"The Great Bright Hand": Puritanism in the Zone

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMEMT OF

THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

ENGLISH

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

April 1994

ISBN 0-612-01162-3

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DEGREE: Master of Arts (English)

TITLE OF THESIS: "The Great Bright Hand": Puritanism in the Zone

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"THE GREAT BRIGHT HAND": PURITANISM IN THE ZONE

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APRIL 25, 1994
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Abstract

"The Great Bright Hand": Puritanism in the Zone

The puritan founding fathers at Massachusetts Bay colony included among their number William Slothrop, a dissenter who argued the providential necessity and therefore the holiness of God's "second sheep", the preterite. William's observations effectually deconstruct the notion of puritan election, thereby casting doubt on puritanism's interpretive strategies in reading providential narrative in horological time. These strategies involve closure and moral exclusivity based on self-privilege, which Thomas Pynchon finds embedded in American hegemony from the first mission in the wilderness to the most current technological state.

Gravity's Rainbow simultaneously establishes narrative instability, the inadequacy of human interpretive ability and the human need for both narrative and interpretation. Puritanism is the analogue for these ideas; Pynchon uses tropes of reversal and incessant narrative digressions to suggest meaning exists in ontological interfaces whose stability cannot be ascertained. Pynchon's narrative is both a catalogue of "Holy-Center-Approaching" and a place where "separations are proceeding... in fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the Center" (GR 508, 519). The centripetal tendency of interpretation is subverted by the centrifugal, or entropic, tendency of the world.

For Pynchon, connectedness and meaning are necessary human constructs because the alternative is "pitiable contingency":

therefore both religion and paranoia assert coherence derived from a force, malign or benign, that transcends time and history. This need for connectedness directly leads to hegemony, to acceptance of hierarchical power and to co-optation into a dominant interpretive system. Pynchon destabilizes his narrative to the point where meaning must be self-consciously constructed by his readers, forming a potential counterpoint to hegemonic force. His reliance on and subversion of puritanism demands awareness that all interpretive and narrative acts are mediations and therefore ultimately unreliable, always existing in history, where transcendental meaning may be immanent but is never present.

For MAM

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Paul Delany for his patience, his insight and his insistence on following the bouncing ball. To Paul Budra for invaluable aid and an encouraging word. To some very special persons who shared the boat and made the ride worthwhile.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:
Narrative, Numinosity and Puritanism

Plots, constructed and narrated, imagined or actual, are essential to Thomas Pynchon's novels. For puritans there is one providential plot, God's divine plan made manifest through signs intended for and interpreted by an elect few. For Pynchon, paranoia also assumes a connected, meaningful world, though it is controlled by a malevolent force. Both kinds of plots require interpretive strategies that are embodied in Pynchon's work; both are ultimately malign for preterites. His narratives therefore subvert these plots while enacting them, suggesting both the inadequacy and the necessity of interpretation as the human search for meaning in the world, for human significance.

Plots are employed and equivocated by Pynchon's narrators and his readers are implicated in them; Pynchon makes it mandatory that his readers both participate in and try to remain aloof from the turmoil of interpretation his characters engage in. Plots within the novels require characters' interpretations, which Pynchon equivocates : "it's a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia"[1] Paranoia, narrative interpretation and puritanism are inextricably linked in Gravity's Rainbow, as necessary but deficient human responses to the world: "If there is something comforting - religious if you want - about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (GR 434). Characters within Pynchon's literary plots attempt to interpret

events that may or may not be causally linked, that are rendered by narrators who are also sorting and interpreting the data they present; readers, in their turn, must interpret the variegated and often disjointed narratives and their plots, whose variety and ambiguous origins are structural parodies of a single providential order disseminated from a central source.

Character, narrator and reader parallel each other. V. features the random, picaresque events of Benny Profane's life counterpoised with Herbert Stencil's quest for coherent meaning in the figure of V., who may or may not exist in a series of apparently related manifestations. Oedipa Maas attempts to identify the central connections between Tristero, Inverarity's legacy and her own concept of the world, which may or may not be solely of her own making. Brock Vond and Zoyd Wheeler are obverse interpreters of both Frenesi and Prairie, highlighting Pynchon's concern with the impossibility of differentiating plot from paranoia, narrative from interpretation. "Orders behind the visible" are mediated, interpretive and therefore uncertain in Pynchon's novels.

Puritanism justifies itself by positing a coherent, meaningful divine plot. This plot has moral implications (puritans define themselves as elect and all others as preterite) and temporal ones (events that puritans interpret in horological time conform to God's divine will in chronometrical time). This direct correspondence between divine and secular, kairos and chronos, allows puritanism its self-valorization, by construing a particular "reading" of temporal events to establish God's divine will made manifest through visible signs. The world is literally God's narrative, interpreted

correctly only by an elect few whose interpretation consequently validates their own chosen status. Those who do not share this interpretation are, by puritan definition, destined to be forever passed over, subordinate in God's divine plot.

Gravity's Rainbow thickens the problem of plot by providing and exploiting puritan narrative and its need for interpretation resulting in access to a central truth. Puritanism and puritan interpretive strategies are embedded in the narrative of Gravity's Rainbow and in the personality of Tyrone Slothrop, respectively. Puritan imagery and the puritan jeremiad form are present in the novel, but Pynchon's concern is not so much to indict puritanism as an outdated and exclusionary discourse as it is to illustrate the interpretive urge and its attendant tendency towards closure and, inevitably, reductiveness. Gravity's Rainbow balances Slothrop's puritan heritage with an unresolvable plot containing multiple minor plots to suggest that a pragmatic attempt to discover meaning is both necessary and futile: Pynchon's readers, like Slothrop, must continually balance this inherent ambiguity.

Leni Pokler's assertion that the world must be viewed as "parallel, not series" is good advice for Pynchon's readers, who may prefer a narrative that conforms to Franz's rigidly held faith in "cause and effect" (GR 159). Linda Hutcheon asks: "does interpretation inevitably enter with narrativization?" [2] In Pynchon the answer is yes: the plot of Gravity's Rainbow encompasses many "plots", most notably those of Pointsman against Slothrop and of the Rocket Cartel against everyone else. The problem remains for the novel's characters and for the reader: where does

narrative end and interpretation begin? Pynchon's narrator is encyclopedic, but nonetheless limited. History, no matter how minutely rendered, cannot be fully recovered: Pointsman and Mexico discuss determinacy and Poisson distributions but "No one listened to those early conversations - not even an idle snapshot survives. They walked till that winter hid them and it seemed the cruel Channel itself would freeze over, and none of us, no one, could ever completely find them again. Their footprints filled with ice, and a little later were taken out to sea" (GR 92). The narrator is actively engaged in interpreting the data he presents to his readers, forcing them to interpret "narrative" as a structural concept simultaneous with the literal narrative of the novel. Reliability is possible only in the sense that the narrator is apparently doing his best to be thorough, but large amounts of potentially vital data, such as the missing conversation, are absent. Pynchon's narrative consists of discrete events and possible connections between them; it is also about the concept of narrative itself as a component of interpretation.

Robert Alter makes two points important to Pynchon in this regard. First, "the hallmark of the true self-conscious novelist is a keen sense of paradox in the relationship between fiction and reality" [3]. In Alter's view reality itself is constructed or fictionalized to some extent, and self-conscious narrators include this idea in their overtly fictionalized representations. Alter pushes this further: "The reader may demand consistency in a fictional character, but human nature itself is stubbornly inconsistent." [4] In considering Pynchon, this requires the added qualification that inconsistency and self-conscious narrative point to

incessant and unresolvable ambiguity. Gravity's Rainbow is constructed to pre-empt totalizing, implicitly reductive interpretations. Each reader, and each reading, parallels Pynchon's metaphor for reading, the reshuffled Tarot deck with its discreet units of possible significance that permutate as subsequent cards are dealt, or "read". [5]

Alter's points answer many critics of Pynchon, who are uncomfortable with his characterizations. [6] More importantly, the postmodern mingling of historicity, fiction and narrative shows reality and history to be inevitably mediated and constructed. [7] Linda Hutcheon suggests Pynchon's metafictional historiography "reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge." [8] Pynchon does problematize historical knowledge, often within the specific parameters of puritanism, to suggest the human impulse for interpretation is mixed with a need for closure, which in turn leads to exclusionary epistemology. Technology parallels puritanism in this respect, and the 00000 Rocket represents the new locus of truth in Gravity's Rainbow. Puritan spirituality retains its power in the Rocket analogue; pending apocalypse is potentially both revelation and annihilation in Gravity's Rainbow. The rocket is both historical fact and fictional construct, with no privilege granted to either.

The parallels between puritanism and Pynchon's narrative fruitfully point to Gravity's Rainbow's subversive stance toward both. "Postmodernism signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it", Hutcheon claims. [9] But Gravity's Rainbow compromises not only the canon, represented by the

myriad texts and discourses Pynchon utilizes; it also compromises itself, multiplying irony with irony to establish the simultaneous need for a reader and a kind of metareader, who must be constantly aware that each interpretive act performed within the novel's narrative and by the reader is at best an attempt, easily undermined by alternative interpretations, to not only perceive but quite possibly force a design on a random collection of events. Pynchon nonetheless understands and accepts the pragmatic aspects of postmodernism as defined here by Hutcheon: "Reading and writing belong to the processes of 'life' as much as they do those of 'art'. Readers acknowledge artifice but also the temporal and affective realities of reading." [10] Reading, or interpretation, requires this temporal progress, and narratives, including Pynchon's, progress through time. However, the reader realizes that Pynchon problematizes narrative, reading, even time itself.

This is why Gravity's Rainbow begins, tantalizingly, as a type of detective or spy novel, inviting the reader to organize data that will eventually, courtesy of the author, begin to cohere. This, true to the detective genre, is Pynchon's red herring; the novel eventually travesties both narrative coherence and its own hero, the character most deeply involved in a quest to piece the rocket's data together, who dissolves along with the novel's already tentative narrative thrust. In Gravity's Rainbow there is no certainty for the reader, either in what anything "means", or in the validity of any particular interpretive act.

Pynchon uses puritanism as an analogue for all structures of interpretive control; America's puritan heritage has a direct impact on

narrative strategies in Gravity's Rainbow. The problem lies not with God or with technology, structures Pynchon identifies as partially "numinous" (GR 242, 668, 750) to imply epistemological uncertainty and ambiguous divinity. Elect interpretations of the numinous are Pynchon's concern, because they turn the numinous into divine sanction of their own election. Puritanism is Pynchon's analogue for all interpretations that require closure, determinism and exclusivity; technology parallels puritanism because in the service of elect interests they are both structures favoring death for preterites.

Pynchon uses puritanism to establish interpretive impulses and the human need for a degree of control that implies self-significance in the world. In V. "The world is all that the case is", according to a young Lieutenant Weissmann. [11] The "sferics" of V. become the Rocket in Gravity's Rainbow, a structure representing the numinous, capable of sustaining an infinite number of possible meanings. Puritanism posits the numinous ordering of the world by God; Gravity's Rainbow disputes not numinosity but puritan interpretations of it, not the technology that made the Rocket possible, but the rationale to apply technology to creating weapons of mass destruction.

G.A. Starr observes that for early puritan narratives " 'the hand of God doth sometimes as it were by a finger point at the sin which it designs to punish. . . :' further evidence of the tendency to regard all objects and events as having a significance, whether obvious or latent, which man must extract from them." [12] Pynchon utilizes the puritan will to extract meaning and perceive a plot in the early sections of Gravity's Rainbow,

but he also parodies it and ultimately refutes interpretive closure and epistemologically centered discourse. The tensions in Pynchon's writing are the fundamental conflicts between interpretation and indeterminacy and between providence and paranoia. This tension is represented by Slothrop's quest for the s-gerat, the covert operations against him and by his gradual disappearance, which parallels the novel's own increasingly diasporic quality.

Pynchon's immediacy relies on his understanding of puritanism's development into a contemporary America prepared to extinguish itself through a rigid adherence to technology, the ultimate manifestation of man's literal-minded attempt to control his environment. Puritan theology, gradually secularized, shed the overt trappings of Calvinism during America's metamorphosis into the capitalist centre of the world, but America maintains a clear sense of privilege deriving from the original mission into the wilderness of the promised land. Pynchon adapts early puritan symbols, rhetorical modes and interpretive methods to suggest a direct ideological line from Massachusetts Bay in 1630 to World War Two, contemporary America and beyond.

The novel is also fundamentally ironic. Slothrop's quest dwindles and finally, forcibly, disappears. The reader's understanding of and attention to that quest is directly challenged. The destructive revelation in the novel's climactic finale takes place both long before and long after Slothrop's disappearance, equivocating the nature of both destruction and revelation. The firing of the fateful rocket 00000 takes place on Easter Sunday, 1945; this day in 1945 is coincidentally April 1, or April Fools' Day.

The novel utilizes both traditional liturgical symbolism and many forms of non-western, non-Christian symbolism, but it appears at various times to validate parts of each while at other times satirizing them. [13]

Pynchon's narrative moves analeptically much of the time. Progress through narrative to an identifiable goal is continually subverted. When chronological time does move forward, it is usually at a minuscule pace, as Pynchon provides minute details and circumstances which bear tangentially on the plot. Episodes are rendered discreetly, bearing little direct relevance to proximate episodes in the novel, but detailed and evocative in themselves. The figure at the center of this elaborate and equivocal construction is Slothrop, who "reads" the data before him, as the readers of Gravity's Rainbow do. Puritanism and paranoia are equal, with two notable exceptions; puritanism allows no doubt that divine order exists and it assumes a God benificent to the chosen few. Slothrop looks for meanings behind the visible order of events, but he can never clearly distinguish sheer chance and coincidence from actual plots or divine Providence. His position parallels the reader's; in an important way the reader is at the center of Gravity's Rainbow. Pynchon's reader must engage in the same type of speculation, striving to make disparate elements cohere. The paradoxes and fundamental irony of the novel make this attempt at closure an impossibility.

Pynchon does provide his word-structure, however. Slothrop has choices to make as he moves through the post-war Zone, "to be present at his own assembly - perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, his time's assembly - and there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn't"

(GR 738). Pynchon's readers do their own assembly work, using the narrative fragments as raw material and narrative hints or intrusions as a guide. The contradictory nature of Gravity's Rainbow forces an equivocal reading that encompasses the will to obtain narrative coherence and a recognition that this coherence does not, unlike puritan doctrines of God's plan, transfer easily to other readers. The relation of personal and historical assemblies and the lack of a punch-line despite the human need for one, are problems each reader must accept as part of Pynchon's formulation.

Tyrone Slothrop's head opens in "vistas of thought" as he nears the end of his trek through the post-war zone of Gravity's Rainbow (GR 555). He considers his first American ancestor, William, a member of the initial puritan settlement at Massachusetts Bay and an eventual "heretic." Tyrone's vistas are of possibility: open-ended, nostalgic and idealistic. Slothrop is intricately aligned with contemporary America; his puritan ancestry and his virtual enslavement by technology parallel America's. William "could have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from" (GR 556). His descendant Tyrone, "last of his line", considers there might "be a way back. . . , the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite" (GR 556). Slothrop's, and America's, puritan legacy leads down an inexorable path to the Zone and its techno-grail, the rocket. Gravity's Rainbow delineates puritanism's epistemology of exclusion and its consistent influence on America. It also mourns the singular point and the

wrong choice while it covertly celebrates individual possibilities for making new, better choices. However, the ironic mode and analeptic structure continually suggest that it is too late for such choices. This position is also treated ironically, in the "TOO LATE" section near the end of the novel, and by the radical prolepsis that propels the rocket into 1973, into the moment of reading, the "now."

The rocket spans the transcendent and apocalyptic spectrum of significance, representing one, the other or both to various characters. The supersonic rocket's "screaming comes across the sky" (GR 3) only after impact: human awareness of the threat is inverted so that the warning comes after the fact. The visible sign is the destruction which can only be observed by those spared the blast. The rocket is partially then a sign of pre-determined outcomes, much like the appearance in puritan literature of the Hand of God in the sky, a connection made explicitly many times in Gravity's Rainbow. The first of these connections features Slothrop's ancestry and prefigures the novel's ending: "White rockets about to fire, only seconds of countdown away, rose windows taking in Sunday light, elevating and washing the faces above the pulpits defining grace, swearing this is how it does happen - yes the great bright hand reaching out of the cloud . . ." (GR 29). Early American puritans understand the apocalypse as destruction for the damned, or preterite, and redemption for all God's elect. No such understanding is available to Slothrop or to Pynchon's readers.

Slothrop and America have a puritan heritage that continues to influence them. What puritanism means for Pynchon, how it functions and

how it is subverted in Gravity's Rainbow are established in Chapter Two of this thesis. Chapter Three discusses the political implications of puritanism in the novel. Specifically, this chapter will examine the establishment of and eventual undermining of the puritan notions of preterition and election, and examine Pynchon's attack on hierarchical structures.

Pynchon ultimately refuses to assist his readers in closure of any sort. Gravity's Rainbow supplies several alternative versions of the "Holy Center". [14] Tarot readings, Geli's magic, Mexico's statistical probabilities and even Slothrop's spiritual blues harp suggest possibilities for a non-determinist universe that might even have a beneficent, non-puritan God. Any order behind the numinous relies on individual ontological decisions. Chapter Four deals briefly with ontological instability and considers Pynchon's position in the postmodern dynamics that ontological issues imply. The focal point throughout the thesis is Pynchon's adaptation and refutation of puritanism and the exclusionary discourses modelled on puritanism in Gravity's Rainbow. He problematizes the impulse to interpret when the interpreter believes it is a natural, analytical response to identifiable divine truths figuratively represented in a coherent narrative. In Gravity's Rainbow, all interpretations are mediations and there is no surety of truth behind any figurative representation. Pynchon's story, and the narrative that conveys that story, is one of revelation and destruction, numinosity and minute temporality, partly "truth" and partly fiction, with no certainty of where the lines are to be drawn.

The most important similarity between Gravity's Rainbow and

puritanism is a preoccupation with final things: "the Puritan impulse was profoundly eschatological; that the eschatology was at once private and public, applicable as it were in the same breath to saint and society; and that the forms of that society expressed the saint's relationship to his church, his fellow-man, the spiritual life to come, and God's grand design for mankind." [15] The church becomes technology, with God's promise to Noah both affirmed and parodied in the rocket's parabolic rainbow; society becomes the Zone; the saint ironically becomes Weissmann, whose symbolic adverserial stance toward the retrograde Slothrop and his meagre progress reveals the true nature of self-defined election for Pynchon as exploitive, exclusive and cruel no matter how spiritual its rhetoric may be; God's grand design becomes what each individual in the novel construes it to be, with no transcendental validation available. Pynchon's narrative parodies the divine plot by parodying itself and the interpretive impulse; he works through digression and dispersal in order to fracture any attempt to enclose his narrative into a coherent whole.

Notes

1 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 188. All subsequent references to this work are contained in the essay.

2 Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 1988), 122.

3 Robert Alter, Partial Magic (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 129.

4 Alter, p. 130.

5 Alter's analysis focuses on Melville's The Confidence Man, but his points apply well to Pynchon, of whom Alter in fact disapproves. (See Commentary, Nov. 1975, pp. 44-51.)

6 Scott Sanders and David Leverenz, both generally sympathetic to Pynchon's work, are unhappy with his characters. (See Mindful Pleasures, George Levine and David Leverenz, eds.(Boston: Little Brown, 1976) .)

7 Hayden White, discussing history as a form of discourse, says: "Discourse . . . is quintessentially a mediative enterprise. As such it is both interpretive and preinterpretive; it is always as much about the nature of interpretation itself as it is about the subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration." In Tropics of Discourse, Boston: Johns Hopkins, 1978, p. 4.

8 Hutcheon, p. 89.

9 Ibid; p. 130.

10 Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1980), 5.

11 Thomas Pynchon, V. (New York: Bantam, 1964), 258-59. Mondaugen's sferics are in a code which Weissmann breaks. He removes "every third letter" to get two distinct messages: one is Mondaugen's name, the other is the "world" message. Implicit in this is the necessity for interpretation that is by definition self-centered. Also implicit is Weissmann 's colonialist attitude towards Mondaugen's personal code and message: "It's your code.I've broken it." Colonialism becomes elect politics in GR.

12 G. A. Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 93-4.

13 Stephen Weisenburger, A Gravity's Rainbow Companion (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988). Weisenburger's introduction includes a description of GR's circular pattern,, which combines parabolic and mandalic figures. Within these general patterns are Christian, "pagan" and secular symbols. The entire apparatus serves, as Weisenburger says, to "hopelessly equivocate" any reading that attempts to valorize a narrative emphasis on any one pattern, figure or discursive mode.

14 Molly Hite, Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983). Hite's formulation is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Her ideas are important to a wide range of subsequent Pynchon criticism.

15 Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. The American Puritan Imagination (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 7.

Chapter Two
"The Long Rallentando":
Puritanism and the Declension of Certainty

Puritan themes are announced early in Gravity's Rainbow. Pirate's dream of both rocket-death and an accompanying pretence of salvation includes two orders of people. One order is represented by the "VIP faces remembered behind bullet-proof windows speeding throughout the city." [1] The other order is poised in an inferior position in a hierarchy that is insistently questioned by Pynchon: "Each has been hearing a voice, one he thought was talking only to him, say, 'You didn't really think you'd be saved. Come, we all know who we are by now. No one was ever going to take the trouble to save you, old fellow'."(GR 4). These two orders, of saved and damned, elect and preterite, are central concepts in Gravity's Rainbow. They are derived from American puritanism as it came from Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion and updated to encompass the technocratic hierarchy that dominates the world of Gravity's Rainbow. Puritanism and Calvin's closed interpretation of Providence are subverted in Gravity's Rainbow, where the universe unfolds in perpetually mysterious ways and answers to forces beyond the interpretive abilities of its characters and even its narrator.

Pynchon utilizes puritanism as an interpretive stance against a possible

void of connection and meaning in the world. Slothrop's heritage ensures his persistent attempts to order the disparate events that befall him. However, Gravity's Rainbow parodies both puritanism's requisite closure and its assumed center, by providing multiple plots and points of view, an alternatively friendly and dissembling narrator and no definition of the numinous. Unlike early puritan narratives, that assume God and His Word at the center, Pynchon disallows logocentrism and undermines any assumption of centeredness. [2] He allows Slothrop and the reader hope of ordering their experiences, but simultaneously subverts this hope.

Robert Alter claims for Fielding what also applies to Pynchon: "in the narrative itself there is a seamless connection between narration and wide-ranging reflection, where at every moment the ostentatiously manipulated fictional materials are set in an elaborate grid of convention, genre, literary allusion". [3] Alter's comments must be qualified, because the "coach-passengers" scene in Tom Jones makes a playful admission to the reader that the narrator has knowingly omitted pertinent facts to keep his reader both ignorant and interested. While this keeps the reader ironically unable to put the novel's key clue into place until the end, though it was presented at the beginning of the novel, the implication is that the narrator did have a coherent story to tell, even if part of the story, as Alter claims, is the art of story-telling. Pynchon's narrator has no such luxurious certainty, so he cannot grant it to his readers. Pynchon, to use Alter again, this time discussing Melville, features a "lurking apprehension of the impossibility of the whole endeavor" [4] of writing fiction; Pynchon passes this apprehension on to his readers and their interpretive strategies.

Puritanism in Gravity's Rainbow highlights the forced nature of interpretive closure and the impossibility of ascertaining an epistemological center; Pynchon's clues are dead ends, of indeterminate origin.

Pynchon relates Calvinism to "Shit, money and the Word, the three American truths, powering the American nobility" (GR 28). Tyrone Slothrop's puritan legacy makes it clear which part of the hierarchy he belongs to: "Interest from various numbered trusts was still turned, by family banks down in Boston every second or third generation, back into yet another trust, in long rallentando, in infinite series just perceptibly, term by term, dying... but never quite to the zero..." (GR 28).The nobility is "powered" and empowered at the literal and figurative expense of Slothrop and his kind. Pynchon's scheme is analogical; financial, mathematical, entropic and spiritual death are all present in the Slothrops' decline, a process begun in puritan America and still continuing. Pynchon strikes the ominous note that Slothrop is "Last of his kind, and how far-fallen" (GR 569). The rallentando parallels the rocket falling at the novel's end; the possibility that any series will fall "to the zero" is poised against possible redemption.

Calvin's doctrines of election, reprobation and providence are the core of puritan belief. [5] These doctrines are represented analogically in Gravity's Rainbow, most importantly as the rocket, its cartel and its questers; puritanism represents any discourse which assumes it alone possesses a central truth mediated by a self-defined elect. Pynchon also presents these doctrines directly, as American puritan beliefs that, held

strongly enough in the imagination and political predisposition of the elect, continue to exert clear effects into the twentieth century and the novel's "now". The present time of Gravity's Rainbow portrays technology as the latest manifestation of puritan doctrines. These doctrines are problematized, like all systematic efforts at control, because they assume a moral imperative to valorize those who write and interpret the system. Gravity's Rainbow spends considerable time explicating the process of control; Pynchon emphasizes that the people who write doctrines always write them to include themselves as elect. This moral casuistry is plainly evident in John Calvin's doctrines, which serve as the theological and political basis of puritan America, and by extension America as it exists today. [6]

The puritan concept of Providence supposes a pre-ordained plan for the world, past, present and future. It is God's plan, and it cannot be diverted or denied. The temptation, as Pynchon sees it, is to interpret everything in terms of Providence, as a sign of God's pleasure or anger with human activity. Pynchon parodies the concept, but retains the human need for it. Providence is a looming but casual and forgetful presence in Gravity's Rainbow. Tyrone asks "Hey, Providence, did you step out for a beer or something?" (GR 378). Providence also "gives Slothrop the finger" (GR 461) and is generally unreliable in the Zone. Slothrop nonetheless maintains some form of belief in Providence; he requires this belief in order to continue his quest. He relies on Providence just as the reader relies on narrative cause and effect, but both are undermined.

G.A. Starr's Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography is instructive on this

point. For early puritan narratives, it is a given that "human affairs are governed by Providence . . . , any attempt to disrupt or elude their established pattern implies a denial of God's power, and, by extension, challenges his very existence." [7] Pynchon reverses this "established pattern" in many ways; Providence is conspicuously absent, though Slothrop seeks comfort in it and has faith that the pattern and its implicit central truth exist. This reversal maintains some of the basic tenets of puritanism, however. Starr notes that Robinson Crusoe's "tribulations seem to have the 'very mark and signature' of his sins upon them, and his failure to grasp this" is indicative of his fallen status. [8] Slothrop also fails to grasp a multitude of details, all relevant to either his rocket quest or to his spiritual status, though the connections between them is never clear, whereas Crusoe's willful ignorance directly relates to his physical trials, which are symbolic of his spiritual depravity. The potential for a connected pattern exists in Gravity's Rainbow, as it does in Robinson Crusoe. The potential is not realized in Pynchon, but the reasons relate to Slothrop's incompetence, to Providence's apathy and most importantly to the obverse, a possibly unconnected, random universe.

Slothrop pursues the rocket, but "There is no good reason to hope for any turn, any surprise I-See-it, not from Slothrop" (GR 509). Young Tyrone connects church steeples with rockets, destruction with revelation. Pynchon's metaphor is nearly identical to what can be found in Seventeenth century puritan sermons such as those Starr quotes from: " "'the hand of God doth sometimes as it were by a finger point at the sin, which it designs to punish.'" [9] Punishment for Slothrop is his confirmation

as preterite, but Pynchon problematizes both words. [10] Tyrone's quest in the zone never materializes into a literal connection. The "slender church steeples poised up and down all these autumn hillsides, white rockets about to fire" make Slothrop's ancestry and rocket technology parallel partners in punishing the world but the indictment is not of himself as Slothrop thinks both when he is young and later in the Zone. It is of puritanism and technology: "this is how it does happen-yes the great bright hand reaching out of the cloud" (GR 29). Apocalypse brought on by the puritan version of God or by the rocket retains its ambiguous power to reveal and destroy.

Starr observes that for the puritan autobiographer, or narrator, "the foremost token of his regeneration is the discovery that he is an object of Providential concern and care. This realization does not betray him into sloth, however; it rather provokes him to new diligence and activity, for he sees that he must strike a middle course between Providence and himself." [11] For Slothrop, the discovery is not of Providence, but of a rocket cartel that subsumes Pointsman's plot and many others that affect him less directly. He alternates between diligent quester and slothful reveller in sex, drugs and alcohol. The middle course cannot be defined or systematically enacted. For his puritan ancestors, however, the problem was one of identifying tribulation as a positive or negative signifier of God's will, a problem much more in line with the narratives Starr discusses. The result of this problem was the American jeremiad, which mourned man's fallen state while simultaneously celebrating trials as visible tokens of God's displeasure, which were explicated to further

signify the colony's continued elect status.

Perry Miller explains the rise of the American puritan jeremiad as a form of "conceiving the inconceivable, of making intelligible order out of the transition from European to American experience." Miller's explanation traces the jeremiad from this beginning to its collapse as a theocratic instrument: 1689 marked "the last time that a ruler of Massachusetts, in an hour of hesitation, formally and officially asked advice of the churches." [12] Jeremiad sermons for the first three generations of American puritans relied on a literal belief in their mission as God's chosen people in the New Jerusalem. The sermons were litanies of detailed societal woes, invariably interpreted as literal manifestations of God's displeasure.

Sacvan Bercovitch amends Miller's conception of the jeremiad to incorporate the jeremiad as both a testament to God's wrath and to his continued attention to his chosen ones. Bercovitch's work provides a valuable link between Miller's view of the early puritan American jeremiad and Pynchon's latter-day exploitation of the form. Bercovitch explains: "For all their catalogues of iniquities, the jeremiads attest to an unswerving faith in the errand: and if anything they grow more fervent, more absolute in their commitment from one generation to the next." [13] Miller thoroughly documents the gradual, "unwitting and nearly indiscernible" [14] change in America, from theocracy to democracy. He traces the social, political and theological contentiousness that gradually secularized America. Bercovitch expands this formulation to incorporate a consistent self-valorization throughout the process from theocratic colony

to democratic republic. The process never deviates from its fundamental sense that the puritans and all their descendants were on a mission designating them from the beginning as a special, or "elect" nation containing elect individuals.

Bercovitch presents a convincing version of how puritan America's belief, descending straight from John Calvin, nonetheless had to overthrow one of Calvin's main doctrines in order to facilitate its mission. The puritans retained a reliance on the Word, and on their status as elect, but they "were concerned with mobilizing society in support of established creeds. Gradually, they rewelded the sundered [by Calvin] bonds of grace and works, through the notion of mutual obligation. The elect must repay God in time, they argued, for what he had granted to them for eternity, by making palpable the fruits of their calling." (Bercovitch's brackets) [15] The facet of Bercovitch's argument most applicable to Pynchon is his assessment of the puritan notion of "visible sainthood". For Calvin, God's signs of election and reprobation remain obscure; he carefully explains that works, since they spring from man, cannot in themselves be considered reliable signs of election. American puritans "gave America the status of visible sainthood . . . it contributes directly to the link between the New England and the American Way, the usurpation of American identity by the United States . . . and to the eschatological anthropomorphism of spiritual biography: American dream, manifest destiny, redeemer nation, and, fundamentally, the American self as representative of rebirth." [16]

Pynchon uses puritan America to question the American dream or destiny at its foundation. The Slothrop genealogy shows a literal

declension that had its basis in a theological spat between the first Slothrop, William, and his puritan brothers. William's deliberate withdrawal from America indicates his doubts about the errand as it existed in the founding colonies. His withdrawal also leaves his ancestors in a "less elect" position, which eventually erodes into Tyrone's father finding it necessary to sell his son to a Harvard research team headed by Laszlo Jampf.

In Gravity's Rainbow the problem is one of transition, from America as William Slothrop knows it to America as Tyrone Slothrop inherits it. Vital puritan components maintain their hold on Tyrone and his America. The puritans' insistence on attaching both literal and divine meaning to natural events becomes America's insistence on technological control of natural events and ultimately of human behavior. The change, as Miller and Bercovitch delineate it, is gradual secularization, but it never devalues America or the founding fathers' sense of mission. American puritans, most notably through the puritan preacher Thomas Hooker's notion of spiritual perception and the soul's preparation, began to desire ways to read signs of their pre-ordained election. Max Weber explains: "wherever the doctrine of predestination was held the question could not be suppressed whether there were any infallible criteria by which membership in the elect could be known." [17] The self-defined elect are free to subtly redefine the doctrines by which they live.

Weber makes another point directly relevant to Gravity's Rainbow and its pervasive control systems. The strict Calvinists of early America enacted a "radical devaluation of all sacraments as a means to salvation

and thus accomplished the rationalization of the world in its most extreme form." [18] Thus any form of mysticism or "magic" is devalued. Everyday life and rational understanding are valorized. For Pynchon, technology is a natural recipient of the secular benefaction of the rationalized world. It is radically opposed by "magic" in Gravity's Rainbow, though this magic always goes unexplained. The meeting between Enzian and Tchitcherine takes place under the aspect of Geli's spell: "This is magic. - Sure, but not necessarily fantasy" (GR 735). Secular, non-magical benefaction is primarily financial and political in form and does not accept Geli's magic.

The Antinomian controversy, with Mrs. Hutchinson on one side and Thomas Hooker on the other, centered in part on this problem. The Antinomians held that they could know God's grace through their own prayers and openness to salvation. Hooker and other puritan preachers held that salvation was a gradual process accompanied by signs. Hooker's study of preparation "established what to the Puritan mind was all-essential: there is an 'order' in God's proceedings." [19] The signs of this order are partially discernible. Miller quotes Hooker: God takes away the soul's resistance to spiritual work and "this consent is not from ourselves, though not without ourselves'." [20] Miller emphasizes the importance of the second clause, which opens puritan belief to the possibility of human will being directly related to salvation. It is a clear enough path from there to associating good works with prosperity in accordance with the stages of preparation under God's covenant, which the puritans applied to both individual and nation. As Miller says: "A man undergoing a work of preparation, in the hope it may be followed by the successive works, will

endeavor to perfect external behavior . . . if in this world he lives by endeavor, he automatically fulfils the national terms." [21]

Weber traces the next development in puritan logic directly into commerce and, eventually, capitalism. The puritan notion of "calling" was attached to the business world. "The decisive point was . . . the conception of the state of religious grace, common to all denominations, as a status which marks off its possessor from the degradation of the flesh, from the world." This, followed by an increasingly rationalized world that devalued monastic asceticism, meant religious life was "no longer lived outside the world in monastic communities, but within the world and its institutions." [22] Pynchon accepts Weber's analysis: Gravity's Rainbow presents those institutions as industrial cartels, weapons development and all forms of technological research that perpetuate elect control.

Miller and Bercovitch show, in slightly different but congruent ways, that the puritan project in America was "monastic" in a figural way only. There were many tasks to be performed, and the first colonists had to live "within the world". The institutions, however, retained their theocratic quality for several generations, as the jeremiads document. The gradual change, as Miller and Bercovitch portray it, is completely in line with Weber's analysis of an increasingly rationalized America. Rationalization exists at virtually every level in Gravity's Rainbow, including puritan attempts to interpret the natural world. Pynchon uses Hooker's garden image in Gravity's Rainbow to contrast not only with Slothrop's carnal love, but with the Slothrop family "lying under fallen leaves, mint and purple loostrife, chilly elm and willow shadows over the

swamp-edge graveyard in a long gradient of rot, leaching, assimilation with the earth, the stones showing round-faced angels with the long noses of dogs, toothy and deep-socketed death's heads, Masonic emblems, flowery urns, feathery willows upright and broken, exhausted hourglasses" (GR 27). The image of decay that "assimilates" with the earth recurs many times in the novel. Here it sharply contrasts puritan images of death, headstones that "leach" and Masonic emblems representing a secret, elect order. Natural order versus man-made impositions on it are delineated. Gravity's Rainbow "interprets" Hooker's garden imagery and his figure of the glozing neuter to partially valorize Slothrop. This inversion of Hooker's intentions forms a counterpoint to puritan interpretations of God's word. Hooker's presence in the novel reinforces Pynchon's point that interpretation of any text is inextricably linked to the values of the interpreter. Hooker's garden image condemns Slothrop and those like him; Pynchon's does the opposite, but with qualifications in other parts of the novel.

Slothrop's ancestors pass on their own man-made impositions to him virtually intact. Constant Slothrop "saw, and not only with his heart, that stone hand pointing out of the secular clouds, pointing directly at him" (GR 27). Tyrone also has a "peculiar sensitivity to what is revealed in the sky." (GR 26) Constant and Tyrone are paralelled by Pirate, who wonders "What if it should hit exactly - ahh, no - for a split second you'd have to feel the very point, with the terrible mass above, strike the top of the skull" and by Pokler's question: "how can he believe in its reality up there?" (GR 7, 425) Pynchon problematizes these sensitivities, partially by describing the

clouds as "secular", pointedly not within God's jurisdiction. Pirate and Pokler have their own versions of the rocket, opposed to each other because one can easily imagine while the other cannot; Pirate is paranoid, Pokler is firmly literal. Tyrone's sensitivity to new forms of revelation coming from the sky in the form of the rocket is a form of paranoia, but it also parodies his puritan ancestry while embracing it. The rocket will descend, but what it finally means is never established.

What comes out of the sky is symbolically constant and literally evolving for Pynchon. The hand of God and the rocket are similar because both require elect, literal-minded interpretation of numinous data. The link between the rocket's simultaneously destructive and revelatory qualities matches a similar link in the puritan notion of God's mercy and wrath. In each case, elect privilege enables them to understand and therefore exclude themselves from the implications for preterites. That is, both the hand of God and the rocket deliver only destruction for preterites, only salvation for the elect. Lawrence Wolfley asserts "the main reason for Pynchon's hostility to the Calvinist tradition is that it divides society, on specious and hypocritical moral grounds, into two unequal classes... the universe itself becomes divided into a part that matters (the immortal and immaterial souls of the Elect, predestined for salvation) and a part that does not matter (the souls and bodies of the damned, and the entire natural world)." [23] He is correct in the first part of his formulation, but the early puritans were remarkably adept at reconciling their earthly appurtenances with their spiritual well-being. The work of Weber, Miller and Bercovitch documents the advent of this economic and political self-

awareness. Pynchon is well aware of the fallacy involved in the elect's definition of election. Calvin, despite his admonitions for humility and his doctrine of God's mysterious ways, was remarkably oblivious to it. He insists on God's literal presence in all things and on God's ability to control all things in a pre-determined universe.

Calvin is explicit about the physical world: "anyone who has been taught by Christ's lips that all the hairs of his head are numbered [Matt 10:30] will look farther afield for a cause; and will consider that all events are governed by God's secret plan. And considering inanimate objects we ought to hold that, although each one has by nature been endowed with its own property, yet it does not exercise its own power except in so far as it is directed by God's ever-present hand." [24] The ability to count all hairs theoretically exists, and represents God's infinite abilities. For Pynchon, this in itself does not necessarily imply God's existence since God is not defined by a supernatural ability to answer questions posed by humans. Calvin assumes that God sees the natural world as man sees it, but with infinitely greater ability to understand and control it. Proximity to God then implies greater ability to control; the formulation of election in part defines God's will, which in turn endorses election.

Whether or not there is an ultimate truth or explanation for every event, Pynchon emphasizes the limited human ability to even properly define the problem. An illustrative example is Oedipa's encounter with an errant hairspray can in The Crying of Lot 49: "The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or a digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel; but she

wasn't fast enough, and knew only that it might hit them at any moment." [25] The hairspray can is a miniature rocket presaging the problem everyone faces in Gravity's Rainbow. Pynchon complicates the later novel with his suggestions that elect organizations believe they can in fact compute the "complex web" of rocket travel. For Calvin there is no doubt that God can in fact trace the trajectory of every particle in the universe. For America there is no doubt that technology is an equivalent mode of understanding and control.

The Pensiero scene in Gravity's Rainbow, with the Byron the Bulb allegory, contains much of the substance of Calvin's passage and reveals Pynchon's subversive stance against puritanism, predictability and control. Eddie is an "amphetamine enthusiast" and "connoisseur of shivers" (GR 641) who inhabits a post-war winter Zonal universe that appears to be driven by forces radically dissimilar to Calvin's just God. Lycanthrophobia "occupies minds at higher levels" (GR 640), possibly all the way to the Almighty. [26] The Kenosha colonel, like young Kane before he became a citizen, is preoccupied with winter and snow: "Snowfields and fenceposts all the way to Chicago. The snow covers the old cars up on blocks in the yards . . . big white bundles . . . it looks like Graves Registration back there in Wisconsin" (GR 643). [27] Winter is death's season, the only transformation available that of the werewolf, from human to beast and back again. The scene is lit by a generator cranked by human energy in the form of Paddy McGonigle: "the wire inside the bulb unbrightens slow enough before the next peak shows up that fools us into seeing a steady light. It's really a train of imperceptible light and dark. Usually

imperceptible. The message is never conscious on Paddy's part. It is sent by muscles and skeleton, by that circuit of his body which has learned to work as a source of electrical power" (GR 642). The light of this world is generated by visceral forces that operate without conscious thought. Circuitry, not human consciousness, sends a message that "fools us".

Eddie is also subject to the influence of Slothrop, off-stage: "Somebody, close by, out in the night, is playing a blues harp" (GR 642). The reference to Slothrop is not explicit, though later in the novel "Slothrop, just suckin' on his harp, is closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet" (GR 622). Slothrop as spiritual influence is a confounding factor in the apparently closed world described in the Pensiero section. Pensiero and McGonigle are subject to forces they are unaware of, but Pynchon reduces these forces to physical phenomena that "trick" normal human perception, as well as to the absence of the minds "higher up". Slothrop exists as an influence apart from these identifiably determinist forces.

The colonel is also part of this system, subject to laws of cause and effect represented by the comb which orders the hairs of his head. This is part of a larger pattern of cause and effect, more ambiguous but palpably present: "The moment the comb contacts his head, the colonel begins to speak" (GR 642) . Eddie, controlled by the blues and the imperceptibly wavering light, in turn controls the colonel. The colonel, contemplating the sunsets in the Zone, is ignorant of the Hiroshima bomb, but nonetheless accurately describes its results well. He asks questions that have, in fact, ready answers, until he moves into the metaphysical realm: "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. Volcanic ash, or any finely-divided substance, suspended in the air, can refract the colors strangely." (GR 642) The colonel's analysis is a dark analogue for the hydrogen bomb's effects on the atmosphere. Nature, the volcano, is not responsible; man and his technology are. The question of why the bomb is dropped, why it was built in the first place, ultimately reverts to the V-2 rocket's development and elect uses of technology. Pynchon relentlessly explores this question but provides no ready answer outside the self-serving aspect of election and control.

The colonel goes on. Colors of sunsets change "and how! The question is, are they changing according to something? Is the sun's everyday spectrum being modulated? Not at random, but systematically, by this unknown debris in the prevailing winds? Is there information for us? Deep questions, and disturbing ones" (GR 642). The colonel's questions can be answered on one level, since the bomb's fallout is the "unknown debris". The deeper question remains. The ash generated by nuclear fallout modulates the sunset's color, but the reason for man's creation of such a technological monstrosity remains unclear. For Pynchon the question is unanswerable, except that those in control of technology are unconcerned with the potential devastation its development may cause.

Pensiero's barbering techniques define this problem. Pynchon posits an initial "state of grace in which all hairs were distributed perfectly even, a time of innocence" (GR 643). In the Zone, Pensiero cuts meticulously but can never count each individual hair. Pynchon equivocates Calvin and Matthew while using their own metaphor. There is not an infinite number

of hairs, but "God is who knows their number" just as God knows the path of an errant hairspray can. Pynchon then changes the postulation: "Atropos is who severs them to different lengths. So, God under the aspect of Atropos, she who cannot be turned, is in possession of Eddie Pensiero tonight" (GR 643). Calvin's formulation is disrupted here by the introduction of Greek mythology and astrology, two alternative discourses that may have as much influence on Eddie, or anyone, as the puritan Christian God does.

Atropos is the third of the three Fates. Clotho spins the thread of life, Lachesis measures the length of the thread, Atropos cuts the thread. Atropos is "characterized as the smallest and most terrible " of the Fates, since even Zeus must accept her decrees. [28] In this scheme, the Greeks have a "fascination with the interrelation of god, man, and fate and the tantalizing interplay of destiny and free will." [29] Puritanism attempts to close the discussion of free will and fate by positing God's providential plan, man's innate depravity as a direct result of Adam's fall and the existence of grace to aid man in justifying himself before God's ultimate judgment. The circuit of providence, depravity and grace is disrupted by undetermined, possibly spiritual forces. A closed circuit has no gaps; for Pynchon, there is no determining what lies between two given points, so there can never be a truly closed circuit.

Pynchon is not suggesting a determinist, secular world as opposed to a determinist spiritual world. The haircut scene has a "soundtrack" of blues mouth harp. Pynchon comments on its meaning: "you suck a clear note, on pitch, and then bend it lower with the muscles of your face. Muscles of

your face have been laughing, tight with pain, often trying not to betray any emotion all your life. Where you send the pure note is partly a function of that. There's that secular basis for the blues, if the spiritual angle bothers you . . ." (GR 643) .There often are secular or physical explanations for what appear to be mysterious phenomena. Hairs on a head are finite, even if they are uncountable in practical terms. Calvin insists that beyond this lies God, capable of counting all the hairs on all the heads in his Providential plan. Pynchon suggests any such explanation is only partial, that at the moment a note bends from its clear pitch there exists volition, indeterminacy and human will. The secular is defined as technical performance, as face muscles tightening a particular way. The spiritual is defined as the ultimately unknowable reasons for suffering and for exploitation. Slothrop as blues player indicates that certain influences on any given scenario are random, beyond the reach of technical explanation.

Byron's story, placed in the middle of the Pensiero section, provides an answer even to Calvin's formulation regarding inanimate objects. Byron is capable of forming an allegorical existence, which runs against what Pynchon calls "the present dispensation" (GR 176). Byron's story, ultimately an unhappy one of unfulfillment and quiet co-optation, nonetheless shows how organized monetary and political groups cannot control all aspects under their purview. Byron's ultimate fate as a dispossessed messiah leaves him ineffectual, but Pynchon's point remains. There are gaps, no matter how minute, in the controlling mechanisms of the world.

Phoebus fails to extinguish Byron; Byron's story is an allegory for

Slothrop's own fate as a non-extinguishable unknown quantity in the schemes concocted by Pointsman and by his superiors. Slothrop's first appearance in the novel is as inanimate matter, to which Pynchon devotes nearly one full page of minute description. This elaborate and evocative synecdoche nonetheless cannot adequately represent Slothrop any more than Pointsman's psychological science can. Slothrop, in turn, cannot be controlled by Pointsman's mechanisms and the more pervasive ordering mechanisms they represent.

The Pensiero section of Gravity's Rainbow posits a largely determined, fateful universe, in which even God is under an intransigent influence. The snow, the werewolves, Byron's failed messianic mission and the colonel's demise are all consistent with Pynchon's portrayal of the North and winter as regions of waste, violence and death. There are two keys to this predominantly nihilistic passage. One is that those subsumed within a system, Byron in Phoebus, McGonigle in his body's circuit, Eddie in "god under Atropos" and the Colonel under Eddie's comb and scissors, cannot perceive that they are in fact subsumed in that system. The other key is the blues harp, which suggests empirical explanations are only partially adequate. The colonel's volcanic ash theory is correct as far as it goes, like the secular theory of blues harp. Pynchon posits the possibility of a spiritual order that cannot be explained, or even named. In Gravity's Rainbow this possibility is everywhere balanced against the dominant discourses of puritan theology and its successor, Western technology.

Pynchon is familiar, then, with puritan theology's attempts to explain the universe. Gravity's Rainbow is thoroughly informed by "word-

obsessed" puritans who derive from Calvin their reliance on the Word, and on God's divine narrative unfolding according to plan. Slothrop meets the Hereroes for the first time, on top of a freight car, in the night: "Certainly nothing was said then of any Herero beliefs about ancestors. Yet he feels his own, stronger now as borders fall away and the Zone envelops him, his own WASPs in buckled black, who heard God clamouring to them in every turn of a leaf or cow loose among apple orchards in autumn . . ." (GR 281). The Zone moves Slothrop away from the entrapments of civilization, away from the plot Pointsman plays against him that exploits Tyrone's history all the way back to infancy. It opens him to a sensitivity towards his ancestors. It also opens him to a sensitivity towards what goes on around him and eventually forces him away from determinism and closure.

Larzer Ziff's stark view of the American puritan errand is relevant to Pynchon's concerns. His work accepts a gradually secularized America, but he notes some aspects of the puritans that are underplayed elsewhere. "The Puritan extension of righteousness from a personal to a cultural scope was to continue to condone the violence unto extermination in future Indian conflicts and was to add its dimension of impersonality to the history of race relations within America". [30] In a passage that defines much of Their behavior in Gravity's Rainbow Ziff summarizes: "Those on the spiritual side of the gap between grace and nature recognized no inherent rights in mere creation and were awesomely capable of treating human nature as they treated field and forest, as something wholly malleable with no intrinsic dignity." [31] Pynchon identifies this same tendency in the technocratic world inherited from puritan doctrines of

election.

Ziff identifies an early scientific bent in puritan America, disapproving as it did of such recreations as the theatre. Ingenuity and creativity were better focused on science. According to Ziff "Puritanism asserts a remarkable capacity to reduce the abstract meanings of volume to the precisions of the word and to reduce the physical existence of the dimension of space - be it represented by an alien psyche, a wilderness, or outer space itself - to the two-dimensional plane of technology." [32] Ziff's view is consistent with Pynchon's as a thematic statement concerning puritan effects on contemporary America. Puritanism is a reductive, ultimately sterile set of assumptions, springing from the literal-minded doctrine of Calvin and evolving into an America capable of exploiting its population for the sake of a few elect persons.

Long after the word "elect" loses its spiritual significance, it still pays dividends for those who retain power, and who not coincidentally continue to define the values America adheres to. Wolfley says "Pynchon manages to trace back to early Calvinism some of the major perversions of the modern world: racist wars, urban blight, the cash nexus of society, sexual fetishes and dysfunctions, runaway technology" [33] Pynchon goes further, though, suggesting that any discourse positing itself as having access to a central truth is guilty of Calvin's error. A doctrine defines its explicators' privileged position. This definition excludes most other people, who become spiritually, and therefore politically, insignificant. "VIP faces" will continue to be shielded from the "bullet with fins". The "long rallentando" of preterition may continue its declension down to the

final note, which parallels the rocket's final "delta-t".

Rocket technology and puritanism both suggest that death and revelation are, in a sense, one. The truth of the rocket's aftermath and the truth of God's word remain unavailable to all humans. The knowledge the elect portray themselves as having is the same that Slothrop fantasizes about. It is indistinguishable from paranoia: "he has become obsessed with the idea of a rocket with his name written on it" (GR 25). This would give him some sense of control, of reasonable expectation. Pynchon clarifies the impossibility of this not only through the inversion of impact and sound, which means the rocket that does have Slothrop's "name" on it will be invisible and silent to him. He also clarifies the impossibility of control by describing the inadequacy of puritan metaphors, paranoiac connections, popular American cultural metaphors and scientific facts in describing the experience: "Beyond its invisibility, beyond hammerfall and doomcrack, 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 . . ." (GR 25). Slothrop and the narrator commit an affective fallacy, placing human tropes on something not human. The Rocket's association with puritanism and the Word implies its analagous inadequacy as an agent of determinacy and revelation. Pynchon, like Slothrop, narrator and reader, can imagine what rocket death is not, but cannot express what it is.

NOTES

1 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking Press 1973), 3.

2 In Jacques Derrida's 1966 essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" he claims "the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The abscence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum." Jonathan Culler identifies Derrida's term "logocentrism": "the orientation toward an order of meaning - thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word -conceived as existing in itself as foundation." Both quotes in Culler's On Deconstruction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 92. Puritanism requires God as transcendental signified, and the Word as a direct signification of God and his will. Pynchon undermines puritanism's basic tenets, and it is this sense of logocentrism, as the possibility of direct signification of God, or any other central truth, that functions in GR. This can lead in many directions, but I wish to focus on puritanism as word and interpretation-driven, reliant on both a center and direct access to that center through the Word.

3 Robert Alter, Partial Magic (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 134.

4 Alter, p. 136.

5 See Institutes of the Christian Religion, in particular pages 930-33, 951-62.

6 Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. The American Puritan Imagination (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 13. "American nobility" is Pynchon's phrase, but Bercovitch delineates the idea that America sees itself as having a moral as well as historical destiny. This destiny, in

Pynchon's terms, is conceived by and acted upon by the puritan founders and their ancestors, the nobility he speaks of. Bercovitch notes America relies on "the anthropomorphic concept of national selfhood - not the secular anthropomorphism of parenthood (Mother Russia, German Fatherland, British Homeland), but the eschatological anthropomorphism of...American dream, manifest destiny, national mission, the promise of a redemptive future".

7 G.A. Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autoboigraphy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 77

8 Starr, p. 96.

9 Ibid; p. 93.

10 Ibid; p. 93.

11 Ibid; p. 97.

12 Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 195.12 Perry Miller,

13 Bercovitch, American Jeremiad, p. 6.

14 Miller, Colony to Province, p.68.

15 Bercovitch, American Jeremiad, p. 80.

16 Ibid; p. 108.

17 Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talbott Parsons (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 102.

18 Ibid., p. 110.

19 Ibid., p. 147.

20 Miller, Colony to Province, p. 56.

21 Ibid., p. 57.

22 Weber, p. 153.

23 Lawrence Wolfley, in Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon, Richard Pearce, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 108.

24 Matthew 10:30: "As for you, even the hairs of your head have been counted." From The New English Bible, Oxford Study Edition (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1970). And Calvin, Institutes, p. 199.

25 Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (New York: Lippincott, 1966), 23.

26 Douglas Fowler notes Pynchon's indebtedness to and his fascinating variations on Melville's Benito Cereno for this episode. Stephen Weisenburger identifies Pynchon's historical source for the werewolf idea: German resistance fighters in the post-war zone were called "werewolf packs". The historical referent is a starting point for Pynchon's usage and appropriately associates the minds "higher up" with the Allies, in terms of a continuing cartel.

27 The reference to "Citizen Kane" seems clear enough given that film's opening snowstorm imagery and Kane's obsession with snow, as his death scene portrays it. Pynchon's "colonel from Kenosha" connects Slothrop's sodium amytal dream to this scene, and may rely on Welles's portrayal of an Army General in "Catch-22" (1970).

28 Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, eds. Classical Mythology (New York: David McKay, 1977), 62.

29 Ibid., p. 62.

30 Larzer Ziff, Puritanism in America (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 145.

31 Ibid., p. 144.

32 Ibid., p. 311.

33 Wolfley, p. 108.

Chapter Three
"The Slothropite Heresy":
Elect Reading/Preterite Narrative

Providence is God's narrative unfolding in historical time; it is consistent, coherent and ultimately meaningful to elect interpreters. Puritans read this narrative and find significance in the physical world that in turn validated their enterprise. Pynchon's resistance to this view of providential arrative is primarily its moral implication, that only an elect few, designated by God, can correctly interpret the narrative. Election as an absolute value is therefore eliminated in Gravity's Rainbow. Pynchon also sees a problem in literal interpretations of figurative representation; providence and history are identical for puritans and identically problematic for Pynchon because they are mediated responses to an assumed central truth. Pynchon denies the literal availability of truth, figuratively, through his own narrative ripe with potential meaning but without a central order.

Gravity's Rainbow uses William Slothrop's deconstruction of election as a starting point in subverting central truths and ultimate meanings in texts while expanding the definition of text to include all phenomena in the world. Interpretation, puritan or paranoid, becomes both a necessity and an impossibility; this ambiguity causes Pynchon's readers understand the place they must occupy in reading is one of continual ontological flux. Distinctions between elect and preterite, hierarchical approximations of the center, are directly challenged because

the center shifts according to who is interpreting. Meaning is defined as an elect function, and there are no elect functions in Gravity's Rainbow, only self-defined elect presumptions which are always revealed as deficient, as ultimately preterite. For Pynchon, all interpretation is inherently self-privileging, simultaneously elect and preterite because it can never close a narrative but maintains faith in closure.

William Slothrop, American dissenter, went back to England from Massachusetts Bay after his book On Preterition was banned. [1] His dissent took the form of pleading the necessary opposite for any definition; in particular, preterition and election define each other. Pynchon says "William argued holiness for these second sheep, without whom there'd be no elect." [2] William's point is then taken further: election and preterition are first established, then transvalued, and ultimately obliterated as valid descriptions of individuals within Pynchon's narrative. [3] A hierarchy exists, but differentiating preterite from elect is problematized in the same way interpretive certainty is problematized. Interpretation depends on data and on interpretive point of view. The elect in Gravity's Rainbow are self-defined, but the novel completely undermines the validity of any single interpretation, thereby exposing election and elect views of narrative as interpretive constructs.

Michael Berube identifies Pynchon's treatment of preterition as more than an attack on puritanism. Pynchon "does not stop at making the marginal central and vice versa.... a revisionist understanding of preterition distinguishes itself from mere repetition-with-a-difference of the Romantic/modernist valorization of the 'marginal' (the visionary, the

exile), by seeking to hold in abeyance, or to undermine, the various bases for the canonical distinction between elect and preterite." [4] Election is in this sense a form of hegemony, keeping the preterite in their place by valorizing texts such as scripture and jeremiad sermons in early America. As Bercovitch describes it, this hegemonic impulse retains its strength throughout post-puritan American history, but began in puritan theology: "what passed for the divine plan lost its strict grounding in Scripture; 'providence' itself was shaken loose from its religious framework to become part of the belief in human progress." [5] Structurally, progress and technology retain the central, or elect, status formerly reserved for the puritan mission. In both cases, the belief is one of privilege for those defining themselves as central to America's concerns and exclusive of concerns other than those of progress.

Berube describes two aspects of preterition; it can be reinscribed to provide revisionary history and it can serve as the basis for deconstructing the elect/preterite distinction, much the way William Slothrop did, making the preterite an indispensable part of the providential plot. For Berube, the obliteration of this distinction is not "license to forget that in Gravity's Rainbow Pynchon depicts a socioeconomic 'System'". [6] Pynchon's ascribed sympathy with the preterites that populate his work becomes less important than the fact that preterition "may signify different things in different contexts, each of which asks for relational demarcation: what is preterite in relation to what?" [7] The wide range of cultural transmissions included in Gravity's Rainbow makes a case for relational demarcation, since Mitchell Prettyplace, Steve Edelman and all rocket questers see their

interpretive enterprise as central rather than marginal. The reader also interprets from a cultural position that may apportion preterite status to characters or stylistic elements in Gravity's Rainbow, particularly such problematic characters as Pointsman, Katje or Pudding, and the overtly pornographic scenes which seem to rely on some elaborate formal and theoretical justifications for their presence.

All these people, along with Pynchon's readers, are also paranoid critics: critical paranoia is "simply interpretation without transcendental grounds, without agreed-upon stopping points". [8] Pynchon forces this paranoia on his characters and readers, and on his narrator, by obscuring the lines between preterition and election, which suggests epistemological uncertainty as to centeredness, or truth in interpretation. Paranoid readers, both within Gravity's Rainbow and outside it, attempt to find order behind the visible; a clear example is Slothrop's sense of a malignant lurking presence in the Casino: "Around the tables, the Empire chairs are lined up precise and playerless. But some are taller than the rest. These are no longer quite outward and visible signs of a game of chance. There is another enterprise here, more real than that, less merciful, and systematically hidden from the likes of Slothrop" (GR 202). Paranoia must acknowledge the possibility of both its possible proximity to the truth and the far more probable chance that it actually obscures the "real text" by its interpretive act.

Puritanism is present in Gravity's Rainbow to establish the deep-rooted nature of American hegemony and its exploitation of the human need for centeredness. Elect interpreters, according to Berube, are no longer

paranoid, because they consider themselves to have access to the real text. However, Pynchon gradually undermines the distinction between preterite and elect as part of a tactic to allow readers expectations of clear demarcations and causal narrative links which will not be fulfilled. The reader's sense of paranoid reading that obscures the real text and of self-privileged reading that actually believes in its proximity to the real text are directly engaged and challenged.

One important way the preterite/elect distinction is problematized and ultimately blurred is Pynchon's treatment of politics. Politics requires the discrepancy between elect and preterite in Gravity's Rainbow. For Pynchon politics is "a response to a power-predicament" and power is "money, (money in the Puritan sense- an outward and visible O.K. onTheir intentions)" (GR 652). Other evidence of political will is analogical. The Other Kingdom as represented by angels, watchmen and Walter Rathenau, and hierarchical election all indicate fundamental political folly: all parallel puritan interpretations of divine will. This becomes secular America, in which "the Calvinist insanity" (GR 57) of payment, exchange defined in terms that perpetuate political power for the elect, retains the original theocracy's authority. Pynchon emphasizes "this primal American act, paying" (GR 605); puritanism defines a rate of exchange in which secular success implies election, completing the move from theocracy to capitalism while embedding elect privilege into American culture. Calvin's methodology survives intact into the present of Gravity's Rainbow, where an epistemologically identifiable God never appears, though the politically empowered act as if by divine sanction.

Bercovitch's analysis of Herman Melville's Pierre is illuminating in this context. He describes Plinlimmon's pamphlet, which appears near the centre of that novel. The pamphlet proposes two types of time, explicitly named in its title: "Chronometricals and Horologicals." [9] As Bercovitch explains, the pamphlet "contrasts our imperfect 'horological' time with the 'chronometrical' time ot heaven". [10] The pamphlet's importance for Bercovitch is its "incisive critique" of puritan rhetoric embodied in the jeremiad form: "the jeremiad was considerably affected by a variety of social and intellectual changes. But through all change the persistence of the rhetoric attests to an astonishing cultural hegemony". [11] Bercovitch intertwines the jeremiad with puritan American hegemony, each reflecting in some dynamic interactive fashion the changes that eventually wrought contemporary America. America defines itself as a chronometrical nation aligned with providence, but this position requires horological interpretation. This transference of figurative to literal meaning is amply represented and always questioned in Gravity's Rainbow.

John M. Krafft observes that America's gradual secularization does not entail abandonment of puritan strategies, though he does note the "death of God". [12] God's ostensible disappearance from the world of commerce and industry "left behind secular castes which use the old vocabulary or to which it remains applicable. The elect are now the economically and politically privileged and powerful." [13] God's disappearance has nothing to do with God; it rather has to do with definitions of God. The concept of God is less efficacious for maintaining privileged positions in secular America. Economics, or payment, and politics become the vehicles for elect

self-preservation, with technology acquiring increasing importance to the point where, for Pynchon, it actually replaces God as transcendental signifier.

The secular castes Krafft identifies are served by what Bercovitch calls "a nationwide cooptation of the conversion experience - a wholesale reversal of spiritual communitas into a rite of socialization." [14] National election allows the ambiguity necessary to incorporate preterite citizens into the community and America never deviates from its sense of national election. Bercovitch elaborates: the puritans "invented themselves, through their federal covenant, as God's people in America, meaning by this a community in process, and therefore released from the usual national restrictions of genealogy, territory, and tradition." [15] The puritans established a "visionary framework" [16] that allowed the symbology of the American Way to flourish. This is why the jeremiad is vital for Bercovitch and illuminating when considering Pynchon: it is the main rhetorical and literary vehicle for moving the process of American national election into contemporary times, and it maintains elect political privilege.

Pynchon's novel can, in a broad sense, be termed a jeremiad, as Marcus Smith and Khachig Toloyan do. [17] Smith and Toloyan incorporate Bercovitch and Melville in their argument establishing that Gravity's Rainbow "repudiates utterly the Puritan venture into the New World", but "in its recasting of the chronometric-horological nexus it demonstrates the incredibly tenacious hold which Puritanism maintains on the American imagination." [18] Bercovitch reads Pynchon's novel as an anti-jeremiad, in

the sense that it envisions, along with The Education of Henry Adams, an "entropic inversion of the world of redemption." [19] Smith and Toloyan posit a somewhat more optimistic reading; for them Pynchon attempts to find a "secular chronometric". [20] Pynchon is certainly contrary to the puritan jeremiad in his disavowal of a centered discourse drawing its validity from God. Pynchon's lament does not presuppose the puritan version of God behind each event. This makes Pynchon anti-puritan, but it does not make Gravity's Rainbow an anti-jeremiad on nihilistic grounds, a reading that limits the scope of Pynchon's critique of puritan America and its far-reaching influence. This reading implies submission, forced or not, to the political structure Gravity's Rainbow stands against.

The puritan jeremiad is a confirmation of providential narrative unfolding as it should, although as Miller and Bercovitch make clear, puritan Jeremiahs were forced into rhetorical contortions to confirm the founding fathers' mission to establish the New Jerusalem had in fact succeeded, when the temporal facts of Massachusetts Bay suggested otherwise. The jeremiad was used to consolidate the harmony of God's plan with the puritan mission; it was, in itself, a narrative that valorized elect members while simultaneously warning them of God's potential displeasure. The early American puritans saw all the world's ills as signs of God's continued displeasure and, in the jeremiad's fundamental rhetorical strategy, as signs of God's continued attention to his chosen people. Man's sins cause God's displeasure; displeased, God causes natural calamities and chastised man mends his ways only to sin again. The fundamental assumption of the jeremiad was God's continued attention to the chosen

few and an explicit link between God's narrative and their own interpretive narrative.

For Pynchon, anti-puritanism is the fundamental opposition to a logocentrism that defines an elite and excludes the preterite masses. The anti-jeremiad, then, should not only lament the fallen state of America, which in itself implies the "entropic finale" [21] Bercovitch reads in the form. If the term applies to Pynchon, it must accommodate the larger political implications of all puritan rhetoric and literal-minded interpretation of divine will; the anti-jeremiad as practised by Pynchon ironically laments a lack of centeredness and interpretive certainty. The alternatives of possible redemption and possible annihilation remain unresovedly present to the very end of the novel.

Bercovitch emphasizes Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" sermon on board the Arbella because for him it is a seminal influence on American puritan rhetorical style. Pynchon also recognizes the sermon's importance, for a different reason. In Gravity's Rainbow William Slothrop is a passenger aboard the Arbella, but he is a cook who, like Miklos Thanatz aboard the Anubis, is destined for a fall from election. William is not, like Winthrop, one of the "more elect" (GR 204). John M. Krafft notes: "That description exhibits Pynchon's scepticism regarding the coincidence of principle and practice, official theory and social actuality." [22] For Pynchon, Winthrop and his fellow elect are already delineating a political and social policy that will enable them to preserve their control of the new world enterprise at the expense of the less elect, who are eventually to be numbered among the preterite. Calvin's stringent dichotomy is politicized

and therefore maintains less theological than pragmatic influence; paradoxically, it maintains a valid role for preterites in America while maintaining national election.

Larzer Ziff explains the puritan awareness that their society required the preterite in order to maintain what gradually became their capitalist enterprise: "Dominant Puritan culture had in the 1630's defined itself through defining deviancy from it. It was one that needed its quota of sinners, hence the priority of the state over the church." [23] The "quota of sinners" is more and more necessary as the desire for unrestricted trade and commercial competition increases. The puritan definition of national and personal election gradually adjusts to the necessary presence of all the people in its community.

Pynchon's notion of more and less elect underscores his understanding of puritan terminology as inherently self-serving. Election is meaningful not in its approximation of the truth but rather in its ability to sustain itself based in large part on exploitation of all members of the community by the "more elect", who demarcate their own centrality. Ziff detects a "tendency toward popular government in Massachusetts, a tendency strengthened by the labor shortage and the subsequent increase in importance of the lower classes". [24] These tendencies reflect puritan America's ability to adapt to change, while keeping the essential tenets of Calvin's doctrine intact, sanctioning political change in the name of God.

William Slothrop's "heresy", then, accurately posits the inherent necessity of the preterite as a defining characteristic of election. Ziff's argument establishes that puritan America compromised for political and

financial expediency, not on religious grounds. Pynchon's inversion of traditional Christian symbolism illuminates this point: "Suppose the Slothropite heresy had had the time to consolidate and prosper? Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot?" (GR 556) The morality he inverts is puritan in its adherence to strict definitions of Jesus and Judas; the political expediencies of puritan America lead to "crimes" of exclusion rather than "mercy".

In Gravity's Rainbow, the most important analogue for preterite utility and expendability is the Nordhausen rocket facility, and Pokler's role as one of the less elect, destined, as is Pointsman, to his own preterition. The rocket program is more important to the elect, such as von Braun, than the Dora workers are; rocket 00000 is more important to Weissmann than any life other than his own, including Gottfried's.

The rocket is a metaphoric component of the War's larger logic. Krafft notes the rocket is the highest achievement in technology for its time, but views it "as a sort of negative savior, the perfector and consummator of Western Man's love of death." [25] Lawrence Wolfley's exploration of Norman O. Brown's influence on Pynchon tends to agree with Krafft, and certainly the Harvard experiments on Infant Tyrone suggest a death-wish component in Slothrop's condition, linked to the rocket, to racism and to fear of defecation. The rocket is linked to church steeples, to Slothrop's penis and to his conditioned responses. Slothrop's encounter with the rocket as "THE PENIS HE THOUGHT WAS HIS OWN" and the narrator's assertion that the rocket "had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts" (GR 216, 324) imply innate complicity

between Slothrop's puritan heritage and technology. The rocket is also a "system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained mother nature" (GR 324). This apparatus is dedicated to sterility, closure and determinacy; it is granted central status during the war.

In Pynchon, elect readings and paranoid connections tend toward closure, inorganic structures, and death. Wolfley's position is partially convincing; Brown's theory has important implications for Gravity's Rainbow. "Concentration on the end pleasure of genital organization is viewed as a direct product of those particular Western neuroses that are reflected in our social environment, characterized as it is by commerce, technology and war . . . sexual behavior in GR conforms to the social criticism implied in this theory. There is no totally healthy sex in the novel because the characters are all participating willingly in a society committed to the death instinct." [26] Slothrop's eventual disintegration can be viewed as a withdrawal from this commitment and a refusal to be defined. However, the death wish as an aspect of Western, Northern, linear and analytical culture is no more than an aspect. The key for the elect that control Pynchon's secular War and America's move into the future after bombing Hiroshima is that they do not believe in their own death. Risks and carnage are for preterites only.

For Pynchon, elect interpretations always have an underlying irony, which the elect person does not see. The novel's opening epigraph is taken from Wernher von Braun's speech at the launch of Apollo IX. [27] He is clearly one of the elect. The indispensable von Braun receives special

consideration as chief engineer for the V-2 program. In V-2 Walter Dornberger explains his efforts to keep von Braun involved and sheltered from competing German High Command interests all through the war. [28] The epigraph is ironic; von Braun believes only in transformation, so the question becomes how the elect define it. One possible reading suggests this is a hopeful statement of regeneration and a never-ending cycle. Under Pynchon's ironic purview, however, the statement applies only to the elect: "our spiritual existence after death" is ominous in Gravity's Rainbow because von Braun, like Blicero, encounters death vicariously. Pokler notices this at the Peenemunde test site and the narrator notes a symbolic similarity: "The farther up the peninsula, the less damage. A strange gradient of death and wreckage, south to north, in which the poorest and most helpless got it worst - as, indeed, the gradient was to run east to west, a year later in London when the rockets began to fall. Most of the casualties had been among 'foreign workers', a euphemism for civilian prisoners" (GR 423). The technical facilities and key personnel are safe; political decisions ensure this.

Walter Rathenau's ghostly appearance at a seance early in Gravity's Rainbow makes the politicized aspect of election explicit. Rathenau is situated with Calvin's God, free of chronos, though Rathenau's abilities are slightly diminished due to inexperience: "here it's possible to see the whole shape at once - not for me, I'm not that far along [. . .] Problems you may be having, even those of global implication, seem to many of us here only trivial side-trips" (GR 165). Rathenau's sense of "us" retains its elect status beyond his earthly grave. Further, he understands technology's

function, and approves of it: "The real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured" (GR 166). Rathenau believes this movement, deriving from coal-tar dyes, Kekule's benzene ring and the subsequent hope that man can effectively break free from organic cycles and create inorganic life on his own, requires technological growth.

Death-transfiguration preserves elect control even beyond the earthly grave. Smokestacks, consuming fossil fuel and dispersing pollution, can withstand atomic bomb blasts. They are "structures favoring death. [. . .] These signs are real. They are also symptoms of a process. The process follows the same form, the same structure. To apprehend it you will follow the signs. All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic.[...] If you want the truth - I know I presume- you must look into the technology of these matters" (GR 167). The "diversionary tactics" of secular history include, for Pynchon, the Second World War and its mass destruction of human life. That such loss is a diversion implies a callow view of the lives expended, calling the ultimate purpose of such a diversion into question. That Rathenau accepts this as understandable, even desirable, marks his self-defined election.

The ultimate aim of technology, according to a member of the elect speaking from beyond the grave, is death-transfigured. Rathenau's position is identical to von Braun's in its practical application. Pynchon's disapproval of this position is heightened by the way he introduces Rathenau's comments, which after all carry no actual weight in this world. The elect persons attending the seance include Generaldirektor Smaragd and his colleagues, the same group that attends the rocket 00000 firing.

Pynchon defines their position in a rare narrative exposition: "Whatever comes through the medium tonight they will warp, they will edit, into a blessing. It is contempt of a rare order" (GR 165). The elect interpret all available data, even if it comes fantastically from a ghost at a seance, as a validation of their position. Transfiguration implies a structurally infinite elect; only the form changes, from organic to inorganic. Blicero ironically expresses Pynchon's view: "the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in is last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe" (GR 722). Pynchon complicates American Death in the figure of Slothrop, who is implicated in structures of death by his affiliations with puritanism and the rocket, but who also refuses to participate in the important ritual of closure that the rocket symbolizes.

The "last phase" implicates the S-gerat, Imopolex G, and the ultimate aim of organic chemistry in the hands of the elect. Death-transfigured is literally the shift from organic to inorganic chemistry. This shift would allow control of all aspects of life at the expense of life as it currently exists. Laszlo Jampf sees it as "seeking to escape the mortality of the covalent bond", substituting silicon for carbon, nitrogen for hydrogen in an effort to "move beyond life, toward the inorganic" (GR 580). This move is formalized by Jampf's "finale, as he wiped away the scrawled C-H on his chalkboard and wrote, in enormous letters, Si-N" (GR 580). Pynchon's ironic suggestion is that Jampf's commitment to the inorganic presumes control of "sin", that he is therefore beyond it. Pynchon undermines Jampf's rhetoric by stating that he "took his lunchbucket to America", the same

place von Braun and Blicero go after the war. However, America is "the sinister influence of Lyle Bland" (GR 580), Slothrop's uncle. Political expediency remains part of an elect cycle dedicated to sustaining itself; America is the "more elect" nation. For Pynchon, the result is unacceptable: "Once the technical means of control have reached a certain size, a certain degree of being connected one to another, the chances for freedom are over for good" (GR 539). Providence and technology are two methods of connection. Pointsman's Pavlovian psychology is another; Pynchon opposes this kind of determinism with his own narrative indeterminacy.

Pynchon radically equivocates the Rathenau seance. The reader cannot ascertain if the voice is actually Rathenau's: the scene does not play on a literal level. The points made by Rathenau are embedded in the narrator's own commentary on Rathenau's assassination, his role as "prophet and architect of the cartelized state" (GR 164). The essential point is that Rathenau's role and his state of mind are simply unavailable. Pynchon's view of history and the elect who manipulate it is described in the moment of assassination, of death and the reasons for that death: "What passes is a truth so terrible that history - at best a conspiracy, not always among gentlemen, to defraud - will never admit it" (GR 164). Pynchon never identifies the terrible truth; the novel consistently implies this truth is unavailable to living human beings. The conspiracy is enacted to preserve the privileged status of the "cartelized state". For Rathenau, this means "the history of organic chemistry, specifically ... the dye and pharmaceutical industries that burgeoned from it." [29] The chain leads to IG Farben, an ominous presence throughout the novel as the definitive

cartel. Rathenau's role as an elect member of the cartel is undermined. He is defrauded and therefore unprepared for the "terrible truth" that he is expendable.

Rathenau's election is called into question, partially because he is assassinated. It is also questioned through the racist song Leni remembers, that associates him with a swine, always a preterite creature in Gravity's Rainbow.[30] For Pynchon there is never a clear demarcation, other than that cartels, conspirators, and history made malleable through strategic use of the Word, are all clear signs of an elect that operates on its own justifications at the expense of the preterite. Pynchon's formulation includes "more elect", a satiric but also ambiguous phrase that applies to Rathenau, Pointsman and Marvy among others of the less elect, whose fates are less palatable than many preterites in the novel. The distinction between the elect and preterite on any but the most theoretical level is blurred.

The Rathenau seance is compounded by the presence of Leni Pokler as well. She has just left Franz permanently, and remembers a conversation with him. Franz is "the cause-and-effect man", opposed to Leni: " 'Not produce,' she tried, 'not cause. It all goes along together. Parallel, not series. Metaphor. Signs and symptoms. Mapping onto different co-ordinate systems, I don't know . . .' " (GR 159). The cartel, secular history, and providential narrative are all based on cause and effect. Leni's alternative is a way of approaching narrative that acknowledges "a dream of flight. One of many possible. Real flight and dreams of flight go together. Both are part of the same movement" (GR 159). Pynchon prefers

Leni's view; his own narrative requires such an approach. Each narrative has many possible meanings, each mingling dream and reality because it mingles reader with narrative. For Franz delta-t approaching zero is a "convenience, so that it can happen." For Leni it is "eternally approaching" (GR 159); the difference is crucial for Pynchon, and for his readers, because the final rocket is a delta-t away; narrative is either cause and effect, a technical exercise, or it is signs to be interpreted and symptoms to be recognized as subjective interpretation.

Leni, like the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow, is interested in astrology, and in the delta-t "approaching zero, eternally approaching, the slices of time growing thinner and thinner, a succession of rooms each with walls more silver, transparent, as the pure light of the zero comes nearer . . ." (GR 159) .She calls it "penetrating the moment" (GR 158), and her chosen metaphors, so closely linked to the narrative's own, make her an important counterpoint to Franz and the rocket program. She is also an important counterpoint to the elite at the seance, a representation of an alternative view of history, technology and "the moment", which Rathenau felt intensely only at the instant of his assassination, "just as the shock flashed his mortal nerves, as the Angel swooped in . . ." (GR 164). Rathenau's ambiguous election and Leni's obvious preterition obscure the lines Pynchon initially draws between the two concepts. Gravity's Rainbow reveals a hierarchy of election, in which all serve an amorphous, conceptual structure. The line between preterite and the least of the "less elect" does not finally exist.

Establishing and subverting the elect/preterite construct enables

Pynchon to further obscure moral and interpretive privilege in the form of hierarchical structures. Pynchon's angels are an important example of elect hierarchy. Angels in Gravity's Rainbow are ambiguous presences, seen by the bomber pilot over Lubeck, lurking on horizons, associated directly with death, as in the Rathenau scene and ultimately with the rocket, the "bright angel of death" (GR 760). They are also associated in many critics' minds with Rilkean angels, a reading Pynchon, again partially, encourages. [31] They are similar to Rilke's angels, in that they "dispassionately monitor the doings of humans". [32] But the clear association with death undermines this reading to some extent, unless Pynchon's angels visit death upon humans as the final result of a pattern of behavior. The angel of death remains dispassionate, but performs the death ritual as a matter of fulfilling the "logic" of a human life, which includes all the controls impacting upon that life which is not necessarily guided solely by them.

The angels are complicated further, since Leni, Katje and Bianca are described as being angelic, most explicitly in a sexual context. Franz "believed she would carry him on her back, away to a place where Destiny couldn't reach. As if it were gravity. He had half-awakened one night burrowing his face into her armpit mumbling, 'Your wings . . . oh, Leni, your wings . . .' " (GR 162). This implies that destiny is not gravity, something Pynchon distinguishes because gravity is, after all, an identifiable and predictable force. That which is "betrayed to Gravity", the rocket and the technological mindframe that created it, is the malign force, not technology or gravity itself. Destiny reaches everyone unpredictably,

whether on a metaphoric angel's wings or not. Escape and death are intertwined in these angels, but each individual's motives and actions moment to moment possibly remain free.

Katje, with her "questing shoulders like wings" (GR 97), confirms the connection to Rilke, since it is Blicero entranced with Rilke who describes her this way. When Blicero/Weissmann departs for Sudwest Africa early in his career, he carries a new copy of Duino Elegies, "a gift from Mother at the boat, the odor of new ink dizzying his nights" (GR 99). Blicero, like the puritans in Slothrop's family tree, is "word-smitten". Katje is not drawn, moth-like, to the flame as Blicero interprets it, so there is a difference between Pynchon's usage and Rilke's. The connection to Leni suggests alternatives to the universe as Blicero and the war-time Franz conceive it. The inevitability of death is entailed in the angels, along with the wish for escape and the possibility of the moment.

Robert McLaughlin suggests "the angels, rather than perfect manifestations of human consciousness and reconciliations of human contradictions, become the novel's ultimate manifestation of Them." [33] This reading implicates the Other side phenomena in a greater conspiracy than even Slothrop contemplates: "the Other side is not a holistically unified alternative to or escape from the bureaucracies, divisions rationalizations, and controls of this world, but instead a bureaucracy with its own divisions, rationalizations and controls. In addition, the Other side seems to be the archetypal structure of control that is manifested in the controlling systems of this world." [34] This "life/death system" answers the problem of more and less elect people, but requires a credulous reading of

some unreliable sources in the novel. The Rathenau seance and the death of Lyle Bland suggest the possibility of another hierarchy on the Other side, but the problem for Pynchon and all his preterite characters remains the nature of hierarchy.

The relationship between this life and the next remains obscure, although many characters believe they understand it. The narrator never commits to a specific stance, though he seems to endorse some possible form of life after death. Nonetheless, the problem remains; the elect need for control extends into metaphysics. The seance ends anti-climactically, with a bad racist joke, but Rathenau makes Pynchon's point clear for all humans regardless of how they define themselves: "what is the real nature of control?" (GR 167) Leni's concern for the moment, and the narrative speculation that Rathenau was unprepared for the intensity of his last moment, are important aspects of Pynchon's partial valorization of preterition and its desperate, often unconscious appreciation of life.

Preterition and election become problematic terms on another level as well. Webley Silvernail explains the problem to the rats and mice in his laboratory: "I would set you free, if I knew how. But it isn't free out here. All the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few, who are the loudest to theorize on freedom, but the least free of all." (GR 230) John M. Krafft identifies this "transvaluation" of the words elect and preterite. The elite are inescapably committed to nurturing their conspiracies. They cannot be "free", for example, like Slothrop is free to make choices moment by moment in the Zone. Krafft's point provides a reasonable basis for a

positive, or at least non-nihilistic reading, of Gravity's Rainbow. If the elect were simply deluded preterites with more power and money but no real control, and the preterites were all consigned to victimization by these elect, there would be literally no positive implications.

Preterition is transvalued by Pynchon to suggest, as William Slothrop did,: "there is also help when least looked for from the strangers of the day, and hiding, out among the accidents of this drifting Humility, never quite to be extinguished, a few small chances for mercy . . ." (GR 610). Slothrop is part of the "drifting Humility" and his fate is ultimately cast to those small chances for mercy. Slothrop's preterition is partially positive, although Pynchon equivocates this as well, particularly in the scenes where Slothrop leaves Bianca and Trudi behind. Bianca, with her "shoulderblades rising like wings, whenever she hugs him" (GR 470) confirms the dual nature of Pynchon's angels, as harbingers of death and of possible salvation. However, Slothrop's departure confirms his preterition and equivocates salvation even further: "Sure he'll stay awhile, but eventually he'll go, and for this he is to be counted, after all, among the Zone's lost" (GR 470). In each instance, he leaves in pursuit of his rocket-quest; his inability to combine the various elements marks him as truly preterite.

Pynchon pays attention to the Other side not to suggest a similar structure on a grander scale than anything on earth. His point is to establish the limitless ability of the elect of this world to include all forms of consciousness into their controlling structures. Pynchon's angels simultaneously reinforce these structures and undermine them; they

appear to substantiate elect notions of hierarchy, but are epistemologically indeterminate. Slothrop's encounter with Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck illustrates the Other Kingdom's probable indifference to secular events; the scene's context of confession and compassion meanwhile suggests a distinct lack of complicity with the elect: "what have the watchmen of world's edge come tonight to look for? deepening on now, monumental beings, stoical, on toward slag, toward ash the color the night will stabilize at, tonight... what is there grandiose enough to witness? only Slothrop here, and Sir Stephen, blithering along, crossing shadow after long prison-bar shadow cast by the tall trunks of palms lining the esplanade" (GR 215). The watchmen, indeterminate, "stoical" beings, observe an event that, like many other preterite experiences in the novel, is not "grandiose" but modest to the point of indistinction for all but the participants. This is an important aspect of Pynchon's preterition, an intimate and fleeting moment shared between two individuals in the face of an oppressive elect structure. The passage's imagery suggests captivity, inevitable decay and death, but it is also lyrical, noting the exchange between Slothrop and Sir Stephen as "sympathetic", in which Slothrop discovers a "terrible secret, a fatal confidence" (GR 216) that the elect are interested in him. Sir Stephen would rather betray his elect superiors than betray Slothrop. He subverts their political will: Pynchon's watchmen are detached but apparently aware of the decency of this exchange.

The angels, the watchmen, Rathenau and Bland's ghost are all manifestations of the Other Kingdom, which Pynchon describes as the "numinous", or divine. [35] The early Slothrops, "packing Bibles around the

blue hilltops" interpret their divine text literally: "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" (GR 242). Pynchon ironically suggests God's divine presence is not available through literal interpretations of the Word. Thanatz believes the divine is available only without words, because "A screen of words between himself and the numinous was always just a tactic" (GR 668). Direct contact seems possible, but not in the way puritanism claims.

Numinous is finally described in terms of passage and death, in the "Isaac" section of Gravity's Rainbow. "The numinous light grows ahead, almost blue among all this gilt and glass" (GR 750). Isaac is analogous to Gottfried, who is about to be sacrificed by Weissmann, who "has engineered all the symbolism today" (GR 750). The numinous light is the rocket's pre-launch glow; Pynchon undermines numinosity as a value-laden term, instead suggesting the only definition available behind the "screen of words" is that death and numinosity are epistemologically synonymous; they exist, but no one can know what they entail.

Tyrone Slothrop is a continual reminder that the puritan legacies of literal-minded interpretation and self-privileging are still active and that they rely on a symbology that connects the natural world directly to God. Within that symbology God defines America, and elect Americans, as His chosen people. Bercovitch's analysis entails America's ability to co-opt oppositional forces, most especially symbolic and literary forces, into its view of itself as a nation great enough to encompass dissident visionaries.

The narrator addresses the reader directly several times, but in a striking passage late in the novel his comments are segregated from the text by brackets. His comments explicitly acknowledge the dangerous element of conformity and cooptation inherent in all structures based on words and interpretation. "I am betraying them all . . . the worst of it is that I know what your editors want, exactly what they want. I am a traitor. I carry it with me. Your virus" (GR 739). This is a warning that Pynchon's own text is implicated in the hegemonic cultural impulses that surround it, that allow it to exist.

Gravity's Rainbow is implicated in political structures and in puritan interpretive reflexes. Hierarchies of election reveal the intrinsically political nature of puritan responses to the new world and their attempt to define divine will. Pynchon never deals directly with the numinous, but always undermines any attempt to define it. The rocket program begins as an elect notion, but Pynchon identifies it specifically: "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 of civilians?" (GR 521) The problem is that it is impossible to access that name, because the Rocket's elect funding and the technological growth it represents require anonymity in order to avoid direct political responsibility to the "civilians" who had no say in the matter. For Pynchon this is unacceptable, a direct result of puritan strategies of control.

The parable of Franz van der Groov illustrates this point. Franz, ancestor of Katje, moves to a new land, as did William Slothrop. The difference is that these Dutchmen were "impersonating a race chosen by

God." They cannot justify their stay in the new land any more than they can justify the mass destruction of dodoes: "if they were chosen to come to Mauritius, why had they also been chosen to fail, and leave? Is that a choosing, or a passing-over? Are they Elect, or are they Preterite, and doomed as dodoes?" (GR 110) Puritans, and the technocratic system that succeeds it, do not fail, and therefore can easily see themselves as elect, not impersonators but truly God's chosen. This certainty enables them to carry out on a massive scale, against human lives, the genocide Franz participated in. The birds have no "detail of Design", and Franz "can believe only in the one steel reality of the firearm he carries" (GR 110, 111). This is a parable of the destructive potential of the puritan assumption that God's design is discernable to their elect selves, and a warning of the danger for preterites, who are by definition outside the Design.

Pynchon's equivocation of both the elect/preterite distinction and of hierarchy reveals the contingent nature of events and the indeterminacy of signification, but Gravity's Rainbow still carries the omen of a new "steel reality", the rocket. For Pynchon, narrative is Franz's technical inclination to take "a function to its limit", to analyse and thereby understand; it is also Leni's many different versions of dreams, resisting closure so long as the zero point of history does not arrive. Leni's narrative is figurative and open; Franz's narrative is technical, determinist and closed: Pynchon accepts the need for both. Franz, however, symbolically marries Leni's view, by penetrating the moment in Dora when he meets an old woman: "he took off his gold wedding ring and put it on the woman's thin finger, curling her hand to keep it from sliding off. If she lived, the ring would be

good for a few meals, or a blanket, or a night indoors, or a ride home" (GR 433). The concrete details provide a solid basis for Pokler's symbolic act but the scene is punctuated by Pynchon's cynical formulation of what the act may amount to, and the qualifying "if". For Pynchon, any narrative is an approximation, forever consigned to its status as mediation, forever without transcendental meaning in any epistemological sense. Gravity's Rainbow is knowingly fixed in its fictiveness; it operates, inevitably, within the structure it strenuously opposes.

NOTES

1 Philip Storey documents William Slothrop/Pynchon's history in detail, making perhaps too much of the biographical connections but making some valid points. In "William Slothrop: Gentleman", Pynchon Notes, Oct. 1983, 61-70.

2 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking Press 1973), 555. All further references to this work will be contained in the thesis and noted as GR.

3 John M. Krafft, " 'And How Far Fallen': Puritan Themes in Gravity's Rainbow", Critique, XVIII.3. 1977.

4 Michael Berube, Marginal Forces, Cultural Centres (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 222.

5 Sacvan Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 93.

6 Berube, p. 235.

7 Ibid; p. 236.

8 Ibid; p. 221.

9 Herman Melville, Pierre (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 210.

10 Bercovitch, American Jeremiad, p. 28.

11 Ibid; p. 28.

12 Krafft, p. 57-8. Krafft relies on a passage describing Victorian architecture, and accepts the phrase "a cruel network of sensuous

moments that could not be transcended" as Pynchon's definitive position. (GR 46) However, this phrase is confounded on the very same page, referring to "some" who doubt "god's very existence". The narrator certainly endorses various forms of magic, spirituality and "god".

13 Ibid; p. 57.

14 Sacvan Bercovitch, The Rites Of Assent (New York: Routledge, 1993), 54.

15 Bercovitch, Rites, p. 85.

16 Ibid; p. 79.

17 Marcus Smith and Khachig Toloyan, "The New Jeremiad: Gravity's Rainbow", in Richard Pearce, Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 169.

18 Ibid., p. 184.

19 Bercovitch, Jeremiad, p. 195.

20 Smith and Toloyan, p. 184.

21 Bercovitch, Rites, p. 292.

22 Krafft, p. 56.

23 Larzer Ziff, Puritanism in America, (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 77.

24 Ibid., p. 83.

25 Krafft, p. 59.

26 Lawrence Wolfley, "Repression's Rainbow: Norman O. Brown's Presence in Pynchon's Big Novel" in Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon, Richard Pearce, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 114.

27 Stephen Weisenburger, A Gravity's Rainbow Companion (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988). The epigraph is not from any of von Braun's published works on rocketry and space travel. Weisenburger says: "The epigraph to part 1, for example, is taken from the remarks of Wernher von Braun, the Nazi and NASA rocket engineer, before the July 1969 Apollo moon launch." p. 15.

28 Weisenburger notes Dornberger's importance to Pynchon. The Pokler episode derives virtually all its detail from Dornberger's book (also published by Viking Press). One of Dornberger's themes is his difficulty in sheltering his key personnel, especially von Braun, from competing interests within the Nazi hierarchy.

29 According to Weisenburger, Pynchon's source for all the intricate details of organic chemistry and its industrial importance comes from Richard Sasuly's book IG Farben, (New York: Boni and Gaer, 1947).

30 Weisenburger identifies the origin of the racist verse. William Slothrop's "pig operation" (GR 555-6) and Tyrone's role as Plechazunga are two indications of Pynchon's sympathy for pigs, as is his inversion of the Biblical parable of the Gadarene swine (GR 555). Apochryphal commentary also comes from Weisenburger's description (third hand) of Pynchon's Manhattan apartment: "Arranged on the shelves were an assortment of piggy banks and several books about swine." p. 1.

31 Douglas Fowler, A Reader's Guide to 'Gravity's Rainbow' (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980). Fowler lists twelve distinct manifestations of the "angel", although these exclude the "watchmen" and other possibly "supernatural" phenomena.

32 David Cowart, Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Illusion (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

33 Robert L. McLaughlin, "Pynchon's Angels and Supernatural Systems in Gravity's Rainbow." Pynchon Notes 22, Spring 1988, 27.

34 Ibid., p. 32.

35 Pynchon's "numinous" is synonymous with "divine"; it may have some relation to Kant's distinction between observable physical "phenomena" and pure intellectual perceptions, or "noumena", but for the immediate purposes of this discussion I will keep to the numinous/divine, which Pynchon complicates on its own terms.

Chapter Four

"A hiss of air, whack": Backward Symmetry at the Dead Center of Pynchon's Narrative

Ontology is foregrounded and destabilized in Gravity's Rainbow. The puritans' assumed connection between immanence and presence, as discerned through divine revelation to an elect defined by interpreting the revelation correctly, becomes detached from the numinous presence of God and is instead a never-arriving immanence. Because election is illusory for Pynchon, interpretation is both elect and preterite, granting itself privilege because it is necessary to do so in order to proceed, but always inadequate. The Fall of man marks the beginning of history and the initial shift from numinous presence to immanence. For puritans the plot proceeds to an ultimate revelation that will reintegrate the chosen people with their origin in God's grace.

For Pynchon, though, "Holy-Center-Approaching" as the puritans practiced it and as virtually every character in Gravity's Rainbow analogously practices, takes place while "separations are proceeding. Each alternative Zone speeds away from all the others, in fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the Center." [1] Alternative Zones are created every time an individual makes, or fails to make, a choice; that is, new Zones are created each moment, so that history entails centrifugal movement. Puritans, and all others seeking the center, assume their interpretive

powers constitute a centripetal force that transcends time and history; Pynchon sees this as the fundamental fallacy of interpretive closure, and ontological instability in his narrative forces the reader away from any analogue for puritan interpretive instinct, towards an acceptance that analysis, control and closure, like election, are illusory, constructs rather than absolutes. Yet he simultaneously affirms the necessity of such centripetal constructs, because the alternative to a coherent, centered universe is the void. Slothrop is betrayed by his puritan ancestry while it simultaneously enables him to interpret his way through the Zone.

Gravity's Rainbow is a consistent and canny exploitation of its own genre and the reader's generic expectations. Molly Hite shows that hermetic readings of the novel begin "from the premise that the supposedly withheld central truth is so cunningly encoded in the text that it requires translation . . . it is the reader who must become the champion, adept and magician" [2] because Slothrop so obviously cannot fulfil his role as quester. Pynchon therefore "constructs his radically decentralized texts around the premise that the center is unaccountably missing . . . it was there at one time, or it would not be so sorely missed. The longing for unity, then, is a cosmic nostalgia, a desire to return to an original state." [3] Fictional narrative is analogous to providence in that it begins, follows certain pre-ordained or authorial lines in order to resolve itself, and ends. Gravity's Rainbow is nostalgic for this kind of narrative, for a return to the centralized starting point, but it is reconciled also to the impossibility of return in any literal way. Pynchon utilizes tropes of reversal and narrative digression, "backward symmetry" (GR 301) to suggest that meaning exists

not in the story of beginnings and endings, but in the moments of the quest, in the processes of narration and interpretation that are resolutely preterite in the sense that they do not claim metaphysical privilege for themselves.

The puritan jeremiads and the lessons of puritan writers such as Thomas Hooker continually assert a coherent narrative that yields interpretation to the elect as a part of its providential design. Puritan narrative begins, literally, with the word; it proceeds in recognizable ways (through interpretive acts) to its pre-ordained conclusion, in which the elect are taken into God's house while the preterite are passed over. Cause and effect are operable; horological time unfolds according to the tenets of chronometrical time. The apocalypse is salvation for the elect constituting the only possible ending to the providential plot.

Pynchon undermines this sequence and its determinacy at every turn. Gravity's Rainbow begins with a rocket-induced apocalyptic fantasy. The "screaming" Pirate Prentice hears is a V-2 on its way into London, establishing the paradoxical nature of Pynchon's approach to cause and effect in its very first line; the inverted sequence of supersonic rocket landings means the sound signifies survival. Narrative cause and effect is similarly problematic for Pynchon. Pirate's facility of "getting inside the fantasies of others: being able, actually, to take over the burden of managing them" (GR 12) parallels both the narrator's ability and demands on the reader. This includes a direct challenge to ontological stability in representation and interpretation.

Pynchon's rendered world is constructed on multiple levels of

perception, conscious, sub-conscious, imagined, real within the bounds of its own narrative, so that the only certainty in Gravity's Rainbow is the mediated nature of human experience. "Will the light come before or after?" Pirate's nightmare asks: the answer is not an answer but an ontological jump; "But it is already light" (GR 4). Pynchon's italics suggest Pirate is surprised, that he has difficulty differentiating between the vivid details of his nightmare and the cold reality of his awakened self. The reader is also surprised, and unable to confidently attribute any aspect of the narrative to a particular level of representational reality. Substitute the word "narrative" for the word "light" at the end of Pirate's fantasy, as it becomes his reality: will the narrative become meta-narrative, or is it that already; perhaps they form, in tandem, an inscrutable terrain the reader must always, self-consciously, traverse.

The novel's second, seemingly contradictory sentence indicates the uncertainty that imbues everything that follows: "It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now" (GR 3). Experience, it seems, does not help; history cannot reveal an instructive template. Individuals are left to their moments, their interpretive "now" as they face the rocket as destroyer and revealer. The "it" of the past, either the rocket and its post-impact sound of arrival, or perhaps Pirate's fantasy of destruction and lost souls, cannot compare to the "it" of the present, the reality that supersedes the fantasy and the implied ontological difference. That is why the novel does not provide an adequate structure for reading it; the formal elements of Gravity's Rainbow, like its content, leave the reader no sure interpretive ground, nothing in the narrative that happens "before" that

can help determine what is happening in a particular "now". This directly contravenes the puritan jeremiad's sense of God's chosen people literally and figuratively re-enacting the trek to New Jerusalem as they formed Massachusetts Bay colony.

Robert Alter describes the self-conscious novel: "through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as a construct." [4] For Pynchon, the construct extends to what is being constructed not only by the fiction, but by the reader. The acknowledgement that Gravity's Rainbow is self-reflexive only begins the process of understanding another, less epistemological than ontological problem: the radical uncertainty of the origin of utterance in the novel asks by extension how we can know the origin of reality in relation to fiction, or vice versa, if all experience is mediated or constructed. Alter again: "ontological critique in the novel . . . is carried on typically not as discursive exposition but as a critical exploration through the technical manipulation of the very form that purports to represent reality." [5] This is more complicated still in Gravity's Rainbow, where reality itself is broken into so many discreet areas of experience and representation that "manipulation" is virtually reversed: the variety and multitude of experienced realities, including those of the narrator and the reader, in themselves manipulate the form of the novel. The novel cannot sustain the level of intricacy necessary to explain the various plots that it entails, nor can it adequately explain the ultimate fate of any character, or the rocket's

aftermath. Gravity's Rainbow is finally "about" inadequacy, of characters' knowledge, of readers' interpretive abilities, and especially of the signifying power of words and constructs of words such as novels. It is, at the same time, about our resolute insistence to define the world epistemologically, to write fictions or to interpret those fictions even at the risk of seeming or in fact being paranoid.

Dwight Eddins augments Alter concerning these problems with the word "onto-epistemological", to imply that the post-modernist shift in emphasis from epistemology to ontology, most clearly defined by Brian McHale [6], is inadequate in dealing with Pynchon's treatment of interpretive paranoia and the attendant understanding that there may be multiple versions of reality competing for attention. "It seems possible that the enveloping drama of Pynchon's fiction - the one that subsumes the onto-epistemological drama - is a religious one". [7] Religion, for Eddins, is "a totalizing commitment to a particular construct of ultimate reality, including the nature of humanity, the significance of history, and the governance of the cosmos; and not ruling out the existence of spiritual forces both malign and benevolent." [8] The claim that Pynchon's fiction itself is necessarily and completely religious, that there is a conceptual template which can totalize Gravity's Rainbow, is too restrictive, the kind of interpretive folly that Pynchon's puritan themes evoke and subvert because they establish an elect/preterite dialectic of reading. Pynchon nonetheless relies on puritanism and religion as Eddins defines it. Gravity's Rainbow uses many different constructs, all similar to puritanism in their totalizing commitment, which ultimately means

closure.

Many of the characters in Gravity's Rainbow exhibit this "totalizing commitment", often clearly at the expense of other constructs that offer equally satisfactory explanations. Pointsman's debates with Mexico are an example; his belief in behavioral theory opposes Mexico's views of probability. Weissmann's construct of the rocket as transcendental signifier is the other, most important example in the novel. He sees the rocket as "the deep cry of combustion that jars the soul, promises escape." The metaphysical aspects of this are explicit: "Is the cycle over now, and a new one ready to begin? Will our new Edge, our new Deathkingdom, be the moon? I dream of a great glass sphere, hollow and very high and far away" (GR 758, 723). Weissmann's rocket construct is "consecrated to shit, to endings, to the desperate nights in the streets where connection proceeds out of all personal control" (GR 722). His vision of transcendence includes determinism, connectedness and death. The rocket construct ultimately becomes the problem each reader faces, the possibility that someone else's construct will impinge on our own, that the reader becomes Gottfried.

Slothrop in particular enacts the role of victim-as-contingent-victor over the determinist constructs that both Weissmann and Pointsman engage in. Slothrop's puritan ancestry allows him the "peculiar sensitivity" to the rocket and to narrative plots, both of which are embedded in the puritan America that became technologically driven. Puritanism and technology are, for Pynchon, constructs that require a similar totalizing commitment, that require exclusion of expendables. Technology defines

other constructs as preterite, as did puritanism: therefore the impulse to totalize becomes dangerous. These in turn parallel any reading construct that claims interpretive privilege.

The problem is embedded in Pynchon's narrative, which always questions the grounds it requires to constitute itself: narrative sequence and readerly interpretation impose their own singular orders. Cause and effect, says Jonathan Culler, are one important focus of deconstructionist strategy, and his comments apply to Pynchon:

"deconstruction reverses the hierarchical opposition of the causal scheme. The distinction between cause and effect makes the cause an origin, logically and temporally prior. The effect is derived, secondary . . . . the deconstruction upsets the hierarchy by producing an exchange of properties . . . . By showing that the argument which elevates cause can be used to favor effect, one uncovers and undoes the rhetorical operation responsible for the hierarchization... if either cause or effect can occupy the position of origin, then origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical privilege." [9]

Culler finds the origins of this deconstruction in Nietzsche but makes the important point that: "to deconstruct causality one must operate with the notion of cause and apply it to causation itself." [10] These points all relate to Pynchon, most obviously in the sense that his nominal deconstruction of narrative cause and effect of course relies on the narrative of Gravity's Rainbow, no matter how varied and scattered it is. It is also similar to his

use of puritan interpretation, which relies on the facets he undermines. Pynchon's readers, like good puritans, must proceed in good faith that their temporal interpretation will yield some kind of meaning, while they must, as postmodern readers, acknowledge that meaning cannot be ascribed any transcendental value. His readers are both puritan and anti-puritan in this deconstructive sense, relying on and denying the efficacy of narrative.

Pynchon spends considerable effort establishing what Weisenburger calls hysteron proteron, the reversal of normal chronological order. [11] Films run backwards, numerous narrative analepses, and, for example, the puritan mission to America reversed all suggest potential "redemption" or "return": "there go that Arbella and its whole fleet, sailing backward in formation, the wind sucking them east again,...the old ships zoom out of Boston Harbor, back across an Atlantic whose currents and swells go flowing and heaving in reverse" (GR 204). Jessica has two orgasms before she and Roger have actual intercourse, and "this is important to both of them" (GR 120) as it is to the reader, for whom these constant reversals have a cumulative effect. Tyrone Slothrop thinks that the return of his first ancestor to England, and his preterite heresy, signify that "there might be a route back" to a "single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up" (GR 556). The reversals of cause and effect are a trope of new beginnings established as an imagined return to a moment in time when the present destructive distinctions did not exist.

They also entail an often vivid reminder that they are tropes for

Pynchon. The "night's stew collecting itself up out of the planks and off the indignant shoes of the more elect, slithering in a fountain back into the pewter kettle as the servant himself staggers upright again and the vomit he slipped on goes gushing back into the mouth that spilled it" (GR 204) only reinforces the fantastical element of the reversal. Reversal and return are constructs themselves, responding to a more malevolent and more powerful construct that, no matter how ominously named it is, still carries V-2 rockets into London: "nothing can stop the Abreaction of the Lord of the Night unless the Blitz stops, rockets dismantle, the entire film runs backward: faired skin back to sheet steel back to pigs to white incandescence to ore, to Earth. But the reality is not reversible. Each firebloom, followed by blast then by sound of arrival, is a mockery (how can it not be deliberate?) of the reversal process" (GR 139). This passage parodies some of Pynchon's own themes and symbols, by substituting "pigs" for raw iron, foreshadowing Gottfried's "faired skin", and by the implicit imputation of intention on the part of the rocket's designers, a clear instance of interpretive paranoia. The most important aspect of the passage, however, is its refutation of Pynchon's own nostalgia for return, which he iterates many times later in the novel. The reader is placed in a flux of novelistic "reality" and novelistic tropes that vie with each other for metaphysical privilege, which neither can have since the original center is absent.

Validity is available only on an ontological level, where the trope signifies both the improbability and the desirability of the new set of coordinates Tyrone seeks. The narrator understands this, and provides

ironic solace for his readers, parodying Fielding's playful, deceitful but all-knowing narrator and echoing Joyce's parody of scientific explanation in the "Ithaca" episode of Ulysses. The Thanatz interrogation scene begins with: "You will want cause and effect. All right. Thanatz was washed overboard in the same storm that took Slothrop from the Anubis. He was rescued by a Polish undertaker in a rowboat, out in the storm tonight to see if he can get struck by lightning" (GR 663). "Was" becomes "tonight", and narrative stability is undermined; cause and effect cannot be accurately traced. The scene proceeds digressively through Ben Franklin and lammergeiers [12] to the Dora homosexual inmates and their experience with Blicero. Eventually the 00000 rocket firing and the S-gerat find their way, almost incidentally, into Thanatz's story, and it is only then that the narrator reveals Enzian as interrogator. The cause is Thanatz's falling overboard: the effect is his revelation to Enzian that Blicero has fired his rocket, with a subsequent effect that the Schwarzcommando are "reconciled for now in the only Event that could have brought them together" (GR 673).

Cause and effect narrative in Gravity's Rainbow is deconstructed in the sense that normal narrative and chronological connections do not exist, but the novel nonetheless relies on some sense of cause and effect. The origin is not apparent, but there are both causes and effects in the novel. Interpretation is the only way to establish connections, and because metaphysical privilege does not exist, the reader must be prepared to suspend any definitive reading which would enforce a pattern of cause and effect. In Gravity's Rainbow every interpretive pattern can be

deconstructed by its own rhetorical strategies; every reader is paranoid, finding connections and imputing an ultimate plot or narrative plan. In Pynchon's case, the plan appears to be inducement of paranoid readings, none of which can be validated by direct reference to a narrative center.

The narrative analepses that dominate Gravity's Rainbow suggest, as in the Thanatz episode, that the relationship between cause and effect, though not dysfunctional, is problematic. It is not quite a deconstruction, the way Nietzsche first conceived it and the way Culler articulates it in Derridean terms. [13] For Pynchon the problem is one of fecundity, of overloaded signification and a countless array of contingencies. In the Thanatz scene, the initial wave, the Polish undertaker's fascination with Benjamin Franklin's electrical experiments, Franklin's own unpublished status as a Mason, the Dora 175's and Thanatz's many freight car rides he finds are all important factors in his finally meeting Enzian. All these "accidents" add up to a form of providence that ironically can only be disrupted by more accidents. "This is one of his earlier lessons in being preterite: he won't escape any of the consequences he sets up for himself now, not unless it's by accident" (GR 669). Cause and effect, contingency and fate, relate to each other in a constantly shifting dialectic that makes it impossible to valorize one or the other.

The analeptic passages operate in a nearly circular way, moving from a specific present into a distant past and eventually working back to the moment after the "specific present". They indicate the potential fullness of a moment's thought, the "now" and the implicit weight of history. These passages make the shifting dialectic even more difficult to focus, because

they ultimately suggest time itself passes in different ways for different people, or at different junctions in people's lives. Truth, then, becomes a matter of perspective that must always re-examine itself as each moment passes. Pudding's "mammoth work entitled Things that Can Happen in European Politics" is a metonymous presentation of Pynchon's larger view of history and providence. The reader can sympathize with Pudding's assessment that " 'it's changing out from under me. Oh, dodgy - very dodgy' " (GR 77). As Pudding tries to put history into perspective in order to work out potential effects, a new event occurs which throws all previous computations awry. Pynchon's narrative also shifts continuously, with its multiple perspectives and plots, and its Protean narrator.

An early, clear example of analepsis is Jessica's cigarette revery, which begins with her poised "between two worlds", and as she smokes, she floats "out of herself, up to watch herself watching the night" (GR 53-4). Her mind wanders to Roger, rockets and probabilities, and eventually to her fear of Pointsman and his hands: "they could as well torture people as dogs and never feel their pain" (GR 58). The revery continues through the lighting of a second cigarette. Pynchon inserts a vast amount of potentially vital detail and thematic imagery into the few chronological minutes it takes Jessica to smoke, pertaining mostly to Roger, the "Anti-Pointsman" and his laws of probabilities: "in the domain of zero to one, not-something to something, Pointsman can only possess the zero and the one... But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one" (GR 55). The scene ends with Roger waking, and an interruption to their intimacy: "a rocket has suddenly struck. A terrific blast quite close beyond the village: the

entire fabric of the air, the time, is changed" (GR 59). What happens between the zero, or chronological starting point of this narrative segment, and the one, or its conclusion, is more important than the actual progress of time, or the relationship between narrative cause and effect. Between the zero and the one is where Pynchon deposits the bulk of his narrative wealth and this is usually, as Jessica is, "between two worlds."

This does not mean Pynchon valorizes the revery, or the analeptic narration, over each moment in present time. Rather, his point is to underline the importance of both, while obscuring the distinction between them and eliminating any clear sense of predictability or stability within the novel. Each moment is laden with both the entirety of the past, and the future's potential. At a Herero camp, Christian shoots at Pavel: "Suddenly, this awful branching: the two possibilities already beginning to fly apart at the speed of thought - a new Zone in any case, now, whether Christian fires or refrains - jump, choose - Enzian does his best -knocks the barrel aside . . . . But both men saw the new branches. The Zone, again, has just changed, and they are already on, into the new one" (GR 524). Action and no action, choice or abstention, each have irrevocable consequences, but the "branch" always exists in the next moment. The rocket that strikes near Jessica does change time and the fabric of her reality, just as each choice in her life will. The mingling of volition and helplessness is part of Pynchon's ambiguous structure; his characters can never know which is which. The important point is the vitality of each moment, both in terms of its relation to history and its potential to effect change. These incidents also work to suggest that any form of pre-ordained plot cannot be functional, just as

Eddie Pensiero's barbering techniques cannot be accounted for. History and those who enact it, both elect and preterite, operate in these indeterminate, minute, temporal branches of potential.

Osbie Feel's film of Katje is another important example of this in Gravity's Rainbow. It shows the fluidity of past and present time, the impossible-to-contain accumulation of emotion and fact, and perhaps most importantly, the inadequacy of representational methods of dealing with reality. "The camera records no change in her face" when Osbie opens the oven door, and "At the images she sees in the mirror Katje also feels a cameraman's pleasure, but knows what he cannot: that inside herself, enclosed in the soignee surface of dear fabric and dead cells, she is corruption and ashes, she belongs in a way none of them can guess cruelly to the Oven" (GR 93-4). The literal oven yields to the imagined oven; the White Visitation yields to Blicero's rooms on the Heath, and Katje moves back in time on the basis of these associations. Her memories are distinct, vivid and detailed; they are also highly mediated, full of symbolism which applies not only to her situation but to the novel itself. She recalls her first meeting with Gottfried: "his face raised to none of them, but as if to something on the ceiling, or in the sky which ceilings may in his vision stand for, eyes-down as he seems most of the time to be- his face, ascending, tightening, coming, is so close to what she's been seeing all her life in mirrors, her own studied mannequin stare, that she catches her breath" (GR 95). This in turn becomes an exposition of Weissmann's change into Blicero, his experience with the Hereros, Katje's eventual escape and placement in the White Visitation, and the history of her

ancestor Franz Van der Groov.

Pynchon puts all this narrative information into a frame of Katje's filmed image, beginning with her real person and ending with Grigori the octopus watching her on film: "the camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere" (GR 113). Katje's memories are mingled with the narrator's voice at indeterminate points, and chronological narrative time is restored only at the end of this long segment. Prentice and Feel use the word "crotchet" to symbolize a cumbersome good luck charm, and Franz's old haakbus "is his crotchet" (GR 111). The narrative is replete with what Pynchon calls interfaces, but Thanatz expresses the problem: "Isn't this an interface here? a meeting surface for two worlds . . . sure, but which two?" (GR 668) Ontological boundaries are permeable to tropes in Gravity's Rainbow. This partially reinforces what Alter calls self-conscious narrative, in the sense that the reader is forced to accept the crotchet trope as partially Franz's, Katje's, Pirate's, the narrator's, and ultimately something that subsumes all of them. That something is the novel itself as a construct, but it is also the direct challenge of the construct, even if it is so obviously self-conscious. Gravity's Rainbow is not meta-fictive only to show itself to be so, thereby making a statement about the nature of fictive representation: it places different demands on its readers to problematize the idea of interpretation, insisting that meaning is inevitably reductive and self-oriented, a form of election.

Plots are consistently revealed through these tropes of backwardness, either hysteron proteron or analepsis. It is a strategy of digression, which implies the over-valued nature of chronological, mimetic narrative.

Theodore Kharpertian identifies all Pynchon's novels as Menippean satire, which asserts "antithetical difference and consequently permits a poststructuralist free play of language, yet it demands, on the other hand, a dialectical synthesis and entails, as a result, a type of prestructuralist positivity." The result is that "nonrealistic narratives deviate in ultimately recognizable ways." [14] Northrop Frye's definition of Menippean satire suggests the same relation between reality and non-mimetic texts; the paradoxical result of Pynchon's subversions of mimetic narrative, like those of Sterne, is that the reader focuses on the relationship between fiction and reality. [15] Kharpertian claims that "Pynchon acknowledges the delusive aspect of figurative language, and the reflexive logic of this acknowledgement leads to the subversion of his own fiction. Pynchon's plots, a metaphor for meaning, resist naturalization and lack conclusiveness, but . . . metaphor is represented as a method of escaping from an entropic, 'plotless' world into vitalizing creativity." [16] Kharpertian overstates the positivist aspect of Pynchon by asserting the narratives are "vitalizing creativity", but he accurately describes the reason for Pynchon's strategy of subversion: truth through language is impossible, and a return to pre-linguistic times is also impossible. What we are left with is the realization that language, though inadequate, is necessary.

The novel's climax, as indicated by Slothrop's very gradual progress through the Zone, should be the 00000 firing, and in one sense this is so. Weissman's soliloquy and the countdown take up the last pages. Its dramatic impact is strong. The scene, though, is analeptic; the firing has

been described twice previously in the novel, and its implications have been discussed by several characters. Pynchon's strategy is partially to make the firing as intensely personal for the reader as for those characters on site, which personalizes what the rocket represents. He also makes clear his point that narrative cause and effect are insufficient but that interpretation is in fact necessary, even at the risk of closing other, often contradictory responses. The 00000 rocket firing occurs three times, but its most vivid rendering is reserved for the novel's last pages, where the reader is invited to actively engage in a response to the rocket metaphor in the moment of reading.

The reader becomes a part of the structure of the novel, able at last to form an opinion based on immediate data rather than the impressions of Marghareta Erdmann or of Thanatz. Pynchon provides temporal parallels, not a series of events, just as Leni claims should be the case. Margot Norris's work The Decentered Universe of Finnegan's Wake is helpful in understanding this aspect of Gravity's Rainbow. Events are referred to on several occasions, incidents are described from different perspectives, so that Pynchon's narrative time in effect repeats itself. However, "This type of repetition does not appear to be merely predetermined . . . the repetition in Finnegan's Wake appears to be compulsive, that is, produced by irrational rather than logical necessity, and therefore actively induced - the result of human impulse rather than time. There is ample reason to consider the possibility that the repetition of events is generated by the pressure of an unresolved conflict, a mysterious trauma whose pain has never been relieved." [17] Pynchon's "repetitions"

can more accurately be termed recurrences, both of event and theme, sometimes in allegorical or analogical form. Franz's slaughter of the dodoes is an allegory of puritan literal-mindedness in perceiving God's plan active in the world. The rocket is an analogue to puritan belief in God's apocalyptic final revelation taking the damned to death and bringing the saved to heaven. The scattered pattern of the novel picks up several stories and drops them to pick them up yet again, though none has a clear resolution.

The "human impulse" Norris identifies is not quite sufficient for Pynchon, since Gravity's Rainbow questions causal links between behavior and results. Still, the novel's most impassioned pleas are reserved for those like Thanatz, Katje, Pirate and Mexico, who see potential freedom in each act they perform. Slothrop in particular enacts contingent narrative, in which he moves haphazardly from situation to situation, often on no stronger impulse than to help someone find their pet lemming. Slothrop also is the subject of a "mysterious trauma", the Harvard experiments, that leads him on his quest, and causes so much thematic repetition in the novel. Pynchon problematizes this even further by suggesting on two occasions that Jampf in fact never existed, which would make Slothrop's trauma a paranoid delusion. The events of each day are in narrative dialogue with the events of characters' consciousness, dreams, drug hallucinations, and outright fantasies, not always one's own. The "irrational" structure of Gravity's Rainbow, is similar to Finnegan's Wake in that the recurrences are not only statically structural; the "events themselves constitute temporal narratives."[18] Franz's episode is not only

an important allegory, it is also a minutely detailed and vividly evoked story of one person's theological turmoil. Slothrop is not only representative of the fate of post-modern heroes and their quests, he is also an intricately drawn character.

Gravity's Rainbow works, then, as a discrete set of events, all of which contain their own narrative and chronological logic. Even Pirate's adenoid fantasy is explicable to a point. The problem comes in trying to join these discrete units into a coherent whole, since they occupy such radically different times, perspectives, even ontological statuses. Interpretation is both required and deliberately parodied, which is why puritanism is such an effective theme for Pynchon to exploit.

This is not the full extent of Pynchon's ironic use of cause and effect and of his narrative strategies in general. Dwight Eddins shows that Gravity's Rainbow features "epistemological missions impossible, finally foundering - as they must - in undecidability; . . . the gradual revelation of this cul-de-sac-, along with intimations that a provisional middle ground can be found and occupied, constitutes the unifying theme of Pynchon's fiction." [19] Further, this habitable ground, which is most evident in Pynchon's scenarios of fleeting communion between individuals, cannot be sustained: "in the very act of privileging moments of communion, Pynchon reminds us of their fragility and transience in the face of massive dehumanizing forces." [20] The uncertain "onto-epistemology" of Gravity's Rainbow provides no sustained comfort for its characters or its readers. However, between undecidability and habitable ground, between communion and massive dehumanization, lies a reliance on subverted concepts. Pynchon's

fiction ultimately becomes a recognition of necessary opposites and the constant search for solid ground, no matter how fleeting or tentative.

Gravity's Rainbow can no more dispense with words, narrative and interpretation than, say, the Bible can. Similarly, cause and effect cannot be disallowed, either in the novel or in the scientific discourses of probability that Mexico argues for. Pynchon's use and subversion of puritanism is instructive on this point, since Slothrop's instincts and sensitivities, though partially conditioned, come to him also as a natural inheritance, as part of his identity. These instincts lead him, like the puritans before him, on a quest for meaning. The irony of the rocket/steeple symbol and the resulting religious overtones of Slothrop's rocket quest require puritanism in order to expose the problem of interpretive control, of definitions of preterition derived from self-named elect constructs.

Although, as Eddins claims, Nietzsche's influences on Pynchon are indirect, there is one idea they share: "Paul thought up the idea, and Calvin re-thought it, that for innumerable people damnation has been decreed from eternity, and that this beautiful world plan was instituted to reveal the glory of God: heaven and hell and humanity are thus supposed to exist - to satisfy the vanity of God! What cruel and insatiable vanity must have flared in the soul of the man who thought this up first, or second." [21] Nietzsche's point, that man's vanity leads him to interpret the world in a way that ascribes vanity to God, who supposedly inscribes the initial interpretation of his providential plan on the world, applies directly to Pynchon. "Zwingli's town", Zurich, is where Slothrop expects to make a

key connection in his attempt to trace rocket hardware: "there are ex-young men, here in this very city, faces Slothrop used to pass in the quads, who got initiated at Harvard into the Puritan Mysteries: who took oaths in dead earnest to respect and to act always in the name of Vanitas, Emptiness, their ruler" (GR 267-8). Vanitas mocks the actual Harvard motto, Veritas, because Pynchon associates puritan notions of truth directly with vanity. Vanity, emptiness, death, and the "odor, the one he knows but can't quite name" (GR 269) are all connected. The odor is both Imopolex G and death, just as Vanitas and emptiness, most obviously associated with the Herero Empty Ones led by Imbindi, are death. Pynchon's formulation is explicit; the elect and determinist interpreter promotes death. The question in Gravity's Rainbow is one of control and insistence.

Puritanism and technology have a parallel belief in progress and validation of their own worth made evident in horological time as part of a divinely sanctioned plan, or plot. Gravity's Rainbow is constructed to subvert all these ideas: progress, time unfolding naturally according to a plan, a central truth that validates action are all undermined through parody, irony and through the narrative structure which valorizes digression in its use of tropes of reversal. The mathematical image of the present as a set of co-ordinate points, from which the future will proceed in any of an infinite number of ways based on an infinite number of possible influences from the past, establishes the value Pynchon places on choice, on freedom and on the moment.

This image also establishes simultaneously his understanding that while

freedom in a moment may obtain, there is already a massive weight of determinacy on each set of co-ordinates. Molly Hite explains Pynchon's strategy: "although Gravity's Rainbow takes a pessimistic view of the twentieth century's flight into totalizing systems, it also insists that such systems do not have intrinsic authority; they are not imposed on humanity from 'outside'. No matter how comprehensive the explanation, it never covers everything, and for this reason it is thematically significant that the action of the novel overflows the parameters set by the structural metaphor." [22] Freedom comes in spite of the totalizing tendencies of constructs of all kinds in the novel. The most important example is the rocket itself, which is described as "an entire system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature" (GR 324). Entropy as metaphor for disorder is replaced by a more insidious entropy as metaphor for complete stasis. Against this Pynchon posits Godel's Theorem, Murphy's Law and indeterminacy: "even as determinist a piece of hardware as the A4 rocket will begin spontaneously generating items like the "S-Gerat" Slothrop thinks he's chasing like a grail" (GR 275). The rocket generates these items because there are so many different versions of itself as grail, all of which make their own interpretive stand.

Slothrop and Weissman are two important figures, but the Schwarzcommandos are a vital alternative to the 00000 rocket and all its mystique. Enzian and his people bring the disparate rocket elements back together to make rocket 00001, the only literal example of hysteron proteron enacted in the novel. They finally "have their Rocket all

assembled at last, their single A4 scavenged all summer piece by piece clear across the Zone" (GR 673). For Enzian, the rocket is "Revealer" of constructs and their necessary 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 anymore" (GR 728). Enzian's belief in truth coming from the sky parallels Tyrone's sensitivity, and therefore parallels puritanism's insistence on words as emblems of the original Word. However, "the history of the old Hereros is one of lost messages" (GR 322). For Molly Hite Enzian is acutely aware of "resemblances, fostered by an acute sense of always having missed the messages". He therefore has "insight into the linguistic slippages that multiply significance in Gravity's Rainbow." [23] Like Slothrop, he knows the rocket will reveal something, but only after death, and therefore beyond earthly comprehension. Weissman, so obviously the antithesis of Enzian, sees the rocket as transcender of a "cycle of infection and death" (GR 724), but he in fact sacrifices Gottfried to his rocket cosmology, not himself. Enzian's version of the rocket as revealer has the merit of subverting the conception that the rocket is anything but destruction, but he too is incapable of naming the truth.

Pynchon's overt formulation of Weissman as elect and the Hereros as preterite becomes a rocket dialectic in which the self-serving nature of election is exposed. This is complicated by Pynchon, however. Enzian is described as an outsider: "he wants to belong to them out there, the vast Humility sleepless, dying, in pain tonight across the Zone.... the preterite he loves, knowing he is always to be a stranger" (GR 731). Enzian is a

preterite to preterites, defining the paradoxical nature of the word. Pynchon ascribes the word "stranger" to Ludwig, Katje and Prentice as well (GR 733, 547); Tchitcherine and Enzian do not recognize each other when they finally meet, and Slothrop is not recognizable by anyone by novel's end. This marginalization, even from the most marginalized aspects of culture, is the fate of Pynchon's "heroic" characters. Katje tells Pirate "the People will never love you... or me" (GR 547). Any notion of a valorized preterite, or a simply transversed elect/preterite formula will not work for Gravity's Rainbow. This problem is representative of the difficulty of interpretation, of the continually shifting narrative parameters which readers expect to finally stabilize in the work.

The reason for this instability is Pynchon's connection between interpretive closure and death. The final access to truth entails death, as Enzian's rocket myth states. The rocket is an updated version of puritan providence; both are created to achieve a pre-determined end. In both cases, an elect few are saved, but Pynchon formulates determinism and totalizing constructs around the rocket to suggest that the will to connectedness subsumes the will to survive. The rocket is the ultimate destroyer, and the novel's self-named elect understand and embrace this fact. Father Rapier gets to Pynchon's point, in terms of technological control that parallel interpretive closure: "Once the technical means of control have reached a certain size, a certain degree of being connected one to another, the chances for freedom are over for good" (GR 539). For Pynchon, this danger extends beyond his own text, to readers of the text who ultimately, in a nightmare scenario, all read his text the same way.

Slothrop's response to rocket strikes reverses cause and effect sequences and is itself problematized by the V-2's own inversion of sound and arrival, but Pointsman refuses to believe this. Instead, he insists, like Hite's postulated hermetic reader, that there must be a "cue" that explains everything. As his name implies, he believes there are discernable points along a track which will determine a given outcome, as surely for human behaviour as for railroad systems. He believes in the cue: "if it's in the air, right here, right now, then the rockets follow from it, 100% of the time. No exceptions. When we find it, we'll have shown again the stone determinacy of everything, of every soul" (GR 86). This determinacy is important because of Pointsman's need for control. He is the extreme example, but all Pynchon's characters have a need for connection and ultimately for a reason for their existence. Slothrop thinks "Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that reason" (GR 434). They in this case is the amorphous rocket-cartel, but They parallel the puritan God and providence.

Slothrop's preference reveals Pynchon's understanding that a person might accept the most oppressive and malign control rather than face pointlessness. This is made explicit in Katje's memory of her days with Blicero: "Katje, Gottfried, and Captain Blicero have agreed that the Northern and ancient form, one they all know and are comfortable with - the strayed children, the wood-wife in the edible house, the captivity, the fattening, the Oven- shall be their preserving routine, their shelter, against what outside none of them can bear - the War, the absolute rule of

chance, their own pitiable contingency here, in its midst" (GR 96). Pynchon's construction of the cartels, conspiracies, deluded hierarchies, co-opted counterforces and puritan/paranoiacs becomes, by its mass of detail and breadth of implication, a construction of people preferring the cold comfort of technological determinism to personal contingency. This preference is then exploited by those already in positions of political power who falsely believe, along with Blicero in his malign way or Pokler in his benign way, that the rocket will transcend earthly cycles of life and death.

The novel's title indicates the equivocal nature of Pynchon's vision. Gravity is both a determiner and the humanly incalculable force that takes over when man-made influence on the rocket ends, at brennschluss. Brennschluss itself is a "delta -t" between two forces, man-made and natural. In Pynchon's ambiguous formulation, there is "a point in space, a point hung as precise as the point where burning must end, never launched, never to fall. And what is the specific shape whose center of gravity is the Brennschluss Point? Don't jump at an infinite number of possible shapes. There's only one. It is most likely the interface between one order of things and another" (GR 302). Pynchon's readers must balance the two orders, of interpretation and ambiguity, of text and reader, of text and reality, and recognize the importance of the interface. The rainbow is the parabolic arc of the rocket's exhaust, and a dual symbol of the Biblical God's promise of salvation for mankind. This salvation is in itself equivocal because it is bookended by an apocalyptic flood and an apocalyptic fire. The rocket as fiery apocalypse is then both a secular and sacred symbol of destruction. All these eschatological elements, of

determinism, salvation, destruction, rely on interpretive impulse and synthesis, paradoxically based on perpetually shifting and indeterminate data. Just as speed and location of a moving object cannot be simultaneously fixed, Gravity's Rainbow's narrative cannot be fully explored because the text's open-endedness shifts its meaning from reader to reader.

All readings are both preterite and elect, because they give themselves privilege which is illusory. All readings are "strangers" to each other even if they are performed by the same reader. Robert Alter's conviction that the novel as genre perpetually replenishes itself is based on this idea, as is Borges' literature of replenishment. [24] For Pynchon, "what it damps out to" (GR 663) is a structure that provides no grounds for closure. The only obtained center in Gravity's Rainbow, a literal bullseye, is the dart Jessica throws while she is in "a shallow trance": "A hiss of air, whack: into the sticky fibers, into the dead center. Milton Gloaming cocks an eyebrow. His mind, always gathering correspondences, thinks it has found a new one" (GR 31). Pynchon's reader, like Milton, whose name suggest blindness and fading twilight to confirm lack of clarity, gathers the correspondence of dart to rocket, determining throw contrasted with the trance and other contingent factors: "Hair swinging, breasts bobbing marvelously beneath each heavy wool lapel" (GR 31). This rocket dart also corresponds inversely to all the test rockets that Pokler witnesses from ground zero: the least likely place for a rocket to land is on its actual target. Finally, though, the dart episode becomes what all rockets in the novel are about. Milton is developing a vocabulary based on mathematical configurations, but even

in his new language the most frequent word is "the same as it's always been...: death" (GR 32).

Pynchon's narrative is a "progressive knotting into" and a "bringing back out of" (GR 3, 472). Slothrop as representative reader is involved in "this Eurydice-obsession" (GR 472) that implies the bringing back out of is not possible. Interpretive entropy will occur, either as an increasingly scattered series of discrete narrative events, or as interpretive closure and a lifeless text. [25] The rocket means widely different things to various Zone questers, but it also means, simply, death.

The novel's ending is emblematic of all that precedes it. There are several dozen instances that foreshadow themes or images in the "Descent" section, and several direct references, particularly associated with the theatre, delta-t's, the touch of a stranger in the next seat, and the community of song sung in unison: "Now everybody-" (GR 760). William Vesterman sees "Pynchon crying in his chains" as he writes about death for "the species". [26] Thomas Moore's dissent to Vesterman claims Gravity's Rainbow finally shows "though it does not intervene in or try to cancel, the horrible turnings of tower-systems back on themselves." [27] Molly Hite maintains that the "tendency to accept nihilism as tough-mindedness is what Pynchon satirizes . . . . Gravity's Rainbow confronts its readers with the spectacle of a postreligious society committed to a vision of apocalypse, and duplicitously invites them to share this vision by trying to fit outrageous humor into a predestined tragic pattern." [28] The humor, of course, will not fit; Pynchon's secular history refutes providential order in its sheer indeterminate diversity.

Gravity's Rainbow, though, is not only secular. Slothrop's sensitivity to what is in the sky exists, most importantly as the implacable and inscrutable obverse of Pointsman's utopia of determination. Slothrop's quest is doomed because in looking for Eurydice he condemns himself to death, but like Orpheus he may also keep singing. The quest entails non-resolution only in the sense that Slothrop does not achieve a specific goal: he does succeed, however, in surviving the Zone and escaping all plots that conspire against him, including the plot to induce paranoia. Pointsman cannot control Slothrop and therefore "stone determinacy in everything" yields, in William's song, to "a face on ev'ry mountainside,/And a soul in ev'ry stone . . . ." (GR 760). The point is not so much what Pynchon means when he uses the adjective "crippl'd", or if the light that "brought the Towers low" is the rocket; rather, it is the wide variety of textual referents he provides, partially as clues, more likely as correspondences, which the reader then must interpret. Pointsman's metaphor of stone determinacy of every soul is subverted by William's souls in stones.

For Pokler, the problem is the rocket's existence as anything but a construct. He sits at ground zero during a test firing, where "Chances are astronomically against a hit": "how can he believe in it's reality up there?" (GR 425). It does exist, though, as surely for Slothrop as for Enzian, Weissman or Pokler. The rocket poised above the theatre, presaged in Pirate's fantasy and by Constant Slothrop's vision, is the personal rocket meant for each reader, the great bright hand reaching out of the sky and the pointed tip of the rocket about to land, "absolutely and forever without sound" (GR 760). It is the rocket that finds ground zero, the individual

reader. The rocket is personal because it is metaphor, to be taken differently by each reader. It is silent because it is metaphor, part of Pynchon's word-construct that can never escape its status as written text. It may one day, like William's hymn, be "centuries forgotten and out of print", only to be similarly revived by yet another preterite reader intent on interpreting the word as a way to discern the truth.

For Pynchon, plots may be resolved by a metaphysical being, either benign or malign: in puritanism, being preterite means God and providence are both malign. The equally plausible alternative is that there is no metaphysical order, that there is nothing beyond a series of contingent events and paranoid interpretations. Ontology is foregrounded and destabilized, forcing the reader away from what Pynchon recognizes as the interpretive impulse to connect, to analyse, to order and control. Gravity's Rainbow simultaneously requires and subverts puritanism, technological determinism and readerly sensitivity to what is latent in the text. The great bright hand brings either a revelation of ultimate order or of ultimate contingency; the rocket-answer is perpetually a delta-t away.

NOTES

1 Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 3.

2 Molly Hite, Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 23.

3 Hite, p. 25.

4 Robert Alter, Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkely: University of California Press, 1975), xi.

5 Alter, p. x.

6 Dwight Eddins, The Gnostic Pynchon (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 4. Brian McHale's argument is in his article "Modernist Reading, Post-Modernist Text: The Case of Gravity's Rainbow", in Poetics Today, Vol. I, #1, Autumn 1979, 85-109. It is more fully developed in his book Postmodernist Fiction (New York: Methuen, 1987). The essence of his argument is that postmodernist fiction contains "ontological doubt". Pynchon exploits modernist readers' assumptions, and this reader "has every right to feel conned, bullied, betrayed. Indeed, these responses are the essence of the aesthetic effect of Gravity's Rainbow." McHale identifies a shift, from epistemological to ontological foregrounding in postmodernist texts, which relates well enough to Pynchon. He does, as Eddins suggests, make the attendant "disorientation" of the reader a kind of punishment administered by postmodernist writers, implying the subtle change in foregrounding in the fiction requires a radical change in the reader's management of it.

7 Eddins, p. 4.

8 Ibid.; p.4.

9 Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 88.

10 Culler, p. 86-88. Culler's main point is that the "Nietzschean example poses numerous problems, but... it can serve as a compact instance of the general procedures we find in the work of Jacques Derrida." My own point is that cause and effect, like all other dialectical relations in GR, are not discarded or valorized on either side by Pynchon, even though he continually subverts the notions he uses.

11 Stephen Weisenburger, A Gravity's Rainbow Companion (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 29. Weisenburger defines his term: "hysteron proteron: a trope of backward motion, regression, and reversals of cause and effect."

12 Weisenburger, p. 280. "Large predatory birds of Europe, the Gypaetus barbatus, called 'lammergeiers' because they are said to swoop down on lost lambs". Pynchon's often obscure references usually have some symbolic or thematic significance to the narration they are embedded in.

13 Culler, p. 86-88. Pynchon is not interested in revealing, or deconstructing, the rhetorical strategies of the trope, although this is certainly part of what he does.

14 Theodore H. Kharpertian, A Hand to Turn the Time (Rutherford: Associated University Presses, 1990), 40.

15 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 308-14. Frye's definition is so inclusive that it undermines Kharpertian's argument that GR is not of the novel genre and therefore requires reading strategies that are informed at the outset by a recognition that it is a Menippean satire. However, Frye claims, and Kharpertian does not disagree, that "The Menippean satire deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes." Pynchon's characterizations have been maligned by hostile and friendly critics alike, but I think totalizing any reading of GR by way of genre is restrictive. Frye

compounds the problem by suggesting elements of Menippean satire can be present in novels; "we can see strains of novel, romance and confession in Pamela, of novel, romance, and anatomy in Don Quixote, of novel, romance and anatomy in Proust". Pynchon, also, can contain multitudes of generic components.

16 Kharpertian, p. 42.

17 Margot Norris, The Decentered Universe of Finnegan's Wake (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 25-26.

18 Norris, p. 25.

19 Eddins, p. 14-15.

20 Ibid.; p. 14.

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Portable Nietzsche, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 68.

22 Hite, p. 99.

23 Ibid.; p. 152.

24 Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths (New York: Penguin, 1970), 223. In his essay "The Wall and the Books" Borges claims art, including literature, cannot be exhausted because the "aesthetic experience" is "the immanence of a revelation". John Barth's essays "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment" use Borges as exemplar of postmodernist writing that understands its constant reworking of, and therefore need of, the past. Fiction is inexhaustible because perspectives are continually shifting.

25 Weisenburger notes that Orpheus looks back at his wife although he is forbidden to do so, thus dooming himself. "So will Slothrop." he says, and this is true in many respects, but dependent on how we define Slothrop's final status. Eddins makes a case for what he calls "Orphic naturalism" in Slothrop and in GR as a whole: this is the counterforce to

the technological totalization process. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal directly with Orphic potential in Slothrop, although the "Orpheus Puts Down His Harp" section invites such a reading.

26 William Vesterman, "Pynchon's Poetry", in Twentieth Century Literature 21, May 1975, 219.

27 Thomas Moore, The Style of Connectedness (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 292.

28 Hite, p. 157.

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