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From Ritual To Rocket: "gravity's Rainbow" In The Apocalyptic Tradition (thomas Pynchon)

David Joseph Robson

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**FROM RITUAL TO ROCKET:
GRAVITY'S RAINBOW IN THE APOCALYPTIC TRADITION**

By

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
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ABSTRACT

This thesis situates Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow (1973) in the Apocalyptic tradition. In constructing this tradition I have employed the critical theories--or critical visions--of Northrop Frye, Mircea Eliade, and of the "Toronto School" of communication theorists: Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong. Ong's conception of the "technologizing of the word" provides the unifying theme of this thesis, a theme which I extend into the postmodern context where it manifests itself in Pynchon's Rocket/Word.

The first chapter examines the way in which pre-literate oral cultures, Hesiod, Plato, Herodotus, and Thucydides are apocalyptic or anti-apocalyptic. The second chapter focuses on the Bible, which provides the central apocalyptic paradigms and which transmutes the imaginative space of myth into a new dialogical, historical space--or "apocalyptic space"--which has the character of a textual field oriented towards signification and "meaning" in contrast to the "oral" mode of participating in the "being" of the cosmos via cultic ritual attunement with the cycles of nature. I discuss four covenants of the Old Testament (Noah, Abraham, Sinai, David) as enactments of the process of what I call the "hermeneuticizing of the cosmos." I relate this apocalyptic/textual space to principles of biblical typology, Puritanism, and to surprisingly analogous ideas of apocalypse in the theories of Northrop Frye and Jacques Derrida.

Chapter three concentrates more specifically on Gravity's Rainbow with some consideration also given to The Crying of Lot 49 and other works of the American apocalyptic tradition. Tyrone Slothrop, I argue, can usefully be seen

as a postmodern Puritan adrift in the Zone: the hyperreal postmodern space for which he has no Bible to serve as his great code. The Zone is an apocalyptic space of signification where the Rocket serves as another ambiguous Logos. This exploding Word--with its metonymic links to the Bomb--is consistent with the double-edged symbolism of biblical apocalyptic revelations, including the smashed tablets of Sinai, the deferred Kingdom of Israel in exile, or Christ as the crucified Logos. Finally, I will consider the way in which Pynchon's postmodern style is, itself, revelatory and apocalyptic.

For Julie and Gail

And in memory of Rob, gardening in Eden

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INTRODUCTION

If I had to choose a particular passage from the works of Thomas Pynchon which served--and still serves--as a revelation to me, I would choose the following passage from the concluding pages of The Crying of Lot 49 where the novel's heroine, Oedipa Maas, contemplates her recent discovery of a sort of underground community of dispossessed America:

What was left to inherit? That America coded in Inverarity's testament, whose was that? She thought of other, immobilized freight cars, where the kids sat on the floor planking and sang back, happy as fat, whatever came over the mother's pocket radio; of other squatters who stretched canvas for lean-tos behind smiling billboards along all the highways, or slept in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even, daring, spent the night up some pole in a lineman's tent like caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages. She remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night,

zooming in and out of your headlights without looking up, too far from any town to have a real destination. And the voices . . . that had phoned at random during the darkest, slowest hours, searching ceaseless among the dial's ten million possibilities for that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word. (180)¹

I encountered this passage in 1984 in the context of a fourth-year seminar course in twentieth-century literature in which Pynchon's V. and The Crying of Lot 49 were required texts, and I found it particularly suggestive since it seemed to articulate perfectly the tensions emerging in the formation of my own critical perspective. Specifically: Pynchon's postmodern texts marked the intersection of the trajectory of literary history (which I had been systematically working through as part of the University of Toronto English Specialist programme) with my own particular historical moment: the postmodern realities of mid-80s Canada in which I was beginning to perceive the world, the text, and myself (the nascent critic) as the situated effects of the particular nexus of discursive formations which constituted the framing grid of my particular place and time. And what a peculiar blend it was: my other seminar course, in Literary Theory, was being taught from "a Derridean perspective"--this, amidst the pastoral enclave of Victoria College,

¹ Pynchon's novels are full of ellipses. Those which I have inserted into quoted passages are in square brackets.

whose Chancellor was Northrop Frye, and whose courses in Shakespeare and the Bible I, like most English students at the college, had dutifully taken. Many hours I had spent in the E.J. Pratt Library reading room beneath Douglas Martin's enormous portrait of a slightly testy-looking Northrop Frye sitting . . . well, sitting on nothing: the portrait depicts him suspended over what could be considered a rugged, even sublime landscape of mountain and sky. But it's not a sublime landscape: the floating professor is by no means dwarfed by mere nature, and the artist's arrangement is an apposite metaphor for Frye's own critical vision of the heroic human imagination as able rival of the alienated expanse which is nature--although the tweedy professor looks somewhat more pedantic than heroic, again appropriate for Frye who felt that imaginative and social revolutions were best channelled through the civilizing institution of the university. Given the subversive breezes of poststructuralism blowing through even Victoria College, one might have been tempted to entitle the portrait "Frye Deconstructed." Yet, as my subsequent inquiries into Frye, poststructuralism, and postmodernism would reveal, the novice deconstructor would be surprised to discover that pulling the chair out from under Frye by no means causes him to fall. The passage from The Crying of Lot 49, it seems to me, articulates the tension which I was feeling between poststructural theory and a more visionary, romantic theory--Frye's--which insists on the revelatory or apocalyptic possibilities of the human imagination. Pynchon's cautious and gently ironic postmodern faith in the "secular miracle of communication" chimes with Frye's understanding of literature as a "secular scripture": both insist that from amidst the discursive overdetermination of the

postmodern condition--the chains of signification, the dissolve of identity in difference, the subversions of textuality, the technologizing of the word, the incredulity toward metanarratives, the simulacra--or, in Pynchon's words, from amidst of "the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love," and alongside the official channels and messages and meanings of the postmodern mediascape, can emerge "that magical Other" which is not just another element in the play of signification, but "the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word."

The Word as "magical Other": this is not simply another logocentric conception of being as presence. It is an imaginative supplement, a glimpse "of a world that may not exist but completes existence, the world of the definitive experience that poetry urges us to have but which we never quite get" (Critical Path 170-1). The dispossessed whom Oedipa glimpses seem "in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in." Thus they are not in exile from mainstream America, but from an "other" America, "invisible yet congruent" with it. This America preoccupies the countercultural or, in Frye's terms, the anarchist tradition of American literature which pursues "the genuine America buried underneath the America of hustling capitalism which occupies the same place" (Modern Century 122). Frye sees Thoreau as the "patron saint of this tradition,"

retreating to Walden to build his own cabin and assert that the only genuine America is the society of those who will not throw all their energies into the endless vacuum suction of imperialist hysteria and of consuming consumer goods. Huck Finn, drifting down the great

river with Jim and preferring hell with Jim to the white slave-owner's heaven, is a similar figure, one of the bums, hoboes, and social outcasts who reach a deeper level of community than the rest of us. This outcast or hobo figure is the hero of most of the Chaplin films; he also finds a congenial haven in comic strips. (77)

And in the novels of Pynchon, I would add.

Sacvan Bercovitch links this uncreated ideal of America with the millennial visions which prompted the Puritan colonial enterprises:

The New World vision that the Puritans bequeathed became in our major writers variously a symbolic battleground, an ideal to which they could aspire because it could never be realized in fact, and an alternative cultural authority through which they could denounce (or even renounce) the United States. (43)

Such an ideal or authority may not literally "exist," but it can be revealed in literature. Such a peculiarly literary or textual mode of being, Frye suggests, is an essential feature of apocalyptic discourse: "Apocalypse means revelation, and when art becomes apocalyptic, it reveals. But it reveals only on its own terms, and in its own forms: it does not describe or represent a separate content of revelation" (Anatomy 125).

The subsumption of reference (or history) by text is an important dimension of the structure of the Bible. The Gospel of John affirms that "In the beginning was the Word"; the Book of Revelation--the canonical apocalypse informing the Puritan millennial visions--clearly insists that at the end, too, the

Word is. If the Bible as a narrative swallows all of human history between its poles of Genesis and Revelation, such affirmations as "I am the Alpha and the Omega" says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1.8) go even further and identify the eternity of God with the totality of verbal expression. Indeed, the beasts and cataclysms and even the millennial imagery of Revelation famously strain referential language, pushing us beyond representation into another sort of linguistic or imaginative space.

Despite the problematics of representation and reference, despite Revelation's consciousness of itself as a thoroughly mediated text (John is commanded: "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches" [1.11]), despite its being a structure of words about the agency of the Word--an unsealed book about the time of judgment when "the books were opened" and the dead were judged by what was written in the "book of life" (20.12)--despite all of this, the predominant mode of interpreting Revelation has been to take it more or less "literally." Precise details may be overwhelming, but the general outline is clear enough: there will be cataclysms, cosmic battles, the Second Coming of Christ, the millennium, Last Judgment, and the arrival of "a new heaven and a new earth" (21.1). The problem of closure is dealt with by seeing the book as a prophecy. What is described had not happened, but it would happen soon. The unrepresentable referents (the "beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns . . ." [13.1]) will be revealed. The reader thus occupies a space of deferral before the radical break. Indeed, the present could be "read" as containing portents of the imminent end. History is

subject to a forward-looking hermeneutics: it is a matter of reading the writing on the wall, to borrow the image from the most apocalyptic of the Old Testament books, Daniel. The full meaning had to wait, but specific historical identifications could be made. For early Christians, the beast from the sea was the Roman Empire. The other beast with its number 666 was identified with Nero. The end had not yet been reached, but an "endtime" had been entered. In the words of Rudolf Bultmann,

The early Christian community understands itself not as a historical but as an eschatological phenomenon. It is conscious that it belongs no longer to the present world but to the new Aeon which is at the door. The question then is how long this consciousness can remain vivid, how long the expectation of the imminent end of the world can remain unshaken. (37)

The Second Coming failed to materialize, so the early eschatological hopes were not validated; but as Frank Kermode notes, "apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited" (8). Naive beliefs in a divinely ordained imminent end persist among Christian fundamentalists today, benignly in such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, more sinisterly in such cults as the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas. But as early as the Acts of the Apostles, such assurance about the imminence of the end was being qualified: "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority'" (1.6-7). In both Acts and the Gospel of Luke there is a greater

historical sense: an awareness that the emerging Christian religion was a phenomenon within history that had to be understood as such. Bultmann calls this process the "historicizing of eschatology" and observes that "the earliest Christian community in its eschatological consciousness would not have been interested" in such historicizing accounts (38-9).

As the space of deferral between the incarnation and the "imminent" Second Coming grew, however, written accounts would become more and more important as vehicles of the apocalyptic promise. In the absence of the apocalyptic referents, discourse (prophecy, exegesis) would proliferate. Jacques Derrida has made an analogous suggestion about the "fabulously textual" nature of nuclear war in the absence of (or in the space of deferral before) the literal manifestation of the apocalyptic referent ("NANN" 23). Biblical historian Bernard McGinn has observed that the Book of Revelation is similar to other apocalyptic texts of the intertestamental period in the "bookish" nature of its revealed message, and apocalypticism has been described as a "'scribal phenomenon' in so far as the message revealed is to be communicated to its potential audience primarily through the written rather than the spoken word" ("Early Apocalypticism" 5).

Today, the word apocalypse tends to be used loosely as a synonym for "cataclysm." This usage emphasizes the negative pole, stressing the ideas of violence and destruction and omitting the connotations of salvation and re-creation--connotations present in the Greek root, "kluzo" (to wash) and which are present in Revelation in the reference to Christ who "washed us from our sins in

his own blood" (1.5) and in the image of the multitudes who have "come out of the great tribulation" and "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (8.14). Even the association of cataclysm with Noah and the deluge contains the idea of purification and the emergence of a new order symbolized by the covenant of the rainbow (which provides an image important for Pynchon).

Despite the neglect of the positive pole in the popular conception of apocalypse as cataclysm, a sense of radical discontinuity is preserved. Theologian Jurgen Moltmann finds the idea of "discontinuity between historical reality and future promise [to be] a significant contribution on the part of the apocalyptic writers" (qtd. in Russell 31). M.H. Abrams, too, acknowledges that "the plot of biblical history is sharply discontinuous. Each of its crucial events [creation, fall, Incarnation, Apocalypse] is abrupt, cataclysmic, and inaugurates a drastic change" ("Apocalypse" 234). The discontinuity of apocalypse involves a shift from the present world order to some radically "other" new order. The varying ways in which this "otherness" is imagined and how it functions in apocalyptic thought and texts is the central concern of this thesis.

Apocalypse as revelation of the Word, and the Word variously conceived as biblical Logos, Frye's poetic Logos, and Derrida's deconstructed--or "other"--Logos: somehow Gravity's Rainbow seemed to resonate productively with each of these conceptions while adding one other crucial identification: the Word as V2 Rocket. By the time I entered graduate school, I had a fairly strong intimation of what the "end" of my critical endeavour would be: a critical reading of Gravity's

Rainbow as a postmodern apocalypse. While inhabiting the space of deferral before this end, however, I found the path of my trajectory--the scope of my project--veering and expanding wildly. Such an experience, I suspect, is not uncommon for individuals working on Pynchon's encyclopedic fictions, but to complicate things more, apocalypse, I soon discovered, is a supremely complex and expansive subject. In their introduction to The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature (1984), C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich write: "Vast as the subject is, it may be doubted whether any single individual could attempt much more than a superficial survey of it. The task, we felt, had to be a co-operative one; for only the congregated talents of diverse scholars could successfully study the impact of apocalyptic thought in general and the Book of Revelation in particular" (vii). My dissertation has but one author (or, to use Foucault's term, David Robson is inscribed as the author function), and it ranges from consideration of ancient, pre-literate cultures to the contemporary--clearly a nontotalizable field. Thus I state at the outset that this thesis does not attain, nor did it attempt to attain, comprehensiveness in any classical sense. To borrow categories from Claude Lévi-Strauss, my approach is that of the bricoleur, not that of the engineer, and the structure which emerges from suc.. a putting together of the pieces at hand is inevitably a mythopoeic one whose grounding center will be problematic (see Derrida "SSP" 285 and Frye GC xxi). Far from grounding the play of signification, my concern with apocalypse propels the play of signification, and my guided tour of the topic, I fear, may at times be "like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac" (GR 412). The final effect, I hope, will be

enlightening rather than cataclysmic.

As a literary critical bricolage this thesis takes Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow as its center (not exactly the most stable ground). In the first two chapters of the thesis Gravity's Rainbow functions as a sort of absent center. Just as Tyrone Slothrop, towards the end of the novel, ends up "scattered all over the Zone" such that "it's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (GR 712); so are traces of Gravity's Rainbow scattered throughout this thesis, crystallizing in the third chapter where the novel is revealed, if not in its radiant millennial identity, at least in an "other" or different perspective. Whether the V2 Rocket, the novel, and this thesis resolve into a "real structure" or remain merely an "aggregate" (to use Frye's terms [AC 118]) is necessarily a problematic question: there exists a deconstructive tension between this binary opposition. I would estimate that in Gravity's Rainbow half of the references to the V2 Rocket use its other name: the "A4" where the "A" stands for "Aggregat" (and it could also, like Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, stand for "apocalypse"). Between aggregate and real structure, difference and identity, bricolage and myth, there remains a signifying dissonance. It is in this mediatory space that the "secular miracle" can perhaps occur. As Enzian explains to Slothrop (alias Ian Scuffling):

"One reason we grew so close to the rocket, I think, was this sharp awareness of how contingent, like ourselves, the Aggregat 4 could be--how at the mercy of small things . . . a film of grease you can't even see, oil from a touch of human fingers, left inside a liquid-

oxygen valve, flaring up soon as the stuff hits and setting the whole thing off--I've seen that happen . . . rain that swells the bushings in the servos or leaks into a switch: corrosion, a short, a signal grounded out, Brennschluss too soon, and what was alive is only an *Aggregat* again, an *Aggregat* of pieces of dead matter, no longer anything that can move, or that has a *Destiny* with a shape--stop doing that with your eyebrows, Scuffling. I may have gone a bit native out here, that's all. Stay in the *Zone* long enough and you'll start getting ideas about *Destiny* yourself." (362)

The first two chapters of the thesis (roughly two-thirds of the whole) necessarily entail my adoption of an "angel's eye view" (GR 54) as I provide a historical/theoretical survey of apocalyptic thought and key texts. In so far as apocalypse is concerned with ultimate revelations (of meaning, of being) or final narrative closure, it is difficult to conceptualize it without crafting a totalizing frame of one's own. Such a critical activity is particularly ironic when one's subject includes Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, a work profoundly suspicious of totalizing--and inevitably paranoid--visions. Pynchon scholars routinely begin their works with an acknowledgment of their paradoxical activity, apologizing, as it were, to the spirit of their prey whom they necessarily must kill in order to survive. But negotiating the postmodern world/text entails habituating oneself to such double binds: there are no neutral vantage points. Even Pynchon's *Counterforce* cannot escape the compromises:

They are as schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of

money, as any of the rest of us, and that's the hard fact. 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 is Bad Shit. We do know what's going on, and we let it go on. (GR 712-3)

The alternatives are perhaps hopeless: "which is worse: living on as Their pet, or death?" (713). On the other hand, postmodern criticism and literature might still possess a residual trace of romantic hope of the sort Blake proclaimed regarding his own apocalyptic project of "Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (qtd. in Fearful Symmetry pref.). In Gravity's Rainbow the romantic creative imagination is re-configured as "creative paranoia."

Counterforce member and former commando Pirate Prentice explains:

"Of course a well-developed They-system is necessary--but it's only half the story. For every They there ought to be a We. In our case there is. Creative paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system--" (638)

I can only hope that the critical enterprise which is this dissertation is aligned with the counterforce: the forces of Eros rather than Thanatos.

In any case, in the paranoid structure which is my historical overview² I map out a variety of imaginative spaces in order to provide a range of contrasts and comparisons which will help differentially to define the uniqueness of the

² To some extent this thesis extends the scholarly tradition of "Paranoid Systems of History (PSH), a short-lived periodical of the 1920s whose plates have all mysteriously vanished, natch [. . .]" (GR 238).

peculiarly postmodern instance of apocalypse which is Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. In constructing what I am calling the "Apocalyptic tradition," I have employed the critical theories--or critical visions--of Northrop Frye, Mircea Eliade, and of the "Toronto School" of communication theorists: Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong. Ong's conception of the "technologizing of the word" provides the unifying theme of this thesis, a theme which I extend into the postmodern context where it manifests itself in Pynchon's Rocket/Word.

In chapter one I examine the way in which the following are apocalyptic or anti-apocalyptic:

Pre-literate oral cultures

I employ Mircea Eliade's ideas about the cyclical--and hence anti-apocalyptic--nature of myths of "eternal return," and establish the central contrast between cyclical and linear (Judeo-Christian, historical, eschatological, apocalyptic) world views, although I note that cyclical myths (and the functions they serve) have their apocalyptic side, as well. My larger purpose is to set up parallels between the pre-logocentric space of orality and post-logocentric space of the postmodern, especially regarding their anti-transcendental character and performative ontologies.

Hesiod

To a certain extent, Hesiod has to stand in as a representative oral myth, although I note the influence of literacy and suggest that he occupies an apocalyptic space

of discontinuity between orality and literacy. With Hesiod "the author" is born, an event with enormous implications regarding the way in which imaginative space is inhabited. The truth status of mythic revelations becomes an issue. I also examine Hesiod's conception of chaos as an anti-essential space analogous to Derrida's "différance."

Plato

Employing the conceptual frameworks of Eric Havelock's Preface to Plato and Walter Ong's Orality and Literacy, I consider the way in which literacy allowed Plato to articulate a "logocentric" realm--the decontextualized realm of the Forms or absolutes, free from the "mythos" orientation of orality and its rhythmic and sensual verbal patterns, formulas and narrative spells (epitomized by Homer). Dialectic and the active critical consciousness it entails challenges the ritual modes of participation associated with the transmission of oral myth. To attain or experience the transcendent realm, however, seems to require the supplement of an apocalyptic (or radically discontinuous) flash of insight--the ladder of dialectic (or of language) alone is not sufficient. Again, imaginative space is re-mapped with the birth of the transcendent realm of absolute truth, a realm which, Havelock argues, only becomes articulable with the development of the alphabet. Walter Ong sees this movement from the spoken to written word as the key event in the process of what he calls the "technologizing of the word," a process whose trajectory leads to the Rocket of Gravity's Rainbow: "the one Word that rips apart the day. . . ." (25).

Greek historians (Herodotus, Thucydides)

Advances in literacy allow a more scientific attitude towards the world. It becomes possible to articulate historical facts and events without having them dissolve in mythic ritual or archetypal paradigms. The Logos of the cosmos comes to be seen as immanent within the cosmos, rather than transcendent (as with Plato's Forms). The hermeneutic problem of the meaning of history emerges. Regarding Thucydides' account of the siege of Melos, I distinguish between the negative pole of apocalypse (literal destruction, genocide) associated with Realpolitik, and the positive pole of apocalypse, associated with hope for a radically other destiny besides that which grim reality seems to offer.

In chapter two I move on to a consideration of the Bible, which obviously is of crucial significance regarding apocalypse, providing its central paradigms. I argue that it uniquely combines "mythos" elements, in its narrative structure, and Logos elements, in its insistence on a relation with a radically "other" or absolutely transcendent realm. I suggest that the interaction of these two creates a new dialogical, historical space--or "apocalyptic space"--which has the character of a textual field where the orientation is towards signification and "meaning" in contrast to the "oral" mode of participating in the "being" of the cosmos via cultic ritual attunement with the cycles of nature. I discuss the four covenants of the Old Testament (Noah, Abraham, Sinai, David) as enactments of the process of what I call the "hermeneuticizing of the cosmos."

Also in chapter two I pursue some of the theoretical implications of this

apocalyptic/textual space by relating it to principles of biblical typology, Puritanism, and to surprisingly analogous ideas of apocalypse in the theories of Northrop Frye and Jacques Derrida.

Chapter three concentrates more specifically on Gravity's Rainbow with some consideration also given to The Crying of Lot 49 and other works of the American apocalyptic tradition. Tyrone Slothrop, I argue, can usefully be seen as a postmodern Puritan adrift in the Zone: the hyperreal postmodern space for which he has no Bible to serve as his great code. The Zone is an apocalyptic space of signification where the Rocket serves as another ambiguous Logos. If, in the words of the slave song, "God gave Noah the rainbow sign: no more water, the fire next time," Pynchon's V2 is his figuring of that apocalyptic fire. This exploding Word--with its metonymic links to the Bomb--is consistent with the double-edged symbolism of biblical apocalyptic revelations, including the smashed tablets of Sinai, the deferred Kingdom of Israel in exile, or Christ as the crucified Logos. In Gravity's Rainbow the Rocket is "the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word" (Lot 49 180). Finally, I will consider the way in which Pynchon's postmodern style is, itself, revelatory and apocalyptic.

CHAPTER 1

"Return and One-Shot Visitation"

In Terminal Visions: the Literature of Last Things (1982) W. Warren

Wagar distinguishes between the Judeo-Christian linear model of history and the more ancient cyclical model, derived from Greek and Mesopotamian antiquity. He suggests that

Both models may be traced far back into prehistory. Representing time's course as circular is an extrapolation from the rhythms of everyday life--the revolutions of the heavenly bodies around the earth, the cycle of the seasons, the sequence of animal and human generations. For the early stargazer or farmer, nothing could have been more natural than to assume the periodic decay and destruction of the whole world. Circular motion, like the circle itself, was an indication of health, regularity, obedience to the divine order. (34)

Such a view could be consoling, but it could also be demoralizing in its lack of concern for justice: it promised no retribution for oppressed nations or individuals and offered no millennial hope to the impoverished or dispossessed.

On the contrary, all triumphs on earth were necessarily empty. The greatest empires would fall, the sturdiest races would perish, the greatest wrongs would go unavenged except in a common doom

pulling down the just and the unjust together. The moral lesson might seem to be the futility of human effort, a conclusion drawn by many ancient poets and prophets. (34)

The Judeo-Christian linear model provides cosmic justice at its conclusion, and thus seems inherently more optimistic--provided one could be certain of being among the Elect chosen for salvation. But the cyclical view has its optimism too: catastrophe will be followed by regeneration and the end is never final (35).

Wagar also sensibly cautions against overstating the differences between the two models of history. The linear scheme can be represented as one grand cycle, and within the biblical history there are sub-cycles involving the rise and fall of the people of Israel in the repeated pattern of apostasy and repentance (Wagar 35, 42; Frye, Great Code 168-71). In the glib yet cogent summation from Gravity's Rainbow, "It's that familiar division between return and one-shot visitation" (584).

Distinguishing the linear apocalyptic mythos from the cyclical scheme of eternal recurrence, Frank Kermode suggests that "one has to think of an ordered series of events which ends, not in a great New Year, but in a final Sabbath. The events derive their significance from a unitary system, not from their correspondence with events in other cycles" (5). In other words, events in history are "meaningful" in so far as they relate to the single, linear, end-determined plot. As Kermode sees it, apocalyptic closure validates the meaning of history: its happy ending transvaluates the waste and suffering of human existence. The Sabbath world is one of full presence, full meaning, and the fulfilment of fallen history. Before interrogating this logocentric conception of apocalypse, I will first examine

the anti-apocalyptic or non-logocentric cyclical view and consider questions of the nature of historical being and meaning in such an imaginative space, the realm of endless repetition where events do not possess the autonomy of "fact" or resolve into full closure, but only relate to other events and other cycles--a world with affinities to the postmodern world of endless repetition, simulation, and perpetual signifying chains which are not ontologically grounded, do not close on a signified, and which seem motivated by some primordial absence rather than any creative or paradigmatic Word.

To begin to answer some of these questions it is useful to consider a distinction made by Northrop Frye in The Great Code between two types of cyclical myths, both of which involve a worship of nature in itself (rather than as a vehicle of the divine), which the Bible condemns. The first is the myth of the earth-mother who is

the most easily understood image of natura naturans, and she acquires its moral ambivalence. As the womb of all forms of life, she has a cherishing and nourishing aspect; as the tomb of all forms of life, she has a menacing and sinister aspect; as the manifestation of an unending cycle of life and death, she has an inscrutable and elusive aspect. (68)

The cycle she presides over (here Frye borrows the term from Plato's Timaeus) is the cycle of the different: "the life that emerges being always different from the life that gave birth to it. Hence the emphasis on renewal and the obliterating of the past" (69). Questions of origins and ends are thus subsumed in a sense of

nature as eternal process.

The second cyclical myth is more complex and "expands toward the conception of natura naturata, nature as a structure or system; and the symbolism of cyclical movement shifts to the sky" whose planets and stars embody the cycle of the same (69).

Such a cycle suggests planning and intelligence rather than mysterious power, and as this sense begins to dominate mythology the supreme god comes to be thought of increasingly as a sky-father. He is a father because he is a deity who does not bear or nurse his children, and hence a god who makes the world rather than one who brings life into existence by giving it birth. (69)

Elsewhere Frye calls this an "artificial" creation myth as opposed to the earth-mother or "organic" creation myth (Creation 31-3). Both are visions of cyclical recurrence, but the artificial creation myth clearly entails a movement in the logocentric direction: a movement away from the organic feminine cycles of nature and difference towards images of masculine artifice, transcendence and sameness. The image of the sky-father or maker of the objectified structure which is nature raises the inevitable questions of intention, the time of origin, and the purpose of the creation. If an all-powerful artificer made the world, is the world therefore perfect and complete? Or is it an imperfect copy of some perfect paradigm or archetype, and if so, what is the relation of our world--with its contingency, pain, and death--to that paradigm?

A text which gives a specific answer to these questions is the Timaeus, a

late text in which Plato presents a myth of origins. As Mircea Eliade notes, "that Plato reproduces such traditional visions in the dialogues that date from his old age is nowise astonishing; the evolution of his philosophical thought itself forced him to rediscover the mythological categories" (121-2).¹ Indeed, the Timaeus explicitly addresses the inevitable need to employ such categories when considering questions of origins.

The central cosmological distinction which Timaeus makes is between the archetypal or paradigmatic realm of "being" and the earthly world of "becoming," with its endless cycles and repetitions.

We must in my opinion begin by distinguishing between that which always is and never becomes from that which is always becoming but never is. The one is apprehensible by intelligence with the aid of reasoning, being eternally the same, the other is the object of opinion and irrational sensation, coming to be and ceasing to be, but never fully real. (27d-28a)

The cosmological account which Timaeus will give, however, will deal not only with the ideal pattern of the world of being, but also with the copy of it: the changing natural world of becoming. If this realm is not fully real a problem emerges as to how one can have true knowledge of it and how it can be described. Timaeus thus admits the limitations of his account:

. . . a description of what is changeless, fixed and clearly intelligible

¹ The dating of Timaeus is controversial. See Owen, Sayre, Kraut, and Meinwald.

will be changeless and fixed--will be, that is, as irrefutable and uncontrovertible as a description in words can be; but analogously a description of a likeness of the changeless, being a description of a mere likeness will be merely likely a likely story. (29b-d)

The myth Timaeus presents is of the "sky-father" sort in which a creating Demiurge "keeps his eye on the eternally unchanging and uses it as his pattern for the form and function of his product" (28). Frye observes that many artificial creation myths include a myth of a fall to account for the discrepancy between the original, perfect creation and the fluctuating, imperfect and evil world we inhabit (GC 33). The Timaeus contains no obvious account of a "fall," but the act of creation itself, in so far as it involves copying or a movement away from the ideal pattern, can be seen as a fall from the world of being to that of becoming. As a product of mimesis, the world is inevitably imperfect.

We are told very little about the character of the Demiurge. He seems to be more of an anthropomorphized abstraction than a distinct or wilful personality (and thus he is quite different from the volatile Old Testament deity). The demiurge is necessary to provide the impulse to creation--to set it all in motion. As to the nature of the pattern or "living being" in whose likeness the creator constructed the world, we are told that it is a perfect, intelligible whole "which comprises in itself all intelligible beings, just as this world contains ourselves and all visible creatures" (30d). Symmetry is an important characteristic; the "living being" is spherical such that all extremes are equidistant from its centre (33b). It is self-sustaining (33d) and has a self-validating, mathematical purity about it

(Plato's account here and throughout owes much to Pythagorean mathematics). It is considerably more abstract than, for example, the world of full presence imaged as the New Jerusalem. Plato's archetypal level--even as a "likely story"--is clearly and appropriately a product of philosophical reason, unlike Revelation's wish-fulfilment ideal city.

The soul of the world is modelled after this abstraction. Timaeus describes how the deity cut strips of the soul "fabric" and fashioned them into circles and spheres of precise mathematical proportion (35-36). The corporeal sphere was then created and merged, centre to centre, with the world soul (36e). The description in these sections parallels that of an armillary sphere, a model containing rings which represent the orbits of the stars and planets. In the Timaeian scheme, too, the planets and stars occupy spherical orbits, and their orderly movements embody a perfection which makes them not quite eternal like the Forms but a "moving image of eternity" (37d). They are associated with time, repetition and number, and thus suggest to individuals the higher intelligible realm in which they might "participate" (39b).

That this cyclical scheme contains apocalyptic moments of destruction is suggested early in the dialogue where Critias quotes an Egyptian priest's rationalized interpretation of the story of Phaeton. The priest regards this story as "a mythical version of the truth that there is at long intervals a variation in the course of the heavenly bodies and a consequent widespread destruction by fire of things on the earth" (22d). Unlike the biblical apocalypse, however, such cataclysms are not accompanied by an ultimate revelation, nor do they mark the

full closure of history. In the Egyptian priest's account, some cultures are forced to "begin again like children" (23a) because all written records are lost (whereas the Egyptians are careful to store their records in strategically located temples, thus preserving their traditions).

The more elaborate cosmological account which Timaeus presents later in the dialogue includes a discussion of the "Great Year" (Lee 54), a different kind of apocalyptic moment associated with the periodicity of the cyclical movements of the planets, a moment which in its temporal perfection approximates the eternal perfection of the Forms. For most individuals, celestial movements are "bewildering" in their number and intricacy. "None the less," Timaeus suggests,

it is perfectly possible to perceive that the perfect temporal number and the perfect year are complete when all eight orbits have reached their total of revolutions relative to each other, measured by the regularly moving orbit of the Same. In this way and for this purpose the stars which turn back in their course through the heavens were made, so that this world should in its imitation of the eternal nature resemble as closely as possible the perfect intelligible Living Creature [i.e., the paradigm]. (39d)

Even at this moment of closest resemblance there remains an ontological gulf between the physical universe and the pattern, or between the "moving image of eternity" and eternity itself.

For Plato--in the Timaeus, at least--the central means of bridging this gulf and participating in the Forms is through the exercise of reason. Reason is the

authoritative part of the soul and embodies "the motion of the Same and uniform in [one]self" (42c). Education, especially the study of the "harmonious circuits of the universe," helps to "repair the damage done at birth to the circuits in our head, and so restore understanding and what is understood to their original likeness to each other" (90d). This version of anamnesis is more vividly dramatized in Timaeus's account of how the Demiurge created "as many souls as there are stars, and allotted each soul to a star. And mounting them on their stars, as if on chariots, he showed them the nature of the universe and told them the laws of their destiny" (41d-e). Through the rational mastery of the passions and the leading of a good life, the individual could even "return home to his native star and live an appropriately happy life" (42b). Like the Forms, the human soul is immortal, but it is also alive and intelligent, existing in time. It thus partakes of both the sensible and intelligible worlds with the faculty of reason, in particular, being the bridge between the two. Through the practice of philosophy one may attain union with the Forms.

The Platonic cosmology as I have sketched it thus far is dualistic with the eternal, static, paradigmatic level of pure "being" separated from the world of becoming with its varying types of movement: the cycles of the same (planetary motion), cycles of difference (generation), or, at worst, disorderly or irrational movement. A bridging of these two levels does not occur via an apocalyptic rupture or temporal discontinuity but through the exercise of reason which furnishes the dialectical ladder allowing progress up the ontological continuum towards purer being or truer knowledge. Essentially, this is an anti-apocalyptic

scheme for the attainment of truth (reality or full presence). Renaissance and Enlightenment developments in apocalyptic thought would move in this direction, downplaying the cataclysmic or discontinuous in favour of the idea of a gradual salvation and the gradual attainment, via advances in human understanding and science, of a utopian condition on earth. Thus the millennial part of the book of Revelation would be emphasized: the (thousand year) earthly realm of Christ which precedes the Last Judgment. Indeed, just what to do with the idea of the Last Judgment becomes a central problem; ultimately it was abandoned for the secularized ideal of progress.

Would Plato have embraced the idea of an attainable Utopia or ideal condition? The image of the virtuous soul returned to its star seems more of a poetic image of perfection--an aspect of Plato's "likely story"--despite its place in Plato's rational structure of explanation. Indeed, it suggests unattainability more than a "literal" goal. Of course, even the stars represent only the perfect movement of the same: the moving image of eternity. The eternal pattern or the Forms remain absolutely transcendent. They belong to a radically other order beyond history.

Is the ideal state outlined in Plato's Republic meant to represent an attainable earthly condition? Obviously I cannot deal with this question in all its complexity here, but it is useful to consider it briefly in so far as it presents a suggestive contrast with apocalyptic conceptions of radical otherness and discontinuity, but also for clues Plato reveals about "logocentrism" and that which seems to subvert logocentrism, what poststructuralism would call "textuality."

Revelation describes the new Jerusalem as a city where God will "make all things new" (21.5), where "there shall no more be anything accursed" and where "the Lord God shall reign for ever and ever" (22.3-5). It can be seen as representing a city of fulfilled desire, radically distinct from any present earthly order.² The Republic, on the other hand, is less a vision of fulfilled wish than of fulfilled reason; but is reason any more likely to attain fulfilment than desire? Could the ideal Republic ever exist?

In Book V of the Republic Socrates admits that the ideal state could never exist in actuality with the perfection which it has as a purely verbal creation:

Is it possible for anything to be realized in deed as it is spoken in word, or is it the nature of things that action should partake of exact truth less than speech, even if some deny it? Do you admit it or not?

I do, he [Glaucou] said. (473a)

As his letters remind us, Plato was well aware of the tyrannical nature of actual political states. The unjust death of Socrates was surely a profound example of the imperfection of society. Of what value, then, is Plato's portrait of the ideal state? Some of its features may be worthy of realization at the political level, but perhaps, as Northrop Frye suggests, the Republic is above all an allegory of "the wise man's mind" (GC 131). This is the implication of the concluding lines of

² The images of torment and punishment can be seen as images fulfilling desires for revenge on others (for D.H. Lawrence "the second half of the Apocalypse is flamboyant hate and simple lust . . . for the end of the world" [33]). They are also powerful images of the inverse of wish: fear.

Book IX:

I understand, he [Adimantus] said. You mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is in the ideal, for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth.

Well, said I, perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city only will be his and of none other. (592a-b)

The Republic is a state of rationally ordered consciousness or it is a "pattern . . . laid up in heaven." Each is an aspect of "Logos" or reason which (for Plato and for much of ancient Greek thought) is both the law of the cosmic order and the essence of individual consciousness (Bultmann 5). There seems to be genuine doubt, however, that the pattern can be realized in the material world. The rational individual confronting the pattern and attempting to realize it in actual historical experience would thus occupy a position paralleling that of the Demiurge of the Timaeus who contemplates the Forms and fashions the world of becoming in their imitation. It is crucial to note here that the element which resists utopian human progress is the same element that the Demiurge had to contend with and which prevented the created order from having the same degree of perfection as the Forms. This element Plato calls "necessity" and it refers to the intransigent materiality of the cosmos: that which must be subdued into order but can never be completely controlled.

Half-way through the dialogue, Timaeus acknowledges that the dualistic cosmological scheme he has been outlining is inadequate and--in a significant moment of narrative repetition--begins his account again.

We must start our new description of the universe by making a fuller subdivision than we did before; we then distinguished two forms of reality--we must now add a third. Two were enough at an earlier stage, when we postulated on the one hand an intelligible and unchanging model and on the other a visible and changing copy of it. We did not distinguish a third form, considering two would be enough; but now the argument compels us to try to describe in words a form that is difficult and obscure. What must we suppose its powers and nature to be? In general terms, it is the receptacle and, as it were, the nurse of all becoming and change. (49a)

We may indeed use the metaphor of birth and compare the receptacle to the mother, the model to the father, and what they produce between them to their offspring. (50d)

Thus the Logos, either as perfect paradigm or intelligent will (exemplified by the Demiurge or "sky-father") is associated with the masculine and is opposed to the feminine necessity. Necessity is less a personality than the essence (or anti-essence) of formless materiality. In its more active figuration it is called (in various translations) the "indeterminate," "wandering," or "errant cause" (48a). The creation of the universe is the result of the "subordination of necessity to

reasonable persuasion" (48a), but this subordination is not completely successful, hence the imperfection of the created order. The Demiurge, it seems, is not all-powerful, and necessity is as primordial as the Forms: both are "essential" or "necessary" constituents of the universe.

Thus the Platonic dualism gives way to a three-term schema made up of the Forms (being), the copy (becoming) and a tertium quid, the "receptacle" (necessity, at times called "space" [52d]). From the point of view of becoming--the world which we inhabit and which we imperfectly know--the other two categories can be seen as manifestations of radical otherness, but they are "other" in contrasting ways. The Forms are other than the experientially known world in that they are transcendent: separated by an ontological gulf, possibly unknowable (although it is the aim of philosophy to try to attain knowledge of them). Necessity is a sort of residual otherness, traces of which permeate the universe. It is that which resists understanding, conceptualization, order, logocentric formal closure or perfection. It is more closely related to the hardness of the "real" than to the ideal.

Just as the mimetic act of the creation of the universe involves a struggle of the intelligent and errant causes, so does the mimetic act of creating a verbal account of a philosophical truth. Ideally, perfection should be perfectly expressible, but the material which is language seems to resist perfect formalization and, to some extent, falsify its object. Thus language partakes of both the Logos (and is therefore a vehicle for the attainment of truth) and of necessity (which subverts or resists logocentric closure). The Timaeus, with its

discussions of the limitations of language, its self-deprecating self-conception as a "likely story," and its narrative repetitiousness, seems to circle around the truth which it would like to express.

Plato's own writings, I am suggesting, exemplify an awareness of and struggle with the element of necessity inherent in language, what recent literary theory calls "textuality." Nevertheless, because of his theory of the Forms, Plato tends to be viewed these days as the big, logocentric villain. The Socratic dialectical method of approaching the Forms is seen as the paradigm which established reason's monopoly on the truth (Norris, Deconstruction 60). That much of the philosophic tradition after Plato has proceeded to fetishize rationally presented knowledge is perhaps true, but Plato himself does not do this.

Plato is not naive about what the written text can accomplish. In Letter VII he writes:

. . . no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially not into a form that is unalterable--which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols. (343a)

Similarly, in the Phaedrus, Socrates condemns writing in favour of discourse and dialectic, but the larger irony is that the dialogue is, of course, a written text.

Another Platonic irony concerns the fact that Plato banishes the poets from the Republic when he is, himself--as Longinus, Sidney, and Shelley would observe--a poet. The dialogue form is a literary form: it may imitate dialectic, but when you ask it a question it will not answer back (Phaedrus 275d). Plato's dialogues

are openly dramatic and make no pretence to express the truth without mediation. Indeed, the forms of subsequent texts of philosophy involve far less acknowledgement of figurative mediation, and philosophical language in general comes to be defined as non-metaphorical. In the words of Jonathan Culler, philosophy attempts "to claim that its statements are structured by logic, reason, truth, and not by the rhetoric of the language in which they are 'expressed'" (Culler 91). Plato knows better. This is not to suggest that Plato was a proto-poststructuralist: textuality was something to be struggled with and overcome. Unlike contemporary theorists, he did not regard it as a possible source of another kind of (non-logocentric) truth.

In her book, The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists (1977), Iris Murdoch examines all Plato's accounts of the theory of the Forms (and there are many, none being definitive), showing how Plato was continually re-presenting his theory, abandoning the imperfect logic or images of his own previous accounts and refashioning them in new ones which themselves would be abandoned and replaced. It becomes apparent that Plato was his own most persistent interpreter, and his philosophy can be seen as an ongoing process of hermeneuses. In the following quotation Murdoch (with rather astonishing succinctness) gives an illuminating summary of Plato's various accounts of the Form of the Good:

In the Phaedo Socrates fears that the sun will blind him, but in the Republic (516b) the perfectly just man looks at the sun and 'is able to see what it is, not by reflections in water or by fantasm of it in some alien abode, but in and by itself in its own place.' This is the

direct perception which the Theaetetus rejects as a possible description of knowledge. The God of the Phaedrus condemns writing because it interposes a speechless medium between the knower and the known. However, in the Parmenides the Forms as objects of knowledge are in trouble, and in the Sophist knowledge appears as familiarity with interwoven structure rather than acquaintance with individual realities. In the Philebus and in the Timaeus Plato develops the idea, present mythically in the Symposium and the Phaedrus, of beauty as the mediator between us and Good; and is then the more meticulously anxious to keep this precious instrument away from the tarnishing hands of art. (58)

We might say simply that Plato is inconsistent in his writings, but we should acknowledge this inconsistency as a sign of his honest struggle--and inevitable failure--to say exactly what he means (hence the need to try again). But if Plato fails, it is a failure to which even the creating Demiurge succumbs. Plato's writings demonstrate the tension between logocentrism and textuality, and if Plato was unsatisfied with the myths, metaphors, or images he had to invoke in articulating his truths, they nevertheless vividly convey his meaning. Language, it seems, has powers both to conceal and reveal.

For Plato and for much of the subsequent logocentric tradition philosophy involved the "subordination of necessity to reasonable persuasion" (Timaeus 48a) in the attempt to forge a dialectical ladder to connect becoming to being in an ontological continuum. This involved conquering or ignoring necessity in its

various manifestations: linguistic (textuality), as a subversive aspect of consciousness (the unconscious), or as the irreducible element of randomness or contingency in the objective world. That the depreciated realm of necessity could be the locus of an "other" sort of non-logocentric "truth" would be a central premise to Nietzsche, Freud, and poststructuralism, and it is implicit in the narrative strategies of much postmodern literature. These theorists, theories and texts emphatically do not depreciate what Plato calls the "unsought particular" which contaminates or detracts from "essential reality" (Letter VII 343b-c). Rather, they see just such elements as the keys to new modes of understanding. For Freud jokes, puns, and verbal slips are clues to the agency of the unconscious: the otherness within the self. Derrida, with his minute analyses of particularly problematic words or nodal points within texts, proceeds to reveal the forces of textuality which destabilize any sense of full logocentric closure. At the level of narrative content, Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 wittily presents an underground communications system that is known by the acronym "WASTE," and in Gravity's Rainbow a character hopes that "Somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom" (525). Such approaches, in so far as they do not pursue any logocentric continuity to Truth but examine ruptures and discontinuities, have affinities with the quality of discontinuity which characterizes apocalyptic revelations of the "radically other."

Perhaps the most famous apocalyptic moment in Plato's own writings occurs in Letter VII in which Plato decries the "inadequacy of language" to convey essential realities (343a). Plato disparages the four ways or objects through which

knowledge of things is attained: names and descriptions are arbitrary verbal expressions and thus have no "sure ground that is sure enough" (343b); physical objects and concepts are too tied to the particular. "Consideration of all four in turn--moving up and down from one to another--barely begets knowledge of a naturally flawless object in a naturally flawless man," itself a rare enough phenomenon (344e). Seemingly frustrated with this ontological ladder as an easy "method" for the attainment of truth (as some of his students were beginning to assume), Plato makes the pronouncements which, with their emphasis on discipline and illumination, would be an inspiration to mystics for centuries:

[True knowledge] must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining. (341c-d)

Hardly after practising detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light. (344b)

Plato is suggesting that, in the final instance, the study of philosophy or the ladder of dialectic, although necessary, will not by itself conduct one to the level of absolute Truth. Logocentric continuity must be supplemented by a discontinuous

apocalyptic spark to bridge the final gap between opinion and true understanding. Thus, it seems that the transcendent Logos and the Logos which is individual consciousness (immersed in history or the world of becoming) cannot coalesce into a pure identity; the transcendent Logos remains a supplement to individual consciousness--even as it is the defining essence of that consciousness. The apocalyptic spark which welds individual and universal mind is simultaneously the trace of otherness or seam of discontinuity which blemishes or qualifies that full logocentric presence.

Letter VII, which reveals the mystical or apocalyptic side of Plato, is, itself, a supplement to the dialogues which most often privilege the rational side.³ It should be reaffirmed that, as the passages quoted above insist, the spark of understanding does not replace the hard work of study and practice of philosophy; such study remains an essential prelude to the experience of the flash of understanding. That this should necessarily be the case did not go unquestioned, and the "apocalyptic moment" of Letter VII is a crucial moment revealing the insufficiency of reason alone--the sort of moment which suggests a possible deconstructive reversal of the whole hierarchy. The English romantic poets would explore the possibility that Truth is more concerned with imagination or "apocalyptic vision" than with reason; poetic flight rather than laborious dialectic could transport one immediately to essential reality. Shelley, in particular, was influenced in this regard by Plato's Letter VII and by the subsequent neoplatonic

³ More than a supplement, Letter VII might even be a forgery (see Kraut and Ryle)--a possibility which adds a nice paranoid spin to the whole issue.

tradition (Woodman chs. 1-4).

In the Ion Plato criticizes the irrational nature of poetic inspiration and the knowledge claims it makes, for only reason can bestow knowledge: "a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him" (534b). That the poet is "beside himself" (or, as another translation has it, "out of his mind") is particularly suggestive given my concern with Pynchon in so far as it suggests the idea of paranoia: "besides-thinking." For Plato, rational thought--the perception of a unitary, intelligible order--is emphatically not paranoid. For Pynchon, as I will discuss, it emphatically is.

If Plato with some reluctance admits the necessity of an apocalyptic (discontinuous, non-logocentric) supplement to dialectic at the highest level of the pursuit of understanding (and he admits this only in a supplemental letter), as a general rule discontinuities and particularities are viewed as traces of otherness which serve only to contaminate "essential reality."

Every circle that is drawn or turned on a lathe in actual operations abounds in the opposite of the fifth entity [its essence], for it everywhere touches the straight, while the real circle, I maintain, contains in itself neither much nor little of the opposite character.

(Letter VII 343a)

The essential circle would be pure in its self-identity, containing no trace of otherness. Names and descriptions, Plato continues, are similarly unstable in so far as they are arbitrary ("nothing prevents the things that are now called round

from being called straight. . ."), lacking an ontological ground. Thus, "when the mind is in quest of knowledge not of the particular but of the essential" it is constantly brought up against the "unsought particular, whether in verbal or in bodily form." Because of this,

the reality that is expressed in words or illustrated in objects [is] liable to easy refutation by the evidence of the senses. The result of this is to make practically every man a prey to complete perplexity and uncertainty. (343c)

Unlike Keats or the post-Heisenbergian Pynchon, Plato sees no value or richness in the realm of "uncertainty." Particularities, uncertainties--indeed, history itself--is depreciated. Truth resides in the intelligible and is only obscured by the phenomenal world. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the ladder of intellection can only be completed by the apocalyptic and discontinuous singularity of the flash of insight--a sort of transcendental particularity which is free of the impurities of the historically particular.



In the preceding section I employed Plato's mythopoeic dialogue, the Timaeus, as a convenient and suggestive articulation of the natures of the space of "being," which Plato clearly privileges, and the space of "becoming," which Plato depreciates as not fully real and not fully knowable. Yet this dualism proves inadequate to support the particular vision of the cosmos which Plato is sketching,

so he is compelled to introduce a third term, necessity, which functions as the "other" of being: an anti-essence or the intransigent materiality the cosmos which Plato also associates with that element of language which resists formalization and prevents words from ever being able to express the Truth (or the Real, or the Forms) in its purity. Since apocalypse (as I am defining it) involves the revelation of an "other" order radically discontinuous with the mundane experiential world, I suggested that the realm of the transcendent Forms can be seen as "other" in its transcendence and (invoking Letter VII) requires an apocalyptic revelation or "flash [of] understanding" to be glimpsed. Likewise, I suggested that necessity functions as a sort of residual (as opposed to transcendent) otherness, which permeates the cosmos, an otherness which later philosophers of discontinuity-- Nietzsche, Freud, Derrida--would regard as the locus in which other sorts of non-logocentric truths could be revealed. Yet the oral mythologies, via myths and rituals of repetition, attempted to negotiate the realm of becoming in their own, distinctly non-platonic and non-theoretical manners, and in this section I will draw upon the works of Mircea Eliade, Eric Havelock and Walter Ong to re-contextualize the realms of becoming and being in terms of the opposition between orality and literacy in order to reveal more apocalyptic implications in the evolving incarnations of the Word.⁴

⁴ The theories of Eliade, Havelock, and Ong are invaluable in my tracing of the "trajectory" of the Word from oral performance through literacy to the Bomb. Their theories, however, have been challenged, especially regarding their tendency to overemphasize the break between the mythic/oral consciousness and that of literacy. See Kirk, Street, Finnegan, Thomas, Murray (Early Greece and "Word"), and essays in Robb.

In The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History, Mircea Eliade examines "the fundamental concepts of archaic societies," the most prominent of which is "their revolt against concrete, historical time, their nostalgia for a periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to the 'Great Time'" (ix). Plato, in his quest to escape from the historical world of becoming to attain knowledge of the intelligible order, and in his theory of anamnesis, provides a late and very sophisticated example of this tendency. Eliade, for the most part, is concerned with earlier "premodern" societies of Asia and Europe for whom the escape from history involved the ritual repetition of archetypal gestures, rather than the practice of philosophical dialectic. For "Archaic man,"⁵ every significant activity (religious rite, agricultural practice, alimentation, war, etc.) is significant only in so far as it repeats or participates in the paradigm of that act, be it cosmically primordial or mythical. Such acts "are repeated because they were consecrated in the beginning ('in those days,' *in illo tempore*, *ab origine*) by gods, ancestors, or heroes" (4). Similarly, objects and individuals possess identity only to the extent that they participate in an archetype. In and of themselves--as historical particulars--they possess no autonomous intrinsic value (3). Eliade's central premise is that

the chief difference between the man of the archaic and traditional

⁵ The phrase is Eliade's (95) and is characteristic not only of the historical moment in which his book was published (1949), but of Eliade's broad-brushed, generalizing approach to his subject. In so far as the attitudes towards archetypes and repetition which he is investigating involve the suppression of difference (as I shall discuss shortly), Eliade's abstract and gender-biased formulations are curiously "appropriate."

societies and the man of the modern societies with their strong imprint of Judaeo-Christianity lies in the fact that the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms, whereas the latter insists that he is connected only with History. (xiii-xiv)

The archaic cosmology is cyclical and therefore anti-apocalyptic. Even world-destroying catastrophes are merely repetitions of some primordial act of destruction, and thus they are not really apocalypses in the fullest sense of the word: since regeneration is guaranteed they do not entail a radical discontinuity of the world order and the revelation of some radically "other" order. The Archaic cosmos is a holistic one in which events, activities and identities participate, via the fact of their being repetitions, in the "beingness" of the archetypes. The world of becoming is not the alienated, imperfect and imperfectly known place that Plato makes it out to be. Rather, Eliade suggests, "among all the forms of becoming, historical becoming too is saturated with being" (123), thus there was felt no pressing need to escape, via dialectic, to the level of purer reality.

Of course, "archaic man" did not exactly have the tools of dialectic at hand. In A Preface to Plato (1963) Eric Havelock has convincingly shown how Plato, with the essential assistance of the technologies of writing and literacy, marks a decisive break from the preceding oral tradition.⁶ Havelock suggests that Plato was vehemently hostile to the way in which the Greek ethos (or expression of

⁶ To what extent Plato was idiosyncratic or characteristic of the general philosophical climate is difficult to determine. See White p. 304.

cultural coherence) resided in poetry which was orally memorized and repeated by successive generations, functioning as a "tribal encyclopedia" (234, 208). Homer epitomized this mode of oral consciousness and, Havelock suggests, his epic poetry was constructed in such a way that facilitated its memorization: it dealt with memorable persons and events with which the hearer could identify. Poetry, with its oral mnemonic "technologies" of rhythm, epithets and repeated stock descriptions, functioned as a sort of spell to entrance the listener. Plato abhorred this passive state of mind which identifies with narratively vivid objects. Instead he advocated the critically active consciousness epitomized by Socrates, and this state of mind would be embodied in a new type of language, the "abstract language of descriptive science" instead of the "concrete language of oral memory" (236). Thus, the response to a poem, or to any morally or culturally significant statement (which would necessarily be poeticized), should not entail mere identification and repetition of the poetic performance, but (for Plato) should involve a break from this via the method of dialectic.

In its earliest form, dialectic consisted of asking a speaker not just to repeat but to reformulate what he said and explain what he meant (208). Thus "meaning" is being pried loose from the performative poetic context: Plato demands something more than the immediacy or full presence of the images, characters, and events of an epic narrative. It is not sufficient that a poem just "be": it must "mean," and the first step towards ascertaining the abstract meaning of something is to "demand that it be said differently, non-poetically, non-rhythmically, and non-imagistically" (209). It is here that an ontological gulf is

being created between the worlds of opinion and true knowledge, or between becoming and being. Oral consciousness can allow one to be "familiar with beautiful actions and events"--vividly depicted in their particularity--but not with "beauty per se"--the essence of beauty, removed from a particularized narrative context (Republic 476b, qtd. in Havelock). Havelock concludes that

Platonism at bottom is an appeal to substitute a conceptual discourse for an imagistic one. As it becomes conceptual, the syntax changes, to connect abstractions in timeless relationships instead of counting up events in a time series; such discourse yields the abstracted objects of 'intellection.' (261)

Havelock makes the suggestive observation that, for Plato, being "is not a noun but a syntactical situation," and this syntax is one of timelessness: abstracted objects of knowledge simply "are"; they "cannot share in the syntax of process and time, for they are not statements of specific situations and instances, not statements of action" (226). Removed from a particularized narrative context, such objects are free from the taint of otherness; as Plato repeatedly affirms, the object per se is "always holding itself self-identical within the same" (227). But this purity of self-identity effectively removes them (or understanding of them) from the realm of becoming, and thus they become "other" in their transcendence. Dialectic, which was to be a tool for the understanding of essential realities--in its act of radical de-contextualization--projects those realities right out of sight. As I have suggested, this otherness of transcendence necessitates a highly problematic apocalyptic leap for understanding of it to be attained.

The opposition between the narrative syntax of orality, and the timeless syntax of "being" which literate consciousness makes possible, can be restated as an opposition between poetic mythos and dialectical Logos (Havelock 236). Logocentric understanding is abstract, conceptual, static, totalized, timeless, free of otherness, and closed. Mythos, on the other hand, is concrete, imagistic, dynamic, pluralized, time-bound, particular, and open. In Homer's narrative, for example, "Agamemnon is noble in one context and base in another; therefore he is both noble and not noble, base and not base," and for Plato, such wandering between different states of being is contradictory and thus cannot give knowledge of essential reality (227). Similarly, in the shift from mythos to Logos, "cosmogony" becomes "cosmology": a story about the genesis or birth of the cosmos (such as that presented in the vivid mythological language of Hesiod) becomes an abstract discourse about the pattern or system of permanent relations which makes up the natural order (299).

My digression into Havelock's theories of the orality/literacy, mythos/Logos opposition provides useful categories to qualify and clarify Eliade's theory of the nature of archaic ontology, especially its anti-apocalyptic character. In the first place, when Eliade speaks of "archaic ontology" he is being anachronistic: the ancient mythologies, rituals and world views he is concerned with are aspects of the broader mythos orientation of oral consciousness; it is only with the later logocentrism of Plato (foreshadowed in some of the pre-socratics) that a concern with "being" itself (or ontology) emerges. Eliade acknowledges as much in his opening chapter:

It is useless to search archaic languages for the terms so laboriously created by the great philosophical traditions: there is every likelihood that such words as "being," "nonbeing," "real," "unreal," "becoming," "illusory," are not to be found in the language of the [primitive] Australians or of the ancient Mesopotamians. But if the word is lacking, the thing is present; only it is "said"--that is, revealed in a coherent fashion--through symbols and myths. (3)

In simplest terms, Eliade is suggesting that archaic symbols and myths, while functioning as the ground of being or the source of all identity and significance, are not abstracted entities existing in a pristine transcendent realm. For pre-logocentric, archaic cultures, "being" is not a transcendent other separated from the experiential world by an ontological gulf which can only be bridged by the apocalyptic supplement to dialectic. Rather, being is immanently present, and the full presence of being is experienced here and now through the repetition of archetypal gestures and rituals, or in the synchronizing of activities with the archetypal patterns or cosmological rhythms. Thus the cosmos is holistic rather than dualistic, and there is no need for apocalyptic breakthroughs to some purer "other" realm. Eliade's suggestion that, in the archaic world, historical becoming is "saturated with being" (123) can be restated in Havelock's terms:

. . . the integrity of the 'itself per se', conceived as category or as principle or as property or the like, gets broken up and scattered and dispersed through the pluralised instances, where we can say it may be present as a principle 'by implication', but where in fact it

was not present in the Homeric discourse because that discourse lacked the linguistic facilities to name it. (256)

Thus, Logos is dispersed through mythos rather than being transcendently separated from it. Indeed, for archaic societies, distinctions between the divine "level," "nature," and the particularly human existential space (or "history") had not yet emerged: the three were inextricably blended. Gods had a numinous presence within nature and individuals. History, conceived of as a narrative discourse about unique, humanly-experienced events, did not really exist: all events were subsumed into the archetypal patterns or stories which repeat themselves in an eternal return.

It is only with the advent of literacy that there occurs what Havelock calls the "separation of the knower from the known" (197). The habit of identifying oneself with myths, narratives or rituals was gradually replaced with the adoption of a critical distance so that "it now became possible to identify the 'subject' in relation to that 'object' which the 'subject' knows" (201). Havelock even goes so far as to suggest that this constitutes the birth of the "autonomous psyche":

Such a discovery of self could be only of the thinking self. The 'personality', as first invented by the Greeks and then presented to posterity for contemplation, could not be that nexus of motor responses, unconscious reflexes, and passions and emotions which had been mobilised for countless time in the service of the mnemonic process. On the contrary, it was precisely these which proved an obstacle to the realisation of a self-consciousness

emancipated from the condition of an oral culture. The psyche which slowly asserts itself in independence of the poetic performance and the poetised tradition had to be the reflective, thoughtful, critical psyche, or it could be nothing. (200)⁷

It would be pointlessly nostalgic to view this alienation from nature or "fall" into objectivity as a "bad thing." It was a shift in consciousness that facilitated a new relation between individuals and the cosmos, one allowing for abstract understanding and technological control, and hence "progress." The extent to which these things can make human experience even more barbarous and horrific than in a "primitive" culture became obvious in the twentieth century (and technocentrism is an important theme for Pynchon). The modern and postmodern deconstruction of the autonomous subject and interrogation of the extent to which rationally ordered existence nevertheless still involves "that nexus of motor responses, unconscious reflexes, and passions" is an attempt--a conscious, analytic attempt--to understand the complex integration or holism of pre-literate culture, or to disinter such elements from the fragmented or overly abstracted logocentric tradition we inhabit. Perhaps "we" are not as in control as we thought; perhaps the psyche is not as autonomous and self-regulating as we had hoped or assumed. Perhaps the Logos is not the transcendent absolute whose power and authority we have rationally and technologically grasped. A re-examination of the

⁷ Havelock is being extreme in his formulation. Other scholars caution against such overstatement and regard the mentality of even the Archaic Greeks as, in many central respects, not unlike our own. See Williams, Shame and Necessity (1993).

extent to which the Logos is scattered through the "pluralised instances" of experience was in order.

Thus, the archaic cosmos, unlike the Platonic cosmos, was one in which pure being was integrated and tangibly present in the realm of experience. In effect, there was no clear distinction between being and becoming: the mythologized and ritualized processes and cycles of the cosmos were themselves the ground of being, identity and significance. Archetypes were not understood and spoken of as timeless patterns or Forms, but were pluralized mythical narratives, endlessly repeating. Archetypes were multiple and various, and could tolerate and integrate even contradictions, making them comprehensible not in a rational way but in a participatory manner typical of oral consciousness: this sacrifice, this battle, this experience of suffering shared an identity with an archetypal model.

Eliade's discussion of "the Symbolism of the Center" (12 ff.) considers the concrete manifestations of purer identity which exist immanently in the archaic world. Most important is "the Sacred Mountain--where heaven and earth meet-- [which] is situated at the center of the world." This identity extends itself: "Every temple or palace--and, by extension, every sacred city or royal residence--is a Sacred Mountain, thus becoming a Center" (12). Other symbols of the center include the axis mundi, the world navel or omphalos, Babylon (Bab-ilane, "gate of the gods"), and the rock of Jerusalem (12-15). In short, "the center . . . is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred, the zone of absolute reality" (17), and the tangible presence of such centers illustrates just how radically different archaic

views are from those of Plato, for whom the absolutely real is absolutely beyond.

In Gravity's Rainbow the symbolism of the "center" is both present and explicitly (self-consciously) named as such. The center is always associated with the Rocket which is found, to quote the title of the largest of the novel's four chapters, "In The Zone." This "Zone" is the chaotic and nationally, politically and militarily confused space which was Germany at the close of the Second World War, a space in the process of "decentralizing, back toward anarchism" (GR 265). As one character describes it, "this War--this incredible War--just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years. Wiped it clean. Opened it" (265, emphasis in the original). Such a space seems quite unlike "the zone of absolute reality" as Eliade characterizes the center, but in another sense, it has distinct affinities.

Eliade suggests that the symbolism of the center is also associated with (or "is") the place where the Creation occurred, and this "cosmogonic act" involved the movement from chaos to order, or "from the nonmanifested to the manifested, from the formless to the formed" (18-19). In human acts which entail a repetition of the act of Creation--acts which include sacrifice, baptism, and consecration--"primordial chaos [is] reactualized" for a "paradoxical instant" (62). This "instant" I would characterize as another "apocalyptic moment" in so far as it marks a moment of discontinuity between the old order and the new or, expressed in its extreme, between disorder and order itself. The above quoted passage from Gravity's Rainbow suggests that Pynchon's "Zone" occupies just such an apocalyptic moment of time which, for the Argentine anarchist who is speaking,

offers a glimpse of an exhilarating potential for a new political order and freedom. Whether this apocalyptic, visionary hope can be realized historically is, in the novel, a vexed and problematic question. New and even more totalitarian power structures seem ready to fill the breach (if indeed there ever was any breach: the suggestion is made that the war itself was staged by "Them" and served their needs admirably). Even in Eliade's analysis of the functioning of the cosmogonic ritual we can see that the momentary rupture it entails is quickly assimilated into the cyclical and ritual continuity, a move which, in effect, purges the moment of its radical otherness, making it into a pure repetition of the original act of Creation. The extent to which the repetition differs from its archetypal model is suppressed. Apocalyptic openness is immediately closed and the potential for the revelation of a radically other vision or order becomes mere repetition of the same (or so the ritual implies).

For Plato, dialectic subsumes the "unsought particular" into the logocentric continuity towards the essential. Similarly, the eternally returning myths and rituals absorb the historically particular into their archetypal narratives. Thus both, in their differing ways, are anti-apocalyptic; yet both contain apocalyptic moments which qualify either the logocentric continuity to Truth, or the continuity of the endlessly repeating mythos of an archaic oral culture. In the case of Plato, dialectic has succeeded in abstracting the real from any historically particularized context and projecting it into a realm which is other in its transcendence, thus necessitating a discontinuous apocalyptic spark of insight for knowledge of it to be attained. In cultures dominated by myths of eternal return, since pure being is not

separated from experience by an ontological gulf but "scattered" through it, there would seem to be no need for a discontinuous apocalyptic leap to the higher realm of "being." But the fact that "being" is not a transcendent other but is, instead, integrated into the mythic weave does not mean that there are no discontinuous apocalyptic moments. The extent to which particular objects, individuals and acts are "other" than the archetypes which define them implies the presence of a sort of "residual otherness" similar to that which we have considered in the context of Plato's Timaeus. There, such otherness was considered to be an aspect of necessity which was to be subordinated by reason. A similar subordination happens in the assimilation of event to archetype, but this very act of assimilation has a discontinuous apocalyptic character which is most clearly apparent in ritual repetitions of the cosmogonic moment.

The Platonic apocalyptic flash of understanding is essentially an individualized experience involving one consciousness and the larger principle of consciousness and reason (the Logos) itself and (in theory, at least) aims at the perception or experience of Truth of an absolutely disinterested sort. In contrast, the "cosmogonic moment" of ritual repetition is a much more public and social event, immersed as it is in the weave of myth, symbol, public ritual, and political structure. It is not merely an articulation of a particular cultural ethos, but, to a considerable degree, the performative ground of that ethos. And this performative, far from being a mere linguistic act, is very much of a political one. Hesiod's Theogony, a text historically situated on the border between oral and literate consciousness (Havelock 97), candidly acknowledges the extent to which poetry is

contradict; you can without any difficulty contradict Socrates" (201d). In an oral culture there could be assumed no such supra-contextual, meta-linguistic, non-contradictory "truth." Indeed, in an oral culture "contradiction" is not a logical scandal which qualifies validity, but a literal "speaking against" in which the agonistic nature of truth is revealed: truth is bound up in the play or struggle of empowered interests. This is not to say that oral "truth" resolves into the will to power of particular individuals. As a verbal technology (Havelock 42) there seems to be a degree of autonomy in poetry--especially in myths--which lifts it beyond the control of mere individuals, giving it a larger, collective sort of function. The prince who mythologizes his power mythologizes himself and, to some extent, is eclipsed by his own archetype: he becomes a character in the cultural narrative.

With reference to pre-literate Greek culture, Havelock suggests that oral verse was the instrument of a cultural indoctrination, the ultimate purpose of which was the preservation of group identity. It was selected for this role because, in the absence of the written record, its rhythms and formulas provided the sole mechanism of recall and of re-use. (100)

Havelock explicitly rejects the notion that some sort of unconscious communal mind preserves and transmits the apparatus of civilization. From his perspective, Eliade's notion of archetypes is similarly too abstract, heuristically useful but possibly misleading with its metaphysical overtones (although Eliade is careful to disassociate himself from Jung). For Havelock, a "verbal archetype" is defined as an aspect of "verbal technology": the specific embodiment of the "tradition" in

poetic forms which, through repeated enactment, guarantees the tradition's preservation and transmission (41-2). Thus there is an inherent conservatism to the poetic practices of oral cultures. They are not revelations of the radically new or other, but consolidations of the same. Havelock thus sees an allegorical appropriateness in Hesiod's identification of the Muses as the daughters of Mnemosune (Memory): "They are not the daughters of inspiration or invention, but basically of memorisation. Their central role is not to create but to preserve" (100).

In archaic oral cultures (as in any culture), the vast majority of events, individuals and experiences are simply not worthy of being remembered or preserved in poetic "technology" as part of the "tradition." Their particularity, or the degree to which they are unique and differ from the archetypal narratives or rituals, is soon forgotten. In Eliade's words,

This is because popular memory finds difficulty in retaining individual events and real figures. The structures by means of which it functions are different: categories instead of events, archetypes instead of historical personages. . . . If certain epic poems preserve what is called "historical truth," this truth almost never has to do with definite persons and events, but with institutions, customs, landscapes. (43)

The further conclusion is that "the memory of the collectivity is anhistorical" (44). Havelock similarly suggests that "it is of the genius of the oral memory that as it picks up the material of specific directives it converts them out of the specific into

the shape of the typical" (122-3). Archaic cultures thus occupy a strange sort of temporality, what Eliade calls the "paradise of archetypes" as opposed to history (74). Havelock is less metaphysical in his characterization, but he generally agrees: "After some such fashion past and present interpenetrate when the vehicle of record is the formulaic word carried in the living memory. Strictly speaking, an historical time sense is impossible" (123).

Accompanying this blurring of past and present is a curious interdependence of repetition and archetype. Any particular, unique, singular act is, by itself, meaningless; it must be repeated, that is, technologically reproduced in the medium of poetry, in order to be preserved in the cultural memory, thus becoming "archetypal." But that archetype comes to be the ontological ground of ritual repetitions, i.e., it is more real and significant than any repetitions, and bestows reality and significance on them. Thus repetition and archetype mutually validate each other, re-enacting themselves perpetually in the perfect continuity of a temporal yet ahistorical space.⁸

The oral world of ritual continuities is fundamentally anti-apocalyptic. Lacking the Platonic language or literate syntax with which to articulate an-other world of static, timeless essences, it pursues no discontinuous apocalyptic leap to understanding of such a higher world of being. Similarly, in its ahistoricity, it obviously cannot be oriented towards an apocalyptic final fulfilment of history. Rather, the ethos of an oral culture is performatively self-present and perpetually

⁸ For a postmodern analogue cf. Jean Baudrillard: "The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced. The hyperreal" (*Simulations* 146).

becoming. If Platonism pursues an understanding of the cosmos as a timeless structure, for oral cultures the cosmos is an event. In Orality and Literacy (1982) Walter Ong makes precisely this point, stressing the phenomenological importance of the oral media in which the "word" is found:

In a primary oral culture, where the word has its existence only in sound, with no reference whatsoever to any visually perceptible text, and no awareness of even the possibility of such a text, the phenomenology of sound enters deeply into human beings' feel for existence, as processed by the spoken word. For the way in which the word is experienced is always momentous in psychic life. The centering action of sound (the field of sound is not spread out before me but is all around me) affects man's sense of the cosmos. For oral cultures, the cosmos is an ongoing event with man at its center. (73)

Opposed to the holistic nature of "a sound-dominated verbal economy" are literacy's "analytic, dissecting tendencies . . . which would come with the inscribed, visualized word: vision is a dissecting sense" (73-4). For literate consciousness, the cosmos is an objective structure "out there," and in the understanding and comprehending of it, visual metaphors predominate. In short, "sight isolates, sound incorporates" (72).

A Platonic Form may be absent from the experiential world of becoming, but in so far as it is articulated as a sort of objectively existing entity it possesses a solidity or permanence in its transcendence. It exists whether or not it is

perceived; its being does not depend on our participation. That which is heard, on the other hand, does have an experientially immediate, incorporating presence, but that presence must be constantly renewed or else the particular tones within it fade, possibly to extinction. Such is the nature of the "eternal present" of oral societies. The most important aspects of the tradition--those elements which must remain a confronting presence if the society is to retain its integrity and identity--must constantly be re-articulated and performatively re-enacted. Ong describes this as the "homeostatic" nature of oral societies. Such societies "live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium or homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance" (46). It is in this process of "sloughing off" that the conservative nature of the poetic practices of oral cultures reveals its more ominous side. I have mentioned Havelock's suggestion that the Muses were agents not of creation but of memorization and preservation; I would add that they have a destructive side as well. The maintenance of an ahistorical eternal present has apocalyptic implications, especially for that which is scapegoated as "other" to the tradition.

Essentially, the apocalypticism of oral (or "aural") cultures takes the form of forgetting, or the movement of resounding presences into silence which is a necessary aspect of their homeostatic ontology: renewal implies obliteration. Even after the emergence of literate consciousness and the more sophisticated understanding of history which it allows, vestiges of the archaic ontology remain, not only in the popular or folk consciousness of illiterate communities (as Eliade acknowledges, 111), but also in Christian apocalyptic sects, where the destructive

aspect seems particularly appealing at some psychic substratum, especially among those removed from real political, economic and technological power. In the twentieth century the destructive apocalyptic urge moves into mainstream political movements, most apparently in Nazism and Stalinist totalitarianism.



In the afterword to his novel The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, Milan Kundera meditates on the apocalypticism inherent in both the personal and political forms of "forgetting":

This is the great private problem of man: death as the loss of the self. But what is this self? It is the sum of everything we remember. Thus, what terrifies us about death is not the loss of the future but the loss of the past. Forgetting is a form of death ever present within life. . . . But forgetting is also the great problem of politics. When a big power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of organized forgetting. This is what is currently [1980] happening in Bohemia. Contemporary Czech literature . . . has not been printed for twelve years . . . history has been rewritten, monuments demolished. A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self. And so the political situation has brutally illuminated the ordinary metaphysical problem of forgetting that we face all the time, every day, without

paying any attention. (234-5)

In a manner similar to that of oral cultures, the ontological ground of the identity of both individual self and state (as Kundera describes it here) is not a logocentric essence, but a performative enactment: active recollection in the conscious memory or in the "technologizations" of memory, i.e., the confronting presences of textually-embodied literature or history. The erasure of individual or collective memory constitutes an apocalypse of identity.

About two thirds of the way through Gravity's Rainbow there occurs a humorously self-reflexive passage which comments on the erosion of Slothrop's identity (as an individual, within the diegesis, or as a character within a novel):

Slothrop, as noted, at least as early as the Anubis era, has begun to thin, to scatter. "Personal density," [rocket engineer] Kurt Mondaugen in his Peenemunde office not too many steps away from here, enunciating the Law which will one day bear his name, "is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth."

"Temporal bandwidth" is the width of your present, your now. It is the familiar " Δt " considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are. It may get to where you're having trouble remembering what you were doing five minutes ago, or even--as Slothrop now--what you're doing here, at the base of this colossal curved embankment. . . .

"Uh," he turns slackmouth to Narrisch, "what are we . . ."

"What are we what?"

"What?"

"You said, 'What are we . . . ,' then you stopped."

"Oh. Gee, that was a funny thing to say." (509)

Unable to situate himself in time or in language--and this parallels the reader's increasing difficulties situating Slothrop within the narrative--Slothrop "scatters." The idea makes for an amusing gag in the quoted passage, but the novel also acknowledges the genocidal implications of such an apocalyptic erasure of the self: An earlier section concerns the character Margherita Erdmann, a former actress who, in the twenties and thirties, had performed in "dozens of vaguely pornographic horror movies" in the (historically real) Neubabelsberg studios (393). In 1939 she visits a spa ("Bad Karma") to try to recover from various psychological and physical ailments and she is implicated in a series of child murders. She is spied by another character accosting a child: "'I wander all the Diaspora looking for strayed children. I am Israel. I am the Shekhinah, queen, daughter, bride, and mother of God. And I will take you back, you fragment of smashed vessel [. . .]'" (478). She is prevented from murdering the child--if, indeed, that was her intention; the whole section is implausible, darkly comic and somewhat surreal. The episode ends, however, with a chilling throwaway line: "The next day was 1 September. There was no longer any way for children to vanish mysteriously"

(479).⁹

In Kundera's terms, genocide, too, can be a form of "organized forgetting": the homeostatic means of obliterating otherness from a culture's identity. For the self the erasure can be total. For the state, the "real" identity (one with historical breadth, with memory) can be forgotten and replaced by a patently false affirmation of the utopian condition of the present or imminent future. Such utopian visions are characteristic of the millennial side of apocalyptic thought. To quote Kundera again: "Totalitarianism is not only hell, but also the dream of paradise--the age-old dream of a world where everybody would live in harmony, united by a single common will and faith, without secrets from one another" (233). Kundera suggests that by exploiting such essentially religious paradisaical archetypes, totalitarianism extended its appeal. In romantic terms, the vision of ideal community would involve an apocalyptic leap of the imagination in its inspiring conception of a new social order radically other than that which actually exists. In more secular, political terms, however, the apocalypse need not be creative and visionary but may be destructive and cynical in its manipulative use of visionary

⁹ It takes a sure hand to use the holocaust as a punchline, but Pynchon has done it before. In V. we are given a disturbing account of the--historically real--near extermination of the Herero people in the German colony of Sudwestafrika in 1904 by the forces of General von Trotha: "Allowing for natural causes during those unnatural years, von Trotha, who stayed for only one of them, is reckoned to have done away with about 60,000 people. This is only 1 per cent of six million, but still pretty good" (245). In Kundera's terms, Pynchon is re-inscribing an event which had been erased from historical memory (it was a revelation to me, at least) and situates that event in a historical trajectory of horror of increasing magnitude.

language for the purposes of social engineering or genocide.¹⁰ To attain a utopian community "without secrets" involves less a transformation of consciousness than the obliteration of those who insist on retaining secrets: the extermination of the residual "otherness" which blemishes or resists the realization of the archetypal ideal state.

Once the dream of paradise starts to turn into reality, however, here and there people begin to crop up who stand in its way, and so the rulers of paradise must build a little gulag on the side of Eden. In the course of time this gulag grows ever bigger and more perfect, while the adjoining paradise gets ever smaller and poorer. (Kundera 233)

Thus, millennial visions can conceal an apocalyptic political programme of "organized forgetting." Such a programme has its roots in what Eliade calls the "archaic ontology" of oral cultures in which cultural identity is embodied in symbolism, myths and rituals--the "word" as technologized in oral poetry--which functions as a tool to assist in the continuous re-enactment or maintenance of the homeostatic identity of the culture and the individuals within it. Just as the millennial proclamations of a totalitarian society are accompanied by the apocalyptic "sloughing off" or necessary "forgetting" of those elements which are deemed to be "other" than the visionary ideal--elements which may include history itself--so accompanying the re-enacted creation rites of archaic societies is the

¹⁰ "Engineer of human souls" was Stalin's definition of the writer, a phrase the Czech-Canadian novelist Josef Skvorecky uses for the title of his 1977 novel.

symbolic re-actualization of primordial chaos which can have, in political practice, similarly ominous implications.

In societies dominated by what Eliade calls the "Myth of the Eternal Return" there obviously cannot be an archetype for everything. Only what is significant, essential to the cultural ethos, is worth preserving and repeating or re-enacting. Everything which is other than the archetypes--including virtually all historically particular events--is either forgotten or incorporated into the repeating mythical pattern as an aspect of all-embracing "chaos":

. . . desert regions inhabited by monsters, uncultivated lands, unknown seas on which no navigator has dared to venture, do not share with the city of Babylon, or the Egyptian nome, the privilege of a differentiated prototype. They correspond to a mythical model, but of another nature: all these wild, uncultivated regions and the like are assimilated to chaos; they still participate in the undifferentiated, formless modality of pre-Creation. This is why, when possession is taken of a territory--that is, when its exploitation begins--rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.

(9-10)

In other words, that which is "other" than the dominant tradition is deprived of its autonomy and redefined in the discourse of the predominant myth where it is assimilated as "chaos."

But chaos is not just an archetype among archetypes; rather, it is a sort of

anti-archetype, or precondition for the possibility of archetypes: the "formless modality of pre-Creation." Like the necessity of Plato's Timaeus, chaos is a sort of residual otherness, but its presence is potentially even more subversive since it does not merely co-exist with archetypes (as necessity co-exists with the Forms), but is their necessary pre-condition.

Hesiod's Theogony provides a suggestive example of the originary role of chaos in the archaic cosmos. Its genealogy begins:

The first power to come into being was Chaos. Then arose Gaia, broad-bosomed earth, which serves as the ever-immovable base for all the immortals who dwell on the peaks of snowy Olympos;

(116-9)

The word "chaos" is derived from a root meaning "gap" or "abyss" or, in its verb form, "to yawn, gape" (OED). It (or he) is a distinct thing which is specifically said to have come into being, but it seems to be less of an entity or presence than an absence. It is usually understood as the gap which opens up between the primordial unity of Earth and Heaven (although they are said to have been born only after Chaos, Ouranos being the son of Gaia) (J.M. Robinson 5). Chaos is thus curiously a product of differentiation--or in a sense, is differentiation.¹¹ It is only with this differentiating gap that Earth and Heaven, or Gaia and Ouranos,

¹¹ Cf. Jacques Derrida: "Différance is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological--ontotheological--reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology--philosophy--produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return" (Margins of Philosophy 6).

can assume their respective identities; and it is only with the opening up of this space that the subsequent beings can come into existence. Thus, one might say that "difference" precedes "being," event precedes essence, perhaps even that the primordial ontological ground is the abyss.¹²

Of course, these formulations are all very abstract in themselves, products of literate, logocentric consciousness rather than of the oral, mythos-oriented consciousness which originally produced such cosmogonies. Which discourse is the true one? It depends what one's conception of "truth" is: whether one prefers mythological, agonistic genealogies, or metaphysical abstractions. Regarding the latter, viewing "difference" as "prior" to the archetype is a step away from the logocentric--an attempt to think oneself back into an earlier (or other) mind-frame. Derrida's "différance" is a further step in this direction, one that should perhaps be called "post-logocentric." This intellectually sophisticated, neologistic, visually and aurally playful term which, so we are told, "is neither a word nor a concept" (Margins 7), does seem to occupy or resonate in some sort of strange new (yet old) intellectual space. It is akin to Joycean "punccepts": words invoking an idea or concept while simultaneously acknowledging their material contingency. As puns they appeal to the ear (oral/aural consciousness), but as written words invoking concepts they appeal to the eye (literate/visual consciousness). Such a playful but strangely coherent and suggestive use of language has something magical about it, an appeal and power which seems to reside neither in its status

¹² My formulation here is, admittedly, an extreme one. In the commentary to his edition of the Theogony, West cautions that Hesiod was more interested in the genealogy of the gods than in questions of cosmogony (192).

as "truth" nor in any mythic, narrative appeal.¹³

The Theogony itself, given its liminal position between orality and literacy, contains moments of self-consciousness uncharacteristic of purely oral works or of Homer. Specifically, the question of the truth value of the narrative is raised--a question characteristic of literate consciousness. In the "Hymn to the Muses" we read:

This is the speech with which I was first addressed by these
goddesses,
the Muses who sing on Olympos, the daughters of Zeus of the Aigis:
"Shepherds who dwell in the fields, base creatures, disgraces, mere
bellies,
we know how to tell numerous lies which seem to be truthful,
but whenever we wish we know how to utter the full truth." (24-28)

In Myths of the Greeks and Romans Michael Grant comments:

This utterance . . . has been described as the first literary manifesto of Europe. Though obscure, it seems to imply a recognition, first, that there is factual content as well as artistic form in poetry; secondly, that although Hesiod is concerned with poetic creation, he

¹³ Richard Rorty criticizes the early Derrida for indulging in "word magic" in his creation of terms having an "impossible combination of properties without explaining how the combination is supposed to have been made possible" (Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity 124). Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, authors of a bizarre, sometimes outrageous, but nevertheless suggestive psycho-linguistic study of Freud's Wolf Man, unabashedly entitle their book The Wolf Man's Magic Word. And this "magic word" is not something so stable and essentialist as an individual Logos; rather it is a deconstructed Logos, thoroughly shot through with contingency.

cannot dissociate himself from the question of truth and falsehood, from the facts of religion, morals and daily life: facts which it is his duty to transmit. (93)

In a manner typical of oral poems, the Theogony dutifully transmits the essentials of the cultural ethos, but in acknowledging that the Muses, at will, can either lie or "utter the full truth," the whole poetic process is rendered problematic. A few lines later in the Hymn we are told how the Muses "reveal what is and what will be and what was before" (38), suggesting a complete, comprehensive, closed vision akin to the "Alpha and Omega" of the Book of Revelation. But whereas the Alpha and Omega is identified with the presence and omniscience of God (and thus claims an absolute, divine ground), the ground of the comprehensive vision of the Muses is left ambiguous. The possibility is explicitly raised that it may all be "numerous lies," and the further acknowledgement of the way in which the Muses prove politically expedient to "honorable kings" (80) does little to ease the vertigo. As Pynchon might say, it's enough to make a fella paranoid.¹⁴

Just as the cosmos begins with the abyss of chaos, so does Hesiod's cosmogony (or cosmography) begin with an intimation of the abyss of language. Chaos provides the space of openness and pre-Creative potential in which the other mythic creatures can come into being. Similarly, the openness and potential of the Muses' language entails the potential not only for the "truth" to reveal itself, but also the potential for the dissemination of lies. Hesiod seems coyly to be

¹⁴ For more on Muses and truth see Thomas, Literacy, and West's commentary, p. 162.

acknowledging that there are "other" sorts of truth than that of oral narrative, and these other truths could take various forms. Perhaps another narrative, another genealogical sequence, would be the true one. Or perhaps the other truth is of a transcendent sort: a matter of essences involving the non-narrative Platonic language of timeless relationships, of being. Or perhaps that which is "other" than oral narrative is history, thus introducing the question of literal reference: the relation of Hesiod's cosmogonic narrative to the facts or the sequence of events which "really happened."

Of course, these possibilities are not made explicit in Hesiod, and what gets articulated--the performative, enacted truth--is the archetypal cosmogony. Nevertheless, the self-interrogating moment of the "Hymn to the Muses" qualifies the whole project. The imaginative space created by mythic language was no longer the seamless weave of archetypal and experiential. Hesiod can thus be seen as occupying an apocalyptic space of discontinuity between oral and literate culture. He not only sings of Chaos, but reactualizes chaos in the sphere of language and consciousness.

Thus, Hesiod's apocalyptic moment is, to borrow a phrase from Hillis Miller, very much of a "linguistic moment." The *Theogony* is indeed an example of an archetypal cosmogony, and it was composed "in the formula tradition of oral epic poetry" (Frazer 15); but it was written down, and thus did not require repeated oral performance in order for it to remain a confronting presence. Codified in the verbal technology of writing, it attained a fixity and thus a particularity unattainable for a purely oral myth. Indeed, it is appropriate and

suggestive that this earliest of written texts preserves in the "Hymn to the Muses" a questioning of the role of the Muses who were so central to the oral tradition--the tradition in the process of transition to the new paradigm of literacy. Hesiod's acknowledgement that the Muses can lie as well as tell the truth is not simply a spoken moment, subsumed in the rhythms and larger poetic performance--and which would likely not have been present in every performance and thus would have faded in time. Rather, as a written preface, it is a more-or-less permanent qualification of the text which it introduces. Furthermore, the implicit interrogation of the poetic process implies the presence of a critical consciousness of the sort Havelock has in mind when he speaks of the advent of the "autonomous psyche which emerges with literacy--the "I" that can "break the spell of [the tradition's] hypnotic force" as embodied in memorization and participatory oral performances (199-200).

In the introduction to his translation of Hesiod's poems, R.M. Frazer states quite categorically that

Hesiod is the first Greek and, therefore, the first European we can know as a real person, for, unlike Homer, he tells us about himself in his poems. . . . We are probably safe in dating him between 750 and 650 B.C. It seems likely that he lived after the Greeks adopted the alphabet . . . for it is hard to imagine that his poems were not written down soon after composition, since otherwise their autobiographical passages would probably have been omitted or altered in oral transmission. (4-5)

Thus, with the written works of Hesiod we witness the birth of the author: Hesiod is inscribed in his poetry. But this literary "presence" is purchased at the expense of the living, breathing presence of the oral poet. It seems that the birth of the author implies the death of the "singer of tales."¹⁵ Or, somewhat more grandly, the apocalypse of the poet involves his transfiguration into poetry. In the process, the imaginative space of the culture was being re-mapped and could no longer be inhabited in quite the same way.

Despite Hesiod's inscribed textual presence as a historically particular individual, the vision of human history which he provides in his writings is not a "factual" record of unique human events or exploits so much as an extension of cosmogony. Specifically, in Works and Days Hesiod sketches another "story" of the generations of mortal men with the central structural principle being a pattern of progressive degeneration. In the golden age the first generation of noble spirited mortals created by the immortals on Olympus "lived like gods without any care in their hearts, / free and apart from labor and misery" (112-113). After this race had passed into being "powers of good on the earth, guardians of mortal men" (123), the Olympians "created the second, the silver race much worse than the first, / being unlike the golden both in thought and appearance" (128-9). We can speculate as to who these people were in historical fact, as we can with increased certainty of the even more degenerate people of the bronze age who, with their bronze weapons, likely descended from the north about 2000 B.C., and

¹⁵ The Singer of Tales (1960) by Albert B. Lord continued the investigations into the relation of Greek oral and written poetry initiated by Milman Parry. Both were very influential to Marshall McLuhan and Eric Havelock.

whose surviving written documents ("Linear B") are regarded as an early form of Greek (J.M. Robinson 13-14). Their descendants were responsible for the sack of Troy (c. 1250), the event celebrated in the Homeric poems. For Hesiod, these particular men form a separate generation outside of the degenerative pattern.¹⁶ They are the "heroes" whom it was culturally important to celebrate: the importance of their remaining a confronting presence, it seems, took precedence over the preservation of a consistent pattern of history--a pattern likely adapted from Near Eastern mythology and which Hesiod was trying to impose on Greek notions of the past (Griffin 96).

The fifth and final age is Hesiod's own, the iron age, a race so miserable that Hesiod wishes he "had died earlier or had been born at a later time," for in this time "men shall never / cease from labor and woe by day, and never be free from anguish at night" (175-8). Hesiod gives no suggestion of a later regeneration of the world, and as a vision of the "end time," the iron age is grim indeed.

"Might will be justice" and

Shame and Nemesis, abandoning men, will return to their lives
among the immortals; and what will be left for mortal men are
only the anguishing pains, but no defense against evil. (189, 199-
201)

Hesiod is not explicit about the end of history--indeed, "history" was still a very ill-defined concept--but the pattern of progressive degeneration suggests that the end time entails a complete breakdown of justice (Frazer 105). Such a

¹⁶ The sequence is thus: gold, silver, bronze, heroes, iron.

movement toward disorder is a feature common to biblical eschatology where it is the necessary pre-condition of the apocalyptic closure of history and the revelation of the radically new order. In Paradise Lost Milton gives a succinct picture of the Christian end time, and his account echoes Hesiod:

. . . Truth shall retire
 Bestuck with sland'rous darts, and works of faith
 Rarely be found. So shall the world go on,
 To good malignant, to bad men benign,
 Under her own weight groaning, till the day
 Appear of respiration to the just,
 And vengeance to the wicked (12.535-41)

Much of Works and Days counsels a humane and humble morality of prudence--or self-interest--in the face of such inauspicious circumstance. In the long run, "Justice wins over Hybris" (217). With somewhat strained optimism Hesiod even declares that "Never do famine and ruin accompany men of straight justice" (230). Whereas the transcendent Platonic ideal of justice might so banish contingency, Hesiod's experientially grounded observations fail to be very convincing in their denial of the ubiquity of misfortune. As a guarantor of the ultimate superiority of justice over violence, Hesiod invokes not abstract concepts and arguments (as Plato would do), but, in keeping with the privileging of mythos over Logos, he invokes the omniscient presence and personality of Zeus:

Upon those who are lovers of hybris and hard-hearted deeds
 far-seeing Zeus, son of Kronos, dispenses his punishing justice.

(238-9)

Thus, in the final instance, it is the power of Zeus that guarantees the triumph of justice: he is the strongest character in the narrative which includes the realm of human experience, the mythos of history. Justice, it seems, is guaranteed by might, albeit by the might of the just god Zeus.¹⁷ But given that the agency of Zeus is rarely seen in human affairs with the vividness with which it is depicted (or recited) in myth, Hesiod raises again the more personal argument of individual self-interest as the rationale for just behaviour:

Now neither would I myself be just in my dealings with men nor
 hope that my son be, since it will be a bad thing to be just,
 if the deviser of greater injustice will have greater justice.

But I hope Zeus of the Counsels will not yet bring this to pass.

(270-3)

This is a far cry from Milton's "suffering for truth's sake / Is fortitude to highest victory" (12.569-70). "Truth" or "justice" as absolute value or abstract category is not sufficient motivation for moral behaviour. For Hesiod, if just behaviour doesn't offer this-worldly rewards, forget it. There is no millennial or heavenly reward for those who suffer in the name of justice.

To conclude this discussion of Hesiod and the question of history we should note two essential points. In the first place, Hesiod's rudimentary vision of history as a pattern of progressive degeneration--from the Golden Age to the "might is justice" world of his own iron age--is proto-apocalyptic in its grim eschatology. It

¹⁷ See Lloyd-Jones, The Justice of Zeus (1971).

is not fully apocalyptic, according to the terms I am developing, because it does not entail the absolute closure of history: its discontinuous "breaking off" and the revelation of a radically "other" order.¹⁸ However, since Hesiod's pattern of history does not present the possibility of what Vico would call a "ricorso" to reactualize chaos and set the degenerative pattern in motion again, we can perhaps deduce a movement away from a myth of eternal return towards a linear conception of history. Such a unilinear, irreversible conception of history would be apocalyptic rather than cyclical.

The second important point to note is that, as Hesiod's concern shifts from the cosmogonic in the Theogony to the human generations and "down to earth" advice and wisdom of Works and Days, he, in effect, moves from the archetypal to the more recognizably historical. As mentioned earlier, the very presence of autobiographical content suggests that shift has been made from the "verbal technology" of orality to that of literacy since writing could codify or "freeze" historically particular details in a manner that oral poems could not. Indeed, the possibility of writing history presupposes literacy and the more detached consciousness which literacy facilitates.

But the archetypal and the historical cannot be so easily accommodated, as Hesiod's struggles to make sense of the problem of justice illustrate. For Hesiod,

¹⁸ It should be acknowledged, however, that the pattern of degeneration does not imply a perfect continuity. As mentioned, the "heroes" constitute a race apart from their immediate predecessors and descendants. But beyond this, each age is not born of their predecessors but created by the gods. Therefore "the generations of men not only form a discontinuous series but are brought into being by special acts of creation" (J.M. Robinson 17).

"justice" is not an aspect of transcendental Logos, but is uneasily grounded in human experience, in social practices as Hesiod saw them. But to "make sense" of that experience--experience which revealed a prevalence of injustice--and to give it an articulable shape, it had to be grafted onto myth. Thus, to provide a moral ground for human experience and ensure (at the level of understanding) that human affairs do not resolve into the play of power--and to re-attach perceptions of the "actual" to the available forms of myth--Zeus is invoked as the guarantor of the triumph of justice. This raises some problems since the capricious Zeus of myth does not seem always to behave justly; and in his battles with the Titans--the subordination of whom was a necessary pre-condition for his assumption of supreme power--Zeus must employ the "fifty-headed, hundred-handed" monsters of the underworld, and his need of their assistance casts a shadow on his power (Theogony 670 ff.; Frazer 71). Such contradictions, however, are merely the stuff of myth (or mythos), in which strict logical (Logos) consistency is not required. Nevertheless, in that the presence of Zeus is invoked to guarantee the morality of a world order which Hesiod (in his grimmer observations about his own iron age) seems to acknowledge is not all that moral, a tension between levels of being is evident. Is justice a fact of experience? (it seems not); is it a categorical imperative? (in which case logocentric language and concepts are needed to articulate it: this is what Plato would provide); or is just behaviour a mythical imperative: a necessity of the mythos of existence which includes the participation of Zeus? If the representation of experiential reality does not resolve into the eternal presence and performance of archetypal myth, but is articulable (thanks to

the resources of literacy) in its own right, then the possibility of history (i.e., the record of unique human events, taking place in irreversible time and unassimilated to any archetypes) emerges.

At the historical and linguistic moment which Hesiod occupied, however, history (or historiography) was still just a possibility--an implication of the resistance which "facts" were posing to myth; a potentiality latent in the capacities of the newly acquired alphabet to grasp and articulate unique and particular events. But in the absence of a truly historical mode of discourse, the implications of such singularities were unclear. Specifically, what would ground a narrated event which was not part of an archetypal mythos, or what would it signify? A written text could seize and hold a random event--or, more problematically, it could articulate a unique experience of seemingly unjust suffering. Eliade suggests that, in an oral culture, such a human experience would be made tolerable, at the level of individual understanding, by being integrated into a mythos or cause and effect chain of explanation (the "karma" concept of universal causality is a more systematic example [98]). He suggests that oral cultures "cannot conceive of an unprovoked suffering":

. . . suffering proceeds from the magical action of an enemy, from breaking a taboo, from entering a baneful zone, from the anger of a god, or--when all other hypotheses have proven insufficient--from the will or wrath of the Supreme Being. (97)

Integrated into some sort of causal chain or mythos, the randomness or contingency of suffering is denied. Thus it becomes "intelligible and hence

tolerable it is not absurd" (98). A purely accidental or singular event would be inconceivable, just as in oral songs and poems the historically particular is unsingable since it would be subsumed by the archetypal patterns and rhythms. Gratuitous suffering is thus that which has not yet been understood or processed by the verbal technology of orality. With the arrival of literacy, however, all this changes.

Eliade makes the suggestive observation that, "from the point of view of anhistorical peoples or classes, 'suffering' is equivalent to 'history'" (97 n. 2). With the tools of literacy, however, unique events of suffering could be articulated and critically scrutinized. How would they be understood? There are many ways. In Hesiod we see the invocation, again, of the will of Zeus--although this explanation does not seem satisfactorily to account for the suffering of the just. An imprecise pattern of historical degeneration is invoked, as is a utilitarian argument that in the real world, just behaviour simply does win out in the end. Tensions remain, however. The discrepancy between the world of human experience and a higher ideal (of whatever sort) can be negotiated using a variety of textual strategies, and if with Hesiod we can discern the posing of the question, the solutions would begin to emerge with the discourses of Greek tragedy, philosophy, and history. Hesiod's place in the fissure between the oral and literate modes of understanding and articulation is, figuratively conceived, a "chaos" or "abyss" of language. It is a space of radical uncertainty, but also of openness and possibility--of precreative potential. It is an apocalyptic space in which radically other modes of articulation and understanding could emerge.

Of course, three centuries would pass before the emergence of the Greek "father of history," Herodotus, and his younger contemporary, Thucydides. Without pretending that their histories unproblematically represent "reality"--or that any historical writing can--it is useful to note that their attitudes towards history and towards themselves as historians make explicit much that was implicit or latent in Hesiod. The advance in literacy facilitated new conceptions of the self, new ways of understanding and describing human experience, and new criteria of truth.

The famous first paragraph of Herodotus' History (5c BCE) vividly reveals the shift from oral consciousness and methodology:

I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another. (1.1)

Herodotus is not an anonymous oral poet whose archetypal songs eclipse both himself and the historically particular contents of his poems. Rather, he inscribes himself in his text, and fixes the events he chooses to celebrate in writing so that they may remain a confronting presence not dependent on the living memory, and therefore less prone to fade with time. He also desires to "understand" his subject--the spatial metaphor evokes the separation of the knower from the known--rather than just celebrate it as the poet in a purely oral culture would. He hopes to explain underlying reasons and causes of the Persian Wars.

The truth of what he writes, therefore, becomes an issue. The events he describes do not exist in the ahistorical space of oral culture, a space experientially present and performatively grounded in the poetic enactment itself. Rather, his subject, the Persian Wars (and their background) is approached as a natural phenomenon, and both his prose style and conception of history as a series of events in time are influenced by the methods of science (Bowra 123). Although he was sceptical about such matters as the divine parentage of certain mortals and the attribution of natural phenomena to the direct action of the gods (Bowra 127), his overall moral theme was similar to that of Hesiod's Works and Days:

. . . the god strikes with his thunderbolt the tall, and will not allow them to display themselves, while small beings do not vex him; you see how the lightning throws down always the greatest buildings and the finest trees. (7.10; qtd. in Murray, "Historians" 191)

Hybris will be punished. This, however, is less a matter of the direct actions of Zeus as a "character" in the mythos of history than it is a more generalized statement of the lot of humankind¹⁹ (with the central piece of evidence being the Athenian defeat of the superior Persian forces).

Indeed, Herodotus subjects Homer and Hesiod to his critical, rationalistic gaze, acknowledging that their delineations of the gods were largely poetic creations:

¹⁹ "One of the words for 'lot' in Greek is moira, and the Moirai are the Fates. It seems to have made little difference to an ancient Greek whether he spoke of Zeus or the Moirai or the gods in general as being responsible for men's fates" (Frazer 13).

But whence each of these gods came into existence, or whether they were for ever, and what kind of shape they had were not known until the day before yesterday, if I may use the expression; for I believe that Homer and Hesiod were four hundred years before my time--and no more than that. It is they who created for the Greeks their theogony; it is they who gave to the gods the special names for their descent from their ancestors and divided among them their honors, their arts, and their shapes. (2.53)

This attitude of Herodotus reveals a conceptual advance or refinement beyond the binarity of Hesiod's Invocation where the words of the Muses are either "the full truth" or "lies which seem to be truthful" (Theogony 27-28). Herodotus seems to imply that such mythic accounts may not be historically true, but they are not exactly "lies" either. Herodotus was also sensitive to the way in which verbal accounts tended to idealize and mythologize human individuals. Edith Hamilton suggests that he "lived in an age of heroism and never really believed in heroes" (149).

Whereas the authenticity or authority of a poem in an oral culture is a matter of the poet's relation to the Muses, in literate culture the question of sources emerges. It was at about this time in Greece that "the written archive [was set] alongside oral tradition as a source for history' (Murray 192). C.M. Bowra suggests that Herodotus "drew on strange sources; he sometimes misunderstood his informant, but he never invented and he never recorded nonsense" (130). In one astonishingly candid moment, Herodotus qualifies the validity of his whole

project: "My business is to record what people say; but I am by no means bound to believe it--and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole" (7.152; qtd. in Veyne 12). This is an example of what we might call a deconstructive moment: a moment within a specific text which seems to render problematic the very assumptions or ground of that text. The Hymn to the Muses in Hesiod's Theogony contains such a moment. In raising the question of the "truth" of the Muses' words, the oral, performatively grounded "truth"--the seamless weave of archetypal and experiential--gives way to a revelatory glimpse of the abyss: a sense of radical uncertainty and possibility; a tantalizing but possibly dangerous otherness which the old oral mode of articulation and comprehension concealed (or did not allow to be revealed). Hesiod's place in the gap ("chaos") or discontinuity between orality and literacy allowed him both to sing of Chaos (the firstborn . . .), but also, in the space of hesitation or fissure between paradigms, to reveal at least a glimpse or intimation of a radically other mode of articulation and understanding. This is why I would consider Hesiod's deconstructive moment also to be an apocalyptic moment.

If Hesiod is, in this sense, apocalyptic, then Herodotus is, in a related sense, post-apocalyptic. The "abyss" or destabilized space of language (between orality and literacy) which Hesiod inhabited was, by the time of Herodotus and the consolidation of the paradigm of literacy, being bridged. The radical questioning of "truth" and the uncertainty of the mode in which it could be articulated was giving way to answers and confidence. Truth was becoming a matter of scientific or historical fact. Rather than singing of chaos and

apocalyptically intimating radically other modes of understanding beyond the oral/aural envelope of poetic performance, the stable identity of truth as historical knowledge was emerging. The language of history involved a referential relation with particular yet significant "facts" which possessed an autonomy which resisted their assumption into ahistorical, archetypal patterns or eternally recurring myths. Thus, instead of Hesiod's vertigo at the abyss of language, there was the literate historian's confrontation with the plurality of verbal accounts (memories, stories, texts, myths) which he would have to negotiate. There was a growing confidence that this negotiation could be successful: language did have a stable referential ground in history, and that ground was articulable. Thus Herodotus' "deconstructive moment" or caveat about the believability of his sources--or of his own History--is less an intimation of the abyss or apocalyptic moment of radical openness and uncertainty than an acknowledgement that history involves the employment of a critical consciousness on the part of both the historian and the reader/listener. There are facts, and there is a ground of historical Truth, but Truth entails interpretation.

Such a critical consciousness entails a more sophisticated linguistic awareness. Just because a story was sung did not make it true. The rhythmic, mnemonic spell of the oral poet was giving way. The new elicited response was not participatory but more distanced and critical. Indeed, for Herodotus the word history (historia) meant "investigation" (Hamilton 150), and his investigations revealed insights of considerable anthropological subtlety. A case in point is his observation regarding the relativity of specific cultural practices: ". . . if there were

a proposition put before mankind, according to which each should, after examination, choose the best customs in the world, each nation would certainly think its own customs the best" (3.38). This is illustrated with an amusing anecdote of how the emperor Darius brought together some Greeks and Indians who were mutually disgusted at the other's practices of honouring their dead fathers: the Greeks burned the corpses of their dead fathers, the Indians ate them. Herodotus concludes, "These are matters of settled custom, and I think Pindar is right when he says, 'custom is king of all'" (3.38).

Thus, in acknowledging the existence, value, and autonomy of particular historical facts, a greater awareness of cultural and historical differences emerges: facts are less likely to have their uniqueness (or difference) denied and be subsumed into archetypal patterns, as would be the case in an oral culture. Instead, the facts can serve as a ground from which, in a scientific manner, larger conceptual truths can emerge. These truths (such as "custom is king") are not explicitly bound to a mythic narrative; they are abstract, but not wholly transcendent. Language functions as a bridge of continuity between the facts (which it can articulate) and the generalizations or truths drawn from them, and thus it functions logically or logocentrically, but in a non-essentialist manner. In short, historical particularities conduct one to general observations or quasi-scientific truths; they are not singularities or ruptures which, in their discontinuity, reveal the apocalyptically radical other. Nor are the facts of history interpreted in such a way as to suggest that history as a whole has an eschatological shape, or that an end time is imminent.

Perhaps the most suggestive statement of the 5th century conception of the nature and purpose of history comes from Thucydides, a statement which, again, exemplifies the radical shift from the imaginative space of orality to that of literacy. Thucydides' is very much a literate conception of the self (both individual and collective), and he displays an astonishing confidence in the ability of language to describe and articulate the truth of experience.

The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content. In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time. (1.22)

Unlike the storytelling oral poets whose performances were "of the moment," Thucydides' definitive history, fixed in a written text, is "for all time."

A curiously symmetrical reversal has taken place in this shift from orality to literacy. Whereas the content of the oral poet's song has to do with the eternal (archetypal immortals and heroes in an imaginary ahistorical space), and the oral form, in so far as it entails an immediate performance, is a unique event in time-- just the opposite is true for a literate historian such as Thucydides. For him, his content is concerned with unique events in time (particular facts and individuals), while his form, the written text, takes on an eternal character in so far as it is fixed in words. In other words, with Thucydides it is not the gods but the text

which is eternal; but this eternity is of a somewhat diminished (or imaginatively impoverished) sort: not Olympus but eternity as potentially infinite extension in time. Not individuals but (verbal) technology is eternal--an ominous progression accompanying the movement from the live oral poet to the inscribed (dead?) historian.

Although an increasing sensitivity to historical fact was crucial to the narratives of both Herodotus and Thucydides, neither was interested in facts for the sake of facts. Thucydides did indeed hope to convey "the plain truth of the events which happened" in and around the Peloponnesian War, but he hoped that such knowledge would be useful since events of the sort he describes "will according to human nature happen again in the same way." The suggested concept of repetition and the idea of human nature are important to examine in so far as they mark a shift from earlier myths of eternal recurrence, and as they are an essential part of the cultural ethos to which Platonism would be a response. Also, the emerging Greco-Roman historiographical tradition provides the central point of contrast with the emergent Judeo-Christian eschatological tradition.

As Oswyn Murray suggests, it is crucial to note that Thucydides asserts "no crude theory of repetition, but merely the usefulness of the study of human society in action" ("Historians" 195). Murray also suggests that Thucydides "is a social scientist, a student of the contemporary world, not a historian" in the modern sense of the term (194). Indeed, Thucydides was very close to his subject. He was an Athenian general in the early part of the war, but, due to military misfortune, was exiled and thus "was enabled to watch quietly the course of

events" (qtd. in Hamilton 166). Although he valued the Athenian ideal of democracy over the Spartan aristocracy and ethic of militarism, he nevertheless maintains an intellectual detachment, remaining coldly impartial and seldom passing judgment on individuals or policies (Bowra 139).

Thucydides is not concerned with discerning a grand pattern of history or outlining a cosmic mythos; rather, with a scientific precision, he examines how societies behave--repeatedly--in the areas of war and politics. Similarly, his idea of human nature is not assimilable to the idealized archetypal characters of myth, but, grounded in first-hand experience and the analysis of historical facts, he deduces what he sees as universal truths about human behaviour and motivation. These shifts in emphasis are consistent with the movement from the mythos orientation of orality to the Logos orientation of literacy. Whether in the mythic concern for gods and heroes or the more logocentric notion of "human nature," the category of personality remains crucial--as it will in yet a different manner for Jewish eschatology which combines both mythos and Logos elements.

For Thucydides, the essence of human nature--what lies deeper than the political differences of Athens and Sparta--is the striving for power (Hamilton 167; Bultmann 15). Murray suggests that

the influence of the sophists on Thucydides' theory of politics is clear. Thucydides seems to accept as a general fact about human society that 'might is right'--societies are in fact organized in terms of self-interest. . . . So in terms of social morality no one is ever in the right or the wrong: once Sparta's fear of Athens has been isolated, it

is clear that the war is 'in accordance with nature.' (195-6)

The central lesson Thucydides offers is that "the cause of all these evils was the desire for power which greed and ambition inspire" (3.83). This marks a crucial shift from the historical understanding of Herodotus. While acknowledging the existence of individual and political motives, Herodotus could still affirm that "god strikes with his thunderbolt the tall": hybris will be punished and divine justice is at work, a fact proved by the defeat of the superior Persian forces (Bultmann 15; Hamilton 172). For Thucydides, on the other hand, the causes for historical events are immanent rather than transcendent. The abuse of its own power brought about the downfall of Athens, not the agency of the gods. From the point of view of the desire to understand history, the gods, it seems, are not very relevant. History has its ontological ground in nature; it is not grounded in, and not subject to the influence of, some higher or radically "other" order.

Rudolf Bultmann suggests that

Thucydides' view of history is typical of the Greek understanding of history in general. Historical movement is understood in the same way as the cosmic movement, in which all change is simply the same thing in new constellations. History, therefore, is not regarded as a peculiar field of life distinct from nature. The Greek historian can, of course, give counsel for the future in so far as it is possible to derive some rules from the observation of history. But his real interest is directed to knowledge of the past. (15)

From my point of view of apocalypse, the crucial implication here is that, as the

Greeks understood it, history does not involve the revelation of a radically other order. There remains an essential sameness to the natural order and to history, which is a part of it, and thus there is little concern for questions of the ultimate ends or meaning of history. A similar lack of concern with questions of ultimate origins is also characteristic of the Greek understanding of history. The cosmogonies which oral cultures conveyed in vivid mythological terms were now regarded with a certain intellectual disdain, or bracketed off as not entirely "true." The more limited concern is with the humanly recognizable past--a past which is recognizable only because human nature is a constant (or so it was assumed).

Whereas the tragedians of the time could still dramatize the consequences of hybris and the operation of a cosmic justice, for many, "the facts" seemed to argue the contrary. Few would affirm, with Hesiod, that just behaviour wins out in the end. As Edith Hamilton suggests, Athenians "could see their city prospering by doing wrong to other cities. Where, then, was the divine power of justice?" (173). Thucydides dramatizes this gradual erosion of Athenian idealism. In the famous funeral speech of Pericles the virtues of Athens are extolled: its democratic spirit which fostered a respect of achievement and talent "not for any sectional reason but on grounds of excellence alone," its concern for education, architectural beauty and "recreations of the spirit" (2.37). In a later speech, however, in which Pericles must respond to criticism of his military leadership and questions about the larger purposes of a war which was proving to be very costly to the Athenian citizens, Pericles adopts a tone of Realpolitik. He tells his fellow citizens that their empire is, "to speak somewhat plainly, a tyranny; to take it

perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe" (2.63). Beyond this, he asserts that "a city that rules an empire holds nothing which is to its own interest as contrary to right and reason" (2.66). A reference to "a general law of decay" (2.64) to which the Athenian empire will perhaps succumb is suggestive of Thucydides' emerging understanding of the dynamics of politics--and it is a pessimistic vision, grounded in his pessimistic conception of human nature.²⁰

Thus, in the absence of Zeus as guarantor of justice, the sophistic "might is right" attitude prevails. That this can have apocalyptic implications in political practice is exemplified in Thucydides' account of the "Melian debate." The inhabitants of the island of Melos hoped to remain neutral in the Peloponnesian conflict, but the Athenians felt that allowing such neutrality would be a dangerous sign of their own weakness, and thus they attacked the island without provocation. Thucydides presents a debate between the Athenians and Melians in which the Athenians, in effect, assert their dedication to a sort of proto-reality principle in their affirmation of the supremacy of power over any other conception of justice: "You know and we know, as practical men, that the question of justice arises only between parties equal in strength, and that the strong do what they can, and the weak submit" (59). After a fight, Melos was forced to surrender unconditionally to the Athenians "who put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves; subsequently they sent out five hundred settlers and colonized the island" (66). Such was the apocalypse of Melos: literal,

²⁰ For more on the complex questions of Thucydides' moral purposes, personal views, and on the generic and philosophical influences and biases affecting his historiography, see Davies, Hornblower, Meiggs, de Ste Croix and Lloyd-Jones.

genocidal destruction, redefinition and re-colonization. Whereas earlier oral cultures might invoke a cosmic ritual to authorize such an act--symbolically assimilating the otherness of their opponents to an aspect of the pre-creative potential of chaos--and later cultures might similarly justify such destruction in the name of millennial or utopian progress, the Athenians invoke no such self-serving symbolism. They frankly assert that "the end of our empire, if end it should, does not frighten us" (5.91), and they believe that the glorious memory of the Athenian empire would, in any case, persist (2.64).²¹

But another sort of apocalypticism is revealed in the episode with Melos. To explain their initial refusal to surrender, the Melians declare: "we know that the fortune of war is sometimes more impartial than the disproportion of numbers might lead one to suppose; to submit is to give ourselves over to despair, while action still preserves for us a hope that we may stand erect" (5.102). The Athenians scoff at this invocation of hope--"danger's comforter"--in the face of the "marked superiority of real power" (5.103, 109). It is a law of nature that the strongest shall rule (5.105). For the Athenians, "honour" is merely a "seductive word" which leads people "to fall of their own free will" (5.111). They quite accurately observe that the Melians' "strength lies in deferred hopes" (5.111) and meet their refusal to submit as follows:

To judge from your decision, you are unique in regarding the future

²¹ In retrospect, this attitude is not without some irony. As Simon Hornblower observes, "Thucydides (or Pericles) was wrong; it is only specialist ancient historians who know about Athenian imperialism, but everybody has heard of the Parthenon, and of Greek tragedy" (in Boardman 126).

as more certain than the present and in allowing your wishes to convert the unseen into reality; and as you have staked most on, and trusted most in, the Spartans, your fortune, and your hopes, so will you be most completely deceived. (5.113)

As I shall discuss shortly, this fundamental opposition between present worldly power and future hope is central to the eschatological orientation of Jewish conceptions of history, an orientation which becomes fully apocalyptic when the eschatological events are understood as involving a fulfilment beyond history itself. With regard to the Melians, their moment of decision can be viewed as an apocalyptic moment in so far as it involves the turning away from the world of "real power" and a refusal of the "immediate facts" of their predicament to embrace an undefined hope--a hope that some other destiny is possible besides that which seems determined by their inauspicious circumstances. What is "other" than the oppressive present is the future which, somehow, is "more certain," or a destiny as yet "unseen" but somehow more real. In short, theirs is an apocalyptic refusal of the sophistic reality principle in which the real resolves into Realpolitik: power and might. They prefer to embrace the hope that the future might reveal a radically other destiny for them. The Athenians could only scorn such hope--despite the fact that, generations earlier, the Athenians themselves confronted the vastly superior forces of Persia, proving that the ultimate outcomes of such encounters can be different from what the mere facts of military power might seem to dictate.

As is so often the case, the apocalyptic hopes of the Melians did not

materialize: they were slaughtered. For our purposes, the incident reveals the two poles of apocalypse. The positive pole is associated with hope: the ability to imagine another destiny besides that which seems determined by the facts of power--and this hope or vision is present only in language; its referent (or fulfilment) remains potential. The second type of apocalyptic referent did not remain potential. This is the negative pole of apocalypse: the literal apocalypse of destruction caused by superior military (or technological) might. As we shall see, these two poles of apocalypse often occur together, and their relationship remains antinomian: neither, it seems, can be absolutely privileged over the other. To pursue the example of the Melian incident, from one perspective, the Athenians were right: the hopes of the Melians were mere words, incapable of transforming the reality of the situation (although--not insignificantly--their defiant words perhaps deferred, or at least filled the space of deferral, before the literal cataclysm). But the incident as a whole is related in words: it is incorporated into the structure of Thucydides' text where it functions--subtly and without obvious narratorial judgment--to illustrate the descent of the Athenians from a former Periclean ideal. Honour and justice are, indeed, words, but they are not mere words: they retain an other sort of power, even in the face of death.

This conflation of the cataclysmic and the visionary reminds us again of the visions of destruction and new creation in the Book of Revelation. Commenting on this, Northrop Frye suggests that

The vision of a created order is never an easily attained vision, but comes out of the depths of human anguish and effort. One very

clear example in the Bible is the 'Song of the Three Children' in the Apocrypha, meaning the three Jews in Babylon who were flung into Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace because they would not abjure their faith. It was from the midst of the fire that they sang their hymn of praise to God for his beautiful world, just as the hymns of praise in the Psalms and elsewhere come out of Israel's deliverance from the 'furnace of iron' which is what Egypt is called by Solomon.

(Creation 57-8)

Like the Melians' proclamation of hope in the face of indisputably grim "reality," the apocalyptic song is a verbal contradiction of the circumstances of the fiery furnace. Indeed, the fire becomes a miraculous refining fire of life, rather than the humanly intolerable literal, physical fire. The figure of Israel's Egyptian sojourn as a "furnace of iron" suggests the larger principle that it is the harshness of the historically real which is the occasion of apocalyptic proclamations of a radically other order of existence.

This association of apocalypse with a type of language which affirms something "other" than that which can be grounded in "facts" is made more explicit in the New Testament account of the Pentecost which dramatizes the fulfilment of John the Baptist's prediction that the Messiah would provide a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3.16):

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And

there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

(Acts 2.1-4)

The multitude is perplexed, and demands "What does this mean?" (2.12), speculating that the apostles are drunk. Peter contradicts this, quoting the prophet Joel's statements about the strange events of the "last days" in which the voice of prophecy shall be heard, and strange signs revealed: "the sun shall be turned into darkness / and the moon into blood, / before the day of the Lord comes, / the great and manifest day" (2.20-1). Peter also proclaims the name of the risen Christ in whom the people should repent their sins.

In the face of all of this, we might empathize with the bewildered multitude and ask again their question, "What does this mean?" The answer opens up into the whole tradition of Christian theology. From a narrower focus regarding the structure of apocalyptic language, however, the primary point to note is succinctly articulated in Frye's observation that apocalyptic metaphors suggest "a total disruption of the habits of sense experience, a vision of a total removal of meaning in which the sun is turned into darkness and the moon into blood" (TLS). The normal conventions of language, which assume an unproblematic referentiality, no longer apply. Whatever else it may imply, apocalypse entails a linguistic and conceptual discontinuity or rupture. And it does not simply reveal a wish-fulfilment fantasy world, since it is bound up with an acute awareness of the experiential harshness of history, including the realities of suffering, pain, and

death. Thus T.S. Eliot, in the apocalyptic "Little Gidding," fuses imagery of Pentecost and of the London blitz:

The dove descending breaks the air
 With flame of incandescent terror
 Of which the tongues declare
 The one discharge from sin and error. (200-3)

In Gravity's Rainbow Pynchon chooses the V2 rockets which fell on London towards the end of the Second World War as the apocalyptically destructive weapon which is simultaneously a revelation: "the one Word that rips apart the day. . . ." (25). These rockets are the forbears of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles--the messengers of nuclear apocalypse--which entail not only destructive/revelatory moments of discontinuity, but also the possibility of the closure of the mythos of history itself. In speaking about the "literal" close to human history which the reality of nuclear weapons of mass destruction implies, we face unusual linguistic problems. Just as a visionary or metaphysical otherness beyond the closure of human history strains the abilities of language, so does the idea of the physical destructiveness of nuclear obliteration. Indeed, the fundamental oppositions metaphysical/physical, figurative/literal break down or blend into one another. Just as the vision of the radically new or other order revealed in the Book of Revelation employs--perhaps excessively--the imagery of physical destruction, so conversely do attempts to describe nuclear obliteration and human extinction tend to strain the language of literal reference towards the more obviously metaphorical if not visionary. In the words of Jonathan Schell,

no matter how poor and thin a thing for imagination to grasp extinction may be, it seems to be in imagination alone that it can be grasped at all. Lacking the possibility of experience, all we have left is thought, since for us extinction is locked away forever in a future that can never arrive. (The Fate of the Earth 140)

The language employed in "thinking the unthinkable" (140), however, can only be language of an extraordinary sort, hence Derrick de Kerckhove can refer to the Bomb as "the destroyer, which everyone knows (the peace that passeth all understanding)," casually--but significantly--alluding to St. Paul ("On Nuclear Communication" 72; the allusion is to St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, 4.7).

The Bomb indeed seems to be a special case of worldly destructive potential, qualitatively different from any previous manifestation of power (martial or otherwise)--and thus understandably necessitating the employment of metaphysical metaphors to intimate the resolutely physical but nevertheless cataclysmic destruction. Such claims for the special status or the overwhelming and hence apocalyptic magnitude of the destructive potential of one's own historical moment, however, have been made for millennia. In the opening chapter of his History, Thucydides acknowledges that "the Persian War was the greatest war of past times," but it pales in comparison with the immensely long Peloponnesian conflict and the unparalleled misfortunes it caused.

Never had so many cities been taken and laid desolate, here by foreigners, here by the parties contending (the old inhabitants being sometimes removed to make room for others); never was there so

much banishing and blood-shedding, now on the field of battle, now in the strife of action. Old stories of occurrences handed down by tradition, but scantily confirmed by experience, suddenly ceased to be incredible; there were earthquakes of unparalleled extent and violence; eclipses of the sun occurred with a frequency unrecorded in previous history; there were great droughts in sundry places and consequent famines, and that most calamitous and awfully fatal visitation, the plague. (1.23)

Thucydides, who in his previous paragraph had declared the "absence of romance" in his history and affirmed his concern with historical "events," here invokes "old stories of occurrences handed down by tradition" to find a parallel to the magnitude of what is now the historically real. In other words, the images of the mythological past are needed to evoke the unparalleled destruction experienced in the present. The conditions of the present are so radically new that normal referential language will not do; an "other" sort of language is needed and thus the resources of myth are invoked.

A similar strategy is very often employed in testimonies of nuclear destruction. One survivor of Hiroshima has written of his experience:

I just could not understand why our surroundings had changed so greatly in one instant. . . . I thought it might have been something which had nothing to do with the war, the collapse of the earth which it was said would take place at the end of the world. (qtd. in Rhodes 717)

An American Naval officer who visited Hiroshima a month after the bombing commented that it was "like the ancient Sodom and Gomorrah." and less than a decade later Robert Oppenheimer grimly observed of the H-Bomb--a bomb a thousand times more powerful than that used on Hiroshima--"This thing is the plague of Thebes" (Rhodes 742, 777).

Apocalyptic language is thus a language of extremity and discontinuity. On the positive pole it is the language of radical hope: a contradiction of one's historically immediate or "real" condition and proclamation of an "other" condition or destiny. The negative pole attempts to grasp "the real" in its cataclysmic magnitude and horror. In both cases, however, there is a very strong sense that the ultimate referent remains elusive--looming somehow at the end of what is only a detour of language. Yet this detour may not resolve into the final referent, or, at best, this referent remains highly problematic. Hence the Athenian scepticism at the Melians who regard "the future as more certain than the present" and who transfigure the real with desire and hope such that "wishes convert the unseen into reality." Beyond the words which make up the Melians' gesture of proclamation, however, there is no referent that can be "seen" or expressed as a simple referential fact. Likewise, to articulate the magnitude of the destructiveness of war--whether in ancient Peloponnesus or modern Hiroshima--normal referential language is inadequate, and a more self-consciously figurative language must be employed.



The ancient Greek historians felt no pressing concern for pursuing the apocalyptic referent. History was not some grand hermeneutic problem to be solved. Rudolf Bultmann suggests that "the Greek historian does not raise the question of meaning in history, and consequently a philosophy of history did not arise in Greece" (16). In his book Meaning in History Karl Lowith suggests that

The ancients were more moderate in their speculations. They did not presume to make sense of the world or to discover its ultimate meaning. They were impressed by the visible order and beauty of the cosmos, and the cosmic law of growth and decay was also the pattern for their understanding of history. According to the Greek view of life and the world, everything moves in recurrences, like the eternal recurrence of sunrise and sunset. . . . (4)

Essentially, such a world view is anti-apocalyptic, and although it may contain apocalyptic moments within it (such as the Melians' proclamation of hope or the magnitude of their defeat), these moments occasioned no crisis of understanding or language. Indeed, historically particular events were not viewed in their radical--and potentially apocalyptic--singularity; rather, the specificity of historical events and actions was assimilated to the concept of human nature and into the continuity of the cycles of power, both of which are aspects of Logos, the larger principle of order in the cosmos. Historical events were no longer accounted for in the manner of oral cultures by being integrated into an explanatory causal chain or mythos governed by the agency of some wilful god. Lacking the consolations which such a mythos could provide, the literate "Logos" understanding of suffering

as an inevitable part of the fixed world order is doubtless one cause of the powerful classical sense of the tragic. Indeed, as Oswyn Murray observes, "there are strong signs that Thucydides began to articulate the second half of his history around the conception of a tragedy" ("Historians" 197), and the episode with the Melians is a crucial event signifying the Athenians' fall from honour.

If one aspect of the apocalyptic attitude is hope for a radically other destiny, then the Greek world view has an element of hopelessness about it: there is no breaking free of the Logos of the cosmos. In Lowith's words, "the Greeks believed that man has resourcefulness to meet every situation with magnanimity--they did not go further than that" (4). Commenting on the Greek logocentric conception of the nature of man "as mind, as reason," Bultmann observes that

in principle the future cannot bring anything new in so far as man is independent of time in realising his real nature. This thought was consistently developed by the Stoic philosophers. Their ideal of the wise man is the man who is independent of all that can encounter him, good as well as evil, because he is untouchable in his interior, in his mind. He lives completely unhistorically, enclosing himself against everything that the future may bring. (94-5)

Lowith makes a similar point concerning Thucydides, specifically:

History was to him a history of political struggles based on the nature of man. And, since human nature does not change, events that happened in the past "will happen again in the same or in a similar way." Nothing really new can occur in the future. . . . It may

be that future generations and individuals will act more intelligently in certain circumstances, but history as such will not change essentially. There is not the least tendency in Thucydides to judge the course of historical events from the viewpoint of a future which is distinct from the past by having an open horizon and an ultimate goal. (7)

There can be no true novelty in such non-teleological, anti-apocalyptic history. Since the radical openness of the future is denied it is only a small step to the widespread belief in the predetermination of fate as a sort of "natural fatality" (Lowith 9). Given this, classical prophecy would not entail the apocalyptic revelation of a radically other order, or a renegotiation of individual or collective destiny (as it would for the people of Israel), but instead would be a matter of divination or the foreshadowing of the future. Despite the belief in fate, moments of decision would (of course) still have had a pressing existential value for those involved, and the consultation of oracles and sensitivity to dreams and portents at such moments was common (10).

Thus, prophecy would merely provide a proleptic glimpse of the future, a future which possesses a certain "being" in so far as it is an inevitable aspect of fate. Historical events, be they past, present, or future, would have a certain particularity or fixity, but they could be subsumed in the beingness of the Logos-- they were not signifiers of some other meaning, nor would they, in themselves, embody something radically new. The extent to which fate (or history) constitutes a mythos (a variegated and possibly limitless sequence of events, in short, a story)

is downplayed. The subsuming Logos of history would be privileged; the fate of a particular empire, for example, could be assimilated to the larger cycles of political power. Similarly, the Stoic ideal of the wise man (outlined by Bultmann, above) entails an idealizing of a logocentric conception of individual identity: the desire to be autonomous or even "untouchable" in one's interior mind is, in effect, a desire to escape the vicissitudes of the mythos of history with all its contradictoriness and "plot" complications involving good and evil, fortune and suffering, etc. It is more important to know thyself than to know what it is that the mythos of history--and one's role in it--might mean. In short, the acknowledgement of the autonomy of historical facts which facilitated the early Greek histories prompted a demythologizing or a decline in the importance of the eternally recurring mythoi which had provided the ontological ground of oral cultures. Being came to be an aspect of Logos rather than of mythos. It was only with the extreme formulations of Plato, whose theory of the Forms involved a previously unknown level of abstraction, that the Logos of the cosmos ceased to be regarded as an immanent presence and was projected to a transcendent state, wholly other to the experiential world of becoming, and attainable (as I have already discussed) via an apocalyptic flash of understanding. This is perhaps an even greater refusal of history than that of the Stoics.

Earlier oral cultures, with their mythos rather than Logos orientation, were likewise innocent of history conceived of as a linear, uni-directional mythos which possesses meaning or eschatological significance. Particular events, be they random or mundane would, if unassimilated to any archetype or mythos, lack the

reality or solidity of "being" possessed by the archetypes. Eliade suggests that the archaic ontology of oral cultures constituted "a desperate effort not to lose contact with being" (92):

The desire felt by the man of traditional societies to refuse history and to confine himself to an indefinite repetition of archetypes, testifies to his thirst for the real and his terror of "losing" himself by letting himself be overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of profane existence. (91-2)

Thus the profane world--or history--not only lacks true being, it is meaningless; it "does not constitute a 'world,' properly speaking; it is the 'unreal' par excellence, the uncreated, the nonexistent: the void" (92).

Formulated more positively, however, this void is also chaos or the space of pre-creative potential or pure plenitude. I have suggested that in Hesiod's Theogony Chaos functions as a sort of principle of differentiation (or even "différance") that is a necessary precondition for the emergence of the identities of the primordial pair, Gaia and Ouranos. Chaos is thus the paradoxical ontological "ground" which precedes the emergence of the ground ("Gaia, broad-bosomed earth" [116-7]) herself. Chaos ("the first power to come into being" [116]) is what sets the narrative in motion, and this play of difference and identity, in effect, is the narrative. The presence of Eros among the first-born further suggests the inseparability of narrative and sexuality: instead of copula verbs denoting primordial "being" or originary pure presence, we are given the story of the copulation (and castration) which underlies such an abstraction.

Hesiod's account of how Kronos castrates his father is perhaps an attempt (somewhat achronological) to explain the cause of the emergence of Chaos or the separation of Earth and Sky, yet even this suggests that difference is prior to or inherent in unity. Ouranos refuses to allow his children to emerge into the light, hiding them instead in the earth. Gaia fashions a sickle which Kronos uses to castrate his father, thus freeing his fellow Titans. From the spilt blood emerge the Furies and giants, and from the severed member and the foam of the sea, Aphrodite--who would be accompanied by Eros and Himeros (Desire)--is begotten (154-210). J.M. Robinson suggests that this account

as an explanation . . . may seem worthless, but it serves to reveal an important fact about the primordial unity, namely, the existence within it of opposing principles, male and female. Their existence is important because otherwise nothing would happen; the process of creation could never begin from a completely undifferentiated unity.

(7)

Thus, primordial unity would not have begotten narrative. Note also that a primal, all powerful sky-father does not prevail and does not figure as the ultimate creator (as in the monotheistic Genesis account). Indeed, the rebellious energy of the son--and his primal sin--is necessary to keep the process of creation moving. Kronos' own son, Zeus, would also successfully rebel. Chaos, differentiation, and dismemberment are all crucial elements of the creation: they are not aspects of a "fall" from some ideal paradigm (as in Plato) or from some perfect created order (as in Genesis).

If, as I have suggested, the theogonic myth which Hesiod provides dramatizes the play of identity and difference, so too does the use to which such myths were put in oral cultures. Following Eliade, if it is true that the mythic archetypes represented the fully real while miscellaneous existential events constituted merely the "meaninglessness of profane existence" (92) or chaos, then the interplay of the two--the interplay of sacred and profane, myth and abyss, identity and difference--forms the ahistorical mythos of the culture itself: a self-validating performance of that culture's identity which is also, in Havelock's words, "a didactic instrument for transmitting the tradition" (43). As I have discussed, the conservatism of the poetic practices of oral cultures can, at times, be destructive, even apocalyptically so, to that which is scapegoated as "other" than the dominant tradition. On the other hand, however, the process by which events are assimilated to archetypes--an imaginative but also sensual (rhythmic, musical) process--can be creative in a dynamic, holistic, non-logocentric manner. It perhaps holds clues as to how the relationship between the "Word" and the "other" can function together in a manner that might avoid or deconstruct apocalypse.

A beautiful illustration of the way in which the poetic practices of an oral culture can negotiate oppositions and hostilities, transforming destructive possibilities into creative performances and social solidarity, occurs in Gravity's Rainbow in the "Kirghiz Light" chapter (336-359). We are told how Tchitcherine, "during the early Stalin days," travelled to the Soviet province of Kirghizistan: "He had come to give the tribesman out here, this far out, an alphabet: it was purely speech, gesture, touch among them, not even an Arabic script to replace" (338).

In one village Tchitcherine witnesses "an ajtys--a singing-duel" which functions not as a debate from which one clear winner will emerge, nor as a rational argument which will reach a distinct conclusion or solution (these would be characteristic of a literate culture). Rather, it is a communal ritual, a sort of social talking cure which leads to a harmony at once personal and collective, musical, intellectual and sensual:

The boy and girl stand in the eye of the village carrying on a mocking well-I-sort-of-like-you-even-if-there's-one-or-two-weird-things-about-you-for-instance--kind of game while the tune darts in and out of qobyz and dombra strummed and plucked. The people laugh at the good lines. You have to be on your toes for this: you trade four-line stanzas, first, second, and last lines all have to rhyme though the lines don't have to be any special length, just breathable. Still, it's tricky. It gets insulting too. (356)

After a particularly annoying insult, the boy "zips back a fast one about bringing all his friends around and demolishing her and her family too. Everybody sort of goes hmm. No laughs" (356). But the ritual form of the duel--as skilfully employed by the girl--can accommodate and diffuse this threat of literal violence by destabilizing it and shifting its focus somewhat.

She smiles, tightly, and sings:

You've been drinking a lot of qumys,
I must be hearing the words of qumys--
For where were you the night my brother

Came looking for his stolen qumys? (356)

Tchitcherine's sidekick comments, "This could go on for a while," and he is right: the improvised mythos of this verbal performance could potentially go on forever, arriving at no conclusion or truth, but playing with various attitudes, threats, insinuations (of violence or love), all of which would be variations within the unifying poetic form with its rhythms and repetitions.

Havelock provides a Homeric example of this oral formula and theorizes about the principles involved. Beyond sheer verbal repetition, "Hector is dead; Hector is dead," would be a repetition that retains the image but alters the word order in a formulaic manner: "Hector is dead; dead indeed is Hector." A more complex version would look at the essential image "from different aspects or in slightly different ways by using words and syntax which do not alter the essential situation but restate it:"

Hector is dead; fallen is Hector.

Yea Achilles slew him

Hector is defeated, Hector is dead. (147)

Havelock suggests that

Such devices can be pushed further and further to that extreme virtuosity found in the Homeric epic. The basic principle is however already revealed and can be stated abstractly as variation within the same. The mind's attention is continually bifocal: it preserves an identity, yet it makes room for a difference within this identity.

(147)

Unlike the pure logocentric identity of Plato's Forms, identity as oral performance or mythos is flexible enough to accommodate difference, thereby avoiding the need for apocalyptic leaps to transcendent levels of being or understanding, or apocalyptic affirmations of hope which contradict the harshness of history (each of these is an aspect of what I have been calling the positive pole of apocalypse). Alternatively the oral mythos approach to negotiating identity and difference can also (perhaps) avoid instances of literal apocalyptic destructiveness (the negative pole of apocalypse). This is what is accomplished in the ajtys which Pynchon dramatizes:

Slowly, turn by turn, the couple's insults get gentler, funnier. What might have been a village apocalypse has gone on now into comic cooperation, as between a pair of vaudeville comedians. They are out of themselves, playing it all for the listeners to enjoy. The girl has the last word.

Did I hear you mention a marriage?

Here there has been a marriage--

This warm circle of song,

Boisterous, loud as any marriage. . . . (357)

Such a moment of "comic cooperation" is perhaps the closest an oral community could come to inhabiting--indeed, enacting and creating--what Eliade calls the "paradise of archetypes" (74). Paradise is performatively present, incarnated by the poetic act itself. In light of the above stanza it is worth noting that "marriage" was, for J.L. Austin, one of the classic examples of performative

utterance. As the girl affirms, with her hearing a mention of marriage there has, in effect, actually been a marriage: a communal union in "this warm circle of song." Paradise is not an ideal place lost in the distant past or a teleological goal, nor is it some sort of transcendent perfection, free from the taint of otherness. Rather, "paradise"--or, at least, a moment of cultural harmony and community--is immanently present. In such a manner could an oral culture's ethos and tradition be maintained and transmitted.

In a non-literate culture the verbal must not be identified with the conceptual. In the phrase describing the Kirghiz tribesmen, "it was purely speech, gesture, touch among them" (338). "Presence" is not an attribute of some transcendental signified. Rather, presence is an aspect of performance and, to a considerable degree, is rooted in the body--in precisely that which is other to the conscious, rational self or literate word. As Havelock suggests, the verbal technologies of orality entail a "mobilization of the resources of the unconscious" including various bodily motor reflexes (151-2). Just as an oral cosmogony will ground an account of what "is" in visions of originary sexuality (viz Hesiod), so in the performance of an oral mythos the consciously controlled use of language can give over to another mode--go "pure ballistic" (like a V2 rocket after the Brennschluss point [GR 7])--where forces of a more primal, sexual nature seem to be at work. Havelock suggests that the motor reflexes involved in oral poetic performance,

like similar reflexes of the sexual or digestive apparatus . . . were highly sensual and were closely linked with the physical pleasures.

Moreover, they could confer upon the human subject a specific type of pleasure. The regularity of the performance had a certain effect of hypnosis which relaxed the body's physical tensions and so also relaxed mental tensions, the fears, anxieties, and uncertainties which are the normal lot of our mortal existence. Fatigue was temporarily forgotten and perhaps the erotic impulses, no longer blocked by anxiety, were stimulated. (152)

The shift from orality to literacy (and the accompanying shift from mythos to Logos modes of articulation and comprehension) entails a de-sensualization of the word. Primal energies which were incorporated into oral performance are repressed or sublimated, replaced by a more rational, abstract, and analytic mode of language and thought. In Marshall McLuhan's phrase, with the advent of literacy, the "ratio among our senses" changed radically, with tremendous implications for our mental processes (Gutenberg 24). Walter Ong suggests that orality entails

a sound-dominated verbal economy [which] is consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies rather than with analytic, dissecting tendencies (which would come with the inscribed, visualized word: vision is a dissecting sense). It is consonant also with the conservative holism (the homeostatic present that must be kept intact, the formulary expressions that must be kept intact), with situational thinking (again holistic, with human action at the center) rather than abstract thinking, with a certain humanistic organization

of knowledge around the actions of human and anthropomorphic beings, interiorized persons, rather than around impersonal things.
(73-4)

Indeed, the "technologizing of the word" (Ong's subtitle) facilitates technological control. The implications are ominous. If, as I have suggested, the oral poetic performance can integrate Word and Other in such a way as to avoid apocalypse (that is, if it can entwine both the integrative and destructive impulses--Eros and Thanatos), a disruption of this balance could have a dangerous result. The alphabet effectively pries the word from its performative context and its holistic integration with the cosmos. If literate logocentrism thus abstracts and privileges the Word (Identity, Truth, pure Being), whence the Other? What form might the return of the repressed take?

In a paragraph rather boggling in its scope, Derrick de Kerckhove suggests that our present day nuclear apocalyptic predicament has its root in the early Greek shift from orality to literacy.

Greek atomism was our first mental move toward the bomb. As soon as it was applied as an archival tool to keep records of reusable information, the phonetic alphabet changed the nature of information itself. The analytical processes it imposed on knowledge tended always toward breaking it down to its smallest common denominators, in effect to atomize the contents of human understanding and then to reconstitute them in a homogenized and coherent order. The notion of "matter" was created not from an

overview of the planet, but from "the atom up," so to speak. Thus one of the alphabet's first effects was metaphorically to smash matter to pieces and to reprocess it as "nature." By pushing its fragmenting process to the exploration and exploitation of subatomic levels, the phonetic alphabet made the creation of the nuclear bomb possible. (73)

Literacy, in a sense, creates nature: the objectively existing order of the cosmos which the subject/inquirer can attempt to understand, comprehend and technologically manipulate. If the Bomb represents a (thoroughly ambiguous) crowning technological achievement grounded in scientific understanding of the natural order, it is simultaneously--in its almost unimaginable and certainly unarticulable destructiveness--antithetical to or "other" than the natural order (whether nature be understood as principle--Logos--or substance). In other words, a linguistic and scientific orientation that refuses to acknowledge (or attempts to banish) the element of chaos in the cosmos--or otherness in the Word--in the end comes face to face with an other of its own creation but of truly cataclysmic and cosmic proportions.

CHAPTER 2

"Text in the Unlimited Sense"

In the Judaic tradition, an awareness of the cataclysmic other is present from the start. As presented in the Book of Genesis, the paradisaical Eden lasts for barely three chapters. Of course, the larger order of the cosmos persists: creation as a whole is not negated or destroyed, but with the "fall" or expulsion, there emerges a strong sense that the true or "real" home of humankind has been lost. The subversive energies of the primeval parents are not celebrated aspects of the agonistic created order (i.e., Adam and Eve are not Ouranos and Gaia; Cain and Abel are not Kronos and Zeus). Rather, their acts receive explicit moral judgment: they are sinful and destructive. The sin of disobedience is followed by Cain's act of murder. The first genealogy (Gen. 4.17-25) which enumerates the line from Cain through Lamech--like all of the genealogies--reveals the human race being fruitful and multiplying. But more is expected than mere biological procreation: there is subtle narrative irony and implicit moral judgment in the fact that both Cain and Lamech were murderers. Everything is subject to the judgment of a higher authority, the judgment of Yahweh.

Exactly what the right relation between humans and the divine should be is not spelled out, but it seems fairly clear that the border separating the two realms must remain distinct. In the riot of wickedness that precedes the covenant with Noah we are told--in one of the strangest biblical passages--of the "Nephilim," the

"sons of God [who] saw that the daughters of men were fair; and . . . took to wife such of them as they chose" (6.2). These creatures of gigantic size and strength resemble the Titans of classical myth or the gods of Olympus who routinely cross the all too permeable border between mortals and the divine. In this context, however, they signify a breaking down of the cosmic order, which prompts the deluge and a fresh beginning of human history. Indeed, it seems crucially important that the integrity of the border between the two realms be preserved: while the expulsion from Eden is punishment for sin, it also seems to be an act of damage control on the part of an anxious Yahweh: "Then the Lord God said, 'behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever'--" (3.22).

The primacy of God (and his heavenly colleagues) remains secure and the transcendent realm remains inviolable. The created order, however, has no such guaranteed permanence, as is indicated by the deluge--the destructive apocalypse by water. In response to man's wickedness Yahweh vows to "blot out" his creations, humankind and other living creatures (6.7). It is important to note that this cataclysm figures as a unique event: a particular manifestation of God's will and judgment in response to a particular manifestation of human wickedness. Cataclysm is not a part of a regular periodic cycle of the cosmic order (as it is in various cyclical myths of the "eternal return" variety that Eliade analyzes). On the contrary, it dramatizes the transcendence and power of a realm wholly other (and superior) to that of nature.

Of course, the Flood is not so much an absolute end as a beginning-again. A saving remnant survives beyond the cataclysm and history resumes.¹ It is the occasion of the first covenant between God and his creation (specifically, Noah). Yahweh affirms:

"I will never again curse the ground because of man . . . neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (8.21-2)

Yahweh, here, guarantees the regularity and periodicity of the cycles of nature, the implication being that Yahweh, himself, stands over and above those cycles. To recall the distinction Frye makes in The Great Code, we are dealing here with an artificial creation myth in which a transcendent "sky-father" makes the created order (*natura naturata*). This is to be distinguished from the organic creation myths with their imagery of an immanent earth-mother who begets and nurses her creation. Organic myths involve a reverence for the mysteries and cycles of nature, which are regarded as divine in and of themselves. Historically, the break from "nature" (or with the ritual practices associated with the worship of nature deities) is one of the key features which distinguished the Jews from other peoples. For them, the crucial relationship was with a transcendent reality--a

¹ The "saving remnant" is a biblical motif. Other examples include Lot saved from the destruction of Sodom, the faithful who do not perish in the wilderness, and those spared God's wrath in the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity (Prophets). The surviving remnant is also a staple of the "post-apocalypse" sub-genre of science fiction. An excellent example is Walter M. Miller's A Canticle for Leibowitz (1959).

radically other order of being--and the dynamics of that relationship determined the "meaning" of history. History was not the "meaninglessness of profane existence"; rather, the endless round of the cycles of nature was the relatively meaningless background for the meaning-charged encounters with deity. Just as the recognition of the autonomy of historical "facts" allowed the Greek historiographers to write history rather than sing the archetypal myths, so does the uniqueness of the Old Testament human/divine encounter allow for a breaking away from the ritually repeated mythoi and the emergence of a mythos which is linear rather than cyclical, open and future-directed rather than oriented toward ritual repetition and eternal return.

Figuratively conceived, the Judeo break into history is a sort of tangent from the cyclical patterns of nature-grounded myths of eternal return. The fiat of creation constitutes a wholly singular and discontinuous moment, grounded in no cyclical rhythm. It is self-authorized by a transcendent will which continues to exert an influence on the worldly mythos of history via occasional interventions and manifestations. Thus, the linear--or horizontal--mythos of history has a crucial relation to a transcendent order which is not a perfect paradigm, but something more radically other which manifests itself in discontinuous, theophanic moments--apocalyptic moments: vertical thrusts from the transcendent Logos into the horizontal mythos of history. It is the wilfulness of biblical divinity--its novelty--which distinguishes it from the much more static Greek Logos. If the Greek Logos (as exemplified in the writing of Thucydides) stills the movement of the mythos of history, assimilating unique historical facts to a larger pattern, then the

Old Testament Logos, conversely, propels mythos. Significantly, the Israelite name for God, YHWH, can be translated "I am who I am" (as in Gen. 3, when Moses, after the theophany of the burning bush, asks God his name), "I will be what I will be," or, in the more literal third-person form, "He causes to be." The RSV note remarks that "the name does not indicate God's eternal being but his action and presence in historical affairs." Rudolf Bultmann suggests that the biblical deity

is not conceived as the law of mind which forms the Cosmos into a harmonious shape which can be recognised by reason. Certainly, the pious Israelite admires and praises the wisdom of God, but he does not see it in the rational cosmic structure. (96)

Rather than some essential structure or principle of cosmic order, the nature of the biblical God, Bultmann suggests, is will (96). So, too, is the essence of the human individual, whose will is judged in ethical terms vis-à-vis the will of God.

Soul is not the rational mind which is related to the divine mind.

There is no trace of the Greek conception of an ideal image of man which is to be formed according to the law of mind like a work of art, nor does the idea of rational education and culture exist. (96)

It is in the dynamic interaction of the human and divine--encounters which take place in (or constitute) history--that value, meaning and identity are grounded.

These encounters are not mere repetitions of archetypal patterns, but have a radical novelty and an orientation towards the future. For later Jewish and

especially for Christian theology, the biblical fusion of mythos and Logos would produce telos: there would be a distinct eschatological goal.

But to return to the Old Testament, it is clear that the nature of God's presence and activity in the mythos of history differs tremendously from the depictions of deities in classical myth. Athena disguises herself and orchestrates events in The Odyssey. The gods take sides in the Trojan war, and actively intervene. In a work like Ovid's Metamorphosis there is a tremendous fluidity between the divine, human and natural. Yahweh, in contrast, is very much of a veiled presence, never described directly, yet whose agency and ultimate power is insisted upon. If the classical gods are more vividly present, their presence is confined to the "in illo tempore," ahistorical space of myth. The Old Testament, on the other hand, purports to be history, but we notice that God is present--and moreso as the book proceeds--in signs pointing or attesting to his active agency, rather than as some sort of fleshed out "character." We are told that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33.11), but after the apostasy of the golden calf, Yahweh tells Moses, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (33.20)--yet the assurance remains, "My presence will go with you" (33.14). Indeed, we are repeatedly told what "the Lord said" to Moses (or Abraham or Jacob or Joshua), but the words are always disembodied: Yahweh is never described, and rarely is any sort of "realistic" setting presented. The presence of Yahweh, I am suggesting, is not grounded in his person, or even in his "being," but rather in his words--his meaning--and the whole process of signification by which words and events are meaningful. History, in a

sense, is this process of signification: the story of the communication between the divine and the human, of a potentially meaningless mythos (mere series of events) made meaningful via a relation to a transcendent Logos. Yahweh is the hermeneutical God; history is the text.

The burning bush, the ark of the covenant, the pillar of cloud and the temple: these are symbols which point towards a God whose full presence transcends any concrete manifestation. Similarly, the events which attest to God's agency--whether a direct theophanic encounter or a military victory or defeat--are not significant in so far as they embody or participate in some sort of fuller being; rather, they are important in so far as they mean something. History for the Jews was not what it was for the Greeks, an inquiry into what is; on the contrary, biblical history is concerned with what is other than what is: what is beyond it, what it means, what it will be--what it reveals. Biblical history is thus apocalyptic through and through since it is concerned with the revelation of what is concealed in the given. Divine and human will is involved (as Bultmann suggests), but meaning does not resolve into the will to power--otherwise God would win, just as, for Hesiod, Zeus wins, as do the Athenians confronting the militarily inferior Melians in Thucydides' account. Will functions as an aspect of what is more like a free or open dialogical exchange rather than a battle or clash, and the ethical significance of human will--whether it is good or bad--is far more important than its mere magnitude.

The biblical shift in orientation from cosmos to history (to borrow Eliade's terms) involves, I am suggesting, a hermeneuticizing of the cosmos: a shift from

world to text, from being to meaning. This can be vividly illustrated by considering in sequence the four covenants of the Old Testament.

The first is the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9.1-19). Yahweh promises that "never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (9.11), and guarantees the regularity and periodicity of the cycles of nature, a gesture which (I have suggested) demonstrates his power over and transcendence from nature. The apocalyptic destruction and restoration, however, can also be seen as an erasure and re-inscription.² Whereas the original creation was the product of the divine voice (the primordial performative utterance, as it were), the post-deluge re-created order is, in a sense, an act of re-writing, and it carries a signature: the rainbow, "a sign of the covenant between [Yahweh] and the earth" (9.13).³ The rainbow sign is a sort of writing on or writing of the cosmos. Thus, the cosmos (or nature) now signifies something beyond itself: a divine, transcendent, creative, sustaining--and potentially destroying--power. The cosmos not only "is" but "means," and this concern for meaning sets the biblical understanding apart from that of oral cults with their "mythos" orientation and their ritual modes of participating in the being of the cosmos; it is also to be distinguished from the Greek understanding of Logos as immanent in the cosmos itself. In turning nature into a signifier, the covenant evokes a radical other which is associated with cataclysm, creation and (for Noah and the creatures on the Ark) salvation.

² The RSV's translation of 6:7, "I will blot out man whom I have created. . . ," supports my argument.

³ "Each plot carries its signature. Some are God's, some masquerade as God's" (GR 464).

The second covenant is with Abraham, whom Yahweh had called forth from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan, where it was promised he would become the patriarch of a great nation. In the initial covenant (from the older source) Yahweh has Abram "Look toward heaven, and number the stars," promising "So shall your descendants be" (Gen. 15.5). This image nicely suggests the shift of emphasis from the cosmic to the human. I suggested that the covenant with Noah entailed a writing on/of the cosmos (with the rainbow as the cosmic signature); the covenant with Abraham involves a writing on/of the individual. In the reaffirmation of the covenant (in Gen. ch. 17, a later source) Abram ("exalted father") is re-named Abraham ("father of a multitude"). This "re-writing" of the name is also an ascription of an identity which contradicts Abraham's "natural" state: at the time Abraham was ninety-nine years old and Sara was also aged and childless, so the promise defies the merely biological. But the covenant as "writing on the individual" goes beyond this. Yahweh decrees that "Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you" (17.10-11). This "covenant in your flesh" (17.13) is a sort of writing on the body. Again, those inscribed will have a significance beyond their mere existence: they are members of a specially chosen community; they signify a special relation between the human and the divine.

The third covenant is with the people of Israel and occurs on Mt. Sinai with Moses as the mediator. In this instance the divine act of "hermeneuticizing"

takes a more recognizable form: the writing of a text, specifically, the inscription of the Decalogue on the tablets of stone:

And he gave to Moses, when he had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. (Ex. 31.18)

. . . And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. (32.15-16)

This writing is the Law and the response it demands is obedience. The people had already pledged obedience to Yahweh's words of the Sinai covenant as verbally repeated by Moses (24.3) and to those same words as written down by Moses and re-read to the assembled people (24.7). But during the space of delay when Moses was receiving Yahweh's own inscribed text--the Ur-text or master copy, as it were--the restless people break the covenant by fashioning and worshipping a golden calf (32.1-5). Despite the reiteration of the law and the seeming directness of the channel of communication, Yahweh's message just doesn't seem to get through: the will of God is received by a wilful people; the Word of God--the Logos--receives a reply from a people whose "word" isn't worth much.

The Yahweh/Israel dialogue very nearly comes to an end before it can reach the point of written correspondence. The delivery of Yahweh's post card⁴ is on the verge of being pre-empted by the apocalyptic anger of the Lord:

⁴ To a certain extent, the argument I am making here involves a reading of the transmission of the Sinaitic covenant as a Derridean post card.

And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation." (32.9-10)⁵

Moses intercedes on behalf of his people, seeming to shame Yahweh by pointing out that if he does obliterate the Israelites, the Egyptians will interpret it as a confirmation of their view that Yahweh was a god of evil intent (32.11-12).

Beyond this, Moses--astonishingly--urges Yahweh, "'Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people'" and he reminds Yahweh of his pledges to multiply the people of Israel and bestow upon them the promised land (32.12-13). Moses proves persuasive: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" (32.14).

The dialogical, interactive character of this exchange extends to a point of role reversal. Clearly it is the behaviour of the restless Israelites which is in violation of the covenant and is therefore sinful; but it is Yahweh who "repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." That the monotheistic god contemplates and repents of an act of "evil" suggests the complexity of this deity who thus would resist easy conceptualization as the essence of good or the essence of power.

What kind of cosmology or theodicy could integrate such a figure?

⁵ Note that even in his threat Yahweh (with some editorial assistance, no doubt) is careful not to renege on his side of the earlier covenantal bargains: he will still "make a great nation" of Israel even if he has to start from a remnant of one individual: Moses.

Answering this question involves a critique of its assumptions and terms. As I have discussed, the shift from orality to literacy involves a shift from what I called a "mythos orientation" to a "Logos orientation," a shift reflected in the forms of the respective symbolic or mythic systems: from cosmogony to cosmology (my representative examples were Hesiod's Theogony and Plato's Timaeus).

Cosmogonies, grounded as they are in the process of sexual generation, resolve into the paradigm of the cycles of nature. Clearly the Old Testament is not a mythos of this cyclical sort. Indeed, it is precisely such earth-centered mythologies that the chosen people are being differentiated from. Nor is the biblical mythos (as we have examined it so far) assimilable to a static, logocentric cosmology, whether Platonic or of the later classical sense (in which Logos is identified with reason or the ordered structure of the cosmos). Instead, the Old Testament is historical in the sense that it is concerned with a temporal and linear sequence of radically singular events proceeding towards some sort of divinely promised goal. But whereas in a mythos-oriented oral culture particular events would be subsumed in the eternally repeating mythic patterns, and in a logocentric cosmos individual events would merely be aspects of the "unsought particular" (Plato, Letter VII, 343c) and therefore lack the "being" of essential reality--or, as in Thucydides, particulars would be assimilated to the larger rational pattern of the Logos--in distinction to these, biblical "events" are meaningful: they signify something "other" to themselves. The biblical mythos dramatizes this process of the cosmos and the chosen people "made meaningful" vis-à-vis the transcendent Logos level. Thus Yahweh figures as the hermeneuticizing God: the

historiographer of and in the mythos of history.

If Hesiod's Theogony is cosmogony (a story of the birth of the cosmos), and Plato's Timaeus is cosmology (cosmos as Logos or perfect rational pattern), then the Bible (to some extent) is cosmography: the continuous writing of cosmos and history. The presence of Yahweh, then, is inseparable from this process of signification, a process dramatized in the biblical narrative, but also, in a self-validating manner, a process in which the reader of the biblical text cannot help but be actively engaged, and it is this ongoing, temporal dimension of biblical hermeneutics that is crucial to the biblical Logos, and allows it, as it were, to spill beyond the borders of the text. In other words, participation in the biblical myth is not limited to ritual repetition (as in oral cultures) but seems to demand interpretation. This interpretation, however, does not entail merely a dialectical drive towards the transcendent (as in Plato), but also involves a dialogical engagement with the transcendent other, an engagement which is by no means merely intellectual, but which includes actions of the community and of individuals on the "horizontal" plane of history where the most significant events have the character of a theophanic encounter, but where virtually all events are meaningful in so far as they have ethical significance and relate to the Law. In the myths and rituals of a pre-literate culture, historically particular events are eclipsed by the more fully "real" archetypal patterns--history is assimilated to myth. Under the biblical model, myth (the transcendent) is forced to engage more directly with and in history. The Torah (and by extension, the Bible) is not an example of Logos as a static and absolutely transcendent other--it is not a Platonic Form. Rather,

there is a greater sense of continuity and interactive participation between the divine and the historically particular--participation which does not involve the assimilation of one to the other, but which, on the contrary presumes a certain autonomy of each. The model (I am suggesting) which can usefully account for the nature of this interaction is that of a dynamic textual field which includes both divine and human, scripture and history, reader and historical agent--dialogically engaged in an ongoing process of signification.

If the events surrounding the Sinai covenant and the revelation of the Decalogue serve as a paradigm or introduction to this process of signification inherent in manifestations of the biblical Logos, it would thus seem that this process is very fractious indeed. The bestowal of the law entails a complex process of mediation which involves reiteration, repetition, delay (and thus impatience: a space for sin), and deferral. The covenant originates in the speaking presence of Yahweh; it is repeated verbally to the people by Moses, written and read aloud by Moses, and finally inscribed by Yahweh, himself. The trajectory of the Word is threatened fundamentally in ways which jeopardize the possibility of its final arrival. On the human side, the worshipping of the golden calf is a reversion to the earth-centered cults with their celebration of the cycles of life and death--a denial of the singularity and transcendence of the Logos and a refusal to see the unique meaningfulness of history, a meaningfulness dependent upon their participation in the dialogical exchange with Yahweh and their taking seriously the significance of these exchanges. On the divine side, the wrath of Yahweh threatens to invoke a premature closure of the mythos of history. This

potential for cataclysm exemplifies the ever-present threat of the negative pole of apocalypse: literal destruction--an event which, significantly, is regarded as inherently "evil" even if Yahweh himself is the active agent. The obliteration of the people of Israel would constitute a violation of the covenantal promises and a denial of the hope for some sort of future salvation. It is this future-looking, hopeful orientation which constitutes the positive pole of apocalypse grounded in the residual presence of the desire for some other condition of existence, beyond that which mundane (and usually grim) history offers. The dialogical encounters with deity, I am suggesting, are always charged with the presence of both apocalyptic poles.

Yahweh, of course, does not obliterate the people of Israel for the apostasy of the golden calf; the mythos of history is allowed to proceed. The Logos, however, in its particular manifestation as the "writing of God, graven upon the tables" (Ex. 32.16), is obliterated: "And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (32.20). The popular cliché "carved in stone" which is taken to mean rigid, permanent, and immutable must be qualified if we look more closely at the biblical source. Upon encountering the carnival atmosphere at the foot of Sinai, Moses' first act--which is simultaneously his bestowal of the Law to the people--is to smash the tablets to pieces. Thus the "presence" of the Logos is rendered thoroughly ambiguous: it is simultaneously offered and withdrawn. To complicate matters even more, after a certain penance has been exacted, Yahweh inscribes another set of tablets with

the Law (Ex. 34). How does this copy relate to the original? What is the authority of the reinscription?

Thus the response demanded by the Word is of a complex sort. The Tablets are not to be worshipped in and of themselves: as physical entities they can be destroyed like any other idol. They demand an active response, but beyond mere obedience--other priests and gods also made demands of slavish obedience--something more is demanded, and this something more seems to be bound up with the ongoing process of history as a series of dialogical exchanges between the human and the divine, a process which seems necessary because the revealed Word is always the shattered Word. Revelation is not a once and for all event, but an ongoing process of signification and hermeneuses.

The fourth Old Testament covenant lacks the focused symbolism of inscription (rainbow, circumcision, tablets) of the first three: instead it initiates a complex of imagery of central political and existential importance for both Judaism and Christianity. Specifically, what Yahweh bestows to Israel with the fourth covenant is kingship, and the anointed one is David:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son." (2 Sam. 7.12-14)

Or, as conveyed in "David's" Psalm:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my

son, today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends
of the earth your possession. . . ." (Psalm 2.7-8)

That the Chosen People--a nation with a special relationship to the monotheistic God and possessing a divinely inscribed legal code--should need a king at all is a problematic point. Since Moses, Israel had had a series of "judges" to lead them, and their political and military fortunes had been mixed, the low points or misfortunes coinciding with apostasies or fallings away from a steadfast faith in Yahweh. Often these apostasies took the form of reversions to the earth-centered cults, as acknowledged in this characteristic plea from 1 Samuel:

And they cried to the Lord, and said, "We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee." (1 Sam. 12.10)

Such a tendency to fall away from faith and refuse to see the special role of Israel in history was everpresent. During the wanderings in the wilderness, "all the people of Israel murmured against Moses . . ., 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt!'" (Num. 14.2). By the time of Samuel, the last judge, the murmuring people were still making demands that seem to display a lack of awareness of their special historical destiny: "now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8.5). But the people of Israel were not supposed to be "like all the nations," and Yahweh consoles and advises Samuel:

"Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for

they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I have brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you." (1 Sam. 8.7-9)

Samuel warns the people that they will soon regret having a king over them, "but the people refused to listen" (8.19).

The first anointed king is Saul, but it is his successor, David, who would be the covenantal king whose line would inherit the throne. Saul would prove largely successful in attaining military victories, but his disobedience led to his rejection by Yahweh, and his persecution of David renders him and his kingship morally ambiguous. To complicate matters more, the two narrative strands in 1 Samuel take opposite attitudes towards Saul and kingship. The Early Source views the kingship positively while the Late Source, which concentrates more on Samuel, sees the institution of kingship as a mistake, and regards David as worthy of divine favour in spite of being a king (H. May 330).

Leaving aside the question of the relative merits of specific kings, the larger question for my purpose concerns what it is, exactly, that "kingship" means. In the covenant Yahweh declares, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever," but what is the status of the referent, "kingdom"? Are the chosen people to be governed by a worldly king "like all the nations"? In Psalm 2 David figures as the "son of God"--an ominous appellation by which the Pharaoh of Egypt was also known. On this latter point, the philosopher of history Eric Voegelin remarks:

When Moses brought Israel up from Egypt, he drew the new ["collective"] Son of God from the waters in which the old one perished; and now Yahweh draws from the waters a ruler [David] who resembles the Pharaonic Son of God. Has Israel now been demoted and Pharaoh resurrected? Has the symbol of the Son of God gone full circle, back to cosmological rulership? (396)

In other words, if David is son of God and king, then he seems indistinguishable from the Pharaonic ruler who embodied in his person the intersection of the human and divine, and whose coronation symbolized or ritually repeated the birth of the primordial deity who would bring order out of chaos (Voegelin 76). Such a divine king presides over a cyclical cosmology of the "eternal return" variety--precisely that which the Judaic "break into history" is supposed to define itself against.

Perhaps the Davidic kingdom would simply overcome all rival empires and thus constitute a terminus to history, accomplishing its eschatological goal in the establishment of an eternal kingdom under God--such the covenant seems to promise. But biblical history shows that this was not to happen: the monarchy itself remained united only for the reign of David's son and successor, Solomon, and with the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar (587 BCE) exile rather than empire seems to be the defining context of Judaism. Northrop Frye suggests that "the most important single historical fact about the Old Testament is that the people who produced it were never lucky at the game of empire" (GC 83), and the scriptural text itself makes this quite clear. Indeed, the editing of the books of

Samuel--with their interwoven pro- and anti-kingship strands--took place in the post-exilic period (H. May 330): there could be no illusion that the covenant with David would entail imminent and unproblematic historical fulfilment.

I would like to suggest that with the fourth covenant begins the revelation of a radically new sense of the term "kingdom." Despite his conquest of Jerusalem and subsequent military victories, David by no means has succeeded in accomplishing a final kingdom which could be inhabited in some sort of perfect attunement with the divine. The "meaning" of Israel's place in history was not to be fulfilled yet, and the process of dialogical encounters with Yahweh would continue. The real meaning of the kingdom would progressively reveal itself: history remains an ongoing process of signification, with its detours, deferrals, moments of steadfastness and apostasy, and senses of the consoling presence and disturbing absence of Yahweh.



Having traced the trajectory of the apocalyptic word through the space of cosmogony (oral myth and ritual), cosmology (with its conception of a transcendent Logos), classical history (with its immanent Logos, historical facts and general laws), and biblical history (the "apocalyptic space of signification" in which the transcendent Logos smashes its way into the mythos of history), I will now move towards the apocalyptic space of postmodern fiction, specifically that occupied by Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. The consideration of the biblical

apocalyptic/textual space in the previous section provides a useful avenue into this novel which is so highly self-conscious about its place in the American apocalyptic tradition with its roots in the Puritan new world adventure. The Puritan typological perspective (as I shall discuss) is a blend of the geographical, historical, and the textual. All history resolves into biblical history; there is nothing outside of that text, so to speak, since even their contemporary historical moment was but a moment contextualized by the poles of Genesis and Apocalypse, and thus it could be "read" accordingly. The Puritan textual space, like that of the Bible itself, is centered around a Logos, but, as I hope my unfolding argument is beginning to make clear, the bestowal of that Logos is a very fractious process evoking both millennial and cataclysmic possibilities. Puritan antipathy to "play" in signification notwithstanding, the divine purpose turned out to be not at all easy to discern. Predictions regarding the time of the apocalypse--the closure of the defining mythos--were especially prone to disconfirmation, necessitating an ongoing process of revision and renegotiation--not unlike the ongoing process of covenantal renegotiations of the people of Israel in the Old Testament (whose wilderness sojourn the Pilgrims so often compared to their own experience in the American wilderness).

Pynchon associates the hermeneutic propensities of Puritanism with paranoia, an association which unites the angst which must have been present in such an apocalyptically obsessed culture with the postmodern suspicion of metanarratives. Whereas the Bible provided the centering Logos of the Puritan space of signification, the Rocket is the center of the postmodern novelistic space

of Gravity's Rainbow--and the Bomb arguably is the centering Logos of the space of postmodernism. Thus, a new variation on the inevitable link of apocalypse and signification can be discerned.

In The Language of Allegory (1979) Maureen Quilligan comments on the paradoxical status of allegory ("other-speaking") in seventeenth century Puritan culture:

Allegory is a genre for the fallen world, but is a genre self-conscious of its own fallenness. In a prelapsarian world at one with God, there is no "other" for language to work back to, for there has been no fatal division. . . .

Milton's position on allegory, associating it with fallenness, if not with evil necessity, ought not to surprise us in a Puritan. And we ought to notice here how different Milton's approach to wordplay is from that of Augustine or Aquinas. In the Middle Ages wordplay was a sign of God's harmonious design; in the seventeenth century it had become a sign of that design's failure. In so far as allegory was considered a rhetorical figure, a kind of "continued metaphor," it would have been suspect to the Puritan mind with its much-discussed demand for the rigours of a reasonable "plain style."

(182)

Given this, Quilligan continues, there is "something inexplicable" in Bunyan's decision to write the great Puritan allegory, Pilgrim's Progress (1678), "since it ought to have been impossible for a Puritan to write a straight allegorical narrative

toward the end of the seventeenth century" (182-3). Bunyan justifies his literary procedure by invoking the figurative language employed in the Bible, itself: "Gospel laws, in olden time held forth / By types, shadows and metaphors" (qtd. in Quilligan 183). In other words, deviation from the literal is authorized and channelled in a rigorously typological direction. So employed, the otherness of language would not be an end in itself (which would be demonic), but would function as a tool in the attempt to repair the divisiveness of the fall.

Postmodern wordplay, in contrast to this, has no such obvious logocentric purpose; it lacks confidence in an ontological anchor for the word. Indeed, it seems to revel in the unruly disseminative capacities of figurative language and narrative. Hence Gravity's Rainbow self-reflexively announces on its first page, "No, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into--" (3). Reader expectation and narrative conventions are openly mocked: "You will want cause and effect. All right" (663). So begins an outrageously convoluted chapter about an undertaker who rows about in a boat (while wearing a World War I Wehrmacht helmet) hoping to get struck by lightning (so he can better understand his customers who die in such a fashion. . .). OK, amusing, but the improvisations are more expansive than this: "lightning" triggers a narratorial digression on the topic of discontinuity:

Most people's lives have ups and downs that are relatively gradual, a sinuous curve with first derivatives at every point. They're the ones who never get struck by lightning. No real idea of cataclysm at all. But the ones who do get hit experience a singular point, a

discontinuity in the curve of life--do you know what the time rate of change is at a cusp? Infinity, that's what! A-and right across the point, it's minus infinity! How's that for sudden change, eh? Infinite miles per hour changing to the same speed in reverse, all in the gnat's-ass or red cunt hair of the Δt across the point. That's getting hit by lightning, folks. You're way up there on the needle-peak of a mountain, and don't think there aren't lammergeiers cruising there in the lurid red altitudes around, waiting for a chance to snatch you off. Oh yes. They are piloted by bareback dwarves with little plastic masks around their eyes that happen to be shaped just like the infinity symbol: ∞ . Little men with wicked eyebrows, pointed ears and bald heads, although some of them are wearing outlandish headgear, not at all the usual Robin Hood green fedoras, no these are Carmen Miranda hats, for example, bananas, papayas [. . .]

(664)

Somehow I don't think this is what Plato had in mind in his conception of the "flash [of] understanding." Nor is this exactly equivalent to Aristotelian reversal. But there is a point to both the style and content of this passage, and it concerns the revelatory nature of the experience of discontinuity. The undertaker, who got his idea "one night in a flash (though not the kind he wanted)," realizes: "What stories they could tell!" (663). Discontinuity, it seems, begets narrative (and more narrative). And after such an experience of discontinuity, the world will be apocalyptically transformed:

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 lightning-heads. Another world laid down on the previous one and to all appearances no different. He-ha! But the lightning-struck know, all right! Even if they may not know they know. (664)

Evocations of such an uncanny world--the same yet not the same, familiar yet unfamiliar, identical yet different--occur in several instances throughout the novel. They evoke Pynchon's peculiarly postmodern form of apocalyptic negation which is associated with discontinuity and "cataclysm," but which does not resolve into a vision of mere literal destruction. Yet it is also quite different from full revelation of the Logos. This intermediate space (I will argue) is a space of deconstruction, and it has distinct affinities with what I have called the biblical apocalyptic space of signification. It is into this postmodern apocalyptic space that Pynchon's stylistic swerves, ingenious analogues and narrative discontinuities conduct us.

To draw seventeenth-century parallels, Pynchon's own technique, nurtured though it may be on the ethos of American Puritanism, perhaps has more in common with those whom the Puritans disdained so much: the metaphysical poets, whose startling puns and conceits reveal a cosmos of linked analogies: an overdetermined space in which the sexual, spiritual, celestial, and conceptual are threaded together in poetic knots. Pynchon's narrative "knotting into" does something quite similar, adding even more layers which include the technological, mathematical, psychoanalytic, chemical, and linguistic (among innumerable

others). Pynchon is the great fabulist of multiple levels of being, and his narrative focus ranges from the microscopic to the macrocosmic, often managing to blend the two in a sense of archetypal--yet always vaguely paranoid--patterning. For example, in the context of a discussion of Gavin Trefoil's ability to change the colour of his skin, we are given a dialogue of epidermal cells--denizens of the "Outer Level": silent, unconscious of their former glory until a messiah cell reminds them, "we're in exile, we do have a home! [. . .] Back there! Not up at the interface. Back at the CNS [central nervous system]" (148). But the "Outer Level" can be figured more expansively; Pynchon seems constantly to be pushing the circumference of the imagination. The cosmos of Gravity's Rainbow also includes "the watchmen of the world's edge":

But out at the horizon, out near the burnished edge of the world, who are these visitors standing . . . these robed figures--perhaps, at this distance, hundreds of miles tall--their faces, serene, unattached, like the Buddha's, bending over the sea, impassive [. . .] (214)

Such deities watch the unfolding human drama of World War II, with its Allied aerial bombardment and Nazi V2 vengeance weaponry. Pynchon allegorizes this as an elaborate "game of seduction" involving an ominous weave of eros, Thanatos and technology. Such a vision goes beyond any normal human perspective, assuming an "angel's eye view" (54):

[. . .] indeed, as the Angel that stood over Lübeck during the Palm Sunday raid, come that day neither to destroy nor to protect, but to bear witness to a game of seduction. It was the next-to-last step

London took before her submission, before that liaison that would bring her at length to the eruption and scarring of the wasting pox [i.e., Rocket strikes], noted on Roger Mexico's map, latent in this love she shares with the night-going rake Lord Death . . . because sending the RAF to make a terror raid against civilian Lübeck was the unmistakable long look that said hurry up and fuck me, that brought the rockets hard and screaming, the A4s, which were to've been fired anyway, a bit sooner instead. . . . (214-5)

Finally, the allegorical landscape of Gravity's Rainbow is figured in terms which specifically invoke Bunyan. One of the duties of American technical intelligence officer Tyrone Slothrop is to visit the V2 Rocket sites in London:

Ruins he goes daily to look in are each a sermon on vanity. That he finds, as weeks wear on, no least fragment of any rocket, preaches how indivisible is the act of death . . . Slothrop's Progress: London the secular city instructs him: turn any corner and he can find himself inside a parable. (25)

Pynchon's postmodern apocalyptic landscape, then, is quite explicitly an allegorical or textual landscape. Just as Bunyan expressed trepidation towards the Puritan literalists of his age who might object to his figurative excesses, so did the novels of Pynchon (and other postmodern apocalyptists of the 60s and 70s) face the hostility and dismissiveness of another generation of critical literalists. Yet the fabulists--whether they knew it or not--had a champion in the anti-mimetic theories of Northrop Frye.

In his 1966 article "The Apocalyptic Temper," Robert Alter suggests that much recent American literature has told considerably less than the truth precisely because of the apocalyptic postures it has assumed. The excitement of apocalypses is seductive and may easily give the impression of profundity and imaginative daring where neither is present. No one can be altogether impervious to the jeweled flashes and lurid flames that illuminate those doomed landscapes of the Book of Revelations [sic], but there is no other document in either the Old or New Testament so inhuman, so spiritually irresponsible, and the same negative attributes adhere to the modes of imagination that ultimately derive from Revelations. . . . There is no room for real people in apocalypses, for when a writer chooses to see men as huddled masses waiting to be thrown into sulphurous pits he hardly needs to look at individual faces; and so it is not surprising that recent comic-apocalyptic novelists should fill their worlds with the rattling skeletons of satiric hypotheses in place of fully fleshed characters. (62-3)

Leaving aside for the moment Alter's underlying assumptions about what the novel and novelistic characterization should be, this statement unveils a general hostility towards the apocalyptic mode, extending back to the source text, the Book of Revelation. That apocalyptic texts are neither "profound" nor "imaginatively daring" constitutes a flat rejection of any revelatory message or vision which may be present. Significantly, Alter does acknowledge a certain

seductiveness of apocalyptic spectacle--"the jeweled flashes and lurid flames that illuminate those doomed landscapes"; but finally, such effects he judges to be "inhuman" and "spiritually irresponsible." The contemporary novelists Alter is attacking include Ralph Ellison, John Barth, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon.

Northrop Frye, on the other hand, takes apocalypse very seriously indeed, and far from seeing it as spiritually irresponsible, he sees it as constituting the spiritual and imaginative core of the Bible--and of literary experience. For Frye, "spiritual" always centrally means "metaphorical," and the metaphors employed in apocalyptic texts constitute "a form of imaginative comprehension" (GC 56; TLS). The following observations (from The Great Code) could stand as a rebuttal to Alter:

The general material of the [apocalyptic] vision is the familiar material of prophecy: there is again a culbute générale in which the people of God are raised into recognition and the heathen kingdoms are cast into darkness. There are portentous events in both social and natural orders: plagues, wars, famines, great stars falling from heaven and an eventual transformation, for those who persist in the faith, of the world into a new heaven and earth. We are greatly oversimplifying the vision, however, if we think of it simply as what the author thought was soon going to happen, as a firework show that would be put on for the benefit of the faithful, starting perhaps next Tuesday. For him all these incredible wonders are the inner meaning or, more accurately, the inner form of everything that is

happening now. Man creates what he calls history as a screen to conceal the workings of the apocalypse from himself. (135-6)

In this passage Frye is, of course, referring to the Book of Revelation (but one could apply a startling amount of it to Gravity's Rainbow). Apocalypse has been a central critical category for Frye, from Fearful Symmetry on, and I presume that the apocalyptic dimension of Gravity's Rainbow has much to do with why he regards it as "one of the most remarkable works of fiction in our time" (Divisions 17).

But why the emphasis on destruction and chaos, in both Revelation and apocalyptic fiction? R.W.B. Lewis, in his influential 1964 essay "Days of Wrath and Laughter" (which also singles out Ellison, Barth, Heller, and Pynchon), clearly sympathizes with the hero of Bellow's Herzog, whose observation he quotes: "Safe, comfortable people playing at crisis, alienation, apocalypse and desperation, make me sick" (233). In its very act of negation, however, such "playing" can initiate a redemptive process. To quote Frye on Revelation again, "What is symbolized as the destruction of the order of nature is the destruction of the way of seeing that order that keeps man confined to the world of time and history as we know them" (GC 136). In other words, it is not just "nature" which is being destroyed, but the repressive conventions of representation and understanding which ground the very concept of nature. The reality principle itself, so Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown suggest, could and should be apocalyptically overthrown and a radically new form of liberation would thereby be revealed.

In representing the destruction of the object of mimesis (nature), mimesis is

subverting itself and posing a hermeneutical challenge. In the process, the ontological ground of both object and subject, nature and self, is shaken, and a greater self-consciousness about the intricacies of the mediatory processes themselves (be they perceptual, representational, or ritual) is demanded. To borrow the terminology of Thomas Kuhn, apocalypse initiates a paradigm shift. Such a paradigm shift is dramatized and invoked in the four Old Testament covenants (discussed earlier): the shift is away from the characteristically "oral" mode of participating in the "being" of the cosmos via cultic ritual attunement with the cycles of nature; it is a shift towards a new dialogical, historical space which, I suggested, has the character of a dynamic textual field where the emphasis is on signification and meaning rather than on identification and being. This is not to say that nature ceases to have any autonomous being whatsoever: after the deluge (to pursue the most familiar of the apocalyptic paradigms) Yahweh re-establishes the periodic cycles of nature. But in a sense, nature has been placed sous rature: it is not quite what it is--it both is and is not itself--since it simultaneously signifies something other than itself, something of which the rainbow as cosmic signature reminds us. Or, more positively, nature has been unveiled and another dimension in it has been revealed. Similarly, Isaiah presents apocalyptic images of the day of vengeance and its attendant chaos (ch. 34), but nature subsequent to this is figured as joyfully revelatory:

. . . the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. . . . and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign which

shall not be cut off. (55:12-13)

In other words, after the day of wrath, nature is not so much revealed as transformed, as transformed into a revelatory "everlasting sign."

Apocalyptic negation is thus not the same thing as obliteration or absolute transformation: what is negated is preserved, supplemented, and integrated in a more complex ongoing process of mediation. Freud suggests that "with the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning" ("Negation" 438-9). Negation is thus one way in which the repressed can be acknowledged and negotiated by consciousness. In the psychoanalytic context, for the negation to become fully therapeutic, a transposition must occur (as Freud wryly figures it, to the analysand's, "It's not my mother" the analyst reads, "So it is his mother" [437]). In the imaginative literary context, instead of conscious denial as unconscious affirmation we have outright expression and depiction of that which might normally be suppressed or repressed, whether it be horrific or fantastic or both. With reference to the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear Frye writes:

In a dramatic scene of cruelty and hatred we're seeing cruelty and hatred, which we know are permanently real things in human life, from the point of view of the imagination. What the imagination suggests is horror, not the paralysing sickening horror of a real blinding scene, but an exuberant horror, full of the energy of repudiation. This is as powerful a rendering as we can ever get of

life as we don't want it. (Educated Imagination 41)

Of the more ambiguous Book of Revelation, Frye acknowledges that it may appear "as simply an insane rhapsody . . . yet, if we were to explore below the repressions in our own minds that keep us 'normal', we might find very similar nightmares of anxiety and triumph" (GC 137).

This ambiguous apocalyptic space does not at all lend itself to a straightforward mimetic reading, hence Robert Alter's frustration with the "doomed landscapes" lacking "real people" and filled with "rattling skeletons of satiric hypotheses." But for Frye, literature is hypothesis, and his understanding of mimesis is of a more visionary and radical sort. From his essay on the "Theory of Symbols" in the Anatomy of Criticism Frye writes:

We have adopted the principle in this essay that the events and ideas of poetry are hypothetical imitations of history and discursive writing respectively, which in their turn are verbal imitations of action and thought. This principle brings us close to a view of poetry as a secondary imitation of reality. We are interpreting mimesis, however, not as a Platonic "recollection" but as an emancipation of externality into image, nature into art. From this point of view the work of art must be its own object: it cannot be ultimately descriptive of something, and can never be ultimately related to any other system of phenomena, standards, values, or final causes. (113)

Thus we arrive at Frye's controversial assumption that literature constitutes

"a total form" or an autonomous "order of words" (118). That such an order is not primarily an imitation of nature, but rather an "emancipation of externality into image, nature into art," indicates Frye's own positive conception of apocalypse, for this emancipation is what results from the "destruction of the way of seeing" which images of the "destruction of the order of nature"--or, indeed, any image--symbolize. Alter, with his more conservative conception of mimesis as imitation rather than emancipation, remains chained to the reality principle and, more modestly, sees the novel in the same way as the ancient Greeks conceived historiography, as an inquiry into what is, rather than an apocalyptic vehicle to give access to what is radically other than what is.

Like Alter, R.W.B. Lewis sees no visionary implications in apocalypse, but he does acknowledge a more modest trace of hope in the grimly comic apocalyptic fictions of the 60s:

For if there is a large portion of bitterness in the laughter, and if laughter sometimes seems the only response still possible in a radically graceless world, it has served nonetheless to define, to measure and assess the horror, to reveal its sources and make visible its shape. To do this is to reassert the human. These apocalyptic visions indeed are offered as weapons for averting the catastrophe.

(235)

Lewis is thus more concerned with what I have been calling the negative pole of apocalypse, associated with literal destruction, and the pragmatic hope implicit in literature is that this can be deferred or avoided. Frye--influenced as he is by

Blake and traditions of radical Protestantism--makes the visionary or positive pole of apocalypse central to his critical system. Both, however, involve the mediatory use of language in the absence of the absolute apocalyptic referent itself.

In defining "apocalyptic space" as primarily a space of mediation in which a process of negotiation with (or revelation of) a radical "other" takes place, I am trying to articulate a space which entails both the literal and figurative, or historical and visionary. It is easiest to associate the literal and historical with the negative pole of apocalypse: cataclysms of varying degrees are "of this world." The figurative and visionary is most easily associated with the positive pole of apocalypse: salvation or utopia are things this world has not really ever known, and thus they are expressions of human hope which exist in words or hypotheses--and can therefore more easily be dismissed as "mere language." But these associations can be reversed, as can be seen in examples where the "other" is of a more radical sort. Examples of extreme destructiveness (genocide, natural disaster, the Bomb) necessitate the invocation of figurative or mythic language in the attempt to grasp their cataclysmic magnitude. Conversely, images of radical hope (positive apocalypse) can never quite escape earthbound imagery and this-worldly categories. Language, of course, is the medium of apocalypse no matter what its form; it is what allows us both to "approach and avoid" the ultimate apocalyptic referent (V. 55). That this referent--this "wholly other"--is an otherness beyond language is more or less taken for granted in most apocalyptic texts. But perhaps apocalypse is more productively understood if this otherness is seen as being not beyond but within language: if the apocalyptic referent is

brought within the field of the text, or, conversely, if our notion of text is expanded to include reference, generally, and the apocalyptic referent, in particular.

Such an apocalyptic space is that which Frye identifies with the anagogic phase of literary symbolism. This phase completes

the imaginative revolution begun when we passed from the descriptive to the formal phase of symbolism. There, the imitation of nature shifted from a reflection of external nature to a formal organization of which nature was the content. But in the formal phase the poem is still contained by nature, and in the archetypal phase the whole of poetry is still contained within the limits of the natural, or plausible. When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate. (AC 119)

Frye's scheme, derived from the medieval theory of the "Four Senses of

Interpretation" (literal, moral, allegorical, anagogical), is clearly rooted in traditions of biblical hermeneutics. A post-structural version of this apocalyptic/textual space could be something like what Jacques Derrida has in mind in his famous affirmation, "There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte]" (Of Grammatology 158). With reference to various autobiographical writings of Rousseau, Derrida suggests that

beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (159)

Unpacking the theoretical assumptions and implications that led these two theorists to make what I tentatively suggest are analogous accounts of the disappearance of nature into text is far beyond the scope of my project here. Suffice that both articulate theoretical notions of a sort of textual space (and textual temporality) which profoundly problematizes any simple conception of linguistic reference or literary mimesis. Both conceptions will be extremely useful

in understanding the dynamics of apocalyptic texts, especially in delineating the problematics of the apocalyptic referent.

Perhaps the first observation to be made about the respective "apocalyptic spaces" of Frye and Derrida is that, despite the assumption of nature into text, or referent into signifying structure, they still can be associated with the poles of apocalypse I have been discussing. For Frye the anagogic phase completes a process of "imaginative revolution"; alien nature is redeemed by being internalized and possessed by "an infinite and eternal living body" (119). The association with a principle of divine personality is obvious. Although Frye is careful to affirm that "this is not reality," a strong sense that anagogic metaphors finally coalesce in some sort of grounding term, center or identity is present. In The Great Code, for example, Frye suggests that the biblical apocalyptic vision is that "in which the body of Christ is the metaphor holding together all categories of being in an identity," and he presents a table of apocalyptic imagery which is mirrored by a table of demonic imagery (166-7). Thus, with Frye, apocalypse again becomes associated with Logos: not the static paradigm of Plato, but "the universal creative word which is all words" (AC 125). Derrida's "apocalyptic space," on the other hand, is clearly grounded in no final Logos. Totalizing identity dissolves in a "chain of differential references," supplements, substitutive significations, and traces. Instead of Christ we get something more like a prison house of language; not the Word but a textual field of infinite substitution, without even a cyclical pattern providing some logocentric coherence. Instead of fuller presence and the creative incarnation of imaginative desire, the Derridean chain of signification

seems propelled by a "rolling-stock absence" likely culminating in an "Absolute Zero" (to borrow phrases from the opening page of Gravity's Rainbow). Or, in Roland Barthes' terms, if the Fryean apocalyptic space "closes on a signified," then the Derridean apocalyptic space "practises the infinite deferment of the signified" and possibly "accomplishes the very plural of meaning" (158-9).

What I have just provided is a fairly standard sketch of certain central aspects of the theories of Frye and Derrida which illustrate a seemingly unbridgeable difference between them, despite their respective radically expanded notions of "text." Frye moves beyond consideration of the recognizably delineated textual field of "literature" via anagogy--"the radical form of metaphor in which everything is potentially identical with everything else"--to the all-inclusive and integrating category of apocalypse, "of which only religion, or something as infinite in its range as religion, can possibly form an external goal" (AC 118, 124-5). At what is perhaps the climax of the Anatomy of Criticism, Frye throws down the gauntlet in defence of his own dauntingly totalizing enterprise:

Unless there is such a center [of the order of words], there is nothing to prevent the analogies supplied by convention and genre from being an endless series of free associations, perhaps suggestive, perhaps even tantalizing, but never creating a real structure. The study of archetypes is the study of literary symbols as parts of a whole. If there are such things as archetypes at all, then, we have to take yet another step, and conceive the possibility of a self-contained literary universe. Either archetypal criticism is a will-o'-the-wisp, an

endless labyrinth without an outlet, or we have to assume that literature is a total form, and not simply the name given to the aggregate of existing literary works. (118)

Post-structuralist Derrida seems to take a fundamental centerlessness as the starting point for an examination of the dynamics of the textual field, which may indeed have more in common with "an endless series of free associations" than with a "real structure," and it is precisely the totalizing impulse within literary, aesthetic, philosophical or political constructs that Derrida programmatically deconstructs.

Like Frye, Derrida makes use of a notion of "text in the unlimited sense" ("NANN" 26), not to reveal the omnipresence or omnipotence of any Logos, but to reveal the radically contingent, unstable, self-subverting nature of "textuality" itself. Linguistic difference rather than the identity of the Word is the governing category. For Derrida the text (or "writing") does not subsume everything else so much as it is interpenetrated with everything else, such that "text" functions as an epistemological paradigm governing the examination not only of actual texts, but of the psyche, sexuality, or even political practice (in a similar manner "sexuality" provides Freud with his epistemological frame). To use an analogy Derrida himself suggests, just as diplomacy extends itself into war (according to Clausewitz), so, too, does textuality extend itself into our current nuclear predicament ("NANN" 26), and the implications of this are directly relevant to the issue of apocalypse.

Derrida's anti-logocentric orientation would make him anti-apocalyptic if

apocalypse were considered only in Frye's terms (which clearly represent the positive pole). But how would the negative pole of apocalypse, associated with "literal" destruction, fit in to Derrida's "textualist" scheme? How does one take apocalypse literally? Derrida's 1984 essay "Never Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)" attempts to answer this question with particular reference to the possibility of nuclear war. As might be expected, the apocalyptic referent, given its extreme character, once again strains the theory of language which attempts to grasp it. For Derrida, all linguistic reference is problematic, the referent itself being an effect of the differential structure of language rather than a "given" which language mirrors. The apocalyptic referent, however, is so radically "other" that the very field of textuality itself--which is acknowledged as a field of difference, contingency, in short, the field of the play of the word and its other--cannot accommodate, negotiate, or otherwise trace the dynamic of this other. Derrida is thus forced into an astonishing reversal of terminology--a reversal which leads to pronouncements which are strangely analogous to those of Northrop Frye.

That nuclear war cannot be simply another element within the textual play of signification is obvious. In the most basic sense, nuclear war entails "the possibility of an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces, of the juridico-literary archive--that is, total destruction of the basis of literature and criticism" (26). Apocalypse constitutes a limit of criticism, but in so far as this absolutely unique, "ultimate event" has not yet occurred, it thus exists in discourse--or discourses, since "in this area in particular, there is a multiplicity of dissociated, heterogeneous

competencies" which are "neither coherent nor totalizable" (22). The classical opposition between opinion and scientific knowledge (or doxa and épistémè) no longer applies since, "at the critical place of the nuclear age . . . there is nothing but doxa, opinion, 'belief'" (24). There is "no model" or paradigm for the nuclear event, and thus no one can have definitive knowledge of it. Literary theorists, as "specialists in discourse and in texts, all sorts of texts," are therefore especially entitled to concern themselves with the nuclear issue "whose essential feature is that of being fabulously textual" (22-3):

. . . nuclear war is not only fabulous because one can only talk about it, but because the extraordinary sophistication of its technologies-- which are also the technologies of delivery, sending, dispatching, of the missile in general, of mission, missive, emission, and transmission, like all techné--the extraordinary sophistication of these technologies coexists, cooperates in an essential way with sophistry, psycho-rhetoric, and the most cursory, the most archaic, the most crudely opinionated psychagogy, the most vulgar psychology. (24)

This textualization of the Bomb, however, even if it is done with a hyper-critical, post-structural awareness, is itself a potentially dangerous activity which "may constitute a process of fearful domestication, the anticipatory assimilation of that unanticipatable entirely-other" (23). Such conscious activity may have grim unconscious motivation: "Who can swear that our unconscious is not expecting this? dreaming of it, desiring it?" (23).

Thus the Derridean apocalyptic referent is a sort of nightmare version of

Frye's. Frye's Logos is the creative Word that provides the imaginative identity of the order of words. Derrida's overdetermined nuclear word grimly stands (like Milton's Satan) as an ominous limit presiding over seething mazes of discourse whose only exit is into obliteration. But the apocalyptic word is a privileged word, and Derrida employs uncharacteristically essentialist language to describe it:

The anticipation of nuclear war (dreaded as the fantasy, or phantasm, of a remainderless destruction) installs humanity--and through all sorts of relays even defines the essence of modern humanity--in its rhetorical condition. (24)

In so far as modern humanity produces the fantasy of nuclear war as its "fabulous" referent, it is analogous to literature which, in its performative dimension, also "produces its referent as a fictive or fabulous referent" (26). If I am reading the argument correctly here, Derrida proceeds to employ a sort of mobius strip logic of interpenetration and observes that

literature gives us to think the totality of that which, like literature and henceforth in it, is exposed to the same threat, constituted by the same structure of historical fictionality, producing and then harboring its own referent. We may henceforth assert that the historicity of literature is contemporaneous through and through, or rather structurally indissociable, from something like a nuclear epoch (by nuclear "epoch," I also mean the époque; suspending judgment before the absolute decision). (27)

In other words, the sense of being "on the brink" which characterizes the nuclear

epoch has affinities with, or is "structurally indissociable from," the suspended space of textuality or *différance*. What is surprising, however, is the language Derrida adopts in his subsequent characterization of the apocalyptic referent:

If we are bound and determined to speak in terms of reference, nuclear war is the only possible referent of any discourse and any experience that would share their condition with that of literature. If, according to a structuring hypothesis, a fantasy or phantasm, nuclear war is equivalent to the total destruction of the archive, if not of the human habitat, it becomes the absolute referent, the horizon and the condition of all the others. . . . The only subject of all possible literature, of all possible criticism, its only ultimate and a-symbolic referent, unsymbolizable, even un-signifiable; this is, if not the nuclear age, if not the nuclear catastrophe, at least that toward which nuclear discourse and the nuclear symbolic are still beckoning: the remainderless and a-symbolic destruction of literature. Literature and literary criticism cannot speak of anything else, they can have no other ultimate referent, they can only multiply their strategic maneuvers in order to assimilate that unassimilable wholly other. (28)

I quote this passage at length because it constitutes an intriguing moment of deconstructive reversal within deconstruction itself, a moment occasioned by the attempt to grasp and articulate the apocalypse. Using language which recalls, but for the adjective, Frye's logocentric "universal creative word which is all words"

(the Derridean version might substitute "destructive" or perhaps "deconstructive" or Frye's "creative"), Derrida here proclaims nuclear war as "the absolute referent, the horizon and the condition of all the others." This sounds to me suspiciously like an attempt to name the transcendental signified--precisely that which deconstruction denies can ever escape textuality or the system of differences. "Nuclear war" functions as a classical center: "that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality" ("SSP" 279).

But, of course, nuclear war is not a center of a sort ever conceived before, being fundamentally different from classical centers--determinations of "Being as presence"--associated with such terms as essence, existence, substance, subject, altheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, etc. ("SSP" 279-80). Each of these functions as the "fundamental ground" which anchors the play inherent within any system, thus constituting the "fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude which itself is beyond the reach of play" ("SSP" 279). This classical notion of the center began to be challenged when the "structurality of structure" began to be thought, an event or "rupture" Derrida associates with Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger. The center came to be thought as absent or as a function or as "a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" ("SSP" 280). This was the moment--like Frye's apocalyptic (or anagogic) moment--when the referent dissolved:

This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse--provided we can agree on this word--

that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. ("SSP" 280)

But if the center is to be thought, Derrida suggests, it would be "a thought of finitude," specifically, "the total destruction of the archive, if not of the human habitat" ("NANN" 30, 28).

In another context Derrida poses the question, "Is not the center, the absence of play and difference, another name for death?" (WD 297). If so (and Derrida's remarks on apocalypse which I have been considering confirm this), then the desire for a center is an aspect of a deathwish. As in Freud's formulations, where the element of Thanatos is interwoven with the economies of desire (including the pleasure principle), so in Derrida's formulation the desire for a center is not merely an unhealthy aberration which contaminates the freedom of the play of signification; rather it is an important "function of play itself," possibly "the indestructible itself":

And in the repetition or return of play, how could the phantom of the center not call to us? It is here that the hesitation between writing as decentering and writing as an affirmation of play is infinite. (WD 297)

Such a space of hesitation, but with the stakes raised incalculably high by the Bomb, is the apocalyptic space of the Nuclear epoch: "the époque suspending judgment before the absolute decision" ("NANN" 27). Following Kant--and

echoing Frye--Derrida suggests that the background against which this radical act of finitude "cuts its figure . . . [is] the possibility of an infinite intellect which creates its own objects rather than inventing them" ("NANN" 30). This is Frye's Blakean "infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way" (AC 119).

Derrida deconstructs or ironically inverts this creature, substituting a figure who, it seems to me, owes more to Beckett than to Blake: the nuclear space of hesitation, Derrida suggests, "occurs within a 'who knows?' without subject or knowledge" (WD 297), or, even more grimly and with a greater emphasis on finitude, apocalypse would be "the auto-destruction of the autos itself" ("NANN" 30)--Frye's infinite man blowing himself to bits.

So who is right, Frye or Derrida? In so far as apocalyptic criticism operates at an extreme level of abstraction and hypothesis, it seems rather senseless to choose. Indeed, as both are aware, criticism itself cannot view the field of the text from any sort of extra-textual vantage point. As Derrida affirms, "deconstruction, at least what is being advanced today in its name, belongs to the nuclear age. And to the age of literature" ("NANN" 27). Similarly, Frye acknowledges that the apocalyptic limit of criticism, where the critic confronts the Logos, must also finally be a space of hesitation. About the apocalyptic man and the universal creative word, Frye suggests, "we can, speaking as critics, say only one thing ontologically: we have no reason to suppose either that they exist or that they do not exist" (AC 125). Criticism does not, finally, become religion: "The total Logos of criticism by itself can never become an object or an ontological personality" (126); "Between religion's 'this is' and poetry's 'but suppose this is,'

there must always be some kind of tension, until the possible and the actual meet at infinity" (127-8). It is precisely imaginative culture's power of hypothesis--the power it has to conceive and reveal a wholly other to juxtapose against any institutionally sanctioned Holy Presence--which prevents full closure (this side of infinity, at least).

Thus we inhabit the space of openness which is the space of ongoing mediation, where apocalypse can involve the revelation of the "inner form" of what is, thus providing glimpses of the infinite (Blake's "World in a Grain of Sand"); alternatively (or simultaneously), apocalypse entails an awareness of "the atomic age as an age of in-formation" where the technologized and textualized word can lead to the act of radical finitude ("NANN" 27). The former unleashes the creative energies of desire which transfigure the real (Eros-apocalypse); the latter releases the death within the play of signification which potentially can obliterate the real (Thanatos-apocalypse). These contemporary theoretical configurations of an expanding or exploding word, I am suggesting, are of a piece with the double-edged symbolism of biblical apocalyptic revelations, including the shattered Word of Sinai, the deferred Kingdom of Israel in exile, or Christ as the crucified Logos.

The existential implications of this double-edged apocalyptic condition are worth considering. If the Bomb "defines the essence of modern humanity--in its rhetorical condition" ("NANN" 24), are the various human acts of signification thereby reduced to being futile gestures of hope, at best, which might also be dangerous acts of "domestication," possibly hastening the end which the

unconscious has already accepted? Is the apocalyptic space of openness merely a space of deferral before the absolute closure guaranteed by the Bomb? Is there any sense in which apocalypse is now? This question relates, once again, back to the Bible where images and affirmations of the closure of history are most explicit.

Among the various contemporary commentators on apocalypse, it is perhaps Martin Buber who takes the hardest line in delineating its grim existential implications. In his essay "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour," Buber draws a central distinction between prophecy and apocalyptic, suggesting that prophecy (and his representative example is the Book of Jeremiah) constitutes a valid call to individuals in history to make free decisions in response to their circumstances, no matter how irredeemable those circumstances might seem. Even as doom is being threatened, there is always time to turn, to "participate on the ground of becoming, in the factual decision that will be made about the make-up of the next hour, and thereby in some measure also about the make-up of the future hours" (192). Apocalyptic texts, on the other hand, assume an iron determinism which precludes the possibility of meaningful existential action:

Everything . . . is predetermined, all human decisions are only sham struggles. The future does not come to pass; the future is already present in heaven, as it were, present from the beginning.

Therefore, it can be 'disclosed' to the speaker and he can disclose it to others. (201)

In short, the apocalyptic message--according to Buber--is that the time for action

or hope has passed: the transcendently certain end is imminent. History--the space of meaningful human action--is virtually over: "Time will no longer be"

(203). Apocalypse springs from cultural and religious decadence,

and wherever man shudders before the menace of his own work and longs to flee from the radically demanding historical hour, there he finds himself near to the apocalyptic vision of a process that cannot be arrested. (203)

Buber condemns such fatalistic visions which allow "no possibility of a change in the direction of historical destiny" and thus deny the existential freedom of the individual or community (202).

I find Buber's expositions of the prophetic and apocalyptic to be extremely suggestive--even though I do not accept the clear distinction he draws. As my analysis of the four Old Testament covenants suggests, my own understanding of apocalypse entails just the sort of dialogue Buber tries to confine to prophecy alone. Furthermore, most other commentators deny that the message of apocalypse is a message of doom which entails the abnegation of historical responsibility. In fact they take precisely the opposite view: apocalypse is about hope, renewed responsibility for historical destiny, discontinuity with present worldly circumstance, a new world, new life, new song (see Russell, McGinn, Bultmann, Moltmann, liberation theologians, etc.). In Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel, John R. May (with considerable justification, I think) is sceptical that biblical prophecy as a whole can be characterized as so proto-existential, and he criticizes Buber's unwillingness to examine more closely

the Book of Revelation "where a dialogical framework is indeed implicit in the letters to the churches" (15). In short, Buber associates what I have been calling the positive pole of apocalypse with prophecy, and the negative pole with "apocalyptic."

Buber's views on the meaning of kingship implicit in the prophetic perspective chime nicely with my understanding of the expansive nature of the biblical referent "kingdom" which, as I see it, cannot be limited to a literal worldly accomplishment of an eschatological goal, but entails an ongoing process of dialogue and revelation with the wholly other:

What view of the ruling of the Ruler underlies all this? Clearly a view that preserves the mystery of the dialogical intercourse between God and man, free from all desire for dogmatic encystment. The mystery is that of man's creation as a being with the power of actually choosing between the ways, who ever again and even now has the power to choose between them. Only such a being is suited to be God's partner in the dialogue of history. (197-8)

Buber seems committed to an existentialist theology which, at all costs, must preserve the autonomy and freedom of the human subject, while not denying the otherness of the divine and the potential for salvation or disaster. What this entails, it seems to me, is a limiting of the stakes of this dialogue such that free human acts cannot preclude in any radical way subsequent freedom (Buber emphasizes the "freedom of Adam" which we all share rather than the notion of a "hereditary sin" which he sees as being "entirely foreign to the Old Testament")

[201-2]). In short, Buber refuses to accept that the dialogue of history has apocalyptic stakes. Both Buber, from his existential theological perspective, and Derrida, from his deconstructionist perspective, are, for theoretical reasons, disinclined to accept systematic formal closure: the dialogue of history or the play of signification entails an irreducible openness. Except, for Derrida, in the case of (nuclear) apocalypse which is so exceptional that he resorts, out of paradoxical necessity, to a transcendentalist affirmation of an absolute referent. Buber refuses to acknowledge such an act of radical finitude, whether it originates from a divine or human source. Or rather, Buber can only acknowledge such a possibility under the cover of the negated term "apocalypse."

If we perform an elementary deconstruction on Buber's binary opposition prophecy/apocalypse, then we can recognize that Buber takes the negative pole of apocalypse very seriously indeed, moreso than those (predominantly Protestant) theorists of the apocalypse who invariably stress the visionary or positive pole. Thus Buber is doubly suggestive: his perceptions (regarding prophecy, but by extension, apocalypse) of the importance of the acceptance of historical responsibility; his beautifully suggestive rendering of wilful humanity as "a centre of surprise in creation" (198); his insistence on the everpresent human possibility of "turning, of risk, of giving oneself, of inner transformation" (207)--all these express eloquently what many others associate with the positive pole of (usually) Christian apocalypse (and it should be noted that Buber acknowledges Jesus as a prophet whose message the apocalypics proceeded to obscure). But it is what Buber specifically associates with "apocalypse" (and thus dissociates from authentic

"prophetic" vision) which is especially suggestive and indicates the grim side of apocalyptic possibility. This is the vision--highly relevant to Gravity's Rainbow--of the deterministic web of necessity and control in which vaunted gestures of existential freedom are, indeed, "sham struggles," "for everything is linked invincibly with everything else, and there is nowhere a break where [the individual] can take hold. He surrenders anew to the turmoil, but now, so he thinks, out of insight" (192). Buber decries the apocalypticist who laments, "'Ah, Adam, what have you done! When you sinned, your fall did not come upon you alone but also upon us, we who issue from you'" (202). Such sentiments certainly entail an existential denial of responsibility. But beneath the "absolute referent" of nuclear apocalypse, is it really so easy to deny the validity of (at least) the possibility of the radically determining cataclysmic decision? Does freedom not entail the freedom to annihilate the self--or the collectivity? Against the spirit-killing, deterministic conception of original sin, Buber emphasizes that we share not the sin of Adam so much as the freedom of Adam whose "capacity for decision was not impaired by any inner inheritance" (202). But what if we were to side with the apocalypticist, not so much with the conception of original sin, perhaps, but with the suggestion that an enormous burden of inheritance--or conditioning--falls on us all? This problematizes Buber's notion of an autonomous, essentially free self. A representative modern man might then be Tyrone Slothrop, with his inheritance of sexual, social, cultural, political, economic, linguistic, sartorial (etc.) conditioning which causes any prospect of existential freedom seriously to be called into question.

This brings us back to Robert Alter's criticism of 1960s apocalyptic novels which lack "real people," that is, characters inhabiting a recognizably real historical order who can make free decisions. Similarly, R.W.B. Lewis notes how the depicted worlds in apocalyptic fiction tend to metamorphose into chaos or a sort of "nightmare country" (219), and he cites Buber's observation of the way in which, in apocalypses, "the actual historical-biographical situation of the speaker [or writer] is deliberately replaced by an alien scene taken over as analogous to his own" (Buber 200; Lewis 219). This swerve in apocalyptic texts into an "alien" or other landscape is part of what makes them, in Alter's words, so "spiritually irresponsible." What is especially clear in Buber's account, however, is that this swerve is specifically associated with a swerve into text: the bookish nature of apocalypse is central to its perniciousness: "The apocalyptic writer has no audience turned towards him; he speaks into his notebook. He does not really speak, he only writes; he does not write down a speech, he just writes his thoughts--he writes a book" (200). The genuine prophet, on the other hand,

speaks the word that it is his task to speak; he is borne by this task, proceeding from a divine purpose and pointing to a divine goal. The spirit moves him; not only his organs of speech but the whole man is taken up into the service of the spirit. The body and life of the man become a part of this service and by this a symbol of the message. (200)

In Derridean terms, Buber's obviously excessive bias against apocalypse is also a classic example of the valorization of speech over writing. The ancient texts

Buber is discussing here are both, of course, written texts, but prophecy attains the immediacy of the whole man, moved in body and spirit, addressing his fellow men with a call to decision--a call that even rings "to all future generations, to each generation in its own language" (198). Apocalypse, on the other hand, is solipsistic doodling. Of the Ezra-apocalypse, Buber writes:

visions mingle in the conversations, mostly of a schematic-allegorical nature, and are interpreted piece by piece in an orderly fashion. At the conclusion a task is formulated, but this is merely an ingredient of the literary fiction, and apparently is not even of the original one; for instead of that prince of the sixth century, Ezra the Scribe stands before us. (201)

A "schematic-allegorical," self-interpreting, mere "literary fiction" by an after-the-fact imposter/scribe.⁶ What, Buber implies, could be more worthless than this? "Nowhere in the book does there stir the prophetic breath of actually-happening history and its fullness of decision" (201). Again, one need not be a post-structuralist to question Buber's faith in the immediacy of the prophetic voice which seems to escape the destabilizing forces of textuality completely, conveying its message of freedom from a real individual in history to real individuals in history through a medium which is more spirit than word, and which seems to admit no static or noise.

My purpose, here, is not simply to reverse Buber's privileging of prophecy

⁶ Such a capsule description applied to Gravity's Rainbow would not, I think, be wholly inaccurate.

over apocalypse but to interrogate both terms--under a more broadly defined category still called "apocalypse"--to attempt to understand their complex interpenetration. Buber's cogent affirmation of the irreducibly textual nature of apocalypse is something I fundamentally accept; what I do not accept is the critical dismissal that Buber (among others) assumes must necessarily accompany this fact. Conversely, Buber's insistence on the purity and directness of the prophetic voice such that it approximates speech rather than mere writing is something I do not accept; but this does not mean I reject his insistence on the revelatory openness of the "dialogue of history" and the space it preserves for human freedom and surprise. As I see it, dialogue and text are not opposing terms. They are both aspects of the apocalyptic space: a dialogue of history occurring within the textual field of history, yet where, amidst the detours and deferrals of signification and communication, the apocalyptically radical other may indeed reveal itself.

And detours and deferrals continued to dominate the mythos of Jewish history: After the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, exile would be the predominant condition for a large proportion of the Jewish people. There was a period of respite during the centuries after Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon (555 BCE). This empire functioned as a commonwealth and allowed a fair amount of regional autonomy, thus some exiles returned to Jerusalem and the temple was rebuilt. Warren Wagar has called this period a "golden age" in the history of the Jewish people, but in so far as Israel was still only a province within the larger Persian empire, it fell short of eschatological expectations--the final

fulfilment was not yet and apocalyptic fervour continued to simmer (48). With the conquests of Alexander the Great and the "invasion of Hellenism" (334 BCE), however, Israel yet again received direct political and cultural challenges to its identity (H. May 1543).

If apocalyptic literature is a literature of crisis, then the centuries of crisis which produced the major Jewish and Christian apocalyptic books (many of which are non-canonical) had arrived. D.S. Russell describes the culture of Hellenism as a "conglomerate culture" (8), and his description of it recalls the overdetermined "Zone" of Gravity & Rainbow: "Barriers of all kinds were thrown down--political, national and cultural--and men from totally different backgrounds found themselves swept up into a culture which challenged powerfully their long-established beliefs and institutions" (Russell 7). Greek language and culture swept the Near East and international trade flourished (H. May 1543). Some Jewish factions favoured assimilation to the new culture and the abandonment of Mosaic observances. Instead of the Jewish Logos as hidden, transcendent God, revealed in theophanic moments within the dialogue of history, the cosmopolitan Greek Logos was proffered: the immanent law of reason with its attendant ideals of the perfected mind and beautiful bodily form. This was combined with a disillusioned awareness of the role of brute power in the maintenance of political order. Political persecution of the Jews was accompanied by calculated religious profanations, the most serious of which was overseen by the Selucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes who desecrated the second temple (169 BCE) and rededicated it to Zeus, complete with an altar and statue--possibly bearing the

features of Antiochus himself (Russell 16). To call Zeus--a mere character from the Greek pantheon--"God," and to presume to incarnate that god in sculpture--while par for the course for cosmopolitan Hellens--was clearly sacrilegious for the monotheistic Jews whose attitude towards images of the divine were profoundly anti-mimetic. Antiochus also encouraged his subjects to worship him as a god (Russell 12)--as did many Greco-Roman emperors, often for reasons of ceremony, flattery, and political expediency, or for a mixture of motives which could be tolerated in this "conglomerate culture" but not in the monotheistic Jewish or Christian traditions (Veyne 89).

These outrages, combined with systematic and brutal persecution of the Jews, prompted both literal and visionary responses. The literal (or political) response was the Maccabean revolution: the temple was purified (164 BCE) and Israel gained a century of relative prosperity and independence--again, not the final kingdom, but an enclave in a world of hostile empires, a respite between the decline of Syria and the rise of Rome (GC 89). The visionary response was the composition of the Book of Daniel which, in its own way, is perhaps more profoundly revolutionary in that it does not merely urge resistance to the immediate historical and political circumstance, but subsumes politics and history--and even notions of the finality of death--in a wildly comprehensive re-vision of history.

As is typical of intertestamental apocalyptic writings, Daniel is pseudonymous and involves a temporal displacement from the time of its composition: it is set during the Babylonian captivity (6c BCE), and Daniel has

dream visions of the future final judgment and establishment of the eschatological kingdom. Both pseudonymity and temporal displacement are characteristics which Martin Buber criticizes as aspects of the bookishness of apocalyptic texts: their supposed lack of immediacy or dissolution of the existentially valid prophetic voice in mere textuality. Such apocalyptic de-historicizing and mythologizing could be seen as taming the revolutionary import of the prophetic call to decision and action; it could also, however, in its radical re-historicizing and envisioning of an eschatological condition radically other than present circumstance, function as a perpetual dialectical challenge to the conditions of the given, no matter what they might be. Furthermore, apocalyptic re-visions of history have affinities with what Linda Hutcheon has called "the postmodern problematizing of history" (365).

Both the apocalyptic and postmodern textual/historical spaces have been accused of trivializing or ignoring "reality" or allowing meaning and value to dissolve in the play of signification. Some apocalyptic and postmodern texts may indeed do this, but I think the assumptions upon which such a criticism is based are inappropriate or incompatible with such texts, especially regarding reference and representation.

Both apocalyptic and postmodern texts entail a complex referentiality which implicitly or explicitly assumes that meaning, value, reality--or Truth--are irreducibly bound up with the process of signification. Unproblematically representing what "is" is either impossible or irrelevant: what "is" cannot be divorced from what might be, what was, what will be--in short, from what is other than what is--or from the element of desire or will which informs and propels the whole process of signification.

In a proto-metafictional manner, the Book of Daniel, to pursue this example, is preoccupied with questions of signification and interpretation: reading the signs of the times and predicting a future radically discontinuous with the "present." And it does this with what we can easily enough see as a peculiarly textual, self-validating logic. Specifically, the Book of Daniel employs the technique of *ex eventu* or "after the fact" prophecy. Daniel warns Nebuchadnezzar (and his immediate successors) that their days are numbered and they would be wise to break off their sins, become more righteous, and show mercy to the Jews (4.27). Since the author of Daniel is writing centuries after Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire did indeed fall, the "prediction" is a sort of sleight of hand facilitated by the capacity of a text to situate itself temporally wherever it (or its author) pleases.

From this ground of certain historical fulfilment the vision extends itself--with, presumably, the same degree of predictive power--into the historical moment of its composition and beyond: Antiochus IV Epiphanes himself is alluded to and an account is given of the martial escapades that lead to his downfall. That things did not turn out exactly as described would seem to be a mere quibble given the larger momentum of the vision of history unfolding according to plan, and there is enough obliqueness in the symbolism to make precise "factual" identification impossible. In any case, such historical facts are not the point: the vision is of a larger process fulfilling itself, a process of fulfilment which involves the negation of worldly empires (in images of their military defeat or judgment and fiery destruction), but also the affirmation of another more positive order. This

affirmation involves a diachronic move from "predictions" relating to past events (which are therefore certain, according to rational criteria), to predictions regarding the imminent outcome of the present circumstances (which are not specified as "present," but would be recognized as such by those suffering persecution at the hands of Antiochus), to radical visions which involve a vertical lift to a higher dimension of time (the vision of the messianic king who is given everlasting dominion over "all peoples, nations, and languages" [7.14] and the vision of the resurrection of the dead, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" [12.2]). These more radical visions involve a rupture with the worldly order of history and its transfiguration or replacement by another order. They are not necessary causal outcomes of what precedes them; rather they are the necessary fulfilments which desire or hope demands.

Typologically, Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus are the same, and thus their eventual downfalls are equally certain--as, by extension, is the downfall of all worldly empire. The ultimate antitypes are the visions of apocalyptic destruction of a magnitude never before seen followed by an equally radical vision of salvation. In short, the discourse of history swerves through text into an apocalyptic meta-discourse that does, indeed, leave existential reality behind.

Since Buber's essay is from 1957, he cannot address postmodern, metafictional apocalypses, but he does suggest that "specifically modern apocalyptic is not merely secularized," it is also "thoroughly disenchanting" and finds any sort of faith "altogether unseemly" (205): "The only poetry that still becomes such an age is one of a self-directed irony; the only art that still fits it is

one that atomizes things" (205). Buber is unspecific about the forms of modern apocalyptic he is referring to, and although he does not elaborate on his remarks regarding modern art, the element of "self-directed irony" and "atomizing" would, I think, still apply to a postmodern apocalypse like Gravity's Rainbow. But postmodernism, it seems to me, contains an imaginative counter-movement within it, a movement whose strength entails an awareness of many of the implications of structural mediation and textuality. From representations of violence or social chaos, from atomized character and narrative form, from layers upon layers of self-directed irony, and from an awareness of just how conditioned, determined, compromised, and possibly doomed the world (and the text) really is--from all this emerges a phoenix (a "grim phoenix," perhaps [GR 415]) of a suitably complex, ironic, deconstructed sort of apocalyptic hope.

Postmodernism perhaps marks an extreme in textual self-consciousness, especially regarding the limitations or inherent self-reflexivity of language and the degree to which it is shot through with contingency and empowered interests. But the "textual" nature of biblical apocalypse has always necessitated an unusual degree of hermeneutical sophistication. The Old Testament can be seen as dramatizing the shift away from the "oral" mode of participating in the "being" of the cosmos via cultic ritual attunement with the cycles of nature. This entailed a new orientation towards the uniqueness of historical events and an inquisitive attitude as to their meaning vis-à-vis the radically other realm of the transcendent. To a certain extent, world was becoming text: the natural order itself was no longer unproblematically self-identical, and the element of difference within it had

to do with its power to signify or reveal something other than itself which necessitated an active process of interpretation.

As I have discussed already, both the oral and literate (or "textual") modes have their positive and negative apocalyptic aspects. The oral mode of ritual and cyclical repetition can entail an apocalyptic obliteration of elements of difference in a homeostatic process which consolidates cultural or tribal identity (i.e., individual historical events and "real" individuals are subsumed in archetypal patterns). On the other hand, the performative dimension of orality entails the potential to deconstruct binary oppositions, subsuming them in the verbal, rhythmic, and musical play of identity and difference (word and other) of the enacted mythos, and thus avoiding apocalypse (my example was the "ajtys" or singing duel dramatized in Gravity's Rainbow). The sensual dimension of oral performance also serves a cathartic function, allowing for a creative rather than violent release of bodily (non-conscious) impulses: Eros rather than Thanatos is more likely to prevail.

The more textual biblical orientation, on the other hand, entails a more conscious negotiation of identity and difference in the hermeneutical pursuit of meaning beyond being: the signifying otherness of what "is." There is still a performative dimension, but it does not involve letting oneself be caught in the participatory spell of oral ritual performance; rather, the biblical performative centers around specific covenantal acts of promising, acts usually involving some sort of writing (on nature, on the self, on tablets, etc.) and which establish a juridical framework with its attendant conditions, interpretations and a future-

directed orientation towards fulfilment of the promise. This fulfilment would eventually become a consolidated apocalyptic referent, but it would be a referent which is radically discontinuous with the present worldly order or, as Frye would say, a world transfigured by the forms of human desire.

Whereas oral performance might entail a higher degree of immediate gratification, and, more broadly, oral cultures attempt, via ritual, to escape the "terror of history" and instead participate in the "paradise of archetypes" in what Eliade calls "a desperate effort not to lose contact with being" (139, 74, 92), the more "textual" performative covenant entails a degree of deferral of fulfilment, which often involves an acceptance of the necessity of a detour through grim historical circumstance. In psychoanalytic terms, this would be an example of the repression of desire and the acceptance, to some degree, of the reality principle. Freud suggests that the reality principle

does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure. ("BPP" 278)

At the most basic level of object relations such a deferral could entail merely the simple manipulation of external reality to allow the desire to be met (a child finding the sandwich which she dropped on the floor and conveying it to her mouth, for example); or, at higher levels of culture and literacy, it could entail a dutiful life of suffering for some impossibly abstract notion of Salvation beyond life

itself, or, more perversely, the mobilization of a huge proportion of a culture's resources to accommodate the production of such things as rockets or cataclysmic bombs to ensure a millennial peace on earth.

In any case, the shift from orality to literacy entails a new sort of temporality. In place of what Eliade calls the "in illo tempore" ahistorical space of myth which can be experienced "immediately" via ritual participation, the literate/textual orientation of the Judeo-Christian tradition involves a deferral of fulfilment, and the nature and status of this fulfilment is problematic. The "Promised Land" and "Kingdom of God" are promised in the covenants, but what is the referential status of a promise? Whereas in an oral culture, "history" would constitute the "meaninglessness of profane existence" (Eliade 92), in the biblical cosmos, history is the space in which meaning would reveal itself in the dialogical interaction with otherness. In the simplest temporal sense, meaning could fulfil itself in the literal manifestation of that which is promised. The promised referent would, in time, become the real referent. History would not have to be escaped; rather, it would eventually be made tolerable--indeed, pleasurable--with the establishment of a stable kingdom justly ruled by a Davidic king in a land flowing with milk and honey. Much Old Testament prophecy promised just this sort of earthly fulfilment. Thus history would not be transcended, but would merely enter its final--possibly eternal--phase (Russell 26).

The promised end, however, never seemed to arrive. Whereas oral ritual performance allowed a participation in fuller mythic identity "here and now," the covenantal performative seems to defer or even fracture identity. Of the promise

as a peculiar type of performative utterance, Shoshana Felman observes: "Constituted by the act of anticipating the act of concluding, the promise is symptomatic of the noncoincidence of desire with the present" (49). This inherent structural asymmetry of promising--and covenants--seems predicated on an irreducible lack or disparity between what "is" and the fulfilment of desire. Identity within such a covenantal space of deferral could only be a very problematic thing. In annual ritual repetitions Pharaoh could consolidate his identity as a god (and also consolidate his power, both sacred and secular). Moses, in contrast, dies just outside of the Promised Land, and the kingdom of Israel would eventually become divided and the identity of the people of Israel, which from its inception involved a break away from a ground in the cycles of nature, would thus lose its ground as a political entity, as well.

With reference to the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, Eric Voegelin notes "the tendency to move away from the order of the concrete Israelite society toward an indeterminate goal" (490), and as the goal becomes more indeterminate, identity within the space of deferral becomes more existentially problematic. Voegelin traces the exodus from a series of grounds of identity as follows:

When Abram emigrated from Ur of the Chaldaeans, the Exodus from imperial civilization had begun. When Israel was brought forth from Egypt, by Yahweh and Moses his servant, and constituted as the people under God, the Exodus had reached the form of a people's theopolitical existence in rivalry with the cosmological form.

With Isaiah's and Jeremiah's movement away from the concrete Israel begins the anguish of the third procreative act of divine order in history: The Exodus of Israel from itself. (491)

It seems that the purer being or self-identity that oral cults strove to attain in their ritual escapes from history is not the sort of fulfilment which the textual/biblical culture was moving towards. Indeed, the biblical progression seems to be towards an existential recognition of the groundlessness of identity. In History as Apocalypse (1985), Thomas Altizer suggests that

it is when the manifold of the given in all its comprehensiveness falls under a total and imminent judgment that identity as such becomes other than itself. Then the center of identity itself is actualized as self-judgment, and deep or primordial ground becomes manifest and real as transcendent and absolute otherness. Only in the catastrophic situation of the ending of the nation or nations of Israel does Yahweh dawn within Israel as absolute otherness, an otherness that is not only the source of an immediate eschatological judgment, but is itself the actuality and embodiment of that judgment. (54)

In other words, identity is apocalyptic in so far as it entails the negation of everything that "is" and a turning towards the wholly other transcendence of Yahweh. Such negation can be imaged as destruction, as in the Isaiah apocalypse: "Behold, the Lord will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants" (24.1); the entire natural and social fabric shall be rent. But even without the imagery--or the act--of destruction, the

existing political order, in the prophetic/apocalyptic view, is still negated. Worldly empire, even if it stands, is not the ground of identity: "All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness" (40.17). Beyond empire and beyond the cycles of nature, however, there is something which persists: "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever" (40.8). This word is eternal and has a positive content: "other lords besides thee have ruled over us, but thy name alone we acknowledge" (26.13), unlike the kingdoms of enemies, which, after the day of vengeance, are ironically re-named "No Kingdom There" (34.12). Thus the apocalyptic space is less a space of literal destruction by Yahweh, than a space of deconstruction over which stands the absolute referent--which is absolutely other--Yahweh. To quote Altizer again:

Israel can name Yahweh as the Creator only when it can know and speak "I AM" as absolute sovereignty, a sovereignty before which all other identity becomes empty and nameless, and a sovereignty whose manifestation and actualization assaults and subverts everything that stands forth in its presence. The full presence of "I AM" is the absolute reversal of all other presence and power, the de-construction or de-presencing of presence as such, as the fully actual presence of absolute otherness enacts and brings forth a fully negative identity to everything that exists and stands forth. To know Yahweh as the Creator is to know the groundlessness, and the absolute and total groundlessness, of ex-istence as such, and

therefore to know and to realize ex-istence as exile, and not only as exile, but as exile which is exiled from itself. (55)

That a transcendent, all-powerful, wholly other is the ground of collective and individual identity is understandably an angst-producing situation for a people being battered by history to be in. A tendency toward paranoia might be expected; Yahweh warns Isaiah: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread." But it is not an anonymous and malignant conspiracy (such as that denoted as "They" in Gravity's Rainbow) which looms over history; rather, it is Yahweh, "the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary . . ." (8.12-14). But what is the sanctuary of the Lord, and how is it to be inhabited? Clearly it will not be a literal magic or charmed object or holy center of the sort Eliade discusses in connection with oral cultures. Nor will it be a literal kingdom of Israel--this is the "terrible truth" which Voegelin suggests that Jeremiah glimpsed: "that the existence of a concrete society in a definite form will not resolve the problem of order in history, that no Chosen People in any form will be the ultimate omphalos of the true order of mankind" (491).

In examining the question of temporality and apocalyptic fulfilment, it is useful to consider the historical progression of the conception of divine sonship since it is in the person on whom such symbolism attaches itself that the most "fulfilled" identity might be expected to reveal itself. With reference to Jeremiah, Voegelin observes that "the sonship of God, moving from the Pharaoh to Israel,

and from the people to its Davidic king, has at last reached the Prophet." Significantly, however, this "transfer of the royal symbolism" is to an "institutional outcast" (467) whose function, it seems, is more to pose a dialectical challenge to the specific forms and institutions of the "kingdom" rather than consolidate its identity--a function starkly different from that of the typical poet/celebrant of an oral culture. As Frye suggests, "the prophet with the authentic message is the man with the unpopular message" (GC 126), and its unpopularity could take the form of apocalyptic visions of the negation of all that which is. Clearly the "authenticity" of the prophet does not inhere in his embodying some sort of fuller identity or fuller "being"--he is not an idealized archetypal identity. He does not embody the Logos, but reveals or proclaims the Logos, which, in Derridean terms, is not a "being present" but a message: a mediatory word, expressive of terror but also of hope. That the images of destruction entail a real possibility rather than mere words would be obvious to a people whose historical existence was so precarious--the apocalyptic other clearly did not exclude such a grim fulfilment (à la Derrida). But the fact that an existential space remained at all for the proclamation of a more positive other kingdom--imaged as a fulfilment of desire--was grounds for hope.

The prophet occupies and, in a sense, embodies this mediatory space which, in existential terms, is a space of tension between what is and what could be or, with the temporal dimension diminished even more, the prophet occupies the agonistic space between "this is" and "but suppose this is." Apparent triumph may be horror; apparent abasement may be a triumph. Both entail a hermeneutic

problematizing of "given" circumstance and an uncovering or unveiling of its real meaning: a revelation of that which is concealed in the given; but this "real" meaning never seems to attain total fulfilment.

A striking example of the way in which the final fulfilment of either individual or collective identity is always qualified or fractured is dramatized in the triumphal moment when David brings the ark into Jerusalem. Surely this should be a moment of the fulfilment of David's identity as king and of Israel as the chosen kingdom under Yahweh. The presence of the ark of the covenant would make Jerusalem the religious, political and military center of Israel (Mays 382). But (in a Derridean manner) there remains a space of play at this center. As the ark is conveyed into the city, Michal (David's wife and Saul's daughter) spies from her window "King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6.16). She sarcastically greets David:

"How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" And David said to Michal, "it was before the Lord, who chose me above your father, and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord--and I will make merry before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." (6.20-2)

This incident might not leap out at one as an apocalyptic moment, but in

less than obvious ways, it is. In the first place, the sexual connotation of revealing or "shamelessly uncovering" oneself is an instance of what is indeed a pervasive dimension of apocalyptic revelation which concerns the body, sexuality, and desire (in this respect the hardships of Tyrone Slothrop are part of a very long tradition of apocalyptic signifiers). But of greater importance is the startling presence, indeed affirmation, of abasement on David's part--at the very moment of his greatest triumph. It seems that there can be no moment of pure presence of completely fulfilled identity; this does not, however, prevent David from embodying the identity of his people. On the contrary--and this is what is peculiar about the idea of kingship in the Old Testament--it makes him somehow more the authentic king in so far as he is not excluded from the vicissitudes of history and the contradictions and humiliations that that might entail. Frye observes this peculiar functioning of the "royal metaphor" in the Bible: "If the king represents the unity of his society, he represents it also in defeat and humiliation" (GC 89). And this humiliation, so the Bible insists, is not the ritual humiliation of an annual rite; rather, it represents a historically particular moment and makes a greater claim to existential validity. Thus, instead of ritual attunement with the cyclical processes of the cosmos and with the beingness of the divine, biblical kingship entails a more problematic atonement (or "at-one-ment") to suggest a unity that includes historical and existential suffering.

If David's dance represents a simultaneous moment of exaltation and abasement, the chapters which follow enact in time these contradictory states. In the subsequent chapter David and his line are "raised up" via the covenant of

kingship. But a few chapters later, after accounts of more military victories, we learn of David's scandal with Bathsheba and his sin against Uriah, and of the rebellion of his own son, Absalom. The "meaning" of such a sequence of events is very problematic and entails constant reinterpretation of the covenantal relation between the human and divine in an attempt to assimilate new historical conditions to the ever-expanding biblical mythos of history. This mythos lacks the closure of cyclical mythologies, yet it does concern itself in fundamental ways with visions of the end or of final fulfilment while simultaneously (and paradoxically) allowing a space of openness within it for what Buber calls the element of surprise in creation--whether that surprise be human wilfulness, divine capriciousness, or what from the human perspective seems an abyss of sheer contingency. Erich Auerbach perhaps best sums up the hermeneutical implications of the Old Testament's insistence on its vision of "universal history":

It begins with the beginning of time, with the creation of the world, and will end with the Last Days, the fulfilling of the Covenant, with which the world will come to an end. Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world, or at least everything that touches upon the history of the Jews, must be fitted as an ingredient of the divine plan; and as this too became possible only by interpreting the new material as it poured in, the need for interpretation reaches out beyond the original Jewish-Israelitish realm of reality--for example to Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and

Roman history; interpretation in a determined direction becomes a general method of comprehending reality; the new and strange world which now comes into view and which, in the form in which it presents itself, proves to be wholly unutilizable within the Jewish religious frame, must be so interpreted that it can find a place there. But this process nearly always also reacts upon the frame, which requires enlarging and modifying. (16)

The distinction between rigid determinism and what Auerbach calls "interpretation in a determined direction" usefully suggests the way in which the biblical mythos, which aims to be comprehensive, nevertheless remains open and subject to revision. Frye suggests that whereas most mythologies are synchronic, forming a static cosmology, biblical mythology is diachronic, requiring an ongoing temporal process of interpretation moving towards an ever-elusive fulfilment (GC 83). Particular historical events are either assimilated to this frame or the frame itself is stretched, contorted, or radically redrawn to accommodate new facts.

The most radical rift in the biblical mythos, however, is precisely that which divides Judaism and Christianity, textually embodied in the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. In Auerbach's succinct account: "Paul and the Church Fathers reinterpreted the entire Jewish tradition as a succession of figures prognosticating the appearance of Christ" (16). Rhetorically, this process is known as typology, denoting a temporal trope in which certain figures or types prefigure and are fulfilled by antitypes, which themselves can become types to receive future fulfilment. Thus Romans 5.14 refers to "Adam, who was a type of the one who

was to come," i.e., a type which has been definitively (from the Christian point of view, at least) fulfilled in Christ.

Frye observes that, from the perspective of Judaism, "the Old Testament is much more genuinely typological without the New Testament than with it," and given the fact that both testaments prophesy the coming of a Messiah and restoration of Israel, "Judaism has . . . the great advantage, for a typological outlook, of keeping its crucial antitypes in the future" (GC 83). In either case, the final fulfilment of any figure remains problematic. Clearly, the related figures (for example, Adam/Jacob/Christ) are not algebraically equivalent or ontologically identical to each other; they are not repetitions of the sort found in cyclical mythologies, repetitions which subsume historically particular uniqueness into an archetypal sameness. Nevertheless, typologically linked biblical figures do possess a certain identity despite their historical difference, and this identity has to do with what Auerbach calls their insistent relation "to a single and hidden God, who yet shows himself and who guides universal history by promise and exaction":

The greater the separateness and horizontal disconnection of the stories and groups of stories in relation to one another, compared with the Iliad and the Odyssey, the stronger is their general vertical connection, which holds them all together and which is essentially lacking in Homer. Each of these great figures of the Old Testament, from Adam to the prophets, embodies a moment of this vertical connection. (17)

The passage from such moments to others--and, indeed, the moments

themselves--are not depicted as experiences of consolation and reassurance: Auerbach describes the journey of Abraham and Isaac to the place of sacrifice as unfolding "like a silent progress through the indeterminate and the contingent" (10). It is this more existentially "real" sense of the fallibility of the central Old Testament figures, and their character development due to their experience of moments of both exaltation and humiliation which, Auerbach suggests, "gives the Old Testament stories a historical character, even when the subject is purely legendary and traditional" (18). Ultimately, however, the biblical narrative occupies an overdetermined space which combines "legend, historical reporting, and interpretative historical theology" (21)--what I would call an apocalyptic space.

Eliade chooses the example of Abraham's sacrifice to illustrate the contrast between biblical theophany and "the repetition of an archetypal gesture" which characterizes cyclical mythologies. Eliade also vividly suggests the apocalyptic otherness of Yahweh and openness of history characteristic of the Old Testament:

Between God and Abraham yawned an abyss; there was a fundamental break in continuity. Abraham's religious act inaugurates a new religious dimension: God reveals himself as personal, as a "totally distinct" existence that ordains, bestows, demands, without any rational (i.e., general and foreseeable) justification, and for which all is possible. This new religious dimension renders "faith" possible in the Judeo-Christian sense.

(110)

Typology is the structural trope which unifies and orients such a narrative and

world view, where instead of firm ontological grounding there is the abyss, where there are no rational explanations which can explain a sequence of events, and where the telos can only tentatively be grasped or must be qualified by the awareness that "all is possible" or, rather, anything is possible.

It is the irrational quality and future-directed orientation of typology that differentiates it from causality (which is also a form of rhetoric [GC 81]). Frye notes that causality

is based on reason, observation, and knowledge, and therefore relates fundamentally to the past, on the principle that the past is all that we genuinely or systematically know. Typology relates to the future, and is consequently related primarily to faith, hope, and vision. (82)

It is precisely the lack of full presence of any given figure or type--the otherness or difference within it--which functions as a signifying excess, propelling interpretation forward. "Faith, hope, and vision" all have to do with desire which, it seems, finds no complete fulfilment in any specific figure or historical event, and thus projects forms beyond the present in visions of an "other"--and better--order. Antitypes thus always have a disjunctive aspect balancing their "fulfilling" aspect: covenants are never completely fulfilled; promises are never completely kept. The more negative conception of an apocalyptic future as imminent inevitable doom is thus less typological than it is a causal extrapolation of the grim conditions of "the present" into a cataclysmic future: it assumes that no leap of desire or act of will can transfigure the future into something more positive, something radically

different than the grim circumstances of the present.

Besides the temporal dimension, the spatial dimension of typology distinguishes it from causality and makes it even more obviously the apocalyptic trope par excellence. This has to do with what Auerbach calls the "moment of vertical correction" implicit in the central biblical events: a moment beyond the mundane temporal dimension where causes and their effects are located. Frye (who, with Auerbach, is the central modern theorist of typology) suggests that

Typology points to future events that are often thought of as transcending time, so that they contain a vertical lift as well as a horizontal move forward. The metaphorical kernel of this is the experience of waking up from a dream, as when Stephen Dedalus speaks of history as a nightmare from which he is trying to awake. When we wake up from sleep, one world is simply abolished and replaced by another. This suggests a clue to the origin of typology: it is essentially a revolutionary form of thought and rhetoric. We have revolutionary thought whenever the feeling "life is a dream" becomes geared to an impulse to awaken from it. (GC 82-3)

The analogy of waking to suggest the nature of the shift from one ontological level of reality to another is useful in understanding the disjunctive shifts among the myriad of "levels" (of narrative point of view, temporal location, state of consciousness, micro/macroscopic physical world, etc.) which permeate Gravity's Rainbow. Such waking to new orders or perspectives has its biblical culmination, Frye (following Kierkegaard) suggests, in the "apocalyptic promise: 'Behold, I

make all things new" (AC 345; Rev. 21.5). Frye emphasizes the positive or visionary pole of apocalypse: the release of revolutionary creative energy which can extend beyond vision to social action; but just what form such a brave new world might take is another question, and the political manifestation of the negation of type by antitype can be ominous. The negative pole of apocalypse again raises its ugly head: the typological fulfilment of history can be just another name for imperialism, especially when the royal symbolism passes from the institutional outcast (such as Jeremiah or Christ) back to the institutional center (such as the Roman Empire with the conversion of Constantine). The apocalypticism of the Puritan colonizing of America, like so many apocalyptic moments in history, entails elements of both the positive and negative apocalyptic poles.

CHAPTER 3

"Not a Ruin at All"

As I have argued, the typological orientation, even as exemplified in the Old Testament, has always entailed a self-consciousness about the process of signification. Typology was a guiding principle in the formation of the Christian canon and justified the Church's conception of itself as the historical fulfilment of the Word. In The Great Code Frye succinctly summarizes this development:

As century after century passed without a second coming, the Church developed a progressive and forward-moving structure of doctrine, one that carries the typology of the Bible on in history and adapts it to what we have called second-phase, or metonymic, language. This structure of doctrine became increasingly the compulsory means of understanding the Bible. . . . What this means in practice, whatever may be true of theory, is that the doctrines of Christian theology form the antitypes of which the stories and maxims in the Bible, including those of the New Testament, are types. (85)

Essentially this was a process of the domestication and reification of the apocalyptic impulse. Especially with the conversion of Constantine (313 CE) and the movement of Christianity from the margins to the center of political power, the apocalyptic radical negation of nature, self, and worldly empire, together with

apocalyptic visions of a radically other Kingdom, simply could not remain the authorized Christian message. Given this new worldly context, it is understandable why Augustine, in the City of God (400 CE), chose to historicize, rationalize, and spiritualize the visions of the Book of Revelation. Patristic Fathers of the second century (including Justin and Irenaeus) had taken the visions of Revelation quite literally, especially the vision of the millennium which would precede the final judgment (Rev. 20.1-6). The even more literalistic popular imagination of the time magnified the Judaic eschatological visions of a promised land flowing with milk and honey and pictured "a millennium of banqueting and the propagation of children" (McGinn, "Revelation" 529). If, as Frye suggests, apocalypse entails the ultimate fulfilment of desire, then to the second century imagination, fulfilled desire would mean an earthly paradise with all the food and sex you could ever want. Augustine overruled such "carnal" visions and "came to identify the thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints on earth with the history of the Church" (528)--an interpretation which, given the hardships of the age, could hardly have been very convincing (or comforting) to most people. More significantly, however, Augustine adopted a spiritual interpretation of the Apocalypse "which reduced the prophetic part of Revelation to the minimum and read the symbols as messages about moral conflict within each person and in the Church in general" (528). Thus a space for apocalypse was being made within history and within the soul of the individual believer. The vision of the literal and cataclysmic end of the world order and of history itself was down-played, and this reading became the official interpretation of Revelation for seven hundred years:

Those who followed the tradition did not engage in historical readings of Revelation, but in finding moral messages to encourage the struggle against vice and error. Though the centuries from 400 to 1100 saw many events that heightened people's sense that the approach of the end was imminent, and though the same period produced considerable apocalyptic literature in both the East and the West, the Tyconian-Augustinian tradition did little to encourage these ideas. (McGinn, "Revelation" 531)

These centuries saw the end of the Roman Empire, the establishment of the papacy and ebbs and flows of fortune for the Roman Catholic Church; certainly the Church's sense of itself as a revolutionary institution grounded in a source not of this world helps explain its tenacity and persistence. Its identity was not predicated on worldly power, but neither did it eschew such power.

As Norman Cohn has demonstrated in his book The Pursuit of the Millennium (1961), apocalypticism in the medieval period did not die out, but merely shifted to another level of society:

The importance of the apocalyptic tradition should not be underestimated; even though official doctrine no longer had any place for it, it persisted in the obscure underworld of popular religion. It was largely thanks to that tradition that the idea of the Saints of the Most High became as potent in some Christian circles as it had ever been amongst Jews--although, since Christianity claimed to be a universal religion, it was no longer interpreted in a

national sense. In Christian apocalyptic the old phantasy of divine election was preserved and revitalised; it was the body of literature inaugurated by the Book of Revelation which encouraged Christians to see themselves as the Chosen People of the Lord--chosen both to prepare the way for and to inherit the Millennium. And this idea had such enormous attractions that no official condemnation could prevent it from recurring again and again to the minds of the unprivileged, the oppressed, the disoriented and the unbalanced.

(14-15)

It was here, among those whom Pynchon would call the "preterite" (borrowing the Puritan term which denotes those passed over for salvation), that apocalypticism continued, complete with a counter-canon of apocalyptic texts. Whereas the official Church doctrine purported to embody the antitypes to the Bible, underground texts such as the Sibylline Oracles offered their own visions of the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and cultivated myths focusing not on the spiritual presence of Christ in the soul of the believer (the apocalypse within), but on the literal coming of the apocalypse and the imminent end of history, with particular emphasis on the Antichrist or evil "Emperor of the Last Days" (Cohn 15-16). Such texts were, along with the Bible, among the first books to be printed, but the fact that they were printed in the vernacular suggests their counter-cultural nature (18).

At later stages of the technologizing of the word, the Logos becomes institutionalized and thus less dialogical: revelation is supposedly over and is fixed

in an authorized canon, presided over by authorized exegetes like Augustine, whose interpretations become definitive, authoritative--and enforced--doctrine. Such reifications are invariably anti-apocalyptic in that they de-emphasize the degree of otherness in the word and attempt to impose closure on it. But other meanings, visions, and interpretations would emerge somehow, keeping the process of signification/revelation going, and if official institutions would not accommodate the apocalyptic otherness of the Word, then underground sects would. Thus, alongside the authorized texts and doctrines of the medieval church with its ideal of a rigidly ordered Christian society, would spring the unauthorized texts of the apocalyptic underground and the anarchic community of the dispossessed, so certain that they were the true elect, soon to partake of glory (and both the institutional church and the more spontaneous popular movements were capable of systematic acts of horrendous, genocidal violence in the name of their respective beliefs: in their pursuits of differing versions of the millennium).

The Crying of Lot 49 contains passionate visions of the community of the dispossessed who inhabit another America, "invisible yet congruent" (180) with the America Oedipa Maas lives in, and these "other" citizens, like their medieval counterparts, avail themselves of--and seem even to be defined by--an underground communications network identified in the novel with a shadowy organization known as "Tristero." That this counter-culture contains a millennial dimension is suggested by the acronym "WASTE" which appears on their "mailboxes" and which, at one point in the novel, is glossed as "WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO'S EMPIRE" (169). Other portentous signifiers include the

acronym "DEATH" ("DON'T EVER ANTAGONIZE THE HORN" [120]) and the suggestion that a line from the Jacobean revenge play The Courier's Tragedy, "This tryst or odious awry," might be an apocalyptic pun: "This trystero dies irae . . ." (102). Questions emerge from all this: Is the empire which this underground community awaits (or embodies) a millennial kingdom or a kingdom of death? Is Tristero malignant or benign? Or does it exist at all: are its proliferating signifiers merely noise rather than information, waste rather than meaning--are the two really opposites? Can a pun or a textual misprint be a revelation? Is it all in the mind of the deluded interpreter, Oedipa Maas? These questions remain unresolved, but what is revealed in The Crying of Lot 49 is an awareness of the way in which apocalypse is inextricably bound up with the process of signification--and the deferrals, negations, and play of identity and difference, noise and information, which signification involves. Such a heightened awareness of the processes of signification, I have suggested, is characteristic of apocalyptic moments in their various textual/historical manifestations.

At the conclusion of the novel, Oedipa reflects on the experiences she has had and her hermeneutic endeavours leave her trapped in a matrix of binary oppositions, "Ones and Zeroes": "Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth [. . .] Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none" (181-2). As M.H. Abrams points out, such a logic of polar opposition is characteristic of apocalyptic thought, and is rooted in Revelation's visions of the final battle between the "totally good and the absolutely evil" between whom there is no middle ground ("Apocalypse" 229-30). Oedipa,

however, is not trapped between good and evil, precisely, but between a series of terms in binary opposition to each other. Thus it is binary logic itself which entraps her, and the pervasiveness of such a mode of thought she finds particularly sad given the unique potential of America: "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?" (181).

The Crying of Lot 49 ends before we see what sort of revelation will manifest itself, but as Oedipa has already indicated in her enumeration of the binary pairs which define her predicament, there must always be some sort of signifying excess beyond the zero which will keep the process going:

Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America, and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (182)

In other words, if the term with positive content is nothing so grand as "transcendent meaning," "some fraction of the truth's numinous beauty," or even just "another mode of meaning behind the obvious" (181-182), but merely the a-symbolic presence of the country itself--"just America"--then to open up America, at least for herself, to make it signify, Oedipa must negate it, and the form of this negation would be a "calculated withdrawal": willed exile and the embracement of a paranoia which is not even "true." Such a space--between the one and the zero,

or between transcendent meaning and a-symbolicity--is where a desperate sort of freedom lies.

Thus The Crying of Lot 49 is the story of Oedipa's discovery of America. Her America--like that of the Puritans--is a strange mix of the textual, geographical and the spiritual. She has a testament to guide her¹--the last will and testament of Pierce Inverarity--which, like the Bible for the Puritans, proves to be so expansive that America itself is encoded within it (178). The Puritans hoped--or with the absolute assurance of faith and scriptural proof, knew--that America was the place of ultimate fulfilment: the site of the millennium or the New Jerusalem. In time, however, America proved to be nothing so profound (or the discipline and obedience of the Puritan community was such that they just couldn't pull it off). It was not the New Jerusalem but "just America and if there was just America then" the Puritans, rather than embrace exile (as Oedipa does), flipped from the "one" of millennial presence to the "zero" of apocalyptic annihilation. Of disillusionment was born the Puritan Jeremiad tradition of proclamations of the imminent, cataclysmic Judgment Day, such as that found in Michael Wigglesworth's "Day of Doom" (which was not just a representative Puritan vision but the first American best-seller--thus we are reminded once again that the medium for the dissemination of the "Word" is never simply the "spirit" but always involves technologies of communication, commerce, and other such manifestations of secular power). Predictions of a literal apocalyptic negation of

¹ That Pierce's will is a sort of devil's scripture is suggested by the title of a portion of the novel which had been published in Esquire: "The World (This One), the Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity."

the whole American enterprise, of course, were not fulfilled either. Thus the Puritans were left in the space between the one and the zero: neither the manifestation of the fully present Kingdom, nor the obliteration of the present world; instead they were left in the apocalyptic space of signification where more discourse would predict, invoke, envision, explain, rationalize, re-evaluate (etc.) the absence and/or imminence of apocalyptic fulfilment. As Derrida suggests, in the absence of the apocalyptic referent, apocalypse remains "fabulously textual" ("NANN" 23).

In this space is born what Richard Hofstadter calls "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," or the peculiarly American version of what M.H. Abrams calls the "conspiracy view of history" in which, after the paradigm of the Book of Revelation,

all reverses or disasters are attributed to the machinations of Satan or Antichrist, or else of human agencies, whether individuals or classes or races, who are demoniac or (in the secular rendering) are motivated by the negative forces in the historical process. In times of extreme stress such thinking has helped engender a collective paranoia, religious or racial or national, which has manifested itself in crusades, sacred wars, pogroms, witch-hunts and other attempts to achieve, by annihilating the massed forces of evil, a final solution. ("Apocalypse" 230)

The America Oedipa discovers is on the other side of such Puritan/paranoid absolutism. In the first place, Oedipa never set out to discover

any America, millennial or otherwise. At the opening of the novel she seems comfortably ensconced in the anaesthetized life of a suburban California housewife, a life of television, Muzak, and tupperware parties. Her duties as executor of Pierce's estate jolt her from this complacency, and before long "revelations . . . seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into *The Tristero*" (81). In short, Oedipa experiences the signifying otherness amidst the world she thought she knew; behind almost every outward form she senses "a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate" (24).

Just as the Biblical Testaments structured the Puritan "reading" of America and provided logocentric expectations of fulfilment, so does Oedipa have expectations about fulfilling Pierce's testament. She hopes to bring into "pulsing stelliferous Meaning" that "organized something" which Pierce left behind "after his own annihilation" (81-2). The desired absolute fulfilment eludes Oedipa as it eluded the Puritans, but whereas the Puritans proceeded to proclaim that the day of wrath was imminent--that America would be laid waste to make room for the real New Jerusalem--Oedipa discovers, via a path which leads from Pierce to *Tristero* to America itself, that America already is a WASTE-land. If this revelation is not cataclysmic it is at least a minor miracle; and if it doesn't usher in the millennium, it does suggest that another kingdom is already here:

Last night, she might have wondered what undergrounds apart from the couple she knew of communicated by WASTE system. By

sunrise she could legitimately ask what undergrounds didn't. If miracles were, as Jesús Arrabal had postulated years ago on the beach at Mazatlán, intrusions into this world from another, a kiss of cosmic pool balls, then so must be each of the night's post horns. For here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world. (124-5)

This other America exists in the excluded middle realm. It is not identical with the Republic, but neither is it nothingness. These voluntary exiles have chosen to occupy a mediatory space of uncertainty, and uncertainty equals information--it signifies--according to the tenets of information theory which are both examined and enacted in the novel. But what is the referential status of this other America, this "separate, silent, unsuspected world" (124-5)? Can we take this literally? This other world may strain plausibility, especially regarding the deliberateness of this calculated withdrawal which seems to suggest that some sort of collective consciousness is at work; but the diction seems deliberately to avoid imaging a positive content which we might then be forced to judge as fantastic or

unrealistic. Thus the other world remains suspended between the "1" of the given (ontologically grounded) and the "0" of pure absence or fantasy (not ontologically grounded), occupying the signifying space of ambiguity between them. Or, more precisely, it is a negation of America which does not crystallize into a new positive identity.

This is Pynchon's version--a postmodern version--of apocalyptic negation. Pynchon's "other" America, I am suggesting, is like post-deluge nature after the flood: nature placed sous rature such that it no longer unproblematically "is" but possesses meaning beyond being, or signifies something other than itself. If we understand apocalyptic negation as deconstruction rather than simple destruction it becomes clearer just how history has the character of an ongoing dialogue within a textual field. Symbolic (apocalyptic) negation does not destroy entities or identities, but deconstructs them, thereby preventing their reification as absolutes and keeping the process of signification going. Covenantal promises (or apocalyptic images and visions of fulfilled desire) propel and provide a direction for this process, and typology functions as a rhetorical principle by which specific figures (individuals, identities, events) can be linked in a hermeneutic process which can acknowledge both identity and difference, and which can spill beyond the testamental textual space into history--itself, a textual space.



There is a passage in The Crying of Lot 49--a set piece of the sort at which Pynchon excels--in which Professor Emory Bortz explains to Oedipa his hypothesis that a pornographic version of The Courier's Tragedy was produced by a radical Puritan sect. The historical scenario that he sketches nicely adumbrates the poles of the apocalyptic space in which the Puritans found themselves, poles which also structure the apocalypticism of Gravity's Rainbow, where they are investigated more expansively (as I shall discuss). But first, Professor Bortz:

Robert Scurvham had founded, during the reign of Charles I, a sect of most pure Puritans. Their central hangup had to do with predestination. There were two kinds. Nothing for a Scurvhamite ever happened by accident, Creation was a vast, intricate machine. But one part of it, the Scurvhamite part, ran off the will of God, its prime mover. The rest ran off some opposite Principle, something blind, soulless; a brute automatism that led to eternal death. The idea was to woo converts into the Godly and purposeful sodality of the Scurvhamite. But somehow those few saved Scurvhamites found themselves looking out into the gaudy clockwork of the doomed with a certain sick and fascinated horror, and this was to prove fatal. One by one the glamorous prospect of annihilation coaxed them over, until there was no one left in the sect, not even Robert Scurvham, who, like a ship's master, had been last to go. (155)

The Puritan binarity in this instance involves a vision of the "vast, intricate machine" of Creation as propelled by either "the will of God," or a "blind, soulless

... brute automatism." The latter proves to be the more appealing option--an example of the seductiveness of apocalyptic spectacle which Robert Alter decries. To use Martin Buber's dichotomy of prophecy and apocalypse, the Scurvhamites may have intended their vision to be a prophetically empowering call to besieged Puritans (a call to embrace the "freedom" of subsumption in the will of God), but the call becomes derailed into a fatalistic apocalypse. Yet, as I argued earlier, the very opposition between prophecy and apocalypse proves hard to maintain: in this instance, "God's will" and "the brute Other that kept the non-Scurvhamite universe running like clockwork" (156) tend to blur into one another. This blending is facilitated by the use of mechanistic metaphors for Creation since the conception of the motivating force (God or Other) seems subordinate to the mechanism itself: once the watch is set in motion, the watchmaker no longer has anything to do.

Buber's complaint about the "bookishness" of apocalypse--its preoccupation with textual mediation--is also relevant to the scenario Pynchon sketches. The Scurvhamites produce their "dirty version" of The Courier's Tragedy, in which the Tristero symbolizes the "brute Other,"

"as a moral example. They were not fond of the theatre. It was their way of putting the play entirely away from them, into hell. What better way to damn it eternally than to change the actual words. Remember that Puritans were utterly devoted, like literary critics, to the Word." (156)

But figurative language and literary incarnations have their risks (as Bunyan knew), and the Scurvhamites prove to be of the devil's party despite their

intentions to the contrary: their infernal version of the play is less a vehicle for conversion and salvation than a "glamorous prospect of annihilation." The dissemination of the Word, it seems, can lead in unforeseen and cataclysmic directions.

In a manner characteristic of Pynchon's use of historical background, the convoluted and playful account of the Scurvhamite predicament is grounded in a historically accurate understanding of the shifting metaphors of seventeenth-century religious and scientific discourse. In Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress (1949) Ernest Tuveson examines the way in which rationalistic and mechanistic conceptions of the Creation proved increasingly difficult to integrate with the apocalyptic Christian mythos. Whereas Newton could square his profound understandings of the nature of the physical universe with an intense Christian devotion, others (including Blake) would soon take Newton as "the symbol of the soulless universe" (Tuveson 186).

The increasing hegemony of the rationalistic world view prompted a series of countermeasures--imaginative objections to the reifying reality principle--embodied in literary works from gothic fiction to Gravity's Rainbow. In his 1984 article "Is it O.K. to be a Luddite?" Pynchon traces these reactions:

The craze for Gothic fiction after "The Castle of Otranto" was grounded, I suspect, in deep and religious yearnings for that earlier mythical time which had come to be known as the Age of Miracles. In ways more and less literal, folks in the 18th century believed that once upon a time all kinds of things had been possible which were

no longer so. Giants, dragons, spells. The laws of nature had not been so strictly formulated back then. What had once been true working magic had, by the Age of Reason, degenerated into mere machinery. Blake's dark Satanic mills represented an old magic that, like Satan, had fallen from grace. As religion was being more and more secularized into Deism and nonbelief, the abiding human hunger for evidence of God and afterlife, for salvation--bodily resurrection, if possible--remained. The Methodist movement and the American Great Awakening were only two sectors on a broad front of resistance to the Age of Reason, a front which included Radicalism and Freemasonry as well as Luddites and the Gothic novel. Each in its way expressed the same profound unwillingness to give up elements of faith, however "irrational," to an emerging technopolitical order that might or might not know what it was doing. "Gothic" became code for "medieval," and that has remained code for "miraculous," on through Pre-Raphaelites, turn-of-the-century tarot cards, space opera in the pulps and the comics, down to "Star Wars" and contemporary tales of sword and sorcery. (40-1)

Pynchon's own Gravity's Rainbow is a part of this countermovement. But Pynchon's novel is less simply escapist since it offers simultaneously a grim vision of the horrors of the "emerging technopolitical order." To use Frye's vocabulary, Gravity's Rainbow spans both the romantic pole in its glimpses of the world as we want it to be, and the ironic pole in its visions of the world as we fear it really is.

If Gravity's Rainbow insists on romantic possibilities (of love, of freedom, of ecstasy or transcendence, of alienation from nature overcome, of God or gods), it does not do so naively: those possibilities are always thoroughly qualified, doused in what Frye calls "the powerful acids of satire, realism, ribaldry" (AC 127). An aspect of the novel's postmodernism is that it casts a thoroughly ironic eye on romantic attitudes.

Yet the ironic pole, too, is ironized: it cannot simply resolve into a vision of grim "reality" since the scope of this darker vision is so exuberantly paranoid that the historically real is subsumed by a more expansive vision which I am calling apocalyptic. Pynchon even succeeds in giving the details which constitute the historical "ground" of the novel the character of revelations: I doubt I was the only reader who, before reading Gravity's Rainbow, knew nothing of the German colonial enterprises--and systematic programs of genocide--in Southwest Africa early in this century. As postmodernists we have all heard of the global reach of multinational cartels, but it is nevertheless astonishing to discover just how much of the information about corporate incest before, during, and after the Second world war is actually true. Maureen Quilligan suggests that "these time bombs of particular historical detail comprise one method Pynchon uses to get beyond the covers of his book" (209). Altering Quilligan's figure, I would suggest that Pynchon is expanding the covers of his book towards the point where it swallows the real (to use Frye's metaphor for anagogic apocalypse) or to the point where there is nothing outside of the text (to invoke, again, Derrida's apocalyptic/textual space).

Gravity's Rainbow, then, represents an apocalyptic space at once historical, imaginative, theoretical, and "fabulously textual." Apocalyptic space is always textual, but never more so than in the American script. For the Puritan settlers, historical space was textualized because the experience of the New World had been typologically prefigured in the Bible. When the Puritans fled persecution, they repeated Exodus: America was the "New English Canaan." But the Bible provided more than just textual types to be enacted or repeated in history; the biblical mythos completely engulfs history providing an account of primal origins and visions of the End. In the absence of either millennial or cataclysmic fulfilment, however, Puritan space remained the space of signification: apocalypse could only exist as discourse.

Even William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation (1630-50)--that seminal document which provides the American myth of origins of the Pilgrim Fathers--demonstrates the ever-present apocalyptic phenomenon of the repetition of the end: what Frank Kermode has referred to as "literal disconfirmation . . . thwarted by typology." (9). Early in this historical document Bradford recounts how the community, facing persecution in England and dissolution in Holland, decides to move "to some other place," not, of course, for reasons of "newfangledness . . . but for sundry weighty and solid reasons": the fulfilling of their Christian providential destiny (23). This "other place" is named and colonized: it is America, "vast and unpeopled" (25). By the end of his account, however, it is clear that the millennial dream (as Bradford conceived it, at least) was not coming true. The pilgrim community had begun to scatter; the remnant, once again, "began seriously to

think whether it were not better jointly to remove to some other place" (333, emphasis added). Thus the pattern repeats, but it is not a ritual repetition which subsumes historical difference into an archetypal sameness or identity (as in cyclical myths of eternal return of the sort Mircea Eliade has analyzed). Rather, the typological repetitions which punctuate the more linear apocalyptic mythos entail a different sort of negotiation of identity and difference, one where disconfirmation (or the failure of the attainment of apocalyptic closure), far from discrediting or invalidating the defining mythos or promise, serves to propel that mythos forward, often in a redefined and expanded form. Kermode remarks that the failure of apocalyptic promises does not mean those promises were false; they were merely true "in a different sense" (29). Literal disconfirmation thus becomes the opportunity for the re-casting of the typological net: the intransigent otherness of history must be recontained. If New England failed to resolve into the Promised Land, "some other place" would be found, and the Puritan eschatological hopes would reconstitute themselves as America expanded across the continent invoking a more secularized but still universalist discourse of manifest destiny or progress which, in time, would entail American returns to the Old World, forays into the Third World, and voyages to the Moon.

A central apocalyptic gesture, I have suggested, entails the negation of nature or its symbolic transformation into text: nature must not be, in itself, the ground of being; it can only signify a transcendent other which, for the Puritans, was the Christian God. Clearly William Bradford interprets the experiences of his colonial enterprise after the paradigm of Exodus, the new world, typologically,

being "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (62) in which God's chosen people must wander. The discovery of desperately needed Indian corn is read typologically as the grapes of Eschol (Numbers 13.23-6) which signified that the Promised Land was near (66). At times, however, this historical/allegorical space has an almost Kafkaesque feel to it: the hand of God seems suspiciously arbitrary. The self in this typological space is also hermeneutically problematized: one can scrutinize oneself for signs of election, but the final judgment--the final reading--is God's alone: there remains an absolute gulf, so to speak, between signifier and signified, and this gulf would almost necessitate angst, if not paranoia.

Bradford is a particularly suggestive early source to consider, for my purposes, because Of Plymouth Plantation contains an account of a rival colony whose world view was precisely opposite to that of the Puritans. If the Puritans are an apocalyptic sect, Thomas Morton and his associates at Merrymount constitute a pagan sect whose ground of being was the cycles of nature, celebrated in song and dance and rhyme. Theirs was a myth of eternal return; these sensualists were not a people of the book, but prefer the modes of ritual associated with orality. Their symbolic center was not the cross but a May-pole. Far from being concerned with the Last Judgment, these anarchists, Bradford tells us, behaved "as if this jollity would have lasted ever" (206). Morton's drunken ironies, however, are not sufficient to dialogize the Puritan mythos: a foray takes place and the May-pole is cut down. But this is no real final judgment: appropriately, the deported Morton "returned the next year," and a few years

beyond that, the Plymouth Plantation itself began to scatter, prompting Bradford to adopt the Jeremiah role and warn that this "will provoke the Lord's displeasure against them" (210, 254).

Two centuries later Nathaniel Hawthorne would write "The May-pole of Merry Mount," his short-story based on this incident. In the author's note to the story Hawthorne remarks on the way in which "the facts, recorded on the grave pages of our New England annalists, have wrought themselves, almost spontaneously, into a sort of allegory" (54). We are certainly entitled to be sceptical about that word "spontaneously"--Hawthorne's story is constructed for particular allegorical effects--but his remark does, I think, show a perceptive awareness of the nature of the apocalyptic historical/textual space of the Puritan (or American) imagination.

In this story Hawthorne quite schematically lays out the stakes of the contending forces at Merry Mount:

The future complexion of New England was involved in this important quarrel. Should the grisly saints establish their jurisdiction over the gay sinners, then would their spirits darken all the clime, and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm, forever. But should the banner-staff of Merry Mount be fortunate, sunshine would break upon the hills, and flowers would beautify the forest, and late posterity do homage to the May-Pole!

(62)

This opposition is clearly overstated, and the story itself, with its carefully crafted

ambiguities of diction and narrative, proceeds to deconstruct its terms. Indeed, Hawthorne categorized his writings as "Romance" as opposed to the "Novel," with its excessive concern for "minute fidelity" to facts ("Preface" to The House of the Seven Gables). In so far as the Puritan mythos has worn out as a mythological or typological frame for reading beyond the literality of facts, Hawthorne invokes the term Romance to denote his own particular version of the apocalyptic frame, and it was one which allowed the critical scrutiny and hermeneutic problematization not only of nature, self, and history, but of the Puritan frame itself. The Scarlet Letter (1850), I would suggest, inhabits just such a deconstructive/imaginative space. Hester Prynne is quite literally inscribed by her community into the Puritan mythos: she is forced to wear the letter "A" which reveals her sin. But the "A" also stands for apocalypse, and as such it resists the fixity of Puritan literalism and opens a space of signification in which other meanings can proliferate. Hester, thus, can re-appropriate the letter: "A" might also stand for "able" or for "angel." Significance can be inverted. Apocalypse often entails (so I have argued) an increased awareness of the intricacies and ambiguities of the mediatory processes themselves, problematizing or deconstructing basic categories such as meaning, identity, power, authority, nature, and self. This is what The Scarlet Letter demands and accomplishes.

Within the diegesis, Hester not only succeeds in making the "A" signify in excess of its literal Puritan meaning, she also experiences an apocalypse of consciousness: a defamiliarizing of her world and intimations of radically other configurations:

The world's law was no law for her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before. . . . In her lonesome cottage, by the sea-shore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England. . . (164)

The task of emancipation proves too daunting: "She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew" (165). Hester is left wandering "without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind" (166). Likewise, Dimmesdale--for a moment, in the forest, free from the Puritan mythos in which he is inscribed--experiences an apocalyptic flash. Laying aside his preoccupations with the next life, he exclaims, "This is already the better life!" (202). But Dimmesdale is too weak to embrace "America, with its alternatives" (215).

The importance in such a mental shift necessarily preceding more direct political action was an important tenet of the Transcendentalists. In a journal entry from August, 1852, Ralph Waldo Emerson reveals his own struggles towards emancipation:

I waked at night, & bemoaned myself, because I had not thrown myself into this deplorable question of slavery, which seems to want nothing so much as a few assured voices. But then, in hours of sanity, I recover myself, & say, God must govern his own world, & knows his way out of this pit, without my desertion of my post which has none to guard it but me. I have quite other slaves to free than

those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts, far back in the brain of man,--far retired in the heaven of invention, &, which, important to the republic of Man, have no watchman, or lover, or defender, but I.-- (1077)

In "Nature" (1836) Emerson specifically refers to an "apocalypse of the mind" (29), and at the end of the piece we are urged "to look at the world with new eyes. . . . Build, therefore your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit" (44-5).

While Emerson and Transcendentalism, generally, consciously define themselves against a narrow Christianity, certain apocalyptic impulses remain. The movement's impatience with history and general forward-lookingness is characteristic of American apocalypticism: "why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?" ("Nature" 7). Even the attitude towards nature has more in common with the biblical/textual orientation than with a more nature-centered ontology. As in the Old Testament covenants, nature is something to be negated and transcended: it is important less as an entity unto itself, but as a signifier of something other than itself. For Deists, nature was a signifier of the divine; for the Transcendentalists, the precise referent to which nature points is necessarily more indefinite. It is at times called God, Spirit, the Oversoul. Emerson's transcendental meditation, "Nature," takes nature as its starting point, and moves progressively through Commodity, Beauty, Language, Discipline,

Idealism, Spirit, and concludes with "Prospects," suggesting an unwillingness to insist on absolute closure. A typical romantic valorization of process necessitates such an open end.

The apocalyptic space of Transcendentalism is very much a textual or hermeneutic space, as the following passages from "Nature" suggest:

Everyman's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. (7)

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit. (17)

The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. (21)

A life in harmony with nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause. (23)

Nature as text; the world as "an open book": transcendentalism preserves yet transforms the fundamental apocalyptic metaphors. The transcendentalist cosmos is inherently revelatory.

There is, however, a more ominous and anti-democratic side to Emerson's apocalyptic imagination. Not everyone is as open and receptive to movements of the Spirit. Those who are thereby have a special authority:

We do not yet see that virtue is Height, and that a man or a company of men plastic and permeable to principles, by the law of nature must overpower and ride all cities, nations, kings, rich men, poets, who are not. ("Self-Reliance" 40)

Apocalypse of consciousness must not culminate merely in vision. Vision must give way to action, and one form of transcendence would be the triumph of the will:

The one serious and formidable thing in nature is a will. Society is servile from want of will, and therefore the world wants saviours and religions. One way is right to go; the hero sees it, and moves on that aim, and has the world under him for root and support. He is to others as the world. His approbation is honor; his dissent, infamy. The glance of his eye has the force of sunbeams. A personal influence towers up in memory only worthy, and we gladly forget numbers, money, climate, gravitation, and the rest of Fate. ("Fate" 30)

What prevents this proto-fascist hero from being a complete tyrant, Emerson argues, is that he is not merely affirming his individual self or will, but is responding to a larger current of history. He possesses a degree of feminine receptivity:

So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour. So the great man, that is, the man most imbued with the spirit of the time, is the impressionable man,--of a fibre irritable and delicate, like iodine to light. He feels the infinitesimal attractions. His mind is righter than others, because he yields to a current so feeble as can be felt only by a needle delicately poised. ("Fate" 44-5)

Be that as it may, Emerson's celebration of the hero reminds us that the positive or visionary pole of apocalypse is often accompanied by a more disturbing negative pole: the promptings of the spirit had been and would continue to be the justification for all sorts of atrocities in the name of the imminent new order. Nazism obviously comes to mind.

Melville's Moby-Dick (1851)--to schematize drastically--juxtaposes the negative and positive apocalyptic poles in the figures of Ahab and Ishmael, respectively. Like Poe, Melville proves a useful antidote to the millennial optimism of the Transcendentalists. The initial New England setting and the Old Testament character names root the novel even more deeply in the apocalyptic tradition.

Ahab is something of an Emersonian hero who, by sheer force of will, attempts to overpower everything that stands in his way, including society, nature, and any constraining element of fate. As he tells his crew, he will not be contained:

"How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the

wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines. . . ." (144)

Ahab's attempt to smash through the walls ends cataclysmically: he goes down with his ship--a microcosm of America--caught in a watery vortex, a sort of inverted version of Emerson's figure of concentric circles of expanding significance ("Nature" 18).

To extend the "wall" figure: Ishmael does not attempt to smash the walls that contain him, but rather wishes to read the writing on the wall. His aim is not to kill the whale--though, as a member of the whaling crew, he cannot help but to contribute to the enterprise. Instead he wishes to understand, experience, and primarily capture the whale in language. Narrator Ishmael clearly delights in the process of the imagination interacting with the world. He revels in the mediatory space of language--and he lives to tell the tale. Ishmael's quest, then, is associated with life and is incorporated into the comic structure of the novel. Ahab's quest

leads only to death, and he is a sort of tragic hero. If the whaling ship is a metaphor for the cultural, commercial, and technological dynamo which is America (well armed and aggressive), Melville seems to fear that the country could expire in an apocalyptic convulsion.

The alternative? Melville is not naive about the power of the visionary or writer to lead the rest of us into the promised land. "Romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men" like Ishmael (and Melville, himself) drift into the whale-fishery "seeking sentiment in tar and blubber" (139). Ishmael admits that, "with the problem of the universe revolving in [him]" he "kept but sorry guard" atop the mast:

. . . lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature. (140)

This moment resembles the famous "transparent eye-ball" passage from Emerson's "Nature": "all mean egotism vanishes. . . . I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (10).

Melville, however, qualifies this blithe mysticism; meditating atop the mast has its hazards:

But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Cartesian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in

the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever.

Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (140)

Similarly, when the black boy, Pip, falls overboard and is left adrift so that his "ringed horizon began to expand around him miserably," he has no benign apocalypse of consciousness: "The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. . . . He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense. . . ." (347).

Ishmael may be able to command himself into being through language--"Call me Ishmael"--but that which is other to the self (what Emerson calls the "NOT ME" [8], here symbolized by the whale) proves more elusive. It is easy to forget that the first words of the novel are in fact not "Call me Ishmael," but "ETYMOLOGY (supplied by a late consumptive usher to a grammar school)," and the first page contains a list of the word "whale" in thirteen different languages (including Hebrew, Greek and Erromangoan). Thus, prior to any question of the meaning of the whale, and prior to the incorporation of a whale into the narrative, we are already at sea in the multiplicity of signifiers. As the novel proceeds, Ishmael/Melville employs a dazzling range of narrative techniques, discourses, tones, and classificatory schemas to attempt to capture the whale in his verbal net. The object or essence is never finally pinned down, but a sense of the whale--of Moby-Dick--does emerge, not as an entity, perhaps, but as the effect of the stylistically exuberant structure which is the novel, itself. In other words,

Moby-Dick inhabits an apocalyptic/textual space. If the whale functions as an apocalyptic referent, it does so according to the peculiarly textual, self-validating mode of apocalyptic discourse. To quote Frye again, "Apocalypse means revelation, and when art becomes apocalyptic, it reveals. But it reveals only on its own terms, and in its own forms: it does not describe or represent a separate content of revelation" (AC 125).

About a hundred pages into Moby-Dick, after the first mention of the white whale, Ishmael provides a chapter entitled "Cetology" in which he comically provides "some systematized exhibition of the whale in his broad genera" to help us on our voyage towards "a thorough appreciative understanding of the more special leviathanic revelations and allusions of all sorts which are to follow" (116). We are soon lost in a mass of proliferating sources and pronouncements (most of them historically real), all having to do with things "leviathanic." In an amusingly self-reflexive and metafictional manner, Ishmael employs a book analogy for classifying types of whales into the broad categories of Folio, Octavo, and Duodecimo, each subdivided into Books and Chapters. Such a "typology" differs tremendously from biblical typology, with its subsuming providential mythos, but it is still, I would suggest, a version of an apocalyptic/textual space of signification.

The novel contains many other moments of narratorial self-consciousness, but the "Cetology" chapter makes it absurdly clear that the whale is as much a creature of the text as a creature of nature. If, as Derrida suggests, "what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence" (OG 159), then the whale seems to have swum into such a revelatory space of

textuality. The "Cetology"--or "whale-Logos"--chapter concludes:

But I leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught--nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience! (127-8)

The whale is thus the problematic or absent center of a nontotalizable system. Attempts to grasp the whale in the classical style, to employ Derrida's terms, are inevitably frustrating in so far as "finite discourse [is] in a vain and breathless quest of an infinite richness which it can never master. There is too much, more than one can say" ("SSP" 289). But Moby-Dick is not an empirical, scientific undertaking; Melville is clearly playing with such forms, and the structure which is this novel is perhaps more appropriately viewed in poststructuralist terms from the standpoint of "play":

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field--that is, language and a finite language--excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the

play of substitutions. ("SSP" 289)

Does the whale then signify some sort of abyss? The chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale" considers this possibility:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors: is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (169-70)

This vision is just short of nihilism in so far as absence is not quite nothingness: there is still a signifying excess. If there is "blankness," it is nevertheless "full of meaning." Substitutes, supplements and the whole process of signification or play continues, and this is somehow redemptive (or, at least, entails continued life). The whiteness of the whale is the space of pre-creative blankness, the occasion for the exuberant proliferation of meanings--of writing--which is Moby-Dick. It is analogous to the blankness Milton speaks of in the Invocation to Light when referring to his blindness which symbolically (and apocalyptically) negates nature, yet which is thereby imaginatively enabling:

Seasons return; but not to me returns

Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,
 Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
 But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
 Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
 Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair
 Presented with a universal blank
 Of Nature's works to me expunged and razed,
 And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
 So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
 Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
 Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
 Of things invisible to mortal sight. (Paradise Lost 3.41-55)

A similar apocalyptic moment occurs at the center of The Prelude when Wordsworth realizes he had unknowingly "crossed the Alps":

Imagination--here the Power so called
 Through sad incompetence of human speech,
 That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
 Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
 At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
 Halted without an effort to break through,
 But to my conscious soul I now can say--

'I recognise thy glory': in such strength
 Of usurpation, when the light of sense
 Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
 The invisible world . . . (6.591-602 [1850])

Likewise, Emerson suggests that "the ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye" ("Nature" 43).

In The Crying of Lot 49, too, Oedipa describes the strange interdependence of revelation and blankness:

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals . . .
 as the epileptic is said to--an odor, color, pure piercing
 grace note announcing his seizure. Afterward it is only
 this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, and
 never what is revealed during the attack, that he
 remembers. 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. (95)

Finally, apocalyptic blankness figures on the final page of Gravity's Rainbow as

the blank movie screen at the Orpheus theater upon which the ICBM is about to fall:

The rhythmic clapping resonates inside these walls, which are hard and glossy as coal: Come-on! Start-the-show! Come-on! Start-the-show! The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent. The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out [. . .] And in the darkening and awful expanse of screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see . . . it is now a closeup of the face, a face we all know--

And it is just here, just at this dark and silent frame, that the pointed tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound, reaches its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta-t. (760)

The Rocket, like the whale, is the ambiguous Logos (or Logos-substitute) at the center of Gravity's Rainbow. Indeed, Moby-Dick is the American apocalypse which most closely resembles Gravity's Rainbow, thematically, structurally, and stylistically. We could perhaps call them the apocalyptic epics of their respective centuries.



The way in which such pursuits of the millennium can become exercises in empire, power and control is a central theme of Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. A

character in the novel, one Lt. Weissmann (also known as "Blicero"), who commands a V2 rocket battery during the closing months of the Second World War, meditates on America's ominous role in this unfolding apocalyptic mythos:

"America was the edge of the World. A message for Europe, continent-sized, inescapable. Europe had found the site for its Kingdom of Death, that special Death the West had invented. Savages had their waste regions, Kalaharis, lakes so misty they could not see the other side. But Europe had gone deeper--into obsession, addiction, away from all the savage innocences. America was a gift from the invisible powers, a way of returning. But Europe refused it [. . . .]

"In Africa, Asia, Amerindia, Oceania, Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old metropolis. But now we have only the structure left us, none of the great rainbow plumes, no fittings of gold, no epic marches over alkali seas [. . . .]" (722)

Such is one vision of the negative pole of apocalypse in which the typological fulfilment of history is just another name for the endless series of acts of imperialism. But apocalypse means revelation, and although apocalyptic

discourse aims to define, contain and domesticate otherness, it also serves to reveal the other. It is this revelatory or irreducibly prophetic dimension of apocalyptic discourse which prevents its perfect coalescence with any particular historical, political or institutional manifestation. Apocalyptic discourse is usually profoundly hostile to the status quo. Its meanings and referents always exceed what "is" and point toward what is "other" than what is, and this other dimension can be a source of prophetic hope of liberation: projected wish reflected back as the possibility of salvation.

Weissmann, to return to my example from the diegesis of Gravity's Rainbow, perceives the trajectory of death into which Western culture is locked and to which, as an SS officer, he contributes. But he desires to be something more than a functionary in this destructive apocalyptic mythos; he desires to escape the repeated patterns of conquest and embraces a more radical apocalyptic hope for a kind of dark transcendence: "I want to break out--to leave this cycle of infection and death. 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. . . ." (724). He makes this "creative" affirmation at the moment just prior to the launching of a V2 rocket which he has specially modified to contain his lover, Gottfried, whom he is addressing. This launch is the culminating gesture in a relationship which has included sado-masochistic rituals--rituals which function to domesticate or master the larger horrors of the expanding "Deathkingdom" which surrounds them (723). This launch presumably (and quite irrationally) will deliver them from the oppressions of the "real" into an "other" sort of hyperreal

apocalyptic space. Gottfried seems to understand Blicero's desperate hope for salvation as he listens silently:

This is so more-than-real . . . he feels he must keep every word, that none must be lost. Blicero's words have become precious to him. He understands that Blicero wants to give, without expecting anything back, give away what he loves. He believes that he exists for Blicero, even if the others have all ceased to, that in the new kingdom they pass through now, he is the only other living inhabitant. (721-2)

Beyond the repeated gestures of choreographed sex and violence Gottfried has also felt more, worshipfully more past these arrangements for penetration, the style [. . .] all become theatre as he approached the gates of that Other Kingdom [. . .] there have to be these too, lovers whose genitals are consecrated to shit, to endings, to the desperate nights in the streets when connection proceeds out of all personal control, proceeds or fails, a gathering of fallen--as many in acts of death as in acts of life--or a sentence to be alone for another night. . . . Are they to be denied, passed over, all of them? (722)

I doubt that Pynchon endorses Weissmann's morbidly romantic desire for transcendence (and its bizarre technologically facilitated means), yet again and again within the diegesis characters express a wistful hope that apocalypse can be "worshipfully more" than just a synonym for the finality of destruction. The novel's obsession with technologies of destruction makes it seem nihilistic or

fatalistic, but the acknowledgment of such grimly literal possibilities does not exclude other, romantic possibilities. As Northrop Frye reminds us--employing an especially apposite figure--"In romance violence and sexuality are used as rocket propulsions, so to speak, in an ascending movement" towards regained identity (SS 183). This necessarily entails a movement into figuration or, as Norman O. Brown has it, a movement "against gravity; against the gravity of literalism, which keeps our feet on the ground" (Love's Body 259). Weissmann is sceptical about the ability of the literal conquest of gravity via technology to usher in a new order: "'Is the cycle over now, and a new one ready to begin? Will our new Edge, our new Deathkingdom, be the Moon?'" (723). Such a literal attainment of the apocalyptic referent (the Moon as the site of the millennium) would be just another instance of conquest and colonization. What is new, and what prompts another lyric celebration, is the possibility of inhabiting an apocalyptic space:

". . . no, they weren't really spacemen. Out here, they wanted to dive between the worlds, to fall, turn, reach and swing on journeys curved through the shining, through the winter nights of space--their dreams were of rendezvous, of cosmic trapeze acts carried on in loneliness, in sterile grace, in certain knowledge that no one would ever be watching, that loved ones had been lost forever. . . ." (723).

The pastoralism of conventional Promised Land imagery gives way, here, to something much colder: a post-romantic, postmodern, post-Apollo space program

version of the artifice of eternity (via Rilke's 10th Elegy and Kubrick's 2001).²

Frye acknowledges that the "creative" pole of apocalypse seems inevitably shadowed by what he calls the "paranoia principle": the suspicion that any religious vision or imaginative hypothesis which transcends ideology really does nothing of the kind, but is merely subjective projection (CP 130). In Gravity's Rainbow the prophetic and the paranoid are invariably conflated. Certainly the apocalyptic dreams of Weissmann betray a fair degree of psychopathology, although, Pynchon implies, in a culture for whom the crowning technological achievement is rocket-borne weapons, Blicero is perhaps less abnormal than representative. By any standard, however, Weissmann's fusion of Eros and Thanatos in a glorious, phallic, techno-suicide could hardly be a universally valid symbol of apocalyptic fulfilment.

Gravity's Rainbow explicitly links the blend of paranoia and religion with the American strand of Puritanism. The ancestry of the novel's central character, Tyrone Slothrop, is traced "back to 1630 when Governor Winthrop came over to America on the Arbella, flagship of a great Puritan flotilla that year, on which the first American Slothrop had been a mess cook or something" (204). Like his ancestors, Tyrone Slothrop possesses "a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia" (188). This reflex has a specifically hermeneutic orientation, and entails a hermeneutic problematizing of the given in

² Weissman has had first hand experience of colonialism at its genocidal worst: he served with the German forces which brutally quelled the Herero uprising in the colony of South-West Africa in 1922. And he brought his copy of Rilke with him: "Of all Rilke's poetry it's this Tenth Elegy he most loves" (GR 98).

an attempt to uncover its real (or at least, "other") meaning:

[Slothrop] will learn to hear quote marks in the speech of others. It is a bookish kind of reflex, maybe he's genetically predisposed--all those earlier Slothrop's packing Bibles around the blue hilltops as part of their gear, memorizing chapter and verse the structures of Arks, Temples, Visionary Thrones--all the materials and dimensions. Data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God" (241-2).

These pre-romantic Puritans, in the midst of the natural landscape, nevertheless devote their energies and attention to the Bible, the revelatory text. If nature reveals--if it is also a sort of text--it reveals only via its connection with the Bible. As Jonathan Edwards asserted, "the book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature." Elements of the natural landscape--hills, valleys, rivers, roses, etc.--function "as representations of those spiritual mysteries in many instances" (Edwards 359).

Slothrop is a postmodern Puritan. Rather than entering the previously uncharted natural landscape and reading its significance via the Bible, Slothrop enters the Zone: the overdetermined or hyperreal space of "endless simulation" (489) which is the European theatre of operations in the closing months of the Second World War; a space of shifting borders, multiple and overlapping jurisdictions (political, military, economic); a space where "nature" is merely one significant level among many. Slothrop has no master text through which he reads this postmodern landscape, but there is no question that the landscape signifies:

"Signs will find him here in the Zone, and ancestors will reassert themselves"

(281). It is not that Slothrop imposes his reading on the Zone; on the contrary, the Zone seems to read him.

Slothrop has an ambiguous attitude towards the proliferating intimations of the looming, ominous forces which surround him. At the recently liberated Casino Hermann Goering he backs away from the uncanny atmosphere of its Forbidden Wing, "retreating from yet facing the Presence feared and wanted" (203), and soon "he is snuggling up, masturbatorily scared-elated, to the disagreeable chance that exactly such Control might already have been put over him" (209). Slothrop is a sort of reluctant Puritan unwilling to decipher the extent to which he is inscribed and implicated in some larger defining mythos:

He gets back to the Casino just as big globular raindrops, thick as honey, begin to splat into giant asterisks on the pavement, inviting him to look down at the bottom of the text of the day, where footnotes will explain all. He isn't about to look. Nobody ever said a day has to be juggled into any kind of sense at day's end. He just runs. (205)

Such unwillingness to read the signs of the times is a conventional element of biblical (or Bible-influenced) apocalyptic scenarios, since "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2). In the context of Gravity's Rainbow, however, it is the V2 rocket which functions as the apocalyptic Word.

The interdependence of technology and apocalypse is not a new phenomenon with postmodernism. The medium by which the Word is

disseminated is never simply the "spirit" but always involves technologies of communication, transportation, commerce, and other manifestations of secular power--including weaponry--and this was certainly true of the Puritan New World adventure. The Protestant Reformation itself was facilitated in part by a development in what Walter Ong has called "the technologizing of the word." In a very literal and practical way, the printing press allowed for the Christian Bible to be disseminated in a manner which allowed a closer and (the reformers believed) more immediate and spiritual interaction between individual believer and text, an interaction which prompted a questioning of the modes and forms of institutional and doctrinal mediation which for a millennium had been controlled by the Roman Catholic Church. Thus the essentially secular development of print technology--which Pynchon ironically refers to as "the Word made printer's ink" (571)--released a liberating and revelatory otherness in the official sacred Word and triggered a spiritual revolution. If, as Derrida suggests, the Bomb is also a technological incarnation of the word--with its "technologies of delivery, sending, dispatching, of the missile in general, of mission, missive, emission, and transmission" ("NANN" 24)--then it can be read as another unforeseen but nevertheless typologically explicable advance in the "Puritan hopes for the Word" (571).

This is precisely what Marcus Smith and Khachig Tölölyan suggest in their essay "The New Jeremiad: Gravity's Rainbow." In their view, "the controlling idea of [the novel] is that the world's present predicament--the system of global terror dominated by ICBMs--threatens to fulfil in historical time the apocalyptic and

millennial visions which prevailed in the Puritan culture of colonial New England" (169). They suggest that, for Pynchon, "the rocket borne atomic dawn" is the most likely antitype to the Puritan type (169).

Gravity's Rainbow, however, does not give us a literalistic account of nuclear war. While containing plenty of accurate historical detail, it is also surrealistic, rife with narrative disjunctions, dazzling in its range of tone, fabulously complex in plot, erudite beyond any reader, ontologically and epistemologically unstable, and pluralistic. It exemplifies what Lyotard calls the postmodern "process of complexification" associated with technoscientific development ("Post" 49); in Fredric Jameson's terms, the novel is an example of "high tech paranoia" literature which attempts "to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" ("Postmodernism" 80). If this is what the novel is attempting, it is understandable that it fails to attain the Aristotelean unity of action and moderation of magnitude such that it could "easily be perceived at a glance" (Poetics ch. 8); indeed the opposite seems to be the case: as a narrating voice comments regarding one of the more slapstick sections in the novel, "It is difficult to perceive what the fuck is happening here" (504). If beneath the verbal play and complexity there is a center--if there is a "still center of the order of words" (AC 117) which is Gravity's Rainbow--that center can only be the problematic one evoked by the term "apocalypse."

Critics like Smith and Tölölyan deduce that Gravity's Rainbow is "all about" the Bomb even if it does not deal directly with it. In this reading, the V2 Rocket, which is the central symbol of the novel, is a displacement of the Bomb: it is more

comprehensible, something which can be negotiated by consciousness more easily than the thought of nuclear annihilation (so often associated with "the unthinkable" and which Derrida calls "that unassimilable wholly other" ["NANN" 28]).³ The link, however, can be conceived of in less strictly metaphorical and more metonymic terms: the V2 rocket is a stage in the chain of technological development culminating in nuclear missiles. Both "can penetrate, from the sky, at any given point. 'Nowhere is safe' (728). Thus they have an almost divine omnipotence, and seem to violate limitations of space and time, projecting those beneath its trajectory into the space of the hear-after: "a rocket will hit before they can hear it coming. Biblical . . . spooky as an old northern fairy tale" (54). The brute repetition of rocket strikes suggests the dawning of a new order: "they will watch their system falling apart, watch those singularities begin to come more and more often, proclaiming another dispensation out of the tissue of old-fashioned time" (752). The bomb strikes which punctuate Part I modulate into celebratory champagne corks popping in Part II, but the suggestion is made (by an unanchored paranoid voice), that "peace," announced with VE day, is no longer an accurate term to describe the situation: "There's something still on, don't call it a 'war' if it makes you nervous, maybe the death rate's gone down a point or two, beer in cans is back at last and there were a lot of people in Trafalgar Square one night not so long ago . . . but Their enterprise goes on" (628). This ominous "enterprise" is an aspect of the new dispensation born with the Second World

³ Similarly, Peter Schwenger suggests that if Gravity's Rainbow can be read as a sort of dream, then "the latent content . . . is summed up in Hiroshima" (59).

War: the world of multi-national cartels, the military industrial complex, the Cold War, and perhaps most importantly, our nuclear predicament which, in its intimations of the grim closure of our historical trajectory (and like the Bible for the Puritans) inscribes everything leading up to it within its mythos--a mythos of secular scripture, indeed. Gravity's Rainbow documents the launching point of this historical trajectory.

The novel does contain references to "the Bomb" but they are displaced, scattered or fragmented. In a seance the spirit of Walter Rathenau--described as the "prophet and architect of the cartelized state" (164)--parenthetically refers to "cosmic bombs" (167), and in a particularly dense section later in the novel a punning reference to a priest's "Critical Mass" is glossed for us: "get it? not too many did in 1945, the Cosmic Bomb was still trembling in its earliness, not yet revealed to the People, so you heard the term only in the very superhepcat-to-superhepcat exchanges" (539). In the final section Slothrop glimpses "a scrap of newspaper headline, with a wirephoto of a giant white cock, dangling in the sky straight downward out of a white pubic bush" (693). This is a photo of a nuclear blast, and if we fill in the missing letters of the headline--if we reassemble the shattered Word--it reads "BOMB DROPPED [on] HIROSHIMA." A Japanese Ensign named Morituri, weary of the war, wants merely to return to his wife and kids, "and once I'm there," he says, "never . . . leave Hiroshima again" (480)--a remark which undercuts the strategy of the retreat to the local as a response to the oppressiveness of the totalizing closure of metanarratives (Lyotard "Postmodern Condition"). An American Colonel getting a haircut weaves into his

monologue a reference to the altered quality of the sunsets: "Do you suppose something has exploded somewhere? Really--somewhere in the East? Another Krakatoa? Another name at least that exotic . . . the colors are so different now [. . .] Is there information for us? Deep questions, and disturbing ones" (642). Finally, the closing moments of the novel seem to depict a nuclear rocket descending towards the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles during the Nixon years--a rocket which has metamorphosed from Weissmann's modified V2 launched on the Luneburg Heath.

These oblique and fragmentary evocations of the nuclear bomb supplement and expand the ethos surrounding the V2 rocket which is the central historical focus of the narrative. No matter how self-referential and overdetermined Gravity's Rainbow might be, it does not seal itself off completely from historical reference and enter some sort of realm of pure fantasy (as Sci-Fi novels can) or textual play (as does Finnegans Wake). Rather, as with typological interpretation, the historical (or "literal" level, as the medieval exegetes called it) becomes an integral level in the field of signification: not the ground of meaning, being, or reference, perhaps, but not unimportant or absent, either.

Northrop Frye, whose own critical system adapts the medieval principle of the four levels of interpretation, or "polysemous meaning," as Dante called it, associates the very fact of polysemy with the element of delight, pleasure or exuberance in literature (AC 93). As he sees it, literature has "a relation to reality which is neither direct nor negative, but potential" and thus "the reality-principle is subordinate to [and subsumed by] the pleasure-principle" (93, 75). What literature

yields ideally, then, is not knowledge of the real, but recreation, or re-creation according to the forms of human desire and imagination. Its limits are, like those of dream, "not the real, but the conceivable" (119). Such a comprehensive literary space, from the historical to the anagogic, is that occupied by Gravity's Rainbow.

Analogously, post-structuralism has much to say about 'the element of play in signification. The Derridean commentator Christopher Norris, however, cautions against misreading Derrida to make him the patron saint of the "'anything goes' school of postmodern hermeneutic thought" (Uncritical Theory 17). Norris insists that "to deconstruct naive or commonsense ideas of how language hooks up with reality is not to suggest that it should henceforth be seen as a realm of open-ended textual 'freeplay' or floating signifiers devoid of referential content" (17). If there is an element of *jouissance* in the play of signification, there also exists something more ominous, as Derrida's remarks on Nuclear war make quite clear. Thus, for both Frye and Derrida--and Pynchon--the play of signification has a limit, and that limit is apocalypse.

The following passage gives a good indication of the extent to which Gravity's Rainbow is thoroughly polysemous in its use of the symbol of the Rocket:

[. . .] the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it--in combat, in tunnel, on paper--it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable . . . and heretics there will be: Gnostics who have been taken in a rush of wind and fire to chambers of the Rocket-throne . . .

Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter--rivets, burner cup and brass rose, its text is theirs to permute and combine into new revelations, always unfolding . . . Manichaeans who see two Rockets, good and evil, who speak together in the sacred idiolalia of the Primal Twins (some say their names are Enzian and Blicero) of a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle. (727)

In other contexts the Rocket is identified as the Word, "incoming mail" (6), information, spectacle, Presence, an icon, the Other, the phallus, Technology, the crowning achievement of the order of reason, a vehicle of Romantic transcendence, a "terminal orgasm" (223), an image on a screen, a new star, a descending angel, a parable, Scripture, "a baby Jesus, with endless committees of Herods out to destroy it in infancy" (464), a "pyrotechnic cross" (751), an equation, "that elegant blend of philosophy and hardware" (239), and the Tower card in the Tarot pack which signifies, we are told, "a system which, by its nature, must sooner or later fall" (747).

What can criticism do in the face of such wild overdetermination? Derrida, employing imagery which resonates nicely for anyone familiar with Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, suggests that apocalyptic discourse "is a challenge to the established receivability of messages and to the policing of destination, in short to the postal police or the monopoly of posts." "By its very tone, the mixing of voices, genres, and codes, apocalyptic discourse can also, in dislocating destinations, dismantle the dominant contract or concordat" ("Apocalyptic Tone" 29-30). In

short, it poses a definitive if not subversive challenge to any critical approach, pushing it to an apocalyptic limit of its own.

If the apocalyptic discourse which is Gravity's Rainbow serves to "dismantle the dominant contract or concordat," it does so not by sweeping it away in the free play of discourse, or by somehow substituting the uncentered active interpretive openness of history for the closure of the dominant metanarrative--a gesture which would merely be another flip from one pole of a binarity to the other. Rather, the dismantling must be post-structural: it must acknowledge the fact of structure yet seek a critical position beyond it. Such a critical position would thus be supplemental to any metanarrative, at once inside and outside of its closure. Derridean criticism tries to occupy such a position both within and without the closure of western metaphysics, and it is precisely its awareness of this position which can give this approach a liberating distinctiveness (OG xxxviii), or allows it to have its cake and eat it too (viz Derrida's logocentric formulation that the bomb "defines the essence of modern humanity" ["NANN" 24]). If Gravity's Rainbow is an apocalyptic interrogation of the metanarrative which we will tentatively call the "emerging technopolitical order"--an order which we might associate with modernism and whose closure is guaranteed by the Bomb--then the novel attempts to inhabit a postmodern space supplemental to this order.

In his article "On Paranoia," James Hillman examines the problematic nature of paranoid "revelations" and their relation to religious or "noetic" reality. Hillman, from a Jungian perspective, makes suggestions analogous to those made by Thomas Altizer (whose post-structuralist theology identifies Yahweh with

absolute otherness): "Is it not the aim of miracles, glossolalia, and other descents of the spirit to break, defy and annul the context? Revelation must briser l'histoire because it is revelation of totaliter aliter, the wholly, holy other" (36). The attempt to understand such revelations, Hillman suggests, necessarily implicates the critic or analyst in them:

Psychological endeavors are always partially paranoid because, as Jung says, the psyche offers no outside objective standpoint. We are always caught in our own vision of things. Moreover, our professional calling depends on the paranoid ability to detect, suspect, interpret, to make strange connections among events. . . . Each time we open a meaning we invite in the paranoid potential. Psychology walks the borderline between meaning and paranoia: psychologists, too, are borderline cases. (34)

As are literary critics, I might add--especially those who attempt to read the implications of Pynchon's paranoid style.

The postmodern signifying cosmos which is the Zone is a textual space where it is becoming apparent that the real locus of power "now lay not in absolute weaponry but in information and expertise" (427). Slothrop is thus a quester after information--about the V2, about Imipolex G, about himself and the international/interplanetary/ metaphysical web of conspiracy which (perhaps) links them all. In response to one of Slothrop's requests for information a blackmarketeer nostalgically breathes "a tragic sigh" and laments:

"Information. What's wrong with dope and women? Is it any

wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of exchange?"

"I thought it was cigarettes."

"You dream." He brings out a list of Zurich cafes and gathering spots. Under Espionage, Industrial, Slothrop finds three [. . .] (158)

This passage exemplifies Pynchon's characteristic stylistic gesture of taking a serious point and pushing it to a parodic or comic extreme, an extreme which often involves a sort of nesting of ironies within ironies, or a mise en abyme of reflexivity. In this instance, a serious (or historically relevant) point is being made about the emerging dominance of information systems in the post-war world (recall Derrida's examination of "the atomic age as an age of information ["NANN" 27]); but the point is made in a novel--a work of fiction--and the silliness of the scenario (where blackmarketeers have sub-indexed listings of cafes and their various illicit information specialties) reminds us of this. This does not exactly negate or undercut the serious point, but supplements it, and the direction of this movement of supplementation is always towards a greater consciousness on the reader's part of "textuality": weapons systems are a sub-set of information systems, and this piece of information is itself conveyed in the information system which is the text of Gravity's Rainbow. This final swerve towards our increased awareness of fictionality is a swerve in a comic direction (perhaps accompanied by a chuckle, a minimal bodily release)--the direction of play, of freedom. This contrasts the tragic (Slothrop as Oedipus) or grimly ironic (Kafkaesque) direction

which Slothrop's series of revelations takes him within the diegesis: movements towards his increasing awareness of just how predetermined his existence really is.

Such a conflation of the playful and serious, comic and ironic, is an aspect of Pynchon's apocalyptic tone, as it is (to some extent) of Derrida's when he justifies his seemingly outrageous suggestion that nuclear war is "fabulously textual" by glossing his point with punning metonymic links between "mission, missile, emission, and transmission" and analogies--surely they are nothing more?--between postal and ballistic "technologies of delivery, sending, dispatching" ("NANN" 22-4). (If the Bomb is a post card, are we to take it seriously?)

The episode ends with an ambiguous comic/serious flourish. Slothrop parts from his blackmarket colleague with information about which cafe to investigate. Our glib comic-book gumshoe takes his clue:

"Footwork," folding the list in an oversize zoot-suit pocket.

"It'll get easier. Someday it'll all be done by machine.

Information machines. You are the wave of the future." (258)

The human order with its residual ties to nature (or, at least, to the natural pleasures of "dope and women," drugs and sex) is threatened by an imminent cybernetic order, perhaps having more in common with the "blind, soulless . . . brute automatism" of the Scurvhamite anti-God (Lot 49 155).

In my earlier discussion of Old Testament narrative I suggested that the series of covenants between Yahweh and the people of Israel were part of a larger process of the hermeneuticizing of the cosmos: a shift away from the beingness of nature towards the otherness of the transcendent. This process, I

suggested, is apocalyptic in so far as it entails a sort of negation of nature (and of the self, of the inscribed word, and of worldly kingdoms) and the revelation of a pervasive signifying otherness within it: nature not only is, but means. The covenant with Noah thus entails not the destruction of nature, but its deconstruction such that it would come to signify something other than itself. This other (associated with both cataclysm and salvation) is the transcendence and power of Yahweh. The rainbow is thus the signature of Yahweh on the re-inscribed order of nature with its cycles of seasons. This signature is a sign of authority and veracity: a validation that nature now has its ontological ground not in its self but in the divinely inscribed and authorized mythos of history which now contains it. Nature is now part of the divine plot.

The signifying space which is the Zone, in contrast, is a space of multiple plots. One character suggests that "each plot carries its signature. Some are God's, some masquerade as God's" (464). The problem for the various Rocket-questers is one of authentication and interpretation: which plot is the true one, which "an advanced kind of forgery" (464)? Is there, indeed, a single "valid" mythos, and would it culminate in salvation or cataclysm? In the Forbidden Wing Slothrop feels "the rainbow edges of what is almost on him . . . rippling most intense here in this amply coded room" (203). He is poised on a sort of revelatory brink, the adjective "rainbow" suggesting a new dispensation of some sort.

Enzian, too, experiences revelations in the Zone. Enzian is the leader of the black rocket troops known as the Schwarzkommando, and he is attempting to re-center his displaced people around the rather dubious Logos of a scavenged V2

Rocket. Enzian is a postmodern Moses leading his exiled people in the postmodern desert. He has an epiphany while riding his motorcycle through the apocalyptic space which is the devastated German industrial landscape.

. . . Zoom uphill slantwise toward a rampart of wasted, knotted, fused, and scorched girderwork, stacks, pipes, ducting, windings, fairings, insulators reconfigured by all the bombing, grease-stained pebbly on the ground rushing by a mile a minute and wait, wait, say what, say 'reconfigured,' now?

There doesn't exactly dawn, no but there breaks, as that light you're afraid will break some night at too deep an hour to explain away--there floods on Enzian what seems to him an extraordinary understanding. This serpentine slag-heap he is just about to ride into now, this ex-refinery, Jamf Ölfabriken Werke AG, is not a ruin at all. It is in perfect working order. Only waiting for the right connections to be set up, to be switched on . . . modified, precisely, deliberately by bombing that was never hostile, but part of a plan both sides--'sides?'--had always agreed on . . . (520)

Enzian had assumed that the "holy Text" for his messianic enterprise "had to be the Rocket," but wonders "if I'm riding through it, the Real Text, right now, if this is it":

--the bombing was the exact industrial process of conversion, each release of energy placed exactly in space and time, each shockwave plotted in advance to bring precisely tonight's wreck into being thus

decoding the Text, thus coding, recoding, redecoding the holy Text . . . If it is in working order, what is it meant to do? The engineers who built it as a refinery never knew there were any further steps to be taken. Their design was "finalized," and they could forget it.

It means this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted . . . secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology . . . by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques, by something that needed the energy-burst of war [. . .] (520-1)

Just as the deluge of the Old Testament entails a symbolic erasure and reinscription of nature such that nature becomes a signifier of something more radically other: the power and presence of Yahweh, so does the bombing of the industrial landscape--its literal destruction-- actually constitute (as Enzian sees it) its deconstruction, part of an ongoing process of "coding, recoding, redecoding" of the "holy Text" (521). Politics and the political mode of understanding history are reduced to "theatre," and metaphors of theatre and film function throughout the novel as another mode of deconstructing or placing historical reference under erasure to reveal more expansive--and more paranoid--significance.

Enzian's attempt to read the text of his historical situation leaves him caught in a spiral of paranoid speculation, a seemingly endless attempt to seize and name the other. His paranoid "reasonings" are structured as a dialogue or pseudo-dialectical drive towards the "truth." Yet they culminate not in certainty but in something more like hysteria and collapse, a sort of final negation which

leaves a blank where final revelation should be. Specifically, after political explanations of the war are negated, Enzian seems to reach a tentative conclusion: the real impetus for war stems from the needs of Technology, needs "which are understood only by the ruling elite . . ." (521). The subsequent paragraph, however, immediately negates this conclusion: "Yes but Technology only responds [. . .] 'All very well to talk about having a monster by the tail, but do you think we'd've had the Rocket if someone, some specific somebody with a name and a penis hadn't wanted to chuck a ton of Amatol 300 miles and blow up a block full of civilians? Go ahead, capitalize the T on technology, deify it if it'll make you feel less responsible--but it puts you with the neutered, brother [. . .]'" (521). The only thing that seems certain is that there is a plot to be deciphered, a plot which requires radically new modes of interpretation:

We have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function . . . zeroing in on what incalculable plot? [. . .] the planetary mission [. . .] waiting for its Kabbalists and new alchemists to discover the Key, teach the mysteries to others . . . (521)

But this Kabbalistic mood of resignation and dedication to the mystery is not the final word. It is still unclear to Enzian which ruin/text deserves his attention, that in Hamburg "or another make-believe 'ruin,' in another city? Another country? YAAAGGGGHHHH!" (521).

If this is an apocalypse of the mind (to borrow Emerson's phrase) it is not

one which reveals the romantic coalescence, unity, and identity of consciousness and nature in an apocalyptic harmony of the poetic Word. Rather, it is almost the inverse of this: the mutual disunity of consciousness and landscape in an uncentered and highly unstable space of textuality. As always, the apocalyptic space of mediation is charged with both apocalyptic poles. In this instance, the negative pole is associated with the "literal" fact of wartime devastation. This devastation is not fully apocalyptic, in Derrida's sense, since it does not yet entail the total destruction of the archive: there is still signification; total (nuclear) apocalypse may perhaps be implicit in the logic of escalating technologies of weaponry, but as yet apocalypse can only be "the signified referent" not "the real referent" ("NANN" 23). We are still in the space of the "fabulously textual," and thus Enzian can still "read" the devastation. Moving further up the positive pole, we do not find, in this instance, an unequivocally "positive" affirmation or wish-fulfilment vision of the real transfigured by the energies of imagination and desire. Instead we get paranoid fantasies of more expansive orders of control and significance which, if not reassuring, at least demonstrate a perversely creative power of speculation. The precise nature of the referent evoked remains highly ambiguous--as is always the case with the apocalyptic referent.

Enzian speaks with the voice of the paranoid and the prophet. It is also the voice of someone who has taken too many drugs. The paragraph which follows immediately upon Enzian's barbaric yawp ("YAAAGGGGHHHHH!") tells us, in a more sober and seemingly omniscient narrator's voice, "Well, this is stimulant talk here, yes Enzian's been stuffing down Nazi surplus Pervitins these

days like popcorn at the movies" (521-2). This observation is followed by the text of a song, one of many which occur throughout the novel and which routinely shatter whatever vestige of novelistic realism might be emerging at any given point:

Just a daredevil Desox-yephedrine Daddy
 With m'pockets full o' happee daze,
 Zoomin' through the Zone, where the wild dogs roam,
 Givin' all m'dreams away . . . (522)

Such a moment of glib playfulness completes the movement of supplementation away from the literal (the devastated industrial landscape) to the self-reflexively comic sphere of verbal play ("Don'tcha ephedrine of me, my honey, / Swoon just to hear my name—" [522]). Playful and humorous as these lines are, they also function to destabilize any sense of ontological grounding for the narrative (in the historically real, in Enzian as a coherent "round" character, in any of his visions or countervisions, or in a centered narrator's perspective). In Derridean terms this could be seen as a dissolve of the real in textuality; in Frye's terms, it could be an apocalyptic moment of the transfiguration of the real by the imaginative energies of language. It also exemplifies the stylistic means by which Pynchon's own text "permute[s] and combine[s] into new revelations, always unfolding" (727).

Within the diegesis Enzian clings to a belief that, "Somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom" (525). As in The Crying of Lot 49, the wasteland is not a place of meaninglessness, but an apocalyptic space of signification, a secular scripture in

which the "secular miracle of communication" can still occur. Enzian speculates that "if he dies before they find the True Text to study, then there'll have to be machinery for others to carry it on," and that machinery involves the mythologizing of himself and his people's quest: turning their experience, their wanderings in the postmodern desert, into a sacred text: "Say, that's a swell idea--call the whole Erdschweinhöhle together, get up there say, My people, I have had a vision . . ." (525).

In the final chapter in which Enzian appears, he is leading his people through the Zone, "rid[ing] the interface, like gliding at the edge of a thunderstorm . . . all the way to the end between armies East and West" (731). He is aware of his own humanity and finite limitations, but also aware of his prophetic role, soon to be inscribed in a new mythos of his people. This is illustrated in a conversation between Enzian, Katje, and Christian, in which Enzian imagines a battle in a desert:

"Who would fight for a desert?" Katje wants to know [. . .]

"In," Christian squatting down, [. . .] "not 'for.' What he's saying is 'in.'"

Saves trouble later if you can get the Texts straight soon as they're spoken. "Thank you," sez Oberst Enzian. (729)

It is precisely the presence of the Rocket which authorizes this re-textualizing of experience and birth of new scripture. Enzian tells his disciple, Christian:

"[The Rocket] comes as the Revealer. Showing that no society can protect, never could--they are as foolish as shields of paper [. . .]

They have lied to us. They can't keep us from dying, so They lie to us about death. A cooperative structure of lies [. . .] Before the Rocket we went on believing, because we wanted to. But the Rocket can penetrate, from the sky, at any given point. Nowhere is safe. We can't believe Them any more. Not if we are still sane, and love the truth." (728)

Prior systems of belief or understanding are negated, reduced to "shields of paper." The Rocket here fulfils precisely the same apocalyptic function as does the prospect of nuclear war in Derrida's formulation that the Bomb "installs humanity-- . . . even defines the essence of modern humanity--in its rhetorical condition" ("NANN" 24). This "rhetorical condition" is, according to Derrida, inherently literary in so far as it is literature which is the paradigm of a structure which "produces its referent as a fictive or fabulous referent" (26). The Bomb, too, is a "fabulous referent" looming over "the totality of that which, like literature and henceforth in it, is exposed to the same threat, constituted by the same structure of historical fictionality, producing and then harboring its own referent" (27). The Bomb inscribes us in its mythos; it is simultaneously the "absolute referent" towards which that mythos points or moves.

Apocalypse pushes us through the looking glass. Or it is the looking glass: the interface between world and text. On the one hand it is a sort of guarantor of the Real and the Serious: what could be more real than the proliferation of nuclear weaponry and the destructiveness implicit in it? What, except this "death menace" reveals the "essential finitude" (27) of everything which is? But nuclear

apocalypse is not a presence; it is not (yet) real, but an atmosphere of "familiar unreality" (GR 350)--like the ontologically unmoored yet vivid, present or textually incarnated atmosphere of the space of literature. It thus cannot be the ontological "ground" of being, yet it would not be precise to call it the guarantor of being's groundlessness, either. Rather, it is the perpetual reminder of our "precariousness" ("NANN" 27), or, in Enzian's words, it makes abundantly clear that "nowhere is safe." Such a realization constitutes neither a grim resignation to the reality principle, nor a desperate or naive return to myth, but rather it authorizes a cautious sort of freedom. Since Enzian and his people are not bound by any grounding mythos, be it mythical or rationalistic, sacred or secular (these are now revealed as merely "a cooperative structure of lies"), they can now inscribe their own mythos in the full awareness that, in Derrida's words, "the movement of its inscription is the very possibility of its effacement" ("NANN" 27). If "the hypothesis of . . . total destruction watches over deconstruction," it also watches over the cautious constructions necessary to make the apocalyptic/textual space inhabitable (27).

The complex of imagery which perhaps best evokes what I am calling the apocalyptic/textual space is that which figures the action of the novel as taking place "under parabola and parable" (299). The parabola is the trajectory of the V2 Rocket. At the Casino Hermann Goering, Slothrop and Katje discover that this trajectory, quite literally, connected them. Katje was in Holland, where the rockets were launched; Slothrop was in London, where they fell. As Katje suggests, the parabola is much more than a literal path:

"Between you and me is not only a rocket trajectory, but also a life. You will come to understand that between the two points, in the five minutes, it lives an entire life. You haven't even learned the data on our side of the flight profile, the visible or trackable. Beyond them there's so much more, so much none of us know. . . ."

But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakable. It is the parabola. They have guessed, once or twice--guessed and refused to believe--that everything, always, collectively, had been moving toward that purified shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chances, no return. 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. . . . (209)

Here the Rocket trajectory is an incarnation of "gravity's rainbow" in which gravity is in no way transcended, but merely pulls the rocket--the product of tremendous human ingenuity fighting to overcome natural law--back to earth where it fulfils its destructive goal. The "rainbow" is a symbolic signature on this grim new covenant: a fatalistic mythos of potentially cataclysmic predetermination: "no surprise, no second chances, no return"; a bleak gospel of "black-and-white bad news."

Rockets have the capacity to devastate the landscape even before they are launched: The streaming masses of dispossessed soldiers and refugees in the Zone after VE Day find a landscape not only devastated by Allied bombing, but barren of sustenance since even the fruits of the earth have been diverted to Rocket production. The DPs were

supposed to pick potatoes along the way, they've been chasing these non-existent potato fields now for a month--"Plundered," a one-time bugler limps along with a long splinter of railroad tie for a cane, his instrument, implausibly undented and shiny, swinging from one shoulder, "stripped by the SS, Bruder, ja, every fucking potato field, and what for? Alcohol. Not to drink, no, alcohol for the rockets. Potatoes we could have been eating, alcohol we could have been drinking. It's unbelievable." (550)

The paragraph from which this passage is taken contains a huge Whitmanesque catalogue of the dispossessed, metonymically evoked by their clothing or possessions; it concludes: ". . . 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" (551). Not only bourgeois possessions, but bourgeois subjectivity (the two are linked) is being dispersed. With all its limitations, it at least had a human center. That human center is giving way to the vast machinery of a "Rocket-cartel," or "Raketen-Stadt" (566, 296)--a postmodern version of the Scurvhamite "brute automatism" (155) which, if it is not soulless, then "the Rocket is its soul" (566).

The space beneath the parabola of the V2 trajectory, then, is where the natural order, social order, and individuals are inscribed like figures in a demonic parable. Slothrop is inscribed into this parable/parabola not only by being a member of American technopolitical society, but by having been "sold to IG

Farben like a side of beer" (286) by his father who, more precisely, allowed the Harvard researcher Laslo Jamf to perform conditioned reflex experiments on the "Infant Tyrone" in the 1920s. Slothrop is thus literally a child nurtured by the military industrial complex. "Shoestring funding may have been why Jamf, for his target reflex, chose an infant hardon" (84): the presence or absence of the reflex in response to the mystery stimulus is (so we are told) simple to measure: "a hardon, that's either there, or it isn't. Binary, elegant. The job of observing it can even be done by a student" (84). The mystery substance comes to be identified, in the course of the novel, with Imipolex G, a special insulating plastic which Weissmann incorporates into his 00000 Rocket--a fact which doesn't provide a causal connection between the correspondence of Slothrop's hardons and the rocket strikes, but which does link them via a larger, conspiratorial web of manipulation and control. Slothrop has to come to terms with "THE PENIS HE THOUGHT WAS HIS OWN" (216). Whereas cultural conditioning always (according to Freud) entails a channelling of libido away from the polymorphously perverse towards "normal genital organization, in Slothrop's case, there are more ominous levels of overdetermination, linking his personal Eros with his culture's larger thanatotic drives.

We have already examined Weissmann's phallogentric, apocalyptic hopes. Slothrop, too, has his moments of phallogentricism, but the tone and style of their presentation are vastly different. After a paragraph describing Bianca's enacting with Slothrop a sort of archetypal heterosexual male porny sex fantasy of the most generic kind (Bianca "has him all figured out": Slothrop is very much a product of

the social and cultural conditioning of his age, a postmodern everyman [469]), the tone swerves into the ludicrous:

Now something, oh, kind of funny happens here. Not that Slothrop is really aware of it now, while it's going on--but later on, it will occur to him that he was--this may sound odd, but he was somehow, actually, well, inside his own cock. If you can imagine such a thing. Yes, inside the metropolitan organ entirely, all other colonial tissue forgotten and left to fend for itself, his arms and legs it seems woven among vessels and ducts, his sperm roaring louder and louder, getting ready to erupt, somewhere below his feet . . . (469-70)

The moment of orgasm is described in terms which explicitly link the phallus and technology:

[. . .] she starts to come, and so does he, their own flood taking him up then out of his expectancy, out the eye at tower's summit and into her with a singular detonation of touch. Announcing the void, what could it be but the kingly voice of the Aggregat [the A4 rocket] itself? (470)

Throughout the novel, sex, technology, and death are figured as being inextricably linked, and the modes of figuration range from the lyrically intense (as we have seen in the passages relating to Weissmann's apocalyptic desires) to the ridiculously disgusting:

There once was a fellow named Slattery
Who was fond of the course-gyro battery.

With that 50-volt shock,
 What was left of his cock
 Was all slimy and sloppy and spattery. (311)

The literal horrors of weaponry--the vehicles of Thanatos--are exuberantly transfigured by the Eros of style.

There are moments, however, when an assertion of the human can escape the grim closure of the Rocket's parabola. Slothrop's London map with its stars indicating his sexual conquests celebrates a series of such moments. That these stars coincide exactly with sites of (subsequent) Rocket strikes, of course, ominously qualifies this testament of joy; but the map does suggest a counter-order, or another more hopeful framing grid which can be placed on the devastated landscape:

Still Slothrop keeps his map up daily, boobishly conscientious. At its best, it does celebrate a flow, a passing from which--among the sudden demolitions from the sky, mysterious orders arriving out of the dark laborings of nights that for himself are only idle--he can save a moment here or there, the days again growing colder, frost in the morning, the feeling of Jennifer's breasts inside cold sweater's wool held to warm a bit in a coal-smoke hallway he'll never know the daytime despondency of . . . cup of Bovril a fraction down from boiling searing his bare knee as Irene, naked as he is in a block of glass sunlight, holds up precious nylons one by one to find a pair that hasn't laddered, each struck flashing by the light through the

winter trellis outside . . . nasal hep American-girl voices singing out of the grooves of some disc up through the thorn needle of Allison's mother's radiogram . . . snuggling for warmth, blackout curtains over all the windows, no light but the coal of their last cigarette, an English firefly, bobbing at her whim in cursive writing that trails a bit behind, words he can't read. . . . (23)

It would be too grand to call these moments revelations. They are minor epiphanies, perhaps: Wordsworthian spots of time; Proustian moments of redemptive memory; or moments, as Blake says, which the devil cannot find. I quote the passage at length because it is a fine example of Pynchon's expansive, lyrical style which evokes, not transcendence, but the richness of a potentially infinite series of very particular, this-worldly, deeply sensual moments. Preterite moments: passed over for salvation, perhaps, but by some minimal grace saved or salvaged from destruction. The final image of the cigarette coal trailing "words he can't read" suggests the insignificance of these moments: they do not signify, at least according to the defining metanarrative of the parabola. They are meaningless in the language of the technopolitical order of war: the order of rationality and death. The elegiac tone of the passage further suggests the precariousness and impermanence of such moments of human connection.

Whereas that which lies in the doomed space beneath the parabola is evoked in expansive, lyrical prose (often in catalogues of particulars of infinite variety), the Rocket itself tends to be evoked in metaphorical terms assimilable to a singular identity--terms which, finally, resolve into the monologic, capital-W,

"Word." This is suggested in the paragraphs of conversation between Slothrop and Tantivy which immediately follow the lyric passage quoted above. Slothrop's exuberant story-telling about his girls is interrupted when he experiences a bout of shivering, a response to the uncanniness of life beneath the parabola:

"You can't hear them when they come in."

Tantivy knows which "they." His eyes shift away. There is silence for a bit.

"Of course you can't, they go faster than sound."

"Yes but--that's not it," words are bursting out between the pulses of shivering--"the other kind, those V-1s, you can hear them. Right? Maybe you have a chance to get out of the way. But these things explode first, a-and then you hear them coming in. Except that, if you're dead, you don't hear them." (23)

Tantivy tries to reassure Slothrop, suggesting analogies for the Rocket which he thinks are commensurate with its special sort of horror. He suggests the infantry cliché, "You never hear the one that gets you"; the Rocket is thus just "a very large bullet [. . .] With fins" (23). Slothrop's obsession with the idea of a rocket with his name on it is regarded by Tantivy as a form of "operational paranoia," a useful pretence in combat situations (25). For Slothrop, however, these ways of understanding the Rocket--these metonymic substitutions, displacements or prose paraphrases--are wholly inadequate. In Derridean terms, Tantivy's attempts to grasp the Rocket function like nuclear discourse, "strategic maneuvers in order to assimilate that unassimilable wholly other. . . . strategies for speaking of other

things, for putting off the encounter with the wholly other, an encounter which . . . cannot be wholly suspended" ("TANTIVY" 28).

The condition of living under the dispensation of the Rocket strains language to the breaking point, where ellipses perhaps signify more effectively than do words. Indeed, ellipses pervade the pages of Gravity's Rainbow like fragments of smashed language or the lingering fallout of the exploded word. In a sense the Rocket is beyond words because it is the grounding term, the Word itself:

"jeepers, Tantivy, listen, I don't want to upset you but . . . I mean I'm four years overdue's what it is, it could happen any time, the next second, right, just suddenly . . . shit . . . just zero, just nothing . . . and . . ."

It's nothing he can see or lay hands on--sudden gases, a violence upon the air and no trace afterward . . . a Word, spoken with no warning into your ear, and then silence forever. Beyond its invisibility, beyond hammerfall and dooincrack, here is its real horror, mocking, promising him death with German and precise confidence, laughing down all of Tantivy's quiet decencies . . . no, no bullet with fins, Ace . . . not the Word, the one Word that rips apart the day. . . . (25)

This monological Word is associated with rationality, science, technology, and the devastation of the urban landscape. In contrast to this, Slothrop's erotic activities are figured as being organic, plural, and exuberantly inclusive. The stars

on his map signify no hierarchical order, but a more polymorphous order of feeling:

The stars he pastes up are colored only to go with how he feels that day, blue on up to golden. Never to rank a single one--how can he? Nobody sees the map but Tantivy, and Christ they're all beautiful . . . in leaf or flower around his wintering city [. . .]--yes it is a little obsessive maybe but . . . "I know there is wilde love and joy enough in the world," preached Thomas Hooker, "as there are wilde Thyme, and other herbes; but we would have garden love, and garden joy, of Gods owne planting." How Slothrop's garden grows [. . .] (22)

Like the fictional William Slothrop and the historically real William Pynchon, Thomas Hooker was an English-born Puritan who emigrated in the 1630s to Massachusetts where his more liberal and egalitarian theology led to tensions with Governor Winthrop. His distinction between "wilde" love and joy and "garden" love and joy is a distinction between the exuberant creative energies of nature, and those energies in their ideal form exemplified in "Gods owne planting" or the Creation. As Frye reminds us, human creativity has the character of re-creation: we are not omnipotent or divine creators; but human creativity does go beyond the natural, apocalyptically transforming nature according to the forms of human desire. In The Great Code Frye suggests that apocalyptic imagery--imagery of an idealized world or the kingdom of God--is drawn from two main sources: from "the top half . . . of the natural cycle: the area of youth and spring and all the vigor and energy of life"; and also from "creative or productive

human work":

The genuine work which is founded on the human need for food and shelter moves in the direction of transforming nature into a world with a human shape, meaning, and function. The animal world is transformed into a pastoral environment of flocks and herds; the vegetable world, into a cultivated land of harvests and vintages and gardens; the mineral world, into cities and buildings and highways. (72)

Slothrop's "recreational" activity is associated with the garden, suggesting it partakes of this idealizing creative tendency Frye outlines (Hooker would certainly view Slothrop's promiscuity as sinful). Frye also notes that "the exuberance of creation, the spilling over of life and energy in nature . . . deeply impresses the prophets and poets of the Bible," and he cites the exhortation from Ecclesiastes to "live joyfully" (9.9), and the description of Wisdom, in Proverbs 8.31, "playing over all the earth" (GC 125). This latter image reveals "the real form of wisdom in human life as the philosophia or love of wisdom that is creative and not simply erudite" (125), a remark suggestive in its application to Pynchon's creative and at times outrageously exuberant stylistic transformation of an undeniably immense erudition.

The Great Code contains a table of what Frye calls "Apocalyptic Imagery," which outlines the creative transformations of natural images into humanized and idealized forms. The table includes a list of categories from the Divine through the human, animal, vegetable, and mineral, whose transformed forms are,

respectively, the Trinity, Israel, the sheepfold, harvest and vintage, and the city of Jerusalem. Frye observes that

This hierarchy is the basis of the famous "chain of being" polarized by form and matter, which lasted from early Greek times until the eighteenth century at least. But in its apocalyptic context it is not a hierarchy but a vision of plenitude, in which everything is equal because identical with everything else. Such a world cannot be perceived, or even comprehended theoretically, by what is usually called the ego: we have described it as the way reality looks after the ego has disappeared. (165)

Such an apocalyptic vision, where the perceiving ego dissolves and merges with the vision, or where "we can no longer tell the dancer from the dance" (GC 125; AC 94), is a sort of dissolve in pure creative energy--or desire--where even the distinction between subject and object no longer applies. Slothrop may not attain this state, but his erotic vision of his girls--"Never to rank a single one . . . Christ they're all beautiful"--is a movement toward a vision of just such exuberant plenitude or toward an apocalyptically total identification.

The characters in the novel who come closest to a loving apocalyptic transformation of self and fusion in a new, more comprehensive identity are Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake. Of Jessica, Roger muses:

You go from dream to dream inside me. You have passage to my last shabby corner, and there, among the debris, you've found life. I'm no longer sure which of all the words, images, dreams or ghosts

are "yours" and which are "mine." It's past sorting out. We're both being someone new now, someone incredible. . . . (17)

But as with Slothrop's fleeting moments of sensual connectedness--moments celebrated by the stars on his map of London--Roger and Jessica's love exists in a desperate enclave beneath the parabola (of the rocket and of the emerging technopolitical order). Roger is aware that with the end of the war he

will be forgotten, an amusing maniac, but with no place in the rationalized power-ritual that will be the coming peace. [Jessica] will take her husband's orders, she will become a domestic bureaucrat, a junior partner, and remember Roger, if at all, as a mistake thank God she didn't make. . . . (177)

In the Zone, however, Slothrop--never a romantic--attains a different kind of libidinal transformation of self beyond the conventional ego. He seems to escape the repressive constraints of that cornerstone of civilization which Freud called "genital organization" or the primacy of the genitals for libidinal gratification. He attains a state of polymorphous perversity which is neither natural nor, I think, ideal:

Trudi and Slothrop retire to a mattress [. . .] Slothrop settles back sighing, takes his helmet off and lets big sweet and saftig Trudi have her way with him. His joints are aching with rain and city wandering, he's half blitzed, Trudi is kissing him into an amazing comfort, it's an open house here, no favored senses or organs, all are equally at play . . . for possibly the first time in his life Slothrop

does not feel obliged to have a hardon, which is just as well, because it does not seem to be happening with his penis so much as with . . . oh mercy, this is embarrassing but . . . well his nose actually seems to be erecting, the mucus beginning to flow yes a nasal hardon here and Trudi has certainly noticed all right, how could she help but . . .

(439)

Given that Slothrop's penis up until this point has functioned not as anything so innocent as a mere signifier of individual desire, but as a signifier of the whole techno-political-phallo-thanato-centric order, this moment is a moment of truly free sex: a parody Marcusean moment of the functioning of the pleasure principle free from the civilized configurations which bind it to repression and the death instinct. The sheer absurdity of the passage, however, prevents us from taking it too seriously as a sign that the new order of liberated Eros is imminent.

In Eros and Civilization (1956) Herbert Marcuse interrogates "the specific historical character of the established reality principle" and challenges Freud's assumption of its universal validity (175). He argues that a non-repressive civilization is possible, a civilization based on the embracing of "another mode of being" grounded in Eros rather than reason (109). Such apocalyptic optimism can be seen as a romantic reaction against the grim (nuclear) apocalypticism of the Cold War and its accompanying technopolitical structures. The critique Marcuse provided was influential on currents of 1960s campus radicalism and, I suspect, influenced Pynchon. Gravity's Rainbow is full of passages and episodes which could be seen as putting an imaginative/paranoid spin on a Marcusean analysis of

the structures of repressive control or the bureaucratization of the oedipus complex. The following passage could describe just what Tyrone Slothrop--or anyone in the postmodern west--is up against:

. . . personal father-images have gradually disappeared behind the institutions. With the rationalization of the productive apparatus, with the multiplication of functions, all domination assumes the form of administration. At its peak, the concentration of economic power seems to turn into anonymity: everyone, even at the very top, appears to be powerless before the movements and laws of the apparatus itself. Control is normally administered by offices in which the controlled are the employers and the employed. The masters no longer perform an individual function. The sadistic principals, the capitalist exploiters, have been transformed into salaried members of a bureaucracy, whom their subjects meet as members of another bureaucracy. The pain, frustration, impotence of the individual derive from a highly productive and efficiently functioning system in which he makes a better living than ever before. Responsibility for the organization of his life lies with the whole, the "system," the sum total of the institutions that determine, satisfy, and control his needs. The aggressive impulse plunges into a void--or rather the hate encounters smiling colleagues, busy competitors, obedient officials, helpful social workers who are all doing their duty and who are all innocent victims. (98-99)

Such a vision of the compromised, postmodern self is not inconsistent with Pynchon's (which is more outrageously comprehensive, including even the metaphysical, supernatural or spiritual realms among systems of control: the "bureaucracies of the other side" [GR 411]). Marcuse argues that such repressive structures can be apocalyptically overthrown and some sort of millennium of Eros attained. Pynchon's apocalypticism, being postmodern rather than 60s-neo-romantic, cannot, I think, be nearly so unequivocally optimistic: the self, for Pynchon, is always a compromised self; apocalyptic moments (as represented within the diegesis) do not crystallize in a "real" millennial order, nor do we get inspiring visions of what such an order might be like.

Gravity's Rainbow does present us with a figure who is a sort of theoretician of Eros, but his vision of liberation is rather dubious (albeit hilarious):

"Ludwig, a little S and M never hurt anybody."

"Who said that?"

"Sigmund Freud. How do I know? But why are we taught to feel reflexive shame whenever the subject comes up? Why will the Structure allow every other kind of sexual behavior 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."

This is Sado-anarchism and Thanatz is its leading theoretician in the Zone these days. (737)

The liberation of Eros is exactly what "Thanatz" would love--a humorously ominous fact that suggests the inseparable conjunction of Eros and Thanatos, a conjunction which implies that millennial possibilities of liberation will always be shadowed by darker possibilities.

From a Marcusean perspective, Pynchon could be accused of playing for cheap laughs here: trivializing the "real" human desire for liberation and poking fun at the theoretical attempt to envision "another form of civilization under another reality principle" (Marcuse 147). Once again, Pynchon is subsuming the real in verbal play, a stylistic gesture which is an essential feature of his postmodern, self-reflexive aesthetic--an aesthetic which does seem to have "joy in it." It is suggestive that the politically committed theorist Marcuse--the theorist of Eros--must, when push comes to shove, valorize his political commitment to the real above the erotic jouissance of the literary (which Pynchon embodies so well). In the following passage, Marcuse sounds positively puritanical:

The aesthetic quality of enjoyment, even entertainment, has been inseparable from the essence of art, no matter how tragic, how uncompromising the work of art is. Aristotle's proposition on the cathartic effect of art epitomizes the dual function of art: both to oppose and to reconcile; both to indict and to acquit; both to recall the repressed and to repress it again--"purified." People can elevate

themselves with the classics: they read and see and hear their own archetypes rebel, triumph, give up, or perish. And since all this is aesthetically formed, they can enjoy it--and forget it. (145)

We might ask: can the spirit of joy which attends the formalized shape of an aesthetic vision not extend beyond the immediate experience of the work of art and inform committed political action? Does the experience of aesthetic form necessarily entail a sort of cathartic closure or consummation of the (libidinal) energies which it arouses in the individual? Marcuse's position, in Eros and Civilization, seems quite clear: "As aesthetic phenomenon, the critical function of art is self-defeating. The very commitment of art to form vitiates the negation of unfreedom in art" (144). The phrase "negation of unfreedom" is a litotes Marcuse borrows from Adorno to evoke the most art can envision under the conditions of institutionalized repression, or under the reality principle. A more positive content, such as "the image of man as a free subject," would demand, presumably, an erotically transformed mode of perception or, to borrow Enzian's phrase, "we [would] have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world" (521).

Not surprisingly, Marcuse valorizes oppositional art forms, such as surrealism and atonal music, which violate traditional form and thereby deny reconciliation with the prevailing reality principle (145). Such art "allied itself with the revolution" (149). Pynchon's narrative technique in Gravity's Rainbow certainly has affinities with surrealism, but its playfulness will not, I think, be tied down to a posture of pure oppositionality--especially not one tied to a particular political program of liberation (which is Marcuse's rather paradoxical stance).

Pynchon's postmodern stance seems to be on the far side of Marcuse's debate, deconstructing its terms and paradoxes. This is brilliantly illustrated in the following paragraphs in which two characters debate the relative merits of Rossini (who represents the consolations of aesthetic form) and Beethoven (who strives to attain a more radical liberation via a dialectic of form):

Gustav is a composer. For months he has been carrying on a raging debate with Säure over who is better, Beethoven or Rossini. Säure is for Rossini. "I'm not so much for Beethoven qua Beethoven," Gustav argues, "but as he represents the German dialectic, the incorporation of more and more notes into the scale, culminating with dodecaphonic democracy, where all notes get an equal hearing. Beethoven was one of the architects of musical freedom--he submitted to the demands of history, despite his deafness. While Rossini was retiring at the age of 36, womanizing and getting fat, Beethoven was living a life filled with tragedy and grandeur."

"So?" is Säure's customary answer to that one. "Which would you rather do? The point is," cutting off Gustav's usually indignant scream, "a person feels good listening to Rossini. All you feel like listening to Beethoven is going out and invading Poland. Ode to joy indeed. The man didn't even have a sense of humor. I tell you," shaking his skinny old fist, "there is more of the Sublime in the snare-drum part to La Gazza Ladra than in the whole Ninth

Symphony. With Rossini, the whole point is that lovers always get together, isolation is overcome, and like it or not that is the one great centrifugal movement of the World. Through the machineries of greed, pettiness, and the abuse of power, love occurs. All the shit is transmuted to gold. The walls are breached, the balconies are scaled--listen!" It was a night in early May, and the final bombardment of Berlin was in progress. Säure had to shout his head off. "The Italian girl is in Algiers, the Barber's in the crockery, the magpie's stealing everything in sight! The World is rushing together. . . ." (440)

That this debate takes place amidst the final bombardment of Berlin renders it more than merely academic; it reveals the apocalyptic implications on either side. Säure's celebration of Rossini (joy, romance closure, the miracle of love's occurrence) seems contradicted by the context: he proclaims "The world is rushing together" while bombs fall all around them. But his very proclamation is a creative act: an apocalyptic denial of the "reality" of the context which defines or enfolds them; an affirmation of another order of being. Gustav's embracement of the aesthetic of Beethoven seems less escapist: a willingness to embrace the freedom which comes with the risk of leaving behind the false consolations of "predictable little tunes" (441) and venturing towards a less harmonic and more inclusive order beyond even tragedy to the sublime atonality which dwarfs the self-a movement (he contends) which entails a truer submission "to the demands of history." If, as Marcuse suggests, "art survives only where it cancels itself" (145),

this cancelation seems on the verge of historical ratification by the bombardment, an apocalyptic ratification which will perhaps not allow survival. The negative pole of apocalypse seems to loom at the end of this road of aesthetic "freedom":

[. . .] it seems that Gustav's German Dialectic has come to its end. He has just had the word, all the way from Vienna along some musicians' grapevine, that Anton Webern is dead. "Shot in May, by the Americans. Senseless, accidental if you believe in accidents [. . . .] Do you know what kind of myth that's going to make in a thousand years? The young barbarians coming in to murder the Last European, standing at the far end of what'd been going on since Bach, an expansion of music's polymorphous perversity till all notes were truly equal at last. . . . Where was there to go after Webern? It was the moment of maximum freedom. It all had to come down. Another Götterdämmerung--" (440-1)

Clearly Gravity's Rainbow encodes within itself an awareness of both the "Rossini" and "Beethoven" aesthetic poles. With its narrative and stylistic disjunctions, it is something of a "dodecaphonic democracy" of a text, and the vision which shimmers through the formlessness seems to intimate a literal apocalyptic closure. The novel's final page, while it does not describe a nuclear blast, does take us within delta-t of it. And like all novels, Gravity's Rainbow ends. But as a conventional book--and if the Bomb hasn't dropped--it can be read

again: it is not quite a self-consuming artefact.⁴ On the other hand the novel does depict and cherish moments when "love occurs," and even its grimmest, most ironic visions contain an exuberant intensity of style such that the thanatotic content is, in a sense, redeemed by the Eros of form.⁵

⁴ William Gibson's most recent novel, Agrippa, is a self-consuming artefact: its text is contained on a computer disk which is programmed to self-destruct after one reading. Peter Schwenger discussed the apocalyptic implications of this in his paper, "Agrippa: the Apocalyptic Book," delivered at the ACCUTE session of the 1993 Learned's convention. In terms of my argument, Agrippa represents a further stage in the "technologizing of the word" beyond print.

⁵ Beyond this, I can't help but note the parallel between Pynchon, who published Gravity's Rainbow at age 36 and proceeded to take a 17 year sabbatical, and Rossini, "retiring at the age of 36, womanizing and getting fat" (440). The author, if not his text, perhaps inclines towards the "Rossini" pole. We do not, however, have any idea what Pynchon's motive or mood was during this period. Of Pynchon's reclusive tendencies, Salman Rushdie has written: "I can dig it, I can relate to that (but, like, he should try it when it's compulsory instead of a free-choice option)" (NYTBR, 14 Jan. 1990). Note that fellow postmodernist Rushdie can face his own predicament--which approaches tragic grandeur--with characteristic levity.

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