

Tribhuvan University

**Parody on Western Discourse of Rationality in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's*
*Rainbow***

**A thesis submitted to the Central Department of English in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Rikhi Ram Sharma has completed his thesis entitled “Parody on Western Discourse of Rationality in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from May 2008 (A.D.) to April 2009 (A.D.). I, hereby, recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled “Parody on Western Discourse of Rationality in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Rikhi Ram Sharma, has been approved by the undersigned members of research committee.

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Abstract

Thomas Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* presents, nightmare of hyper-technological society, made possible by the discourse of calculation and control, mechanical certainty, along with the development of science and technology that has gone out of human control. The science and technology has been capitalized, individual has become perpetual victim of external observation and manipulation of outer forces; and individual has been reduced to a functional receptacle unit of work process through the interlocking of corporations, and unions. Pynchon at the same time opposes the science and technology by presenting characters inside and outside the dynamic cultural politics of dominant social discourses. *Gravity's Rainbow* is rereading, ironic rethinking and the interpretation of the past in a deconstructive effort to revise or reread the past in paradoxical way that simultaneously affirms and challenges historical representation. It focuses on the differences and ex-centricity, interest on the hybrid, the heterogeneous, and local, and an interrogative and deconstructive mode of analysis. It seeks to assert difference, not to homogeneous ideology. Pynchon declares that the differences are always multiple and provisional. By bringing the intertextual references, historical references, complicit and critical role of central characters to dominant ideology along with their failure, reification of science and its limitations and by recontextualizing them in present postmodern context, Pynchon has clearly undercut the western mode of all aesthetic, cultural politics and mode of thinking, so called rationality.

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I. Capitalization of Science

Pynchon reifies technology, that is, instead of treating it as a body of knowledge which men have developed for satisfying their needs and for dealing with material world, instead of presenting it as complex of relation among men, he has elevated technology into the metaphysical principle standing outside the human control. By capitalizing the technology, by surrounding the rocket, its chief token, with an aura of necessity, he has invested technology with supernatural forces. Any sensible man must agree with Pynchon's own observation that our industrial system, if it continues on its present course, will exhaust the earth. But the surest way to bring that catastrophe about is to believe that it is inevitable, that is dictated by the logic of technology.

Most of the characters, in the *Gravity's Rainbow* engages with the finding a truth behind the every events, either connected with rocket-consequences of developed science, or to accomplish assigned work. Pointsman wants to find out the relationship between Slothrop's erections and the rocket strikes; he wishes to extend his knowledge of the psychological and physical laws which govern the world in order to extend his own ability to survive in it as an individual. Slothrop wants to find out who is following him and later how he is connected to the rocket. His fate suggests the interrelationship of societal man's fate and in order to escape that technology, Slothrop must abandon society. Mexico wants both to maintain his personal life with Jessica and to continue investigating the physical properties of the world through mathematics. His love for Jessica, whatever its chances for survival, is smashed by Pointsman's manipulations – because Pointsman needs Mexico's abilities to divine the shape of the future and places little value on personal salvation. Both Blicero, in his firing of the 00000, and Enzian, in

his quest for and firing of the 00001, are men of destiny who cast aside their personal lives to speed the collapse of world culture.

One of the things Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* does so successfully is to evoke the schizophrenia of modern society and the novel's portrayal of the horrors of the system is more than enough to convince one that something is seriously wrong with the way our society constitutes itself. The corruption of humans and their society is hardly new to fiction but Pynchon manages to present the "underside of our dreams through a series of strategies designed to confuse readers and expose them to the full effects of the virus while parodying the literary aspects of the corruption at the same time" (Hans 267). But this is only half of the problem, its externalized version, and more a symptom of the problem than anything else. The real difficulty is that we believe this myth of the Firm and the Father and make use of it to escape our own complicity in the myth we have created. It is, after all, the Firm's fault, and not our own, that we live in a culture of death. We would do things different, but inasmuch as the Firm has co-opted everything, there is nothing we can do. Maybe we think we can escape our complicity because our own view is not quite so paranoid as to generate a Firm, but this changes nothing. It is merely an indication of our unwillingness to accept the full consequences of the view we have. We "may blame the state of the world on the Oil Companies, the government or the bureaucrats, but the result is the same, a view of the world in which all of its problems find their source in something outside us" (277). That choice obviates the need for to investigate our own premises of action, and this is the spot of vulnerability upon which Pynchon plays throughout the novel.

By his choice of period and setting Pynchon identifies one crucial historical influence. *Gravity's Rainbow* entirely takes place during the later months and

immediate aftermath of World War II, with extensive flashback to the thirties and the earlier years of war. This was an era in which paranoia was erected into state policy: the Nazi campaign against the Jews, Stalin's purges, the American incarceration of the Orientals, the early salvos of the Cold War. Rationing, conscription, mobilization of the sources- all the devices for regimenting civilian population during the war accelerated the movement towards our present administrated society. Techniques of "human engineering" and "behavior modification" were developed at that time, and have subsequently proved effective in selling us everything from soap to president. In short, the era of the war, and particularly immediate aftermath in German Zone, offers a heyday for Pynchon's conspiratorial imagination. His entropic vision gets "plausibility in the context of the thirty million war-dead" (Sanders 189). Paranoia offers the ideally suited hypothesis that the world is organized into a conspiracy, governed by the shadowing figure whose power approaches omniscience and omnipresence, and whose manipulation of the history may be detected in every chance gesture of their servants. It substitutes for the divine plan a demonic one, viewed in this perspective, paranoia is the "last retreat of the puritan imagination" (178).

The development of science and technology by human being, it neither does liberates the human from ignorance nor leads to advance society but inversely it has lead to such a bizarre situation no one can control it. The war was precisely such a time, Pynchon's characters wander about within the moral and political anarchy of the Zone, trying to build for themselves private tents of belief to shelter them from the encroaching night. The "displaced persons who populate the Zone epitomize the predicament of all the Pynchon's characters" (189). They are all the marginal social types.

Several of the war's more ominous technical and political developments have become prominent features of our own society. The scale of organization, whether business or government or labor, has increasingly, dwarfing the individual: through mass media and through electric surveillance devices, the individual has become increasingly subject to the external observation and manipulation, power has become at once more ruthlessly centralized, through the interlocking of corporations and unions and governments, and more remote mysterious secret; automation has tended to reduce the individual to a functional, replaceable unit in the work process, the imperatives of consumption economy have generated an array of products which bears no relation to human needs.

Tyrone Slothrop, from infancy onward, has in fact, been manipulated by the external forces, first by the scientist Laszlo Jamf, subsequently by the Pavlovian Pointsman and finally, in the anarchic Germany at the close of World War II, by the host of the operators ranging from expatriate African to Soviet agent to black marketers. He is perpetual victim of other's plot. He is situated far from the center of his respective conspiracies, real or imagined, as a puritan from his god, and consequently must piece together the most obscure hints and petty revelation to make any sense of the plot at all. "Those like a Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic, flashes, omen, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies all dancing on the ground of terror, contradiction absurdity" (Pynchon 582). Thus it is clear that, even engaging in science and technology, he becomes only a puppet of different firm. Even he lost his sense and reasoning capacity.

Slothrop's paranoia appears in various guises, ranging from his suspicion that the rocket bombs falling on London have his name written on them to his fantasy that

he is intended victim of father conspiracy: wishing to kill his son, the child denies this wish, projecting it onto the father himself, so that the father is believed to desire to the death of son's hatred. Pynchon argues that:

There is villain here, serious death. It is this typical American teenager's own father, trying to after episode to episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it. So far he is manage to escape his father's daily little death plots- but nobody has said he has no keep escaping. (674)

First, Slothrop actually has been the victim of a father conspiracy, his father volunteered him as an infant subject for psychological experiment conducted by Laszlo Jamf- a trauma, from which Slothrop never fully recovered and a manipulative enterprise from which he has never escaped. In another way, Piontsman subsequently has taken the place of father, once again subjecting him to experimentation. Thus, Pynchon explains to us that Slothrop fears a father conspiracy because he has been the victim of one, he fears castration because his experimental controllers wish to castrate him.

Later entering the Zone of postwar Germany where conspiracies proliferate with the anarchic splendor, he searches for hidden meaning in every thing. He still hears the voices clamoring through the data of his world, but no longer knows whence they come, having lost "the luminous certainty of god in them in every turn of leaf" (281), he hunts for conspiracies.

Pynchon asks us to reject the conventional definition of history that failed to consider the preterite, a marginalized group. Our society has been improved by cause and effect history or a parade of prominent historical figures or even by the progress of modern man, "human nature and the interaction of individual to society are the

fundamental of elements of history, in any time and place. In any age love and the need to connect are the simple intuitions that are the tests of reality” (Swartzlander 143).

A “screaming comes across in the sky” (1), as *Gravity’s Rainbow* opens with this line, something is approaching towards the London, whatever is coming, it is not quite a scream, nor it is necessary a screaming person or screaming rocket, it is rather a screaming, a bodily expression of the panic so disembodied that it only hints at the cause beyond itself. The rocket is seen as purely a symbol and agent of death, of man’s death – wish incarnated by his deadly technology. The title, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, is, then, ironic: God’s promise which the rainbow represents is merely never again to destroy the world by flood, and the rocket represents the fire next time. The only possible “transcendence” or “illumination” which can occur to characters in such a novel would be a vision of death; we readers, therefore, see Blicero largely as Pynchon’s spokesman

The war is Pynchon’s representative manifestation of or metaphor for the nature of modern Western technocratic civilization. The “highest” achievement of the civilization is the production of the V-2 (or A-4) rocket which has given divine attributes as a sort of negative savior, the perfecter and consummator of Western man’s love of death. Rocket strikes, actual and anticipated, are described in terms now associated with nuclear explosions as well as the both blessings and punishments from what we have developed as an instrument to control life and natural forces- science and technology.

Pynchon has presented a particular social condition- the experience of the anomic, manipulated, paranoid individual within advanced industrial society- as if it were the human condition. He treats the Zone as the world, displaced person as everyman. He interprets an era of decadence in particular form of the society as proof

that we are “doomed to fall away from the human, that we are tugged along in a cosmic tide of death. It is this leap from historical observation to metaphysical one” (191).

What is important of all these internalized challenges to humanism is the interrogating of the notion of consensus. Whatever the narratives or system that once allowed us to think we could unproblematically and universally defined public agreement have now been questioned by the acknowledgement of differences-in theory and in artistic practices. The interrogation of limit of the universal consensus has contributed to the crisis of legitimization of knowledge. It has certainly meant a rethinking and putting into question of the bases of our “western mode of thinking”. “Postmodern exploits but undermines such staples of our humanist tradition as the coherent subject and accessible historical reference (McHugh 46) and this may be what is irritating about it for liberal humanist and anti-postmodernist. “Postmodernism’s questioning of humanistic notion of history also involves challenge to its implied notion of subjectivity along with the development of dismal science and technology, and human rationality” (Hume 226).

II. Parody

Definition of Parody

Parody is a term derived from Greek word 'parodia' which was narrative poem, imitating the style and prosody of epics but treating light, satirical or mock-heroic subjects. The original Greek word has sometimes been taken to mean counter-song, an imitation that sets against the original. In precise word parody can be defined as a piece of writing, speech etc. which imitates the style of an author, speaker often in exaggerated way.

In general, parody refers to the imitative use of words, style of particular writer or school of writers, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way to make them ridiculous. Parody can be achieved through two distinct ways: imitating use of words, attitude and ideas of original author and whole literary perception using these in an inappropriate style and another way is imitating style of original author for trivial or inappropriate subject for deflate the original one. M. H. Abrahams views on parody in his *Glossary of literary terms* "parody imitates the serious manner and characteristic feature of a particular literary work or a typical stylistic and other feature of serious literary genre and deflates the original by applying the imitation to lowly or comically inappropriate subject" (Abrams 26).

The first recorded usage of the word parody occurs in Aristotle and Aristophanes, who parodied the dramatic style of the Aeschylus and Euripides for comic purposes of effects. The manner of the "style of heroic poetry is adopted for comic purposes to trivial subject matters, this style of writing is unequivocally known as "parodia" in Greek discussion"(42 Dentith).

Parody can be achieved through exaggerating certain traits of original work. It is a kind of satirical mimicry. In the sense, it tries to imitate certain traits but in living in-between and creates neither original nor another version of identity. It shows only gaps between the original ones and imitative ones to ridicule the contemporary human foibles and to expose so called “human rationality,” so, here is subtle difference between original one and imitated version of reality. There should be subtle balance between the supposed the original one and its deliberate distortion of it.

Parodies may span whole text or part of any part of that text, providing they are distinctive of the general style. Parody may target single text, or entire part of the text, general convention of the literary period, way of thinking of author and narrative techniques and historical referentiality.

Postmodern Parody

Parody is a component of postmodernism, parody, is often called “an ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation or intertextuality, is usually considered to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders” (Hutcheon 89). Postmodern parody is rereading, ironic rethinking of the past and it interprets as a deconstructive effort to revise or reread the past in paradoxical way that simultaneously affirms and challenges historical representations. There are similar affinities between parody and postmodernism and it has particularly important feature of postmodern narrative for the reason that parody resists “singularity.” All parodic narratives are doubled narratives; there is story and also activity that undermines that story.

Parody by using innovative doubled narrative structure that questions and at the same time answers, foregrounds the conflict between “truths and lies,” plays with the different perception of truths and tension also occurs due to the distance of action,

distance of the time/ space and context. Through the doubled process of installing and ironic subverting, parody signals how “present representation came from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and different” (89).

Postmodern parodic novels put into question that entire series of interconnected concepts that have come to be associated with what we conventionally label as liberal humanism: autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authenticity, unity, totalizing, system, universalization, center, continuity, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin and so on. Such novel inscribes then undercuts –in typical postmodern way.

Thus, past can be observed through the lens of the present and present from the past. Parody installs historical context as a significant and even determining but doing so, it problematizes the entire notion of historical, ontological and epistemological knowledge and notion of signified, its implication in postmodern literature is to reveal and expose there can be no final or ultimate truth, meaning and if meaning has that can not be signified, essentialized, transcendent, and genuine historicity. Deeds Ermath puts her argument stressing the value of postmodern parody:

In the hands of accomplished artist parody becomes means for reconstructing the world. Parody has a “play” or scope in postmodernism because it undercuts singular narrative and parody itself is playful in the sense that it is a form which pluralizes the possibilities of the play of systems. Postmodern parody is, thus, exercises old tools in the service of new conjugation that surprises and takes on the objectified world of humanism and history, in that process postmodern artist transfigured the classical parody. (227)

In Ermath's definition, parody is an urgent necessity in postmodern period. Postmodern parody is shaped in different model and used for different purposes than classical to modern period to cope with the postmodern condition of life to knowledge. Postmodern parodic form suits to an age which suspects the master narrative. Thus, critics have transfigured the classical and modern concept of parody in broader and richer sense making a parody one of stimuli to destabilize the established knowledge in its contemporary usage.

Parodic imitation is not conventional type of Platonic mimesis. Platonic mimesis is imitation of life and metaphysical reality. Imitation of life is modeled reality and that imitation leads to second false reality that is to a process stepping back from the reality but parodic imitation does not cause a removal from the reality but helps us to approach multiplicity of so called reality.

Parody is, somehow, related to past, that's why some think that it has similar affinity with nostalgic art. Reminiscence of the past is nostalgic art and it has not "doubled -voiced" narrative. Nostalgia denotes evasion of present, absence of present, going back to remote past of bygone days through memory, idealization of past, fanaticizing it and recovery of the past as an Edenic, utopian and if these features are pertained under the nostalgic art then certainly parody is not nostalgia. Parody is return to the past nostalgia in its form but critical, dialectical, revisiting of the past forms content, context and hidden motives of subject formation. "Parodic reprise of the past is not nostalgic but it is always critical" (89). It is fundamentally in its "ironic and critical not nostalgic or antiquarian to its relation to the past" (39). In opposition to nostalgia, parody is rethinking of past history, literary conventions, in new ways.

Postmodern artists and theorists argue for a return to a collective historical and to the convention of the art this is not nostalgic return to humanistic universal history, it can't be, because postmodern art is considered not as the product of original genius or even of individual artisan activity but as set of operations foregrounded in the field of signifying practices, which have past as well as present a public as well as personal dimension. Parody goes to past to make us look to past from the acknowledged distance of the present, a distance which inevitably conditions our ability to know the past.

Parody is marked by retuning to past history and it does indeed to “problematize the entire notion of historical knowledge” (45). Linda Hutcheon’s idea of reinstalling the past history is not uncritical, imitative use but problematization of entire humanist notions of certainties and essence, and it does not mean denial or death of total history but it ask us to rethink and critique our notion of history, literary convention, historical knowledge, certainties, notion of singularity and signified as a whole.

Parodist leaves the present but we can not relate it to transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is an intellectual mode oppose to rigid rationalism, materialism and commercialization, artists turned away from modern society, getting and spending to the scenes and objects of natural world which were regarded both as physical facts and as correspondence to aspect of human spirit. That is opposed by parody because parody does not evade the present context, society, culture and world as a whole. Parody “requires historical context to interrogate the present as well as past through its critical irony” (45). Thus, parody is not transcendentalism which is evasion of society and culture.

Traditionally parody is charged as only imitation of already “modeled” reality and 18th century notion of wit and ridicule but they lack the keen insight what parody

can perform in field of cultural and historical transformation in wide range of form and intents. Jamison argues parody is “postmodern ironic citation,” “pastiche,” or “empty parody” (Jamison 125) assuming that only unique style can be parodied and novelty and individuality is impossible today. Post modern parody does not disregard context of past representation as Jamison thought but it uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated from the past today by the time and subsequent history of those past representation that is ironic difference and there is also continuum of history. It is a present of the past and same time absent of the past. It is play of past and present and absent and present of past history and knowledge.

Jamison is charged with he has no keen insight to be familiar with the postmodern parody. He compares postmodern parody with pastiche. Pastiche is a sort of copying or appropriation of the forms and style of the other literature. Thus it has a strong resemblance to parody where a parodist writes a version of well known work in order to parody the original one. Jamison regards parody as “symptom of the age” and has not deconstructive, reflexive and cultural value. He further says:

Under postmodernism parody cease to be potent cultural force, it finds itself without vocation, whilst that strong new thing that pastiche slowly comes to take its place [. . .] Pastiche is a parody emptied out of content: it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without any parody’s ulterior motives, imputed of the satiric impulses devoid of laughter [. . .] pastiche is, thus blank parody a statue with blind eyeballs. (125)

Jamison's idea about relegation of postmodern parody from historical context and “empty parody” as pastiche but Linda Hutcheon by opposing and giving distinct definition between parody and pastiche. She says parody is not mere pastiche, mere

quotation of images of intertextuality, and a “denaturalizing” form of knowledge in the history cultural of representation. Parody should not be seen period limited definition as Jamison said postmodern parody is “symptom of age” rather postmodern parody is not a-historical, or di-historicising but it questions how present representation came from the past one and how it is continuity of the past and different that from past.

Postmodern parody is focus point in “difference and ex-centricity, interest on the hybrid, the heterogeneous, and local, and an interrogative and deconstructive mode of analysis” (166). It seeks to assert difference, not to homogeneous ideology. Postmodern differences are always multiple and provisional. It is always aware of difference, difference which is present within any grouping and difference defined by contextualization or positing in relation to plural others.

The unresolved postmodern contradiction foregrounds the process of meaning making in the production and reception of the art but also in broader discursive term it foregrounds how we make historical "facts" out of brute "events" of the past or more generally how our various sign systems grant meaning to our experience. History does not exist without text, but it's accessibility to us now only through textuality.

The question of ideology's relation to subjectivity is central to postmodern parody, where modernist parody investigated the grounding of experience in the self, “its focus was in self seeking integration amid the fragmentations” (104). In another word its focus on the subjectivity was still within the humanistic dominant framework, obsessive search for wholeness and integration itself, is the problem of post modern parody. It questions, challenges, and brings the double coded politics because of double-ness of postmodern discourse. Postmodern works both to “underline and undermine the notion of coherent self-sufficient subject as a source of meaning or

action” (104). About the doubleness of postmodern discourse Elizabeth Deeds puts her argument as:

To the modern empiricist mind, [. . .] the term parody could seem to modernity to imply little more than faintly unsavory undercut a weak form of humor or joking, and a shallow form of satire lacking the cultural agreement that enables satirist’s wit and edge. In the discourse of modernity, then parody’s double capability lacks opportunity. (227)

Parody can be seen as having a dual tendency as both conservative and revolutionary. It is apt mode of postmodernism, which paradoxically conservative installing and the radical "subverting" the installed convention in ironic way. Many postmodern novels use parody similarly to challenge singular narrativity, to blur the boundaries between fiction and history, fact and fiction, to acknowledge the politics, for evasion of pure aesthetic representations. Postmodern parody is both “demonstratively critical and constructively creative, and paradoxically making us aware of both limits and power of representation in any medium” (94). Post modern parodic texts are varieties of images, pictures, quotations from different sources but not of them seem too original and they are blended and clashed each other. Thus postmodern text does not cite just work of specific artist but also convention and myth of art as an expression and point to the “politics of particular view of representation” (95).

Fiction receives more attention in Hutcheon’s discussion of “historiography metafiction” a key concept, she introduced in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* and *politics of Postmodernism*. Hutcheon says “narrative representation- fictive or historical -comes under parodic subversive scrutiny in paradoxical postmodern form I would like call it historiographical metafiction” (14). Historiographical- metafiction incorporates the

contradiction that is its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as a human construct, and is made for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and content of the past. The inherent contradiction of historiographical metafiction that it always works within a convention in order to subvert them. The enunciative situation of discursive context of the text, the traditionally verifying third person past tense voice of history and realism, is both installed and undercut by shifting different narrative voices and different tenses.

Postmodern historiographical metafiction with due representation from all classes and historical personage also appears within the fiction. It is, thus, mixing of the historical and fictive and this tampering with historical so called “fact” of the created history, that parody aims to. The postmodern writing of historiographical metafiction or history and literature, it does so by first “installing and then critically confronting both that grounding process and grounds themselves” (92). The process of the critically examining and analyzing the record of survivals of the past is “historical method and imaginative reconstructive of that process is called historiography” (92). It returns past to confront the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for us in present. It puts into question of the historical knowledge at the same time.

Historiographical metafiction appears to privilege two modes of narration both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity, multiple point of views or overtly controlling narrator. Neither do we find a “subject is confident of his or her ability to know the past with any certainty” (117). Then, it establishes and differentiates dispersive narrative voices that use memory to try to make sense of the past. Historiographical metafiction shows “fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured” (120).

Postmodern intertextuality uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusion and then subverting that power through irony. Intertextuality also challenges the author-text relationship with between reader and the text, one that situate actually no longer be regarded original, if it were; it could have no meaning for its reader.

The use and abuse of the conventional expectation accompanies other form of metafictional paratextuality, such as chapter heading and epigraphs, with the footnotes, forewords and epilogue, these devices in historiographical metafiction move into two direction at once, to “remind us of narrativity as of a primary text and to assert it’s factuality and historicity” (82). Historiographical metafiction can be related to Bertolt Brecht’s alienated effect to the reader like his song in his play. Historical documents, dropped in fiction in different way, have the “potential effect of interrupting any allusions making reader into an aware collaborator, not a passive consumer” (85).

Postmodern historiographical metafiction does its ideological work by questioning not only narrative convention and codes but master-narratives as well. Hence, the detotalizing urges of such metafictional test as Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* in which the narrator Saleem offers his “pickles” version of history with each chapter shaping partially, it's own content by it's form. Here is blurring the history of private and public. As Hutcheon suggests, instead of single unified history and literature postmodern historiographical metafiction offers the “histories (in plural) of the losers as well as winners of the regional and (colonial) as well centrist of the unsung many as well as the much song few [. . .] of women as well as man” (99).

Fissure of Foundation: Grand Narrative and Postmodernism

Everything in this world depends on grounding or foundation. Grounding may be physical, or metaphysical, from very small project to large literary conventions have their own kind of foundation or universal value, such as external empirical world in empiricism, human reason in rationalism, universal human essence in humanism, authenticity, autonomy and utopian apocalyptic hope in modernism, gender, patriarchy and matriarchy in feminism, language in deconstruction, power knowledge and truth in new historicism, fact, universal truth in historicism.

Strong foundation and literary foundation interred from the past and reached its apex developed point in 18th century enlightenment period due to the excessive faith in human rationality and development of science and technology and experts tried to establish universal law and truth by development of these faculty and applying in human praxis. Charles Darwin exploded the long established view of human essence, and god-like image of man as a progeny of an ape and merely puppet of natural causes and effects. Karl Marx also challenged the long established view about ideology and society and literature. He upside downs the material and spiritual relation, alluding that material change creates new spiritual relation, thus ideology is a false consciousness. Frederic Nietzsche's idea "Death of God" is death of the rationality, death of center, death of center of human morality in broad sense loss of signified. Freud's reliance up on the unconscious human psyche is guiding force of human life undercuts long established belief in rationality. Moreover, these contributions of modernist intellectuals were not only cause of loss of long established human foundation but on the other hand they were more obsessed with utopian vision and only art can bring re-order, faith, and universally order. They resided their ideas on particular logo.

Eighteenth century enlightenment philosopher celebrated human reason and scientific thought as an instrument of liberation from the superstition and ignorance inherited from the past to mankind. Habermas was supporter of grand narrative, universal truth and morality that was project. The project must have foundation, process and aim of reaching ultimate aim /meaning /signified. Habermas labored energetically to define project to modernity as if was formulated by the philosopher of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that consist in the “relentless development of objective science of the universalistic foundation of morality and law and of autonomous art all in accord with their immanent logic” (291). Patrician of Enlightenment could still entertain extravagant expectation that art and science would not “merely promote and control of the forces of nature but also would promote further understanding of self and world progress of morality, justice in social institutions and even human happiness” (291).

Postmodern differs from modernism not only it's humanistic contradiction but also refuses to posit any structure or what leotard calls “master-narrative” such as art or myth. For leotard, postmodernism is characterized by “exactly incredulity towards master or meta-narrative” (303).

Postmodernism is overturning or erosion of “master-narratives.” People say stories about themselves and about world, and out of these stories certain stories- Christianity for instance or a story of progress of science and rationality-are meta-narratives-stories about stories, that shape people’s sense of themselves and world and whole history is a part of grand-narratives the working out of God’s plan. Everything fits into this story, everything has its place. The same is true of the enlightenment project of rationality, which enabled people to believe that science and reason would make the world an increasingly better place in which we live.

Postmodernism is identified with decentering of particular notion of individual as a unique and autonomous, and then both humanistic and capitalistic notion of selfhood or subject will necessarily be called into question. Similarly, postmodern parody "contests our humanistic notion of artistic originality and uniqueness, and our capitalistic notion of ownership and property (89). With parody -as with any form of reproduction-the notion of original rare, single, and valuable is called in to question. Thus, "postmodern parody rejects the universal "cogito" and bourgeoisie subjectivity" (225).

One of the main features that distinguishes postmodernism from modernism is fact that, "it takes the form of self- contradictory, self- undermining statement" (1). It is rather "like saying something and whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said" (1). Postmodernism is a "paradoxical critique of complicity and critique, or reflexivity and historicity that once inscribe and subverts the convention and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth century western world" (11).

Postmodernism is a cultural phenomena. It has certainly meant rethinking of and putting a question on the bases of our western mode of thinking what we label as signified, whether it oppose the whole western rationality or "erosion of master narrative" or "cultural logic of late capitalism" all go against western mode of discourse or more precisely mode of thinking. Jean Francois Lyotard puts his word regarding to postmodernism "let us wage a war on totality: let us be witness to the unrepresentable: let us activate the difference and save the honor of the name" (314). Postmodernism is discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentering, indeterminacy and anti-totalization. It gives equal value to different entities and at same time does not.

Thus, postmodernism is a contradictory phenomena that uses something and abuses, installs and subvert the very concept originality it challenges, be it in architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, philosophy, aesthetic theory as postmodern parody does. Linda Hutcheon puts her argument about postmodernism. Postmodernism is the process of making product. It is absence of presence. It is dispersal that needs centering in order to be master code. In other words the postmodern partakes of logic of “both/and not one of either/or” (378).

Function of Parody

The theories and practices of post modern parody has also shown that parody is very complex literary device which can be used more than imitation, ridicule a particular text, particular manner of literary convention; but also opened up the new possibility of fresh look at every subject from negative to positive.

To mention most obvious function of parody, either ancient or modern or postmodern, the use of parody is used for ridicule opposing groups destroying its aesthetic system and comic effect used to be regarded as constituting the core of the salient feature of parody .It ridicules another text or genre with comic elements.

In addition to ridiculing another text and literary genre, parodies, from ancient times to onward has tended to ironize and criticize particular works and prevailing aesthetic practices, traditional and style. In doing so, parody function as in important medium of criticism of literary conventions, norms and values. To identify the function of parody entirely with the comic and ridiculing effect of the device is to missing the significant cultural function that postmodern parody can perform.

Postmodern parody like satire often fulfills as important function as a didactic medium aimed at criticizing the current political, social, and cultural state of affairs.

Parody faintly and indirectly comment upon the events, and cultural development. It chains those events merely to reflect and evoke. In doing so, parody can perform a normative and political function because it implicitly propagates ideologically charged view of the present. Parody is a postmodern device use to observe on the implicitly fragmentation, discontinuity, and increasing level of entropy that is characteristic of life in postmodern condition. But there is distinction between parody and satire in general. Parody may be critical of its target but it differs from the satire that the satire does not need to restrict itself to transformation of already existing literary and artistic materials.

Parody which has generally come to fore in postmodern literature derives from its metafictional uses. Being constructed in terms of an inbuilt aesthetic discourse with the literary tradition, postmodern parody in the post war American fiction, can be seen as a modes, which functions as a means self-conscious interrogation to literary convention and aesthetic convention which especially understood as a literary modes of realism and high modernism. The parody can be used as a form of metafiction, as it acting as a commentary upon the literary work. It also able to be used as a metafiction and it is this application of parody, which will be seen to have been concentrated up as many postmodern analysis of parody.

Another function of parody is, by conducting a double-coded dialogue between present and cultural past, as a means of highlighting the complex language and inventing of cultural memory. In doing so, it can became central to the formation and maintenance of the collective identifies. This kind of function is very obvious, for instance in postmodern novel, which parodically integrates wide range of textualized traces and the cultural memory of the past and self-consciously explores the nature of genesis and possible meaning of the past and interrogates the notion of singularity.

Parody as a form of “ironic representation, is doubled coded in political terms: it both legitimatizes and subverts that which it parodies” (99). Parody helps us to challenge such conventions and authorities. Postmodern parody becomes a “way out for ironically revisiting to the past of both history and art in postmodern parodic novel” (99). The double coding forms of aesthetic practices and theory both install and subvert the prevailing normative and ideological discourses. They are “both critical and complicitous, outside and inside, to the dominant discourses of the society” (121). Double coded politics is always aware of difference, resistance and reaction that helps us to perpetually question the singularity.

A good example of doubled coded discourse is “historiographical metafiction”. The intertexts of the history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the “world” and literature. At first glance it “would appear that it is only its constant ironic signaling of difference at the heart of similarity that distinguishes postmodern parody from medieval and renaissance imitation” (124).

Postmodern parody makes its paradoxical doubleness of both continuity and change, both authority and transgression. In parody we find blending of dependence and detachment from their predecessors in literary convention, historical representation of past and aesthetic judgment as whole. Parody has “acquired the reputation of being the postmodern art form par-excellence because its double-coded structure which is suited to the effect such blending” (Hofele 38).

While discussing about function of parody, has emerged from recent theoretical consideration, is it’s essential function of “self-reflexivity,” it’s capacity to reflect critically back itself, not merely it’s target text. Self-reflexive, a term applied to literary works that openly reflects upon their own processes of artful composition. Such self-

referentiality is frequently found in postmodern works of fiction that repeatedly refer to their own fictional status. Parody possesses the self-reflexive aspect, because of the “dual function of the parodist as a reader (of the parodied work) and the author (of the parody)” (Mannosh 113). Reflexivity is inherent in the definition of parody as a comical retelling and transformation of another text and is demanded by the form itself. It provides new vision of old story, but can not legitimately propose itself as a definite one. This kind of self reflexive function does not allow to parody to become authoritative, and acknowledges the "open-ended" quality of parody and attributes to the important function to show the process of literary creation to be unfinished and open for further development. Parody must even allow for a critique of itself such as it has performed on the original.

The self reflexive parody, thus has guaranteed both critical and creative dimension. The parody not only rewrites another work. But also suggest another one within itself, reminding the reader of the relativism of any work of art. Parodic reflexivity commonly manifest as a potential work, second it may allude to others examples of its story, thus singling to the reader that it is merely on among many possible ones.

Post modern parody functions as the deconstructive tool to subvert singularity, meaning, signified, literary convention and whole human knowledge as a whole. To subvert the previous literary and aesthetic convention, parody goes to the past context and brings it in the present context. So, it is re-contextualization of the past. Postmodern parody ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the convention and presupposition it appears to challenge. Postmodernism’s initial

concern is to denaturalize some of the dominant feature of our way of life, to point out that those entities that, we unthinkingly experience as a nature.

Postmodern parody is contesting of the unified and coherent subject is more generally questioning of the any totalizing or homogenizing system. The center no longer completely holds. From the decentered perspective, the margin and “ex-centric” take on new significance in the light of implied that our culture is not really the monolithic for instance; western, white, male, we might have assumed. The concept of alienated “otherness” based on binary opposition gives away, differences are asserted, not centralized sameness but a decentralized community. Postmodern parody is both “demonstratively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both its limits and power of representation – in any medium” (94).

Postmodern parodic strategies often used by “feminist artists to point to history and historical power of those cultural representations while contextualizing both such a way to deconstruct” (98) them. And it has certainly has become most popular and effective strategy of other ex-centric- of blacks, ethics, gays, and postcolonial artists - trying to come terms with and to respond critically and creatively. These "ex-centric" groups may use postmodern strategies of parodic inscription and subversion in order to initiate the deconstructive first step by step but they do not stop there, and create parallel version of original, which challenges the universal "maleness" of man and “womeness” of women, and certainly they use parody to challenge the European, male, white, heterosexuality to implicate and yet to critique, is distinctly paradoxical and postmodernist way” (16). Postmodernist use of parody is against modernist urge about closure, distance, artistic autonomy and set out to uncover and deconstruct apolitical nature of representation. Modernist’s pretension of artistic independence has been

further subverted by the demonstration of necessarily intertextual nature of the production of meaning by postmodern parody.

Postmodern parodies, far from being only merely deconstructive, serve a reconstructive purpose and fulfill creative function, in that way they transform literary genre and cultural and historical background and help to generate new ones. It were Russian formalists, who were first to argue that parody was able to contribute to the renewal of the literary forms and genres. Mikhail Bakhtin has altered us to the possible functions and creative power of parody and stresses the important role that parody has played in the evolution of novel. Literary parody of dominant -novel types “plays large role in the history of European novel. One could even say that the most important novelistic models and - novel types arose precisely during this parodic destruction of preceding novelistic world” (Nunning 131).

By linking the comic and metafictional potential of the form postmodern parody has opened up new, positive and new complex function, thereby demonstrating that parody is not simply crisis and deconstruction of language but a major form of literary device, a major form of creative play and artistic joyously experimental renewal art. By engaging in an intertextual dialogue with the literary tradition and by commenting upon earlier works outworn literary conventions. Post modern parody “serves to shape aesthetic norms, to contribute to renewal of the form and to generate new and more often than hybrid genre” (131).

The creative power of postmodern parody is by no means limited to the generation of new genre or forms, however but extends to epistemological function of opening up new “way of world making, the exhaustion of the specific forms prevents static or fixation as the parodist forces forms to generate correspondence new level of

perception – hence new epistemological realities” (132). From the formalist point of view the active and constructive role that postmodern parody has come to play both as an agent of change in literary evolution and in terms of its epistemological potential to offer the new perception about the realities.

From the aforementioned statements and definitions by different philosophers and critics, postmodern parody is part of postmodernism. It is textual imitation to cultural past, literary convention to historical referentiality, to show the multiplicity, disorder, inconsistencies and deconstruct the western mode of thinking, to blur the binary opposition between fictionality and historical so-called “fact” and deconstruct the whole western discourse of “metaphysics”. Within the framework of these postmodern parodic deconstructive aspects, the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* will be interpreted and analyzed to show how it itself is a parodic text and how it parodies the western discourse, and mode of thinking.

III. Parodic Rereading of Western Discourse of Rationality

Thomas Pynchon does clearly undermine literary conventions such as plot and characters. If one subscribes to traditional summary and concentrates on story line that seems to hold most of the action together, the *Gravity's Rainbow* may be said to deal with an American soldier Tyrone Slothrop, who realizes after awhile that there might be a connection between his erection and the approach of the v-2 rocket, only to be "scattered" near the end of the novel, he travels across the occupied Germany (the Zone) to discover the secret of rocket and it's connection to his penis. The final part of the book moves the story to early 1970s San Francisco, where on the last page, a bomb, possibly a modern version of the two special rockets, many of the characters concerned with in 1944-45, seems to poised just above a movie theatre. This minimal nod towards the summary already suggests some of the indeterminacies that trouble the reading experience, and these in turn point to the essential metafictional aspect of the *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Pynchon hybridizes both the relationship between his parody and target text, and the system he constructs in the text of parody and target text. Parody may target single text, or entire part of the text, general convention of the literary period, way of thinking of author and narrative techniques and historical referentiality as well. In order to disrupt the connection between parody and target text, Pynchon at the start of western parody confronts one of the target's elements with the western generic status, and thus creates what might be called metafictional parody. Pynchon turns the well known theme of loneliness of the American frontier, into a numerical rule, which undermines the typicality of the scene; his narrator presents Crutchfield as not archetypical and thus

problematizes the straightforward application of the standard code. This does not render either the target or the incongruities totally proceedings. This metafictional onset of parody distances the reader and perhaps one could even regard it as an immediate invitation to see beyond the mere fun that Pynchon will poke at the target. Pynchon subtly introduces other registers and vocabularies, which of course also results in incongruities with respect to the standard western; he continuously calls his “one of each of everything” (68) rule into question and eventually drops the fun for an impressive holocaust narration.

The first of these aspects concerns the parallel between the protagonist and the reader. Pynchon gives his audience a palpable inking of what Slothrop is going to through. Confronted with myriad of details, countless connections between them and host of ambiguities, the reader finds him/herself in an investigative position similar to that of searching protagonist. The distance resulting from an insight onto this parallel may either lead to complete surrender and thus confirm the analogy between the readers and eventually frustrated protagonist or triggers on extra interpretive effort. In any case, it makes the reader very aware of the book as a task to be completed and thus at the very least undercuts it’s problematic consumption as a historical representations.

The second metafictional aspect of the *Gravity’s Rainbow* relates to the fact that it is a variable cornucopia of references to existing texts, a term with which the whole spectrum from single publication such a specific poem to general form such as a scientific writings, or the epic. Pynchon considerably hinders the reader’s interpretive work by evoking a great number of literary and non-literary discourse types, whose intentional combination may provide the best indication of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* impressive self –consciousness. The list of the targets in *Gravity’s Rainbow* which run

the gamut from the specific authors and of their works to more general materials such as the epic quest and even the totalizing tendency of all discourse to create system and structures as postmodern parody does.

By involving its reader in the experience it narrates, *Gravity's Rainbow* is a postmodern novel in the sense that it recreates the experience of postmodernity. Its self-reflexivity focuses its reader on a world of experience already narrated by the “decentered and indeterminate profusion of information, images, stories, yet a world still dominated by a discredited white male discourse” (24). It also reminds its readers that reading like film going, is a cultural activity, and thus it implicates readers in the “critique and complicity dynamic of cultural politics” (24).

On the side of detailed targets, Slothrop is as a parodic version of Rilke's Orpheus. Slothrop's disintegration is explicitly associated with Rilke's poet-singer through the direct quote the last poem in the *Sonette an Orpheus*- and to list comical incongruities between American lieutenant and his modernist model. Their main difference stands the human condition whereas Slothrop does not have a clue.

Pynchon and Rilke share one common theme to the several Rilkean Sonnets that deals with airplane flight or with the technology general. Pynchon's obvious connections to Rilke's are important to redemptive vision. Not only he has infused his narrative with fragments of Rilkean poetry but also has “clearly drawn Slothrop as an Orpheus figure, less awesome, sullied and suitably bumbling, given the state of our world” (Chambers 272).

The falling object might likewise be a “celestial body, a larger and usually and more destructive one” (Arich-Gerz 231). The image of the celestial body of the rider is invoked by Pynchon; obviously, the reason for this correspondence is that *Gravity's*

Rainbow shares a common intertextual reference point in the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, the outstanding German lyricist of the 1920s, in the *Sonnets of Orpheus*, Rilke links one of the “major topoi of his poetry, the yearning of transformation, with the constellation of new star” (231) named “Rider,” in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, it is the sinister Nazi officer Weissenmann, a fervent Rilke reader, who seeks and in the end apparently indeed achieves this kind of transformation at the rocket’s peak point .

In the Orpheus myth, although Orpheus has been torn to pieces, his head rests in cave, where it sings day and night until God Apollo himself asks to be silence, taking the lyre to the Heaven to become the constellation. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Slothrop lays the harp aside just before the rocket launch.

Pynchon again in his book repeatedly touches on the question of parody succinctly and its target plays with Joseph Conrad’s “solemn, guilt-haunted equations between European imperialism and evil plunge out of rational civilized consciousness” (177). The passage foregrounds in the novel, which starts “colonies are the outhouses of European soul where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his shit” (317), that contributes to the novels motive insistence on the darkness, and thus functions independently of their target, but the explicit connection with Conrad, who sets up a neat distinction between North and the South.

Pynchon’s purpose of use of parody in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is “the novel’s satirical project” (Coward 6), which primarily originates in the subversive potentials presented by the welter of language and text types. The precise and general example of the “satiric inversion” (6) to parodic incongruity, to mention some of them, the cowboy’s lyrics that Pynchon parodies during the famous trip down the toilet of Slothrop, “down this toilet they say you are flushin- won’t chew light up and set for a

spell? Cause the toilet it dint going nowhar, and shit hereabout shore is swell” (68). A whole list of discourse type including scientific writing, travel handbooks and letters are playfully manipulated by Pynchon.

Slothrop’s journey can be seen as a “parody quest” and demonstrates how it differs both with regard to content and form, from traditional epic trek, and also singles out, Milton’s *Paradise lost* as a reference point for Pynchon’s “contemporary hell” (Krafft 58), parody both as a sign of the collapse of values and as a comic compensation for negative portrayal of contemporary reality.

The name of Pynchon’s [counter] hero invites readers to recognize in him some versions of the Sophoclean protagonist who undertakes a quest involving his own past and diseased social present. America, like Thebes, suffers pestilence – a plague of racism, economic marginalization, and general neurasthenia. Re-enacting the passion of Oedipus, Pynchon’s character discovers in himself, in his “own blindness and complacency, the source of her country’s troubles” (10).

In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however the ontology of cultural politics is highly uncertain. Slothrop’s paranoid efforts to be free, pure, unvictimized and unvictimizing, along with any such aspects of 60s cultural revolution or post-modern cultural politics, is like the Christianity of Slothrop’s puritan ancestors, who sought to establish God’s shining city on a hill, a heavenly kingdom on earth, a beacon of righteousness to the world. On one hand, it is an inspiring example of redemption, as indeed Slothrop’s example inspires the counter-force. His Christ-like sacrifice of self, his God-like dispersal across the Zone, and his born-again hippie saintliness all work like martyrdom to inspire the preterite cause of transforming the world. On the other hand, rather than being born again, Slothrop is more likely dead. Or, as those in the counter-force

recognize he is incredibly naive, the typical naive American. His dispersal across the Zone and his disappearance from the world of the novel suggest that no such “utopia is possible, which is also the common pronouncement about hippie alternative consciousness” (8).

Slothrop’s trip down to the toilet, as a surreal vision induced by the injection of sodium amytal, the story moves to western setting. Since, it follows two version of “Red Malcolm” i.e. Malcolm X from whose autobiography Pynchon freely borrows in this episode, this location will apparently provide the backdrop for narrative explaining or illustrating these two lines. The narrator immediately produces an incongruity with respect to the western as a target text and through the change also projects an audience that will use generic knowledge to make sense of the scene:

Here now in Cruthfield or crouchfield the westwardman. Not archetypal westwardman but the only, understand, there was only one, there was only one Indian, who ever fought to him. Only one fight one victory and one lose, and one president, and one assassinate and one election, true one of each everything, you have thought, thought of solipsism, and imagined the structure to be populated – one your level- by only terrible one no count on any level. But [. . .] one of each everything’s not so bad. Half an Ark is better than none. (67-68)

Instead of alluding to the temporal development in his evocation of American frontier, he suggests there were literary only few players in this chapter of American history. As if this strange manipulation of the mental picture of the west were not enough, the narrator goes on to imagine a narrator, who takes the new information so seriously that

he conceives of the frontier as a place of loneliness- as essential aspect of the situation of the west, of course but one which the narrator now undermines by relating it to the incongruity he has just parodied. “No count on any other levels” indicates the Herero who fought bravely for the sake of American sovereignty, nationality, and equality. It is a reversive method of parody which enfolds the hidden meaning, and subversive reality.

The sudden approach of Noah’s Ark further complicates the picture. If one takes into account that, this “Ark” provide refuse for all the piety species in the face of catastrophe, havoc disaster, and tries to see how that connects to the frontier, that later will be have to appear as a bloody encounter with no real way out for Native Americans. The quantitative relevance of the parallel hides cynical comments on the events which popular representation is being ridiculized.

Slothrop is a modern Oedipus, searching through his past for the clues that will help him solve the mysteries of the rocket and Imipolex G, both of which, linked to him early in life, will solve the puzzle, give him his identity and confer meaning upon all of his actions, that Slothrop, the Firm and Imipolex G and rocket are so completely connected in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, is a reflection of Pynchon’s paranoia as well as presentation of our own sense that “Slothrop is everyman, at least up to the end and we are eager participation in his search, for like him we are looking for the clues in the book that will confer meaning upon our own action”(271).

Gravity’s Rainbow foregrounds the political question central to debate in the 60s; the counterculture. In the years since its publication, *Gravity’s Rainbow* has become canonized in the academy as a “classical postmodern novel because its disruptive narrative conventions, its indeterminate epistemology and its countercultural

politics, anticipate, indeed influence later theories of postmodernism” (1). More ambitiously, it focuses on the emotion of cultural politics, both a “comedy of radicalized consciousness and tragedy of that radicalized consciousness’s inability to change an unjust political and economic system” (2). It engages the “joy and terror of cultural resistance to social injustice” (2).

Gravity’s Rainbow explores the possibility of and especially the limits confronting each of these efforts to resist social power. In this sense, the novel anticipates another well-known theorist of postmodernism Linda Hutcheon, who elaborated the idea that postmodern cultural politics is both critical of and complicit with the dominant discourse. Thus, Slothrop’s antics expose the working of power, including especially how the White Man’s discourse of Enlightenment leads to concrete institutional practices of subjugation and control. Yet his own cultural politics of resistance to the White Man’s power may be controlled by that power, or, worse, may in fact be a version of that power. Hutchen goes on to argue for a necessary “second-stage operation” for cultural politics. After the postmodern critique of representation has exposed the workings of power in discourse, cultural politics must re- code identity and sexuality to redress power inequities. This is Hutcheon’s claim for discourses of the “Other,” such as certain feminisms, which are able to get outside the Oedipal frame that contains Slothrop and the white guys of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

However, a countercultural politics of woman and minorities that escapes the dynamic of critique and complicity is, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, uncertain at best. No doubt, the countercultural situation is decidedly different for the non-white/nonmale “others” in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. This is most evident with Greta Erdmann, Weissmann’s

female counterpart. Her identity and her pleasure come not from wielding the power and control represented by the Rocket but from being its victim, and unlike Slothrop, whose “victimization” is evidenced by his wielding Rocket power, Greta, Bianca, Enzian, Katje, and a host of other are victims because they are not only “subject to but excluded from Rocket power, yet none of the nonwhite/ nonmale characters do any better than Slothrop in countering “Their” Rocket power” (13).

Here, Slothrop is a figure of the “liberation ontology” of countercultural politics rather than playing “Their” fame, rather than defining himself through the pleasures and paranoia provided by “Their” power. Slothrop retreats into an existence untouched by “Them”. Fragmented, dispersed, disengaged from patriarchal Oedipal processes, he seems to have accomplished the purpose of oppositional cultural politics: an “alternative consciousness, a re-coded identity, (or non-identity) - a new way of being, no longer be “Their” tool either as a victim or victimizer” (8). Thus dropped out, purified, tuned in with his miraculously found harmonica, and in the natural groove, Slothrop exemplifies hippie alternative consciousness.

More specifically, *Gravity’s Rainbow* articulates the affect particular to white male postmodernism. The white male characters of the novel occupy a uniquely conflicted position within the cultural politics of resistance. In one way, these white guys are victims like everyone else of the forces of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism. Yet, unlike everyone else of course, the forces of capitalism and colonialism grant privilege to white guys. Thus the question of cultural politics for white guys in the novel, especially the naïve young Tyrone Slothrop, is how to “resist without this resistance itself becoming a form of complicity and perpetuation” (2). The

white male characters of the counterculture, especially Slothrop, move between the pleasures of a hippie-style resistance to “The Man” and the paranoia that such “resistance” is yet another manifestation of the power of “The Man,” in terms of later debates on postmodernism. In *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* white male characters help clarify the “emotional experience of liberation and its limits proper to postmodern critiques of representation” (2).

Cultural conditioning is a systematic description of the way entire populations of individuals may be both created and controlled by the dissemination of certain cultural forms- an account which begins to erode notion of individual action and motives. The first explanation on the other hand- Prentice’s attribution of control to a mysteries “Them” centers the individual experience. Paradoxically, these explanation conservers the very concept of “individuality and autonomous subjectivity apparently under the threat, and it does so by assigning the most threatened qualities of the subjectivity- intention and coherent action- to social and systematic level”(Melley 714). *Gravity’s Rainbow* only puts into question whether persons are controlled and constructed by the discursive or social system: the “uncanny sense of control is conveyed by all of the novel’s mail, rocket and letters alike, may be only result of the paranoid reading of accidents” (715). Instability of narrator’s position dramatizes central feature of agency panic itself, the difficulty of locating where action originates and who or what controls them. Pynchon’s conspiratorial imagination tends to make our social organization appear even more real by exposing the relation of power which in fact governs our society. Since his leading characters all “hover at the margins of conspiracies, they are condemned to be either victims of enterprises they cannot understand, or impotent by-

standers, ignorant and ignored” (190). What fragments of the plot they do “uncover only make them feel more helpless and more isolated” (190).

Agency appears to have been shuttled, through the channels of desires, from “single person of agent to personified and potentially fantasized agency with vast power of surveillance and control them” (712). The narrative itself appears to offer two competing explanation for this uncanny invasion of privacy. The first is that a dangerous, monolithic “They” may mysteriously gain access to an individual’s private fantasies for regulating purpose. The second is that sexual desire is, in fact, mass-produced by something like Pavlovian conditioning: desire is first given an object when young men are “conditioned to get harden in the presence of generic representation” (23) of female body and then it is driven into the secret, when they are “condition to fed shame” (24). In such regime, “desire is generic but seems nonetheless to be individual because each individual is conditioned in society” (713).

Gravity’s Rainbow’s explores cultural politics within a multi-layered, discontinuous collection of narratives that are often “boisterous, preposterous, and slapstick” (2). The novel always retains concrete historical reality as its referent, but it presents history in “grotesque characterizations and cartoonish allegorical plots punctuated by disruptive digressions and an often-playful mocking narrative voice” (2). Thus, the terrors of history, specifically of the Cold War get displaced by the pleasures of the narrative. The political implication is that culture can transform history; indeed that pleasure can transform history.

Gravity’s Rainbow is in large part organized around the question of countercultural politics. Virtually all the “zany plots and subplots involve the issue of how cultural practice shapes material reality” (2). From fairy tales to pornographic

films, from drug-induced hallucinations to the experience of other people's fantasies, from the lessons of games and toys to the magical spell of the words like "fuck you," the novel explores forms of language, discourse and culturally determined significance.

Gravity's Rainbow documents the cultural construction of the real and natural, but insists that this deal is a betrayal of "us" by "them." The "fundamentally melodramatic and sentimental qualities in all Pynchon's fiction stems from this willfully innocent lament for our corrupted origins" (Kuberski 140). They are also identified with the system. Both critics ignore the way that the grammar of the "They" seals "Us" off from Them, actually perpetuates what Kuberski calls the "passion for discrimination" (146), which misses the point that what is "unlocatable" in Them is Us – it is simply another way that our participation in such passion is repressed or displaced as an Other's passion. But in displacing the "They" within a conspiracy Pynchon introduces romantic teleology in the degraded form of paranoia. However, mocking its presentation, the conspiracy in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is marked elsewhere.

This melodrama features a villain familiar to the 60s and even more similar to postmodernism. The White men are in power or more especially, the discourse that establishes and maintenance the power. On "Their" side Nazi rocket science and its Cold War legacy evoke a familiar version of totalitarian evil, which comes across as originally a cultural phenomenon. The historical determination of a "way of thinking is deeply rooted in the traditions, and in the institutions and the individuals of western patriarchal society" (3). This cultural context is most clear with the Nazi director of the rocket program, Weissmann or "white man," also known as Blicero the "bleacher" who turns everything white. He is dressed out with an assortment of features consistent with the more strident postmodern analyses of the western metaphysical tradition. His idea of

uniting the German people is depicted, especially in the plight of the scientist Franz Pokler, as an “exercise of power achieved through a subjugating discourse of coercion and exclusion” (4). Weissmann’s use of science to foster destruction suggests a “Postmodern critique of the ontological and epistemological violence of the Enlightenment” (4).

Pynchon transforms the counterculture of those years into the Counterforce that he imagines as coming into existence at the end of World War II. Though set in the period just before and just after the end of that war, *Gravity’s Rainbow* moves toward a “calculated violation of its meticulously constructed temporal frame” (6). Having begun with an incoming V-2 in wartime London or, rather, with the sound of the rocket, which has exploded some seconds before the novel’s famous opening line: “A screaming comes across the sky” (1), it concludes with the descent of a more deadly rocket - an ICBM in contemporary Los Angeles.

Describing the birth of consciousness- that which man feel into at the same “time” he feel into history – Pynchon calls it “human consciousness, that poor cripple, that deformed and doomed thing” (720). That characterization seems to serve as a controlling conception at the root of Pynchon’s “vision of the past, the present and the future, and of his vision of imaginable, alternative ones in which the ill effects of such a handicap might have been, or might be reduced” (56).

Gravity’s Rainbow clearly sympathizes with the cultural politics of resistance. But this sympathy takes form not as an affirmation but as an exploration of the experience of cultural politics. *Gravity’s Rainbow*, who seek to decode, dismiss, or otherwise judge what cultural politics is or should be. The novel itself seeks to explore the emotional experience of cultural politics. More specifically, it explores the

“euphoria of the desire for liberation embedded in a cultural discourse that opens real historical possibility and, at the same time, the paranoia of that same desire as it confronts real historical limits” (15). *Gravity’s Rainbow*, to preserve the value of the desire for liberation while at the same time mark its worldly limits.

The allied opposition to the Nazis is similarly governed by a culture of domination. The white guys from Britain and the U. S in particular are in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, driven by a “flattened technological version of the Enlightenment whereby the earth and its people are resources to be used for the purposes of those in power” (4). The real power at “The White Visitation,” he directs the research at PISCES (psychological intelligence schemes for Expediting surrender) by manipulating funding, patients, colleagues and assorted employees. A devotee of Pavlov, he sees the world through a “binary logic of stimulus and response, on and off, cause and effect, the logic of western metaphysics reduced to the precise calculations of machines” (4). Moreover, for Pointsman and PISCES, the science of the psyche, this Enlightenment faith that the order of numbers lies behind not only nature but also human nature, seeks less to explain than “control inside,” thus, Pointsman exemplifies the approach to social control prevalent in capitalist democracies.

At the outset in his fight against “The Man,” Slothrop seeks freedom through a “countercultural politics of rebellion and pleasure, pleasure in rebellion, transgression” (6). Always a bit of a rogue, he becomes explicitly rebellious. Indeed AWOL, when he confirms his paranoid suspicions that he is the object of “Their” experiment for control of the Rocket. Assigned to the Casino Hermann Goerring on the French Riviera, told to study plans of the Rocket, and presented with the beautiful Katje, Slothrop is observed by Pointsman’s crew who seek to unlock the secret of the link between the Rocket and

Slothrop's sexuality. Learning of the experiment, Slothrop takes off at the earliest opportunity, donning a Zoot suit, and heading off into the Zone to escape "Their" control. Soon learning of "Their" earlier patriarchal programming of his infantile sexuality, he decides to discover for himself the truth about his penis and the Rocket.

Thus, Slothrop sets out on a "mock quest for freedom and self-knowledge" (6). It is avant-garde in its challenge to conventions, postmodern in its embrace of the popular, and recognizably 60s in its effort to take its countercultural politics into the public sphere.

Throughout his quest, Slothrop "enjoys the pleasures of avant-garde cultural resistance to social authority by exploring the forbidden delights of the Zone outside to Their control" (7). The Massachusetts hipster in the post-Hitler German Zone, Slothrop hooks up with revolutionaries, drug dealers, smugglers and others living in the seams of power. He trades his Zoot suit first for the garb of "ace reporter" Ian Scuffling, then for the uniform of Rocketman, daring superhero of the cultural revolution, who facilitates drug deals, trades in contraband and counterfeit cash and "leaps board highways in a single bound"(380). A major part of Slothrop's pleasure in the counterculture is of course libidinal frenzy. Slothrop encounters all manner of woman ready and willing to take him into their bed (or wherever). He moves from one sexual encounter to another across the Zone, ending up finally in an orgy on board the Anubis, ship of decadence sporting pornographic movie stars, European royalty and all manners of sexual combinations. Thus Slothrop's sex and drug trek combines "pleasure and transgression acted out in the fashion of the postmodern avant-garde, in the public sphere, at times in direct confrontation with the authorities" (7).

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, this countercultural politics has limits. Slothrop's antics challenge "Their" authority, but my not really escape "Their" control. Everywhere in the murky Zone, he encounters possible signs of "Their" continued control, not least his unexplained ability to evade signs of "Their" continued control, not least his unexplained ability to evade "Their" control. Even his quest may be "Their" idea:

He knows as well as he has to that it's the s-Great [the Rocket] after all that's following him, it and the pale plastic ubiquity of Lazlo Jamf. That if he been seeker and sought, well, he's baited, and bait The Imoplex question was planted for him by somebody, back at Casino Hermann Goerring. With hopes that it would flower into full Imoplectique with its own potency in the Zone – but They knew Slothrop would jump for it Looks like there are sub-Slothrop needs They know about and he doesn't. (490)

Though the extent of "Their" control may be the effect of Slothrop's rampant paranoia, the narrative nonetheless opens the possibility that Slothrop's quest for freedom and knowledge may be just part of "Their plan, his Rocketman pleasures the effects of "Their" programming of desire, and his very resistance the form of "Their" control. Caught in the oedipal contradictions of this 60s paranoia, Slothrop becomes less a "figure of countercultural resistance than figure for hopes shattered and revolutions failed" (7).

In the end, no form of countercultural politics in *Gravity's Rainbow* escapes the limits of critique and complicity. The final scene is telling. A Nazi Rocket shot in 1945 is descending in 1970 upon a movie theater, its audience, and its manager, Richard M.

Zhubb, in allegorical terms, the fascist legacy at the origins of the Cold War looms apocalyptically while the preterite are contained, manipulated and anaesthetized by the culture industry and its politicians. Thus countercultural politics is figured in the novel as so much mysticism “beyond the zero” and appears in the end like the pious moral teachings of Slothrop’s long dead Puritan ancestor, whose preterite prayer the narrator offers to the audience and exhorts them to sing along as the Rocket “reaches its last immeasurable gap above the roof of the old theater” (760).

Gravity’s Rainbow accomplishes this analysis of our attitude towards the past by approaching history from very conceivable angle. Conventional approaches to history are parodied and trivialized: history as a cause and effect, history as a recorded of man’s progress, history as procession of people, places, and events, and history as a manifestation of the God. Instead, we are presented with history as an “illusion, nightmare, eternal struggle between the preterite and elect” (135). We are shown the “inadequacies of any historical perspectives, and throughout the novels, we are forced to adopt a perspectives that focuses on human relationships” (135).

The concept of cause and effect is a recurrent motif in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and the perspective from which all conventional definition of history are derived. The characters in Pynchon’s work are “conditioned to trust in cause and effect, control and linearity, they strive for creativity, however false their perception of it may be” (136). Pointsman, the Pavlovian scientist, epitomizes this perception, while Roger Mexico, a more endearing character, rejects this limited approach to life. The elaborate, artificial pattern created by the character like Pointsman by chance:

How can Mexico play, so at ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware- that in his play he wrecks

the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole generation have turned out like this? Will postwar be nothing but "events", newly created one moment to next? No links? Is it the end of history? (56)

Pointsman's fear that such randomness is the end of history is negated throughout the rest of novel. The narrator acknowledging the reader's weakness grudgingly complies: "you will want cause and effect all right" (663), we are also harshly warned that "all talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is diversionary tactic" (167). Human suffering is completely disregarded by the philosopher of history that focuses on events, cause, and effects, rather than on people. Ultimately, such a perception "perpetuates a fictionalized aggrandizement of the past" (136).

Gravity's Rainbow is essentially about the horrifying progress, for which the rocket is a metaphor. Progress created by the multinational cartels, leads to death and destruction for the masses and lucrative profits for big business. Corporations achieve their ends by sacrificing the preterite through the careful manipulation of history:

The basic problem, he proposes, has always been getting other people to die for you. What's worth enough for a man to give up his life? That's where religion had the edge, for centuries. Religion was always about death. Perverse, natürlich, but who are you to judge? It was a good pitch while it lasted but ever since it becomes impossible to die for death, we have had a secular vision-yours. Die to help history grow to its predestined shape. Die knowing your act will bring a good end a bit closer. Revolutionary suicide, fine. But look: if history's changes are inevitable, why not die? (701)

Pynchon addresses the essential question what it means to be human by examining life as a struggle between the powerful and powerless, the elect and the preterite. *Gravity's Rainbow* illustrates a more conspiratorial, paranoid view of history, so, Pynchon's vision is more desperate and darker. Slothrop believes that the conspiracy is directed by industrialist, secret agent, the rocket, the earth or an indeterminate "They". However, the ultimate conspirator is the multinational cartel of business including IG Farben, Westinghouse, and General electric. Pynchon concludes that the exploitation of the individual in a corporate society result from a "fundamental struggle between the preterite and the elect" (139).

It becomes clear that the government is not really the "I" behind the established network, nor is the war really being fought for strictly political reasons. Instead, it is a "celebration of markets" GE, ICI, shell and the like are putting the war and the various political systems to use for their own purposes, exploiting them in exactly the same way that government seems to be exploiting the men in the war and the way the men in the war are exploiting their positions within it. Pynchon has laid out for us in vivid detail the working mechanisms of a capitalist society that are so thoroughly visible today. Under the guise of freedom of markets and freedom of choice, our economic and political systems have become ever more adept at coding the world in terms of purely economic structures, leading away from any freedom and toward a deeper and deeper bondage of both people and the earth. We see this coding going on throughout the novel, reflected most clearly in the words of the Argentine anarchist Squalidozzi:

In the days of the gauchos, my country was a blank piece of paper. The pampas stretched as far as men could imagine, inexhaustible, fenceless.

Wherever the gaucho would ride, that place belonged to him. But

Buenos Aires sought hegemony over the provinces. All the neuroses about property gathered strength, and began to infect the countryside. Fences went up, and the gauchos became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that openness: it terror to us. (307)

Squalidozzi's myth begins with the conjunction of writing and fencing. The sheet of paper begins blank, uncoded, the field remains open, unfenced and then humans begin to write, to code, to fence in the land and themselves. And if we must forgive Squalidozzi his naive belief in an original clean sheet of paper – the dream of a time before human life came into language – we can still see how apt his description of the coding and territorializing properties of capitalist society is. Squalidozzi attributes the mania for labyrinths to the Argentine character, and in this he is also naive, it is rather the driving force behind Western culture as a whole. But he does manage to “put his finger on the underlying factor in fence building fear of openness, fear of an unstructured environment” (268-269).

So, we fence in naturally in order to protect ourselves, just as any animal seeks to secure a safe space in which to live, and it is simply the genius of the capitalist system to have been able to encode everything so thoroughly in its own image while appealing to this need. Under the guise of freedom – only a freedom from risk in the end, our world, but ultimately the coding and its attendant bureaucracies become so much of a burden that they are resisted, as they are by Squalidozzi and the other Argentine anarchists

If Squalidozzi is naive in his belief in an original clean sheet, and if his naiveté is complemented by Slothrop's argument that "fencing in itself is mark of progress" (307), he is also oblivious to the functions of the war, which he sees as a possible way out of our predicament:

in ordinary times [...] the center always wins. Its power grows with time, and that can't be reversed, not by ordinary means. Decentralizing, back to the anarchism, "needs extraordinary times [. . .] this war- this incredible war-just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for thousands years. Wiped it clean. Opened it. (307)

The assumption here is that the nation states seek to centralized power, to fence in the terrain, when in fact the great chemical and the oil cartels seem to be the ones that are doing the fencing. Ironically, it turns out to be those bodies that are decentralized, at least geographically, that are now generating the fences of the world. Governments, wars, and other institutions merely serve the purposes of the coding of the multination corporations. In fact, then, the war is not providing even the moment of openness, it is generating the appearance of openness, while the "corporations go on recoding the terrain for their own purposes, consolidating their previous territorializations and extending them in the process" (269).

The dilemma of the novel- and Western culture is how humans moved from the innate tendency to code the uncoded in their environment to the world of binary coding in which we seem to find ourselves today. The "Firm" the "They" of the novel, ultimately gains it's power from a never-ending series of binary choices, the most fundamental of which suggests that either everything is connected or the else nothing is

connected, in which case there is no meaning at all. The whole “Counterforce” section of the novel is devoted to a through demonstration of the power of the Firm and its logic, and Pirate’s remarks to Mexico about the necessity of a “We- system” may appear to be, it still begins with the “binary logic of the Firm- there is a “We” and a “They”, there are some people who share the coding procedures of the “We” and these coding procedures are defined in terms of the “They”, only the mirror image” (743). The counterforce has merely been co-opted by the Firm in a different way and is only put to different uses; it becomes simply that which seems to need to be territorialized by the firm rather than that which has already been territorialized. But in fact it has been territorialized; the code is simply “employed inversely to give the image of the “They” greater definition” (270).

We seek our identity in terms of that, which distinguishes us from our surroundings, but the more we seek to differentiate ourselves, the more we become like our surroundings. The double bind of parent and child, the “imitate me/don’t imitate me upon which our identities are founded, is hopelessly contradictory from the beginning, and once one accepts the oedipal logic, once belongs to the Firm” (271).

Slothrop from his ancestral background to his ultimate depression, testifies to a way of life that can only be defined as Oedipal precisely because it focuses on the self, on the identity, and the connection of this search to capitalism is essential simply because the “capitalist mode codes the world so that we go about our search for identity in terms of its production” (271). The preterite and elect of his treatise are no different from Firm and the counterforce, neatly binary, are conveniently defined in terms of other. This is indeed the logic carried on by the present system; the one Slothrop tries

futilely to escape. Slothrop does posit an alternative to this binary system, harking back to Squalidozzi:

It seems to Tyrone Slothrop that there might be a route back- maybe that anarchist he met in Zurich was right, may be for little while all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of a Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a simple sets of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, even nationality to fuck it up. (648)

Slothrop puts his finger on the problem, the very system which begins with an elect and preterite , and he posits the possibility that there is an alternative system, something different from the “shit, money and the word” of his personal legacy, but his end hardly suggests the promise any more than the ending of novel does. Nothing seems to have changed, so it would appear that Pynchon is pessimistic about such alternatives.

The question of individual identity is equally problematic. Personal density is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth. “Temporal bandwidth is the width of your present, your now. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more your persona. But the narrower your sense of now, the more tenuous you are” (593).

The more one is occupied with his past and future, the greater the density of his persona, his identity, but more he dwells in the past and future, the less he actually is, circulating instead of his memory. On the other hand, “total absorption into the moment means a lot of persona, a lot of the senses of the past and future, history and the continuities of one’s existence become simply an endless series of random events”

(273). Pynchon clearly believes that we don't spend enough time in the "now" absorbed as we are into the past and future that are supposed to constitute our identities, and this is part of our problems, but he also realizes that the solution to the problems is not to opt completely for the now. It is again only "binary logic that suggests we must choose one or the other to begin with; a Pynchonian logic suggests the inseparability of one from the other" (273).

All this was done under the belief in our ability to control and our desire for a secure world, in which the threat to us was no longer a problem. But the more we try to control, the less we actually controlled just as the more we sought our identities, the more they escape the grasp. To find our identities is to achieve control too, after all illusion of the desire for identity is the individual expression of the larger illusions underlying the culture of death; the desire for the end, for a "structure of immobility" that will put an end to risk in our lives, the immobility that we only achieve through the death. Thus, our "individual and cultural identities comes to be revealed as the desire for death" (273). The problem now is that it is harder to believe in the illusion of control, and the harder it is to believe it, the more desperate we become in our search for it. The culture of death seems at a certain point simply to move on under its own momentum, leading to less and less security and more and more desire for control. Webby's protest against the elite is eloquent on this subject, even if his belief that someone is actually in control is misguided:

I would set you free if I knew how. But isn't free out here. All the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few, who are the loudest to theorize on freedom, but the least free of all. I can't even give

you hope that it will be different someday _ that They'll come out, and forget death, and lose Their technology's elaborate terror, and stop using every other form of life without mercy to keep what haunts man down to a tolerable level. (268)

Here, again the contradiction of the Firm is carefully in place, all kinds of horror are wreaked upon humans and everything else to keep what haunts man down to a tolerable level, to generate a security that will partially eliminate fears. But the fear is only increased, and as our tolerance to the culture of death grows, we become more accustomed to its horrors, like Slothrop, "we get to the point where we have trouble sleeping if we don't hear the rockets overhead" (275).

The possibilities and limits of Slothrop's various identities sharpen the novel's question about white guys. Unquestioned in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the need for white guys to change. The White Man's identity and sexuality, his way of thinking and being, and his domination of the "other" involve sundry terrors personal and political, spiritual and apocalyptic. Thus, the cultural discourse that grounds the identity and political hegemony of white men needs to be altered, displaced. What is in question in the novel is the material possibility and the material limits of this change. Actively trying to change, for his own survival, freedom, and psychic health, the white male legacy and escape into the margins of the oppressed may be an "extension of white male legacy. Everything, poor paranoid Tyrone tries to raise the question of complicity and futility" (11).

The perverse sex, the abundance of drugs and the willingness to treat people as objects are just the surface of the problem, just as are the child sacrifices, the manipulation of human behavior and the war itself. The larger problems involved in all

of these manipulations are twofold. Initially, we sense that for the first time the Firm knows what it is doing. On an individual level this means that “They” always seem to know just what inducement is necessary to prod one into doing “Their” business. On a larger level, They have learned how to control the world, and this means that “They” command both their “binary system and the presumed alternative that we see in people like Bland and Mexico” (276).

A binary logic that is out of control is one of the manifestations of the culture of death, but the system itself goes back to the origins of Western civilization, back to the problem of the father, which Pynchon emphasizes toward the end of the novel when he refers to Weissmann’s “Torot” and the Firm as “the father you will never quite manage to kill” explaining that “the oedipal situation in the Zone there days is terrible” (671). The rocket mythology is simply an updated version of the older myths, harking back to Oedipus, but relying equally on Christianity, whose God is both creator and destroyer, whose image of infinite power and control is today appropriated by the Firm whose illusions are carried on by the underlings who seek control of people, who seek to wrest control of the atom for themselves, and who convince themselves that they are the masters of the planet now that they are able to believe. They could decide now “what properties they wanted a molecule to have, and then go ahead and build it” (290). Equally, the rocket “embodies all of our fervent desires to escape the clutches of nature once and for all” (277).

The female characters are generally victims of rocket, willing or not, Greta, Bianca and others many Slothrop’s “girls” hopelessly lost. The female characters pursue paths of resistance and redemption, and some hold out genuine possibility, but all are subject to the limits of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Some female characters indicate “not only

ineffectiveness but also their own form of complicity” (13). Jessica Swanlake, whose love with Roger Mexico, may hold the promise of freedom and redemption, betrays that promise when she retreats into the bourgeois security of her Jeremy’s world. Most of all, Katje, who like Greta and Jessica chose to play her role as “Their” tool and target, who loved Weissmann and worked for Pointsman, in the end seeks redemption for playing “Their” game. She wants to help save Slothrop. But as her final conversation with Enzian shows, she finds it hard to escape her own conditioned reflex to please men by being what they want her to be, and she may also find it hard to escape her won desire for the Rocket.

The “third world” characters of *Gravity’s Rainbow* also offer critique and resistance ineffectiveness and complicity. More central to the novel is the plight of the African Hereros brutally colonized, cut off, forever from their traditional tribal ways, they exist in the tension between national suicide and the Schwarzcommando quest for Rocket power, as if their two chances for political freedom were death or obtaining for themselves the White Man’s terrible power, On a personal level, Enzian is devoted to his people’s struggle and brings special intelligence and wisdom and a scholar’s desire to understand life in the Zone. Yet central to his understanding is that his identity, like Katje’s, is indelibly marked by his own live for and masochistic sexual history with Weissmann. The implication is that “postcolonial struggle will not liberate some pre-colonial and thus pure, whole, or redemptive identity or culture” (14). Rather, their liberation, like “Slothrop’s struggle against the material effects of the discourse of the White Man both geo-politically and spiritually, and that transforming the White Man’s discourse and its material effects faces limits ranging from ineffectiveness to complicity and perpetuation” (14).

However, the novel remains undecided about the question of cultural politics. The Rocket's Cold War momentum favors apocalypse but it remains uncertain, and while it is still up in the air the cultural revolution may yet have material effect. To be sure, *Gravity's Rainbow* offers no decisive affirmation of uncertainty or indeterminacy as if uncertainty of apocalypse were itself a guarantee of salvation. Here the apocalypse is "uncertain, but infinitely more uncertain is the effectiveness of cultural resistance. The uncertainty, the lack of closure, the "last immeasurable gap" indicates the possibility and quite powerfully, the limits of countercultural politics.

Pynchon is, alone, expressing fictionally his understanding that power and control, though their effects are everywhere, do not emanate from a center an originating seat of power; analogously, his narratives emanate from no fixed beginning, are embodied in no single major plot, and terminate in uncertain suspense, no one possesses enough power or knowledge to impose a unitary vision in Pynchon's fiction, not even "They" as a class. Even as the Elite appear to control all the Preterits in *Gravity's Rainbow*, they themselves are gripped by their own fears of control from "higher up" or from elsewhere. The source of profound anxiety, in Pynchon's fiction is that "individuals do not even have an a priori existence, before they become the victims of oppressive controls" (232).

The implications of discoveries made in the new physics are not merely the source of new ideas which Pynchon incorporates into a traditional novelistic framework, they rather the basis for a radically new conception of the nature of human identity and societal organization which Pynchon has chosen to express in a "highly appropriate but nevertheless extremely problematic narrative mode" (Nadeau 454).

The Firm's desire to maintain and extend control over other systems, leads to more research into the life of nature in the hope of discovering principles that would allow them to produce more saleable technologies and consumer goods - the most important of which in the novel are Imipolex G and the rocket. In doing such research, however, the Firm discovers that there are principles in the life of nature which call into question the efficacy of simple causality, hierarchical organization and closed systems. The inventor of Imipolex G, the mysterious Jamf who did the operant conditioning research on the infant Slothrop, recognizes, for example, that relativity theory has moral implications. In a lecture attended by Pokler, Jamf counsels his students to stay in touch with their lion, his term for their aggressive, territorial instincts, which is equivalent to the firm. The lion does not know subtleties and half-solutions. He does not accept "sharing as a basis for anything! He takes, he holds! He is not a Bolshevik or a Jew. You will never hear relativity from the lion. He wants the absolute. Life and Death. Win and lose" (577). As long as individuals continue to see themselves as discrete and separate entities who must dominate or submit to the "domination of others in the ruthless struggle for power, the Firm will maintain its control" (465).

Slothrop has early connections with the Firm through his Uncle Bland, and his education at Harvard was paid for by the Firm in return for allowing the infant Slothrop to be experimented upon by Jamf. The "Conditioned stimulus X" (Pynchon 84) which Jamf used to evoke the hard on response could be, it is suggested at various points, sound, light, German technical language, and the smell of Imipolex G, there is even some suggestion that the penis which Slothrop thought to be his own is made of Imipolex G, a substance which has "erectile" properties, perhaps telepathic communication exists between Slothrop and Katje who tells him in lowered voice, "you

were in London [. . .] while they were coming down. I was in's Gravenhage [. . .] while they were going up" (209). Or, ignoring the clues and opting for the simplest explanation, we might "conclude that Slothrop is capable of precognition" (469).

Gravity's Rainbow generates uncertainty and instability on a both narrative and epistemological strata, casting the reader either in the role of "seeker and sought" (490). Even more disconcerting, by the paranoid magic, the characters like Slothrop, with greatest interesting discovering truth, "were thrown back in dreams, psyche flashes, omens, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity" (Olsen 582).

Pynchon's central characters are victims of attempting to break away from the system- social, political, religious etc., which have institutionalized. More than other character in Pynchon's work, Tyrone Slothrop embodies the role of "victim-escape and dramatizes the neurosis created by the conflict between man and history" (Marquez 55). Once again, Slothrop provides us with classical formulation of this dreaded anomie, "If there is something comforting- religious, if u want- about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything" (434).

This binary perception of the possibilities for understanding history is the single most important feature of Pynchon's worldview: paranoia or anti-paranoia; everything is connected, or nothing is connected, reality either radiates from center, or it is centerless, history is either wholly determined within, or it is wholly meaningless, the individual is ether manipulated or he is simply adrift. Once again, "the pattern of theological expectations is evident, either there is some principle as a powerful and absolute as God to order the universe, or else the universe is chaos" (185).

Since for the paranoid all history is conspiratorial, to be dropped from conspiracies is to lose all connection with the past and future. Pynchon formulates the view in which states that character is function of historical awareness, “The more you dwell in the past and in the future the more solid your persona, but narrower your sense of now the more tenuous you are” (509). Having shuffled through various guises, Slothrop “loses all senses of who he is, losing track of where he has come from or where he is going, losing that is all historical perspectives, Slothrop disintegrates” (187). Within the novel Pynchon always speaks of freedom in this guise, as the freedom from conspiracies, and hence as a ticket to death. The binary possibilities remain; subjection to external control or disintegration. At various moments Slothrop imagines the conspiracy to be directed by the industrials, secret agents, the rocket, the earth, or simply by an unspecified them.

Paranoia uniformly originates from the situation of life which Pynchon has been describing for us in his central metaphor. This is even valid for the strange phenomenon of anti-paranoia which finally counterbalances paranoia just as certainty had its opposite in uncertainty, control in randomness, and ascent in descent. “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” (434). It is this occurrence of anti-paranoia which finally throws a sharp light on what Pynchon himself is doing. His answer to the challenge of this dichotomy is the “attempt to expose that order and chaos (and hence paranoia and anti-paranoia) should not be seen as antagonists of the either/ or type but as elements of one and the same universal movement” (Alan and Puetz 358).

The official systems of structuring reality may be convenient means of justifying as necessary and expedient the personal interests of those in power, especially if the average person is unaware of the relativity of such systems. One way of responding to “Their” system is with another system, as Prentice explains to Mexico:

Of course a well –developed They- system is necessary – but it’s only half the story. For every They there ought to be a We. In our case there is. Creative paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We – system as a They – system – [...]They – systems are] what They and Their hired psychiatrists call ‘delusional systems.’ Needless to say, ‘delusions’ are always officially defined. We don’t have to worry about questions of real or unreal. (638)

First, some sort of “paranoia”, and over sensitivity to patterns, is necessary for the investigation of reality, they are not going to reveal themselves when it is not to their advantage to do so, and we must be constantly alert to the possibility of their presence. Second, we must create a We – system in order to counter their strategy and to keep our paranoia from devouring us. They would predict, by creating uncharacteristic patterns within the regimen they have set up – initiating singularities, interference, and perhaps revelation from outside the acknowledged system. Ambiguity, not deterministic certainty, is the essential fuel for such Creative Paranoia. “real” or “unreal” is impossible to know, since “They” seem to be defining the meaning of our “reality.” It is the system, “the system of the novel that matters in allowing man to structure and respond to the contemporary world” (Siegel 53).

Slothrop’s ensuing “disintegration suggests his failure against the firm” (272). Slothrop’s loss of vision or of a vision of coherence contributes to his disintegration.

Either because he is so socked, or because his capacity for a comprehension is finally overreached by what he must try to comprehend, or for both reasons, he can no “longer perceive or conceive of his world as a totality, and therefore, loses his own totality”(70). In this novel means to recognize, continually and with great anxiety, that your personality, might not be yours, that is constitutes and is constituted by global control structures, and that as it moves in and out of your body, it makes “certain lines of discursive production and regulation and moves information through immense but invisible networks” (736).

The mental structure implicit in Pynchon’s fiction reproduces a dominant feature of Calvinist –Puritan kinship. The analogues which have emerged might be schematically listed as follow: Pynchon’s paranoia parallels to Puritanism’s faith, cosmic conspiracy to God’s plans, gravity to god’s will, membership in the firm to election, exclusion from conspiracy to preterite, multiple narrative patterns to typology, remote control to grace, binary vision to theism/atheism, decadence of history to depravity of man, paranoid self reference to personal salvation, and the zero to last judgment.

The novel’s basic antithesis between the “they system” and the “we system” is colored by the idea of preterition. Pynchon transforms the Calvinist dichotomy onto the social-political terms as the preterites are now the disinherited, the disfranchised, and the disparate and powerless masses of humanity. In Pynchon’s metaphor, America is the “seductive bitch that whispers love, promises life and hope and then betrays the dreamer-lover by only giving death and nightmare” (623).

Pynchon expresses, in numerous ways, a profound empathy with what he calls the preterite, the left out, the passed over in every form of election (spiritual, economic,

racial, cultural). These are the American Dream's insomniacs, "the poor, the defeated, the criminal, and the desperate" (35), as he calls them in his report on what is in the aftermath of the 1965 riots. Readers can trace the author's "sympathy for this element the decade that redefined American political idealism" (4).

Enzian, the leader of the Schwarzkommando, believes that "Somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom" (525). If such a restoration is to be, it can be brought about only by the preterite, since the elect are enjoying things as they are and doing their best to maintain the status quo, not caring about the consequences for the preterite or even for themselves.

That grace ever existed as God's gift of saving grace is only alluded to in the novel. The morphology of Puritan conversion by grace is accurately characterized by "the great bright hand reaching out of the cloud" (29). More commonly, even to an extent in regard to earlier times, grace is used as a synonym for luck, bad and good, and to describe physical or social qualities. Thus, the characterization of the coming of grace above is actually invoked as an image of being killed by a rocket. Attuned to the ironies of his situation, Slothrop finds or wishes to believe that he can survive in the war zone if he can keep "some state of minimum grace" (603) – a state which is both quite different from and quite like a minimum state of grace. Desperate and furious in a situation where to show that he is either would be dangerous. Slothrop finds that "This smile asks from him more grace than anything in his languid American life ever has, up till now. Grace he has always imagined himself short on" (253).

Slothrop attempts to escape their control, only to discover gradually that what he had felt as imposed extrinsic control is also, in larger part, the determining influence of

the past, individual and collective, of history, personal, national and cultural: “it is the past that makes demands here. It whispers and reaches after, and sneering disagreeably goes its victims” (208). That may be less obvious, even surprising, if official history has been mythicized and mystified in order to gloss over the constant, ordinary, rather shabby, even the sinister effect of human nature manifesting itself through the time. Repeatedly, Slothrop is struck by the realization that his family and his culture have lied to him about the real course of history and the nature and the limits of human possibility, notably concerning the viability of his action: “yep they have conned you-conned you again” (266). Living according to the model of false history can eliminate the possibility of reaching to any future; let alone the glorious kind usually promised by such “histories,” the “horror and the despair engendered by learning the truth about the past and what is revealed about human nature eventually cause Slothrop virtually to disintegrate” (67).

Pynchon’s novel deals with forms of resistance, even revolution by the power of imagination though complication and contradiction around. As noted in the novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* Slothrop discovers rather early that he had been conned by his discovery may be in part another subtle cultural job. The counterforce is formed with high hopes but almost immediately disintegrates. Likewise, Blicero, possessed by the desperate yearning for transcendence he makes an attempt that he knows is futile to achieve vicarious symbolic fulfillment by the sending Gottfried up in rocket. The rocket, of course, follows the path of *Gravity’s Rainbow*-that mocking promise-and achieves no transcendence but instead brings about the death which was to have been transcended. This last example demonstrates an attempt to escape history-which, in this particular case, seems to be more directly anti-historical than a response to historical

defeat- and demonstrates both the dangers of such attempt per se, and the possible result of such attempts when the “intended means of escape themselves-imaginative, political or otherwise-become subject to historical process” (72).

Gravity's Rainbow is to be contrasted with the God's rainbow. The promise of the general destruction associated to the *Gravity's Rainbow* “seems to oppose the promise of no longer general destruction signified by the God's rainbow” (Ozier 201). However, the description of the *Gravity's Rainbow* as “an interface between one order of things and another” (302), suggests the process of transformation, and V-2 becomes not only the “wrathful hand of god reaching down from the clouds” (26).

All the actions Pynchon marks as “positive in the novel are individual, minor, and personal- be kind, don't try to control others, don't fret about your personal future, and be open to the “Other Side.” He shows no concerted heroic social action” (Hume 639), the lack of positive action stems from the nature of control. Pynchon never shows any form of control to be good, even in the narrow slice of the cosmos represented by aerial views, he almost always marks control as negative. He appears to agree with the old saw that “power corrupts, and acknowledges that organization demands unequal distribution of power and control, hence, social groups can work together, but only toward evil ends” (640).

Some of the forces influencing Slothrop are objects of manipulation in other contexts. The engineer Franz Pokler helps to construct the rockets which haunt Slothrop. He, in turn, is the victim of anonymous “They.” “They are using him – have been, various “Theys,” for ten years” (164). He is seen as an “extension of the Rocket, long before it was ever built” (402). And the engineers working on the rocket “were all equally at the Rocket's mercy” (402). Katje Borgesius is instrumental in a control

scheme devised to win guidance over Slothrop. She, in turn, is the help less tool of Blicero and, later, the Allied Slothrop hunters. In fact, the whole novel abounds with “shuttlecocks of various anonymous or personalized forces” (357).

Pynchon describes both the cultural and the thermodynamic energies of the world as inevitably running down. Entropy, from the second law of thermodynamics, is the tendency of an ordered system a chemical experiment, an isolated culture, or a universe to become disordered or random because its energy is leveled and unavailable for work. Pynchon depicts only “two alternative responses to such breakdown of organization, complete withdrawal from socio-cultural life or a human attempt at restoring partial order and at making conditions more bearable during the collapse of the culture” (40).

Reality is relative, but, at the same time, one “reality” is not as good as another. Different conceptions of “reality obviously results in different courses of actions. Throughout the novel, Pynchon emphasizes the pattern of probability as opposed to more absolute and static epistemologies” (44). Such emphasis represents the language of modern science as opposed to that of the older, mechanistic or positivist science of Newton and Pavlov. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Roger Mexico champions the new conception of reality that encompasses principles of randomness and degree, while Pointsman represents the older binary conceptions of stimulus response and cause-and-effect that demand the choice of one or zero.

The first of the four sections of *Gravity's Rainbow* is entitled “Beyond the Zero” and is accompanied by a quotation from Werner von Braun: “Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief is the continuity of our spiritual existence

after death” (1). In the novel Pynchon suggests that scientist, such as von Braun and Poekler, may be using a false idealism of scientific non-politicization to obscure the irresponsibility of making V-2's for the Nazis to drop on British civilian. However, Von Braun's claim that the benefits of his technology will some day outweigh the harm caused by the V-2's is not discredited in *Gravity's Rainbow* unless one is romantically predisposed to see all technology as bad or to reason circularly from the position that the world is doomed by man .

Pynchon views the dynamo-the new forces unleashed on humanity-as charismatic but destructive force, man is repelled but also fascinated by the energy and power. He is preoccupied with the meaning or non meaning of history, and epitomizes the modernist skeptical view of history. The facts teach us that history was in reality never anything else but an “accumulation of the crimes and misfortunes of human race” (54). Obviously, the more we scrutinize the parts, on the contrary “it destroy the hope of attaining such understanding” (54). The trust of this mode of skepticism challenges the conjunction of progress of history, and questions the notion that history offers an intelligible schema or explanation of human problems.

Underlying Pynchon's juxtaposition of history and fiction lay a stringent skepticism that questions the truth of history. For Pynchon, history is fragmented and deceptive and another system of illusions, an enormous con-game that shields bizarre lies and conspiracies. Pynchon further asserts, “what passes is truth so terrible that history-at best a conspiracy, not always among the gentlemen, to defraud-will never admit it, the truth will be repressed or in ages of particular elegance be disguised as something else” (64).The truth of history either repressed or has been shown in different hiding reality and showing in different guises. By fictionalizing and glorifying the past,

we distance ourselves from it, and the result is the tragic sense of isolation that pervades the postmodern literature.

Fantasy becomes the literary equivalent of deconstructionism, since both the narrative and critico-philosophical modes are “designed to surprise, to question, to put into doubt, to create anxiety, to make active, to make uncomfortable, to rebel, to subvert, to render ambiguities, to make discontinuous”(76). As an instance of the novel’s general concern with the material effects of culture, the film motif echoes the novel’s melodrama of cultural conflict, in which many characters, including some white guys, find it necessary and perhaps impossible to counter the culture of white men. Bringing “reader into theatre and under the rocket thus implicates readers, white guys or not, in terrifying material effects of white male discourse” (23).

Pynchon’s fantastic text disrupts the mimetic belief in stability of time and space. By doing so it raises the question about technology, logic, reason, order and constancy. The text disjoints and conflates past, present, and future as well as here and there. Abrupt dislocations in time and space throw us back to biblical events, the middle ages, the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the 1920’s and 1930’s, and ahead to Jack Kennedy’s and Malcolm X’s assassinations, mentions of Nixon, and even apparently to the beginning of World War II as the rocket screams down on the theater in Los Angeles, as well as across to New England, Southwest Africa, Argentina, the Russia, France, Switzerland, and Holland, as many have indicated, the reader senses that he is viewing some sort of crazy documentary on the Second World War and its aftermath, but that the reels have gotten mixed up. And so have the projectors, apparently, since time in the text can even run backwards: “agents run around with guns which are like vacuum cleaners operating in the direction of life – pull the trigger and bullets are

sucked back out of the recently dead into barrel, and the great irreversible is actually reversed”(745). All the past, present, and future is contained in a brief narrative now. For narrator, the past, present, and future all happen now. They are almost interchangeable. Consequently, the idea of Newtonian time, where there exists a clear demarcation between one moment and the next, becomes meaningless.

Gravity's Rainbow employs a mixed language that revels in variety and potentiality. Such a language is an ideal vehicle, “for the writer who is motivated by the spirit of irony and parody and who finds it impossible to remain committed to a single vision of reality” (81). It lends itself as a subtle offer to transgress, to cross over into that which the dominant culture was silenced. A register of this is Bodine’s and Roger Mexico’s verbal disruption of officialdom at the diner party, through a escalation of deliberate misreading of the menu, they move from “surprise roast” to “snot soup”, “pus pudding”, “menstrual marmalade” and “discharge dumpling”(713-714). There is impulse of fantasy and deconstruction- a bizarre free play among texts, a delight in possibility, a joyous affirmation of kinesis, an invitation to narrative and cultural illegality, a thrust outside dogma and law, an “interrogation of ethnocentric construct such as reality, reason, order, identity, truth and meaning, an overwhelming sense of frustration before a culture that jams desire” (583).

Gravity's Rainbow ends with an episode titled “descent” in which the audience in a contemporary movie theatre in Los Angeles impatiently waits for the film to begin. The strike of the rocket itself is conspicuously suspended: “it is just here [. . .] that the pointed tip of the rocket” (760), falling nearly a mile per second, (because of its supersonic quality) “absolutely and forever without sound, reaches its last immeasurable above the roof of this old theatre” (760). While the novel remains

absolutely and forever silent about the disastrous consequences of this particular strike at this final part point, and we can respond it to the open ending aspect in mainly two easy: by identifying the rocket with the nuclear missile because of the 1970s setting of the scene, and with a metaleptica interpretation of the film audience as the novel's preterite reader. A radical conclusion from these two reading would however cast a dubious light on Pynchon and, more exactly on the fictional strategies he employs.

The white male characters of *Gravity's Rainbow* that resists the system can project no authenticity to quest after, no future to narrate, except in terms of the pleasure of futile resistance. Even Slothrop who remains dazed and confused through the novel, captures a cosmic-book glimpse of his conflicted effect in "fabulous four" fantasy. Because of his white male class privilege, his Harvard training as both infant and adult, he has readier access than, say, Katje or Enzian to the pleasure of resistant. At the same time and because of same privilege an training, Slothrop is more paranoid about their power to control him or kill him, as well as more paranoid about his complicity with the their destructive power. Operating exclusively within the oedipal frame of his resistance to power, Slothrop seems to recognize here "something of the limits to that resistant and, consequently, to feel something preserves the pleasure of futile resistance" (20).

We confront the grim realities of the preterite and elect struggle when Pynchon describes the "real business of war". For Pynchon war is the "synecdoche for history itself" (140). Here history is not a temporal, conventional cause and effect series of events but rather the stark realization about the elect vs. preterite opposition:

Don't forget the real business of war is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing; [. . .] it serves as spectacle,

as diversion from the real movement of the war. It provides raw materials to be recorded onto history so that children may be taught history as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world . . . out there, down here among the people, the truer currencies comes into being. So, Jews are negotiable. (105)

Violence and murder, killing of People as much as we can is the policy of the war. It is bloody events sequenced as order but they are really fragmented and disrupted and written only through one perspective.

Pynchon is searching for solution to the individual's problematic quest for meaning in a modern existence. In novel, this quest inevitably takes a form of using history to shape reality, to give meaning to an otherwise overwhelming existence, to impose order on chaos. However, according to Pynchon, the standard definition afforded by history are misperceptions that only serve to "describe and distract because they do not address the fundamental, human features of mankind, and they either paralyze us from taking any action or prompt us to take inappropriate action" (134).

At the end, however, just as the nonwhite/nonmale characters of the *Gravity's Rainbow* are included in critique and complicity dynamic of cultural politics, so the dissonant affect of pleasure and angst is not restricted to white male readers. The final scene is again telling. The song and context of singing it in the movie theatre under the descending rocket structure for all readers the novel's perverse pleasure in apocalyptic terror. Through the use of the pronoun "us" and "we" the narrator suggests that the audience in the theatre includes also readers of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

So, Tyrone Slothrop toils to cast off his personal and cultural history, false realities fashioned for him by others, illusions that obscure the bestial realities. He has

been duped; his family and culture have lied about the exploitation in history. All of his sources have told to him to believe in the American dream and to put faith in progress, but “yup they’ve conned you – conned you again” (512).

While celebrating this cultural politics, *Gravity’s Rainbow* also marks its limits. The novel undeniably creates sympathy for the counterforce and its cause. Yet the novel presents the possibility that the counterforce’s creative paranoia. No less than Slothrop’s politics of pleasure, fails to alter material reality. Mexico succeeds in disrupting a meeting and a dinner party but doesn’t himself hold much hope of disrupting much more. Moreover, it indicates that the counterforce, no less than Slothrop, is in complicity with “Their” power, even if that complicity is located in a different part of the anatomy.

IV. The Critique and Complicity of Dynamic Cultural Politics

Gravity’s Rainbow exposes the conflict cultural politics. On one hand, an oppressive and hegemonic “system” serving an elite or “Elect,” “They” is coercing the entire planet toward military apocalypse. On the other side, a victimized, mostly powerless and likeable human “Preterite,” “Us” attempts in varying ways and with varying degrees of manic euphoria and desperate futility to counter the apocalyptic momentum of the system. The indisputable central conflict happens, elsewhere between the “system” and those of all stripe and affiliation who choose to resist it.

Gravity’s Rainbow presents the nightmare of hyper- technological society made possible by the discourse concerned only calculation and control, the empty purity of number, the mechanical certainty of binary thought. Pynchon exposes his characters and

his readers to a cosmos that is far from value-free. They come to understand some of the ways in which cultures and people are controlled by symbol systems. They are also pressured to realize that symbol systems do not provide any ultimate meaning because such systems are helpless when faced with the void, whether that void is radiant or merely empty. Nor do symbol systems appear adequate to encompass that multiple realities offered us in this text.

Through Slothrop's efforts to escape Pointsman's control and uncover for himself his connection to the rocket, *Gravity's Rainbow* explores a number of forms of cultural resistance that could be considered postmodern. Slothrop sets the Oedipal pattern for white guys. In which every attempt to escape or resist is either evidence of the White Man's control or, worse, complicity with the White Man's power. Other white guys, in the novel, notably Roger Mexico who joins the "counterforce," further solidify this pattern of necessary but futile resistance. *Gravity's Rainbow* shows both the possibilities for freedom opened by cultural resistance, but also the limits to freedom and resistance. That is, in the end, no form of countercultural politics in *Gravity's Rainbow* escapes the limits of critique and complicity.

Pynchon makes characters at least marginally aware of forces that control their lives. They recognize that they have been controlling others through these means; they try to repudiate such power. To demonstrate the character's awareness to social system and their desire to leave it, Pynchon instrumentalizes Rilke's poetry and his imagery of rider in particular in order to describe, first, the transformation of Weissmann at the very moment when the rocket reaches the tip of its flight curve, at the same time meant to counter-song, an imitation that set against the original. Second, he presents the consequences of this in terms of different between what rider signifies for him who has

transcended earthly existence on the one hand and for those who stay behind on the other. His poetry explicitly associates it with the sky as a location beyond the confine and limitation of earthly existence.

Pynchon's conspiratorial imagination tends to make our social organization appear even more real by exposing the relation of power which in fact governs our society. Since his leading characters all hover at the margins of conspiracies, they are condemned to be either victims of enterprises they cannot understand, or impotent by standard, ignorant and ignored. What fragments of the plot they do uncover only make them feel more helpless and more isolated. The most pervasive presence in *Gravity's Rainbow* is not a character but an organization or system. The "Firm," controlled by "They," is vast network of corporations and cartels. The firm's authority stems from classical physics, which does rest on cause and effect relationships between forces and objects, which has taken God's place.

Keeping in mind Pynchon's reference for non-rationalist modes of behavior, the purpose of historical reference to Calvinist Puritanism is evident. Pynchon's pity condemnation shit, money, and the world, the three am American truths, powering the American mobility, suggests a psycho-historical matrix involving psychology, economic, history, and religion, and it establishes a theme crucial to the characterization of Tyrone Slothrop and novel's thrust. Slothrop introduces "shit, money and word" has become a perverse in western consciousness.

In Calvinist theology- and subsequently in Puritanism- everyone is held to be either elect or preterite. If elect, one's life is filled with meaning, because one is incorporated into God's scheme of salvation. If preterite one's life is meaningless, because one is excluded from God's plan. These are exactly binaries possibilities

imagined by Pynchon. Springer, for example, filmmaker turned blackmarketeer, believes himself to be one of the elect. Postmodern parody is focuses on difference and ex-centricity, and is interested on the hybrid, the heterogeneous, and local, and an interrogative and deconstructive mode of analysis. It seeks to assert difference, not to single homogeneous ideology. Postmodern differences are always multiple and provisional. It is always aware of difference, difference which is present within any grouping and difference defined by contextualization or positing in relation to plural others. The complicity of Slothrop's resistance is again evident as *Gravity's Rainbow* explores one more version of counter-cultural politics familiar to multiculturalism. In a comic book story/fantasy late in the novel, Slothrop assembles the "Fabulous Four." A mod force comprised of Slothrop, Maximillian, Myrtle, Marvelous, and Marcel—one white, one black, one woman, and one machine, echoing in even more mocking tones the countercultural agenda in the novel as a whole. As Slothrop's own fantasy of multiculturalism, the "Fabulous Four" mission poses two familiar possibilities for the relation between white guys and multicultural politics.

Gravity's Rainbow is about cultural resistance. It involves itself in the experience it narrates. The narrator, too, is in the theatre, contained like rest of "us" by the culture industry, anticipating the rocket's descent and encouraging us to find pleasures while we can. The implication is that *Gravity's Rainbow* may offer insight, even the form of countercultural resistance, to its reader, but only within the same limits it explores thematically. Its countercultural insight may be revelatory, transformative, even liberating for readers, yet they still may be ineffective against the rocket and the materiality of the discourse that produces it. *Gravity's Rainbow* implicates itself in a dynamic of critique and complicity. At the end, the novel mocks itself as if its

countercultural politics were mere amusement, opiate for the masses, as well as a kind of messianic delusion, puritan preterite prayer offered up by the narrator playing the role of the TV show.

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