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**Parody of Modernist Search for Order in V.**

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## **Abstract**

Thomas Pynchon has very craftily parodied the modernist/new critical aesthetic premises to dramatize the postmodern condition of disorder in his novel *V*. The sense of higher order, which the modernist writers tried to seek in their literary works, is just an illusion because the disorder acknowledged by each individual is the reality of our existence. The two contrasting protagonists in the novel are presented to prove this fact. Benny Profane is presented to parody Herbert Stencil. Herbert Stencil searches for higher order in the disordered world whereas Benny Profane takes the disorder as the reality of human existence. The sense of multiplicity, disorder, meaninglessness have been presented in the novel *V*. in such a way that these concepts parody the modernist aesthetic conventions including the search for order. This parody is made in total exaggeration and brutal form. This technique of parodying the modernist/new critical concept of order gives the glimpse that almost every form of order is impossible though the people become nostalgic in search of it. The disorder, presented throughout the novel, is the reality of every individual.

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page No.</b>
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
<b>I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Literature Review	12
<b>II: PARODY AND POSTMODERNISM</b>	<b>17</b>
Definition of Parody	17
Parody and Style	17
Parody and Postmodernism	24
The Loss of Foundations and Master Narratives	31
<b>III. PARODY OF MODERNIST SEARCH FOR ORDER IN V.</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>IV. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	<b>55</b>

## I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The function of literature is no longer to create coherence; instead, it is precisely to undermine all attempts at totalization. In order to achieve this goal, writers must practice what Richard Poirer calls "self-parody." Literature, in postmodern era, proposes not the rewards so much as the limits of its own procedures; it shapes itself around its own dissolvments. Literature calls into question not any literary form, of empowering an idea with a style. In the literature of parody, the critics see a direct line running from T.S. Eliot and James Joyce to the American writers such as Thomas Pynchon and John Barth.

Thomas Pynchon's *V.* is a novel about the repressive nature of both political and literary structures. Thomas Pynchon attacks not only worldly and historical outrages, but also a central aspect of his own activity as a writer, "the element of plotting" (23). He draws out the similarities between literary plotting and the plots in the outside world which conspire to control and distort human life.

Pynchon's *V.* parodies the modernist aesthetic conventions. This parodic reworking takes as its point of departure a view of modernism largely shaped by the concerns of the new critics. The advantage of this approach is that it helps situate the novel within the literary and cultural history of this century. First, it shows how *V.*, as a postmodernist novel, is neither entirely continuous nor fully discontinuous with modernism. *V.* enacts both a dispute with modernism and a reinterpretation of its meaning. As a reinterpretation, it is concerned above all with those aspects of modernism which the new critics tended to overlook. Second, the focus on the

modernist/new critical synthesis allows us to place *V.* not only within the movement from modernism to postmodernism, but also within the cultural shift that took place in the United States from the 1950 to the 1960s.

What Pynchon does in *V.* is to seize on the principal features of the modernist/new critical tradition and present them to an almost brutal form of exaggeration and distortion. He takes the modernist premise that subjective illumination will occur only under the most unexpected conditions and extends it to its most improbable, shocking extreme.

As an example of postmodernist text that sounds with echoes of the modernist writers of the first half of twentieth century, Pynchon's *V.* offers an excellent site for an analysis of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. It is a text that manifests itself in an altered view of the nature of art, but also in the emergence of different conceptions of the self and of history. A few years ago, Pynchon offered some reflections on his early work that help to situate this book in the context of the literary and cultural changes that were taking place in the United States during the postwar period.

In the "Introduction" to *Slow Learner*, a collection of his early short stories, Pynchon describes the cultural mood of the 1950s, when he was starting off on his literary career. He observes that there were two poles in the literary culture of the period, a conflict he summarizes in terms of "traditional vs. Beat fiction" (1). He adds that by "traditional he means "the more established modernist tradition we were being exposed to then in college" (2).

This definition suggests the importance of the institutional context within which Pynchon first became acquainted with modernist literature. In a narrow sense, this institutional context was provided by Cornell University, where Pynchon studied

as an undergraduate. However, the larger context towards which his remarks point is the state of literary criticism and literary education in the United States in the 1950s.

The most influential school of criticism at this time was the New Criticism, of which the leading representatives were, among others, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. In devising a critical method that proves particularly effective in the classroom, the new critics had succeeded in becoming highly prominent in the academy. Since the work of the New critics arose largely in the conjunction with and as a response to the emergence of modernism in literature, their theories and presuppositions played a crucial role in shaping the way in which modernism came to be understood.

Many commentators have drawn attention to this nexus between the New criticism and modernism, including some of the New critics themselves. R.P. Blackmur, for example, observed that "What the new criticism is, essentially, is the kind of formal criticism and the kind of technical criticism that was best suited to understanding the characteristics poetry written in English both in England and in America in the period between the two great wars" (3). Later critics have suggested that the fit between modernist writing and the new critical esthetic was not quite as tight as Blackmur apparently believed. It has furthermore, become increasingly difficult to believe in a single correct interpretation of modernism. So, the new critic's view of modernism now tends to be regarded as merely one phase in its historical reception, rather as a definitive account of its meanings. The great critic Andreas Huyssen has used this insight in order to propose an interesting thesis about the emergence of postmodernism, which, he maintains, "was never a rejection of modernism *per se*, but rather a revolt against that version of modernism which had



been domesticated in the 1950s" (4). In literature, this domestication took place largely at the hands of the New critics.

Huyssen's observation takes us back to Pynchon's recollection of the 1950s, for in emphasizing the fact that he was first exposed to modernist writing in college, that is, within a specific institutional framework, he appears to acknowledge the extent to which his understanding of modernism was mediated by certain cultural formations of the period.

The modernists depicted a world of fragmentation and uncertainty, but sought to contain and transcend their vision of disjointedness. They evolved a number of strategies for establishing the forms of coherence. They relied on paradox, irony, contradictions, myth, but they sought higher order or unity in the contemporary anarchy. Thomas Pynchon takes these modernist premises and presents them in brutal form; he parodies these premises. The present discussion centers on the modernist motifs and shows how these motifs are parodied.

Along with its emphasis on loftier themes such as racism, imperialism and religion, and its cognizance and appropriation of many elements of traditional high culture and literary form, Thomas Pynchon's work also demonstrates a strong affinity with the practitioners and artifacts of low culture, including comic books and cartoons, pulp fiction, popular films, television programmes, cookery, urban myths, conspiracy theories, and folk art. This blurring of the boundary between "High" and "Low" culture, sometimes interpreted as a "deconstruction", is seen as one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism.

In particular, Pynchon has revealed himself in his fiction and non-fiction as an aficionado of popular music. Song lyrics and mock musical numbers appear in each of his novels. In his autobiographical introduction to the *Slow Learner*, he reveals a

fondness for both jazz and rock and roll. The character Mc Clintic Sphere in *V.* is a fictional composite of master jazz musician such as Ornette Coleman, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk. *The Crying of Lot 49*, the lead singer of "The Paranoids" sports "a Beatle haircut" and sings with an English accent. In the closing pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*, there is an apocryphal report that Tyrone Slotrop, the novel's protagonist, played Kazoo and harmonica as a guest musician. In *Vineland*, both Zoyd wheeler and Isaicah Two Four are also musicians: Zoyd played Keyboards in a 1960s, surf band called "The Carvairs", while Isaiah played in a punk band called "Billy Barf and the Vomitons."

Investigations and digressions into the realms of human sexuality, psychology, sociology, mathematics, science, and technology recur throughout Pynchon's works. One of his earliest short stories, "Low Lands" (1960), features a meditation on Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as a metaphor for telling stories about one's own experiences. His next published work, "Entropy" (1960), introduced the concept which was to become synonymous with Pynchon's name. Another early story, "Under the Rose" (1961), includes amongst its cast and characters a Cyborg set anachronistically in Victorian-era-Egypt. This story significantly reworked by Pynchon, appears as chapter 3 of *V.* "The secret integration" (1964), Pynchon's last published story, is a sensitively handled coming-of-age tale in which a group of young boys face the consequences of the American policy of racial integration. At one point in the story, the boys attempt to understand the new policy by way of the mathematical operation, the only sense of the world with which they are familiar.

*The Crying of Lot 49* also alludes to entropy and communication theory, and contains scenes and descriptions which parody calculus, Zeno's paradozes, and the thought experiment known as Maxwell's demon. At the same time, the novel also

investigates homosexuality, celibacy and both medically-sanctioned and illicit psychedelic drug use. Like *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow* describes many varieties of sexual fetishism, and features numerous episodes of drug use, most notably marijuana but also cocaine, naturally occurring hallucinogen's and the mushroom *Amanita muscarita*. *Gravity's Rainbow* also derives much from Pynchon's background in mathematics: at one point, the geometry of garter belts is compared with that of cathedral spires, both described as mathematical singularities. *Mason & Dixon*, explores the scientific, theological, and socio-cultural foundations of the Age of Reasons whilst also depicting the relationship between actual historical figures and fictional characters in intricate detail and, like *Gravity's Rainbow*, is an archetypal example of the genre of historiographic metafiction.

After leaving Cornell University, Pynchon began to work on *V.* From February 1960 to September 1962. He was employed as a technical writer at Boeing in Seattle, where he compiled safety articles for the Bomarc service News, a support news letter for the BOMARC surface-to-air missile deployed by the U.S. Air Force. Pynchon's experiences at Boeing inspired his depictions of the "Yoyodyne" corporation in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, and both his background in physics and the technical journalism he undertook at Boeing provided much raw material for *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* when it was published in 1963, Pynchon's *V.* won a William Faulkner Foundation Awards for best first novel of the year.

After resigning from Boeing, Pynchon spent time in New York and Mexico before moving to California, where he was reportedly based for much of the 1960s and early 1960s, most notably in an apartment in Manhattan Beach (Frost 2003). Pynchon, during this time, flirted with the life style and some of the habits of the hippie counter culture (Gordon 1994).

Relatively little is known about Thomas Pynchon's private life; he has carefully avoided contact with journalists for more than forty years. Only a few photos of him are known to exist, nearly all from his high school and college days, and his whereabouts have often remained undisclosed. A review of *V.* in the New York Times Book Review described Pynchon as "a recluse" living in Mexico, thereby introducing the media label which has pursued Pynchon throughout his career (Plimpton 1963: 5). Nonetheless, Pynchon's absence from the public spotlight is one of the notable features of his life, and it has generated many rumors and apocryphal anecdotes.

### **Literature Review**

Numerous critics have diversely commented upon Pynchon's *V.* Since its publication in 1961. It is certainly impossible to incorporate all of them in this short thesis. Commenting upon the form and narrative style, the famous critic Tony Tanner posits:

It is worth noting that *V.* is not a difficult book to read in the way that Joyce's major works, for example, initially are. Each of the fifteen (sic) chapters and the epilogue can be read in what might be called traditional way what is confusing initially is the connections between the chapters and its narrative. (42)

The renowned critic Robert Holton comments on the historiography of the novel *V.* He says, 'A post modern historiographical novel, a novel about historical representation as well as about historical event' (343). Holton seems engaged only with the view of history in *V.*

Further, examining the blankness of women in *V.*, Mary Allen says, "The variety of women in *V.* results from various fantasies of men" (1). She interprets *V.* as a novel that shows the woman as fetish construction. Commenting upon the search

of Herbert Stencil, the famous critic James Mark. D. Hawthorne writes, "Psychologically, Herbert Stencil is trying, at once, to rival his father and to justify an oedipal love for his mother" (204). Hawthorne, thus, interpreted the novel *V.* from psychological point of view.

Similarly, Molly Hite reaches a very different conclusion about the nature of history in *V.* She argues that "If history is not a cabal in *V.* this does not condemn it to incoherence. History does have a pattern in this book; it is organized by a sort of repetition compulsion that rages unchecked because nobody seems to see it" (38). Molly Hite's interpretation sounds postmodern.

Another famous critic Kenneth Kupsh sees parody of detective and historical fictions in *V.* He even finds the adherence of traditional demands. He writes:

Pynchon set out in *V.* not simply to parody forms he was in the end imitating, but rather to challenge basic assumptions and formulae of detective and historical fictions, while at the same time adhering to their most traditional demands. Here we may begin to see the parody of forms and adherence of traditional demands. (18)

Thus, Kupsh sees *V.* as a novel that falls under the category of modernism and postmodernism at the same time since it parodies and adheres the traditional demands.

Mark Sanders analyzed the novel *V.* in historiographical terms and states some ground rules for the metropolitan European colonialism in Africa. He, especially, focuses his interpretation on "Mondaugen's Story." He says:

"Mondaugen's story" is an allegory, much in the tradition of *Heart of Darkness*, in which Africa is called upon to provide a space in which the European *Zeitgeist* can be visited by its disavowed spectral double. The Europeans, who enact their sexual fantasies within the walls of

Foppl's castle, are, by Pynchon's account, typical European colonizers in general. (Fall 1997)

Sanders sees Africa in *V.* is the place for Europeans to perform acts that they wish nobody back to hear about, a place where the cries of shame are muted and life proceed. Alice Jardine interprets the novel *V.* from the feminist point of view. She has given her analysis. On the basis of gender as social construction by examining the role of *V.* in the novel. She writes:

*V.* herself is nothing more than a fetish construction constructed by male ideology that man will always search for, without ever knowing why, neither study also considered the ways in which man, masculinity, and maleness are also social construction that shape, and are shaped by, the feminine. (3)

Similarly, the famous critic Susan Basow, while discussing about gender and sex says that sex is a biological term; people are termed either male or female depending on their sex organs and genes. In contrast, gender is a psychological and cultural term, referring to one's subjective feelings of maleness or femaleness. She says, "At no point in *V.* do we question *V.*'s biological sex, though in "*V. in Love*" and in her role as the Bad Priest, Stencil and Fausto identify her with masculine gender or sex role identity" (12).

Susan Basow also sees gender as the social construction in Thomas Pynchon's *V.* She claims that the gender is socially and psychologically constructed in the novel *V.*

Thomas Pynchon's handling of the theme of "entropy" has raised many reactions from the various critics. The word "entropy" refers to "The degradation of

the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity", the definition of Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.

Many critics have so well documented the animate object has so quickly and thoroughly insinuated itself into the world of *V*. The famous critic Tonny Tanner in his book "*V. and V2*" writes:

It has been thought that *V*. single-mindedly depicts the decline in the world from the animate to the inanimate, but this view really only represents half of the novel's more complex and subtle equation. For each animate being that can be seen to have become somehow less animate, there is some inanimate object, like Benny's garrulous robot-antagonist SHROUD, or Rachel Owlglass' sensuous sports car, that has become to some degree newly animate. (27)

Theme of "entropy" and decline of animate into inanimate thus becomes clear in Pynchon's *V*. In the similar vein, the famous critic David Seed shares a similar opinion. He bases his interpretation on the theme of entropy he says, "Entropy is the strict theme of *V*. and the text is complicated so as to make a clear overview well high impossible" (116). He sees loss of matter and energy in *V*.

Another critic Theodore D. Karpertian has given a bit different idea of entropy with its opposite. He examines the two different narratives in *V*. and says:

The *V*. narrative represents and the Profane narrative constitute, then, a binary opposition; as the Profane narrative represents entropy (and ridicules its principal exponent profane), so the *V*. narrative represents the contradictory effort at negentropy (and ridicules its principal exponent, Stencil), and the two narratives coexist within the frame of the text, consequently, in ironic relation to each other. (76)

Thus, the sharing of skepticism of entropy as the central motif in *V.*, what all of these views hold most strikingly in common is their basic distrust of the text as it stands, a feeling that its evidence can never be truly and faithfully accepted as adding up to any one thing in particular.

Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury in *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* present the similar view. "In *V.* Thomas Pynchon attempted to give a parodic shape to the powers of world history, despite the entropic and disintegrating process he discerned at work in it" ("Strange Realities Adequate Fictions" 382). Ruland and his co-writer view the history in *V.* and conclude that the history is no longer a graspable progression but a strange set of lunacy and pain that turns the writer away from the immediacy of realism towards a mocking of the world's substance, a cartooning of character, a fantasizing of acts.

The observation above shows that the novel has undergone diverse sort of readings and interpretations. Despite this multiplicity of interpretations, the present research will be confined in viewing the novel as a true parody of modernist search for order and coherence. In order to prove this, the second chapter will be centered on the theoretical aspects. And these include, mainly Linda Hutcheon's view on parody and other diverse concepts of postmodernism by different critics and philosophers.



## II: PARODY AND POSTMODERNISM

### Definition of Parody

Parody refers to the imitative use of the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous. This is usually achieved by exaggerating certain traits, using more or less the same techniques as the cartoon caricaturist. In fact, parody is a kind of satirical mimicry. As a branch of satire its purpose may be corrective as well as derisive. If an author has a propensity for archaic or long words, double blanked adjectives, long convoluted sentences and paragraphs, strange names, quaint mannerisms of expression, sentimental, bombastic, arch or pompous, then these are some of the features that the would be parodist will seek to exploit.

Parody is difficult to accomplish well. There has to be a subtle balance between close resemblance to the 'original' and a deliberate distortion of its principal characteristics. It is, therefore, a minor form of literary art which is likely to be successful only in the hands of writers who are original and creative themselves. In fact the majority of the best parodies are the work of gifted writers.

The origins of parody are ancient. Aristotle refers to it in *Poetics* and attributes its invention to Hegemon of Thasos who used an epic style to represent men as being inferior to what they are in real life. Hegemon was supposed to have been the first man to introduce parody in theatre, in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. However, the 6<sup>th</sup> century poet Hipponax has also been credited with this.

### Parody and Style

Style has so many senses, but in literature it implies to the set of features which individualizes some individual or group. These features emerge through print,

but the term could apply to the full range of human behaviour, physiognomies, demeanors, mannerism anything that is open to individual variation. We can speak of the style of Beethoven, of Frank Lloyd Wright, of Boris Yeltsin, of Steffi Graff.

However, style is the constellation of idiosyncratic practices. Theorists have traditionally subscribed to the belief that idiosyncratic style is a consequence of choice-but choice circumscribed by constraints of medium, genre intention, and the like. In literary art these choices are of many sorts-favoured phraseology, syntactic turns, discourses design, and content itself. The analyst of idiosyncratic style is not concerned with the small-scale feature (say, alliteration) per se; its definition is taken for granted. Instead, he or she studies the feature's frequency and function as a component of an author's overall personal style.

Traditionally, parody has been defined as a subspecies of satire, the genre of making fun. A parody- one in the class of what Gerald Genette calls "hypertexts"- typically ridicules another text- the "hypertext".

There are actually several different phenomena included under the name "parody". Genette's *Palimpsests* masterfully clarifies these, proposing four categories; "strict parody," "travesty," "satiric pastiche" and "pure pastiche". The first three may be considered "parodic" in the broad sense, while "pure" pastiche is not satirical and therefore not parodic, but still useful to style analysis since it depends on textual imitation. In its narrowest traditional sense, "parody" is a simple figure of speech, a form of word play. The "strict parody" imitates an original by substituting as little as possible, for instance, replacing a loftier word with a trivial or commonplace one, while keeping the rest of the text verbatim. A strict parodic text "cites a known text

in order to give it a new meaning, playing on words as necessary to the extent that that's possible (24).

“travesty” or “burlesque travesty”, is another of the categories Genette proposes. As he explains “burlesque travesty modifies the style without modifying the subject; inversely, parody modifies the subject without modifying the style. In other words, travesty takes a wellknown noble story and renders in it in a demeaning style quite at odds with that to the original” (29). It is too bad that the term “travesty” is so little utilized today in English studies and so often confused with “parody” they are not only different from each other but, in an important sense, opposite terms.

The third of Genette's category is the “pastiche.” Pastiche, borrowed from the French “pastiche”, which was in turn borrowed from the Italian “pasticcio” refers to stylistic imitation, whether satirical or non satirical. In Genette's words pastiche is “the simple act-whatever its function-of stylistic imitation” (24). Non-satirical imitation are sometimes called “exercises”. Genette asserts that such literary exercise tends to have a playful, not a satiric, charge.

“ Satiric Pastiche” (or “charge” or “imitation caricaturale”) is the fourth parodic category Genette describes. This is the form that we generally understand as stylistic parody: the parodying text makes fun of the original text by imitating its style and using it as a vehicle for baser, more vulgar, or otherwise inappropriate content. (Since that imitation may or may not entail exaggerations of the original style, “Caricatural” is perhaps not the best cover term,”) According to Genette, this form works “ by means of imitating the style of another, noble, text and applying it to a vulgar subject”. With the above distinction we can say that parody refers to stylistic

imitation for satirical effect, whether the satiric target is inappropriate content or style.

There is clear distinction between parody and satire in general. Nonparodic satire can be directed at anything in the world, that is, at any target made up of what the Russian formalist called “unmodeled reality.” But parody only satirizes other texts or genres, that is, what has already been textually modeled. Following Ziva Ben Porat (1979), Linda Hutcheon usefully distinguishes between the extramurality of satire and the intramurality of parody. So Hutcheon defends, as she must, against the poststructuralist contention that all is text.

Ben Porat argues three possible relations of parody to satire. In one, the parody is “indirectly satirical,” that is the target of the parody is the form—the “style” of the original in the global aspect. The second is “directly satirical” or “instrumental”(23), that is the style used to satirize something other than the original content. In this usage, it is not the form that is satirized, but the content—by being put in this form.

No one can deny the claim that parody is, at once, ridicule and homage. Indeed the term’s ambivalence is built into its very etymology since para-can mean either “against” or “: along side of” . But Hutcheon argues that ridicule, however necessary to satire, is not a defining component of parody, that the sole criterion of the latter is “representation with ‘critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity (8). The replacement of “ridicule” with the broader term “irony” opens floodgates. This replacement does accounts for the element of homage in texts like *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which, however, much fun it makes of Victorian novels, also treats them with respect. It also explains the case where the parody, far

from being comic, is actually horrendous. Broadening the definition of “parody” to include such cases is obviously useful, but extending it to be the entire sum of postmodern texts seems to blur some distinctions between the genre and the movement.

There are two possible ways to reaffirm the centrality of ridicule to parody. One is by nastier synonyms such as “derision” , “mockery” and “taunting”. The kind of ridicule we may want to talk about is best captured by better synonyms that accommodate the ambivalence of criticism and homage. While thinking of parody as a kind of twitting or rallying of the original, such that even target, the parodee, can admire the accomplishment. Certainly we all know and accept good-natured teasing, and, in many cases, that’s all that parodies do. Hutcheon defines parody as “ imitation with ironic different”. It is understandably tempting to find in some single concept the key to a whole zeitgeist, but Dwight Macdonald in avoiding such claims sounds wiser. He says:

I fell at home with parody because elderly culture like ours is suffused with parody. We are self-conscious, we have the historical sense, we look back on the past. Our avant-garde has done a lot of its fighting in the rear. We are backward looking explorers and parody is a central expression of our times. But I had better stop before I begin talking about the Zeitgeist. (15)

Moreover, there are some important parallels between parody and irony. Both are schemata that rely on hidden subtexts: the reader must acknowledge what is implicit rather than explicit and must understand the rhetorical and literary norms which are

being flouted by the parodying text. In an important sense, he or she must be in the know, a member of an elite or in group, to become aware of the transgression.

In the case of parody, Hutcheon's theory of parody has raised interesting issues. She says, "the kind of parody upon which I wish to focus is an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting and trans-contextualizing previous works of art" (21). So, Hutcheon takes parody as the device of postmodernism.

Of the three terms—irony, deference, and imitation—imitation remains the most tractable, as long as one remembers is what parodic imitation is not: it is not conventional mimesis. Mimesis is the imitation of life, that is modeled reality, where as parody imitates only an already modeled reality, the texts themselves. It is by only imitating another text, an original which the reader can recognize or consult, that stylistic parody arises. And the success or failure of that imitation gives us valuable insights into the nature of the style of the original.

We recognize the various components of imitation whatsoever—word choice, syntax, punctuation, figures of speech and so on. The sentences of elaborate stylist like James Joyce, William Faulkner have provided rich fodder for generations of parodist. But formalists should not forget the content, too, can be parodied. Parodies of narrative fiction, for example, may imitate kinds of actions; kinds of character; kinds of setting; kinds of themes; kinds of aesthetic conventions and so forth. A parodist of Tolstoy would evoke a large cast of characters, events on an epic scale, a focus on moral questions; a parodist of Beckett would think of one or two characters in a nondescriptive plebian setting who obsess over their boredom and misery.

Not only substance and form can be parodied, but also the original author's way of thinking. Carolyn Wells, an early student of the subject, recognized this and wrote, "A parody may utilize not only the original writer's diction and style, but follow a train of thought precisely along the lines that he would have pursued from the given premise" (26). We might want to rephrase "train of thought" in more modern terms such as "discourse design" but Well's observation still seems correct.

In scope, parodies may span whole texts or only parts, providing they are distinctive of the general style. Parodies may target single texts or entire gesture of texts, general textual convention or the style of an author, a period or a literary movement. Narrative techniques may also be imitated. But narrative features by themselves are too few and too generalized to mark a text as a parody: they can only work together with stylistic and contextual imitations.

In sum, parody, whether of personal, generic, or periodic style, typically turns on idiosyncratic choices among the entire panoply of literary and linguistic features — from the smallest particulars of form, like meter and rhyme, to the broadest choices of subject matter.

As practically every theorist has argued, stylistic parody depends on an audience familiar with the style of the original author and cognizant of the new subject matter's inappropriateness. Both kinds of knowledge are required: the audience must not only recognize the original but sense that the style is being used to express content which the targeted author could or would not contemplate, except in joking spirit.

## Parody and Postmodernism

Parody is the component of postmodernism as it dismantles the previous texts. Linda Hutcheon's arguments in both *The Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism* are often developed in direct response to Fredric Jameson. He favours modernism over postmodernism. As a result, Hutcheon's discussion sounds like a polemic against modernism. She sees postmodernism as a case of play with purpose. She defines postmodernism as the process of making the product. It is absence with presence, it is dispersal that needs centering in order to be impersonal. In other words, for Hutcheon, the postmodern part takes of a logic of "both/and", not one of "either/or". Hutcheon equates post structuralism with post modernism she says:

The poststructuralist version is not the modernism of the closed and finished work of art. Rather, it is a modernism of playful transgression, of an unlimited weaving of textuality, a modernism all confident in its rejection of representation and reality, in its denial of the subject, and of the history. (Poetics, 50)

For Hutcheon, postmodernism remains historical and political through its parodic historical reference. Through such parodic reference, "postmodernist forms want to work toward a public discourse that would eschew modernist aestheticism and hermeticism and its attendant political self marginalization" (Poetics 23). She argues that the term postmodernism in fiction be reserved to describe the more paradoxical and historically complex form. She calls such fiction as "historiographic metafiction" (40). The terms "postmodern fiction" and "historiography metafiction": therefore exist in a relationship of identity and describe the same set of objects.



In defining the term parody, Linda Hutcheon takes it as a value-problematizing, denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history of representation. Parody is often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or inter-textuality. It is usually considered central to postmodernism both by its detractor and its defenders. To her argument, Hutcheon disapproves Jameson's idea of Pastiche which is equivalent to empty parody.

Linda Hutcheon, discussing about the function of parody, says:

Postmodern parody is not ahistorical or dehistoricizing but signals how present representation come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference. Postmodern parody does not disregard the context of the past representations but uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated from the past. (*The Politics*, 94)

Further, Hutcheon seems to argue that Parody also contests our humanistic assumptions about artistic originality and uniqueness and our capitalist notions of ownership and property.

Through the process of reproduction, parody works to foreground the politics of representation. In terms of historiographic metafiction, "Postmodern parody is a kind contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of the representations of history" (95). Postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative. It makes us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation paradoxically. Linda Hutcheon, more or less, equates parody and irony with postmodernism. She says:

Irony makes intertextual references into something more than simply academic play or some infinite regress into textuality: What is called to our attention is the entire representational process— and wide range of forms and modes of production and the impossibility of finding any totalizing model to resolve the resulting postmodern contradiction. (95)

As a form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies. Parody can be used as:

a self-reflective technique that points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past. Its ironic reprise also offers an internalized sign of a certain self-consciousness about our culture's means of ideological legitimating. (101)

Postmodern parodic strategies are often used by feminist artist to point to the history and historical power of those cultural representations. Postmodern parody ironically contextualizes both history and historical power to deconstruct them.

The politics of representation and the representation of politics frequently go hand in hand in parodic postmodern historiographic metafiction. Parody becomes a way of ironically revisiting the past-of both art and history.

Linda Hutcheon attempts a deliberate concentration on what she terms “core notions” of postmodernism, introduced in her previous work *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History Theory, Fiction* (Routledge, 1988). There, she explores lucidly and intelligently with a generous willingness to address an audience without an extensive background in her subject. Emphasizing ideology in its Althusserian sense, Hutcheon describes the postmodernist commitment to a “critique of domination”, which she takes on the paradoxical form of “complicitous critique”

(13), postmodernism's inevitable participation in the very systems it tries to subvert, the fundamental confrontation of postmodernism, according to Hutcheon, is that of "documentary historical actuality" with "formalist self-reflectivity and parody" (7). This paradoxical postmodernism she models on the example of postmodern architecture examined in her book.

On the other hand, this focus on an art form that translates into stable, palpable actualities has its clear advantages, specifically in discussing the controversial issue of postmodernism vs. modernism. The distinctiveness of postmodernist architecture (Centre Pompidou, for instance) from what Hutcheon in her *Poetics* calls "Modernism's great purist monuments" (26). (Philip Johnson's *Pennzoil Place*, for example) allows for a sharp differentiation between the two styles. And yet, the limitations of such a model become apparent when applied to possibilities rather than actualities: what are the historical "purist" modernist texts? While Hutcheon is clearly aware of postmodernism's "contradictory dependence upon and independence from... Modernism" (*Poetics* 23), her efforts to examine the tension between the two yield less than satisfactory results. Responding to the question of whether the politics of postmodernism are "neoconservatively nostalgic" or "radically revolutionary". Hutcheon writes:

Modeling postmodernism as a general cultural enterprise from postmodern architecture. I would have to argue that it is both and neither, it sits on the fence between a need (often ironic) to recall the past of our lived cultural environment and a desire (often ironized too) to change its present. (13)

This description of postmodernism can easily be applied to the many modernist's texts, their style and presentation.

Hutcheon, of course is aware of the lack of any consensus on the interpretation of postmodernism. This conflictual spirit in fact energizes the main thrust of her argument, a defense of postmodernism against critics such as Terry Eagleton or Fredric Jameson. These critics accuse it of trivial kitchiness, deathlessness, "aesthetic— cannibalism," or a lack of "genuine historicity". In her defense, Hutcheon focuses on two mass media representations, fiction and photography.

Fiction receives more attention in Hutcheon's discussion of "historiographic—metafiction", a key concept she first introduced in her poetics. Postmodern fiction not only interrogates historical representation but also stresses the political nature of its own act of narrativity. Representation but also stresses the political nature of its own act of narratives. Responding to some Marxist critics' charge that postmodernism is a historical. Hutcheon refers to accentuate postmodernism's engagement with issues of historiography, albeit in ironical, parodic ways.

Postmodernist fiction does its ideological work by questioning not only narrative conventions and codes but master narratives as well. Hence the detotalizing urge of such metafictional texts as Rushdie's *Mid Night Children*, in which the narrator Saleem offers his theory of the "pickles" version of history", with each chapter shaping partially, its own contents by its form. As Hutcheon suggests, instead of a single unified history, postmodern fictions offer "the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few. . . of women as well as men" (66).

Post modernism's political assertions, according to Hutcheon, occur in the context of parody. Her devotion of a chapter to the exploration of its politics, which she interprets as a deconstructive effort to revise or reread the past in paradoxical ways that simultaneously affirm and challenge historical representations. Hutcheon argues cogently and well, but in her relegation of the politics of postmodernism to the realm of parody, she forecloses the possibilities of examining the ideological dimensions of her subject in other ways. The sharply defined contours of her argument lend it a repetitive quality, her chapter on parody mostly a reiteration of her earlier discussions of postmodernism's "complicitous critique" or "doublecoded politics." Still, she succeeds in extending her remarks to photography and film.

Political grounds (parodic or not) define the common arena of much contemporary aesthetic practice. It is the crossing of disciplinary boundaries within these common grounds that is the most innovative, exciting feature of postmodernism. It's site of inquiry or a mosaic of theory and aesthetic practice—from painting and poetry to sculpture, film and video. Thus, in the most important chapter of her book, "Text/ Image border tensions", Hutcheon explores "fringe interference" the aesthetic confrontation between art forms. She mainly focuses on "fringe constructions" in photography to point out how such interferences combine not only the visual/verbal but also mass media and high art, artistic practice and aesthetic theory in the spots where these apparent opposites overlap and interfere both with each other and with mainstream notions of art. Investing a hyphen in photography, Hutcheon underlines its graphic potential, which she studies in the verbal/visual photography of Barbara Kruger, Martha Rosler, Ham Heacke, and Victor Brugin. By denaturalizing the determined nature of the process of making meaning, more importantly, they raise

such questions as, “What interests and powers does the traditional separation of the visual and the verbal have in both consumer mass culture and high art? or put more broadly, what are the cultural, sociopolitical, and economic conditions of production and reception” (133)?

A key concept in any discussion of postmodern specifically its politics - - is obviously that of reception. To perform its political function, postmodernist aesthetic practice, more than ever, depends on the viewer’s active participation. And yet, surprisingly, except for a brief discussion of “the politics of address”, which veers more towards artistic praxis than the viewer’s role. Hutcheon does not engage in any close scrutiny of the affective or the subjective in her study of postmodernism. Thus some basic questions concerning reception and value immediately present themselves: How do politics as an aesthetic end reshape our very understanding of aesthetic in general? Is the value of postmodernism finally in its didactic impulses to tutor us into becoming a more politically aware audience? But isn’t such an objective as old as Plato’s republic, as new as “modern” as Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* or Joyce’s *Ulysses*? Is the significance of postmodernism, as described by Hutcheon, applicable in its methodology to all texts - - contemporary or not - - since ideological bearing are inherent in all texts? Are we being “political” or “proto-political” - - to use Jameson’s useful term - - in reading a metafictional text or in viewing a hybrid photography?

Hutcheon herself comments on what she sees as postmodernism’s limitation, “it does not seem able to weak the move into political action” (157). The ultimate challenge of postmodernism, then, seems to be not just the crossing of boundaries

among disciplines but the propulsion of critics, artists and academics in to the realm of political action, which often demands unification.

Thus, Hutcheon ends her book with a chapter on various aspects of post modernism, although she is careful not to conflate them. They draw attention to the various subjects, to appropriations and misappropriations of the texts and society and their functions as socially and culturally determined and validated.

Yet, feminism, intent on charge and social agency, resists the ambivalent double-coded nature of the politics of postmodernism.

### **The Loss of Foundations and Master Narratives**

The power of any position has been traditionally gathered from its grounding. This grounding could be to either a metaphysical foundation- such as an external world in empiricism, mental structures in rationalism or human nature in humanism- or a narrative, a story of history- such as Marxism's class struggle, social Darwinism's survival of the fittest or market economics' invisible hand. With such groundings, positions are made to seem secure and inevitable, and not opportunistic or driven by advantage.

Again , as in the case of identity, postmodernists take two different but not incompatible stances, one categorical (valid throughout history and social context) and one interested in recent historical trends (thus overlapping the philosophy/periodization distinctions). Following the first position, foundations and legitimating, narratives have always been a hoax. They have been used to support a dominant view of the world and its order. Feminists, for example, have argued that the historical narratives have always been history. Empiricist's appeal to the nature of the external world covered the force of their own

concepts, methods, instruments, activities and reports in constructing that world. The significance of discourse and the inability of language to represent contribute to a general skepticism toward the legitimizing (meta) narratives underpinning western scientific thought, since no privileged access to external realities can be granted. The influential idea that different vocabularies can not be strictly compared or evaluated in terms of empirical support is mobilized as a support for this skepticism.

Following the second position, other postmodernist not the growing social incredulity note the growing social incredulity towards narratives and foundational moves. Lyotard (1984) showed the decline of the grand narrative of “spirit” and “emancipation”. “The proliferate of options and the growing political cynicism of the public leads to a suspicion of legitimating moves” (Giddens 1991). In Lyotard’s sense, perhaps all that is left is local narratives, i.e. accounts focusing on a particular setting and with limited generalizability over space and time. Research on gender would, for example, be clear about having studied gender relations in a particular social group at a particular time, and be modest about what this might say about gender relationship generally, in other settings or at another report in time.

Not all postmodernist see the retreat of grand narratives and a strong emphasis on the local as necessarily positive. Certainly, the decline of foundations and grand narratives takes away a primary prop of the dominant group’s offer of security and certainty as a trade for subordination. But the replacement is not necessarily freedom and political possibility on the part of marginalized groups.

Lyotard, demonstrated the rise of ‘performativity’, where measures of means towards social ends become ends in themselves. Access to computers and information- contingent less upon knowledge integrated in the person than upon



financial resources- has become a significant source of knowledge and power. Along with this come new forms of control directed not by a vision of society and social good but simply by more production and consumption. As several critics have noted, Lyotard and Baudrillard come close to being caught in a contradiction between rather general statements about general cultural conditions existing 'out there', and problematization of the ideas of representing the whole (master narrative) notions of the 'real' and representation (hyperrelativity) (Kellner 1988). Critics have been quick to respond to Lyotard's thesis about the end of metanarratives:

that not only does the thesis itself betray the traces of master narrative, a criticism which Lyotard acknowledges when he asks 'Are "We" not telling, whether bitterly or gladly, the great narrative of the end of great narratives?', but also that it might be necessary to distinguish between different orders of grand narrative (Smart 2000:456)

The difficulty for postmodernism with the claimed fall of grand narratives, as in the concept of fragmented identities, is how to generate a political stance with regard to these developments. One victim of the increased doubt of grand narratives is the idea of knowledge as a source of emancipation. If one rejects an essentialist foundation and beliefs that more than local resistance is needed, some kind of combination between postmodernism and critical theory may well provide the best remaining option.

From aforementioned statements by different philosophers, it is clear that the parody is a part of postmodernism. It is a textual imitation in literature to show the multiplicity, disorder and inconsistencies. Within the framework of these aspects of post modernism, the novel will be interpreted and analyzed in the third chapter to show the parody of modernist search for order in *V*.

### III. PARODY OF MODERNIST SEARCH FOR ORDER IN *V.*

Thomas Pynchon in his novel *V.* craftily presents the parody of modernist search for order and coherence. The analysis of the protagonists, their worlds and their actions throughout the course of the novel will help us to prove this hypothesis. Besides, the description and interpretation of the major characters, events and their worlds depicted in the novel can also help adding some significant evidences to justify this assumption.

At the center of *V.* stands the problem of how and where to find a principle of order in the modern world. By dividing the text between two very different characters, Pynchon seems to be balancing against each other two opposite answers. Benny Profane, a young man moving along the fringes of Bohemia in the New York of the mid-1950s, is part of a blatantly and unredemably disordered world. The aimless quality of his existence is reflected in one of his favourite past times, yo-yoing. It consists of riding the subway shuttle endlessly back and forth between Grand Central Station and Times square.

But if in Profane's world nothing appears to connect with anything else, in Herbert Stencil's world all signs seem to gravitate towards a single, magnetic source. The person at the heart of the all-pervading plot Stencil intuits beneath the surface chaos of twentieth-century history is *V.*, a mysterious woman whose checkered career Stencil has long been trying to reconstruct.

Herbert Stencil's role in *V.* clearly draws on the elements of modernist tradition. The modernists depicted a world of fragmentation and uncertainty, but sought to contain and transcend their vision of disjointedness. They evolved a number of strategies for establishing forms of coherence. One of the most forceful and recurrent strategies was the manipulation of mythic allusions. T.S. Eliot offered a

memorable elucidation of the purpose of this technique in his essay on James Joyce's *Ulyses*, where he stated that the mythic parallels in this novel are "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (8). Pynchon refers to this tradition of modernist writers. He says:

As spread thighs are to the libertine, flights of migratory birds to the ornithologist, the working part of his tool bit to the production machinist, so was the letter V to young Stencil. He would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he'd awakened to discover the pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly quest after all, and adventure of the mind, in the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*. (61)

Pynchon links Stencil explicitly to an earlier generation's search for an overarching mythical order. The reference, however, is pointedly satirical. There is an "unmistakable air of absurdity to Stencil's obsession"(52). And it does not take long for the reader to begin suspecting that the entire story of V. may be no more than a vast fabrication on Stencil's part. Herbert Stencil does not seem very eager to establish whether the pieces of the narrative he has so far gathered together are true or false. This strategy is summed up in the motto "approach and avoid" (55).

Evidently, Stencil attaches greater importance to the sense of vitality he derives from the mere facts of this involvement in the search of V. than to the actual possibility of unveiling the mystery of her identity. Implicitly, he fears that if his quest were to be brought to some kind of terminus, he would lose the energy and enthusiasm he now feels, and perhaps sink into the same passive torpor as Profane.

Two points may be made about Pynchon's parodic echoing of the modernist interest in myth. In the first place, by emphasizing the inner-directed nature of Stencil's motivation, Pynchon draws myth into the orbit of subjective delusions. Myth no longer provides, as it does in Eliot, a way of sustaining a belief in continuity or permanence. Instead of offering a means of escape from the torments of private experience, it becomes an extravagant, magnified projection of a character's inner fantasies. In the second place, the contours of myth remain ultimately undefined in *V.* The fragmented narrative which Stencil reconstructs still possesses specific aura that makes it significantly different from the mythical orders to which the modernists alluded.

Moreover, if there is a pattern to the twentieth century, as is occasionally suggested in *V.*, its revelation would clearly result in a starkly negative form of transcendence. The myth hidden at the heart of *V.* evokes no consolatory potencies. For the modernists, the interest in myth was a way of expressing their belief that there were possibilities for human fulfillment of which the modern world seemed to have lost sight.

The narrative of *V.*, however, leads not towards a vision of a higher unity, but towards an increasingly pervasive state of disintegration. If the lady *V.* is conceived as a mythical emblem of the course of twentieth-century history, then the message she bears is a frightening, appalling one. She is consistently associated with violence, and with processes of dehumanization.

In Pynchon's dark parody, the modernist vision of higher forms of coherence collapses. We are left with two equally dismaying alternatives: either *V.* is nothing more than a series of coincidences, or there is indeed some kind of pattern beneath the

inconclusive appearance. But the pattern presented in the plot seems chaotic which leads us towards the total annihilation.

Another method the modernist writes evolved to transcend their intuitions of disorder was the representation of heightened states of consciousness. They discovered value and meaning, however tentative and provisional, in certain transitory moments of intense, luminous awareness that gave focus and coherence to a disjointed world. There is a direct allusion to this modernist motif in chapter eleven of *V.*

"Confessions of Fausto Maijstral." At the end of the long description of a day during World War II which Fausto spends wandering around Valletta, Malta with his wife, he writes that they were deceived, that "there are no epiphanies on Malta this season, no moments of truth" (337). In this passage, the inversion of the modernist motif is straightforward and uncomplicated.

In chapter nine, "Mondaugen's story", a more intricate pattern emerges. Here the epiphany or moment of truth actually does take place, but with a horrifying twist to it. The scene at this point in the novel is German south-West Africa in 1904. The immediate context is the ruthless suppression by the German occupying forces of a rebellion of the native Hereros and Hottentots. In describing the experiences of one of the German soldiers who participates in this campaign of extermination -- which anticipates the destruction of the Jews during World War II -- the narrative begins to center on a strange bond that develops between victims and executioners.

At first, the narrator describes this bond in the cold, mechanical language favoured by the modern bureaucratic dispensation: it is a matter of "functional agreement" or "operational sympathy" (261). But a few pages later this same experience gives rise to one of the novel's most remarkable stylistic flights.

The protagonist of these scenes, identified as the rider of a mare named Firelily, leads an outfit in charge of moving consignments of Hottent prisoners across the desert. At one point one of the prisoners causes trouble, and he is removed from the line, "After Fleische, with the tip of his Sjambok, had had the obligatory sport with the black's genitals, they cubbed him to death with the black's genitals, they cubbed him to death with the butts of their rifles and tossed what was left behind a rock for the vultures and flies" (263).

But the description of this brutal, wanton killing does not end there. Until now, killing has been a mere habit for Firelily's rider. For him each death is only one unit in a seemingly infinite series. This infinite series of death shows that the things seemed all at once to fall into a pattern or order. But, implicitly this image of death parodies, both in its structure and details, to James Joyce's epiphanies, Marcel Proust's moment's privileges, and Virginia Woolf's moments of vision. In this way Thomas Pynchon parodies the modernist aesthetic conventions.

What Pynchon does in "Mondaugen's story" is to seize on the principal features of the modernist/new critical tradition and submit them to an almost brutal form of exaggeration and distortion. He parodies the modernist aesthetic conventions.

The section centering on Firelily's rider's epiphany as he murders a black man is set within an intricate narrative structure that underlines, in the uncertainty it creates, this loss of stability and unity. The chapter in which these scenes occur deals principally with the experiences undergone in south-West Africa by a German engineer named Kurt Mondaugen. But in spite of the chapter's title "Mondaugen's story", it is not at all clear whose story this really is. In the novel's present --1956— Mondaugen is working for Yoyodyne, Inc. on Long Island, which is where Stencil tracks him down and gets him to tell his story. But the version we read is Stencil's

retelling of the story, and it is clearly not an entirely faithful account. As Dudley Eigenvalue puts it, the narrative has been "Stencilized" (228).

The scenes dealing with Firelily's rider occurred for the most part in 1904, eighteen years prior to Mondaugen's stay in South-West Africa. And we never find out exactly how Mondaugen came to know about these events. He may be dreaming these scenes, but the narrator observes that "if dreams are only waking sensation first stored and later operated on, then the dreams of a voyeur can never be his own" (225). In the given lines we find Mondaugen's Voyeuristic tendencies. He may have become a medium for somebody else's memories. But the question never receives a conclusive answer.

We have, then, several embedded narratives, with an uncertainty and disorder as to exactly how and in what form the narratives are relayed from one level to the next.

Furthermore, Firelily's rider's epiphany eventually becomes a part of his own receding past, so that it is perceived through yet another level of consciousness. After being mustered out, Firelily's rider moves to the coast, where he works on a harbour construction project. But his new life is a falling off from the fullness of his earlier experiences, and, as a result, he becomes a searcher after lost time in the Proustian mold.

At one point, a fusion of past and present appears to take place. Firelily's rider is supervising a line of native women at work in the harbour; one of the women stumbles and falls, bringing the rest of the line down. This reminds Firelily's rider of the incident with the black prisoner, and he is briefly overcome by a feeling of beneficence: "His heart rose the wind off the ocean turned balmy; here was a fragment of the old past, revealed as if by a parting in the fog" (269). But it is an ephemeral,

illusory moment. In making us uncertain as to whether these experiences actually belong to a particular individual, Pynchon seems to be moving away from the modernist belief that the power to contain and transcend the world's barrenness and disorder belong to the individual, isolated mind. Firelily's rider must eventually confront the fact that a divide has been crossed, a new world ushered in. If a season like the Great Rebellion ever came to him again, it could never be in that same personal, random array of picaresque acts he was to recall and celebrate in later years at best furious and nostalgic. But rather with a logic that chilled the comfortable perversity of the heart, that substituted capability for character, deliberate scheme for political epiphany.

For Sarah, the Sjangbok the chain of events become doubt:

The dances of death between Warmbad and Keetmanshoop, the taut haunches of the firelily, the black corpse impaled on a throne tree in a river swollen with sudden rain, for these the dearest canvasses in his soul's gallery, it was to substitute the bleak, abstracted and for him rather meaningless hanging on which he now turned his back. (273)

The first point to be made about this intricate narrative structure, in which the innermost scenes dealing with firelily's rider's involvement in the suppression of the Great rebellion of 1904 are seen through a series of frames, is that it casts doubt on the integrity of the experiences described.

The second point-dealing with the view of history implied in this conception of the self-can be approached by observing how the framing device, with its effect of retrospective vision, evokes the theme of loss, memory and nostalgia so powerfully associated with the work of Marcel Proust. But there is drastic difference between Marcel Proust and Pynchon. In Proust, the memory guarantees wholeness of vision,



the ability to escape the consive effects of time. The experience of loss is important precisely because it sets the stage for a more powerful sense of return and rediscovery.

Pynchon performs his revival of modernist conventions with exceptional skill and energy. The passages in "Mandaugen's story" are as intensely evocative, as stylistically accomplished as anything the modernists wrote. And yet, Pynchon clearly rips apart the modernist synthesis. It is as though he wanted to express the power and near heroism of the modernist aesthetic and experiential ideal, but also his own sense of anguish upon recognizing that this ideal has now become impossible to sustain.

It may be speculated that for Pynchon this impossibility is a consequence of twentieth century historical experience, which he sees as having penetrated and infected all areas of modern life. This stands in marked contrast to the modernist attitude to history, which often takes the form of an attempt to ignore or suppress it altogether. We may think, for example, of Stephen Dedalus' well known statement in *Ulysses*: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (37). It is true that these words suggest that Stephen is till the captive of history. But the fact that he clings passionately to the hope that this situation may be changed, indicates that he does not believe that it is in history that human beings achieve their fullest realization. This attempt to shift history to the margins, to at least provisionally master its disruptive influence, receives an exemplary expression in *To The Lighthouse*, where Andrew Ramsay's death in the trenches of World war I is referred to only briefly in a parenthetical aside. The narrative assimilates the momentousness of this event, and the larger event of which it is a part least comprehensive fashion.

However, a consideration of the attitudes towards history of the New Critics may provide an even clearer sense of the context against which Pynchon writing in *V.*,

for the anti-historical tendencies in modernist writing become much more insistent and dogmatic with the New Critics. This is reflected in a number of aspects of their aesthetic theory: in the belief that a poem as a poem has no propositional content, that is, that it does not assert anything about the world; in the theory of the aesthetic artifact as an autonomous whole, a unique of an unrepeatable manifestation that can not be translated into any other symbols; and in the assumption that the proper effect of the poem is to induce in the reader a state of equilibrium or detachment that results in a blockage of any tendency towards action. These aesthetic presuppositions are echoed in the New Critic's most significant and controversial methodological claim: that the study of biographical or historical materials is ultimately irrelevant to an understanding of the work of art.

In "Mondaugen's story", Pynchon recreates this longing to escape from the weight of history. Firelily's rider's moments of sudden insight into a cosmic pattern is placed in explicit opposition to the realm of worldly historical experience that lies beyond. The epiphany is:

Different from the official language of Von Trotha's orders and directives, different from the sense of function and the delightful powerless languor that are both part of military order that's filtered like spring rain down countless levels before reaching you; different from colonial policy, international ginagling, hope of advancement within the army or enrichment out of it. (264)

This is, on one level, an almost perfect mimicry of the modernist/New Critical vision. The contrast Pynchon sets up here may easily be inserted into the oppositions between history and epiphany, life and art, the mechanical and organic, prose and poetry that were central to this tradition.

On another level, however, Pynchon has clearly made the notion of an escape from history highly delusive. Is it truly possible, we may ask, that the murder of this blackman from "Von Trotha's orders and directives" or from "colonial policy"? Do these things really have nothing to do with Firelily's rider's actions?

Pynchon represents the desires that went into the creation of the modernist epiphany, but he also pictures its breakdowns. Instead of detached intellectual observer often placed at the center of modernist texts, the protagonist of these scenes from *V.* is a dedicated participant in a historical crime of appalling magnitude.

Pynchon's handling of the theme of nostalgia may help to further elucidate his sense of the modern historical predicament. For the fact that Firelily's rider yearns for a part that is thoroughly entangled in "a historical nightmare" (39). This means that whatever we reach out for is already tainted by the course of world events, or that the sheer enormity of the present makes us long desperately for the terrors of the past.

In *V.* Pynchon implies that the genuine purity has become an impossible ideal; so impossible that it cannot even be imagined anymore. "History-conceived as a spectacle of horrors – has expanded into a total and inescapable condition (40). Postmodernist writers and critics have placed a great deal of emphasis on the idea that it is impossible to distinguish in any consistent or meaningful way between history and fiction. This stress on the fictionality of all texts provides writers with new opportunities. Since history no longer consists of a more or less fixed order of events, writers may now regard the part as a largely unmarked terrain upon which they can freely impose their own designs.

In Pynchon's *V.*, there is extreme doubt as to the possibility of knowing the past appears in one of its most forceful and memorable forms. Herbert stencil's quest,

both comical and frightening, is haunted by the sense that "history will remain forever out of reach"(48).

Pynchon parodies the New Critical beliefs that the best poetry contains multiple "qualifications, double meanings and ironic contradictions," but they could somehow still resolved into a perfect and satisfying whole, that is, higher order.

The clues pertaining to the mystery of *V.* are scattered throughout the novel, reminding us, in their insistent interaction, of the notion of "cross-referentiality"(51). Stencil's own epistemological bias, which consists of an unrelenting urge to detect hidden meaning in just about anything that presents itself to his attention, comes across as an echo of the strategies of the New Critics. However, the persistent multiplication of connections in *V.* does not culminate in the discovery of a higher unity. It is not simply that we fail to acquire any certainty concerning the lady *V.*'s identity. What makes the attempt to uncover a coherent narrative, or to acquire a clear symbolic understanding of the meaning of *V.* Even more fruitless is the fact that the letter "V" pops up everywhere in the novel. It becomes much more than merely the thread that binds together the lady *V.*'s different disguises.

In the course of the novel, the letter 'V' is regularly attached to objects that have no apparent connections to her biography. Thus, we come across a mysterious land named "Vheissu" an episode involving Venezuelan terrorists a New York Jazz-club called the "V-Note", and the story of a rat named "Veronica". This proliferation of associations makes it impossible to formulate a clear set off alternatives within which the meaning of *V.* may be contained.

Stencil creates a frame that provides his quest with some degree of structure. He effectively restricts the possible solutions to the mystery to two: either the lady *V.* was an actual historical figure, or he is simply imagining her existence. But the

multiplication of the words beginning with the letter "V". disrupts this frame, and point the reader towards something else altogether: the arbitrary playfulness of the novelist.

Pynchon's use of multiple point of view, somewhat in the manner of Faulkner or Durrell, underscores the difficulty of piecing together historical truth and of separating it from the purely subjective. The narrator's reliability is consistently undermined by dream, disguise, and "poetic license." In the final sequence, the observer's identity is totally effaced. He becomes merely a possible vantage point. None of the "eight impersonations" knows the complete story, and neither, without creating part of it himself, can Stencil. The plot, to paraphrase the Wittgensteinian message of Mondaugen's atmospheric signals, is all that the case is.

If a pattern, coherent story, history exists, it must be put together by the reader, who, in a sense, mimics Stencil by supplying the pieces necessary to form a whole. If some of the pieces – the essential ones, the vital connections – are imagined by Stencil, then no plot really exists. The plot of chapter three becomes a metaphor for all plots, including the great plot that is history. Metaphor itself is, as Fuasto Maijstral realizes, "a kind of disguise"(29), and the plot centering on the murder of Porpentine may be nothing more than an elaborate system of impersonations and speculations whose purpose is to disguise the truth: that there is no pattern, no cause and effect sequence, no recoverable story, no history.

In the prefatory section to Chapter Seven, Eigenvalue, "The soul-dentist" (210) reflects on the causes of cavities and concludes, "Even if there are several per tooth, there's no conscious organization there against the life of the pulp, no conspiracy. Yet we have men like Stencil who must go about grouping the world's random caries into cabals" (139).

"Random" is the key word here. For Stencil, the threat of conspiracy is an acceptable alternative to the horror of randomness.

In Pynchon's most recent novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, paranoia is pervasive. Every character imagines an indefinable "they" pulling the strings. An older paranoia – belief in a transcendent God who an order on a formless universe – has given way to a new kind. Technology, man's boldest attempt to create his own order, has become "a control that is out of control"(27), as it applies either to the universe or to man-made systems. Many characters in *V.* engage in frenetic efforts both to control others and to identify the "they" whose ultimate control would make no sense at all.

In the novel, the centers of consciousness are characters within the story, not outside observers nor eavesdroppers on scattered fragments of conversation. Pynchon's technique makes possible an "increased sense of the fabric of history, as well as a sense of its personal dimensions"(203); here again one can not assertion how much is truth and how much is speculation or recreation. The increased complexity of the plot, moreover, adds immeasurably to the difficulty of determining what really happened.

Nevertheless, since the source of the information is not so vague as before, and since the elder Stencil appears as himself in the chapter, a kind of progression toward clarification can be seen, even if it proves in the end to be illusory. Another important difference between the two chapters in an increased tendency of the characters themselves to reflect on their situations – or of the elder Stencil on the situation. The alteration of point of view from one character to another provides a means of recording these reflections. By the end of the Florence chapter, the reader might, as Eigenvalue later does, notice that a number of the concerns of principal characters reflect Stencil's own. For instance: Old Godolphin's obsession with

Vheissue, its randomly changing surfaces and hollowness beneath. Victoria Wren's casual remarks that "perhaps only radiance left is Vheissue"(184) and that there may be "no Via del Paradiso" (185) anywhere in the world; Evan Godolphin's conception of mass paranoia as "a kind of communion" (178); and, finally, an observation by the elder Stencil which explains much about the structures of Chapter Three and Seven and sheds some light on the epistemological theme of the entire novel: "He had decided long ago that no situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the mind of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment" (174).

This types of order, structure and coherence collapse and we continuously fall into the fragments of truths until the final chapter.

Moreover, the history of particular V. figure Victoria wren-and her country is indeed a "country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth"(299). we first encounter Victoria during a retelling of the Fashoda incident, where she reduces Goodfellow, an agent of the British Foreign office, and later finds it "difficult to determine how much she had in fact planned, how much she had been out of control" (166). Whatever constituted her feelings for Goodfellow, Pynchon tells us that "She did not love him" (93). Despite such ambivalent feelings for Goodfellow, she weeps at their parting, when he is murdered, apparently through jealousy, by the agent of proper time.

Throughout the chapter, we are made uncertain, the possible truth is distorted, and dismissed even the higher order. Here also Thomas Pynchon is playing with the modernist tendencies, and p[resent them in most brutal forms so as to parodize the modernist literary conventions.

Almost all the incidents in V. "enact a decline of available energy, a hardening of living being into artificial ones, a degradation from vitality to mechanism, a

transfer of sympathy from human suffering to inanimate, objective existence" (84). In the world of *V.* there can only be few alternatives to decline, and those few are weak. Some understated temporary acts of escape and love, a sudden dash into the sea as all the lights go out in a city, the reconstruction of a marriage. All the rest dead to stasis – although the book's scale and exuberance suggest that mass decline is a principal of existence in the novel but not in its creator. The central plot from which the book's various historical fantasies depend – Egypt in 1898, Florence in 1899, Paris in 1913, Malta in 1919 and again in the 1940s, South-West Africa in 1922, and glimpses of a score of other setting and moments – involves the search made by one Herbert Stencil for traces of the woman *V.*, who may have been Stencil's mother, as she moves through Europe and the twentieth century, becoming "ever less vital and more artificial as she grows older" (321). In her final manifestation as "the Bad Priest" at Malta during the Second World war, *V.* advises young girls to become nuns to "avoid the sensual extremes – pleasures of intercourse, pain of childbirth"(343) – and to stop the creation of new life. To young boys she preaches "that the objects of male existence was to be like a crystal: beautiful and soulless" (340). And before her death she gives up much of her own body to inanimate surrogates: a wig, artificial feet, a glass eye containing a clock, false teeth. A jewel is later found sewn in her novel. Increasingly lifeless and crystalline, finally killed by the mechanical engines of war in the sky over Malta, the woman *V.* is the most vividly realized victim of the book's "pandemic processes of inanition and decline"(351). The other victims include a ruined product of failed plastic surgery, a man with a knife-switch in his arm, a synthetic body used for radiation research, a girl reduced to a fetish, a character named Profane who is constantly, victimized by hostile objects. The book implies a



conclusion that lies beyond itself: An ending where all life and warmth "have declined and disappeared, an apocalypse that arrives in total silence" (263).

Stencil's father asks in his diary "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: What is she" (53). The given remark of V. indicates that we are totally helpless in determining the wholeness as the postmodern critics believed. The novel *V.* is an elaborate gloss on an earlier account of a woman whom history replaced with an object: the chapter on "The Dynamo and the Virgin" in *The Education of Henry Adams*. Pynchon's Stencil, who like Adams talks of himself in the third person, searches for a symbol even more inclusive than Adam's; is the virgin who became the dynamo. The woman V. is Stencil's reconstruction of scattered and ambiguous clues and symbols, gathered into episodes told by narrator – often obviously flawed and unreliable – whom Stencil creates for the occasion.

Half the novel consists of Stencil's indirect narration of the life of V., who is seldom central to the story, but slips inside ways when she is least expected. Stencil's reconstruction of twentieth-century history, a reconstruction in which he establishes the novel's background. The woman V., like Pynchon's history, is put together by design, but the design is repeatedly parodied.

Pynchon invents coincidences and patterns which suggest historical design in the novel's world. This sense of historical design is brutally parodied. He presents, "If the coincidence are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but some thing far more appalling" (450). This lines suggests that the ultimate end or truth is quite impossible in this time.

The suggestion of will and design in history is analogue so Stencil's own "design" of V., but Pynchon makes the analogy even more complex and suggestive than a simple equation can be. First of all, V. is "not entirely a product of Stencil's

reconstructions"(369). The frame of the novel *V.* is a narrator's direct account of events in 1955 and 1956, events which include Stencil's indirect narrations of the life of *V.* The direct framing narrative is, unlike Stencil's apparently reliable, and it gradually and increasingly provides its own, un-Stencilized, evidence of *V.*'s existence. "The confessions of Fausto Maijstral," an apparently reliable narrative written by the last person who saw *V.* alive, has a chapter to itself, unmediated by Stencil, it presents a plausible account of *V.*'s final moments. And a relic of *V.*, and ivory comb which in Stencil's invented narrative she had perhaps acquired decades earlier, later appears both in Maijstral's confessions and, in the hands of Maijstral's daughter in Pynchon's direct narrative. The comb serves as a kind of optical proof that *V.* once existed in the world of the book. But by the time the evidence appears in the direct narratives, Stencil has gone off to Stockholm to pursue other and more tenuous threads"(391), and the authentic clue eludes him, presumably forever. The moment when the comb reappears is a heart breaking one, not only because the reader knows then that one neat and satisfying conclusion to the novel a reasonably successful conclusion to Stencil's search – has been irrevocally denied, but also because the incident makes a faint and reticent suggestions of the limits of human knowledge: a suggestion which, perhaps because of its reticence, rings true.

This leads back to the matter of historical design. For the characters in the direct narration of the book, *V.*'s existence is never more than speculative: their evidence of her is always partial. It is only the narrator, who has no use for it, who has through knowledge of the evidence and of the "truth". The characters have only partial knowledge of what in the book "in fact" exists. Now the book's spenglerian speculation on historical design is also "a reconstruction from partial evidence"(229), for even the narrator's historical knowledge is severely limited. But by analogy, with

the "real" coherence of the woman V., there may, the book suggests, be a real order and coherence to history in the world of phenomena that lies outside fiction's garden. But, as the genuine of V. elude Stencil- though they may exist, and Stencil has partial knowledge of some of them – so there may be a genuine transcendent coherence in the world's history, but the signs of that coherence either refuse to cooperate with our preconceptions, or elude us entirely. V. is finally a tragedy of human limitation, and like all tragedy, it points towards the larger frame in which the tragic actions occur. The contradiction between human ignorance of the frame, and the frame itself, is tragedy's ultimate source, its mode of being.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As an example of postmodernist text that resonates with the echoes of the modernist writers of the first half of the twentieth century, Thomas Pynchon's *V.* offers an excellent site of an analysis of the parody of modernist search for order. The novelist parodies the modernist aesthetic conventions, which are implied by the modernist writers to transcend the contemporary fragmentation. The modernist writers implied the aesthetic conventions like: the use of myth, moment of vision, heightened state of consciousness, etc. techniques, to transcend the vision of disjointedness. They demanded higher order and coherence though the society was full of disorder and fragmentation. Thomas Pynchon takes almost all the modernist/New critical aesthetic premises and parodies them in almost brutal form.

Pynchon parodies the modernist aesthetic conventions so as to make us aware about the idea that there is no any higher unity or order as such. He parodies the sense of historical truth as searched by the modernist writers.

Pynchon presents two main characters: Herbert Stencil and Benny profane. In the world of Herbert Stencil, all signs, his actions and his search, seem to gravitate towards a single, magnetic source. His search is presented as the search of modernist writers who longed for the higher order in the disordered world. Stencil intuits beneath the surface chaos of twentieth century. His search is pointedly satirical. There is an unmistakable air of absurdity in Stencils obsession. He attaches greater importance to the sense of vitality he derives from the mere facts of his involvement in the search of *V.*, than to the actual possibility of unveiling the mystery of her identity. He fears that if his quest is to be brought to some kind of terminus, he would lose the energy and enthusiasm he now feels.

But in the world of Benny Profane, nothing appears to connect with anything else. Benny Profane, a youngman moving along the fringes of Bohemia in the New York of the mid 1950s is part of a blantly and unredemably disordered world. The aimless quality of his existence is reflected in one of his favourite past times, yo-yoing. It consists of riding the subway shuttle endlessly back and forth between Grand Central Station and Times square. This presentation of two contrasting characters reveals that one is presented to parody another: Profane is presented to parody Herbert stencil.

The novel *V.* presents myth into subjective delusions. Myth no longer provides, as it does in Eliot, a way of sustaining a belief in continuity or permanence. Instead of offering a means of escape from the torments of private experiences, it becomes an extravagant, magnified projection of a characters inner fantasies. the countours of myth remain ultimately undefined in *V.* Similarly, in Pynchons' dark parody, the vision of higher forms of coherence collapses. The pattern presented in the plot seems chaotic which leads us towards the total annihilation. Moreover, the epiphanic moment that takes place in "Mondaugen's story" is also presented as a functional agreement or operational sympathy. The fusion of past and present also does take place in the events of Firelily's life, but Pynchon gives a horrifying twist to it. In making us uncertain as to whether these experiences actually belong to a particular individual, Pynchon seems to be moving away from the modernist belief that the power to contain and transcend the world's barrenness and disorder belongs to the individual, isolated mind.

Pynchon deals with the modernist themes: vision, order, loss, nostalgia, complex narrative structures, life and art, mechanical and organic, prose and poetry etc., mimics them and presents in exaggeration and brutal form. Thus, he parodies the

modernist aesthetic conventions. Pynchon implies that the genuine purity has become an impossible ideal; so impossible that it can not even be imagined anymore. The modernist aesthetic history, which Pynchon parodies in *V.* has placed a great deal of emphasis on the idea that it is impossible to distinguish in any consistent or meaningful way between history and fiction. This stress on fictionality of all texts provides the idea that history no longer consists of a more or less fixed order of events, rather it consists of disorder, parody and multiplicity.

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