside...all this time... Pökler vomited. He cried some." (*Rainbow* pp.432-433). Pynchon's description of Pökler as

drawing "marks on paper" indicates that the danger of making constructions which seal one off from human problems is not confined to scientists, almost any activity can act as such a buffer, including writing.

Pynchon's attitude to science is summarized in his demonstration of the history of plastic, the substance which represents for many the artificial nature of contemporary society, a history which exemplified the hand-in-glove cooperation of scientific and commercial interests. The synthesis of plastics required structuring groups of molecules in new combinations, it meant that "chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of Nature" (*Rainbow* p.249), but it also meant that substances were being created which were not biodegradable; the nineteenth century chemist Kekulé researched into the molecular structure of Benzene and discovered that the six carbon atoms are curled around into a closed ring, a shape which was later used in the synthesis of plastics; but it took a dream to help him discover this, he couldn't visualize it

until he was made to see it, so that others might be seduced by its physical beauty, and begin to think of it as a blueprint, a basis for new compounds, new arrangements, so that there would be a field of aromatic chemistry to ally itself with secular power, and find new methods of synthesis, so there would be a German dye industry to become the IG... (*Rainbow* p.412).

The criticism of Kekulé, however, does not rest on a connection with plastics for which he could hardly be deemed responsible, but on the limitation of his response to his dream. He dreamed of the Great Serpent holding its tail in its mouth, a traditional symbol

of "life, continuity and eternity"²², but his scientific, rational mind was unable to recognize the mystical significance of his dream:

But the meanness, the cynicism with which this dream is to be used. The Serpent that announces, 'The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning,' is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that 'productivity' and 'earnings' keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity - most of the World, animal, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. The System may or may not understand that it's only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life. (*Rainbow* p.412).

The ambivalence in Pynchon's attitude is contained in the substance Imipolex G, fantastically erotic and the insulating device which allows Gottfried to ascend in the rocket at the end of the novel, but nevertheless a plastic. Finally though, I think Pynchon views the twentieth century technocracy as a terrifying force, blind to any spiritual awareness of the universe which might have tempered its demonstrations of power. The occasional references to the atom bombs which fall on Japan during the historical time dimension of the novel would support this view, the oblique way in which they are mentioned seems to give them even more force:

At the instant it happened, the pale Virgin was rising in the east, head, shoulders, breasts, 17° 36' down to her maidenhead at the horizon.

A few doomed Japanese knew of her as some Western deity. She loomed in the eastern sky gazing down at the city about to be sacrificed. The sun was in Leo. The fireburst came roaring and sovereign...
(*Rainbow* p.694).

The complexity of the twentieth century technocracy has resulted in considerable loss of sovereignty for the individual; the scientific innovations and the burgeoning of economic, social and political theory has resulted in a system which not only has to be run by experts but is totally unintelligible to anyone but an expert - and even that expert can only understand his own small field, and perhaps a little of those fields which lie close to his. As members of society we are called upon to make decisions about our future, but we can't possibly hope to garner enough information about any one problem even if we could understand it, so we accept what is recommended by politicians who, we hope, have been well-advised by the experts, though the question still remains which group of politicians should you choose to believe? The unintelligibility of the bureaucratic systems in our society leads in the trusting to passive acceptance, and in the suspicious to rapidly expanding paranoia. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon portrays a technocratic bureaucracy in which paranoia is a condition of existence even among pillars of the community like Jessica Swanlake's Jeremy:

Aha, *but*, once a month, Jeremy, even Jeremy, dreams: about gambling debts...different sorts of Collectors keep arriving...he cannot remember the debt, the opponent he lost to, even the game. He senses a great organization behind these emissaries. Its threats are always left open, left for Jeremy to complete...each time, terror has come welling up through the gap, crystal terror...(*Rainbow* p.708).

Paranoia is essentially a creative force, it is not seen as the persecution delusions of the mentally deranged but as an expression of the increased perception of those who are "wised-up" to the System. Slothrop's proverbs for paranoids help him through his early experiences in the South of France and indicate that he is losing the naivety so noticeable at the beginning of the novel:

You may never get to touch the Master, but
you may tickle the creatures. (*Rainbow* p.237).
The innocence of the creatures is in inverse
proportion to the immorality of the
Master. (*Rainbow* p.241).
If they can get you asking the wrong questions
they don't have to worry about answers. (*Rainbow* p.251).

Later on we come across the Proverbs for Paranoids, 5 but we never do see number four; Pynchon is encouraging us to operate on a paranoid level: what happened to number four? was it suppressed? Operational paranoia is useful because it encourages us to think of explanations for events which demonstrate the greatest degree of oppression by THEM. THEY have created a false sense of security in us so that we tend to give them the benefit of the doubt, paranoia makes us think of them in the worst possible light, it opens our eyes to manifest corruption. A good example of this is Gwenthwy's City Paranoiac; he notices that the greatest concentration of V2 rockets is falling on the south and east end of London, the poorest areas, and decides that THEY deliberately planned the city so that the expendable poor would be destroyed first, knowing that any threat would come from the East and the South, from the mass of Europe. (*Rainbow* pp. 172-173).

There are drawbacks inherent in the paranoid view however; by separating the world into US and THEM it is more difficult to recognize individual responsibility:

Go ahead, capitalize the T on technology, deify it if it'll make you feel less responsible - but it puts you in with neutered, brother, in with the eunuchs keeping the harem of our stolen Earth for the numb and joyless hardons of human sultans, human elite with no right at all to be where they are - (*Rainbow* p.521).

We are all individually responsible for the world in which we live, as much by inaction as action; paranoia encourages the view that it's all THEIR fault, and we can settle back and indulge ourselves in a comforting sense of moral superiority. This is a limited paranoid vision, however, complete paranoia sees connections throughout the universe, not just in THEIR System; we are as inextricably linked with THEM as THEY are with each other:

Like other sorts of paranoia, it is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the discovery that *everything is connected*, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination - not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route in for those like Tchitcherine who are held at the edge... (*Rainbow* p.703).

Here Pynchon is exploiting the connection between paranoia and the unitive experience of the mystic. Alan Watts refers to those "tough-minded" types who regard this experience as "a commonly recurring hallucination with characteristic symptoms, like paranoia..."²³, but Pynchon rejects this kind of degradation of the unitive experience of the mystic with a complete reversal; paranoia, far from being a psychiatric symptom, becomes a possible

route towards the transcendent experience of unity. It is significant that one of the first things we see the Counterforce doing is cheapening paranoia by institutionalizing it; according to Pirate Prentice "Creative paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system - " (*Rainbow* p.638), the essential individuality of paranoia inherent in its solipsism has been pushed to one side and the result is the dilution of genuine power into mere words. This view of the counterforce's use of paranoia is supported by the song Katje sings with the Hereros, another institutionalized group of subversives; she is "the allegorical figure of Paranoia (a grand old dame, a little wacky but pure at heart)" (*Rainbow* p.657). This description shows that the concept has been reduced to little more than a pantomime figure.

In a section I am calling the Preterite Ball (*Rainbow* pp.537-548), though we are not aware of the fact at the time, we get a kind of preview of the Counterforce. As the novel continues we remember the people in this rather strange, fantastic section and realize that they all become active members of the Counterforce; one way of interpreting the preterite ball section is that it is the inauguration of the Counterforce - an examination of the scene casts light on this rather dubious political group. The problem is suggested at the end of the preceding section: "Dialectically, sooner or later, some counterforce would have had to arise..." (*Rainbow* p.536). As their name suggests the Counterforce is inextricably linked with the System, the force which engendered them; their emergence is inevitable, as dialectical opposites they are mutually defining, and thus

they are robbed of any hope of effective action. In a society like ours where freedoms of all kinds are considered the golden rule, a carefully controlled counterforce helps THEM achieve respectability, because it gives the illusion of a freedom we do not really possess. Roger Mexico realizes this when he says "They will use us. We will help legitimize Them, though They don't need it really, its another dividend for them, nice but not critical..." (*Rainbow* p.713), but we have already had much firmer indication of THEIR position with regard to the Counterforce in the Preterite Ball section. Prentice arrives in a mysterious hall to find a whole bunch of acquaintances from the Firm; he thinks he has left THEM to join the Counterforce but realizes that in fact he has been assigned to it by the Firm he tried to leave, "then I defected for nothing, didn't I? I mean if I haven't really defected at all..." (*Rainbow* p.542). Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck confirms his suspicions when he says "The Firm know perfectly well that you've come here. They'll expect a full report from you now. Either voluntary or some other way." (*Rainbow* p.543)

Pynchon's attitude is that the entire conception of organized corporate action is futile; many in the Counterforce are well-intentioned, like Prentice who thought he was making a difficult moral decision when he "defected", or Osbie Feel, the inveterate doper, who really does think that the Counterforce "piss on Their rational arrangements" (*Rainbow* p.639), but groups require organization and become just as systematized and standardized as the force against which they are fighting. Katje says that Prentice "briefed" her on "folklore, politics, Zonal strategies" (*Rainbow* p.657), and in

this brief statement we can see that subversion has become institutionalized, a mockery of its anarchical essence. The fundamental problem is that any organized attempt at political revolt has to operate on THEIR level of reality and use THEIR terms of reference; apart from the fact that THEIR superior position in the prevailing power structures gives them a nearly insuperable advantage, if you play THEIR game you become indistinguishable from THEM in nearly every way except the most superficial, like the colour of the flag that is being waved. We can try to understand THEIR systems, try to learn that everything we were taught about power structures or distribution networks was deliberately misleading, and try to discover the ones that appear more real; but ultimately the plot is "incalculable" (*Rainbow* p.521). Enzian finds to his cost that the only result of all his attempted analysis is dehumanization:

'Don't sweet-talk me,' Christian explodes, 'you don't care about me, you don't care about my sister, she's dying out there and you just keep plugging her into your equations - you - play this holy-father routine and inside that ego you don't even hate us, you don't care, you're not even *connected* any more - 'He swings his fist at Enzian's face. He's crying.

Enzian stands there and lets him. It hurts. He lets it. His meekness isn't all political, either. He can feel enough of the bone truth in what Christian said - maybe not all of it, not all at once, but enough. (*Rainbow* p.525).

Pynchon really seems to feel that corporate action is useless, perennially doomed to failure; Byron the Bulb knows everything but still cannot act (*Rainbow* p.654), and even more depressing is the sight of Slothrop leading a group of "revolutionaries" in Rocket-

City. Slothrop has achieved the greatest level of awareness of anyone in the novel, the group he leads are comic-book characters with superhuman powers, and still they have no hope of success:

There's no real direction here, neither lines of power nor cooperation. Decisions are never really *made* - at best they manage to emerge from a chaos of peeves, whims, hallucinations and all-round assholery. This is less a fighting team than a nest full of snits, blues, crotchets and grudges, not a rare or fabled bird in the lot. Its survival seems, after all, only a mutter of blind fortune groping through the heavy marbling of skies one Titanic-Night at a time. (*Rainbow* p.676).

Roger Mexico learns that the choice is not between the System and the Counterforce because that choice functions on the level of appearances only, but between "living on as Their pet, or death" (*Rainbow* p.713), postponing the decision for a while isn't a compromise "but a decision to live, on Their terms..." (*Rainbow* p.713). Even though the death Mexico refers to is not imminent, we know from Mr. Information that it may take a while before THEY remove a dissident, it is a very hard decision to make, few people can face the sacrifices involved. But this for Pynchon is the only route which can achieve anything positive; individual acts of subversion, like the marvellous "snot-soup" episode (*Rainbow* pp.714-717), function to disturb THEM in their complacency and keep alive dissent, but it is not expected to achieve much at the level of political reality. As I shall show later the only "salvation" is an individual one based on a real understanding of the Self and its place in the universe.

* * *

The moral framework of *Gravity's Rainbow* can be interpreted most successfully in the light of Norman O. Brown's conception of the dialectical unity of opposites, which is called non-duality by Alan Watts. The Christian religion encourages a world view based on a total separation of opposites, its god is all goodness, wisdom and light, so the evil and darkness in the world must come from another source, the devil. When Blicero first meets Enzian he is an Herero boy already partially corrupted by Christianity but still retaining an easy acceptance of the non-dual nature of his tribal god. He says to Blicero "We make Ndjambi Karunga now, omuhona..."

He [Blicero] looks up in alarm. The boy wants to fuck, but he is using the Herero name of God. An extraordinary chill comes over the white man. He believes, like the Rhenish Missionary Society who corrupted this boy, in blasphemy. (*Rainbow* p.100).

Blicero's reaction shows that, for the Christian, buggery (possibly even sex in any form) is a sin, and that to call on the name of God at such a time is blasphemous because it offends God's exclusive purity. For Enzian his non-dualistic God is represented when they fuck because "God is creator and destroyer, sun and darkness, all sets of opposites brought together, including black and white, male and female...and he becomes in his innocence, Ndjambi Karunga's child..." (*Rainbow* p.100). The Christian dissociation of good and evil in their conception of God has resulted in a division of the world into that which can be accepted and that which should be rejected at all costs, in other words judgement has become of paramount importance. The limitations of man's powers of judgement

are shown in the section concerning the extermination of the dodos on Mauritius in the seventeenth century; "To some it made sense. They saw the stumbling birds ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody argument against a Godly creation." (*Rainbow* p.110). Here we have an example of extremely superficial criteria being used to justify the extinction of an entire species; Pynchon's point however, is not just the pragmatic one that man's powers of perception are so limited that his attempts at judgement are pathetically inadequate, he is also arguing for a holistic conception of the universe whereby opposites coexist as mutually defining and equally significant parts of the total creation.

The relationship between Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake shows the limitations of experiencing life one-sidedly. Roger recognises the reason he needs Jessica, "her cheeky indifference to death-institutions" (*Rainbow* p.126) balances his belief in them, she can provide him with the necessary compensatory perceptions of life:

But he wanted to...believe that no matter how bad the time, nothing was fixed, everything could be changed and she could always deny the dark sea at his back, love it away. And (selfishly) that from a sombre youth, squarely founded on Death - along for Death's ride - he might, with her, find his way to life and to joy. (*Rainbow* p.126).

Unfortunately, although Jessica can help Roger find an awareness of the life-oriented aspects of existence, she refuses to attain a more complete understanding for herself by rejecting the partial validity of Roger's view of the universe; "When she's with Roger

it's all love, but at any distance - any at *all*, Jack - she finds that he depresses and even frightens her." (*Rainbow* p.126).

Jessica is so determined to be comfortable that she rejects Roger Mexico in favour of Jeremy, "Isn't it safer with Jeremy?" (*Rainbow* p.126).

At the end of the novel Mexico goes to see her and begs her to leave Jeremy for him;

She flips a red lever on her intercom. Far away a buzzer goes off. 'Security'. Her voice is perfectly hard, the word still clap-echoing in the air as in through the screen door of the Quonset office with a smell of tide flats come the coppers, looking grim. Security. Her magic word, her spell against demons. (*Rainbow* p.709).

Jessica would do anything to preserve her fictitious but comfortable view of reality; she cannot accept that the black side of life exists and in order to shield herself from any risk of greater understanding she will marry Jeremy, who can provide her with one aspect of the security she values so much; she will also continue believing that the other aspect of security, the policing departments of THEIR institutions, really does protect the innocent, like herself, even though that innocence is as culpable as what she would term guilt, because it is preserved only by a deliberate rejection of realizable insight. It is significant that Roger's and Jessica's sexual relationship is the only one in the novel which would be considered normal by the standards of conventional morality, and yet their relationship is far from satisfactory; Pynchon's treatment of sexuality in the novel is both a demonstration of dialectical unity, and a fundamental questioning of our moral standards, and the concomitant predilection for judgement.

One of the most shocking passages in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the description of the sado-masochistic relationship between Katje, in her role as the Mistress of the Night, and the Brigadier; our instinctive reaction is revulsion at the graphic portrayal of the Brigadier eating Katje's shit, and yet that revulsion is a measure of our own inability to accept the forces of darkness she represents. The Brigadier finds a kind of truth in pain and humiliation because our way of life does its best not just to ignore such elements but actively to cover them up; this deception pervades all existence to such an extent that the Brigadier's reaction becomes understandable:

But tonight he lies humped on the floor at her feet, his withered ass elevated to the cane, bound by nothing but his need for pain, for something real, something pure. They have taken him so far from his simple nerves. They have stuffed paper illusions and military euphemisms between him and this truth, this rare decency, this moment at her scrupulous feet... no its not guilt here, not so much as amazement - that he could have listened to so many years of ministers, scientists, doctors each with his specialized lies to tell, when she was here all the time, sure in her ownership of his failing body, his true body: undisguised by uniform, uncluttered by drugs to keep from him her communiques of vertigo, nausea and pain... Above all, pain. The clearest poetry, the endearment of greatest worth...
(*Rainbow* pp.234-235).

One of our main difficulties in accepting this passage is that the Brigadier gets sexual pleasure from it; human sexuality has been deodorized and restricted, its main purpose is thought to be procreation, and the only acceptable expression of it is within the bounds of a reasonably affectionate, adult, heterosexual relationship; the Brigadier's sexuality isn't nearly pretty enough for us to

accept. By linking a sado-masochistic relationship with the search for truth, Pynchon is forcing us to extend our perception of sexuality to a much more complex one, where sex can be dirty, vicious and humiliating as well as pure and loving. When Slothrop fucks Greta Erdmann for the first time she asks him to whip her; knowing that he has not done it before she starts to tell him where to do it:

But somebody has already educated him. Something... that dreams Prussian and wintering among their meadows, in whatever cursive lashmarks wait across the flesh of their sky so bleak, so incapable of any sheltering, wait to be summoned... No. No - he still says 'their', but he knows better. His meadows now, his sky...his own cruelty. (*Rainbow* p.396).

Through Greta, Slothrop becomes aware of his own capacity for cruelty and experiences an area of sexuality normally classified as deviant; with her daughter, appropriately called Bianca, he has his most remarkable sexual experience, and yet even that would be judged unnatural by conventional standards because Bianca is only eleven or twelve years old, a child. The prevalence in *Gravity's Rainbow* of what would normally be classified as "perverted" sexuality leads us back to *Eros and Civilization*, in which Marcuse sees the perversions both as an expression of liberation from the goal-oriented performance principle, and as an expression of the death-instinct because perverted sexuality cannot lead to procreation. This shows the ultimate identity of Eros and Thanatos thus further confirming the dialectical unity of opposites.

The only evil appears to be the limitation and oppression of THEIR bureaucratic system because it prevents us from having a full

experience of the universe; it is even possible that THEY guide our moral distinctions for Their own political benefit, Thanatz's theory of sado-anarchism asks why we are taught to feel reflexive shame whenever sadism and masochism are mentioned:

Why will the Structure allow every other kind of sexual behaviour but *that* one? Because submission and dominance are resources it needs for its very survival. They cannot be wasted in private sex. In *any* kind of sex. It needs our submission so that it may remain in power. It needs our lusts after dominance so that it can co-opt us into its own power game. There is no joy in it, only power. I tell you, if S and M could be established universally, at the family level, the State would wither away. (*Rainbow* p.737).

Thanatz's conclusion is perhaps a little questionable, but the reasonableness of the theory in itself continues to encourage us to look at our sexual standards with more questioning eyes. Pynchon does seem to feel the need for people to recognize the evil of Their institutions, which does suggest the application of a moral standard of some kind. However, perhaps a distinction can be made, which is more than merely linguistic, between discrimination and judgement. We do need to discriminate, we need to be as aware as possible of the hidden operation of Their power-structures, but this is not the same as applying moral judgements that consign individuals to a lower or higher place on a moral hierarchy. The example of the pointsman who operates the lever that either sends us to Pain City or to Happyville shows that there is an either/or aspect to judgement which is an insult to the complexity of most moral situations. More important than this is the fact that good and evil coexist naturally in us all in a way which precludes

judgement: "Thanatz, are you going to judge this man? Thanatz haven't you loved the whip? Haven't you longed for the brush and sigh of ladies clothes? Haven't you wanted to murder a child you loved, joyfully kill something so helpless and innocent?" (*Rainbow* p.671). It is not only that we are all as guilty as each other however, but that guilt in itself is insignificant if the idea of judgement is discarded. Seaman Bodine's reaction to Gustav's confession renders that confession and the guilt which inspired it meaningless by refusing to recognize its moral terms of reference:

'I have to tell you,' Gustav whispering speedily, I feel so awful about it, but perhaps you don't want people like me. You see...I was a Storm Trooper. A long time ago. You know, like Horst Wessel.' 'So?' Bodine's laughing. 'Maybe I was a Melvin Purvis Junior G-Man.' (*Rainbow* p.717).

We are reminded of Baudelaire's comment, already quoted in the first chapter of this thesis, that true civilization lies in the reduction of the traces of original sin.

Pynchon's conception of the dialectical unity of moral concepts is best exemplified in his treatment of the Calvinist doctrine of election and preterition. The first Slothrop on American soil, William, used to drive pigs across the Berkshires to sell them back in Boston; he grew to love the pigs and hated the fact that they had to die at the end of the journey and he had to return home pigless:

William must have been waiting for the one pig that wouldn't die; that would validate all the ones who'd had to, all his Gadarene swine who'd rushed into extinction like lemmings, possessed not by demons but by trust for men, which men kept betraying...

possessed by innocence they couldn't lose...by faith in William as another variety of pig, at home with the Earth, sharing the same gift of life... (*Rainbow* p.555).

His experience with the pigs caused William to write a tract called *On Preterition* which was banned and ceremonially burned in Boston:

nobody wanted to hear about all the Preterite, the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation. William argued holiness for these 'second Sheep', without whom there'd be no elect. You can bet the Elect in Boston were pissed off about that. And it got worse. William felt that what Jesus was for the elect, Judas Iscariot was for the Preterite. (*Rainbow* p.555).

Pynchon has two main quarrels with the doctrine of election apart from the obvious fact that it encourages a rigid implementation of the faculty of judgement. Firstly is the fact that, traditionally, God may inform the elect of their election by bestowing on them material success; from here it is only the small step America took to justifying any kind of exploitation if it achieves the right results. If the qualities which demonstrate election are material success, power, and authority, then people like Bloody Chiclitz are going to heaven; the doctrine of election merely projects the status quo into eternity. Secondly, if we accept the dialectical unity of opposites, then the elect and the preterite define each other, in fact the elect *depend* on the preterite spending an eternity in hell in order for them to be able to spend their eternity in heaven. The preterite, like William Slothrop's pigs, accept the situation because they are innocent and trusting, and preterition for Pynchon does not begin at the day of Judgement but from the moment we

start to judge success and failure.

At the beginning of the Preterite Ball section is a quotation "thought to be from the *Gospel of Thomas*" which indicates that the section can be seen as a kind of allegory for the hell on earth occupied by those we classify as failures; "Dear Mom, I put a couple of people in Hell today..." (*Rainbow* p.537). Prentice has been assigned to it and suffers because he accepts the judgement which has been laid on him without question:

Without expecting to, it seems Pirate has begun to cry. Odd. He has never cried in public like this before. But he understands where he is, now. It will be possible, after all, to die in obscurity, without having helped a soul: without love, despised, never trusted, never vindicated - to stay down among the Preterite, his poor honor lost, impossible to locate or redeem. (*Rainbow* p.544).

The Preterite have been so inculcated with the moral values of our society that their misery is based on their own feelings of guilt, "No there's no leaving shame after all - not down here - it has to be swallowed sharp-edged and ugly, and lived with in pain, every day." (*Rainbow* p.546). Ironically by accepting these moral principles they become more likely to live up to their label, "There'll be talk like this all the time, Prentice, we're a case-hardened lot." (*Rainbow* p.545). The truth about Preterition is that its misery is caused not by God, but by humanity's ill-considered formulations of good and evil, and his propensity for judgement; every person is responsible, even those who suffer most from it, because we all conform to the prevailing moral principles of our society: "'But the People will never love you' she whispers, 'or me. However bad

and good are arranged for them, we will *always* be bad.'"

(*Rainbow* pp.547-548). It is almost as though we need the scape-goats; however, rigid moral systems oppress us all, the Elect even more than the Preterite, because their path to change of consciousness is hindered by the fact that the system appears to benefit them so much. "...he lifts his long, his guilty, his permanently enslaved face to the illusion of sky, to the reality of pressure and weight from overhead, the hardness and absolute cruelty of it..." (*Rainbow* p.548). This description of Pirate Prentice applies to all those who labour under our secularized Christian morality; we are allowed the illusion of sky but the reality is an absolute moral system, imposed from above, which requires the misery and death of all those not numbered among the rich and successful.

Somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom. (*Rainbow* p.525).

It is the constant theme of Hermetic literature how the philosopher's stone hides in the waste and offal of the world - especially there, where it can best bear witness to the universality of the divine²⁴.

Thanatz, comfortably riding on the white ship, *Anubis*, is washed overboard and suddenly discovers that all his privileges are gone, he has become one of

...the preterite, swimming and drowning, mired and afoot, poor passengers at sundown who've lost the way, blundering across one another's flotsam, the scrapings, the dreary junking of memories - all they have to hold to - churning, mixing, rising, falling. Men overboard and our common debris...(*Rainbow* p.667).

Thanatz is furious at his change in circumstances but

...nobody's listening and the *Anubis* is gone.
Better here with the swimming debris, Thanatz,
no telling what'll come sunfishing by, ask that
Oberst Enzian, he knows (there is a key, among
the wastes of the World...and it won't be
found on board the white *Anubis* because they
throw everything of value over the side)
(*Rainbow* pp.667-668).

The elect have denied the universality of the divine by the act of separation between good and evil, success and failure, clean and dirty, on which their very existence depends. It is only the preterite by accepting their preterition who can, like Slothrop, achieve moments of transcendent understanding. Slothrop actually becomes a pig when he agrees to represent the Pig-Hero in a village festival, the costume fits him perfectly and he continues to wear it without shame or embarrassment for some time; he has learned to ignore the conventional moral system.

The same image of preterition occurs three times in the novel, twice with reference to Slothrop and once to the Brigadier, "And where is the Pope whose staff's gonna bloom for you?" (*Rainbow* p.364, p.470, p.532). This is a reference to Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* in which Tannhäuser is torn between the Christian Virgin figure, personified by his lover, Elizabeth, and Venus. He seeks absolution from the Pope who refuses to give it to him, and, on returning to Elizabeth to discover that she has died of a broken heart, he sinks beside her bier and dies as well. At this point pilgrims arrive from Rome bearing the Pope's staff, which has sprouted leaves in token that God has forgiven Tannhäuser. Two verses appear at the beginning of the section in which we learn of the Brigadier's death:

Where is the Pope whose staff will bloom for me?
Her mountain vamps me back, with silks and scents,
Her oiled, athletic slaves, her languid hints
Of tortures transubstantiate to sky,
To purity of light - of bonds that sing,
And whips that trail their spectra as they fall,
At weather's mercy now, I find her call
At every turn, at night's foregathering.

I've left no sick Lisaura's fate behind.
I made my last confession as I knelt,
Agnostic, in the radiance of his jewel...
Here, underneath my last and splintering wind,
No song, no lust, no memory, no guilt:
No pentacles, no cups, no holy Fool... (*Rainbow* pp.532-533).

The Brigadier has gladly given himself up to the Venus-figure, all the paraphernalia of sadistic sexuality, tortures, bonds, and whips, lead to images of light and song; even though he is nearing death he finds Venus's call as strong, he glories in his agnosticism and does not suffer from guilt, despising the fate of Lisaura, presumably the Christian Elizabeth of the Tannhäuser story. The Pope's staff is not going to bloom either for Slothrop or for the Brigadier, but this is not to be sorrowed over, conventional morality has been abandoned in a defiant celebration of a holistic universe.

* * *

So generation after generation of men in love with pain and passivity serve out their time in the Zone, silent, redolent of faded sperm, terrified of dying, desperately addicted to the comforts others sell them, however useless, ugly or shallow, willing to have life defined for them by men whose only talent is for death. (*Rainbow* p.747).

Humanity is set apart from other species by the knowledge that we will die, but we find it difficult to accept death as a natural concomitant to life; the success of modern medicine in prolonging

life indicates not only the wonders of science, it is in some way a measure of our fear of death and our wish to stave off the "evil" moment as long as possible. Pynchon sets out the possibility that many of our oppressive power systems are a product of a neurotic inability to accept death; by demonstrating that we have the power of life and death over others we can somehow avoid the fact of our own mortality. Webley Silvernail expresses this view to the animals in the research laboratory at the White Visitation:

They have had their moment of freedom. Webley has only been a guest star. Now its back to the cages and the rationalized forms of death - death in the service of the one species cursed with the knowledge that it will die... 'I would set you free, if I knew how. But it isn't free out here. All the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few, who are the loudest to theorize on freedom, but the least free of all. I can't even give you the hope that it will be different someday - that They'll come out, and forget death, and lose Their technology's elaborate terror, and stop using every other form of life without mercy to keep what haunts men down to a tolerable level - and be like you instead, simply here, simply alive... (*Rainbow* p.230).

The fear of death can express itself in obsession as well as repression and Pynchon emphasizes that a compulsive concern with death is as characteristic of our society as Jessica Swanlake's determined avoidance of the same issue, by the popularity of the group of spiritualists trying to make contact with the 'other side'. At one of these séances Rathenau informs the director of the IG that technocracy is only the appearance of life:

You think you'd rather hear about what you call 'life': the growing, organic Kartell. But it's only another illusion. A very clever robot. The

more dynamic it seems to you, the more deep and dead, in reality, it grows. Look at the smokestacks, how they proliferate, fanning the wastes of original waste over greater and greater masses of city...The persistence, then, of structures favouring death. Death converted into more death. Perfecting its reign, just as the buried coal grows denser, and overlaid with more strata - epoch on top of epoch, city on top of ruined city. This is the sign of Death the impersonator. (*Rainbow* p.167).

The reality of death as the basic orientation of our vast industrial complexes despite their apparently organic nature is paralleled in the illusion of new life in the polymerizing of molecules to create different ones. "But this is all the impersonation of life. The real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death transfigured. The best you can do is to polymerize a few dead molecules. But polymerizing is not resurrection." (*Rainbow* p.166). However it is not just that death-structures are the inevitable result of the technocracy, but that they are a political necessity for the continuation of Their power. This problem is analysed in terms of election and preterition by the Jesuit who acts as devil's advocate at the Preterite Ball; he suggests that death has been the source of Their power because we all believed that we were under the same sentence of death and therefore we didn't begrudge Them taking much more than anyone else. But the gift of eternal life for the Elect means that not only do they not die, they need the death of the Preterite to ensure their life: "'We have to carry on under the possibility that we die *only* because They want us to: because they need our terror for Their survival. We are their harvests...'"

(*Rainbow* p.539). In more political terms Enzian sees that Their power depends on our fear of death inasmuch as They encourage the illusory belief that They can protect us from death and by doing this they ensure the loyalty they need for Their survival. Enzian believes that the sudden and arbitrary nature of death from the V2 rocket has exposed the fallacy involved in viewing society as protector, "...they are as foolish as shields of paper..." (*Rainbow* p.728).

In many ways Pynchon sees Christianity as responsible for the West's obsession with death; the Reformation contributed to it with its conception of life as 'vanitas', if life is merely an empty charade then death assumes a terrifying significance. Slothrop becomes aware of this when he visits Zurich, Reformation country where "Spies and big business, in their element, move tirelessly among the grave markers" (*Rainbow* p.267), in one sentence Pynchon has indicated the relationship between Protestantism, commercialism, and the prevalence of 'structures favouring death' in the modern world. In *Life Against Death*, Brown sees the development of Protestantism as marking an important stage in the psychic history of civilization:

This recognition [Luther's] of life as death-in-life reflects and crystallizes an immense withdrawal of libido from life. In other words, whereas in previous ages life had been a mixture of Eros and Thanatos, in the Protestant era life becomes a pure culture of the death instinct.²⁵

The colonies were a release from the restraints of so-called civilization:

Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit. ...Christian Europe was always death, Karl, death and repression. Out and down in the colonies, life can be indulged, life and sensuality in all its forms, with no harm done to the Metropolis, nothing to soil those cathedrals, white marble statues, noble thoughts... (*Rainbow* p.317).

Unfortunately, as Blicero realizes, Europe infected its colonies with its own "order of Analysis and Death", and the country which learnt its lesson best is continuing the mission to propagate death. Ironically "American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old Metropolis." (*Rainbow* p.722). Christianity has also contributed to the Western neurosis about death with its concept of immortality; as soon as the Christian Easter celebration, with its teaching that Christ ascended to heaven for eternity, replaced pagan spring festivals, the view of the universe as eternally returning was lost, and the cyclical was replaced by the linear. Thus death becomes a terrifying stop on the line, instead of a natural concomitant to life, a period of off in a constant vibration between off and on. Like Barth, Pynchon sees little value in immortality; Byron the Bulb is blessed with an eternity of frustration, the agony of everlasting life is that it is changeless, mortal life is "...carried on under a sentence of death whose deep beauty the angel has never been close to..." (*Rainbow* p.746) because the angel is trapped in the stasis of immortality. As William Slothrop's pigs taught him there is no understanding of life without an awareness of death:

Of course he took it as a parable - knew that the squealing bloody horror at the end of the pike was

in exact balance to all their happy sounds, their untroubled pink eyelashes and kind eyes, their grace in cross-country movement. (*Rainbow* p.555).

It is easy to sympathize with Laszlo Jamf's hatred of the hypocritical way in which the West tries to reconcile itself to the fact of death:

...all (his) yearnings aimed the same way, toward a form of death that could be demonstrated to hold joy and defiance, nothing of bourgeois Goetzgian death, of self-deluding, mature acceptance, relatives in the parlour, knowing faces the children can always read... (*Rainbow* pp.579-580).

However, his answer is to "move beyond life toward the inorganic. Here is no frailty, no mortality - here is Strength, and the Timeless." (*Rainbow* p.580). His defiance is admirable in a way, but by rejecting mortality he is rejecting life; Pynchon has shown us that embracing death and propagating it is as much a denial of its true status as wilfully ignoring it, and both are a product of fear.

It would be wrong, however, to think that Pynchon's attitude to death is as simple as I have implied so far; it is fundamentally ambivalent firstly because in a cyclical universe death is part of the cycle which involves rebirth and therefore in some ways perhaps it is to be sought after; and secondly because for some people anyway, death is undeniably and profoundly attractive. The Aqyn's song about his experience of the Kirghiz light says that he has "come from the edge of the world" (*Rainbow* p.357); the light is to be found "In a place where words are unknown, ...At the tall black rock in the desert,/ In the time of the final days." (*Rainbow* p.358). In order to achieve the rebirth which allows him to "sense all Earth

like a baby" the aqyn has had to put himself "In a place which is older than darkness,/ Where even Allah cannot reach." The Zone-Hereros are living underground in the North, which is the region of death according to tribal custom, and they do not know whether they are waiting to be reborn or whether they have been "...buried for the last time, buried facing north like all the rest of our dead..." (*Rainbow* p.322). This doubt is reflected in the novel in the ambivalent attitude to the rocket, upon which their hopes of rebirth rest, but I will discuss this in more detail later.. The character who is most attracted by death in the novel is Blicero; the name is significant because he chose it for his SS code name, his real name being Weissmann, taking it from the nickname given to death by the early Germans, Dominus Blicero, the bleached God. Enzian recognized in him "...a love for the last explosion - the lifting and the scream that peaks past fear..." (*Rainbow* p.324), and it is this which makes him so obsessed with the rocket; when Greta describes his appearance just before the launching of the rocket she says "the wrinkled wolf-eyes had gone even beyond these domestic moments of telepathy, on into its animal north, to a persistence on the hard edge of death I can't imagine..." (*Rainbow* p.486) Greta herself has devoted her life to the black side of things, her longing for death can be seen in the conversation she imagines she has with a corpse, in which the corpse described the place of the dead in terms of warmth and security, but even she cannot imagine Blicero's closeness to death. In the passage referring to Kekulé's dream Pynchon describes living inside the System as being like driving across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide:

...of course it will end for you all in blood, in shock, without dignity - but there is meanwhile this trip to be on...over your own seat, where there ought to be an advertising plaque, is instead a quote from Rilke: 'Once, only once...' One of Their favourite slogans. No return, no salvation, no cycle... (*Rainbow* p.413).

Rilke is Blicero's favourite poet presumably because he expresses a love of death as the final end; even though this is entirely against the idea of a cyclical universe, it is attractive because it makes death more daring, there are possibilities for heroism in the ultimate tragic encounter with forces so much more powerful than man. The fight that Bodine sets up between two seamen hovers at the moment where they could continue and death would be the result:

And still they linger in their embrace, Death
in all its potency humming them romantic tunes,
chiding them for moderate little men...*So far
and no farther, is that it? You call that
living?* (*Rainbow* p.598).

Death viewed in this way is the ultimate challenge.

Among the Zone-Hereros are a group known as the Empty Ones who are advocating a programme of racial suicide; after the extermination of so many Hereros under the German colonization of South West Africa there was a mysterious drop in the live birth rate of the tribe, the Hereros had decided they did not want to live in the world created for them by colonization and they chose a tribal death they could understand in preference to a Christian death they could not; but the Europeans found it a disturbing mystery:

Though they don't admit it, the Empty Ones now exiled in the Zone, Europeanized in language and thought, split off from the old tribal unity, have found the why of it just as mysterious. But they've seized it, as a sick woman will seize a charm. They calculate no cycles, no returns, they are in love with the glamour of a whole people's suicide - the pose, the stoicism, and the bravery. (*Rainbow* p.318).

What was an unconscious and mysterious corporate will to die has become a conscious, planned course of action and in the process it has become trivialized. The Empty Ones are a powerful example of Pynchon's belief that Western Man is becoming more and more obsessed with death, in a way which is not like the instinctive suicide drive of lemmings, but a kind of semi-conscious urge to the apocalypse.

In many ways *Gravity's Rainbow* can be viewed as an apocalyptic novel; it opens with a dreamlike description of an evacuation of a large city:

A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.

It is too late, the Evacuation still proceeds, but it's all theatre. (*Rainbow* p.3).

There is a suggestion that the journey undertaken by the evacuees is the journey to death, the vast and old hotel they go to smells as though it has been newly reopened "to accommodate the rush of souls". There is an overpowering sense of people in limbo, they appear to be in a state of nonexistence wondering what will happen next:

Some wait alone, some share their invisible rooms with others. Invisible, yes, what do the furnishings matter, at this stage of things? Under-

foot crunches the oldest of city dirt, last crystallizations of all the city had denied, threatened, lied to its children... There is no way out. Lie and wait, lie still and be quiet. Screaming holds across the sky. When it comes, will it come in darkness, or will it bring its own light? Will the light come before or after? (*Rainbow* p.4).

Pynchon writing with this sense of impending doom is showing that he is an example of our culture's death-orientation as well as a spokesman against it; by expressing concern for our apocalyptic tendencies he is exhibiting the fact that he is influenced by them. Later in the novel he refers back to the opening image of an evacuation of a capital city; fantods are presumably death fantasies, 'tod' being the German word for death:

...but these are the urban fantods here, that come to get you when you are lost or isolate inside the way time is passing, when there is no more History, no time-travelling capsule to find your way back to, only the lateness and the absence that fill a great railway shed after the capital has been evacuated... (*Rainbow* p.303).

Pynchon is as much a victim of these 'urban fantods' as are some of the characters in his novel, and the terrifying thing is that modern technology crumbles the distinction between fantasy and reality. Pirate Prentice is afraid because he thinks the light is going to go away forever, and his fear is compounded by the fact that everyone else seems to see the approaching darkness as well. (*Rainbow* p.548). At the beginning of the novel the Slothrop family are described as just managing to persist but gradually running down, "...in long rallentando, in infinite series just perceptibly, term by term, dying... but never quite to the zero..." (*Rainbow* p.28). One way of viewing

Tyrone Slothrop's gradual fading out at the end of the novel is that he is responsible for putting the last full-stop to the family history, and he achieves it in a kind of entropic apocalypse. The last section of *Gravity's Rainbow* describes the rocket poised above an old film theatre, the movie has stopped and the last image was difficult to see even though the audience are "...old fans who've always been at the movies"; it was in fact "...a bright angel of death..." (*Rainbow* p.760). Thanatz's description of the launching of the rocket reinforces the apocalyptic nature of the scene in the theatre, he calls the day when it was fired "the last day" (*Rainbow* p.465), a phrase which has connotations of the end of the world.

The references to the atom bomb which I have mentioned before (*Rainbow* p.480, p.694) remind us that the Western technocracy has shown the extent of its obsession with death by creating the instrument of its own apocalypse, it is now possible for our wish to be fulfilled. Galina's dream summarizes the situation; it emphasizes our individual responsibility and shows that schizoid split between attraction and repulsion in our dealings with death, between the will to power and the horror and fear with which we experience its implementation:

Often she will dream some dainty pasteboard model, a city-planner's city, perfectly detailed, so tiny her bootsoles could wipe out neighborhoods at a step - at the same time, she is also a dweller, down inside the little city, coming awake in the very late night, blinking up into painful daylight, waiting for the annihilation, the blows from the sky, drawn terrible and tense with waiting, unable to name whatever it is approaching, knowing - too awful to say - it is herself, her Central Asian giantess self, that is the Nameless Thing she fears... (*Rainbow* p.341).

The rocket is the central symbol of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the title of the novel in fact describes its parabolic flight-path and the plot revolves round various attempts to search out its elusive essence. It is an overwhelmingly powerful force which attracts people to it irresistably; the violent political opposites within the Zone-Hereros are held together by a central force which appears to be the rocket; Blicero identifies the entire direction of his life with it, and Franz Pökler is described as being an extension of it; all those who worked on the early rockets with Pökler were "...equally at the Rocket's mercy: not only danger from explosions or falling hardware, but also its dumbness, its dead weight, its obstinate and palpable mystery..." (*Rainbow* p.402). There is something in the rocket which defies rational explanation, a power which refuses to be analysed. It is this element Thanatz refers to when he talks to Slothrop about the rocket, "...it really did possess a Max Weber charisma...some joyful - and *deeply* irrational - force the State bureaucracy could never routinize, against which it could not prevail..." (*Rainbow* p.404). Although the rocket is an instrument of death there is magnificence associated with it because it has the power to fly, it can momentarily transcend the laws of gravity which bind men to the earth; Pynchon explains that it is radio-controlled in order "...to steer you back on course the instant you'd begin to wander off (how could you've kept from lapsing, up here, into that radiant inattention, so caught up in the wind, the sheer altitude...the unimaginable fires at your feet?)..." (*Rainbow* p.517). It is

precisely this ability to defy gravity which encourages the idea that the rocket is an instrument of transcendence, a means by which men may reach the timeless centre of the universe, whatever name is given to it:

What Enzian wants to create will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to the other nations, will wither away inside this new one. The Erdschweinhöhle will not be bound, like the rocket, to time. The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place... (*Rainbow* pp.318-319).

The two underground tunnels of the Mittelwerke where the rockets were built, were designed in the form of the letters SS stretched lengthwise a little; the architect, Etzel Ölsch, based his design on the double-lightening stroke which was the emblem of the SS, but as his apprentice points out to him it is also the double integral sign, an image which is very significant when associated with the rocket. In order for the rocket's flight-path to be accurate in terms of distance, brennschluss, the moment when burning ended and the rocket started its downward path powered only by gravity, had to occur after exactly the right distance had been travelled. To achieve this the rocket was fitted with a mechanism which measured its acceleration, it then 'integrated' twice using a complicated electronic system and worked out the distance it had travelled, at the right moment the fuel cut off. If velocity is the rate of change of distance with respect to time, and acceleration the rate of change of velocity with respect to time, then the process of integration to calculate the distance travelled by

an object from its rate of acceleration, is a process which progressively removes the factor of time:

But in the dynamic space of the living Rocket, the double integral has a different meaning. To integrate here is to operate on a rate of change so that time falls away: change is stilled... 'Meters per second' will integrate to 'meters'. The moving vehicle is frozen, in space, to become architecture, and timeless. It was never launched. It will never fall. (*Rainbow* p.301).

This quotation is an interesting example of the kind of thought-patterns which emerge in *Gravity's Rainbow*; mathematically the factor of time is not removed completely, it is placed on the other side of the equation; the rocket is not really integrating in the way we understand the term, it is using electronics to achieve a similar result. Pynchon's progression of thought is not scientific or rational, it involves perceptual leaps and associations, it is a spatial conjunction of concepts or objects whose connections are justified on an imaginative rather than a logical level. More interpretations of the significance of the double integral sign follow, in Etzel Ölsch's subconscious it stood for "...the method of finding hidden centers" (*Rainbow* p.302); the society of which he is a representative is finding its centres of meaning in the Brennschluss Point, there is one for every rocket firing site, the apex of the parabola which is the rocket's flight-path. It is the timelessness of this moment which suggests that it could be interpreted as transcendent, "...the point where burning must end, never launched, never to fall" (*Rainbow* p.302), but I will be dealing with the possibilities of the rocket as a vehicle for

transcendence in more detail later. In the mean time it is interesting to note the context in which this description of the significance of the Brennschluss Point occurs. It has risen from "...some corrupted idea of 'Civilization', in which eagles cast in concrete stand ten meters high at the corners of stadiums where the people, a corrupted idea of 'the People' are gathering, in which birds do not fly..." (*Rainbow* p.302). This so-called 'civilization' has rejected the more traditional centres of meaning like 'heart' or 'consciousness' in favour of a moment which belongs to an instrument of destruction; the third possible meaning of the shape of the tunnels in the Mittelwerke is "the ancient rune that stands for the yew tree, or Death" (*Rainbow* p.302).

The rocket is an elusive symbol but there is no doubt that it has a strong connection with death; Pynchon refers to the "dark double-minded love" of the rocket exhibited in the Herero's "common drive to the sea" (*Rainbow* p.726), an image which instantly recalls the suicide drive of the lemmings. Weissmann's assumption of the code name Dominus Blicero, a nickname for death, indicates to Enzian "yet another step to be taken toward the rocket" (*Rainbow* p.322), and the firing of the Schwarzgerät from Lüneberg Heath, the place of the dead among pre-historic German tribes, could suggest Enzian's belief that it is necessary to pass through a kind of death in order to achieve rebirth, but equally it could suggest that the rocket is one of the most significant of the death structures which characterize our era. Katje believes that she and Slothrop have a link between them because she was

present at the launching of the rockets and he was present at their landing in London, this link she identifies not just as a rocket trajectory but as an entire life. (*Rainbow* p.209). Enzian also suggests that the rocket is alive, that it has a 'Destiny', but this is in a passage when he is talking about its contingency; one small mechanical error and "...what was alive is only an Aggregat again, an Aggregat of pieces of dead matter..." (*Rainbow* p.362). It is this contingency which suggest that both Katje and Enzian are wrong about the rocket, perhaps it *is* only an Aggregat of pieces of dead matter. As Rathenau said we do not give life we can only transfigure death (*Rainbow* p.166), the rocket is as much an impersonation of life as any synthesized plastic. It is very significant that it is Thanatz who tells the Hereros the last piece of information they need to know, the identity of the Schwarzgerät:

Whether you believed or not, Empty or Green,
cunt-crazy or politically celibate, power-playing
or neutral, you had a feeling - a suspicion, a
latent wish, some hidden tithe out of your soul,
something - for the Rocket. It is that 'some-
thing' that the Angel Thanatz now illuminates, each
in a different way, for everybody listening.
(*Rainbow* p.673).

Here we can see that Thanatz is being identified with 'Thanatos', the name Freud gave to the death-instinct; it is not just the obvious similarity of the two names but the fact that Thanatz is being seen as somehow beyond ordinary, individual humanity, the "Angel Thanatz" makes us think of the God of Death in the same way that Eros can be conceived of as the God of Love. The Angel Thanatz illuminates the one thing which attracts all the Hereros to the rocket despite their many differences, the conclusion that it

is their death-instinct is inescapable.

The rocket is also given strong sexual connotations within the novel, Katje sees it as programmed in a ritual of love with the target as its feminine counterpart, but it is significant that it plunges to a "terminal" orgasm. (*Rainbow* p.223). Enzian recognizes that the relentless masculinity of the rocket is responsible for an increasing coldness and bitterness within himself:

It began when Weissmann brought him to Europe: a discovery that love, among these men, once past the simple feel and orgasming of it, had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing. Demanded, in his own case, that he enter the service of the Rocket... Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system *won*, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature: that was the first thing he was obliged by Weissmann to learn, his first step towards citizenship in the Zone. He was led to believe that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood... (*Rainbow* p.324).

In this passage Pynchon returns to a theme of his earlier novels, that the machines which scientists maintain combat entropy are in fact responsible for the gradual dehumanization of our society. The masculinity of the rocket is one which expresses the subjugation of femininity, both within men where their concerns are dominated by the desire for power and success, and outside men where women are seen either as willing receivers of men's lust to dominate, (Thanatz describes the rocket as "Cruel, hard, thrusting into the Virgin-blue robes of the sky..." (*Rainbow* p.465)), or as cow-like contributors to the purified needs of the scientized state, "...the

women seemed to move all docile, without color...I thought of them in ranks, down on all fours, having their breasts milked into pails of shining steel..." (*Rainbow* p.325). As we can see from the passage about Enzian the essentially masculine nature of the rocket is a function of its technology, the two are inter-related. According to Brown, the masculine is characterized by possessiveness and aggression, and is reflected in the city which expresses the masculine revolt against the female principles of dependence and nature. The descriptions of Rocket-City are a look at the future we can expect from a system dominated by masculine technologies, the city is constantly changing because "...engineering changes to the Rocket create new routes of supply, new living arrangements..." (*Rainbow* p.726), in other words the demands of our technologies will reign supreme at the expense of more human considerations. The rocket becomes a powerful symbol of the commercial technocracy Pynchon sees cutting across national boundaries, "Oh, a State begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul. IG Raketen." (*Rainbow* p.726). The parabola is the symbolic shape of the new technocracy, it is the curve the rocket delineates in its single journey, the journey which is not a cyclical but a linear experience with a definite beginning and a final end:

But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakably. It is the parabola. They must have guessed, once or twice - guessed and refused to believe - that everything, always, collectively, had been moving toward that shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chances,

no return. Yet they do move forever under it, reserved for its own black-and-white bad news certainly as if it were the Rainbow, and they its children... (*Rainbow* p.209).

The parabola is an oppressive image because it represents a system dedicated to the violation of the cyclical nature of the universe.

Most of the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are pursuing the rocket like a grail, they see it as a 'way' or perhaps only as an explanation, but, whatever they are trying to achieve, ultimately they all follow the same path, "Pilgrims along the roads of miracle, every bit and piece a sacred relic, every scrap of manual a verse of Scripture." (*Rainbow* p.391). In an important passage Enzian, under the influence of stimulants, starts to question his people's continuing pursuit of the rocket:

...all right, say we *are* supposed to be the Kabbalists out here, say that's our real Destiny; to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till its all squeezed limp of its last drop...well we assumed - naturlich! - that this holy Text had to be the Rocket...our Torah. What else? Its symmetries, its latencies, the *cuteness* of it enchanted and seduced us while the real Text persisted, somewhere else, in its darkness, our darkness... (*Rainbow* p.520).

Enzian recognizes the dangers of being seduced by the symmetries of the rocket, the reader has a similar problem, but Enzian does not quite reach the understanding that the real fallacy lies in thinking that there is one Text which can be analysed to provide a solution for human problems. To think in terms of an 'Answer' is the vast oversimplification committed by all institutionalized religions. In a system of ironic 'flashforwards' Pynchon shows how

the rocket is turned into a religion which isn't even faithful to the experiences it is based on, quite apart from the fallacy inherent in the nature of all religions. Making a creed out of the rocket is a pathetic attempt to infuse something mystical into the rationalities of the technocracy, all it achieves is the deification of technology.

The image of the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* is larger and more powerful than analysis can represent, but in the widest terms possible it seems to symbolize the modern world. It is masculine and technological, an example of our obsession with power and domination, and our desperate search for meanings; it genuinely represents both the desire for death and the desire for transcendence. The success of the rocket as a symbol lies in the fact that it conveys both the magnificent attractiveness and the deathly perversion of western civilization.

* * *

The achievement of some form of transcendent understanding seems to be the prime motivation of most of the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*; it is seen as a fundamental human wish which cannot be obscured, though it can be perverted, by a scientific world-view in which objective reality is seen as the only harbinger of truth. Pynchon has an ambivalent attitude to the words which surround such mystical concepts, if not to the concepts themselves, which perhaps springs from an awareness of the ease with which they can be exploited and devalued. One of the 'Loonies on Leave' speaks to Slothrop of the latest invention in the line of getting something for nothing, like a razor edge that never gets

dull or a carburetor which does two hundred miles to the gallon, "...but *here's* one for yo' *mind!* Are you ready? It's Lightning-Latch, The Door That Opens *You!*" (*Rainbow* p.260). As a statement however, it probably says more about contemporary society's ability to trivialize almost anything it lays its hands on because its only objective is to turn it into a saleable commodity, rather than anything inherently absurd in the desire for self-knowledge.

'Transcendence' is a difficult word to use, quite apart from an instinctively sceptical reaction to it from most rationalists, it represents experiences which are essentially non-verbal and vary widely. The urge towards transcendence is even more of an umbrella term because that encompasses all those fumbling attempts which are genuine but unsuccessful, which is as far as most people ever seem to get. I have already mentioned Enzian's hopes of reaching the Eternal Centre and Laszlo Jamf's attempts to escape the mortality of the covalent bond; Blicero is also searching for the experience which will make all other experiences pale in comparison, and he chooses death as the significant factor. By sending Gottfried up in the rocket Blicero is engineering a clash between the forces of life and death which is unusual because Gottfried's youth and the splendour of the rocket as an instrument of death make the clash a peculiarly vibrant one. Normally when people die it is a barely perceptible change-over from one state to another, but Blicero is trying to get the forces of life and death to meet when they are both at their strongest, it is a physical attempt to drag two opposites together. He sees himself as an integral part of the

experience, joined to Gottfried by their love for each other:
"I want to be taken in love: so taken that you and I, and death,
and life, will be gathered, inseparable, into the radiance of what
we would become..." (*Rainbow* p.724). Franz Pökler is an example
of a much more unconscious desire for an experience which is
beyond that of everyday reality; Leni sneers at his suggestion
that one day they will use the rocket to transcend but part of him
still leans in that direction:

(Piscean depths Pökler has cruised dream and
waking, beneath him images of everyday
Inflation dreariness, queues, stockbrokers,
boiled potatoes in a dish, searching with only
gills and gut - some nervous drive toward myth
he doesn't even know if he believes in - for
the white light; ruins of Atlantis, intimations
of a truer kingdom)... (*Rainbow* p.579).

In a short section called 'Streets' Pynchon indicates a practical
value in trying to look beyond what stares you in the face; the
streets are war-torn and the houses gutted shells, "But in each
of these streets, some vestige of humanity, of Earth, has to
remain. No matter what has been done to it, no matter what it's
been used for..." (*Rainbow* p.693). He then refers to a 'moment
of passage', a phrase which is connected to the anthropological
terms 'rites of passage'; a rite of passage is a ritual which
expresses for the social group the moment when one of its members
passes from one state to another, for example a funeral, or the
circumcision rituals which represent the initiation into manhood in
some tribes; Pynchon's use of the word 'passage' is much less
precise and more concerned with consciousness than with sociological

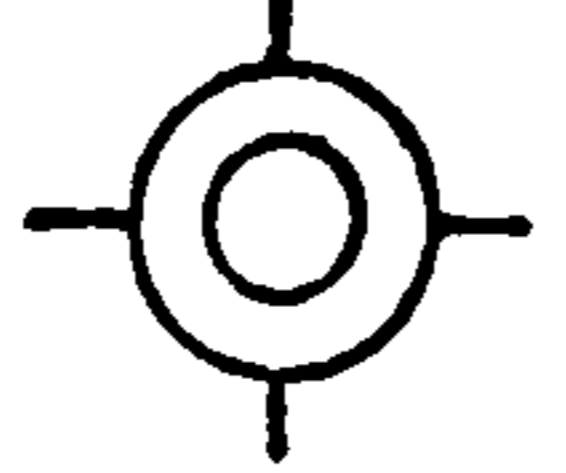
forms:

At least one moment of passage, one it will hurt to lose, ought to be found for every street now indifferently gray with commerce, with war, with repression...finding it, learning to cherish what was lost, mightn't we find some way back? (*Rainbow* p.693).

Some moment when an individual moved beyond the bricks and mortar of appearances is possible in any situation, and we need to relearn the value of such experiences.

Tchitcherine's determined approach of the Kirghiz Light is the first detailed reference to transcendent experience in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The Aqyn's song describes it in terms of awe and fear, it is essentially non-verbal and requires a loss of the old self in order that a new one may be born; the light is deafening and blinding and no one is the same after seeing it. Tchitcherine listens to the song and sets off to find the Kirghiz Light; he reaches it "but not his birth. He is no aqyn and his heart was never ready." (*Rainbow* p.359). He seems to be doomed to continual searching without ever quite getting there, Pynchon suggests that he will be drawn to the rocket and it will be another example of the same quest. It is as though the conscious nature of his search is what prevents him from succeeding, the deliberate following of a grail is too ego-oriented, too self-obsessed, to be able to achieve the death of self which is required. Prior to the Aqyn's song a boy and girl from the village hold a singing duel and later in the novel Tchitcherine refers to this as "a coming-together of opposites" (*Rainbow* pp.610-611) which signalled his approach to the

Kirghiz Light. The transcendent experience is an experience of unity but it can only be described in terms of duality, even to oneself, because language is a system of classification whereby any term implies its opposite, and oneness has to encompass everything. It is this idea of expressing unity through the use of opposites which is fundamental to the mandala symbolism frequently referred to in *Gravity's Rainbow*. As well as representing the coming together of a set of opposites, the series of concentric forms found in a mandala are "suggestive of a passage between different dimensions. In its essence, it pertains not only to the earth but to the macrocosm and microcosm, the largest structural processes as well as the smallest. It is the gatepost between the two."²⁶ A mandala can be a helpful centering process but in itself it is meaningless, it only comes to life in relation to a human consciousness; Pynchon takes care to expose the trap of thinking that if something has a mandalic form it is automatically good or beneficial. The unconscious mandala made by the soldier is a sign for Geli which points her on her way (*Rainbow* p.719), but a few pages later we find out that Rocket-City is built in mandalic form, a fact which should not alter our perception of that city as an image of future horror. (*Rainbow* p.725). Lyle Bland's experience of Masonic rituals shows the reverse side of the same coin; the rituals have become devalued partly through misuse and partly through the insensitivity of the businessmen who partake in them, but Bland is able to respond to the original magic which has remained latent in the rituals despite "the grim rationalizing of the World" (*Rainbow* p.588). Pynchon is making the point that there is no

one way, no right path; rituals or mandalas have no significance on their own and can only come to life when they are given meaning by a society or an individual. The most important mandala in the novel is the one which arose from the shape in which the Hereros built their village - . Andreas explained its symbolism to Slothrop in terms of the unification of male and female, and the four most important elements in their life, birth, the soul, fire and building, all set around the central circle which was the pen in which the sacred cattle were kept. But the Hereros have noticed that the rocket viewed from below shows the same mandalic pattern and have thus turned the rocket into a grail which they think will provide their tribal salvation; the fallacy in making this kind of connection can be seen when we realize that the swastika is also an example of mandalic form. The other danger is that mandalas may become meaningless when removed from the social context in which they originated; Enzian recognizes that Ombindi's harking back to the "gathered purity of opposites" (*Rainbow* p.321) in the tribal village built like a mandala is completely false; he is not using the form to create new meanings which would have relevance to his current situation, but merely referring nostalgically to something about which he has only heard and in which he has no faith. However the mandala is linked with transcendence in that it can represent unity through the conjunction of opposites, Slothrop draws the Herero mandala on a wall when he is approaching a transcendent experience, in the same way as Tchitcherine saw the singing contest as a gathering of opposites which heralded the

appearance of the Kirghiz Light.

The transcendent experience is often associated with some form of flight; in *Where the Wasteland Ends* Theodore Roszak describes the shamanic vision-flight as a root-meaning, it is a combination of symbol and experience which is at the basis of all language that associates height or climbing with the qualities of dignity, worthiness or privileged status. The wish to fly seems to have been a fundamental human desire since ancient times, Pynchon talks in terms of an innate flight-sense when Horst Achtfaden describes how he went looking for a thunderstorm, at the edge of which the rising air makes him aware of something that flies:

You follow the edge of the storm, with another sense - the flight-sense, located nowhere, filling all your nerves...as long as you stay always right at the edge between fair lowlands and the madness of Donar it does not fail you, whatever it is that flies, this carrying drive toward - *is* it freedom? Does no one recognize what enslavement gravity is till he reaches the interface of the thunder? (*Rainbow* p.455).

This quotation indicates the feeling that gravity is a force which limits man, keeps him tied down to the earth, preventing him from transcending physical reality. Roszak suggests that the concept of gravity originated as a comparatively unimportant counterpart to the concept of levity; the shamanic vision-flight asserted that levity was "the prime orientation of the soul"²⁷, while gravity was the sense of being weighed down when the soul lost the sense of buoyancy which kept it close to the sacred. Gradually gravity and levity came to be understood as physical forces of nature rather than transcendent symbols of spiritual lightness and weight, and

by the time of Newton levity was removed completely from the scientific consciousness. Roszak also points out that the concentration on gravity in the seventeenth century corresponds with the religious obsession with the fallenness of man during the same period; the human soul took on such a weight of sin that any concept of transcendent levity, of rising close to the sacred, was inconceivable. Slothrop is able to transcend partly because he accepts his preterition and by doing so makes such moral categories meaningless; his soul is no longer weighed down to earth by the puritan conception of sin.

Science rejects the transcendent experience on which the concept of levity is based because it is not objectively verifiable; the shamanic vision-flight is merely subjective, an illusion, while the aeroplane or the rocket becomes the real experience. This objective/subjective dichotomy is at the root of the empirical value system; the symbol of vision-flight does find expression in technology, but the problem lies in the fact that technology then claims that this expression is the only objectively truthful one, denying the subjective truth of the mystical experience. Roszak coins the phrase 'densification of symbols', by which he means the process that makes a symbol analyzable only in secular, objectively verifiable terms, so that flight can only be thought of in terms of rockets and aeroplanes, and not as a transcendent experience. The rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* is seen as a possible means of transcendence because it flies, it can physically defy gravity, but Roszak points out the problem inherent in this association:

The experience of the vision-flight stands behind the image of airplane or rocket. But once the symbol has been densified, the experience meets the resistance of a thickened medium and is deprived of power. Only then do we begin to think of the experience as being uniquely *in* this material object; the object comes to be 'the real thing'. (*Rainbow* p.346).

This is exactly the way Enzian and the Zone-Hereros think of the rocket; at one point in the novel it is recognized that "Each day the mythical return Enzian dreamed of seems less possible" (*Rainbow* p.519), this is because he has chosen to follow the rocket itself and is thus moving further and further away from the original experience Gottfried had when he flew in it. The rocket has become the centre of meaning instead of the experience of flight.

The second last section of the book is entitled 'Ascent', and describes Gottfried's experience of flight in the rocket; it is difficult to analyse because all the ambivalences in our attitude to the rocket are contained within it. Gottfried is "Moving now toward the kind of light where at last the apple is apple-colored. The knife cuts through the apple like a knife cutting an apple. Everything is where it is, no clearer than usual, but certainly more present." (*Rainbow* p.758). This passage could convey a sense of something which is indescribable, it implies a vision where things are seen in their ultimate truthfulness without the veil we normally have before our eyes; and yet the same passage could easily be interpreted as heavily ironic, the so-called transcendent experience merely produces an apple-coloured apple.

Similarly Pynchon describes the appearance of a 'Brocken-specter', presumably similar to the Brockengespenst, those awe-inspiring God-shadows Slothrop saw with Geli Tripping, as "...someone's, something's shadow projected from out here in the bright sun and darkening sky into the regions of gold, of whitening, of growing still as underwater as Gravity dips away briefly...", but the description continues by turning this brilliance into an expression of chemical destructiveness, "...what is this death but a whitening, a carrying of whiteness to ultrawhite, what is it but bleaches, detergents, oxidisers, abrasives..." (*Rainbow* p.759). The last word from Blicero talks of the experience in terms of a duality, "The true moment of shadow is the moment in which you see the point of light in the sky" (*Rainbow* p.760), but more importantly it turns our attention away from the rocket and back to Gottfried, the 'true moment' depends on his perception and on nothing else. We cannot know whether Gottfried achieved some form of transcendent experience or not, but we do learn that this experience is not dependant on the rocket, despite its magnificence and power, it depends on Gottfried's consciousness. Unfortunately this relative insignificance of the rocket in terms of transcendence does not apply to its status as an instrument of destruction; it rises on a promise of escape, but ultimately its ascent is "betrayed to Gravity" (*Rainbow* p.758). The fact that the rocket must return to earth and when it does it brings the promise of destruction we see in the last section of the novel, is contrasted to Lyle Bland's experience of levitation and voyaging; he transcends gravity but without using technology and he

doesn't have to return. (*Rainbow* pp.588-590). The village idiots who gather to shoot wine also transcend gravity, "...a winerush is defying gravity, finding yourself on the elevator ceiling as it rockets *upward*, and no way to get down." (*Rainbow* p.743). The technicians at Peenemünde analysed the rocket's flight-path by using calculus and looking at films of it frame by frame; Pynchon comments on this; "...film and calculus, both pornographies of flight. Reminders of impotence and abstraction..." (*Rainbow* p.567). But the problem is that the rocket cannot be divorced from mathematical systems like calculus, they make its existence possible; the rocket is a technological expression of vision-flight, it shows that the western world is still striving for transcendent experience, but we have densified the symbol until it is the only form of flight we can accept and understand. The ultimate destructiveness of the rocket is a warning of the danger involved in seeing objective reality as the only source of truth.

From the point of view of transcendence then, the rocket appears more significant than it really is; but in the gradual development of Tyrone Slothrop and his final grasping of some kind of transcendent understanding, Pynchon asserts a positive value which cannot be denied. Initially Slothrop is an unremarkable figure with conventional views, when Squalidozzi talks longingly of the time before the fences were built across the pampas in Argentina, he is quite shocked: "'...that's *progress* - you, you can't have open range forever, you can't just stand in the way of progress - '" (*Rainbow* p.264). He is equally thoughtless concerning his family's

business:

Slothrops in those days were not yet so much involved with paper, and the wholesale slaughtering of trees. They were still for the living green, against the dead white. Later they lost, or traded away, knowledge of which side they'd been on. Tyrone here has inherited most of their bland ignorance on the subject. (*Rainbow* p.268).

This attitude is in strong contrast to the attitude he exhibits later in the novel, in a passage I have already quoted he sees that they have done violence to trees, "amputating them from their roots" (*Rainbow* p.553), and he recognizes the absurdity of grinding trees into paper to be paid for it with more paper. His experiences in the Zone teach him mistrust of authority and the attitudes they purvey; and his assumption of different roles, he is at various times Ian Scuffling, war correspondent (*Rainbow* p.256), Plasticman (*Rainbow* p.314), Rocketman (*Rainbow* p.366), and finally the pig-hero (*Rainbow* p.567), seems to be instrumental in bringing about the loss of ego which takes him away from the false trail of the rocket. Eventually, like many of John Barth's characters, he comes to see the ego as an endless succession of persona and as such transient and arbitrary, but initially the sense of loss of ego under a drug terrifies him: "Before his throat can stir, he's away, on the Wheel, clutching in terror to the dwindling white point of himself, in the first windrush of anaesthesia, hovering coyly over the pit of Death..." (*Rainbow* p.383). Here we can see the relationship between loss of ego and death; the fear of death is a function of our desperate clinging to our sense of ego, if we can face ego-death then physical death is hardly noticeable. Pynchon describes

the relationship between the ego and the "true Self" in a passage about Kurt Mondaugen's "electro-mysticism":

Think of the ego, the self that suffers a personal history bound to time, as the grid. The deeper and true Self is the flow between cathode and plate. The constant, pure flow. Signals - sense-data, feelings, memories relocating - are put on to the grid, and modulate the flow. We live lives that are waveforms constantly changing with time, now positive, now negative. Only at moments of great serenity is it possible to find the pure, the informationless state of signal zero. (*Rainbow* p.404).

This loss of ego therefore, involves the loss of all things we would normally consider essential to life as we conceive of it. An awareness of the true Self is an informationless state, that is, no feelings, no memories, no sensual experience. It is easy to understand why Slothrop is so frightened at the prospect of losing "the white point of himself", and also why the reader feels rather uncomfortable at the first signs of Slothrop's change in consciousness. Slothrop is trying to understand why he is following the rocket, seeking explanations for the mysterious Schwarzgerät and the use of the plastic Imipolex; he realizes that They are giving him information as a bait because They know he will rise to it, but he cannot cast his mind back to the erection he had in the presence of the rocket, which would provide him with the answer. A month before he might have been able to remember:

But nowadays, some kind of space he cannot go against has opened behind Slothrop, bridges that might have led back are down now for good. He is growing less anxious about betraying those who trust him. He feels obligations less immediately. There is, in fact, a general loss of emotion... (*Rainbow* pp.490-491).

To the ego-orientated reader this sounds like a loss of what we would call humanity. And yet it is the first step towards giving up analysing the plots, Their plots, which is a way of dealing with experience Enzian finds frustrating and ultimately dehumanizing. Mondaugen puts forward a theory of 'personal density', a factor which is a direct function of 'Temporal Bandwidth', the more an individual dwells in the past and the future the thicker his temporal bandwidth and the more solid his persona or ego.

(*Rainbow* p.509). Slothrop's personal density is thinning as he learns to live in the timeless present instead of worrying about past and future; consequently he finds it more and more difficult to concentrate on the logical convolutions of the Laszlo Jamf/Imipolex/Schwarzgerät plot: "...aw it's JUST LIKE -

LOOK-IN' FAWR A NEEDLE IN A HAAAAYSTACK!
Ssss-searchinfrasomethin' fulla moon-beams..."
(*Rainbow* p.561).

Slothrop's loss of ego may disturb us but we cannot ignore the fact that it is definitely related to his developing consciousness; he has fewer of the conventional attributes of personality, he shows little desire to form relationships, unless it is with trees or a small boy who has lost his pet lemming, but this change is seen as an advance; it occurs to him that "maybe that anarchist he met in Zurich was right..." (*Rainbow* p.556), he is no longer concerned on the behalf of progress. There are frequent references to the ego which relate it to the image of the albatross; it is as though Pynchon sees the ego as a weight hung around our neck, a weight which keeps us from transcendence in a much more real way than gravity ever does.

I have already mentioned the significance of Slothrop's adoption of the role of pig-hero in terms of preterition; it symbolizes his ready acceptance of a status normally classified as the lowest of the low, relating to Enzian's statement that the key will be found in the wastes of the world. The role of pig-hero is not like the other roles Slothrop has assumed, they were persona adopted as masks on top of his own personality, he has to be born into this one, though ironically the pig-hero is the only role in which he actually wears a mask: "So Slothrop is borne, afloat on the water-leas. Like signals set out for lost travellers, shapes keep repeating for him, Zonal shapes he will allow to enter but won't interpret, not any more." (*Rainbow* p.567). His refusal to analyse 'Zonal shapes' has allowed him to be born, and immediately he becomes the pig-hero; the next time we see him after he has lost that costume he achieves his transcendent experience. He is wandering through some mountains, playing his harp and is "closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet, and he doesn't even know it." (*Rainbow* p.622). This lack of self-awareness is in strong contrast to Tchitcherine's self-conscious determination; even the gradual discarding of the remaining pieces of ego is largely unaware: "He's been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose..." (*Rainbow* p.623). Slothrop sees a message scrawled on a wall which reads "Rocketman was here", and it occurs to him that he might have written it himself, "In its sluggish coma, the albatross stirred." (*Rainbow* p.624). He draws the Herero mandala on the wall and

Pynchon comments "Slothrop besieged" indicating that the mandala is a protection against the reawakening of ego.

At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection where the judges have come to set up a gibbet for a common criminal who is to be hanged at noon. (*Rainbow* p.625).

The traditional symbolic meaning of the crossroads is "that place in which all things are met and from which all things are possible"²⁸; the hanging which takes place *on* him in as much as he is "the living" intersection", is the death of his own ego, the symbolic death necessary in order for him to be reborn. The phrase "a common criminal" is another example of Their value judgements, the error of which is shown up by the description of his sperm as "creamy as the skin of a saint"; Their irredeemable corruption is shown by the way in which they try to exploit him to the last, using his sperm as a means of financial benefit. After his experience he sat in Säure Bummer's kitchen "...finding in every bone and cabbage leaf paraphrases of himself..." (*Rainbow* p.625); Slothrop has lost the alienated vision, he is no longer, in Alan Watts' phrase, "an isolated ego inside a bag of skin"²⁹, he sees himself in relation to the universe, as another expression of it in the same way as a cabbage-leaf or even a star.

...and now, in the Zone, later in the day he became a crossroad, after a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of public clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural... (*Rainbow* p.626).

The rainbow is not the Gravity's Rainbow of the title of the novel, but an ordinary one, the rainbow which can show us the fallacy inherent in the myth of the alienated ego and its concomitant, the objective/subjective dichotomy. As Roszak points out, when we look at the rainbow we find it hard to answer the question "is it 'out there' or 'in here'?", quite apart from the fact that any discussion as to the nature of its reality seems strangely irrelevant when we are faced with its existence.

Slothrop gradually disintegrates before our eyes, he simply fades out of the novel:

...he has become one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell - *stripped*. Scattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained.' (*Rainbow* p.712).

Bodine's sorrow that he is the last person who can still hold on to Slothrop, and that even he will give up soon, is a natural reaction; the death of the ego is the death of everything that an ordinary ego-oriented person can understand. Slothrop has gone beyond the conventions of space and time which are the coordinates we use to plot an individual's existence; but Bodine's sorrow is misplaced in that he feels sorry for Slothrop not just for his own loss, he cannot possibly understand Slothrop's condition enough to know whether it is a happy or a sad one, if indeed such concepts are applicable. Pynchon is far from being a soft-centred mystic, his conception of true transcendence, as opposed to the experience of flight offered by the rocket, involves the loss

of everything we understand as human, and what is gained is by definition impossible to communicate. He manages to convey the extraordinary and frightening nature of transcendence by showing us a permanent experience of it as opposed to a momentary one.

Roger Mexico sees what a hard road it is to choose; he makes the link between Them and the ego, and recognizes that the ego is the source of Their power:

The Man has a branch office in each of our brains, his corporate emblem is a white albatross, each local rep has a cover known as the Ego, and their mission in this world is Bad Shit. (*Rainbow* pp.712-713).

This is why in a very real sense Mexico's choice is between living on as Their pet and death, the death he refers to being the death of the ego, with everything that that involves. Pynchon does not offer us easy alternatives.

* * *

Even more than the other novelists with whom I am dealing, Pynchon has little interest in the concept of objective reality; in *Gravity's Rainbow* we are shown a multiplicity of realities whose validity are justified on the grounds that they are one individual's perception of the world. Each character in the novel expresses a world-view which is as valuable and as 'truthful' as any other; any attempt at an overall perspective on experience is a system of ordering what we perceive in the light of a belief which we consider to be particularly important. Thus for example Leni Pökler orders her world in terms of politics, Thanatz's sado-anarchism is the result of a political slant on his sexual preferences, Enzian sees a maze of connections and coincidences which he has to analyse

in order to achieve the Absolute Centre, and Blicero's world-view revolves round his fascination with death. Each individual provides himself with a frame of reference which makes the complicated, disordered mass of experience intelligible to him, ultimately there are as many realities as there are people to conceive of them. The section which deals with Osbie Feel's screen test, and Katje's interpretation of it, is a parody of the way we normally deal with questions of illusion and reality. Two cowboys, Basil Rathbone and S.Z. ('Cuddles') Sakall, are barred entrance to the town by a midget sheriff with a German accent, discussion follows as to whether the midget is real or an hallucination. Katje watches the film and becomes convinced that it is a message for her in code, her interpretation is as follows:

Say that Basil Rathbone stands for young Osbie himself. S.Z. Sakall may be Mr. Pointsman, and the midget sheriff the whole dark grandiose Scheme, wrapped in one small package, diminished, a clear target. Pointsman ends up in the stagnant trough, and the plot/Midget vanishes, frightened, in to the dust. A prophecy. A kindness. (*Rainbow* p.535).

Katje has no justification for interpreting the film in the way she does, it bears no relation to the description of it we are given, and even if it did, it is difficult to understand how she arrived at the action she took as a result of her interpretation. There is another twist to the section though, when Katje arrives at Osbie's home he's wearing a deerstalker and smoking a pipe, in imitation of Sherlock Holmes, one of Basil Rathbone's most famous parts. Extraordinary though it may seem, Osbie Feel had intended

to convey exactly the message that Katje had received; here we can see that Pynchon is deliberately upsetting our expectations in order to point out that placing value judgements like correct or incorrect on any interpretation of experience is an occupation which is fraught with difficulties.

Lyle Bland's experience of levitation fundamentally alters his perception of the world; he is terrified when he rises up out of his body as he lies on a couch because he knows this is only a first step, the next step will be when he can roll over in mid-air and look down at his body:

It took him a month or two before he could make the turn. When it happened, he felt it as a turn, not so much in space as in his own history. Irreversible. The Bland who came back to join the inert white container he'd seen belly-up on the sofa, thousands of years beneath him, had changed forever. (*Rainbow* p.589).

The turn encompasses a complete change of perspective, which is why it is a turning-point in his personal history rather than a turn in space. Bland starts to study techniques of voyaging and the change in his perception of reality is expressed by his new understanding of the aims of voyaging. Pynchon remarks that our evaluation of expeditions to the North Pole in terms of success and failure are completely upside down; those who returned were failures not successes, they needed to come back to this world rather than choosing, like Lyle Bland does, to go out and not return. The difficulty is that the generally accepted view of objective reality may not just be one among many alternative versions of reality but

actually wrong, or at least ill-conceived. We are forced to face the fact that They are responsible for the conventional interpretations of reality and that it may be in Their interests to mislead us. Slothrop gets a shock when he hears how the American military police search through a hotel demanding for doors to be opened:

Later he will recall that what surprised him was the fanaticism, the reliance not just on flat force but on the *rightness* of what they planned to do..he'd been told long ago to expect this sort of thing from Nazis, and especially from Japs - *we* were the ones who always played fair - but this pair outside the door now are as demoralizing as a close-up of John Wayne...
(*Rainbow* p.256).

The conception of reality which has been handed down to Slothrop is part of Their system of conditioning to encourage patriotism and unreasoning hatred of the nation's enemies; much of Slothrop's development in the novel is a result of serious questioning of the conditioned responses which made up most of his understanding of reality. Soon after the experience in the hotel Slothrop arrives in Zurich and we can see that his questioning has become far-reaching:

The war has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image. The track runs in different networks now. What appears to be destruction is really the shaping of railroad spaces to other purposes, intentions he can only, riding through it for the first time, begin to feel the leading edges of... (*Rainbow* p.257).

Enzian suddenly starts to suspect that a ruined factory he passes isn't ruined at all but in perfect working order just waiting to be connected up correctly, it was modified deliberately and precisely

by the bombing which was not hostile but arranged for this purpose by the two apparently opposing sides. (*Rainbow* p.520). There are several different interpretations of the war in the novel, as I have already mentioned in the section on politics, and none of them individually exhaust its reality. We are not asked to judge between these views of the war, or any of the interpretations of reality we find in the novel; Pynchon indicates the impossibility of such a task through the question of the relationship between the kazoo and the lightbulb. The knuckle-thread above the reed is exactly the same as a thread in a light-bulb socket, so a bulb can be screwed into a kazoo; Gustav takes this to mean that Phoebus, the international light-bulb cartel based in Switzerland, is behind the kazoo and that it is a myth to think of it as a subversive instrument; but the bulb itself, who is of course Byron, wants to say that it is a declaration of brotherhood by the kazoo for all captive and oppressed light bulbs. It is impossible to evaluate these two opposite possibilities, they have to be allowed to coexist as valid inasmuch as they are the product of individual perception. When we consider Pynchon's understanding of the nature of reality, then, it is hardly surprising that a drug induced perception is seen as being as valid as any other. Enzian's rather panicky expression of doubts about the possibility of discovering the 'truth' of any particular situation, is the nearest he gets to appreciating the multiplicity of reality, and occurs under the influence of stimulants. There are indications in the novel that some of the more fantastic descriptions are meant to be seen

as connected with the experience of tripping on acid. Before Slothrop goes to pick up Bodine's hash, Säure Bummer hands him various papers he will need and a "trip ticket"; shortly after this Säure tells him of the death of Roosevelt, "...his voice is arriving from some quite peculiar direction, let us say from directly underneath, as the wide necropolis begins now to draw inward, to neck down and stretch out into a Corridor..." (*Rainbow* p.374). Slothrop sees a band of sinister doctors bearing down on Roosevelt to destroy him, white masks covering everything but their "bleak and grown-up eyes". After this experience his perception of what is going on around him fundamentally alters: "Someone here is cleverly allowing for parallax, scaling, shadows all going the right way and lengthening with the day - but no, Säure can't be real, no more than these dark-clothed extras waiting in queues for some hypothetical train..." (*Rainbow* p.374). Slothrop suddenly experiences that change of perspective which means that he sees what is present but in an entirely different way, "that identical-looking Other World" (*Rainbow* p.225); he no longer sees his surroundings as real but as a deliberate, artificial arrangement made to appear real in much the same way as a movie. The bizarre section with the pinball machines, in which some of the description is from the point of view of the ball bearings used in the machines, actually, of course, beings from the planetoid Katspiel, is also connected with tripping. Referring to the ball bearings Pynchon writes "...your first three-dimensional trip is always your best, when you came down again it wasn't the same..." (*Rainbow* p.584),

and later he describes the lights on the machines as "...primary colors with a touch of acid..." (*Rainbow* p.586). Similarly there is the scene in which the Anglo-American team of Harvey Speed and Floyd Perdoo, who have been detailed to investigate a random sample of Slothrop's sexual adventures in London, get side-tracked from their task; they allow themselves a last thought of the project they're supposed to be on: "...a thought that comes running out in the guise of a clown, a vulgar, loose-ends clown bespangled with wordless jokes about body juices, bald-headed, an amazing fall of nose-hair out both nostrils which he has put into braids and tied with acid-green bows..." (*Rainbow* p.271). Passages of description which are apparently acid oriented and are not overtly labelled as such, are mixed with other more realistic descriptions. It is apparent that Pynchon sees no necessity to distinguish between drug-related perceptions and any other; their validity is a function of their being the product of an individual consciousness, any other factor is irrelevant.

A good example of the many different ways individuals can view the same concept is the treatment of the void and the maze as pictures of reality. In some ways the maze is seen as representing the complicated patterns of the world we have built, and the void is the unknowable area outside it; however the mazes we build can sometimes be the means to avoid unpleasant truths, like Pökler building labyrinths to protect himself from the reality of the Dora prison-camp. (*Rainbow* p.432). Webley Silvernail starts to see that the behaviour of the scientists in the laboratory is remarkably

similar to the behaviour of the rats and mice on which they experiment:

From overhead, from a German camera-angle, it occurs to Webley Silvernail, this lab here is also a maze, i'n't it now...behaviourists run these aisles of tables and consoles just like rats 'n' mice. Reinforcement for them is not a pellet of food, but a successful experiment. But who watches from above, who notes *their* responses? (*Rainbow* p.229).

Webley Silvernail takes us outside the maze and wonders what might be behind it, who might watch over the scientists in the laboratory; it could be more of Their mazes, or perhaps the bureaucratic mazes of the Other Side, or even the void, however that concept is interpreted. Towards the end of the Preterite Ball section Prentice and Katje discuss what they thought they saw outside the hall: "'What did it look like out there, Katje? I saw an organized convention. Someone else saw it as a garden...'" But he knows what she'll say.

'There was nothing out there. It was a barren place.' (*Rainbow* p.547).

The implication is that our mazes are superimposed on what is ultimately a void, we build labyrinths as protection because we cannot bear to be faced with emptiness. However there is no consensus of opinion on the nature of the void; Squalidozzi, the Argentinian anarchist, sees it as an expression of creative simplicity and freedom, since destroyed by obsessive capitalist systems:

In the days of the gauchos, my country was a blank piece of paper. The pampas stretched as

far as men could imagine, inexhaustible, fenceless. Wherever the gaucho could ride, that place belonged to him. But Buenos Aires sought hegemony over the provinces. All the neuroses about property gathered strength, and began to infect the countryside. Fences went up, and the gaucho became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that *openness*: it is terror to us. (*Rainbow* p.264).

In other contexts as well the void is seen as a positive force; when Slothrop fucks Bianca the void is 'announced' as they both come, here it appears to be a transcendent image of oneness (*Rainbow* p.470); and when Greta is subjected to the endless eroticism of Imipolex she feels an abyss between her feet, and all her memories and thoughts stream from her head into the void; again it is a transcendent image but here it is connected with loss of ego. (*Rainbow* p.488). The other side of the coin however, is to perceive the void as a horrifying emptiness, or as signifying destruction; Pökler talks of "personal and dark surrender, to the Void, to delicious and screaming collapse..." (*Rainbow* p.578), and Nora Dodson-Truck is described as having faced the meaningless indifference at the centre of life:

She *has* turned her face, more than once, to the Outer Radiance and simply seen nothing there. And so each time has taken a little more of the Zero into herself. It comes down to courage, at worst an amount of self-deluding that's vanishingly small: he has to admire it, even if he doesn't accept her glassy wastes, her appeals to a day not of wrath but of final indifference... (*Rainbow* p.150).

It is interesting that Pynchon uses the word 'Zero' here, reminding us of the Empty Ones' aim of achieving the Final Zero; at one point

Enzian is referring to the strange affinity he feels for Ombindi despite their political differences, and explains it by recognizing that "The Eternal Centre can easily be seen as the Final Zero." (*Rainbow* p.319). This relationship between the two concepts suggests that the truth about the nature of the void is that it totally depends on an individual's perception of it; it can be seen as a despairing emptiness which horrifies us, or an anarchic, creative oneness at which we marvel.

What if there is no Vacuum? Or if there is - what if They're *using* it on you? What if They find it convenient to preach an island of life surrounded by a void? Not just Earth in space, but your own individual life in time? What if it's *in Their interest* to have you believing that? (*Rainbow* p.697).

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon plays a game of perception which I shall call the "What if..." game; as can be seen from the above quotation the game is at least partly the result of paranoia, if They are trying to control the way we conceive of reality for their own benefit, then we must try to stretch our imagination and think up alternative world-views, as many as we can so as to cover all the eventualities. The Polish undertaker who rows Thanatz to safety is trying to get struck by lightning, he has a theory that it has a profound effect because those who are hit experience a discontinuity in the curve of life. Pynchon then develops a marvellous hypothesis that at this moment the lightning heads are carried off by little men with pointed ears and Carmen Miranda hats, who are piloting lammergeiers that cruise around waiting for just such an opportunity:

...they'll carry you away, to the places they are agents of. It will *look* like the world you left, but it'll be different, Between congruent and identical there seems to be another class of look-alike that only finds the lightening heads. Another world laid down on the previous one and to all appearances no different. Ha-~~ha~~! But the lightening-struck know, all right! Even if they may not *know* they know. (*Rainbow* p.664).

Pynchon is questioning the nature of human understanding and recognizing its limitations; how do we know what we know? if indeed we do know anything; perhaps everything can change and our narrow perception won't even recognize it; if that's the case then how can we pretend to distinguish between those hypotheses which seem to be real possibilities and those which seem to be fantastic; by what means do we judge that the little men in Carmen Miranda hats are absurd, while Geli Tripping's theory that men were created on earth to promote death because the earth was too vibrantly alive (*Rainbow* p.720), is somehow more plausible if not objectively verifiable? Another example of the what if game is the Rocket state-cosmology propounded towards the end of the novel; the rocket is "...not, as we might imagine, bounded below by the line of the Earth it 'rises from' and the Earth it 'strikes' No But Then You Never Really Thought It Was Did You Of Course It Begins Infinitely Below The Earth And Goes On Infinitely Back Into The Earth it's only the *peak* that we are allowed to see..." (*Rainbow* p.726).

Pynchon is forcing us to question the distinctions we normally make between fantastic hypotheses, metaphysical hypotheses and scientific hypotheses; what they have in common is what matters, that is they are all hypotheses, they are all possible interpretations

of experience; the judgements we are inclined to make as to their truth are based totally on Their standards of conventional acceptability, and how can we trust Their motives? It's not quite as easy as that though, Pynchon takes it one stage further; immediately after the questions about the nature of the void I quoted earlier, a voice is heard, "'He won't bother us for a while,' They tell each other. 'I just put him on the Dark Dream.' ...They speak of taking So-and-So and 'putting him on the Dream.' They use the phrase for each other too, in sterile tenderness, when bad news is passed, at the annual Roasts, when the endless mind-gaming catches a colleague unprepared - 'Boy, did we put *him* on the Dream.'" (*Rainbow* p.697). Suddenly we are the victim of the most horrifying 'what if...' of all; what if They deliberately encourage us to play games of perception in order to freak us out, or distract us from more dangerous occupations? We cannot possibly know the answer to this question either, it is just another possibility we have to recognize.

In his long speech to Gottfried at the end of the novel, Blicero implies that life on the earth is unreal because it is "at the mercy of language" (*Rainbow* p.723); language is at the centre of human interpretation of experience, and it can only convey pictures of reality, not reality itself. But then it is doubtful whether men can experience reality either, inasmuch as our responses are conditioned by factors which have nothing to do with the experiences themselves. It is not so much that life on earth is unreal but that it is an expression of a variety of realities which are "congruent but not identical" (*Rainbow* p.519).. Trying to analyse

these realities, or connect them up into a logical system, is Enzian's great mistake; the plot is incalculable because it encompasses the whole world. In this respect he is like Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, she is trying to untangle a plot left to her by Pierce Inverarity, but at the end of the novel she sees that the legacy is in fact America; how can you hope to untangle something of that size? The view of the world as a maze of possible connections is paralleled in *Gravity's Rainbow's* highly plotted structure; and the futility of following the maze is suggested by the way in which the expectations the plot gives us are often not fulfilled. For example we never do find out why Slothrop got his hardons before the V2 rockets landed; he loses interest in the rocket anyway, and we are shown that the whole drive of the novel in terms of plot, which is towards the rocket, is a red herring in terms of the development of consciousness; following the rocket is just following one of the paths of the maze, and its a trick maze because none of the paths take you to the centre, you can only reach the centre by standing outside the maze of rational connections. The plot of a novel must depend on logic, and the main structural connection is generally cause and effect; in order to demonstrate his dissatisfaction with the logical system of cause and effect, Pynchon's plot in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a fraud, the reader follows it through the novel and then discovers that the centre of meaning in the novel lies elsewhere. Pynchon also tries to subvert the reader's desire to analyse anything on a rational level - doctoral students, of course, have to ignore this hint - a particularly good

example of this being the revue which takes place in Rocket City towards the end of the novel (*Rainbow* pp.679-700). If we look at it logically, Rocket City belongs to a different time perspective from most of the rest of the novel, but parts of the revue refer back to incidents and characters that belong to the main plot; the section in the Transvestite's Toilet is part of the revue but it doesn't occur on the stage as the toilet in question is in the audience area of the amphitheatre; a section about two kamikaze pilots turns out to be a World War Two situation comedy, but a member of its audience wins a ticket to the island on which it's being filmed, "Puke-a-hook-a-look-i Island" which has already appeared in another section of the novel anyway (*Rainbow* p.635), and it becomes his reality, he is going to have to fight off vampire mosquitoes and learn to fly a Kamikaze Zero. There is not much point in continuing this analysis except to say that one is also conscious of a parallel with the experience of reading the novel, the audience are the readers who sit and watch as a bizarre selection of sketches cross in front of them. Pynchon is deliberately taking us through labyrinths of fictional levels so that the sense of separation between these levels, and the desire to separate them in logical terms, is completely lost. The levels of reality in *Gravity's Rainbow* are not even distinguished, let alone placed in a hierarchy; Pynchon celebrates the variety of perception with an inventiveness which is both astonishing and captivating.

CONCLUSION

At this stage in my thesis I find it difficult to ascertain whether it is the similarities or the differences between these three writers that strike the reader most forcefully. Perhaps all they have in common is the literary critical fact of their fiction not conforming to the patterns of realism. More should be said, however, about both their similarities and their differences, and without being too repetitive of the main body of the thesis, I would like to recapitulate some aspects which I consider to be the most significant.

The fact that all three writers exhibit a concern for the problem of death, is scarcely surprising; it is, after all, an issue of great significance for everyone. But Hawkes and Pynchon have in common a more complex awareness of the way in which life can become death-in-life, a gradual fossilizing of energy and creativity, as a result of restrictions emanating both from the outside world and from the inside of the individual. In an interview with Robert Scholes in 1971, John Hawkes commented that the image of the chastity belt in *The Blood Oranges* was central to all his fiction:

"That is, my fiction is generally an evocation of the nightmare or terroristic universe in which sexuality is destroyed by law, by dictum, by human perversity, by contraption, and it is this destruction of human sexuality which I have attempted to portray and confront in order to be true to human fear and to human ruthlessness, but also in part to evoke its opposite, the moment of freedom from constriction, constraint, death."

The three writers also share a rejection of the linear as an appropriate pictorial metaphor for their work; Pynchon's eternally returning cycle in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Hawkes' circular relics at the end of *The Blood Oranges*, and Barth's spirals in *Chimera*, all reflect a movement away from "the forward-moving dialectic of neurosis which is history."² This awareness of the inadequacy of linearity leads on to the problem of opposites, a concern for which is clearly shared by Barth and Pynchon, and to a lesser extent, Hawkes, as well as Norman O. Brown and Alan Watts. Conceiving of the world as a set of mutually exclusive opposites is a failure for those of Barth's characters who attempt it; Pynchon's image of America as a giant digital computer shows just how limited an approach to experience he feels this categorizing of the world into pairs of dichotomies is. Such a division is, of course, the basis of language; in *The End of the Road*, Jake recognizes the inadequacy of a language that is unable to provide a word to describe the feeling of love and hate Rennie has for Joe, because the existence of such a word might help her to understand her emotions. Opposites also form a basis for logical thought, p and not-p, but Oedipa Maas remembers all about excluded middles, they were "bad shit" (*Crying*, p.139). We are working our way towards another significant point of connection between all three of these writers; the most important kind of experience for them is subjective. Barth and Hawkes share a love and admiration for the power of the human imagination, this capacity is an individual experience which is supremely important to them. Pynchon seeks the key that will restore us to our freedom in the wastes of the world, but that key is a key for the individual, not one that

will solve directly problems on the larger scale of the social and the political. This emphasis on the subjective experience of the individual has its concomitant in a comparative lack of interest or faith in the familiar world; the act of objectification, the overt relation between individual and social, is unimportant for, even destructive of, the individual. If Roszak can say that for the Romantics the quality of experience essential to art was "the capacity of the mind to create ideas that vastly outstrip or wholly transcend sense data and its logical arrangements"³, then perhaps the work of these writers in part fulfills Roszak's call for a resuscitation of the romantic consciousness.

Unfortunately, the relationship between Hawkes, Barth and Pynchon is not quite as straightforward as it might appear to be at the moment. A conclusion of contradictions is perhaps inevitable where these writers are concerned. I have already mentioned the importance of the imagination which is directly expressed in the work of both Hawkes and Barth, but the way in which this importance is conceived of differs radically between the two of them. John Stark, in his book *The Literature of Exhaustion*, has commented that Barth wants to create better worlds in the imagination, turning his back on "the lunacy of mundane existence", and devising his own "sane and orderly worlds".⁴ The implication of this is undoubtedly that the ordinary world exists, unavoidable, unchangeable, lunatic perhaps but undeniable. In *Chimera*, the thinly disguised figure of John Barth, in the form of the genie, talks to Scheherezade about what he considers to be the function of "the treasure of art, which if it could not redeem the barbarities of history or spare us

the horrors of living and dying, at least sustained, refreshed, expanded, ennobled, and enriched our spirits along the painful way." (*Chimera* p.25). This interpretation of the function of art causes me some discomfort; it suggests a kind of ultimate irrelevance in an art which can only entertain, distract, or at best provide solace. Barth's concept of the imagination is that it is a source of delight, a source of great beauty, but not a source of innovation and change, it can have no effectiveness in the real world. The danger is that one can fall into the kind of unhelpful moralizing Tony Tanner goes in for in *City of Words*, when he accuses Barth of sporting on lexical playfields. In one way Barth is perhaps more radical in a literary sense than either Hawkes or Pynchon, because for him the real world can be ignored altogether in his fiction. However, from a conceptual point of view, Barth is considerably less daring than Hawkes or Pynchon. In the interview with Robert Scholes, Hawkes comments on W.H. Auden's view that the world would be exactly the same if the great artists like Dante and Shakespeare had never existed, by saying "It seems obvious that the great acts of the imagination are intimately related to the great acts of life - that history and the inner psychic history must dance their creepy minuet together if we are to save ourselves from total oblivion."⁵ This comment rejects the view that art merely helps to pass the time more comfortably, and restores to it some measure of relevance; indeed Hawkes seems to be suggesting that the imagination may be the only salvation. In *Second Skin*, Hawkes commits himself to the position that the imagination can have power in the world, fantasy can be the attainable reality, we can in fact

live in the world we imagine. Again, in the interview with Scholes, he denies that his use of the name "Illyria" for the setting of *The Blood Oranges* suggests that Illyria is permanently separated from this world; what he wanted to convey was the possible beauty and fulfillment in any scene which we experience. "Illyria doesn't exist unless you bring it into being."⁶ Although Pynchon's fiction is remarkable for its portrayal of contemporary reality, both social and political, as well as psychological, religious and moral, and in this sense belongs more to a mainstream of literary endeavour than do the works of the other writers with which this study is concerned, he does share with Hawkes the suggestion that other worlds can exist not just in the imagination, but within our world, multiple realities that are congruent but not identical to each other.

The hesitation I feel about Barth at this stage can neither be confirmed nor resolved, perhaps future publications will help provide a conclusion, (the excerpt from his new novel *Letters*, published in *Triquarterly* this summer (1978), is too much of a fragment to give added insight). However, what Barth shares with both Hawkes and Pynchon is a recognition of and a loathing for the prescriptiveness of reality. Their fiction shares a sense of the struggle for more possibilities, for a larger world, for greater freedom; it becomes an act of rebellion against all the limitations imposed both from without and within.

"Recently I did formulate a kind of theory of fiction which can be expressed in few words. It seems to me that fiction should achieve revenge for all the indignities of our childhood; it should

be an act of rebellion against all the constraints of the conventional pedestrian mentality around us. Surely it should destroy conventional morality. I suppose all this is to say that to me the act of writing is criminal. If the act of the revolutionary is one of supreme idealism, it's also criminal. Obviously I think that the so-called criminal act is essential to our survival."⁷

John Hawkes.

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