IN-FORMING AGGRESSION: THE FICTIONAL TECHNIQUES OF JOSEPH HELLER AND THOMAS PYNCHON

A Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

SAM THOMAS
RESEARCH STUDENT

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
1999

Dr. P.P. RAVEENDRAN
Professor of English
School of Letters
Mahatma Gandhi University
Kottayam - 686 560.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **In-forming Aggression: The Fictional Techniques of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon**, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bonafide research carried out by **Sri. Sam Thomas** under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been presented earlier for the award of any degree.

Mahatma Gandhi University,
30 March, 1999.

P.P. Raveendran

DECLARATION

I, Sam Thomas, hereby declare that this thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

Nilambur,
30th March, 1999.

Sam Thomas

Preface

This dissertation focuses on the fictional techniques of two major contemporary American novelists — Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon. They are well-known as exponents of the postmodern trend in American literature. The argument of the dissertation is that the primary concern of these writers can be visualised in terms of their obsession with violence both at the thematic and at the formal levels. The study aims at making an in-depth analysis of the works of these two writers with reference to the specific ways in which they aesthetically transform violence in their writings.

Although a great deal of work has been done on post-war American fiction, there seems to be a paucity of critical material on the question of the artistic transformation of the instinct of violence and aggression persisting in it. Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) are important as providing examples of the post-war experimental novel that offers a vision of the power relations existing in our society. The characters in these novels are caught up in a psychological drama of power and vulnerability. But the questions of power and powerlessness raised in these novels exist not in the domain of everyday reality, but in the privileged realm of aesthetic experience. A study of Heller's and Pynchon's creative output in relation to each other as well as in relation to the society in which they live will throw light on the special nature of this experience. Heller's novels, especially *Catch-22*, exemplify his method of blending history and humour. Through his attack on the military-industrial complex of World War Two, he exposes the aggressive nature of the entire power system that

has been bequeathed by it to the post-war world. In this he is an ally of Thomas Pynchon who sets out to describe the values of his generation and its despairing belief that the way to reduce anger and pain is to reduce involvement. Through his novels Pynchon successfully indicts the inexplicability and inexorability of aggression. This thesis is an attempt to make these apparently inexplicable questions explicable.

The whole argument is organized in the form of five chapters. The first chapter of the thesis introduces the topic. The second chapter entitled "Aggression and the Postmodern Terrain," offers an overview of postmodernism, especially in relation to the works of Heller and Pynchon. The third chapter, "*Catch-22* and Post-War American Fiction," is an attempt to make a detailed analysis of *Catch-22*, while the fourth, "The Paranoic *Gravity's Rainbow*," tries to place *Gravity's Rainbow* in the theoretical context outlined above. The concluding chapter sums up the observations made and the findings arrived at.

At every stage of this work I have benefitted immensely from the scholarship, critical acumen and encouragement of my Supervising Teacher, Dr. P.P. Raveendran, Professor of English of School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University. I am grateful to Dr. Raveendran for his scholarly suggestions and for his critical reading of the typescript. I am extremely thankful to Dr. Sherine Upot, Reader, Department of English, Calicut University for all her timely assistance and encouragement. I am deeply indebted to Dr. N. Ramachandran Nair, Professor and Head of the English Department, Calicut University for his encouragement and help. A

word of gratitude to my wife Rosy who has been helpful all through the project, giving me unstinted support.

I am thankful to the American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad, whose Teacher Research Grants helped me to make use of their excellent collection of books relating to post-war American Fiction.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Sri. Balu for the meticulous typing.

As this study has moved from conception to dissertation many people and libraries, especially the Calicut University English Department Library, have helped me a lot. I am indebted to all of them.

Sam Thomas

CONTENTS

Introduction

Sam Thomas “In-forming aggression : The fictional techniques of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 1
Introduction

Chapter 1
Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the fictional techniques of two major American novelists of our times. Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon are well-known as exponents of the postmodernist trend in American literature. The present study examines the works of these writers as manifesting the strains of aggression and violence both as subject matter and as formal devices. The primary concern of these writers, it is argued, can be discerned in terms of their obsession with aggression at the thematic and formal levels. Though all the works of the two novelists are taken up for the study, the focus falls especially on Heller's *Catch*-22 and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Both Heller and Pynchon have the penchant for the aesthetic transformation of aggression. They do this at the thematic plain mainly in three ways: by referring to the effect of science and technology, by positioning their works in the background of the Second World War, and by emphasising the aspect of dehumanization. At the formal level this is

achieved by resorting to several postmodernist techniques like fragmentation, burlesque, labyrinthine plots and parody.

Violence has been a part of the human society even from primitive days. The ritual of sacrificing animals in the olden days was done for the expiation of violence and anger that man felt against man. Man tried to counter violence with violence. Ever since the colonial days, American life has been steeped in violence of some kind or the other. The pilgrim fathers and their descendants had to resort to force and violence to claim the newfound land. The aspect of racial tensions that prevailed from the olden days, has also to be taken into consideration. Violence can also take the shape of violent forms of thinking as can be seen in the thoughts of several intellectuals who have been consistently critical of the conservative politics in America. While the "varied and forceful expression of protest, social discontent and radical attitudes" (Way 253) can certainly be treated as part of this tendency, recent American writing also demonstrates a violent disruption of conventional forms of narration and story telling. Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon belong to the new crop of American writers whose work can be regarded as exemplifying violence from these several perspectives.

One of the useful ways of approaching Heller and Pynchon critically is to look upon their works as manifestations of the postmodernist trend in post-war American Fiction. This trend, heralded possibly by William Burroughs in 1959 with the publication of his novel *Naked Lunch,* has been of immense influence on the age we are examining.

Postmodernism can be understood as a revolt against the existing order of modernism. It does not represent a continuation of the early modernist vision of imagination and society, but rather a withdrawal from that vision. It can be rightly observed that all art is essentially social and political. The writers of the time are acutely concerned with the nature and origins of contemporary neurosis and depression. They are particularly concerned with the disease that besets contemporary man: his conviction of inauthenticity. Man has no real self, no real identity, no real creative life amid the conflicting tensions that surrounds him. These tendencies which are apparent in society can be seen reflected in the writings of the period. The postmodern writers abandon the search for stable points of reference in reality and in history. They also avoid the purely formalistic narrative techniques which dominated the literature of modernism.

Burroughs writes in *Naked Lunch*: "The world cannot be expressed, it can perhaps be indicated by mosaics of juxtaposition, like objects abandoned in a hotel room, defined by negatives and absence" (qtd. in Federman 93). Certainly "negatives and absence" are the terms of the fiction written by prominent writers of the 1960s. They include John Barth, Robert Coover, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., William Gas and Ken Kesey in addition to Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon. These writers started challenging the literary tendencies that defined Modernist fiction. Mainly, they opposed the element of description found in the fiction of the 1950s. They were against the representation of social reality and social language and against the fictional techniques like the stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and syncopated syntax.

"Disorder" or "deliberate chaos" may be a means of describing "the way that fiction functions today" (Federman 94). Moreover, because one cannot speak of a school or of a movement when investigating the new fiction, one can approach it only through its multiplicity. The small number of critics who have made sincere efforts to define the new fiction have proposed the term *fragmentation* to characterise it. It is true that most texts of the American avant-garde are collections of fragments and puzzling

catalogues of lists. They exhibit a tendency toward condensation and toward bringing together the incongruous and even the incompatible. As Federman suggests, most critics in their efforts to define postmodernist texts, claim that "these texts are caught between paranoia and schizophrenia" (95). Such texts push self-conciousness and self-reflexiveness to their limits. This has been the case with most of the fiction written during the 1960s and 1970s. When the traditional novel continues to describe and explain reality in an attempt to give that reality a certain moral and spiritual order, the new fiction of the 1960s and 1970s seeks to show the form rather than the content of American reality. The new fiction tries to highlight the disorder, the chaos, the violence and the incongruity of American reality. At the same time it reaffirms the energy and vitality of American life.

The American writers of the 1950s were known as "The Silent Generation" because they expressed in their work a silent agreement with the official, political, moral and social attitudes of the state. But when we examine the novels of Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, J.D. Salinger and others, we can understand the implicit presence of the absurd in them. *Catch-22* published in 1961 revels in the aesthetic of the absurd.

The 1960s saw vast changes taking place in the structure of power in the United States. The American radical got new targets for attack. The business tycoon and the trust (in the old predatory sense) and the rich were no longer the main holders of power. "Real power lay in the expansive new bureaucracies of the industrial corporation, the military, and the Administration" (Way 256). The bureaucracies were immune from public criticism or control. The radical writers of the period like Heller and Pynchon were given new images of the nature of power in their society. The appearance of *Catch-22* and *Gravity's Rainbow* "heralds the emergence of a new literature of protest and social criticism" (Way 257).

The absurdist vision often found in Heller and Pynchon may be defined as "the belief that we are trapped in a meaningless universe and that neither God nor man, theology nor philosophy, can make sense of the human condition" (Harris 17). As Charles B. Harris comments, the "new" logic, with its acceptance of the illogical and modern science, with its denial of causality and its concept of entropy, elevates chaos to the level of scientific fact. Modern existential philosophy warns that man would face a loss of self in a divided world of technology which would reduce man to the operational and the functional. The common American has witnessed

from the comfort of his living room, televised film clips of war in Viet Nam, the actual slaying of a president and riots in Chicago and Los Angeles. The modern electronic news media have made him aware of the images of rebellion, disenchantment and nothingness all around him. We have a topsy-turvy, absurd world. The contemporary American novelists live in an age when Nietzche's nihilistic philosophy and existential anxiety have a sway over the world. These novelists resort to absurdity as a theme in an age when it is taken for granted and hence no longer considered serious.

For its recent developments the American fiction is deeply indebted to the Theatre of the Absurd in France. But the absurdist novel of the sixties is rarely so total in its commitment to absurdity as are the French plays. The American variety also does not completely abandon the use of "rational devices." But its basic difference from the novels of the preceding period, which also maintained absurdist themes, is that the absurdist novel of the sixties seeks "new ways to integrate subject matter and form" (Harris 20). Of course there are distinctions between the narratives of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon or between that of John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Each of them takes a different approach to both subject matter and form. Yet they also have in common certain innovative characteristics. What is

new about these novelists is the fusion of an "absurd base" with an equally "absurd surface." Such fusion is rarely maintained throughout a single absurdist novel. As Charles B. Harris states, on close examination we can conclude that in almost every novel published after 1960, "the vision of the absurd world not only constitutes the novel's theme, but is reflected as well by incident, characterisation and language" (21).

The ultimate absurdity of life in these novels is suggested by a series of preposterous and ridiculous events, by characters who are distorted, exaggerated and caricatured and by a language which makes use of distortions, meaningless puns and juxtaposed incongruous details. Absurdity is revealed through the device of comic exaggeration — the burlesque.

Another device which the postmodernist writers use is parody. John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* has been called a mock-epic, a parody of the picaresque novel. James Purdy's *Malcolm* and Heller's *Catch-22* are considered as American Romance Parodies. Parody and burlesque cannot be considered as totally new in the novel tradition. They have been used earlier in novels like *Joseph Andrews*. But the contemporary novelists of the absurd have found out new ways of using these traditional devices.

Burlesque in their novels is not only directed toward the external world, but it is directed to the author himself, to the value of art and the possibilities of language. The novelists of the absurd "wish to ridicule and place in proper perspective . . . the traditional view of literature" (Harris 25).

Probably more than any other twentieth century novelist, Thomas Pynchon has demonstrated in his works a fascination with science and with applying scientific ideas metaphorically to sociology, psychology, history and religion. In his early works, Pynchon uses a nineteenth century scientific concept, entropy, as a central metaphor for the world's decline. In *Gravity's Rainbow* he explores the conceptual models of twentieth century physics in an attempt to find an escape from the entropic doom he is afraid of. For example, the concept of a nondeterministic world largely governed by chance, in which everything is randomly connected, provides the basis for Pynchon's view of a universe in which individuals have free will and are mystically connected to each other. Mankind's attempts to control an uncontrollable world, Pynchon seems to believe, have resulted in a quickening of entropy and a destruction of nature.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon freely adapts ideas from physics to create his metaphors. Using the physicists' view of the subatomic world as

a web of inseparable parts, Pynchon constructs a narrative of apparently disjointed parts that are connected at random. On the interpersonal level, Pynchon compares human relationship to the ionic and covalent bonding of molecules, indicating that relationships based on submission and dominance are deathly. Using physicists' theories of consciousness-created reality, Pynchon explores the question of whether one can distinguish between what is "out there" and what is "in our heads."

One of the more recent and salient trends of postwar fiction is a variant of fantasy, which incorporates both satire and absurdity. Both celebration and despondency seem to be part of its motive. According to critics like Ihab Hassan, the authors exemplifying this trend display great inventiveness, verbal magic and virtuosity. They portray versatility even in despair. Their parodies do not reflect only upon the distempers of society and the foibles of man; they reflect, more fundamentally, on the failures of history or art, the radical disease of consciousness itself. "The line from Nathaniel West and Vladimir Nabokov to John Barth, Joseph Heller, Thomas Berger, Thomas Pynchon, Terry Southern and Donald Barthelme is not as straight as critics might wish. The line, quite real in its' dark comic

fibre, also loops in many stray strands" (Hassan, *Contemporary American Literature* 81).

On close scrutiny we perceive that both *Catch-22* and *Gravity's Rainbow* resort to violence and aggression at the thematic level. Both novels are written in the background of the Second World War. Post World War era is one in which human values like love, trust and sympathy, have lost their significance. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon depicts characters like Myrtle the Miraculous, a wonder woman who hates people but adores perfectly functioning robots and machines. Marcel, the mechanical chess player is an ideal male and a robot tactician. The adult Slothrop is only a "glozing neuter" who finds himself neither as a man of feeling nor as a machine. He is destined to run down oblivious of the purpose or meaning of anything that has happened to him.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon indicts the inexplicability and inexorability of aggression which is manifested in the acts of scientists like Pointsman, who dominate and humiliate men. These scientists control the poor men through conditioning, in order to schematize behaviour. Our "conditioners" are our own parents and the social and economic institutions that decide how we live. The capitalistic urge, the multinational

corporation, the mega-cartels and models of America drifting toward centralized wealth and power, all fall prey to Pynchon's sharp criticism.

Technology is often blamed as the source of all our woes and our short-circuited relations. Pynchon's *V* (1963) is a novel in which technological imagery shapes religious and erotic feelings. A major character in *V* is the messiah "machine," Benny Prophane. His nightmare is that his "clock-heart" and "sponge" brain will be disassembled on the rubble-strewn streets. Even the character V is always young and always fascinatingly beautiful. One man dreams of her as a young machine with radiant skin made up of some new plastic, both eyes of glass, containing, photoelectric cells connected by silver electrodes to optic nerves, a complex system of pressure transducers located in a marvelous vagina of polyethylene, all leading to a single silver cable to the correct register of the digital machine in her skull. In Pynchon's exotic world men and women want each other to be ever ready erotic tools, needing neither tenderness nor love. Pynchon is saying that men control their destructiveness through Prophane-like passivity and disengagement. Women conquer their vulnerability to men, life and death by becoming virtual automatons who cannot feel a thing.

During war all controls on violence seem to disappear. *Gravity's Rainbow* deals with appetites gone out of control in war and in a psychological warfare unit functioning in London. This unit called "Psychological Intelligence Schemes for Expediting Surrender" is so dubious, for it is unclear whose surrender is being plotted. All are busy devouring each other. The novel is a satire on the expertise of the scientists and psychologists. As Josephine Hendin remarks, "by supersaturation with reason the novel draws us further toward admitting the failure of reason and science to explain the truths of life clearly or completely" (283).

Pynchon believes that America is producing plastic people, people without positive emotional capacities. Slothrop's father sold out his baby boy, Tyrone, not out of malice but out of a concern for future that was greater than his love for his child. In return for the money to send him through college, he gave his son Tyrone to a stimulus-response experimenter Jamf, who measured his reactions by the swiftness of his infant erections. It is imipolex-G, a polymer that conditioned infant Tyrone's erections. Through these descriptions Pynchon is emphasising that you are geared to excitement by synthetics and cast into your programming too soon to know what is happening. Cold, harsh,

exaggerated in his rejection of contemporary values, Pynchon neverthless puts together the emotional and cultural life of his generation very brilliantly. Although he casts a cynical eye on our time and the historical forces that shaped it, we can understand that he is a moralist. He makes precise distinctions between ideals of love and justice and the realities he sees.

Turning over to *Catch*-22, it is self-evident that it is much more than just another war novel. It doesn't seek to depict war in any dramatic or melodramatic manner. Nor does it seek to consider, criticize or explain the social, political, economic or other conditions in which the war originated. Even then we must accept the fact that the work is a war novel in the sense that the whole of its action is set in the conditions of war and that the stresses and situations which arise are the direct result of unnatural tensions generated by war and its psychological concomitants.

The men in *Catch*-22 are trapped in their own little circular, absurd world, from which, it seems, there is little chance of escape. Their predicament is similar to that of men trapped in an existence and a universe equally absurd and subject to the same "laws" of circularity and enclosure. This much wider and deeper view of man's condition seems to

lie, imposed upon other themes in the book, as a fundamental and basic question and vision. The novel demonstrates that the single vital quest of the modern age is for the discovery of some way to affirm life against the forces of negation without violating what is human. It faces a world gone mad, where fact and fiction are not distinguishable. It confronts the mystery of fact, a mystery concealing at its heart, forces that have seized control over man's life. *Catch-22* finds laughter and the purely symbolic gesture necessary as the only means of handling all these negative forces.

The post-war era is significant with the emphasis given to the new worlds of science and technology. Eventhough this new world lies somewhat outside the main interests and preoccupations of many of the writers of this period, science and technology engendered a meaningful body of writing, of ideas and controversies that touched the life of literature and of the mind in important ways. The sense of an ever widening gap between faith and reason and between a commonplace educated sense of the world and the arcane understanding of processes and system in science and technology, lay at the bottom of virtually all prominent issues in the realm of thought since the explosion of the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima in 1945. This explosion and its unprecedented destructiveness

had given to many people the most dire of warnings -- not only about the incredible horrors of modern warfare, but also about science and technology themselves. Pynchon alludes to this idea in his *Gravity's Rainbow*. The final scattering of Slothrop coincides with the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. This piece of news is offered to him without his comprehension through "a scrap of newspaper headline, with a wirephoto of a giant white cock, dangling in the sky straight downward out of a white pubic bush" (*Gravity* 693). The introduction of such a powerful weapon of destruction ironically challenges faith in all systems. Pynchon poignantly refers to a fearsome vision of science loosened from the hold of humane ends, a runaway science and technology that subjugates rather than serves mankind.

In their writings since World War Two many writers have expressed their skepticism regarding the current tendencies toward increased mechanization of thinking and feeling and an increased hardening into formulaic, machinelike solutions to problems of design and planning. More authority has been turned over to machines themselves with human desire relegated to a subordinate role in decisions. The simple steam or electricity-driven machine has given way to the "mega-machine," the giant all-

devouring system, in the form of government or business bureaucracy. This is the image of the invisible "They" which finds its echoes in the works of both Heller and Pynchon.

As Frank D. McConnell remarks, "all art, and especially all linguistic art, is inescapably, essentially, social and political — a truism, but a truism that bears repeating in the critical climate of the age" (McConnell xv). The post-war writers in general are acutely concerned with the nature and origins of contemporary neurosis and depression. The search for identity which has been so popular in the novels written prior to the 1960s, is muted in the post war novels. The problem of individual identity continues to be of great importance, but there is very little of the deep agonizing introspection, toiling anguish and long-suffering posture that have been vital to the search for identity. *Gravity's Rainbow* presents Ilse, Franz Pokler's daughter making annual visits to Zwolfkinder amusement park to meet her father. The irony associated with these visits is that the girl who was conceived through film-inspired lust, appears to Pokler as a series of movie-frames.

Her identity is ultimately uncertain. She may indeed be a series of substitutes. Yet Pokler must content himself with the possible illusion that

it is his daughter. Similarly in Heller's *Catch-22* the Company records show that Doc Daneeka is dead, and even while he stands yelling that he lives, he is removed from pay records. His wife collects his insurance, grows rich and receives a sympathetic notification "Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss. or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka: Words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father or brother was killed, wounded or reported missing in action" (*Catch* 354). Man has lost his face, his identity, in the huge military-bureaucracy world.

Both Heller and Pynchon try to portray characters who are socially neglected and oppressed. The close bond of affection and friendship is totally missing from relationships. To Pokler, his daughter becomes a mere illusion. The heart-broken Pokler wanders around the Dora concentration camp searching for his wife and daughter. There, he finds only a dying woman to whom he gives his wedding ring: "if she lived, the ring would be good for a few meals, or a blanket, or a night indoors or a ride home" (*Gravity* 433).

The post-war world of Heller and Pynchon is one of decadence. Both writers allow themselves no escape from their vision of decadence. For Pynchon in his *V*, decadence is to be seen for what it is, but it is better than

its alternative — death. The dentist Eigenvalue realizes that the art of the Whole Sick Crew lacks true originality, but he also realizes that even this exhausted striving for the new has value: "This sort of arranging and rearranging was Decadence, but the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death" (*V* 298).

It is well understood that Pynchon's expansiveness, whimsy changes of style, and intricateness proceed from the perception of decadence. The matrix of the novel is a perception of death and nothingness and in the face of such a perception artistic decadence becomes a necessary act of life. Pynchon is not alone in maintaining this particular view of the state of contemporary art. John Barth speaks of a "literature of exhaustion," which is the literature one writes when certain formal possibilities seem to have lost their function and when older techniques of former masters have become stale. Barth proposes that the novelist can maintain the old by parodying it and by stretching it beyond its formal limits. In Barth's sense, Pynchon's *V* can be considered as a novel which "revivifies the ideas of plot, coincidence and narrative chronology by twisting them to what seems their breaking point" (Golden 10).

Another aggressive stance that these novelists have adopted is in their presentation of reality. Literature in general and the novel in particular, has traditionally been seen as a way of ordering reality. The novelist takes something not aesthetic and endows it with shape, form, and congruity. It is quite evident that the traditional aim of novelists is to make their artistic creation appear life-like. Yet, because they artistically shape reality, what is ultimately presented is something unlike reality. On the other hand, the reflexive use of techniques like the burlesque and parody provides to the contemporary novelists under consideration, a method for rejecting literary pretensions to comprehend and order reality or any part of reality. Thus these writers burlesque not only life but the very vehicle they employ to examine life. This ridicule is directed toward history, religion and even philosophy in their works. These novelists believe that life resists any impositions of order because its realities are multiple. Any attempt to order these multiple meanings, results in a falsification of reality, unless it is done ironically. This view of multiple reality is influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum physics. The quantum theory maintains that "experience that is discontinuous defies precise definition" (Harris 26). Its direction is indeterminate and phenomena that have a semblance of

meaning, on closer inspection, turn out to suggest a multiplicity of answers. Symbols that communicate multiplicity are abundant in the contemporary absurdist novels. In Pynchon's *V* the multiple identities of Fausto, the multiple V's and in his *Gravity's Rainbow*, the many roles of captain Blicero — all these suggest that truth is not unambiguous, but multiple. It is not merely elusive, but as quantum physics tells us, it is uncertain.

The novel of the sixties is inhabited by *picaros* who are both driven and searching. But their movement cannot be plotted like that of their predecessors. Benny Prophane in Pynchon's *V* escapes a barroom brawl and he asks the pertinent question "Where we going?" Pig Bodine answers "The way we're heading." Pynchon's large cast of characters including V in her multiple transformations are continually going in no other direction than the way they are heading. The heroic quest for knowledge, for self growth and for the salvation of the quester's society often ends in great disappointment and failure. Senseless movement, or movement for its own sake, dominated the consciousness of the sixties. This was the impetus not only of Pynchon's characters but of those of Heller, Barth and many lesser novelists.

The aforementioned aspects of the writings of Heller and Pynchon distinguish them as typical postmodernist novelists. These trends in them are a result of the aggressive and violent feelings they have against the prevailing social and cultural conditions. The fictional techniques that they use are intended to formulate an image of the modern world in some distinctive form of waste land that would allow the readers to contemplate its landscape and learn to cope with it.

Aggression and the Postmodern Terrain

Sam Thomas “In-forming aggression : The fictional techniques of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 2

Aggression and the Postmodern Terrain

Chapter 2

Aggression and the Postmodern Terrain

Of all the terms bandied about in both current cultural theory and contemporary writing on the arts, postmodernism is the most over and under-defined. Postmodernism bears an obvious temporal relation to modernism, but the ways in which it reshapes and revolutionizes the literary map of modernist assumptions and methods are of greater import.

The term postmodernism was used for the first time by Federico de Onis in his *Antologia de la poesia espanola e hispanoamericana* (1882-1932), published in Madrid in 1934. Dudley Fitts used it again in his *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* of 1942. Both meant to indicate a minor reaction to modernism already latent within it, reverting to the early twentieth century.

In 1959 and 1960, Irwing Howe and Harry Levin wrote of postmodernism rather disconsolately as a falling off from the great modernist movement. Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan employed the term during the sixties with premature approbation and even with a touch of bravado. Fiedler had it in mind to challenge the elitism of the high

literary phenomena. Every literary-historical moment is post some other moment, just as it is pre some other moment, though of course we are not in the position to say exactly what it is pre — what it precedes and prepares the way for — except retrospectively. But we can always presume what it is post — what it is the posterity of. Postmodernism is the posterity of modernism. This statement can be considered as a tautological one, just like the statement pre-romanticism is the predecessor of romanticism.

Like other categorical terms like poststructuralism or modernism or romanticism, then, postmodernism suffers from a certain semantic instability: no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars. The general difficulty is compounded by two factors: (a) the relative youth, the brash adolescence, of the term and (b) its semantic kinship to other current terms. Thus some critics mean by postmodernism what others call avant-gardism or even neo-avant-gardism,while still others would call the same phenomenon simply modernism.

We cannot discern a sharp division between modernism and post modernism. They are not separated by an Iron Curtain or a Chinese wall. Invariably history is a palimpsest and culture is permeable to time past, present and future. A "period" must be perceived in terms of both

continuity and discontinuity. The postmodern literature is characterized by a great degree of involvement with popular art and culture. It is also an earnest step taken towards negating the concept of literary studies as necessarily a "Homage to the Great Modern Masters, and towards undermining the perpetuation of a methodology of literary pursuit 'prescribed' by them" (Pillai 26). Fictions that primarily exploit the elements of popular culture like science fiction, pornography and the Western constitute a considerable portion of postmodern literature. The imperative of contemporary art to revitalize itself through rebarbarization does not preclude it from continuing to be art. So postmodern fiction, while striving to approximate the pop art retains elements which prevent it from being mere pulp. According to critics like Richard Poirier and Philip Stevick, there are two main strains in postmodernist art: Dionysian and Apollonian. While the Dionysians adopt a position of ecstatic liberation to the contemporary situation, the Apollonian strain is "pervaded by an ironic, disillusioned vision about the nature and function of art" (Pillai 27). The two perspectives are complementary and partial. The Apollonian view, rangy and abstract, discerns only historical conjunctions. The Dionysian feeling, sensuous though nearly purblind, touches only the disjunctive

moment. Thus postmodernism by invoking two divinities at once, engages a double view. Sameness and difference, unity and rupture, filiation and revolt, all must be honoured if we are to attend to history, apprehend change both as a spatial, mental structure, and as a temporal, physical process, both as pattern and unique event. That is why as Linda Hutcheon observes, postmodernism is often considered as a contradictory phenomenon, "one that uses and abuses,installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 3). This is true in different genres like architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics or historiography.

Postmodernism cannot be used as a synonym for the contemporary. It also does not really describe an international cultural phenomenon, because it is primarily European and American. Although the concept of "modernism" is largely an Anglo-American one, this should not limit the poetics of postmodernism to that culture. One aspect in postmodernism that is usually stressed is"historiographic metafiction"! It means those well known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages. In most of

the critical works on postmodernism, it is narrative, whether in literature, history or theory, that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains. Its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past. This type of fiction has often been noticed by critics, but its paradigmatic quality has been overlooked — it is commonly labelled as "midfiction" or "paramodernist".

Critics argue that the increasing uniformization of mass culture is one of the totalizing forces that postmodernism intends to challenge. It seeks to assert "difference" and not homogeneous identity. The very concept of difference could be said to entail a typically postmodern contradiction: "difference," unlike "otherness," has no exact opposite against which to define itself. Postmodern difference or rather differences, in the plural, are always mutliple and provisional.

Postmodern culture, has a contradictory relationship to what we usually label our dominant, liberal humanist culture. Modernists like Eliot and Joyce are usually seen as profoundly humanistic in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral values. Postmodernism is different

from this — not in its humanistic contradictions, but in the provisionality of its response to them. It does not posit any structure or master narrative, such as art or myth, which for the modernists, would have been consolatory. It argues that such systems are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary; but this does not make them any the less illusory. Postmodernism is characterized by exactly this kind of incredulity toward what Lyotard calls "master or metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv). The familiar humanist separation of art and life (or human imagination and order versus chaos and disorder) no longer holds. Postmodernist contradictory art still installs that order, but it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning.

Modernism can be described very broadly as a set of visions and ideas that help to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernisation. It gives them the power to change the world that is changing them. Though it includes figures in literature, art and music from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is better to restrict the term "modernism" to refer to the set of artistic, musical, literary, more generally aesthetic movements that emerged in Europe in the 1880s. They flourished before and after the First World War and became institutionalized in the

academies and art galleries of post-First World War Europe and America. A list of eminent figures usually regarded as distinctly modernist contains, Matisse, Picasso and Kandinsky in painting, Henry James, Joyce and Kafka in literature, Eliot, Ezra Pound, Rilke and Mallarme in poetry and Strindberg and Pirandello in drama. It is possible to demarcate, following Boyne and Rattansi, a set of key aesthetic strategies which can be seen broadly to underlie the modernist project and which distinguish it from aesthetic realisms and naturalisms which preceded it (Boyne and Rattansi 6).

First there is an aesthetic self-reflexiveness, reflected in the tendency of modern artists, writers and composers to make their media of creation and artistic procedures, objects of attention in their own work. Joyce's exploration of the problem of novel writing in *Ulysses*, Matisse's use of colour and perspective to emphasise the significance of colour in art, Picasso's play on the two-dimensionality of the painting surface in cubism are all prime examples. In each of these there is a deliberate distancing from the naturalist aesthetic of mere reflection of an objectively given outer reality, and an exploration of the "reality" of artistic representation and construction.

The second strategy is juxtaposition or "montage". This implies a weakening of straightforward narrative and the creation of unities out of the simultaneous presence of different perspectives. Past, present and future appear more as aspects of a "continuous present."

Paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty figure as the third major theme. Instead of a single infallible narrator, multiple narrative voices are created. This facilitates either for the audience to attempt a resolution of the contradictions thus opened up, as in some of Brecht's works, or leaves the reader, in the manner of Kafka, with an enigmatic experience.

Finally one can perceive the demise of the "integrated individual subject". In contrast to the coherent personalities of the realist novel, the modernist novel presents individuals as riven by psychic conflicts. At the same time in expressionist and cubist art the human form is either distorted or geometrically recomposed.

Boyne and Ali Rattansi's distinctions regarding modernism are eminently useful. According to them these preoccupations of modernism should not be allowed to cover up the significance of an underlying and sometimes contradictory tendency within most modernist projects to cling to the belief that in principle the deep structure of reality is knowable, that

it is intellectually and culturally penetrable, but requires aesthetic philosophical and psychic strategies more complex, inventive and self-reflexive than the ones typically deployed in realist and naturalist forms. They say that this is exemplified by surrealism, which surrenders to the unconscious, celebrates fragmentation and practices "incongruous juxtaposition with varying degrees of commitment to the rational control of the unconscious as well as to social revolution" (Boyne and Rattansi 7).

One has also to take into account here modernism's uncomfortable relation with the project of modernity that unfolded in the West in the post-Enlightenment period. Modernity can be defined in terms of an aspiration to reveal the essential truth of the world. That truth is not superficial, but will be hidden by appearances, masked behind the phenomenal forms of the present. So modernity can be defined in terms of uncovering, of ripping away the layers of disguise, of disclosing and realising the promise or threat of the future by moving on and through where we are now. Inspite of its inevitable links with modernity, modernism always constituted in a sense as a critique of modernity, because it clearly refused to endorse any simplistic beliefs in the progressive capacity of science and technology to resolve all problems.

It is partly because of this critical distancing and the form it took that there are lines of continuity between modernism and postmodernism. Postmodernism also constitutes a critique of the pretensions of modernity and in some senses may be said to extend and deepen the critique already initiated by modernism. As has been pointed out, it was in the literary commentaries of Irwing Howe, Harry Levin, Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan, that the term "postmodernism" gained currency in the 1950s and 1960s. Through the architectural criticism of Charles Jencks and the philosophical intervention of Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, it acquired prominence. We see that the distinctiveness of postmodernism in relation to modernism is essentially blurred, for it is, like modernism, in part a critique of what it takes as the defining features of modernity. As with modernity/ modernism, we shall insist on a relative distinction between "postmodernism", as a term that characterizes a series of broadly aesthetic projects, and "postmodernity", as a social, political and cultural configuration of which "postmodernism" is supposedly a constitutive element.

One of the foremost aspects of postmodernism is an attempt to dissolve the boundaries between "high" and "mass" culture, to find new

languages which synthesise and reconstitute new forms out of and beyond the old divisions. Here one can visualise the significance of the reaction against the elitism of high modernism and also its institutionalisation and domestication especially in New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Tate Gallery in London. In this sense, the postmodernists constitute the sort of avant-garde that the Dadaists and Surrealists represented against the alleged recuperation of various forms of post-impressionism. But now there is a distinctive concern to appropriate many of the popular cultural forms of the post-war period. The exploration of ethnic, minority, and feminist perspectives is a significant element of postmodernism, as is the impact of post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. What allows an extension of the term postmodernism to both the fine arts and trends within the disciplines of literary theory, philosophy and the social sciences is that they share a common condition which we would characterise as a crisis of representation or, more accurately, a series of crises of representation. In these various disciplines the older modes of defining, appropriating and recomposing the objects of artistic, philosophical, literary and social scientific languages are no longer credible. One common aspect everywhere is the dissolution of the very boundary

between the language and its object. This in turn is related to the acceptance of the inevitability of a plurality of perspectives and the dissolution of various older polarities (popular/elite forms, subject/object) and boundaries (for instance between disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, history and psychoanalysis). It can be argued that the idea of "crises of representation" can be extended to cover the crises of social class-dominated political movements and discourses and some of the problems of political representation now apparent in both liberal democratic policies and state socialist systems. This would permit a characterisation of the "postmodern condition" "as one of a coincidence between crises of representation in the fine arts, philosophy, the social sciences and 'modern' political institutions" (Boyne and Rattansi 13).

A tool is required for describing how one set of literary forms emerge from a historically prior set of forms. The Russian formalist concept of the dominant is such a tool. Roman Jackobson states,

> The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure . . . [A] poetic work [is] a structured

> system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices. Poetic evolution is a shift in this hierarchy . . . . The image of . . . literary history substantially changes; it becomes incomparably richer and at the same time more monolithic, more synthetic and ordered, than were the *membra disjecta* of previous literary scholarship. (qtd. in McHale, *Postmodernist* 6)

Jakobson applies his concept of the dominant not only to the structure of the individual literary text and the synchronic and diachronic organization of the literary system, but also to the analysis of the verse medium in general, where rhyme, meter, and intonation are dominant at different historical periods and of cultural history (painting is the dominant art-form of the Renaissance, music the dominant of the romantic period, and so on). There are many dominants and one and the same text will yield different dominants depending upon what aspect of it we are analyzing. If we are analysing a text as an example of verse, it is dominated by one or other of the historical dominants of verse; if it is considered as an example of verbal art, its aesthetic function is dominant; and as a unique text-structure, it possesses its own unique dominant. So different dominants emerge depending upon which question we ask of the text, and the position

from which we interrogate it. Many of the most insightful and interesting treatments of postmodernist poetics have taken the form of more or less heterogeneous catalogues of features – the membra disjecta of literary scholarship, as Jakobson calls them. The catalogues of postmodernist features are typically organized in terms of oppositions with features of modernist poetics. David Lodge lists five strategies (contradiction, discontinuity, randomness, excess, short circuit) by which postmodernist writing seeks to avoid having to choose either of the poles of metaphoric (modernist) or metonymic (antimodernist) writing. Ihab Hassan presents seven modernist rubrics (urbanism, technologism, dehumanization, primitivism, eroticism, antinomianism, experimentalism) to show how post modern aesthetics modifies or extends each of them.

Brian McHale considers the dominant of modernist fiction to be epistemological. Modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (McHale, *Postmodernist* 9). Other typical modernist questions might also be added to it. Questions like What is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it, and with what degree

of certainty? How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower? What are the limits of the knowable? and so on.

According to McHale, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*! can be considered as a typical example which raises such epistemological questions. Faulkner's protagonists, like characters in many classic modernist texts, sift through the evidence of witnesses of different degrees of reliability in order to reconstruct and solve a "crime." Absalom foregrounds such epistemological themes as the accessibility and circulation of knowledge, the different structurings imposed on the "same" knowledge by different minds, and the problem of "unknowability" or the limits of knowledge. It foregrounds these themes through the use of characteristically modernist (epistemological) devices: the multiplication and juxtaposition of perspectives, the focalization of all the evidence through a single "centre of consciousness," virtuoso variants on interior monologue and so on. Finally in a typically modernist move, Absalom transfers the epistemological difficulties of its characters to its readers; its strategies of "impeded form" (dislocated chronology, withheld or indirectly-presented information, difficult "mind-styles" and so on) (McHale, *Postmodernist* 9).

Shifting to postmodernist fiction, Brian McHale has observed that the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like: "which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects. For example: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on.

Once the respective dominants of the modernist and postmodernist systems have been identified, we are in a good position to begin to describe the dynamics of the change by which one system emerges from and supplants the other. Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they "tip over" into ontological questions as

McHale has pointed out (11). This sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible.

The fact that epistemological questions cannot be raised without immediately raising ontological questions and vice versa, may be objected by philosophers. But even for the formulation of such an objection, either of the two sets of questions will have to be mentioned before the other set, since discourse is linear and temporal and one cannot say two things at the same time. Literary discourse specifies which set of questions ought to be asked first of a particular text, and delays the asking of the second set of questions. Even though it is perfectly possible to interrogate a postmodernist text regarding its epistemological implications, it is more urgent to interrogate it about its ontological implications. To put it succinctly, in postmodernist texts "epistemology is backgrounded, as the price for foregrounding ontology" (McHale, *Postmodernist* 11).

The change of dominant appears in its most dramatic form in writers who in the course of their careers travel the entire trajectory from modernist to postmodernist poetics, marking in successive novels different stages of the crossing. Some of the writers who belong to this category are Alain

Robbe-Grillet, Carlos Fuentes, Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Coover and Thomas Pynchon.

A wide range of ontological themes or attitudes is available to postmodernist writers, and it is important to specify which writers display which attitudes. But it is equally important to recognize that these attitudes, whatever they may be, come to our attention only through the foregrounding of ontological concerns which is common to all postmodernist writers. To accomplish this foregrounding all postmodernists draw on the same repertoire of strategies.

A further postmodern move that contemporary fiction enacts is to be found in its bridging of the gap between elite and popular art, a gap which mass culture has no doubt broadened. Many scholars have noted postmodernism's attraction to popular art forms such as the detective story (Fowles's *A Maggot*) or the Western (E.L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times*). Linda Hutcheon argues that as typically post-modernist contradictory texts, novels like these periodically use and abuse the conventions of both popular and elite literature, and do so in such a way that they can actually use the invasive culture industry to challenge its own commodification processes from within. She is of the opinion that

postmodernism is "characterised by the results of the capitalist dissolution of bourgeois hegemony and the development of mass culture" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 6). If elitist culture has indeed been fragmented into specialist disciplines, then hybrid novels like these work both to address and to subvert that fragmentation through their pluralizing recourse to the discourses of history, sociology, theology, political science, economics, philosophy, semiotics, literature, literary criticism, and so on. Historiographic metafiction "clearly acknowledges that it is a complex institutional and discursive network of elite, official, mass, popular cultures that postmodernism operates in" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 21).

The postmodernist novel puts into question that entire series of interconnected concepts that have come to be associated with what we conveniently label as liberal humanism; concepts like autonomy, transcendance, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness and origin. To put these concepts into question is not to deny them – only to interrogate their relation to experience, without the kind of foreclosing assurance. The process by which this is done is a process of installing and then withdrawing those very contested notions.

Criticism does not necessarily imply destruction, and postmodern critique, in particular, is a paradoxical and questioning beast. That is why Charles Newman states, rather polemically, that "Postmodernism reflects not a radical uncertainty so much as an unconsidered suspension of judgement" (Newman 201).

Hutcheon, however, would not accept this formulation. She is of the opinion that the postmodern enterprise is neither uncertain nor suspending of judgement: it questions the very bases of any certainty (history, subjectivity, reference) and of any standards of judgement. Who sets them? When? Where? Why? Postmodernism marks less a negative "disintegration" of or "decline" in order and coherence, than a challenging of the very concept upon which we judge order and coherence. This interrogative stance and the contesting of authority is a result of the decentered revolt. It would be hard to argue that this challenge to models of unity and order is directly caused by the fact that life today is more fragmented and chaotic. Many hold the view that our fiction is bizarre because life is more bizarre than ever before. But this view has been called simplistic and even lunatic in the light of history (both social and literary).

But whatever the cause, there have been serious interrogations of those once accepted certainties of liberal humanism.

One of the major challenges that has become the truism of contemporary theoretical discourse, has been the notion of center. In Chris Scott's postmodern historiographic metafiction *Antichthon,* the historical character Giordano Bruno, lives out the dramatic consequences of the Copernican displacing of the world and of humankind. From a decentered perspective, all possible worlds exist. As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, "in postmodern psychoanalytic, philosophical and literary theory, the further decentering of the subject and its pursuit of individuality and authenticity has had significant repercussions on everything from our concept of rationality to our view of the possibilities of genre" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 58).

Much of the debate over the definition of the term "postmodernism" has revolved around what some see as a loss of faith in the centralizing and totalizing impulse of humanist thought. Both Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis have been attacked as totalizing "metanarratives." Yet they have been fruitful in analyses of postmodernism precisely because their "split" model allows a very postmodern - or contradictory - anti-totalizing

kind of totalization or decentered kind of centering. While much of the actual criticism of postmodern fiction is premised on a humanist belief in the universal human urge to generate systems to order experience, the fiction itself challenges such critical assumptions.

When the center begins to give way to the margins, when totalizing universalisation begins to self-deconstruct, the complextity of the contradictions within conventions — such as those of genre, for instance — begin to be apparent. Cultural homogenization too reveals its fissures, but the heterogeneity that is asserted in the face of that totalizing culture does not take the form of many fixed individual subjects, but instead is conceived of as a flux of contextualised identities. It is contextualised by gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, education, social role and so on. The assertion of identity through difference and specificity is a constant in postmodern thought. Narrative continuity is threatened, used and abused, inscribed and subverted. The modernist tradition of the more "open" ending is both used and abused by postmodern self-consciously multiple endings, or resolutely arbitrary closure (Rushdie's *Midnights' Children*).

In the disorienting reversibility of story and analysis, as well as its manifest dissatisfaction with theorizing, Max Apple's "Post-Modernism" justifies its title. Apple's "Post-Modernism" shares many features with the "Postmodernism" of J.F. Lyotard's influential account. Lyotard has defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (XXIV). Scientific (analytical, theoretical) knowledge, according to him, arose in opposition to "traditional" narrative knowledge. Because scientific knowledge is incapable of legitimating itself, of lifting itself up by its own epistemological boot straps, it has always had to resort for legitimation to certain "grand narratives" about knowledge — the Enlightenment narrative of human liberation through knowledge, the Hegelian narrative of the dialectical self-realisation of Spirit, the Marxist narrative of revolution and the founding of a classless society, and so on. According to Lyotard faith in these and other grand or metanarratives has ebbed, so that knowledge has had to seek its legitimation locally rather than universally. It had to resort to limited language-games and institutions, to what Lyotard calls "little narratives." Lyotard is not alone in discrediting metanarratives and endorsing self-legitimating "little narratives." Richard Rorty also distinguishes in analogous terms between the two ways in which "reflective human beings"

give sense to their lives. One is "to describe themselves in immediate relation to a non-human reality," ie to aspire to objectivity or scientific knowledge in Lyotard's sense; while the other involves "telling the story of their contribution to a community," ie. solidarity, or Lyotard's narrative knowledge.

Many postmodern novels exploit the conventions of the fantastic, as well as those of science fiction and the historical novel. Science fiction is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism. "It is the ontological genre par excellence and so serves as a source of materials and models for postmodernist writers" (McHale, *Postmodernist* 16) including William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Italo Calvino, Thomas Pynchon and Vladimir Nabokov. All historical novels, likewise, typically involve some violation of ontological boundaries. They often claim "transworld identity" between characters in their projected worlds and real-world historical figures. Examples are Napoleon or Richard Nixon. In *Gravity's Rainbow* soon after the countdown we discover that we are in Los Angeles, travelling with Richard M. Zhlubb (Nixon), who is the night manager of the Orpheus Theatre. "He ushers you into the black Managerial Volkswagon, and before you know it you're on the freeways" (*Gravity* 755). Traditional

historical novels try to suppress these violations. They do this to hide the ontological "seams" between fictional projections and real-world facts. They do so by tactfully avoiding contradictions between their versions of historical figures and the familiar facts of these figures' careers, and by making the background norms governing their projected worlds conform to accepted real-world norms. The postmodern novels like Carlos Fuentes' *Terra nostra,* on the other hand, foreground their ontological seams by systematically transgressing these rules of the genre. Familiar facts are factlessly contradicted — Columbus discovers America a full century too late, Philip II of Spain marries Elizabeth of England, and so on. The historical novel is converted into a medium for raising ontological issues.

However we characterise the ontology of postmodernism, whether in terms of acceptance of the world or in terms of ontological indeterminacy we are not characterizing postmodernist poetics as such but only that part of its politics that we may call postmodernist thematics. A wide range of ontological themes or attitudes is available to postmodernist writers and it is important to specify which writers display which attitudes. These attitudes come to our attention only through the foregrounding of ontological concerns, which is common to all postmodernist writers. To

accomplish this foregrounding all postmodernists draw on the same repertoire of strategies. If postmodernist poetics foregrounds ontological issues of text and world, it can only do so by exploiting general ontological characteristics shared by all literary texts and fictional worlds.

According to Thomas Pavel an ontology is "a theoretical description of a Universe" (Pavel 234). This definition should lay to rest the objections of those who find the coupling of "postmodernist" wtih "ontology" in itself oxymoronic and self-contradictory, on the grounds that postmodernist discourse is precisely the discourse that denies the possibility of ontological grounding. "The essential trope of fiction," writes the postmodernist novelist Ron Sukenick, "is hypothesis, provisional supposition, a technique that requires suspension of belief as well as of disbelief" (Sukenick 99).

This gives us an intuition about the special logical status of the fictional text, its condition of being in between, suspended between belief and disbelief. Thomas Pavel argues that readers do not evaluate the logical possibility of the propositions they find in literary texts in the light of the actual world. But they would rather abandon the actual world and adopt temporarily the ontological perspective of the literary work. Fictional narratives are subject to certain global semantic constraints. All the

sentences of a text are governed by the same logical modality. Classical logic recognises three modalities – necessity, possibility and impossibility. Propositions about the real world fall under the modality of necessity. Propositions in fiction, by contrast are governed by the modality of possibility; they require "suspension of belief as well as of disbelief." Umberto Eco excludes logical impossibility from the propositions that constitute worlds: according to Eco every proposition of a possible world must be either true or false. It cannot be both true and false. Possible worlds obey the law of the excluded middle. Worlds which violate the law of the excluded middle, Eco refuses to regard as full-fledged and self-sustaining. But Lubomir Dolozel, is willing to entertain the idea of worlds that violate the law of the excluded middle. To him these are "Semiotic worlds suspended between existence and non-existence" (qtd in McHale, *Postmodernist* 33).

Perhaps there may be only a difference in terminology. While Eco might be withholding the label of "World" from these problematical "suspended" constructs, Dolozel is willing to apply it to them. In any case, we can find many instances of this in postmodernist writings. One example would be Muriel Spark's *The Hothouse by the East River (1973)* in which the

characters are both dead and not dead, and their world both exists and does not exist (McHale, *Postmodernist* 33).

Possible worlds depend on somebody's propositional attitude, that is, in order for them to be possible, they must be believed in, imagined, wished for, by some human agent. Characters inside fictional worlds are also capable of sustaining propositional attitudes and projecting possible worlds. Umberto Eco calls these possible-worlds-within-possible-worlds *subworlds*. Pavel prefers the term narrative domains. It is the tension and disparity among various characters' subworlds and between their subworlds and the fictional "real" world, that formed the basis of modernist and before that of realist epistemological poetics. The possible-worlds approach not only complicates fiction's internal ontological structure, it also weakens its external boundary or frame. Classical mimetic theories had a vested interest in maintaining the conceptual boundary. To them, without a sharp initial distinction between fiction and reality there could be no relation of similarity or mirroring between the two, no representation of reality in fiction. Logicians and philosophers of language have tried to reinforce and even more sharply define that boundary. But possible-worlds theorists in poetics have, by contrast, blurred fiction's external boundaries.

They make it possible for us to understand the passage or circulation that occurs across that boundary.

"Fiction's epidermis, it appears, is not an impermeable but a semipermeable membrane," says McHale (*Postmodernist* 34). If entities can migrate across the semipermeable membrane that divides a fictional world from the real, they can also migrate between two different fictional worlds. For instance the character Cordelia is the "same" whether she appears in Shakespeare's original *King Lear* or Nahum Tate's eighteenth-century revision, even though in the original she suffers a tragic destiny while in the revision she ends happily. Here the transworld identity of Cordelia has been preserved. If a prototype and its replica differ in essential properties and not just the accidental ones, then, according to Eco, this may be a case of mere homonymy rather than transworld identity. Such homonymy abounds in literary parodies like Richardson's *Pamela* and Fielding's *Shamela.* In postmodernist novels too we can perceive this. For instance in *Mulligan Stew* Gilbert Sorrentio "borrows" the character Ned Beaumont from Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man,* and of Anthony Lamont from Flann O'brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds.* Entities can pass back and forth across the semipermeable membrane between two texts as well as between

the real world and the world of fiction. There is one more dimension of transworld migration - that is the historical dimension. Entities can change their ontological status in the course of history, in effect migrating from one ontological realm or level to another. For example, while shifting from the profane realm to the realm of the sacred, real world entities and happenings can undergo "mythification." Similarly mythological entities lose their status of superior reality and deteriorate to the status of "mere" fictions, when the belief-system that supports them gradually erodes. An awareness of such historical processes like mythification and fictionalization compels us to broaden our outlook on postmodern fiction. As McHale points out, "the external cut of the fictional heterocosm is not determined only by fiction's relation to the real world and to other fictional texts, but also by its place among the whole range of other 'unreal' and 'quasi-real' ontologies in a given culture" (McHale, *Postmodernist* 36).

Postmodernist fiction holds the mirror up to reality; but that reality, now more than ever before, is plural. It achieves this by foregrounding the ontological themes and differences, internal and external, described by ontologists of fiction from Sidney through Schlegel to Ingarden, Hrushovski and the possible world theorists. Ingarden believed that the ontological

structures of the text could not themselves be of any aesthetic value or interest, although they could sustain components of indubitable interest and value. The strata belonged permanently to the background of the art work, never to rise above the threshold of perceptibility. As Roman Ingarden believed "the skeleton of the layers and the structural order of sequence in a literary work of art are of neutral artistic value; they form the axiologically neutral foundation of the work of art in which the artistically valent elements . . . of the work are grounded" (qtd. McHale, *Postmodernist* 39). But Ingarden proved to be wrong; it is precisely by foregrounding the skeleton of layers — as well as the double-decker structure of reference described by Hrushovski — the transworld identity described by Eco — that postmodernist fiction achieves its aesthetic effects and sustains interest in the process, modelling the complex ontological landscape of our experience.

The Empire of the Great Khan in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) contains a number of continuous cities, shapeless, sprawling urban agglomerations which do not have internal articulation or even clear external boundaries. There is Penthesilea, a city of continuous suburbs, without a center; Cecilia, a city which over the years has engulfed all the

surrounding territory; and Trude, a city indistinguishable from any other. One contradiction is that the three cities, which absorb the entire space of the Empire, coexist. If Trude is coextensive with the whole world, what room does that leave for Penthesilea or Cecilia? This kind of a problematical world has been designed for the purpose of exploring ontological propositions. Some of Calvino's invisible cities place the world of the living in confrontation with the "other world" of the dead. Others confront the sacred world with the profane; still others confront the real world city with its representation or model or double. All of the cities do not explore ontological propositions, but some raise classic epistemological issues like appearance vs reality, multiplicity of perspectives, the distortions of desire and memory and so on.

> There is a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the heteroclite; . . . in such a state, things are "laid", "placed", "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all. . . . Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because

> they secretly undermine language, they make it impossible to name this and they destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite to one another) to hold together. (Foucault xviii)

The empire of Calvino's Great Khan is such a heterotopia. Radically discontinuous and inconsistent, it juxtaposes worlds of incompatible structure. Trude and Cecilia are everywhere in the Empire of *Invisible Cities*. Umberto Eco would refuse to consider this a "world" at all, beause it fails to observe the basic rules of world-building. In deference to this view, we might avoid using the term "world" and instead use the term "zone," following the practice of some postmodernist writers. Writers like Julio Cortazar, William Burroughs, Alasdair Gray and Thomas Pynchon have depicted zones in their novels. Burroughs depicts his zone as a vast ramshackle structure in which all the world's architectural styles are fused and all its races and cultures mingle. Alasdair Gray's zone in his novel *Lanarak* is a space of paradox modelled on the Wonderland and Looking-glass worlds of the Alice books.

Thomas Pynchon's zone in *Gravity's Rainbow* combines elements of

all these postmodernist zones. "In the Zone", the title of the third and longest section of his novel, refers to occupied Germany in the anarchic weeks and months immediately following the collapse of the Third Reich. The former national boundaries have been obliterated and the armies of the victorious Allies are jockeying for position. Spies, black-marketers and free-lance adventurers move back and forth across the ruined landscape. Pynchon's zone is paradigmatic for the heterotopian space of postmodernist writing, more so than Gray's or Burroughs's or even Calvino's. Here a large number of fragmentary possible worlds coexist in an impossible space which is associated with occupied Germany, but which in fact is located nowhere but in the written text itself. Heller's zone in *Catch-22* is the military from which individuals like Yossarian have no possible way of escape. The sway of the mysterious Catch-22 is felt everywhere and quite often proves to be deadly.

History moves in measures both continuous and discontinuous. The prevalence of post-modernism today does not suggest that ideas or institutions of the past cease to shape the present. Rather, traditions develop and even types suffer a seachange. The powerful cultural assumptions generated by Darwin, Marx, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Debussy,

Freud and Einstein still pervade the Western mind. Certainly those assumptions have been reconceived, not once but many times — else history would repeat itself, and remain forever the same. In this perspective, postmodernism may appear as a significant revision, if not an original episteme of twentieth-century Western societies.

Any definition of postmodernism calls upon a four-fold vision of complementarities, embracing continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony. But a definition of the concept also needs a dialectical vision. This is because the defining traits are often antithetical and to ignore this tendency of historical reality is to lapse into single vision and Newton's sleep. Thus we cannot simply rest on the assumption that postmodernism is antiformal, anarchic, or decreative, for though it is indeed all these and despite its fanatic will to unmaking, it also contains the need to discover a "unitary sensibility to cross the border and close the gap" (Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn* 89).

The two central, constitutive tendencies in postmodernism are indeterminacy and immanence. The term used to designate these together is "indetermanence". Since the two tendencies are not exactly antithetical, and they don't lead to a synthesis, they are not dialectical. Each contains its

own contradictions and alludes to elements of the other. Their interplay suggests the action of a "polylectic," pervading postmodernism. Regarding indeterminacy Hassan says:

> By indeterminacy, or better still, indeterminacies, I mean a complex referent that these diverse concepts help to delineate: ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimization - let alone more technical terms referring to the rhetoric of irony, rupture, silence. (Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn* 92)

In literature our ideas of author, audience, reading, writing, book, genre, critical theory and literature itself have all suddenly become questionable. In criticism Roland Barthes speaks of literature as "loss," "perversion," "dissolution." Wolfgang Iser formulates a theory of reading based on textual "blanks." Paul de Man conceives rhetoric — that is literature — as a force that "radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration" (deMan 10).

The second major tendency of post-modernism, *immanence*, designates the capacity of the mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions and so become, its own environment. This noetic tendency may be evoked further by such sundry concepts as diffusion, dissemination, pulsion, interplay, communication, interdependence, all of which derive from the emergence of human beings as language animals, homo pictor, or homo significans. These gnostic creatures constitute themselves and their universe by symbols of their own making. Hassan says:

> Every where — even deep in Lacan's "lettered unconscious," more dense than a black hole in space — every where we encounter that immanence called Language, with all its literary ambiguities, epistemic conundrums, and political distractions. (Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn* 93)

It is quite often noted that in most developed societies, as an artistic, philosohical and social phenomenon, postmodernism veers toward open, playful, optative, provisional forms; a discourse of ironies and fragments.

Science fiction and postmodernist fiction have tended on the whole to

advance along parallel but independent tracks. But there has been a tendency for postmodernist writing, to absorb motifs and topoi from science fiction writing, often mining science fiction for its raw materials. The postmodernists have not always been gracious in acknowledging their borrowings from science fiction, presumably due to the "low art" stigma that still attaches to science fiction. Allasdair Gray in his *Lanark* and Raymond Federman in his *The Twofold Vibration*, proclaim that they are not writing science fiction. But in fact they protest too much. Both *Lanark* and *The Twofold Vibration* are transparently indebted to science fiction for some of their materials. Many of the motifs dismissed by Federman in fact form a part of his own repertoire, as well as that of other postmodernist writers. William Burroughs seizes on the lowest common denominator of science-fiction conventions: his invaders from outer space are pulp-style bug-eyed monsters. Italo Calvino too improvises on various interplanetary themes in the science-fiction fables of his *Cosmicomics* (1965) and *t zero* (1967). On the whole postmodernist writing has preferred to adapt science-fiction's motifs of temporal displacement rather than its spatial displacements, projecting worlds of the future rather than worlds in distant galaxies. Similarly in constructing future worlds, postmodernist writing tends to focus on social

and institutional innovations rather than on the strictly technological innovations. Often the postmodernists seem content to borrow science fiction's most hackneyed "advanced technologies," using them simply as backdrops and not taking them very seriously.

Most postmodernist futures are grim dystopias. The motif of a world after the holocaust or some apocalyptic breakdown recurs. Angela Carter in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and Sam Shepard in his play *The Tooth of Crime* (1972) project visions of a future America that has disintegrated into an anarchic landscape of warring private armies and desert marauders. The topos of nuclear holocaust and its aftermath recurs in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains.*

Postmodernist fiction shares with classic modernist fiction an affinity for cinema and more recently for television, drawing upon it for models and raw materials. For modernist fiction the movies served primarily as a source for new techniques of representation. Instead of serving as a repertoire of representational techniques, the movies and television appear in postmodernist writing at an ontological level — a world-within-the-world. They appear in competition with the primary degetic world of the text, or a plane interposed between the level of verbal representation and

the level of the "real." Postmodernist fiction at its most mimetic holds the mirror up to everyday life in advanced industrial societies, where reality is pervaded by the "miniature escape fantasies" of television and movies. In a television-oriented culture like the one that postmodernist writing so often reflects, TV and the movies constitute a privileged source for the sort of conceits that threaten to overwhelm the primary, literal reality. If the culture as a whole seems to hover between reality and televised fictions, what could be more appropriate than for the texts of that culture to hover between literal reality and a cinematic or television metaphor? Pynchon uses this strategy of suspension throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, often turning to cinema for his metaphorical vehicles. His movie metaphors are developed so concretely and at such length that we begin to lose sight of the literal reality of which they are supposedly the vehicle.

The distinction between literal reality and metaphorical vehicle becomes increasingly infinite, until the readers are left wondering whether the movie reality is only a trope, or belongs to the "real" world of this fiction. Cinematic discourse pervades the style and imagery of *Gravity's Rainbow* from beginning to end. For a transition from a bedroom scene to a conversation over breakfast, "bridge music" is specified. In other parts the

narrative acquires a voice-over parodying that of an old-fashioned travelogue. The extended cinematic trope has been applied to the text itself. The text has become the metaphorical tenor, the movies its vehicle. Movie metaphors substitute for the language of novelistic narration and description. Cinematic discourse can also be read as the sign of a narrative level interposed between the text and the "real." By this reading texts such as *Gravity's Rainbow, The Wild Boys,* etc. do not directly represent a reality, but rather represent a movie which in turn represents a reality. As McHale has pointed out, this reading is clearly justified throughout Burroughs's writings,where many episodes, not only those in the format of a shooting-script, are presented as movies-within-the-novel (McHale, *Postmodernist* 129).

The ontological structure of the projected world of a postmodernist novel, is a dual ontology; on one side our world of the normal and everyday, on the other side the next-door world of the paranormal or supernatural. The contested boundary separating the two worlds runs between them. As already pointed out, post-modernist fiction has close affinities with the genre of the fantastic, just like it has affinities with the genre of science-fiction. It is able to draw upon the fantastic in this way

because the fantastic genre, like science fiction and like postmodernist fiction itself, is governed by the ontological dominant.

The most influential version of the epistemological approach to fantastic writing is that of Tzvetan Todorov's. For Todorov the fantastic is less a genre than a transient state of text which actually belongs to one of two adjacent genres: either the genre of the uncanny, in which apparently supernatural events are ultimately explained in terms of the laws of nature (deceptions or hallucinations); or that of the marvelous, in which supernatural events are ultimately accepted as such. A classic example of a fantastic narrative that ultimately resolves itself into the uncanny, would be Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." A text belongs to the fantastic proper only as long as it hesitates between natural and supernatural explanations, between the uncanny and the marvelous. "Hesitation, or epistemological uncertainty, is thus the underlying principle of the fantastic according to Todorov" (McHale, *Postmodernist* 74). Few texts manage to maintain this delicate balance to the end. One novel is James's *Turn of the Screw* (1898) and another is Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*.

The fantastic invasion proceeds on many fronts throughout postmodernist fiction. Italo Calvino's "invisible city" of Theodora, having

laboriously eliminated all its natural vermin-serpents, flies, termites, rats and so on succumbs to an invasion of fantastic fauna from its library-sphinxes, griffons, chimeras, dragons and unicorns.

The fantastic, again, is related to the genre of allegory. Maureen Quilligan says: "We seem in the last quarter of the twentieth century to have reentered an allegorical age" (Quilligan 155). This is partly due to our renewed capacity to recognize and appreciate allegory through the efforts of critics and theorists like Edwin Honig and Paul deMan, in addition to Quilligan herself. The romantic prejudice against allegory has been lifted and it has become acceptable. There are any number of postmodernist narratives which are wholly or partly allegorical. These include John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Gunter Grass' *The Flounder* (1977) and Robert Coover' s *The Public Burning* (1977), in addition to *Gravity's Rainbow*. Quilligan's explanation of this resurgence, both of critical insight and allegorical practice, focuses on the "linguistic turn" of twentieth-century thought, involving the recovery of a "medieval" or "suprarealist" view of language as possessing a kind of sacralizing power. But the revival of allegory in postmodernist writing can also be related to its ontological poetics. The ontological structure of an allegorical

narrative is two-level — one level (or frame) that of the trope, the other that of the literal. In terms of Hrushovski's model of the ontology of metaphor, allegory is metaphor's inverse: where in a metaphor the metaphorical frame of reference is absent, the literal frame is present. In allegory it is the literal frame of reference that is missing and must be supplied by the reader. Like metaphor, however, allegory offers itself as a tool for exploring ontological structure and foregrounding ontological themes. Hence the resurgence of allegory.

Postmodern age is significant in that people at large no longer consider fiction as a medium that expresses the truth in their lives. To the postmodernists, the conventional novels presented fraudulent ideals and lies as real life stories. We can assume that it is in reaction to this type of false realism that postmodern fiction assumes its disruptive stance. Many critics of postmodernism have proposed the term *fragmentation* to characterize it. It is true that most texts of the American avant-garde present themselves as collections of fragments, as disorganized catalogues, as montage and collage of disparate elements. It exhibits a tendency toward condensation and toward collecting the incongruous and the incompatible. It is very much against the kind of fiction based on

metaphoric and symbolic representation of reality. Raymond Federman has expressed similar views in this regard. He posits the idea that most postmodernist texts are caught between paranoia and schizophrenia and they push self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness to the limits. Some critics of postmodernism are of the opinion that these texts are incapable of probing below the surface. Much of the fiction written in America today "remains a literature of surfaces which refuses to fall into the old psychological trap of Modernism" (Federman 95).

The postmodernist only disconnects; fragments are all he pretends to trust. His final opprobrium is "totalization." He has preference for montage, collage, for paracritic over hypotactic forms, metonymy over metaphor and schizophrenia over paranoia. Hence the postmodernist's recourse to paradox, paralogy, and paracriticism. The age demands differences, shifting signifiers and even atoms dissolve into elusive sub particles.

"We are witnessing a massive 'delegitimization' of the mastercodes in society, a desuetude of the metanarratives, favouring instead 'les petites histoires' which preserve the heterogeneity of language games" (Lyotard, 37). From the "death of god" to the "death of the author" and "death of the

father," from the decision of authority to revision of the curriculum, we decanonize culture, demystify knowledge, deconstruct the languages of power, desire and deceit.

Postmodernism vacates the traditional self and stimulates self-effacement, self-multiplication and self-reflection. Postmodernism suppresses or disperses and sometimes tries to recover the "deep" romantic ego, which remains under dire suspicion in poststructuralist circles as a "totalizing principle." Losing itself in the play of language, in the differences from which reality is plurally made, the self impersonates its absence even as death stalks its games. It diffuses itself in depthless styles, refusing and eluding interpretation.

Postmodern literature often seeks its limits, entertains its "exhaustion" and subverts itself in forms of articulate "silence." Like its predecessor post-modern art is irrealist, aniconic. It becomes liminary, contesting the modes of its own representation. The postmodern puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself. But the challenge to representation may also lead a writer to other liminal states: the Abject rather than the sublime, or Death itself. More precisely, as Julia Kristeva says, it is "the exchange between signs and death" (qtd. in Hassan, *The*

Postmodern Turn 170). Unrepresentability is that which, through language, is part of no particular language, that which, through meaning, is intolerable, unthinkable.

In absence of a cardinal principal or paradigm, we turn to play, interplay, dialogue, polylogue, allegory, self-reflection — in short to irony. This irony leads to indeterminacy and multivalence. It aspires to the clarity of demystification. Variants of it can be found in Bakhtin, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida and Hayden White. Alan Wilde makes an effort to discriminate its modes, mediate irony, disjunctive irony and postmodern or suspensive irony. Aspects like irony, perspectivism, reflexiveness, express the ineluctable recreations of mind in search of a truth that continually eludes it, leaving it with only an ironic access or excess of self-consciousness.

It is generally accepted that postmodernist art takes its impetus from an extreme reaction to the world we live in. This world or reality is considered as so extraordinary, horrific or absurd that the traditional mode of mimesis or realistic emulation is no longer sufficient. Taking into consideration the contemporary human condition, and the recent developments in human knowledge, the insubstantiality of history is

repeatedly stressed and man is held to be the sum of his roles (the legacy of structuralism). So the contemporary writer is no longer secure in his conception of history or man. Postmodernists feel that ours is a world of altered human relationships, epistemological scepticism, high technology and a strange and distorted history. This world is one of an anarchic and revolutionary subjectivism and the human purpose is thoroughly disoriented. So many contemporary artists feel that there is no point in creating fiction that gives an illusion of life when life itself seems so illusory.

The various aspects of postmodernism discussed in this chapter have been extensively used by both Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon in their works. *Catch-22* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are novels that are generally considered as specimens of postmodernist fiction that undoes the novelistic form by doing violence to itself. These writers resort to violence both at the thematic and formal levels. How they do this is shown in detail in the following two chapters.

Catch-22 and Post-War American Fiction

Sam Thomas “In-forming aggression : The fictional techniques of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 3

Catch-22 and Post-war American Fiction

Chapter 3

Catch-22 and Post-War American Fiction

This chapter tries to place *Catch*-22 in the broad context of post-war American literature. Effort has been made to analyse the specific fictional techniques that Heller has used in order to make his novel generically distinctive. Heller's unique treatment of the theme of war is also examined in this chapter. His treatment may be described as analytical and philosophical in so far as he raises the question why there should be war and suggests how war can be dealt with. The perspective available in the novel is that war is the culmination of absurdity prevailing in the modern world. This absurdity leading to war is not an ontological fact of existence from which there is no escape. Heller is optimistic about a world free from war and for him this world, a Utopia, no matter how far out of reach, is a meaningful ideal for which man may strive.

Catch-22 can be considered as a specimen of postmodernist fiction that undoes the novelistic form by doing violence to itself. Heller gives vent to violence in the novel both at the thematic and formal levels. The plot of the novel is unfurled in the background of the Second World War. It

is a world in which the human situation is coextensive with total war. Its recurring representative act is that of killing and the defining emotion is one of murderous hatred. Heller does violence to the text also, which is posited in detail in the ensuing paragraphs.

One of the more recent and salient trends of postwar fiction is a variant of fantasy, which is satirical only in part and inward with absurdity. "Both celebration and despondency mingle in its motive though its humor tends to be Stygian," says Hassan (*Contemporary American Literature* 81). The authors of post-war fiction display great inventiveness, verbal magic and virtuosity. They try to portray versatility even during times of despair.

Modernist literature had strived to incorporate elements of popular culture into its body. But the proportion of popular culture was comparatively minimal. It gave preponderance to symbols and classical myths over other aspects. The modernists argued that human experience abounded in contradictions and paradoxes which could only be explained through metaphors. Myth in the modernist perspective was a mode of perception which alone could expand consciousness enabling it to include the other within the self; for this to become a possibility, the self must

discipline itself by playing roles, by becoming other than the self. Yeats adopted the mythical device of wearing masks. To the moderns, myth thus served as a device for turning the problems of self and history into a cosmic drama in which the self must determine the role appropriate to itself.

An aversion for the decadence of the times and awareness of being in a painful transitional situation urged the modernist towards a yearning for renovation and a hankering for purity of form in art. Modern writers like Yeats saw war as a necessary means of renewal and Wyndham Lewis praised Hitler and found in Nazism a system favourable to "the aristocracy of intellect." Eliot rewrote the history of all that interested him so as to bring the past in conformity with the present. For him tradition was the continuity of imperial deposits. Modernist aesthetics was revolutionary and new and at the same time maintained a relation with the past.

There seems to be a vast amount of literature which deals with technical innovation. Drama serves as an example of such a development. Megan Terry's folk war movie *Viet rock* (1967) and Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven* (1968) both employ transformations, happenings and direct audience participation to achieve their effects. In American poetry too, generous formal innovation seemed to mark an openness of genre, an

accessible plurality of conventions and options. Jeffry Walsh cites the example of John Balaban's *Vietnam Poems* (1971), where Anglo-Saxon religious verse becomes a linguistic model for treating the Indo-China conflict and "integrates it with wider Christian-pacifist myths" (Walsh 186).

The ambiguous and shifting nature of literary production and its relation to such material conditions as readership and methods of distribution imply complexly evolving cultural relationships and forces. An example of particular relevance to the writing of specifically "war" books is the fluidity and interchange of conventions and styles made possible in a mass paperback market aimed at a mix of readers. An interesting example of such a process of cultural dynamism may be observed in the diffusion of the *Catch*-22 mode of writing.

The production of literature involves a mediated process of negotiations and interactions, conditions which prompt fundamental questions concerning the status of war books in symbolizing external reality. An interesting series of questions revolves around the representation of collective military experience within literary form. It has already been proved that the military-industrial complex has created a massive impact on the social and economic front of the United States.

Estimates show that more than half of America's adult males had undergone some form of military service. In the face of such history the question arises as to how literature can articulate a specific and national response. Also it would be difficult for the unmilitaristic people of America to absorb the increasing resources allocated to military spending. Even though such problematic issues are not easily resolved in war novels, some shaping awareness of them can be discerned at work. Walsh is of the opinion that the vision of Joseph Heller in *Catch*-22 of a vast military bureaucracy communicates a metaphorical awareness of such a situation. *Catch*-22, as Walsh sees it, is a work which "exhibits a profoundly new satiric exploration of war which finds expression through innovatory formal patterning and the fabrication of new myths" (188).

While the Romantics domesticated the classical myths, the modernists strove to connect them to the contemporary situation. They tried to parody or ironize myths. The modern's emphasis was on "impersonality" in its many forms – distance through myth, hardness through image or lucidity through point of view. Both Joyce and Eliot sought to become impersonal and thereby to become spokesmen of the universal unconscious.

Leslie Fiedler has termed this as the "culture religion of Modernism" — an attitude of life and art which sought to redeem the self through discipline taking nurture from myths. The culture religion of modernism which also incorporated within it liberal humanism, was admittedly conservative. It suffered a severe setback during the mid-fifties. Quite shockingly in Nazi Germany avowal of humanist interests was compatible with acceptance of genocide at Auschwitzch.

The post war crisis of conscience that swept across the world led to the rejection of liberal politics by the youth in the 1960's. Modernism came to be viewed as a form of complicity, another manifestation of the lies and hypocrisy that characterised bourgeois power politics. And New Criticism which promoted modernism, and its humanism, was also discredited for a similar dishonesty implicit in its stance.

At the same time two ideologies — Protestantism and Capitalism — happened to be institutionalised in literary criticism thanks to New Criticism. Postmodernism and other post-war trends sought to undermine the hypocrisy and liberal humanism of modernism. It is a literary and cultural phenomenon which was instrumental to the decline of Western liberal humanism and of the literature and culture based on it. Jean

Dubuffet has expressed his impression of the postmodern situation as "a complete liquidation of all the ways of thinking, whose sum constituted what has been called humanism and has been fundamental for our culture since the Renaissance" (qtd. in Hassan, *Paracriticisms* 7).

Leslie Fiedler is the critic who first made an exhaustive study on postmodernism. His essay "Cross the Border-Close That Gap: Post Modernism" is a good introduction to the subject. According to Fiedler postmodernism is primarily a de-Eliotisation movement in art. He accepts with great excitement the fact that postmodernism has reverted to rebarbarization with a vengeance. "A further post modern paradox . . . is to be found in its bridging of the gap between elite and popular art, a gap which mass culture has no doubt broadened" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 20). It has tried to narrow the gap between art and popular entertainment, between high and low arts, between elite culture and popular culture. Postmodernism absorbs into its corpus elements of contemporary popular culture, science fiction, pornography and the Western. John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* are novels which have imbibed a lot from the Western. William Burrough's *Nova Express*,

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-5* and *The Sirens of Titan* have turned science fiction into pop novels. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita,* Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* have practically brought underground pornography into the surface. In *Catch-22* we can find all those elements included.

Post-war American fiction can be seen as a search for ways to deal with the violence, brevity and rigidity of life. It has great penchant for themes like combativeness, fragmentariness, coolness and meaninglessness that are the hallmarks of modern fiction. Eventhough it views modern life as problematic unlike the fiction of the 1920s, it does not grieve at the brokenness of experience as a sign of the decline of the Western civilization. "It offers an acceptance of dislocation as a major part of life and perhaps a hope that the displacement of traditional ideals might permit new ways of dealing with human situations" (Hendin 240).

The post-war writer tries to view man in a totally different perspective. While the modernist hero was shaped by the humanistic ethos in the political, religious, anthropological and psycho-analytic realms, the hero of the post-war period is moulded by the concern with functioning and behaviour, that speeded up the growth of ego-psychology in the 1940s,

1950s and 1960s. This is characteristic of an age of increasing technological sophistication.

The sensibility of the sixties was only in part political, and the reason for the vanishing of novels like *Invisible Man* of the fifties, derives from a different consciousness expressed in a different sense of the self. R.W.B. Lewis defines the characteristic hero of the fifties novel as a "Picaro," literally an outlaw, who often takes an "eccentric pilgrimage" through a mysterious and hostile world towards some "shrine of honour and value and belief" (qtd. in Pearce, "The Sixties" 163). Instances of this can be seen in Saul Bellow's *Augie March* and *Henderson*. The heroes of the sixties are also on the move, searching, but their movement cannot be plotted like that of their predecessors. "Senseless movement or movement for its own sake, dominated the consciousness of the sixties. It was the impetus of the characters of Pynchon, Barth, Heller, Nabokov, Mailer, Capote and others" (Pearce, "The Sixties" 164).

In *Gates of Eden*, Morris Dickstein distinguishes the abstract moral concerns of the fifties from the issues of the sixties, which were concrete and political. The writer of the fifties distanced himself from his subject through style and form. He created an impression that he was not an

interested party. But the literature of the sixties assumed that everyone was interested. It cherished immediacy, confrontation and personal witness.

Another aspect of the fiction of the sixties is the blurred distinction between fact and fiction. In the past, science assuring us that the unseen is unreal, sanctified fact as the basic unit of reality. Writers had to write from fact. But the sudden spurt of mass society, the increased discoveries about the world of the unconscious and the supremacy of scientific relativism make it difficult for us to be sure that our own idea of reality will be recognizable to anyone else. As a result of the blurring of fact and fiction the novelist of the 1960s seized upon two aspects; a growing sense of the mystery of fact itself and a loss of confidence in our own power to effect change and to control events. Being forced to concentrate on fact for so long a period, we have come to see in it a fabulous element and we suspect the existence of some mystery behind its strange surfaces.

Other dominant visions of the sixties are the explosion of the ordinary by the fabulous, the protagonist's sense of helplessness, the mystery of some "They" who have an irrational hold on things, and the ever-present black humour. To contain these visions and to respond to the fabulous nature of fact, the dominant pattern in the novel of the sixties

continues to be a movement away from the realistic novel and toward a contemporary version of romance. "Traditional devices of romance are now being employed to capture the absurdity of ordinary life" (Olderman 6). This is the general intellectual climate that has given rise to the fictional world of Heller, Pynchon and many others.

We expect post-war fiction to be seemingly true, or suggesting whatever that passes for truth, both in its specifics and its generalities. Even though it is generally agreed that the prominent writers of the past still move us profoundly, their vision in its particulars may not be appealing to us. Frederick Karl has aptly remarked "Dostoyevsky was a reactionary, a religious fanatic; Conrad an antiliberal; Lawrence for blood, not social action; Mann a disillusioned rationalist; Hesse, a mystic who recommended asceticism" (Karl 134). But these great writers had made keen psychological observation of man and his world which their readers have in general tended to ignore. These writers do not seem to be one of us — they are too idealistic for us. It may be because we have so assimilated these author's vision, that we no longer turn to them for advice. Quite often they offer only a diagnosis, not a course of action which is true in its details. On the other hand "a novel like *Catch-22*, trailing recollections of Joyce,

Nathaniel West and early, 'funny' Celine" (Karl 134) presents a totally different picture. The novel has a message for the discontented and the disaffiliated reader and emboldens him to face life positively.

The military world on Pianosa in *Catch-22* stands as a metaphor for life within any organization. Men in different walks of life find themselves in a similar kind of world. The sense of absurdity is not created solely due to a neurotic's reaction to his surroundings; but in actual fact it is the aftermath of many conflicting interests that interact and create a world unfit for the individual. At the core of the novel we find the idea that the individual must always relinquish part of himself to the organization which swallows him up. The novel appeals to all those who want the good slice of life and nevertheless reject its particularities, or even fear defining them. While calling themselves as social beings, they hate society and distrust other individuals. For those who find life nauseating, frustrating and meaningless, *Catch-22* provides, temporarily, a moral way out. Those who often wish to do what is right are compromised by the fallacy of their situation. They feel that they are defeated victims, but are compelled to pull on as victors. They would like to love, but find that hate is more viable and sophisticated. They desire to aid society, but are warned that only a

fool puts the self last. Though they wish to embrace the great world, they find it insipid and insolent.

The grotesque surface of *Catch-22* masks a serious purpose. In an absurd universe, the individual has the right to seek survival. One must not be asked to give his life unless everybody is willing to do so. In an impossible situation, one finally has to honour one's own self. That is why Yossarian, the protagonist, concludes that his life is concrete and he is taking a moral decision about the sanctity of human existence. He is a hero by virtue of his sacred appraisal of his future. According to Yossarian life should not be taken lightly by anyone. He considers his life valuable and sacred. Once he has done his dirty share in the war, he has an inviolable right to save himself. The individual must consider himself supreme.

Joseph Heller's Yossarian becomes a politician in a larger sense, as a culture hero for the bold new decade of the American 1960s. Yossarian's creator did not pursue the usual course of a "developing" author. *Catch-22* serves as a talisman to the new culture and it is better known as an underground novel, sharply in contrast to the other novels of the fifties (consider Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, John Updike). Yossarian can be considered as the first underground literary hero of the new activist

generation. As some critics have pointed out, "while Ken Kesey's novel invents a new reality by means of voice, especially voice expressing an imaginatively new construction of the world, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* reaches deeper for its reconstruction" (Klinkowitz 26).

The surface action of *Catch-22* is constituted by characters and themes drawn from World War Two. But its greatest significance lies in its language, especially the grammar and syntax which intimate the deep structure of reality. Even with regard to subject matter, Heller's portrayal of World War Two is a shift away from conventional realism. It comes almost two decades after World War Two, that is, in 1961, when hardly anyone was writing realistic fiction about World War Two.

In *Catch-22* Heller is redefining World War Two as a method of revising our ideas of what passes for reality. And he uses a new type of grammar to reflect this orientation. "The Texan turned out to be good natured, generous and likeable, in three days nobody could stand him" (*Catch* 10). Everything that comes up for discussion is handled in this kind of fractured rhetoric. "Colonel Cargill was so awful a marketing executive that his services were much sought after by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes" (*Catch* 27). Conventional syntax and reason are totally

inverted. Heller is not only inventing a new way to comprehend reality, he is inventing a new reality, based on a reversal of values carried over from the earlier world view.

The military provides a perfect setting for the logical proof of such an illogical recreation of reality and is an example familiar to most Americans. While observing the operations of the Army, one gets the impression that it is a gigantic ship of fools, an absurdist enterprise made operational only by its vaguely assumed importance of mission. The novel pooh-poohs army bureaucracy, army logic, and army inefficiency. Heller's virtuosity with language creates a flamboyant, verbally artistic picture:

> The colonel dwelt in a vortex of specialists who were still specializing in trying to determine what was troubling him. They hurled lights into his eyes to see if he could see, rammed needles into nerves to hear if he could feel. There was a urologist for his urine, a lymphologist for his lymph, an endocrinologist for his endocrines, a psychologist for his psyche, a dermatologist for his derma; there was a pathologist for his pathos, a cystologist for his cysts and a bald, and pedantic cetologist from the zoology department at Harvard who had been shanghaied ruthlessly into a Medical Corps by a faulty anode in an I.B.M. Machine and

> spent his sessions with the dying colonel trying to discuss Moby Dick with him. (*Catch* 15)

Heller's novel with its irrelevant and bitterly comic description of the last days of World War Two, has seemed for many of its readers a frighteningly accurate portrait of the "mentality" behind contemporary social and intellectual institutions (Davis 66). Many of the weird situations in the novel reveal how society's institutions reflect fundamental discontinuities in language, thought and behaviour. Moreover there is the suggestion that at the heart of such dislocations is that problematic and radical discontinuity and this has been the topic of much heated debate. Tony Tanner, Thomas Blues and Robert Protherough are some of the critics who have aired their views on this subject. The problem of discontinuity clearly involves more than sweeping changes in the form and style of recent writing. Davis writes:

> It is also related to those movements which have led much of contemporary thought away from a search for continuities in natural, psychological or cultural being and toward an acceptance of a discourse which acknowledges linguistic, intellectual and social discontinuities. (66)

In this regard reference should be made to Ernst Cassirer's theory

that language is a process of "ever progressive objectification," Sartre's portrayal of how "things are divorced from their names" and Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction" of phenomenological and structualist theories of language. It is in response to this sense of linguistic, intellectual and social discontinuity that Heller turns to language itself for a basic model of these disruptions. Heller tries to demythologize discourse in *Catch*-22 by depicting Yossarian's quest for survival and he tries to discover a more meaningful and "continuous" discourse.

The use of names in the novel is in a strange manner. They fail to properly designate a particular object, person or concept. Heller's characters often identify an object or person purely on the basis of a name assigned by the most haphazard methods. Names become directly related to a person's sense of his own experience or identity. Yossarian, when he usurps someone else's hospital bed, becomes for that period Warrant Officer Homer Lumley, "who felt like vomiting and was covered suddenly with clammy sweat" (*Catch* 300). Major Major when first joined Kindergarten discovered that he was not "Caleb Major," but "some total stranger named Major Major Major about whom he knew absolutely nothing" (*Catch* 87). Another instance of this linguistic discontinuity can be

observed at the beginning of the novel. Yossarian is entrusted with the task of censoring enlisted men's letters. He makes a game out of the job making a parody of the military context.

> Death to all modifiers, he declared one day . . . The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything but a, an and the . . . Soon he was proscribing parts of salutations and signatures and leaving the text untouched . . . when he had exhausted all possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of the wrist as though he were God . . . (*Catch* 8).

Since there is a close resemblance between the independent world of words and the factual world, crossing out a name may in effect "obliterate" a place. Similarly Yossarian attempts to capture the German artillery batteries at Bologna by simply going to the map and moving the red line that indicates the extent of the Allies conquests. The symbolic forms and expressions have the privileged status usually given to "reality." In fact even the Air Corps is temporarily convinced that Bologna has been captured. The process seen in these elementary forms of discourse can

serve as a model for other intellectual procedures within the novel. The cliches and illusions of popular culture, acquire the same status granted to signifiers like maps, charts, and names. Lieutenant Scheisskopf thinks of his own personal life in terms of the formulae and codes of melodrama: he thinks of himself as a Man "chained to a woman . . . incapable of looking beyond her own dirty, sexual desires to the titanic for the unobtainable in which noble men could become heroically engaged" (*Catch* 74). Then there is the incredible fantasy in Yossarian's joke about the German's "Lepage glue gun" (a weapon which glues a whole formation of planes together in mid air). When it is repeated to him by the Squadron's intelligence officer, Yossarian exclaims "My God, its true" (*Catch* 129).

In the same pattern Dunbar attempts to handle time, and Yossarian's friend is led far beyond conventional ideas about time's psychological dimensions. "Your're inches away from death every time you go on a mission," he tells Clevinger.

> How much older can you be at your age? A half-minute before that you were stepping into High School, and an unhooked brassiere was as close as you ever hoped to get to Paradise. Only a fifth of a second before that you were a small kid with a ten-week Summer Vacation that lasted a

> hundred thousands years and still ended too soon. (*Catch* 40)

A most remarkable aspect of this order is that since pleasant experiences seem to make time pass more quickly, the way for Dunbar to make his life last as long as possible is to fill it with as many dull, unpleasant and distasteful conditions as he can.

Joseph Heller animates *Catch*-22 with the behaviour of living human beings whose deep and interesting personalities must respond to the phenomenological surface so described. Yossarian is the best example. He suffers from the paranoid fears that "they are trying to kill me." Even though the system is full of absurdity, his reasoning power forces him to challenge the orders that systematically increased the number of combat missions to be flown. The army pictured in the novel is a village of colliding bureaucracies whose colliding order cook up impossibilities. Heller takes this one good joke and exploits it into two thousand recitations of the same good joke, but in the act he somehow creates a rational vision of the modern world. Yet the crisis of the reason is that it can no longer comprehend the modern world. Heller demonstrates that a rational man devoted to reason must arrive at the conclusion that either the world is mad

and he is the only sane man in it, or that the sane man is not really sane because his rational propositions are without existential reason.

> Good God, how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation? . . . Why in the world did He ever create pain.? "Pain?" Leiutenant Scheisskopf's wife pounced upon the word victoriously. Pain is a useful symptom. Pain is a warning to us of bodily dangers." "Oh, He was really being charitable to us when He gave us pain! Why couldn't He have used a door bell instead to notify us, or one of his celestial choirs?" (*Catch* 184)

In this context Heller does not look for any answer, but there can be one, that God gave us pain for the sole reason that tranquillizers would be discovered.

The essence of Heller's *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-5* or *The Children's Crusade* is that though the three novels are ostensibly about the Second World War, in which both writers served, they are really about the Next War; a war which totally anihilates, a war that will end only when no one is alive to fight it.

In Catch-22 the drama of the war is not presented with that sincerity which characterizes the novels that came out of the actual war experience. It is the absence of specific details that gives it that sense of application for today.

The theme of *Catch-22* in particular is the total craziness of war, the craziness of all those who submit to it and the struggle to survive by the one man, Yossarian, who knows the difference between his sanity and the insanity of the system. It deals with more than the lusty evils of battle; it is a book written for readers who have been warned about the dangers of the military-industrial complex. The novel strikes back at an institution that usurps man's power over his own life. Man's enemy is not simply the chaos of war, but also the deadly inhuman bureaucracy of the military-economic establishment which claims to be a stay against chaos while it threatens human life more insidiously than the battle itself. The establishment that runs the war goes so far to destroy sanity and life. Heller finds that war's greatest evil is its responsibility for the production of organized military inhumanity. In *Catch-22* the emphasis is never on battle, and even the antiwar theme is soft-pedalled when the question of relative morality involves choosing between life-negating war or life-negating bureaucracy.

As Raymond Olderman has observed, Heller deals with one real terror that haunts the American 60s — "the organized institution which in the name of reason, patriotism, and righteousness has seized control over man's life" (95).

The picture of the world that emerges from Heller's *Catch-22* is characterised by "absolute entrapment . . . permanent apocalypse, and built in catastrophe" (Lewis 226). The world of *Catch-22* is an impersonal one, which is constituted by abstract systems, institutions and structures that make men behave irrationally. Though Heller depicts an army camp where order and discipline should reign supreme, this institution encourages nothing but unreasonableness. The order and discipline of the army has very little to do with logic. The commanders constantly lose sight of the simple fact that they are supposed to beat the enemy. Instead they direct their "inverted energies" towards myopic goals.

Joseph Heller's extension of modern fictional techniques cannot be overlooked. "The method, to use Heller's own label, is de'ja vu — a term meaning 'already seen' that suggests something of the delusive experience, hallucinatory quality, and disjunctive expression of reality in *Catch-22*" (Mellard 30). The chaplain asks Yossarian, "Have you ever . . . been in a

situation which you felt you had been in before, even though you knew you were experiencing it for the first time?" Yossarian says "Yes", but when he was asked if he has that feeling now, "Yossarian shook his head and explained that de'ja vu was just a momentary infinitesimal lag in the operation of two coactive sensory nerve centres that commonly functioned simultaneously" (*Catch* 275). For Yossarian the "lag" is not of much significance, but for the chaplain it has tremendous philosophical significance. The lag "rips away at last the voluminous black folds shrouding the eternal mysteries of existence" (*Catch* 275). And for the reader the "lag" creates a discontinuity between a character, a symbol, a narrative and its meaning. In chapter 18 an absurd, incredible character is portrayed, "The soldier who saw Every thing Twice." Like him everyone "sees" twice, at least everything that has importance. But the 'lag' for everyone is between "seeing" and understanding. The reader joins with Yossarian and says with defection "Yes now I see. But still don't think I understand" (*Catch* 62). Heller was obviously influenced by the techniques of epiphany and narrative disjunction resorted to by James Joyce. Heller needs the reader's co-operation and creative assistance in introducing the method of de'ja vu. Several of the important incidents in *Catch*-22 are

introduced as one had seen it before and so one tries to trap and nourish impressions as they occur. For instance the images of the dead man in Yossarian's tent, Snowden dying in the back of the bomber plane, the naked man sitting on the tree, and the soldier in white. Heller's essentially lyrical method forces the recurring images to accumulate meanings until their full significance, their essence is finally perceived. The recurring scenes and events also heighten the feeling of horror.

Rather than being merely repetitive and redundant, de'ja vu is rather incremental and progressive, moving towards completion and resolution. Even on a low level of thematic seriousness, characters such as Chief White Halfoat and Capt. Flume generally expand in significance. In Chapter 5 one learns of Halfoat's threats to murder Capt. Flume in his sleep and of his prophecy that he will die of pneumonia. In the next chapter we know of Flume's great fear of Halfoat and his retreat into the woods living like a hermit. In Chapter 25 the chaplain meets Flume, the "mad hermit" and he accepts Flume's words that he will return before winter, as the words of a prophet. In chapter 32 the reader finds that Halfoat "felt cold and was already making plans to move up into the hospital to die of pneumonia. Instinct told Chief White Halfoat it was almost time. His chest ached and

he coughed chronically" (*Catch* 358). Apparently all these descriptions seem to be comically absurd. But at the end one has the overwhelming feeling that Halfoat will die. At the back of the comic absurdity of these characters we can identify a strange world of tragic consequences. In chapter 6 reference is made to Hungry Joe having nightmares wherein he dreams of a cat sleeping on his face. Such idiosyncrasy seems humorous enough until one learns in chapter 41 that when Hungry Joe "died in his sleep while having a dream, they found a cat on his face" (*Catch* 445).

Many characters in *Catch*-22 like Major Major, Dunbar, Doc Daneeka, and Major-de Coverly who are delineated in the beginning as mere insignificant figures of comic idiosyncrasy, gradually develop into meaningful figures of ironic obsession or compulsion.

Another important aspect of Heller's technique can be seen in the treatment of characters like the soldier in white, the dead man in Yossarian's tent (Mudd) and Kraft. Heller handles these characters in a way similar to E.M. Forster's use of "expanding symbols." Mention is made very early about the soldier in white (Chapter I). But he is fully depicted only many chapters later.

> The soldier in white was constructed entirely of gauze, plaster and a thermometer, and the thermometer was merely an adornment left balanced in the empty dark hole in the bandages over his mouth early each morning and late each afternoon by Nurse Cramer and Nurse Duckett right up to the afternoon Nurse Cramer read the thermometer and discovered he was dead. (*Catch* 171)

Similarly the dead man in Yossarian's tent is mentioned first in Chapter 2, then in Chapters 3,9 and 10. It is only in Chapter 24 that we perceive that he was actually killed in a fight over the bridge at Orvieto. What Yossarian refers to as the dead man in his tent is in fact the uniforms and belongings of Mudd who was killed in action. *Catch*-22 is pregnant with such savage incidents. The dead man in Yossarian's tent, Kraft and the Soldier in White take on added significance as they progress, but their significance is more symbolic than actual. They represent two most important aspects in *Catch*-22, death and responsibility. A recognition of the meaning of these symbolic characters contributes to the development of the novel's central character and consciousness - Yossarian. He is constantly reminded of violent death by Kraft and the dead man in his tent makes him aware of its presence. Kraft also warns Yossarian of his moral responsibility in the war. Even though Yossarian is responsible for Kraft's

death by flying over the bridge twice, he is presented with a medal and a promotion for bombing the bridge. The medal and the promotion develop in Yossarian a feeling of responsibility and guilt and they gaud him to criticise the attitudes of Milo Minderbinder. Milo is really responsible for the death of Mudd, having masterminded the bombing run over the bridge at Orvieto. So, for Yossarian, Mudd becomes a concrete symbol for Milo's generalised irresponsibility.

The soldier in white is rather an epitome of a "neater," more delicate and peaceful death that Yossarian can expect in the hospital. Yossarian quite often comes to the hospital under the pretext of having a "liver condition." That is the only guise by which he can save himself from flying more missions. The hospital turns out to be a haven of refuge for him.

The soldier in white reappears for the last time in chapter 34. "Yossarian froze in his tracks paralyzed as much by the eerie shrillness in Dunbar's voice as by the familiar, white morbid sight of the soldier in white covered from head to toe in plaster and gauze" (*Catch* 373). He shocks the hospital inmates, creating a bedlam of the ward. A sudden unexpected feeling of grotesque horror and chill grasps the readers, when the soldier in white reappears. No one knows for certain what is inside the white gauze

and plaster. For Yossarian, the hospital, which was a haven of refuge at the beginning, is no longer so. There is nowhere he can escape to from the clutches of the Army.

The working of the languages and logic even transform the traditional understanding of such concepts as "death," "presence" and "absence." The dead man in Yossarian's tent has been killed before officially reporting to the squadron. The army maintains that since Mudd "had never officially gotten into the squadron, he could never officially be gotten out" (*Catch* 111). Yossarian is asked to share his tent with Mudd's personal belongings and official "presence." If this situation delineates how the discontinuities of knowledge can turn what is generally thought of as death's 'absence' into the functional equivalent of "presence," Doc Daneeka's final plight portrays a poignant reversal of this aspect. Doc Daneeka has received his pay as flight surgeon on the belief that he accompanies the men on each mission; but Yossarian who knows that the doctor is afraid to fly, persuades Mc Watt to enter his name on the flight log for bombing missions. Mc Watt, piloting a plane in a training flight, dips his wings in a final salute and flies straight into the side of a mountain. When the plane crashes the doctor is declared "dead" by the Air Corps, though everyone on

Pianosa knows that Daneeka was safe on the ground all the while. "His physical appearance never can refuse the 'facts' of official knowledge. When people begin to act as if he really were dead, Daneeka's 'life' is transformed into a functional absence" (Davis 70).

Mrs. Daneeka's letters to her husband are returned unopened, stamped "Killed in Action." Col. Cathcart, desperate after the death of Mc Watt and the loss of the plane, raises the number of missions to sixty five. Doc Daneeka is ostracized by men at Pianosa. He gets no pay or rations and lives on the charity of mess sergeants. Even

> Gus and Wes turned him away from the medical tent without even a thermometer for comfort, and then, only then did he realise that, to all intents and purpose he really was dead, and that he had better do something damned fast if he ever hoped to save himself. (*Catch* 354)

The grieving Mrs. Daneeka is a bit consoled by a notification from Washington that she is the sole beneficiary of her husband's G.I. Insurance. But she is disconcerted to receive an impassioned letter from him.

> Begging her to bring his plight to the attention of the War Department and urging her to communicate with his group commander, Colonel Cathcart, for assurances that-no matter

> what else she might have heard . . . it was indeed, he, her husband, Doc Daneeka, who was pleading with her, and not a corpse or some imposter. (*Catch* 354)

Mrs. Daneeka was filled with remorse and compunction. She thought her husband was right. But the next letter she opened was from Colonel Cathcart. It read "Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss., or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka: Words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father or brother was killed, wounded or reported missing in action" (*Catch* 354). According to Heller, Mrs. Daneeka moved with her children to Michigan and left no forwarding address. The whole incident may seem comic and absurd. But the underlying apsect is that the Army is a colossal ship of fools, an absurdist enterprise made operational by its vaguely assumed importance of mission. Such scenes make fun of Army bureaucracy, Army logic and Army efficiency.

According to Frederick R. Karl, Yossarian is an American about whom we all ought to be proud.

> Heller's point is always moral. The fact that many outraged readers saw Yossarian as immoral, cowardly, or anti-American, simply indicates what falsely patriotic hearts beat sturdily beneath, seemingly sophisticated exteriors. (Karl 136, 137)

Inspite of the presence of many "evil" characters, Heller believes in man's goodness. Even those characters who are branded as evil are not really evil in the true sense, but they only react to the given opportunity. The world of *Catch-22* is one which has turned all men crazy. People float uneasily in a foreign world where human existence is feeble, contradictory and contingent upon myriads of other forces. All the individual can hope to know is that he is superior to any universal force and all he can hope to recognise is that the universal or collective force can never comprehend the individual. In an imbroglio of absurdity the only concrete factor is one's own identity. In a society closed to authenticity and good faith, Yossarian is very open. Usually when a responsive, decent and sensitive character throws himself upon a closed society, insensitive and rigid, quite often the result can be tragic. What keeps Yossarian buoyant and hearty is the fact that he never tries to reform the society in which he lives. He is rather willing to accept its absurdity if it will give him his freedom. "Never a revolutionary, rarely a rebel, unintentionally a hero, only occasionally a young Turk, Yossarian is more often a rank conformist" (Karl 139).

The only happiness that he seeks is what he gets from Nurse Duckett, Luciana or the other whores in Rome. "Yet this twentieth century natural

man is 'with it', not against it" (Karl 139). Yossarian expresses great adaptability towards destructive forces. In the face of adversities he maintains his integrity, sexual balance and coolness. His views are not rigid and without rigidity there can be only personal comedy. Characters like Clevinger, Nately and Snowden who try to fight against the system, are eventually trapped by it and they meet with a tragic end. The shrewd Milo who is comic, masterminds the whole system.

As Frederick R. Karl notes, the greed and egoism of Milo Minderbinder and the innocence and simplicity of Snowden are the two extremes that Yossarian must avoid. A person must know all aspects of life or else he cannot be true to himself. Only fools walk in darkness. Heller derides both Nately and Milo. The latter represents a cheap commercial attitude, while the former attempts to be Jesus Christ in a situation that calls for an instinctive sense of survival.

By treating his absurdist theme with absurdist techniques, Heller introduced a new pattern of literary expression into the American sixties. *Catch-22* is finally a radical protest novel and in technical innovation it operates within an established literary tradition. Like other American novels such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *An American Tragedy*, its protest is

directed from the left toward the prevailing centres of power in America. But whereas Steinbeck and Draiser pointed their polemics at trust and the tycoon, Heller's target shifted. He found out that the new images of power in modern mass society are the inter-linked bureaucracies of industry, the military and the political administration. Heller apparently feels that the power shift must be faced with new models of protest. Heller views the objects of his attack as images of non-reason and hence turns from naturalism to the "literature of non-reason for the appropriate means of exploration and criticism" (Harris 34).

Heller differs from other absurdist novelists of the sixties in that he protests against absurdity rather than simply representing it. Writers like Barth, Vonnegut and Pynchon often dwell upon the absurdities inherent in modern mass society. Yet they view these absurdities as manifestations of a larger absurdity, one that is broad and cosmic. In this respect these novelists cannot properly be called radical protest novelists because they do not feel that society can be cured.

Heller rather than accepting absurdity as an ontological fact views it as a by-product of bureaucracies reigning over modern mass society. In *Catch-22* the military functions as a metaphor for bureaucratic power in

general. As the novel develops this power spreads until it seems to touch all aspects of human life. Yossarian finds to be safe from its powerful clutches when he is on leave in Rome or in the hospital. Eventually these retreats prove to be futile, for the bureaucratic power has already spread its powerful tentacles everywhere. MPs drive the prostitutes from the Roman brothel, depriving Yossarian of the temporary solace of sex. The city of Rome pictured as a symbol of sanity and good life, is transformed into a distorted nightmare of violence and unreason.

After reading the novel one concludes that it is not simply a comic novel. Of course the novel is full of satirical asides, witty dialogues, puns and slapsticks, but one notes a vein of seriousness running through it. At the centre of the tragedy is Heller's awareness of an era that would have existed if people and situations were different. We can find here Heller the idealist who can never accept that moral values have become meaningless or defunct.

In *Catch*-22 Heller has consistenly tried to highlight the emotion of horror. Whenever the novel veers back to its primal scene, Snowden, a bombardier is eviscerated in a plane which is smashed by flak — a scene given us directly and piteously. Scenes like these make *Catch*-22 seem too

disturbing. Often the humorous situations we find in the novel are a strained effort to enunciate the imminence of someone's death by violence. That buried-alive feeling of being caught in a plane under attack, of seeing one's colleague eviscerated, points to the total impotence implicit in the system. This cold immobility is evident in the violence inherent in some of the passages:

> That was where he wanted to be if he had to be there at all, instead of hung out there in front like some goddam cantilevered goldfish in some goddam cantilevered goldfish bowl while the goddam foul black tiers of flak were bursting and booming and billowing all around and above and below him in a climbing, cracking, staggered, banging, phantasmagorical, cosmological wickedness that jarred and tossed and shivered, clattered and pierced, and threatened to annihilate them all in one splinter of a second in one vast flash of fire. (*Catch* 50)

Heller tries to explain the enigma confronting every individual. They are directly in the line of fire, always frightened of being trapped. War is not an affair of groups from which we may escape, but it is everyone's nemesis.

Another incident which produces grotesque terror is that of Kid Simpson's death. Yossarian is lying on the beach, preoccupied with

thoughts of death, from the general consideration of "all people who had died underwater" to that of the specific cases of Clevinger and Orr. As Yossarian studies every floating object, Heller begins one of the most frightening portions of the novel. Captain McWatt came flying on his plane and gave him the biggest shock of all. Blonde and pale Kid Simpson, "his naked sides scrawny," was bobbing on his raft in the sea. McWatt flew his plane so close to Kid Simpson when he leaped clownishly up to touch it. One of the propellers sliced him into two. "Kid Simpson literally 'rained' all over the beach" where the naked men were swimming and Yossarian was lying with Nurse Duckett.

Considering the fact that Heller inverts the chronological structure of *Catch*-22 making its style unique, one may wonder why he has spent so much effort in obfuscation. Heller critic Doug Gaukroger gives two reasons for this. The most obvious reason is to create a special effect by treating all events as equally present. The idea is to confuse the reader's sense of order and to upset his basic assumptions regarding proper form and structure. The unorthodox treatment of time in *Catch*-22 is both parallel to, and prepares the reader for, the unorthodox treatment of the subject matter. To him it is only appropriate that "a novel which deals with an apparently

absurd and topsy-turvy world should be written in an apparently absurd and confused style" (Gaukroger 85).

The second reason for Heller's obfuscation concerns mainly with numerous events occurring during the Great Big Siege of Bologna. By being vague as to the length of The Siege, Heller is able to deal with a large amount of humorous material without the necessity of trying to locate events specifically in time. Heller does not need to develop an impossible time scheme to create a sense of absurdity and confusion in his novel. He achieves this effect better by obscuring and twisting a chronological structure which is both plausible and logical.

The title *Catch-22* is significant in many respects, as the narrator humorously defines in Chapter 5. Doc Daneeka explains to Yossarian why he cannot ground Orr.

> There was only one catch and that was Catch-22 which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't

> but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to . . . Yossarian saw it clearly in all its spinning reasonableness. (*Catch* 47)

There is no escape from this catch. It is a crazy inescapable world. There are other references to Catch-22 and its manifold clauses. The most important view of Catch-22 emerges toward the close of the novel. The nightmarish scenes of the novel which convey its tragic sense culminate in the cosmic nightmare of Chapter 39, "The Eternal City." Once glorious, Rome is now dilapidated. The majestic monuments are shattered, the streets contain surrealistic nightmares. The people seem to be the "husks and shards of humanity." Yossarian walking through the streets in search of Nately's whore's kid sister, meets an old woman who tells him that "all the poor young girls" have been chased away by "tall soldiers with the hard white hats and clubs" (*Catch* 415).

> "What right did they have?"
>
> "Catch-22"
>
> "What ?" Yossarian froze in his tracks with fear and alarm and felt his whole body begin to tingle. "What did you say ?" "Catch-22", the old woman repeated, rocking her head up and down. "Catch-22. Catch-22 says that they have

> a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing." (*Catch* 416)

Yossarian questions the old woman again and learns that Nately's whore and the kid sister are also missing. They have been chased away with the rest into the streets. Yossarian however makes a solid assumption about the absurd law of Catch-22. He was positive that it did not exist, but it did not make any difference. Everyone thought it existed and that was much worse, "for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute, to accuse, criticise, attack, amend, hate, revile, spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up" (*Catch* 418). As a result of his understanding, Yossarian has begun to girdle up himself for the final confrontation with the "law". In the chapter entitled "Catch-22," Yossarian is offered a "little deal" by Col. Cathcart and Col. Korn if he won't complain against flying more missions. The catch, Korn tells Yossarian, is that he has to like them: "Like us, Join us. Be our pal. Say nice things about us here and back in the states. Become one of the boys" (*Catch* 436). If he will like them he will be sent home after another promotion and a medal. But Yossarian finally decides that the catch means a moral death and repudiates the deal.

It is a topsy-turvy world where one wins by losing and loses by

winning. Heller creates a sense of the grotesque and the incongruous. One night in Rome, Yossarian is dumbfounded to discover that Aarfy has raped an Italian girl and thrown her out of the window with impunity. When Yossarian picks up a row over the matter, Aarfy's reply is very poignant: "No Siree, Not to good old Aarfy. She was only a servant girl. I hardly think they're going to make too much of a fuss over one poor Italian servant girl when so many thousands of lives are being lost every day. Do you?" (*Catch* 428). This is a clear picture of society's attitude to the poor and the down-trodden. Man has become valueless, he is massacred ruthlessly everywhere. Man's consciousness has become frozen and limp. He has lost his power to feel. Such repugnant and nauseating scenes are aplenty in *Catch*-22. As a critic has observed, "Aarfy's explanation is virtually a paradigm of *Catch*-22's logical procedures and does more than suggest the fallaciousness of certain kinds of 'acceptable' acts and rationalizations" (Davis 73).

Two characters that ultimately evolve as the real manipulators of power in the novel are ex PFC Wintergreen and Milo Minderbinder. The institution of business is represented by Milo, the airforce mess officer. He personifies the absurdity of the capitalist system, one which has no social

commitments and whose sole objective is the opportunistic amassing of wealth. Heller, through his technique of delayed revelation tricks his readers into accepting the reality of Milo and his huge enterprise. He develops a trading syndicate equal to any of the large corporations which asserted their supremacy after World War Two. He runs his enterprise on the same pattern of the bizarre language structures in the novel.

> I make a profit of three and a quarter cents on egg by selling them for four and a quarter cents an egg to the people in Malta I buy them from for seven cents an egg. Of course, I don't make the profit. The syndicate makes the profit. And every body has a share. (*Catch* 236)

His M & M Enterprises stands for Milo Minderbinder. The "&" is added to thwart the impression that it was managed by a single person. Milo cannot eliminate the middleman in his operation, who is he himself. The "&" in Milo's business is a necessary grammatical structure needed to make this mad world work. The arbitrary nature of war is made evident by contracting bomb runs for the Germans, taking on bridges, emplacements and finally by bombing his own airfield.

The first mention of Milo occurs at the end of Chapter-2, where he is

away in "Smyrna for the fig harvest." Forty pages later one learns why he has gone there for the fig harvest; he has used Yossarian's letter from Doc Daneeka that orders the mess officer to give Yossarian all the dried fruit and fruit juices he wants. He uses the letter in a fantastic way to begin his enterprising career. Many hints about the stages of that career are given earlier, hints about his buying up of the entire Egyptian cotton crop and his bombing of the squadron. Towards the middle of the novel Yossarian and Orr make a harried journey with Milo through his kingdoms. They are astounded to find that Milo has parleyed Yossarian's letter into a huge expansive empire called M & M Enterprises. At the same time Milo has become mayor of Palermo and most of the other towns of Sicily. He has also become Major Sir Milo Minderbinder in Malta, Vice-Shah in Oran, the Caliph of Baghdad, the Imam of Damascus, and the Shaikh of Araby. "Milo was the corn god, the rain god, and the rice god in backward regions where such crude gods were still worshipped by ignorant and superstitious people. Every where they touched he was acclaimed with honour" (*Catch* 244).

But like a tragic hero, Milo reaches too far, and on the return journey through Cairo, he "cornered the market on cotton that no one else in the

world wanted and brought himself promptly to the brink of ruin" (*Catch* 244). In order to pull himself out of the cotton deal, Milo enters into separate contracts with the Americans and the Germans. He contracts with the Americans to bomb the German-controlled bridge at Orvieto and with the Germans to defend the bridge with anti-aircraft guns against his own attacks-both on a cost-plus-six percent agreement. From the Germans he would get a thousand dollar bonus for every American plane shot down. "In the end Milo realized a fantastic profit from both halves of his project for doing nothing more than signing his name twice" (*Catch* 261). It was during this mission that "the dead man" in Yosarian's tent was killed. He had only arrived at Pianosa the same day. When Yossarian shouts at Milo telling him that he had killed Mudd, Milo's reply is that he was away in Barcelona buying olive oil and boneless sardines. The thousand dollar bonus obtained when Mudd's plane was shot down by the Germans was not pocketed by him, rather it went to the syndicate and everybody received a share of it.

Still bogged down in the huge losses incurred after the cotton deal, Milo again contracts with the Germans to bomb the American Squadron, of which he is the mess officer. But his preposterous deal leaves him

defenseless. An immediate inquiry is ordered. Everyone was affronted and denounced the atrocity. But soon Milo opened his book to the public and disclosed the tremendous profits he had made. He could reimburse the government for all the losses it had incurred and "still have enough money left over to continue buying Egyptian cotton" (*Catch* 266). With that kind of profit on the books and the fact that everyone has a share in the M & M Enterprises, of course Milo is exonerated completely.

It is only Yossarian who does not pardon Milo for his atrocities. It is the scene in which Yossarian rejects Milo that becomes the centre of gravity of the novel, because it is the pivotal point in Yossarian's development. The images of death and birth that give the narrative its significance also occur in this scene. The scene is presented from the point of view of Yossarian and the Chaplain. One gives the personal meaning of the encounter and the other suggests its archetypal significance. Yossarian sitting naked on a tree reject Milo's arguments justifying the casualties that have happened due to his business enterprises. He cannot comprehend Milo's crimes against Mudd, "the dead man" in his tent and he is thoroughly disillusioned with his friend. Despite the fact that everyone has a share of Milo's Syndicate (including Mudd), Yossarian has begun to feel that neither this

nor his protests that he wasn't even there can obviate Milo's responsibility for the man's death. Yossarian 'advises' him to bribe the government to buy his cotton and to tell everyone that "the security of the country requires a strong domestic Egyptian cotton speculating industry" (*Catch* 373). In the end Yossarian refuses to accept Milo's invitation to join his business.

The archetypal form of the encounter is fully revealed when Heller focuses attention on the chaplain who has been conducting Snowden's funeral. The death of Snowden is one of the most important incidents in the novel. The chaplain's view of the scene which is presented in flash back is filled with memory and perception, vision and hallucination and a strange "feeling that he had met Yossarian somewhere before the first time he had met Yossarian lying in bed in the hospital" (*Catch* 276). The chaplain does not identify Yossarian as the naked man in the tree but he suspects that their first meeting was on some occasion far more momentous and occult than that in the hospital. It is in connection with the "enigmatic vision" of the naked man in the tree that the chaplain brings up with Yossarian the phenomenon of de'ja vu. As the chaplain is not sure about the vision that he had seen, he wonders about it. "Was it a ghost then? The dead man's

soul? An angel from heaven or a minion from hell ?" It is here that some of the archetypal meanings of Heller's images begin to emerge.

After Snowden has "spilled his secret" Yossrian feels uncomfortable and guilty in his uniform. That is why he takes off his uniform and goes to attend Snowden's funeral naked. It can be taken as a kind of reaction to the power relations existing all around him. He has no other way of showing his disgust and nausea towards the evils of the world. As Victor J. Milne notes, "Yossarian acts as a second Adam in his naked innocence" (59). In a ludicrous reenactment of the Fall of Man he is resisting temptation. Milo Minderbinder approaches Yossarian who is perched high on "the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (*Catch* 269) playing the role of the serpent. He offers him a piece of chocolate-coated Egyptian cotton in place of the forbidden fruit. The real temptation is for Yossarian to submit to absurd exploitation and in doing so to give Milo the encouragement he wants to take advantage of all the men in his mess hall.

Viewing *Catch-22* from a theological perspective one can perceive exploitation and submission to exploitation as two great sins. Exploitation need not involve the imposition of physical hardships, it is better defined in Erich Fromm's phrase as "the reification of man" (qtd in Milne 59). For

Milo, men around him are potential markets for his products. He introduces them to huge broiled Maine lobsters and chocolate-coated cotton.

It is in this context of the denial of humanity that Milo who represents capitalism, demands human sacrifice. Yossarian who gives great value to his individual life, stoically resists exploitation. As Victor J. Milne has stated, the others like Milo and Colonel Korn recognize his importance and "treat him as the bellwether whom the rest of the flock will follow" (60). If he will allow him to be used in any way, even in accepting the evil deal, none of the others will refuse to fly combat missions.

As Stephen W. Potts notes, the picaresque Yossarian, who has been whoring, lying, malingering and dodging his official duties in the interest of self-preservation throughout the narrative seems little related to the "straight forwardly, decent Yossarian presented in the last chapter" (Potts 153). Here Yossarian sincerely argues that he has done his patriotic part for the war effort. He does not express any of the cynical snideness that readers expect from him.

The ending of the novel is an attempt to focus upon the major topic of the book itself, the question of survival. The protesting Yossarian has

become a complete exile among the institutions of Pianosa. The institutions which gave stability to traditional societies fail Yossarian.

Another notable aspect of *Catch-22* is that it is basically a book about death, its varieties and the possibilities of survival. An incredible number of people "die" in the novel. Snowden and Kid Simpson die in scenes of gory horror. Others like Clevinger, just "fly into a cloud" and never come out. Some die in absurd situations like the "soldier in white." And then some others "die" like Doc Daneeka because of an official technicality. In the midst of these odd varieties of death, the chief protagonist Yossarian wants to survive.

The institution of *Catch-22* itself hovers over Yossarian's world. "There was only one catch and that was *Catch-22*, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind" (*Catch* 47).

In the face of all these obstacles two men stand out as having a deep compulsive desire to survive; Yossarian and Orr. But for survival they resort to different methods. Yossarian concludes that the system is to blame and so he protests against it. He has an implicit faith that individual

actions, such as moving the bombline on the map during the Bologna Crisis, can be terrifyingly effective.

Orr, on the other hand, also wants to pass through the door into the chamber marked "survial". Instead of knocking endlessly on the door, he searches for a knob that he can turn. If Yossarian stands for sheer protest, Orr stands for adaptability and resourcefulness. As critic Sanford Pinsker says, Orr can be seen as a "twentieth century version of Ulysses" (151).

When Yossarian escapes to freedom at the end (to Sweden) his act symbolizes more than defiance. He has done his duty by flying many missions. He has shown responsibility to society at large, giving his physical energy as well as his nervous sweat. Now he must try to create order out of chaos. In this respect Sweden seems like paradise – sane people, plenty of good sex, benevolent government and jolly drunkenness.

Sweden is part of Yosarian's imagination and of the imagination of all those who seek to escape the clutches of *Catch-22*. Both the characters and the readers of the novel are kept from forgetting about the "fictional" nature of Sweden.

> Yossarian's choice, at the novel's end, is thus between two kinds of fictions and not between two different worlds or

> between a fiction and some new reality. One fiction, epitomized by the Army, Milo's Capitalism, and the closed language of discontinuity, has lost sight of its own fictionality and has come to believe the myths of its own 'proper' bases. (Davis 76)

"Sweden," which is the other fiction, is portrayed only as an image of our wishes and aspirations for some refuge. For Yossarian it is a symbol of peace and freedom; it is his own personal fiction. The significant fact in choosing his own fiction is his rejection of the fiction that has dominated him up to this point. Yossarian is fighting for the sake of fighting, not for the sake of success. He takes pleasure and strength from the fact that he is fighting back. Yossarian's arrival at his destination, Sweden, perhaps is deferred forever in the novel. But his choice of Sweden in this context, is a refusal to participate in the absurd world of war. Sweden stands for possibilities; it remains valid as an idea. It is certainly the desirable alternative to the absurd world of war and death.

The critical reputation of *Catch*-22 is often a curiosity. Even though the book is praised and celebrated, critics are awed by its repetitious and essentially "formless" structure. Norman Mailer comments: "Like yard goods, one could cut it anywhere. One could take a hundred pages from

the middle of *Catch-22* and not even the author could be certain they were gone" (Mailer 117). But Mailer is apparently wrong in his surmise, for Heller himself has stated that "if anything, it was constructed almost meticulously and with a meticulous concern to give the appearance of a formless novel" (Kiley 277).

Heller's remarks may seem defensive but a close examination of *Catch-22* confirms that the novel is very meticulously structured. Indeed the book's more puzzling features like its astounding chronology, its repetitiveness, its characters' belated change of heart, all fit together to reinforce Heller's vehement protest against the existing social order. What apparently is a formless chaos is in fact a brilliant strategy to expose the worst excuses of the modern bureaucracy and the willing acceptance of this system by everyone.

Heller presents his story in such a way that at certain points it is literally impossible to determine the order of events. An in-depth probe would convince us that nine-tenths of *Catch-22* is organized around three combat missions: the mission to Avignon, the mission to Bologna and the mission to Ferrara. The first mission is the main one. The whole novel is a series of events that either deal with the missions or are outgrowths of

events that happened on the mission. By the time Yossarian enters the hospital in Chapter I, all of the important missions have already been flown. This means that Yossarian has already flown over the bridge at Ferrara twice; that Milo Minderbinder has already started his M & M Enterprises; that Snowden has already died over Avignon; that Yossarian has already stood naked in formation to receive a medal for his "heroism" at Ferrara.

A close scrutiny would suggest that the narrative line in the novel assumes a forward motion only toward the end when Yossarian decides to desert. Thence the narrative goes straight forward with the exception of one flashback, the description of the death of Snowden. Heller resorts to a series of flashbacks in order to introduce many of the important events.

Heller's flashbacks are unique in themselves for he presents much of the relevant material in oblique references, radically truncated scenes and passing remarks in the dialogue (Merrill 140). The death of Snowden is rendered in all these ways, first in the form of casual comments, then as the occasion for short inconclusive "scenes" and finally as the most explosive episode in the novel (Chapter 41).

The sheer number of flashbacks foils any effort to put together the chronological puzzle. If one counts the passing references there must be hundreds of flashbacks in *Catch-22*. We can describe the novel as a pastiche of several flashbacks.

Another aspect worth mentioning is that these flashbacks include few time references that place them within the novel as a whole. For instance Heller never mentions that the mission to Avignon follows the Great Big Siege of Bologna, but it must be so because Yossarian dashes to Rome after the mission to Bologna and Snowden is in Rome at that time.

Why Heller seriously wished to create the impression of chaos or formlessness is answered by the suggestion that "by creating the curiously 'timeless' world of *Catch-22*, where the temporal relationships are so difficult to grasp that almost all readers abandon the effort, Heller fashions a fictional world in which he can introduce a great many repetitions without undue awkwardness" (Merrill 141).

Most narratives could absorb any of Heller's repetitions; any of his recurring motifs would be easily defined, against the central sequence of events. Beyond doubt the central plot line in most books would be

destroyed if there were forty such motifs. Many of Heller's critics observe that *Catch*-22's cohesiveness is marred by the sheer mass of its repetitions. Still the author makes way for repetitions by destroying any sense of a traditional time sequence. A careful analysis of the novel reveals that its tone darkens radically toward the end. Instead of going from incident to new incident, with each successive event darker in tone than the last, Heller's technique is to repeat incidents and situations frequently with detail added to bring out the grotesque horror that underlies them.

A large number of American litterateurs have been trying to portray the growth of dehumanization. The artist is increasingly likely to create literary modes which permit him to depict a social world of an indeterminate and anxious character, and one inimical to the individual's rational understanding. Heller's fiction delineates these features, and his formal procedures such as the devices of satire, distortion, allegory, parody and burlesque contribute to the formation of a vision of breakdown. His novel exploits the departure from literal truth in order to arrive at a representation of the monolithic power of modern institutions, in this case conveyed through the metaphor of the army's hierarchy. A careful perusal should make it clear that the individual generals are as helpless as their

men. This is portrayed in their oversensitivity to the media; their wish to be presented in a favourable light indicates that they are as much victims of 'the system' as the combat airman trying to escape from flying more bombing missions. "The image communicated throughout the novel is of man lost in psychological corridors" (Walsh 191).

Robert Merrill, in his exhaustive essay has made the following observations regarding the segmentation of *Catch-22*. *Catch-22* in his view has three parts. In the first part (Chapters 1-16) is introduced most of the important episodes prior to Yossarian's final insurrection. These events are treated as comic or absurd. Aarfy's complacence and Snowden's death are portrayed humorous. In the second part (Chapters 17-33) which is heralded by the return of the soldier in white, the action of the novel is stalled. Although time passes technically and Cathcart requires more missions, no major event occurs for almost two hundred pages. Instead Heller goes back and repeats the major incidents. As in the second "soldier in white" scene, this section modulates into a more serious tone. Milo comes out as a still comic but troubling influence, as Heller provides richer accounts of Milo's dealings with Germany and other fertile "markets." Nately's quarrel with the old man in Rome is considerably more disturbing than its earlier

reference. Clevinger's arguments with Yossarian and Snowden's death are described in greater and more explicit detail.

The third and final part (Chapters 34-42) takes its decisive tone from the reappearance of the soldier in white in Chapter 34. As we notice, these final chapters differ from the rest in that time does seem to advance. There are virtually no flashbacks and the crucial narrative events are "fresh": The sudden disappearance of Orr, the search for Nately's Whore's Kid sister, Yossarian's insurrection, Kid Simpson's gory death. One flashback is of great importance, the final rendering of the death of Snowden. Quite often the new events like the interrogation of the chaplain, Aarfy's murder of the maid, or Milo's failure to help Yossarian, help to give a climax to the repetitions that have been built up throughout the novel. These new events give an impetus to Yossarian's reconsideration of his experiences on Pianosa and finally his desertion. Heller's suppression of a normal fictional chronology leads to several repetitions necessary to his unusual strategy. These repetitions often appear as individual sequences which move from the comic to the terrible, and from an amused acceptance of the ironies of life to a belated recognition that most of these ironies are in fact human creations and so utterly unacceptable. On close scrutiny it is seen that

Heller argues against the all too general acceptance of the moral monstrosities that he depicts in many places of his novel. It can be observed that the repetitions are "organized into three narrative 'cycles'" (Merrill 147). So that the novel as a whole portrays events that initially seem harmless and comic, then cause for some concern, and finally become the basis for a genuine moral protest.

Yossarian's decision to desert the army affirms that effective moral protest is possible in an inane world, however hopeless such protest may seem and however painful the immediate consequences may be. Unfortunately Yossarian's decision has often been misunderstood. The controversial nature of this act has obliterated its structural connection with the flashbacks immediately preceding it. Making a reassessment of Yossarian's decision would facilitate in bringing Heller's fictional argument to the right conclusion. Many readers have wondered whether Yossarian's desertion was a responsible action. But there can be little doubt that Heller intended it to be so. Yossarian is not running away from his responsibilities, but is moving towards them. Although Yossarian has done nothing to cause Nately's death, he has done nothing to prevent it either. At the end he strives to prevent the death of all Natelys because if he had accepted

Cathcart's deal to fly more missions, all the others too would have been compelled to do so. Nately's whore becomes a symbol of Yossarian's guilt and responsibility for never intervening in the injustices that he knows exist everywhere.

Heller, through Cathcart offers Yossarian the opportunity to return to the United States and pose as a war hero, a live war hero. But, Yossarian opts for desertion which endangers him but offers the other men the right kind of moral example. Yossarian is not motivated by a selfish instinct for survival but by his final understanding of Snowden's "secret." Man is matter, and if he is dropped out of a window he will fall, if he is set fire to he will burn, if he is buried he will rot. But man is something more than matter. It is the spirit that counts not "matter". Surrendering to Cathcart would be killing the spirit, denying the distinction between man and other forms of "garbage."

But Yossarian would not surrender his spirit to Cathcart, even if he is assured of physical safety. Yossarian knows that man should protest against the forces that would render him garbage. He wants to fight sternly against the dark forces that try to crush his individuality and turn him into mere burnable, buryable matter.

When Clevinger asks Yossarian whether winning the war or staying alive is important, he answers it with an other question; "Important to whom?" "It doesn't make a damned bit of difference who wins the war to someone who's dead" (*Catch* 17). As Yossarian sees it, whoever wants to kill him is the enemy. When his commanding officer, Colonel Cathcart sends him on bombing missions, the Colonel is as much an enemy as the Germans. In Yossarian's eyes the apparatus obscures its status as enemy by justifying its use of individuals on the grounds of its own values.

Those values of the Army can only be dealt with by forcibly breaking out of the vicious circle. Yossarian "moves towards that break with his question, important to whom?" (Bryant 159). He completes it by deciding to desert the Airforce.

Yossarian's belated "conversion" is important because it is presented as exemplary. Both reader as well as Yossarian feel ashamed for their indifference to the deaths of Clevenger, Snowden and the others and their amused tolerance for such figures as Aarfy, Milo and the senior officers. Yossarian acts on behalf of all those who first laughed at the novels' "absurdities," but later on came to look back with horror at what they were laughing at. This confirms that the novel's repetitions are the key to its

meaning. Heller is actually trying to expose "the contemporary regimented business society" (Merrill 150) by superbly caricaturing the senior officers, representative professionals and business figures and such wonderful examples of the capitalistic bent of mind as Milo and ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen. Heller's portrait of this world did not require the elaborate system of repetitions that underlies the novel's complex structure. He added this feature because he wanted to make his crucial point about widespread complicity in the regimented business society. He wanted people to laugh at and then look back with horror at what they were laughing at. They had to recoil from the same events they first laughed at because otherwise, they might be tempted to trace the novel's darkening tone to changing circumstances within the fiction. Heller could not permit this, for it is sine qua non to his proposition that the world of *Catch-22* has always been what it is only belatedly perceived to be. By depicting the same events in such radically different ways, "Heller encourages people to see that their problems involve more than life's destructive circumstances" (Merrill 150). An even more crucial factor is their failure to recognize these circumstances for what they are and to act accordingly. Heller stalls his readers' laughter and exposes the complacent beliefs he has shared with.

During the last two decades production of American war books has continued to be prolific. In the realm of "serious" literature, the American war writer has drawn upon a situation of productive crisis rather analogous to that experienced by earlier Anglo-American modernists in the 1920s.

The interpenetration between literary form and the movements of history is made obvious in the commercial success of Heller's labyrinthine novel. The symbolisation of war as a labyrinth has now become firmly established in the way that earlier myths had been. The First World War metaphor of the soldier's farewell to arms was a previous example of equally potent symbolism.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the idea of an all-pervasive catch has become the most widely accepted image of the structures and forms of a battle fought in Pentagon style. Heller's invention of a catch which simultaneously determines, reflects and distorts the attitudes of various ranks of soldiers to the deadness of military institutionalism, symbolises most effectively the nature of hegemonic relations. As Jeffrey Walsh has stated, the intellectual origin of the catch is difficult to identify, even though one can form analogies "with the processes

of formal logic or such complex constructs as those inspired by generative grammar" (Walsh 189).

The catch that Heller envisages is a persuading force that seemed to be unreasonable on most of the occasions. But on so many other occasions it appeared to be so captivating that Yossarian wasn't quite sure it existed at all. It actually radiated a sort of magical spell and caught people under its web. For Yossarian "there was an elliptical precision about its perfect pairs of parts that was graceful and shocking . . . " (*Catch* 47).

The intriguing catch makes itself palpable through various forms. It obliquely implies the reification of military procedures in its formal autonomy. Through its mystique and gestalt-like powers the catch may be drawn upon in a variety of ways to instil loyalty and subservience to the military creed. As Walsh has stated, the metaphor of a catch symbolises the "seemingly willing mass subjection of soldiers to the interests of the industrial-militarycomplex" (Walsh 189).

The absurdity of the whole system is evident in Colonel Korn's educational sessions. These sessions supply an example of the infallible theory in operation: Only men who never ask questions are admitted and

then the sessions are discontinued on the grounds that it was neither possible nor necessary to educate people who never questioned anything.

In the final analysis we find that all that is traditional about *Catch-22* is its protest and element of violence. They are replicated at the formal level by technical innovations that represent a radical departure from the fictional formulae of the past. Joseph Heller's use of burlesque, the way his language underpins the absurdity it describes, and a structure that opposes logical order, all constitute breakthroughs that are vitally new to the American novel.

The Paranoic Gravity's Rainbow

Sam Thomas “In-forming aggression : The fictional techniques of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 4
The Paranoic *Gravity's Rainbow*

Chapter 4

The Paranoic *Gravity's Rainbow*

As has been already stated in the introduction Thomas Pynchon balances his brilliant novel on the pivot of aggression. The presence of aggression and violence can be perceived on the formal as well as thematic levels. Pynchon does violence to the text by making use of numerous novel fictional techniques like burlesque, comic strips, mystical and visionary meditations, scrambled imagery of dreams, allegory and the cold cause-and-effect talk of the behaviourists. *Gravity's Rainbow* is set in England, France and occupied Germany of 1944-45. It is thick with references and flashbacks to World War Two and the Weimar days. Pynchon advocated the "forcible dislocation of self" which reflects the use of fragmentation and alienation as defences against painful confrontations. The character who can change roles at will and who has minimal memory of or attachment to his past, his nation or others emerges in Pynchon's novel not as an anti-hero but as a wry "ideal," a shock-resistant man.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Thomas Pynchon expands the monumental theme taken up in his earlier novels *V* (1963) and *The Crying*

of Lot 49 (1966): the dehumanizing effects of technology, supported by the modern obsession with stability and control. Set at the end of World War Two, *Gravity's Rainbow* exposes the bureaucracies that have used the war to extend their power over science, religion, language, history and all the forms of life and culture that are bound up in them. The novel itself resists this "movement toward death and stillness" by its variety of styles, complexity of structure and fantastic comedy. This dual project – to expose systems and simultaneously to resist them - makes *Gravity's Rainbow* an exceedingly difficult, ambitious and exciting novel.

The bizarre beginning of the novel betokens Pynchon's aggressive method of starting an unusual novel. It begins apparently in *medias res*:

> A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now. It is too late. The Evacuation still proceeds, but its all theatre. There are no lights inside the cars. No light anywhere . . . But coming down in total blackout, without one glint of light, only great invisible crashing. (*Gravity* 3)

This opening passage is full of provocatively rich matter-of-fact references which one can find in other fictional beginnings. The reader's curiosity is immediately aroused. Where and when is this Evacuation

taking place? What screams across the sky? The reader's questions are directed toward reconstructing the fictive world in which the events of the novel unfold. But the reader is disoriented to learn that he has begun not "in the middle of things," as he had assumed. In the midst of dreams on the next page Pirate Prentice awakens from his nightmare of Evacuation to the real (that is, fictive) morning of wartime London. The reader's re-education or de-conditioning starts from this reversal. This passage is a paradigm of problematic passages occurring in plenty in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The reader who is invited to reconstruct a "real" scene or action in the novels' fictive world, is forced in retrospect to "cancel" the reconstructions he has made, and to relocate it within a character's dream, hallucination or fanatasy.

Gravity's Rainbow's plot is a conspiracy which is superbly treated by Pynchon. The conspiracy represented by "Them" or "the Firm" is cosmic, and its reach is virtually unlimited. Its most vivid components include the huge corporations and cartels like General Electric, Siemens, Shell and Standard Oil, I.G. Farben and so on. These multinational corporations are so powerful that they ignore geographical and political boundaries. These behemoths operate as states themselves circumventing the laws of all

nations. Without constitutional or national allegiances, the business state ignores ideologies to conclude deals with friends and foes alike. In the novel Germans, Americans, Russians and Englishmen form commercial links, sell products and buy patents and generally determine the orderliness of markets before, during, and after the war. As generally accepted everywhere war is good for business.

> Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals . . . mass death's a stimulus to just ordinary folks, little fellows, to try 'n' grab a piece of that Pie while they're still here to gobble it up. The true war is a celebration of markets. Organic markets, carefully styled "black" by the professionals, spring up everywhere. (*Gravity* 105)

Since "They" include generals and admirals as well as politicians on board of directors in the interlocking companies, the cartels can have a direct hand during the war either by command or by simply exchanging the material of war between themselves. As Pynchon suggests, these multinationals do "control" everybody. They facilitate technology, invention, production and creation of jobs all over the world. And in the

process homogenize, dehumanise and control their employees; they too have some sort of interference in the lives of people they do not touch directly. In this respect Pynchon uses several Weberian terms in his novel and often refers to Max Weber himself, who has been of great influence on him.

As Joseph W. Slade, John O. Stark and other critics have observed, Max Weber has considerably influenced Pynchon. According to Weber western man counters alienation through a combination of "objectivity" and "rationalization." With objectivity he strips away illusions about the meaning of life; with rationalisation he creates values and new meaning. Bereft of illusions, he is free to design his world. In fact human freedom lies precisely in the ability to see life for what it is, to create meaning and to act with purpose. But the discipline and the asceticism which make possible rationalization can also lead to oppressive systems that control humans. Weber identified the discipline and asceticism in our era as essentially Calvinist. Its most exemplary stage was found in America while in Germany and the Low countries it attained a mediocre level. The capitalist systems that the Calvinist creates becomes oppressive. The bureaucracies reify and control their individual members. For Weber there

was something tragic about this process of rationalization, of imposing design and pattern on nature. This was because he believed that the process was inevitable and irreversible in its homogenising effect on humans. While he spoke in sociological constructs, Weber was postulating a theory of systems analogous to theories of thermodyanamics: closed systems decline into entropy. Weber viewed Calvinist America and its capitalist economics as a logical and self referential by-product of the need to extend and profit from control.

By referring to Weber's condemnation of Calvinism, Pynchon is expressing his feeling of acute aggression against the calvinist elects' over ruling and repression of America's downtrodden — the Preterites.

In the novel, Pointsman arranges for Slothrop to undergo an experiment to test the White American's reaction to Blacks. Slothrop drifts into a memory of the Roseland Ballroom in Roxbury, where he drops his harmonica down the toilet. He escapes by following his harp down the toilet into an underground world — the world of the Preterites. They are America's downtrodden, associated with waste and the repressed.

Chief among Pynchon's dualities are the Elect and the Preterite. The "Them" of the conspiracy in *Gravity's Rainbow* are, or seem to be the Elect. Opposed to "Them" are the Preterite, the disinherited, the "passed over," those who are not touched by grace. As in Weber, Pynchon's America is the place where Calvinist rationalization has run most true, and the majority of Pynchon's direct allusions to Preterition have to do with New England Puritanism and the Calvinist assault on the Western frontier. The Preterites (those who have been passed over) who are America's downtrodden, have been repressed into the deepest recesses of the unconscious by the Calvinist elect. The Calvinist providential plan becomes equated with the arc of the rocket. The rocket is fueled by a Pointsmanlike devotion to the reduction of reality to binary opposites of right/wrong, good/evil. The consequent repression of the dark side of the personality which threatens the self-righteous elect yields an unnatural lack of balance in the cultural consciousness. This consciousness becomes epitomised by the rocket soaring across the heavens to destroy the heathen masses. The landscape of *Gravitys' Rainbow* is global. However characters from Africa, South America, Japan, Central Asia, Russia and Europe are aplenty. Most of them are governed by the Calvinist impulses. To make the connection more

convincing the narrator displays parallels. A village in the Kirghiz steppes resembles a town in a Wild West movie.

The Preterites have their champions, from William Slothrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to Byron the Bulb, an immortal light bulb who defies the cartel-controlled electric grid of Europe. Slothrop's colonial ancestor William Slothrop, once herded his pigs to slaughter in Boston. He watched the pigs rush into extinction like lemmings. Unlike the herd of swine which rushed and jumped into the sea when Jesus sent the demon upon them, here they were not possessed by demons but they were betrayed by men. Slothrop despised the civilization that justified their slaughter. His heretical tract, *On Preterition,* argued holiness for the Preterite "these 'second sheep', without whom there'd be no elect" (*Gravity* 555). The narrator asks, "Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from?" He goes on to suggest that the war-ravaged Zone of postwar Germany offers a parallel possibility. He envisions that all the fences are pulled down, the Zone is cleared and depolarized and it contains only a single set of coordinates to proceed from — a place without elect or preterite. Just like William Slothrop was expelled from Massachusetts Bay Colony, Pynchon

clarifies that the other menaces to the power of the self-appointed elect throughout the western world are also ruthlessly quashed. Nadeau says:

> Man is unique in living in a non-species specific environment - his environment in large-part is a creation of his intellect and reflects the forms resident in his mind. (Nadeau 462)

The world that is not ourselves is the mystery, the void, which we try to fill up and contain with mental constructs. Characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* pass through man-made constructions, the arch-ways and underpasses that are extensions of the forms in their minds. But in the process they unfailingly encounter the unknown and the unknowable. The major characters, with the exception of Slothrop at one crucial point, weave lines of linear connection between people, events and circumstances in an effort to obviate the framing process itself by encompassing and transcending its most basic principle of organisation — the either or. *Gravity's Rainbow* is so complicated that it forms a kind of gordian knot which can be cut through only by intuition. It cannot be comprehended by logical analysis alone. Regarding this Robert Nadeau has also expressed similar views. The "tangled web" of the various narrative lines finally becomes Pynchon's method of demonstrating that "all 'systems' of analysis,

or all closed symbolics, predicated on absolutes lead ultimately to a state of confusion and chaos" (462). The rocket can be assumed as the central figure in *Gravity's Rainobow.* Pynchon creates a version of wartime England, around the rocket and its production. It can be seen to possess mainly two aspects – programmed for death it is evil, but it also promises life. It is the pinnacle of human technology, symbol of a new state and a hope for those dispossessed by the entropic systems which have caused the War.

Events in the novel would arrive at absolute zero in a metaphoric sense, if the rocket at the close of the narrative had exploded over the Orpheus movie house at Los Angeles. But it doesn't explode. It reaches, says the narrator, the "last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta t" (*Gravity* 760). The Greek letter Δ (delta) represents in calculus infinitesimals and Δt is a mathematical notation for units of time used to plot the range and trajectory of a rocket in flight.

The parabola of the rocket is cut up by integrals from a base line stretched between the rocket's point of firing and its point of impact. The rocket's trajectory is one of the most important aspects of the novel. The lines marking the trajectory are artificial and arbitrary. As the rocket moves along its path and as it passes these artificial divisions it has passed

through a change in time designated as Δt. Theoretically, precisely because the number of divisions can be extended infinitely, the rocket can be said to be poised in the sky – "The perfect Rocket is still up there, still descending" (*Gravity's* 426) approaching the final zero, but not reaching infinity. So long as it is suspended there, it is a threat to mankind and a reminder of mankind's achievement.

Yet another aspect of the parabolic shape of the rocket's flight which helps to explain the idea of Absolute Zero is that if we bisect a parabola both sides are perfectly symmetrical. The rocket can be considered as an icon for the several characters and groups in the novel. This is so because during flight it appears to bring about a reconciliation between the various polarities and to effect unity among the opposing factors. In the words of Robert Nadeau, "Absolute zero is, for the rocket worshippers the point of transcendence which takes up into itself all discrepant particulars – it 'symbolizes' the alpha and omega of all being" (463).

The incidents connected with the rocket and its launchings show how the text becomes aggressive to the conventional forms of narration and thematic representation. The novel always searches for something new in its irrational interpretations. The V2 Rocket launched on London, crashed

before the sound of its flight could be heard, because it travelled faster than sound. This portrayal itself is a frightening disruption of conventional sequence and cause-effect expectations.

Being the paradigm product of modern technology, Pynchon makes it the pivotal point in his novel. As Tony Tanner explains admirably, through the rocket "Pynchon is clearly addressing himself to the sociopolitical implications of contemporary trends in history" (*Thomas Pynchon* 76). But Pynchon shuns the conventional narrative way because conventional narrative procedures had become obsolete. In a postmodern age it is no longer possible to explain what is going on in any conventional manner. The trajectory of the rocket which at the end of the novel is both a womb and a coffin is an avowal of the paradox that there would be no more destruction on the earth even as all things that are upon the earth will be drawn back down to it. One can always perceive the presence of the rocket in this proliferating novel. It is phallic and fatal, Eros transformed into Thanatos, invading"Gravity's grey eminence"only to succumb to it, curving through the sky like a lethal rainbow, then crashing to the earth. Whether it will strike by chance or according to some other hidden design is uncertain.

The rocket worshippers frame out experience in closed systems and symbolics. So they arbitrarily put into time frames their vision of themselves and others. In the effort to arrive at closure of the system, the ultimate Δt which is absolute zero, they must deal with all particulars in terms of oppositions, so that all such antinomies will resolve themselves into unity at the final point of transcendence. In physics "entropy" occurs in an isolated system. It is a condition in which the available energy in the system diminishes to the point at which all physical and chemical processes stop. Because characters in a Pynchon novel function in terms of their interrelatedness or interconnectedness to other characters, we can safely conclude that in his novels individuals do not actually live in closed systems. Pynchon uses the concept of entropy as a metaphor for our compulsion to structure and maintain closed systems which in turn create a sense of isolation and withdrawal from others. This death-like state prevents us from perceiving our actual condition.

If the resistance of any object to acceleration is a measure of its interaction with the rest of the cosmos, then the rocket at rest in its gravitational field is just as close to absolute zero as the rocket is at its highest point of trajectory in flight. Through his treatment of the rocket

worshippers, Pynchon implies that irreconcilable polarities and oppositions are fictions of the mind and they have no real existence in nature.

Violence can be noted in Pynchon's depiction of characters as extremes, often pairing approaches to living that are antithetical without permitting any synthesis of views. One prominent metaphor is the hothouse/street duality in which characters either choose to seal themselves within a protective and unchanging environment or to participate in the choatic mutability that defines the outside world. Either extreme is inherently self-deluding in its attempt to impose meaning and comments on the process of fiction writing as an act of naming. "Pynchon's fictions remind his readers of the limitation of rationalism because they resist fixed interpretations" (Newman 6).

The characters that Pynchon depict are machine-like figures wandering through different strata of the novel. Slothrop dons costume after costume, assuming various faces during the course of his journey. At a ten-century-old festival which commemorates Thor's thunder-pig, Plechazunga, driving off a Viking raid in a small Baltic town, Slothrop becomes the Pig-Hero of the pagan preterite and saves the village from Nazi intruders. After a little while, still adorned in his pigsuit, Slothrop

becomes the trickster-hero. Chased by the MPs, he ends up in the baths where the odious Major Marvy exerts the racism that springs from his attempts to suppress his own darkness by having sex with a Spaniard. Marvy escapes from the raid by disguising in Slothrop's pig suit. He also takes on the role of the cartoon hero Rocketman and spawns an underground legend which is confirmed by his discovery of "Rocketman was here" graffiti. Slothrop plays the role of the Fool in the Tarot deck, moving through the various stages of experience symbolized by the primary cards of the deck – the major arcana. Indeed after his disappearance others speculate "that fragments of Slothrop have grown consistent personae of their own" (*Gravity* 74). In his disintegration as an integral character in the novel, Slothrop comes to embody, again, Pynchon's recurrent interest in entropy as a metaphor. Pynchon tries to exemplify the disintegration of personality in the modern world. Men have to assume different roles for their existence. *Gravity's Rainbow* gives us access only to provisional "realities" which are always liable to be contradicted and cancelled out. Most of Pynchon's central characters are either paranoics "who may possibly be suffering systematized delusions and projecting hostile forces" (Siegel 50), or are otherwise hallucination-prone. Pirate

Prentice's "talent" for getting inside the fantasies of others, Franz Pokler's cinema-oriented dreaminess, Mr. Pointsman's burgeoning megalomania, Tchitcherine's and Enzian's predelections for powerful drugs - all these belong to the same general tendency. Motivation here is reciprocal: hallucination-prone characters motivate the presence of hallucinatory structure and content, while hallucinatory structure and content motivate the presence of hallucination-prone characters.

It is often very difficult to make fixed interpretations of Pynchon's fiction because they are written in a true postmodernist spirit. In *The Crying of Lot 49,* Oedipa Maas ruminates over several possible causes for her predicament. Even towards the end of the novel she fails to receive the final revelation. Similarly in his *V,* investigations conducted regarding the various historical incarnations of Thanatos open up theories of a conspiracy of darkness. This is closely related to entropic decay. Pynchon adapts the idea of entropy to a cultural context which is also reflected in his style. Fully subscribing to the theory of entropy, *Gravity's Rainbow* "presents protean protagonists who eventually disappear from the novel" (Newman 6).

Pynchon has great fascination for underground movements in

history and that informs the substance and style of his fiction. He attacks the empirical determinacy that dominates the western world view. He performs this through his satire of characters that rely on it and through his own violations of narrative conventions. In doing so, Pynchon depicts the dangers of overreliance on rationalism and sympathises with the practitioners of a type of anarchic humanism.

In an essay entitled "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" Pynchon describes a historical incident to clarify a cultural cusp. Luddites were groups of men who flourished in Britain between 1811 and 1816. They were trying to destroy the machinery that was threatening to replace them in the textile industry. They detached themselves from the British ruler and swore allegiance to their mythical king Ludd. This king in turn derived his name from a Ned Lud who in 1779, broke into a house and destroyed two machines used for knitting hosiery.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon tries to connect this group of counterrevolutionaries to a repressed mode of thought in Western culture. He does this to formulate a hermetic unity that would always oppose the divisive tendency inherent in the rational arrangement of a mechanical universe.

Pynchon's protagonists as underground characters, are Luddites on a quest with little direction. They seek escape and attain discovery, usually by accident. They join the repressed and become fictional freedom fighters who attack restrictive rational conventions. Pynchon also presents those who quest after control, largely as an outgrowth of their obsession with self-control. By displaying these authorities, the self-appointed and self-perpetuating elect, Pynchon reflects cultural perversions.

Kathryn Hume has an interesting theory regarding the frequent repetitions of certain situations and relationships in Pynchon. Through these repetitions Pynchon allows most of his characters to be subjected to a fixed array of pressures. She says that this is because of his lack of interest in individuality. Within his aesthetics of character, individual variations are trivial when compared to the overwhelming problems facing everybody in his fictive universe. According to Hume the "prominent use of repetition . . . has the potential to reinstate some values" (Hume, "Repetition" 244). She categorises the repeated situations into groups and discusses the values that they create. The first two, (1) symbol systems and (2) the void, form an opposition. Symbol systems represent basic methods of ordering experience, whereas void is that which cannot be ordered by such systems.

The next two (3) technology and science and (4) multiple realities, increase humanist, western reality at both ends of the spectrum - the rational and the non-rational. The last two in the group are (5) activity as game and (6) kindness. They project what human beings may be and what obligations we may have to them.

The presence of symbol systems in the novel can be related to the formation of character. Pynchon reveals the power that is inherent in letters or numbers to his major characters. For example Tchitcherine is chagrined to discover that his life and happiness have been subordinated to letters by external powers. "All the Weird Letter Assignments have been reserved for ne'er-do-wells like himself" (*Gravity* 352).

Franz Pokler's symbols are mathematical. With numbers he can tame the terror of exponential curves and reduce the universe to our feeble human capacity to assimilate it. And the bombs falling in London are manifestation of his power of calculations. Roger Mexico displays the power of the Poisson distribution, in that he can predict rocket falls statistically but not individually. Pointsman revels in zeroes and ones, the fantastic binary opposites that he expects to yield a perfectly mechanical explanation of life.

Slothrop's dallying with verbal and numeric symbol systems includes letters, words, and numbers. He tangles with single letters in Imipolex G, D Wing and Stimulus X. He chases the 00000. In addition he is also exposed to secondary symbol systems: Mandalas, chess as metaphor for life in the zone, and the coercive force of heroic narrative. This last system of symbols causes him to plunge into personal danger because his Rocketman costume engenders powerful generic expectations in himself and others. By confronting his characters with symbol systems, Pynchon makes them at least marginally aware of forces that control their lives. Roger Mexico uses alliterative words to manipulate the Elect, but Pynchon appears to condone this because his prank is explosive and self-consuming.

Pynchon exposes his characters to a nexus containing void, silence and illumination. This repetition operates in two ways, it opens characters' minds to something beyond material reality and it demonstrates that symbols for all their hidden coercive powers, are helpless to describe or tame or control this aspect of existence.

The void displays itself in many forms. As vacuum it threatens Pokler and encroaches upon Katje with Enzian. "So she's only been talking with Enzian about a common friend. Is this how the vacuum feels" (*Gravity*

659). As silence it chokes the narrative after Slothrop sees the Hiroshima headline. His harmonica blues fall silent. "Orpheus puts down Harp" (*Gravity* 754).

When exposed to various voids, characters become aware that quotidian reality is bounded, just like our symbol systems. At the limits, something else commences. One of the methods adopted by Pynchon to unfold his characters is to repeatedly expose them to the void. Thereby he explores the gap between our ordinary reality and what our imagination yearns for.

When it comes to science and technology and multiple realities, Pynchon systematically augments the reality recognised by Western civilization. Orthodox traditions pay little attention to science or its implications. To that tradition reality is a factor outside human control. Hence Pynchon's repeatedly linking characters to science or technology invites us to consider the often unacknowledged power of such forces within our lives. This relationship is sometimes metaphorical. For Tchitcherine, molecular chemistry is both an avocational interest (Psychoactive drugs) and a figure expressing his way of life. He is "a giant

supermolecule with so many open bonds available at any given time" (*Gravity* 346).

For several characters, it is through mathematics that they are connected to sciences. For instance Katje thinks of sex in terms of rocket trajectory equations. Leni Pokler uses calculus as a metaphor for trying to explain to Franz a world with multiple levels of reality. Most characters in the novel maintain a professional bond with the rocket. Roger Mexico plots rocket falls. Pointsman studies the fall in terms of Slothrop's amours. Franz Pokler and Kurt Mondaugen help to make the rocket a reality. Ilsa dreams of going to the moon in it; and Gottfried ascends in it.

"The rockets' ubiquity marks Pynchon's concept of reality." (Hume, "Repetition" 247) Reality cannot be separated from human invention. It is an inevitable product of our science and our other professional activities. Eventhough the rocket may have many peaceful applications in space exploration, it is primarily a weapon of destruction. By repeatedly showing his characters engaged in rocket-related work, Pynchon insists that we take our relationship with technology into account while defining humanity.

In addition to science and technology, Pynchon insists upon another ignored feature of reality – its multiplicity. He repeatedly exposes his

characters to at least two facets of reality that rises above the quotidian. The first which he generally calls "the Other side," is represented by Angels, Titans, the Sentient dead and other supernatural presences. The second is "the world of Them" with a capital T. This shadowy force is by definition outside the secular realm of human action. Sometimes they are so far outside that "They" seem to operate from the other side of life, the world of the dead.

The blurred figure of "They" appearing in the novel consists of the detached and the manipulative. But the perception of who they are vary according to the position of the perceiver. They assume different positions at different times. They present themselves as authoritative figures: the Elect of the Puritan Church, political leaders, corporate executives and even parents. Molly Hite goes a step further when she says that the members of such elite groups derive their authority from higher and remote sources. "The Elect get it from the inscrutable will of their God, the political figures from their corporate bankrollers and parents from their parents" (121). This is exemplified from Captain Blicero's words to Gottfried, "Fathers are carriers of the virus of Death, and sons are infected" (*Gravity* 723).

The denizens of the Other side pervade the lives of many persons.

Angels enter the lives of Slothrop, Tchitcherine, Weissmann and the fliers bombing Lübeck. Also they haunt the text in the name of a nightclub for Katje and Pirate and in the name of a snow game for Roger and Jessica. Pirate and Katje are haunted by Katje's long-dead ancestor Frans van der Groov. "The dead have talked with him, come and sat, shared his milk, told stories of ancestors, or of spirits from other parts of the veld" (*Gravity* 153). We find that almost all the characters accept the remaking of their cosmic picture without hesitation once they have been exposed to some other plane of reality. Those who see the Lubeck angel accept it, but do not report it, well aware of the fact that their bosses (Them) would call the seers insane. Jessica may or may not accept the seances, but she does not doubt that a woman at the white visitation can read her thoughts.

In all these cases we can find a uniformity of response which is quite amazing and which points to the understanding of Pynchon's endeavour. Through all these repetitions he is insisting that non-rational and non-rationalizable forces of some sort are an integral part of life. We cannot begin to make sense of experience without taking this augmentation of material reality into account. In short, as Kathryn Hume says: "our

assumptions about what makes a person or character must include responses to multiple realities" ("Repetition" 248).

The repeated depiction of supernatural beings and of Them make Pynchon's cosmos mythological. Although the presences do not conform to any neat taxonomy, the fabric of this fictive reality has enough structure to challenge the notion that it merely reflects random fragmentation. As the various elements do not fit the same puzzle, they remain as fragments. But we can see that within the pieces there are local orders and characters that need to reach some kind of accomodation with this divided nature of existence.

Another kind of repetition seen in *Gravity's Rainbow* is termed Activity as game. These are mainly attitudes toward humanity. Characters feel that professional activities that they engage in are more in the nature of games. Goals and rules suddenly appear arbitrary, not sanctified by any human value. Moreover those rules and goals do not safeguard the interests of the characters themselves. This discovery is closely connected with identifying a "Them-reality." The game is "Theirs" and characters discover themselves to be mere pawns. When they achieve this insight, they must decide the kind of response.

Katje grows tired of the games as agent and "quits the game for good." (*Gravity* 104) Like Katje, both Pirate Prentice and Roger Mexico recognise how they have been pawns in the games of Them, and quit. Pokler offers his supposed daughter her freedom: "Close to losing control, Pokler committed then his act of courage. He quit the game" (*Gravity'* 430). Pokler continues working on the rocket but at the same time investigates the Dora concentration camp searching for his wife and daughter. He no longer pretends that the camp is irrelevant to rockets and that it has nothing to do with him. Like Katje he too gives his wedding ring to a dying woman at the camp.

By means of the series of repetitions Pynchon exposes his characters and his readers to a cosmos which is far from value free. Cultures and people are to some extent controlled by symbol systems. These 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. The symbol systems also do not appear to be adequate to hold the multiple realities offered us in the novel. Here Pynchon suggests that the actions of human beings living in this world are being observed by Titans or Angels – but for what purpose no one knows. While words can

acknowledge the presence of such forces, they cannot delve into their motives or assign a logic to their actions. We become aware of a Them-pattern making us do things toward ends quite different from those we had in mind. We may find ourselves cheap counters in some unimaginable game that is being played at a higher level.

Yet another repeated situation comes about when characters withdraw from the game and feel impelled to do some act of kindness to others. "In the worlds of hardship experienced at the end of the war, any kindness is a candle lit against the darkness" (Hume, "Repetition" 251). In the novel characters like Leni, Franz, Pirate, Roger, Slothrop, Katje, Geli, Pig and Bianca, all show acts of kindness meant to help someone. The other person may be oblivious to this act of kindness as is the case of the unconscious woman to whom Franz gives his ring. But that gesture helps him reverse the attitude by which he once considered Dora inmates as faceless, and insignificant things. Pynchon associates love with mental bondage and control. But when it disintegrates it leaves a capacity for kindness.

Over and above the flounderings and struggles of the people loom the shadows depicted in the novel as "Them." "They" are the controllers of

international technology, far more powerful and far less known than mere political leaders like Stalin and Churchill. The war is "Their" invention, which acts as a means for redistributing life and property. "They" are referred to in many ways in the course of the novel and in one manifestation "They" are simply the managers of man's insane drive to despoil the earth. Describing the mysterious presence of this invisible authority, which is so avaricious, Pynchon says:

> Taking and not giving back, demanding that 'productivity' and 'earnings' keep on increasing with time the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity - most of the World animal, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. The system may or may not understand that its' only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but the system, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life. (*Gravity* 412)

At the beginning, all this is posited as being in the service of an "elite

few." But as darkness thickens towards the end of the novel a priest named Father Rapier lectures to Pirate and the other dropouts on a totally different possibility – the eternal nature of "They."

> I think that there is a terrible possibility now, in the World. We may not brush it away, we must look at it. It is possible that they will not die. That it is now within the state of their art to go on forever though – we, of course, will keep dying as we always have. Death has been the source of Their power. It was easy enough for us to see that. If we are here once, only once, then clearly we are here to take what we can while we may. If they have taken much more, and taken not only from Earth but also from us - well, why begrudge Them, when they're just as doomed to die as we are? All in the same boat, all under the same shadow. . . Yes . . . Yes. But is that really true? Or is it the best and the most carefully propagated, of all Their lies, known and unknown? (*Gravity* 539)

Father Rapier believes that "They" may be killed by violence and the system is prone to destruction. But even the rebels do not believe this and they wander away from the sermon.

An in-depth scrutiny of the fiction of World War One makes it clear

that society in these novels sanction violence in indirect ways. But society is not responsible for the wars. The war is something beyond society. It is a destructive force that can be characterised only as caused by a mysterious "it" or "they", but that is somehow alien to the experiences of the individuals trapped in it. The shock of World War One was so great that the American novelists who wrote about it seemed almost to deny the possibility that war could be explained in social terms or that the man who fought it could get any type of fulfilment in violence. The novels of World War Two, on the other hand, depict conflict in more social terms. The novels of this period portrayed war not as an example of cosmic irrationality, but as a social event "comprehensible through an understanding of the society that had produced the men who fought it" (Muste, "Singing Back the Silence" 7).

In *The Naked and the Dead* great emphasis is placed on the social background of the individual characters. It ranges from Gallagher's experiences in the Irish ghetto of South Boston to Wilson's lazy maturing in a small southern town to Croft's bitter coming of age in West Texas. Here we can see that the personal and social factors have moulded the men into what they are. In an entirely different way Heller's *Catch-22* also posits war not as an isolated phenomenon. The economic system of the whole

Western world is given a satiric examination in the operations of Milo Minderbinder. A lot of social and political anomalies are brought into the foreground; and the distinctions between war and peace are almost entirely blurred.

Eventhough *Gravity's Rainbow* contains none of the infantry or aerial combat that characterises much of the fiction of World War Two, it manages to combine certain basic attitudes from the fiction of both this century's major wars in such a way as to make it the climatic war novel of this century. Pynchon has populated *Gravity's Rainbow* with an enormous cast of characters — there are over four hundred — carrying to an almost parodic extreme the tendency in the fiction of World War Two to avoid single protagonists. Heller's *Catch-22* parodies the tendency of that fiction to present characters of varying ethnic types, by presenting an Armenian and a Red Indian along with the more standard types. He also displays characters with ridiculous names like Milo Minderbinder and Chief White Halfoat. Pynchon with a much larger cast of characters, substitutes for exclusively American ethnic types a variety of Britishers, Dutchmen, Germans, Japanese, Africans, Americans and even the Argentine anarchists with their stolen submarine. The names of his characters are even more

outlandish than Heller's – Osbie Feel, Geli Tripping and Squalidozzi. Beyond the parodic intent, the proliferation of characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* also conveys the extent to which war is part of everyones' life. They are all involved in the war even after it is nominally over. The atmosphere of the novel does not change from wartime to peacetime. No mention is made about the signing of an armistice and there is no visible change in the lives of people when the action moves into the "Zone." Characters like Jessica Swanlake who abandons Roger Mexico for Beaver when "peace" comes simply indicate a lack of awareness of the real nature of their existence. As John M. Muste says, "they fail to perceive that 'the War', to the extent that it is real, simply does not end when bombs stop falling" ("Singing Back the Silence" 9).

It is very fascinating to observe that "peace" for the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* is both an elusive and an illusory state that they hope to enter at some point. It is also a recollection of a glorious past. Two of the characters Roger Mexico and Jessica talk at one point about "before the war" in such a way as to suggest the infantile state in which desire and gratification are virtually simultaneous. According to anthropologists this is a state which is the source of our visions of utopia and heaven. Tyrone

Slothrop has a vision of going back home. "You have to cross a street then, go down Mrs. Snodds' driveway beside the hollyhocks, through a wire gate and Santora's backyard, over the rail fence where the hedge stops, across your own street, and home . . ." (*Gravity* 744). But we understand that it is only an illusion and "an evocation of a childhood Eden" (Muste, "Singing Back the Silence" 10).

On close observation, it can be seen that out of the dance of parodic opposites rises the basic conflict of *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is the religious dialectic that structures the novel. It is marked by mystical and supernatural manifestations on both sides, by the presence of fanatical devotees and by a drive for nothing less than metaphysical dominance. According to Dwight Eddins, Pynchon finds at the heart of nature a mystical concept of a living, conscious Earth. All blessings emanate from here and the force of gravity facilitates a benevolent cycle of renewal. The realisation of this phenomenon gives birth to a religious response, which is a variety of Orphism. This "leans heavily upon the assumptions of Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry in its identification with natural process and its assimilation of life and death into a unifying lyric of praise" (Eddins 111).

Eddins considers the author-persona himself as the chief exponent of

this religion. Several of the novel's characters are deeply affected by the perception of a sentient Earth and of ultimate union with it. The religious revalorising of primordial Earth and natural process is repulsive to the gnostic technicians who form the Cartel. They have great contempt for the casual flux and the imperfections of nature. Refusing submission to natural processes in the name of an absolute and man imposed control, they work toward establishing a surrogate order. This would be an entirely artificial System that will turn nature outmoded. Pynchon works out the conflict between these antithetical religions with great care so that orphic naturalism and the gnostic drive toward synthesis and control appear to parody each other precisely at almost every point.

For Pynchon it is the sentient Earth that alone continues and which contains the unfathomable mysteries of life processes. It is also that which transcends the individual, whose reverence for this matrix and awareness of its long-term beneficence constitute the differentiating revelation that pulls him away from blind animality and toward conscious identification with the primal animating powers of procreation and regeneration. It is the most primitive and basic of religious impulses, but in Pynchon the narrator, it receives the most subtle differentiation.

The distinctive feature of the "sacred soil" is established by Pynchon with characteristic flippancy, through a description of Pirate Prentice's banana cultivation on the roof of his abode. His banana plants thrive on a rich compost formed by the decay of hallucinogenic plants, pig manure, and epicurean vomit. For Pynchon detritus is an index to the spiritual condition of those who have produced it. Detritus has decayed into a fertile medium. As Eddins says, "the rusting steel, peeling paint and trash-strewn lots of urban decay are symbols of entropy, of society's failure to renew itself through beneficient cycles" (114).

Prentice's bananas flourish in the center of war-torn London. As the phallic death force of the V2 rockets, "the bright angel of death," rapes London, the phallic banana offers "comic evidence for the generative capacities of earth" (Newman 93). Pynchon presents a possibility of hope in the resurgence of humanism to fight against the passivity formed by repression.

As already stated, Pirate's greenhouse is formed by the decay of hallucinogenic plants, pig manure and epicurean vomit. For Pynchon these seemingly ungodly components are associated with the "mindless pleasures" of pure being and with the holy innocence of a preindustrial

America. Thus the soil directly reflects the culture of preindustrial America, which is dependent on and very close to the processes of nature. As Eddins says: "It is the fertile recycling of uroboros as opposed to the steady entropic decline associated with technological bureaucracy" (114).

Out of the nexus of the rocket, the bombs and the V2s, we can discern a rocket subtext crystallizing itself in *Gravity's Rainbow*. With "a screaming across the sky" *Gravity's Rainbow* catapaults us into the world of the rocket. Quite often the rocket imposes its code on elements of the story. Tyrone Slothrop becomes Rocketman, marriage turns into union with a rocket, orgasm corresponds to launching, a graffitomandala proves to be a schematic of a rocket seen from below. Every nineteen pages in this huge novel, Pynchon works another variation on his basic elements, which consist of an aerial force of destruction, the targeted city, and the cowering creature awaiting annihilation.

Since the subtext of *Gravity's Rainbow* is connected to so crucial a concern as the rocket, it can be explored if the subtext actualises the same matrix as the whole narrative. Our involvement with control is reflected in the cityscapes, with their grids, grooves and labyrinthine channels. Control and the presence of "Them" are visible in the architecture, the towers and the

steeples. At the same time the rocketry and the feared explosions have orgasmic and bodily overtones. For instance Slothrop experiences a sexual spasm as being launched in a rocket. So, as Hume observes, these subtexts all point to a matrix "that factors in our lust for technology and control" ("Views from Above" 638).

While trying to recognize the subtext we should divert our attention to Tyrone Slothrop who is depicted as a man suffering anxiety about destruction from above. He fantasises about soundless V-2s directed at him. He connects the destructive aerial force with a gigantic beast, a monster, even with God. His dossier notes "a peculiar sensitivity to what is revealed in the sky" (*Gravity* 26). He is blessed with an ability to see the hand of God, which is also attributed to his Puritan ancestors. To Slothrop, a great fire seen in infancy, the aurora borealis and the London rockets are all signs of God's communication.

Prentice fantasised about the rocket's falling directly on his skull and he had looked down over the city, focussing on its power station, gas works, smokestacks and towers. Eventually the repetition of destructive force above and smokestacked and towered city below will emerge as versions of a basic relationship.

Another variation of the subtext shows Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake. The frightening presence of Slothrop's beast or God appears before them as monster and angel. Slothrop's channelled flows of city traffic become Roger's mathematical image of the grid. "Roger has tried to explain to her the V-bomb statistics: the difference between distribution, in angel's eye view, over the map of England and their own chances, as seen from down here" (*Gravity* 54).

In another part of *Gravity's Rainbow* Roger helps Pointsman capture dogs for laboratory experiments. The dogs become part of Roger's code, and the pun would not be beyond Pynchon - they dog him in his other activities. Later on Roger and Jessica cower in a cottage near a picture of a hunting dog which is "alerted by the eternal scent, the explosion over his head always just about to come" (*Gravity* 58). After a nearby explosion the lovers "sit still as the painted dogs" (*Gravity* 59).

Here we can see an instance of one art form embedded in another, a picture in a novel. This is known as ekphrasis, dog awaiting explosion overhead. The painted sub-world thus echoes the reality experienced by Roger and Jessica. This illustrates Pynchon's liking for creating correspondences between planes of reality by means of a *mise en abyme*, a

tiny replica of a large structure set within the larger version. The effect of this scene is also important because of the perspective assigned to the lovers.

Kathryn Hume says that, after enjoying more than one version of the view from above, the lovers suffer the anxieties of victims down below. The readers are forced "to assimilate both perspectives as part of the subtext" ("Views from Above" 628).

As part of the subtext Pynchon makes vivid descriptions of the network of grooves between paving stones, different types of cities and streets full of pedestrians and traffic making various kinds of flows. Franz Pokler notes the grooves between paving stones as "the streets of Ant City." A variant on grooves for channeling flows is the grid. For instance Byron the Bulb is subject to the tyrrany of the electric power grid of Europe. In the fantasized city known as the Floundering Four, we find people likened to ants and streets to a labyrinth. Pynchon also permits his readers to have "views from above" and "views from below." For Franz Pokler and Ilse, space travel appears to be a subject of happy day dreams. But in reality, reliance on machinery in *Gravity's Rainbow* promises to be disastrous. Loss of humanity, eventual loss of sanity and death -- "these are the damaging

corollaries of humans rising to such heights by means of technology" (Hume, "Views from Above" 634).

Similarly, regarding the views from below, the threat of a descending rocket saturates Slothrop's entire mental outlook. As for Franz Pokler, "the Perfect Rocket is still up there, still descending. He still waits – even now, alone at Zwolfkinder waiting for 'Ilse,' for this summer's return, and with it an explosion that will take him by surprise" (*Gravity* 426). For many of the characters, waiting for the rocket has become a permanent habit of the mind. *Gravity's Rainbow* encourages the readers to internalize this fear of downward-plunging death. The novel opens with rockets and ends with the audience in the theatre being told that the rocket is descending upon them, only delta-t away from impact.

Through the creation of this subtext Pynchon is giving form to his philosophy regarding human action and history. Huge giants, angels with miles-high eyes, monstrous white fingers, loom at one end of the spectrum. At the other end are ants, or people as ants, rats and insects. The forces of destruction are huge; their victims are minute or microscopic. Given the dwarfed stature attributed to humans in Pynchon's mythological cosmos,

we should not be surprised to note that individually we are too small to make much changes in the course of history.

In addition to Pynchon's easily noticed and often comic descriptions of eccentric characters, he undertakes more scholarly tasks: he presents considerable raw information about human psychological traits. On close analysis we can find the most common negative traits of his characters — paranoia, aggression and anality. These traits often act as an impediment to the characters' achieving mature love. Of these three negative traits paranoia is the most important.

Weissmann's belief in secret signals from outer space can be interpreted as evidence of paranoia. In contrast another big question haunts people who exhibit the other symptom and are tormented by the question "What is it they know that the powerless do not?" (*Gravity* 165). Pynchon suggests many cures for paranoia. In *The Crying of Lot 49* when Oedipa decides that an evil force may be opposing her, the narrator suggests some possible responses: "She may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey" (*Crying* 11). In humorous terms this passage enumerates the major alternatives the characters quite often turn to.

As John O. Stark has pointed out, "Pynchon has changed his conception of paranoia in the course of his career" (75). First, he treats with increasing seriousness the possibility that evil plots do exist and so paranoids are right, not sick. Second, Pynchon also makes it seem more likely that a larger plot exists behind the smaller one to which the characters direct their attention. In *Gravity's Rainbow* people trying to find the rocket create their own secret intelligence-gathering plots, and some soon discover evidence that a secret international cartel of industrialists may control the rocket builders. This development also indicates Pynchon's penchant for examining the possibility that paranoids are correct.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon describes "a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia" (*Gravity* 188). Since the Puritans were very influential in shaping American society, the persistance of American paranoia should not surprise anyone. With Pynchon the paranoid view of a situation can reveal more of the truth than a "normal" view can. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the author refers to some of the great psychologists. Freud's theories about paranoia explain many details in Pynchon's work. Pynchon conceives of paranoia as an effort to make patterns, eventhough unlike Freud he hesitates to condemn the paranoid.

According to Freud paranoids give great significance to the minor details of other people's behaviour. They then interpret them and make them the basis of their far-reaching conclusions. Freud holds that paranoids find more meaning in the world than do average people.

In the novel love is represented as a momentary encounter, "a collision of fantasies that are unable to sustain their convergence" (Newman 114). Roger Mexico feels that his relationship with Jessica miraculously links him to the Now and "he might with her, find his way to life and to joy" (*Gravity* 126). However she views Roger as little more than an eccentric adventurer and opts for the upper-class Jeremy. Ultimately the characters, both heroes and villains are isolated, forced to tread "the path you must create by yourself, alone in the dark" (*Gravity* 136). Roger and Jessica part with each other. For Roger Mexico, war, work and government are more important than love, dreams, the spirit and the senses. To him war is a state of mind, a communicable cancer. He fantasizes: "There's something still on, don't call it a 'war' if it makes you nervous, may be the death rate's gone down a point or two . . . but Their enterprise goes on" (*Gravity* 628).

The delineation of a large number of characters show how pervasive the effects of the war is. Virtually all the male characters in *Gravity*'s

Rainbow are in one or another branch of some country's military or intelligence service. Likewise the female characters are either in the service themselves (like Jessica and Katje) or have their lives drastically altered by the war (Geli Tripping and Leni Pokler). Even children are not spared. Franz Pokler's "daughter", who is brought to him once a year for a vacation to induce him to remain loyal, is probably not his daughter at all and is probably not even the same girl from one year to the next. In each of her manifestations she is simply another of the displaced children of Europe. Pynchon depicts characters without identity. The extent to which children are involved, is driven home by, the annual visit made by Pokler and that years' daughter to Zwolfkinder, an amusement park run entirely by children. In many respects this park is a replica of the adult world outside it. Prewar life in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a kind of personal Eden for some characters. But for the experience of the novel itself that world is part of the present. In a historical perspective the earliest action of the novel involves Katje's seventeenth century ancestor, Franz van der Groov, who became obsessed with killing dodo birds in Mauritius. He was so successful that the entire species was extinguished. This strange episode suggests the strength of man's desire to destroy the natural world and to lay haywire its

arrangements. This scene adds historical perspective to the destructive actions of the characters in the novel's present. Closer to the present time than the killing of the dodoes, virtually everything in the novel suggests the continuity persisting between prewar, wartime and postwar periods. Most obvious, probably, is Tyrone Slothrop's mysterious but central relationship to the point at which German rockets will later fall. Wherever Slothrop has had a sexual encounter, a rocket falls a day or two later.

Eventhough we can never find any actual relationship between Slothrop's erection and the rocket's eruptions, it has clearly something to do with the conditioning to which the infant Slothrop was subjected by Laszlo Jamf, the technician. When the deconditioning was done, whether it had not taken full effect or it had gone past zero to leave behind some mysterious power, no one ever knows. Sometimes Slothrop may have an unwitting prescience that guides him to a girl in whatever part of London is to be hit by a rocket that has not yet been fired. He may have an extrasensory perception through his erect penis of where the rockets will land even before they have been targeted. Mexico informs us that the Slothropian erections and rockets' impact follow the same Poisson distribution pattern.

A closer view of *Gravity's Rainbow* shows that the conditioning to which the infant Slothrop was subjected is not a chance event. It is all part of the plot fabricated by the enormous corporate structure that encompasses the entire industrialised world. The role played by that structure in the paranoid vision of *Gravity's Rainbow* deserves great attention. Whether the individual characters love or hate the corporation, they all serve its war-making functions without any apparent qualms. A host of characters like Slothrop, Prentice, Katje, Mexico and Poinstman are involved in various aspects of psychological warfare. Some of the characters who resisted against the corporation found that they were too late. Slothrop, for example, takes an independent course only when he finds that the one man he had depended upon had been killed, ostensibly in battle but almost certainly as part of "Their" plans. In one of the scenes Pirate Prentice believes that he is joining a group that will oppose "Them." But he is informed by Katje that like her he is doomed to serve "Them," because both of them, like many others, have been killers, and killers cannot return to a state of innocence.

Embedded in the first section of the novel is a passage of stunning virtuosity, not only for its stylistic modulations but for its dense web of

allusion, which both knits the passage itself tightly together and connects it with the rest of the novel. Roger and Jessica "driving somewhere in Kent," come upon a Norman church at which a strange congregation is gathering for Evensong:

> These exiles and horny kids, sullen civilians called up in their middle age, men fattening despite their hunger, flatulent because of it, pre-ulcerous, hoarse, runny-nosed, red-eyed, sore-throated, piss-swollen men suffering from acute lowerbacks and all-day hangovers, wishing death on officers they truly hate, men you have seen on foot and smileless in the cities but forgot, men who don't remember you either, knowing they ought to be grabbing a little sleep, not out here performing for strangers . . . (*Gravity* 136)

The following Advent hymn sung by this strange choir is yet another manifestation of war. It manifests that nothing is impossible for the war and no one is immune to it.

> The church is as cold as the night outside. There's the smell of damp wool, of bitter on the breaths of these professionals, of candle smoke and melting wax, of smothered farting, of hair tonic, of the burning oil itself, folding the other odors in a maternal way, more closely

> belonging to Earth, to deep strata, other times, and listen . . . listen: this is the War's evensong, the War's canonical hour, and the night is real. (*Gravity* 129, 130)

Even though this hymn seems to bring memories of peace to the characters, we are forced to believe that such persistent memories exist in a present which they do not control. In the course of the long episode, we are continually reminded of the ironies of the novel's time: while this choir sings, people like them are busy working some sixty miles away, building weapons. What appears to be the christmas star may be infact the first sighting of a rocket. It may descend anywhere, even on top of this church. As Muste says, "the illusions that this church fosters may be part of the plan of the War" (12). Thus Pynchon through his stylistic achievements illustrates how the individual characters are enmeshed in a web from which they cannot extricate themselves. Within this passage, Roger and Jessica are slowly merged by the narrative voice into the crowd that is in the church itself and into the larger population whose fears and hopes are given voice in the church. Later in the novel they will regain their identities. But here they become only part of a mass, not individuals at all, sharing in the general nostalgia for

> cruisers abandoned in the last summers of peacetime

> that once holidayed the old world away, wine and olive-grove and pipe-smoke evenings away the other side of the War, stripped now to rust axles and brackets and smelling inside of the same brine as this beach you cannot really walk, because of the War. (*Gravity* 134)

On page 134 of the text we can find a wretched wartime song entitled "I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen." The humour inherent in this section evokes the holiest of nostalgias of Western civilization in the context of the war and that shows Mexico, whose personality is one of the most resistent to absorption, disappearing entirely from view. This is the "Wars evensong," the "war's canonical hour" - this is not a simple-minded religious idea, rather it echoes suggestions made earlier that the War is an organism that consumes all who come into contact with it. It either destroys them or extracts from them their identities. As has already been mentioned Tyrone Slothrop eventually disintegrates into a group of personalities. In this modern world individuals are insignificant.

One of the projections of Pynchon's vision of an infinite continuity of war, is a dialogue in the novel between "Mr. Information" and an interlocutor named Skippy. It is Mr. Information's task to inform Skippy that the nice man in the whitehood whose face is always in shadow is "the

pointsman." His job is to send people to Happyville or to Pain City by throwing the lever that changes the points. The war is one such set of points, but it is itself only a device.

> The Germans-and-Japs story was only one, rather surrealistic versions of the real War. The real War is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people. Only right now it is killing them in more subtle ways. Often in ways that are too complicated, even for us, at this level, to trace. But the right people are dying, just as they do when armies fight. The ones who stand up, in Basic, in the middle of the machine gun pattern. The ones who do not have faith in their Sergeants. The ones who slip and show a moment's weakness to the Enemy. These are the ones the War cannot use, and so they die. The right ones survive. The others, it's said, even know they have a short life expectancy. But they persist in acting the way they do. Nobody knows why. Wouldn't it be nice if we could eliminate them completely? Then no one would have to be killed in the War. That would be fun, wouldn't it, Skippy? (*Gravity* 645)

In an even more subtle and pervading way, the diffusing of the line between war and peace is stressed in the firing of the rocket in the final

section of the novel. We read that the A-4 rocket 00000 was fired by Weissman/Blicero from the Luneburg Heath in the last days of the war. But without ever being sure that they have found it, Slothrop, Enzian, Tchitcherine and others spend much of the novel searching for the site from which it was fired. Nobody is sure about the direction the rocket has taken, although "the Gross Suckling Conference" decides that it has completed the Mandala by heading North into the region of whiteness silence and death. There is no proof that the rocket ever landed. In the breaking-up of the narrative in the final pages of the novel, this firing becomes indistinguishable from the firing of the 00001, which is constructed by Enzian's Hereros and presumably carrying Enzian as its passenger. According to Muste, one possible variant of reading the novel is to assume either or both of the A-4s as invading Pirate's dream at the very beginning,

"A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now" (*Gravity* 3). The rocket reaches the roof of the motion picture theatre at the very end. All of the actions between the two events take place in the imagination during the interval between the perception of the rocket and its fall. Even if this possibility cannot be accepted the uncertainty about the time of the rocket's firing, its location

and its destination, as well as the later repetition by the Hereros, "contributes to the blurring of any distinction between 'peace' and 'the War'" (Muste, "Singing Back the Silence" 15).

There is also reference to the "Zone" in which all of the actions after Part One takes place. It does not correspond to the American, French, British or Russian occupation of Germany after World War Two. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the "Zone" is a place of undefined borders, without laws, without geographical configuration, in which all kinds of "states," political and psychological, form and dissolve. It is also the "War Zone" in World War Two. According to Muste, "It is the spatial equivalent of the temporal confusion of the novel's final section, demonstrating that distinctions between war and peace have no more existence in space than they have in time" ("Singing Back the Silence" 15). The zone is shown as a no-man's land between the contending forces at the end of the war. It gradually begins to represent for some characters the condition of inevitable meaninglessness. Describing it poignantly Pynchon writes: "Down here are only wrappings left in the light, in the dark: images of the uncertainty . . ." (*Gravity* 303). The difference between the living and the dead blurs. Many, living in the zone have forgotten what they are. Pynchon is apprehended as a writer of

decay and decline. He often speaks of the disinherited and the lost. The world that he creates succumbs to a twilight of no love and no human contact. According to Tony Tanner, by placing his novel at this point of time, Pynchon is concentrating on a crucial moment when "They" propose to set about a new order in the world. This order is one which is apparently addicted to energy and the whole novel is very relevant to our ecological concern at how technological man is simply using up his own planet. Pynchon describes the movement of displaced people at the end of the War, "a great frontierless streaming." There is also an extraordinary flow of objects and people -"so the populations move, across the open meadow, limping, marching, shuffling, carried, hauling along the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois order they don't yet know is destroyed forever." The pervasiveness of technology is predominantly represented by Dr. Laszlo Jamf, who appears only rarely as a character but whose tentacles are everywhere. Jamf is a technician and inventor for IG Farben. Through his conditioning of the infant Tyrone Slothrop, he is linked to Pavlovian Behaviourists like Ned Pointsman. Among other things, he invents Imipolex G, the incredible plastic that is the key to the rocket whose firing is the center of the novel's action. From his actions we come to know that he is

a spokesman for death. While speaking to German students he encourages a type of science that will violate and somehow transcend nature.

The ultimate sources of the rampant paranoia in the novel are death and the fear of death. But Pynchon handles death in a curious way. The word 'death' and the machinery of death are pervasive in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Early in the novel there are references to many who die in the rocket attacks. But the war continues to kill people as "the real War is always there" (*Gravity* 645). The novel's final suggestion is about universal death. But we rarely see any of the characters die. We are made to understand that Tantivy has been killed by "Them," but our uncertain knowledge of this is also the source of Slothrop's knowledge, a newspaper clipping. Gottfried carried aloft in the S-Gerat at the novel's end will presumably die when the rocket hits the ground. But there is every possibility that it may never hit and Gottfried will become one of the stars or be translated into some kind of ultramontane spiritual existence. Pynchon provides a long passage about Narrisch's death, which is imaged in terms of the flight of a rocket. But we are told later that he is alive. Slothrop thinks he finds Bianca's dead body aboard the "Anubis," but taking into consideration his state of mind at that time, this is extremely unlikely.

As we browse through the enormous novel another innovative aspect we perceive is the bewildering variety of genres, behavioural modes and types of discourse present in it. The text includes such varied aspects like pantomime, burlesque, cinema, cabaret, cardgames, songs, comic strips, spy stories, serious history, encyclopaedic information, mystical and visionary meditations, the scrambled imagery of dreams, the cold cause-and-effect talk of the behaviourists and all the various ways in which men try to control and coerce realities both seen and unseen. There is only one text in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but it contains a multiplicity of surfaces. Modes of discourse are constantly turning into objects of discourse with no one stable discourse holding them together. At one point one character is reading a plasticman comic; he is approached by a man of encyclopaedic knowledge, who engages him in a conversation about etymology. We should imagine that we are reading a comic, but it is partly transparent and through it we are also reading an encyclopaedia, a film script or a piece of science history.

Wherever we look there is too much to "read"! "Is it any wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of exchange?" (*Gravity* 258). But never before there has been so much uncertainty about the reliability of the texts. Enzian, making his way across

the wastelands of post-war Europe, wonders whether it does contain a "Real Text." He thinks that such a text may be connected with the secrets of the rocket. Perhaps the "Real Text" is the desolate landscape he is traversing or perhaps he might have missed it somewhere behind him in a ruined city.

Pynchon's novel seems to be a replica of the modern world. At times in his book it is not always clear whether we are in a bombed-out building or a bombed-out mind. How many of those rockets that fell in London fell in the consciousness of the survivors, exploding in the modern mind? Looking around us and inside us, how can we be sure how much is the Real Text and how much is ruined debris? Originally the novel was to be called *Mindless Pleasures.* The intention behind such a title can be inferred from a passage in which Jessica thinks of her second suitor Jeremy.

"Jeremy is the War, he is every assertion the fucking War has ever made-that we are meant for work and government, for austerity: and these shall take priority over love, dreams, the spirit, the senses and the other second-class trivia that are found among the idle and mindless hours of the day. Damn them, they are wrong" (*Gravity* 177). Pynchon has always been a staunch supporter of "second-class trivia," which would include those

"mindless" pleasures that have no interest in "the War" which "the War" and all the official organisation, technology and bureaucracy it represents dismisses and disavows. Tony Tanner says that "a basic struggle in the book, is indeed between "mindless pleasures" and the all-too-mindful pains and perversions of 'the War' " (*Thomas Pynchon* 78).

The title "Gravity's Rainbow" suggests the opposition in a different way. "Rainbow" obviously evokes the rainbow in the Book of Genesis which was God's covenant to Noah that there would be no more destruction on the earth by a deluge. Gravity, on the other hand is that law by which all things upon the earth, are finally, inexorably drawn back down into the earth. It is an absolutely neutral promise that all living things will die. The trajectory of the rocket — which at the end of the novel is both a womb and a coffin — exactly enacts this stark ironic ambiguity. The Rocket becomes a womb since it contains the living figure of Gottfried and it becomes a coffin because it embodies death and perversion of all life-giving love and sexuality.

Gravity's Rainbow does have a recognizable historical setting. In choosing to place his novel at the end of the Second World War, Pynchon is concentrating on a crucial time when a new transpolitical order began to

emerge out of the ruins of old orders that could no longer maintain themselves. At one point he describes the movements of displaced people at the end of the war. It is a great frontierless streaming.

> So the populations move, across the open meadow, limping, marching, shuffling, carried, hauling along the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois order they don't yet know is destroyed forever. (*Gravity* 551)

In a later passage he describes what is taking the place of this vanished order. "Oh, a State begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul" (*Gravity* 566). Pynchon is clearly addressing himself to the socio-political implications of contemporary trends in history. But he avoids the conventional narrative techniques because they themselves were products of that vanished bourgeois order and it is no longer possible to "read" what is going on in any conventional manner.

The novel veers back into colonial and American history, down into the world of molecules, up into the stars and back to Bethlehem when people discerned another kind of burning light in the sky. In all this certain

specific preoccupations can be felt; pattern, plots and paranoia. If we add to this list paper, plastic, preterition, probability theory and pavlovian conditioning the list is almost complete.

Pynchon refers to social and political history in conjunction with an implicit moral dimension. In his *V* he alludes to a little of Maltese history. Down the past many centuries the Maltese were attacked, colonised and persecuted by many stronger powers like the Romans, the Arabs, the French and the British. The island of Malta, because of its composition, is a natural symbol of rocklike endurance, and the Maltese people's strength of character is symbolised by their environment's rock. Pynchon forms an analogy between history and geography in the case of Malta. In *Gravity's Rainbow* he depicts the exploitation of minorities like the Hereros. Their habitat was Southwest Africa . The only geographical attraction for the land of the Hereros was the diamonds. In the year 1884 Britain agreed to make the territory a German protectorate. When the chief of the Hereros died in 1891, the Germans tried to replace him with a puppet, for they had their own nefarious plans regarding the minorities. Soon the German traders began to exploit them. The Hereros suffered greatly during the cattle plague of 1897-98 because cattle were their main source of wealth.

The rebelling Hereros were mercilessly beaten down by a cruel German, von Trotha. He is mentioned by Pynchon in both *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In 1915 an army from South Africa conquered the Germans and the Union of South Africa received a mandate to govern under the auspices of the League of Nations. This political change merely substituted one group of exploiters for another less direct one. The new rulers pushed the Hereros inland into the almost uninhabitable Kalahari Desert where they led a very pathetic life. This historical context both justifies and makes credible, the Hereros' efforts in *Gravity's Rainbow* to obtain the Germans' rocket secrets.

It can be seen that in general Pynchon has demonstrated both understanding of and concern for the plight of minority groups. But in his novels he subordinates this concern to other matters. If he chose to be polemical about minorities, he probably would have taken the opportunity afforded by the historical background of *Gravity's Rainbow* to describe the effects of Hitler's racial and ethnic policy. But he rarely mentions Jewish suffering, writing instead about the little-known Hereros and their search for the rocket.

Popular culture is a part of social history and Pynchon writes about it also. For example in *V*, he portrays characters watching a Western on

television. It shows that their attraction to violence influences both their taste for Westerns and their actions. According to a critic *Gravity's Rainbow* contains allusions to twentyfive movies, nine directors and forty eight actors and actresses (Leverenz 230). The episode that recounts Tchitcherine's experiences in Central Asia is modelled on western movies. Comic strips work the same way as do popular films. For instance the episodes describing Rocketman and Plechazunga, the pig hero, use comic strip conventions.

One of the aspects which has contributed most to the confusion about what Pynchon is trying to tell the reader is the shifting stance of the narrator. At times he gives the false appearance of "camera-eye" objectivity (which is not really objective); at other times he presents himself as a comrade sharing an experience with the reader or deriding the readers' inability to keep up with him. Sometimes he appears as a hysterical paranoid like many of his characters. As critic Mark Siegel says since much of the novel is narrated either through the filter of a paranoid character, "who may possibly be suffering systematised delusions and projecting hostile forces, "or through a narrator" who falls under the spell of his own

story," there is nothing wrong if one attributed characters to Pynchon himself.

Gravity's Rainbow is the story of the degeneration of the Western World. Slothrop's Orphic quest loses cause and effect. He finds himself projected as graffiti on the wall, "Rocketman was here," and scratches another legend, a mandala image of the rocket as seen from below. Slothrop himself becomes such a mandala emblem "a cross road" (*Gravity* 626). His mythic connotations are returned to the Orphic underground of the formless zone. As a cross road from the past to the present he represents the Hermetic unification of what is above and what is below that has been rent asunder by the intellectual parochialism of western reason. His concluding vision of the rainbow entering into sexual union with the earth is an affirmation of his bridging the present with the future: "Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural" (*Gravity* 626). This picture of the rainbow having a union with the earth is a sign of regeneration which is quite antithetical to the rocket's annihilating penetrations.

The attack of *Gravity's Rainbow* is directed against the necrotic order of Western reason. This is symbolised by the V-2 rocket. In the rhetoric of *Gravity's Rainbow* the outcome of ontological repression is sublimated into "Synthesis" and "Control" which manifest themselves as such overarching forms of rationalisation as analytical science and deterministic Calvinism. The repression of death obligates the repression of life also and consequently expressions of such psychological and political perversions like anality and racism find their place in the novel. On the other hand the text declares freedom in multiple forms – Godel's Theorem, Murphy's Law, nature, love, music, comedy, magic, metaphor and middles. As Theodore D. Kharpertian says, "earth and gravity assume paradoxical significance as the complex, mysterious, and powerful symbols of sterile repression and fertile transformation" (111).

If we read parabolically two episodes from the final chapter entitled "The Counterforce," that would enlighten us on the overall relationship of writer, text and reader. The first is a fantastic tale known as "The Story of Byron the Bulb," in which a light bulb named Byron, threatens the oppressive Phoebus light bulb cartel and attempts to kill him. Through a series of fortunate coincidences Byron escapes his intended assassination

and as he grows older understands "more and more of this pattern" of oppression. Finally as Pynchon has clarified, Byron is "condemned to go on forever, knowing the truth and powerless to change anything. No longer will he seek to get off the wheel. His anger and frustration will grow without limit, and he will find himself, poor perverse bulb, enjoying it . . ." (*Gravity* 655). On this aspect Kharpertian has pointed out that Byron may be seen as a projection of Pynchon, the satirist whose work also seems to illuminate and reveal more and more of a pattern to events. But like many other satirists, he realises with "anger and frustration" the powerlessness of satire to reform. "Like Byron, Pynchon goes on cynically enjoying the creation of his angry art" (112).

The second episode takes the form of a joke in which a psychiatrist recommends that a child who hates and fears the food Kreplach, should be allowed to watch his mother make it. Since he is not aware of the final product, the child is excited in the cooking. But when the dish assumes its final shape he screams, "GAAHHHH! . . . "Kreplach!" (*Gravity* 737). Pynchon uses the joke as an instance of the ways in which the "Secret of the Fearful Assembly" of the rocket enters the popular culture. It also throws light on the relationship of the text to the reader. Like the rocket, *Gravity's*

Rainbow may be inoffensive, amusing or interesting in parts, but the final configuration of its elements creates a sense of anxiety, repulsion and terror. "Thus *Gravity's Rainbow* professes to be a prodigy, a monstrous, metaphorical omen that implicates the reader in a vision of circumambient evil" (Kharpertian 112).

Pynchon's satire on Western man's futile attempt to master death by rationalization asumes the Menippean form of the comic, parodistic and fantastic narrative vision of *Gravity's Rainbow*. At the end of a fantastic musical parody, rats and mice emerge from scientist's cages, grow to human size, and sing and dance in the aisles of the PISCES laboratory. At that time researcher Webley Silvernail regards the creatures in their mazes as an image of man's labyrinthine rationalizations of death:

> They have had their moment of freedom. Webley has only been a guest star. Now it's back to the cages and the rationalised forms of death - death in the service of the one species cursed with the knowledge that it will die . . . "I would set you free, if I knew how. But it isn't free out here. All the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled everyday, to preserve an elite few, who are the loudest to theorise 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 men down to a tolerable level – and be like you instead, simply here, simply alive . . ." The guest star retires down the corridors. (*Gravity* 230)

Rationalized death in the novel takes the form of "synthesis" and "control" by the powerful. This theme Pynchon implies in *V* and makes explicit in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Assassinated German foreign minister Walter Rathenau communicates with corporate Nazis from IG Farben in a 1920s seance in Berlin warning them that the cartel is a form of death. The narrator describes Rathenau as the "prophet and architect of the cartelized state" (*Gravity* 164). He had envisioned the ideal political system as a "rational structure in which business would be true, rightful authority" (*Gravity* 165). Neverthless, he now warns the Nazis that their beliefs had been illusory and that the cartel serves to transform death not onto rebirth but into "death-transfigured." "But this is all the impersonation of life. The real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured. The best you can do is to polymerize a few dead molecules. But polymerization is not resurrection" (*Gravity* 166).

Pynchon's ambivalence is exemplified by the juxtaposition of two aspects - the apocalyptic and the comic. Inspite of the novel's overriding concerns with waste, fragmentation, destructiveness, victimization and death, life is sustained. Much of that sustenance is provided by humour. According to Charles Clerc, *Gravity's Rainbow* "is a very funny book full of sight gags, practical jokes, zany chases, and pratfalls" (19). For his epigraph to part two, Pynchon uses Merian C. Cooper's statement to Fay Wray: "You will have the tallest, darkest, leading man in Hollywood" (*Gravity* 179). Saure Bummer, in defence of his favourite composer, assessing a renowned competitor: "A person feels good listening to Rossini. All you feel like listening to Beethoven is going out and invading Poland" (*Gravity* 440). Such comic statements abound in the novel.

The various allusions seen in the work have a way of reinforcing their new context and enlarging the situation. They can be symbolic or analytical and most importantly they can contribute by enriching thematic meaning. From among the many examples, a simple allusion to Phoebus may be chosen to illustrate this. As already described in the "Byron the Bulb" sequence, Phoebus is an evil "international light bulb cartel" which dominates the world. Phoebus uses all its vast resources and wiles to get

rid of any bulb extending beyond "mean operating life." The name Phoebus coming from the Greek word Phoibus, meaning bright or radiant, refers to Apollo, the god of the Sun. By all rights, the victim Byron ought to be Phoebus. Symbolically the sun epitomises promise, renewal, source of life and energy, heroic image, active principle and masculine creativity. Paradoxically the very opposites of these meanings apply to the Cartel Phoebus. Allusion has to be taken ironically in this case. To the public the cartel wants to be associated with all the positive aspects of the sun. But under the surface – the real world beyond the illusoriness of a sunny title – the actual negative faces emerge: threat, death, menace, lack of passion, artificiality, darkness and repression. In the words of Charles Clerc, "Thus Pynchonian concerns with paranoia, with conspiracies, with cabals, are heightened by our awareness of the ironic use of an allusion" (21).

The problem with *Gravity's Rainbow* is not simply that it is fiendishly-complex, or that it frequently takes a parodic attitude toward the multiple theories it purveys. Both of these characteristics are common to the encyclopaedic narrative which has a drive toward comprehensive knowledge and schematization. This drive is one of the salient features of *Gravity's Rainbow*. We understand that most of the book's rhetoric agitates

for a central insight. But at the same time, an opposed, centrifugal tendency seems to be sending information flying outward like the alternative zones of the novel's postwar reconstruction, "away from all the others, in fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the center" (*Gravity* 519).

According to Molly Hite this decentralizing tendency is especially apparent in the closing chapter, where even the discrete sections of an already convoluted action begin to fragment into shorter and less obviously related segments with titles like "LISTENING TO THE TOILET," "WITTY REPARTEE", "HEART-TO-HEART," "MAN-TO-MAN" and "SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF IMIPOLEX G."

This marked diffusion of the narrative energy so near the conclusion suggests that the text is thematically committed to incompleteness. Many basic facts like the nature of Slothrop's relation to the Mystery Stimulus, the direction and target of Blicero's last firing, and the purpose of the Herero's rocket are left ambiguous or dropped entirely. "Problematic knots in the plot are left 'untied' " (Hite 97). As Pynchon remarks, "this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into" (*Gravity* 3).

It is quite evident that through the various innovative postmodernist techniques Pynchon is aesthetically transforming aggression and violence

by endowing them with a fictional form. An attempt has been made to explore these themes in *Gravity's Rainbow* in the backdrop of the Second World War. Pynchon indicts the inexplicability and inexorability of aggression. Through the novel, the author works on the reader's sensibilities to produce something akin to a mind in shock, reeling obsessively into a collapse of comprehension, then drifting off into a lyrical dream before discovering it to be a nightmare.

Conclusion

Sam Thomas “In-forming aggression : The fictional techniques of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon ” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 5
Conclusion

Chapter 5
Conclusion

The portrait of the world drawn by Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon show them using aggression as thematic and formal material to depict the plight of their characters who are forced to live in a hostile environment. Modern man unable to cope with the stresses and strains of the post-war world is the central figure in their novels. Man here is caught within the powerful tentacles of the invisible "They." He searches for a reasonable, methodical way out, but finds only confusion, fear and helplessness. The protagonists of *Catch-22* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are engaged in fruitless searches for a way out; they are protean figures who, after prolonged struggles, eventually disappear from the narrative.

As the foregoing analysis indicates, *Catch-22* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are characterized by three features that help the novelists to handle aggression quite centrally. They are (1) the numerous references to science and technology in the novels (2) their background of World War Two and (3) the themes of social oppression and individual alienation that are integral to the two novels.

Pynchon makes ample references to rocketry, the laws of

thermodynamics, entropy and polymer chemistry in his novel. The V-2 rocket which is the central symbol in *Gravity's Rainbow* is both a weapon of destruction and a means of escape from the realities of the world. Slothrop's disintegration in the novel corresponds with the dropping of the atom bomb over Hiroshima. The V-2 becomes the nuclear bomb. The German V-2s shattered Britain during the latter stage of the Second World War. It is a symbol that betokens modern civilization's obsession with technology, whether it be a question of devising, building, or launching of the weapon, or of pursuing the secrets of its mysterious potency. As symbolic of a huge phallus, it couples sex and death. We are also told that the rocket "has to be many things" to many people. The "Manicheans . . . see two Rockets, good and evil . . . a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle" (*Gravity* 727). It is many other things in the novel: God's hand pointing an omniscient finger; "Baby Jesus" ascending to the heavens, betrayed by the Judas of gravity; the ambivalent epitome of human achievement and failure, of order and disorder.

In physics entropy occurs as an isolated system — a condition in which the available energy in the system diminishes to the point at which all physical and chemical processes cease. Characters in *Catch-22* and

Gravity's Rainbow function in relation to their interrelatedness or interconnectedness to other characters. So we can safely conclude that the authors feel that individuals do not in actuality live in closed systems. The concept of entropy is rather a metaphor for our compulsion to construct and maintain closed systems which induce a sense of isolation and withdrawal from others. Chemistry joins physics in *Gravity's Rainbow*'s description of Tchitcherine; he is depicted as a giant supermolecule with a large number of open bonds available at any time. During World War Two, rocket programmes hastened the development of plastics to make parts for rockets. The simple, repeated chemical units that form the molecules make plastics a fitting analogy for a social structure composed of many simple, nearly identical persons. The molecules of one of the two types of plastics, the thermoplastics, are not chemically joined. One can draw analogies here with loose social bonds. The extreme moldability of plastics has been a major source of their usefulness, and again a social analogy is suggested. Pynchon's characters, often almost indistinguishable one from another, wander around forming unstable bonds with each other and falling victim to stronger forces that mold them at will. Imipolex G, the newly invented chemical is a sexual stimulant.

Even though Heller does not mention directly any features of technology, the fact that his novel is about an airforce squadron engaged in bombing missions, points to the truth that modern science and technology is very much involved in its operations. Both the novels are placed in the context of the Second World War. While *Catch-22* is a microcosm of the Allied Forces during the War, the plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* is centered around the V-2 rockets aimed against London and other cities of Europe. Pynchon places his focus more on the post-war conditions of Europe. With "a screaming" that comes across the sky, *Gravity's Rainbow* wrenches us into the world of the rocket. Likewise the V-2 magnetically draws the novel's characters into that same world. Its fields of force generate the major actions and inform the images. Quite often the rocket imposes its code on elements of the story: Tyrone Slothrop becomes Rocketman; marriage turns into union with a rocket; orgasm corresponds to launching; and a graffito-mandala proves to be a schematic of a rocket seen from below.

The evil sway of an all-pervading "They" or "Them" can be seen in both the novels. In *Catch-22* it is the military-economic establishment which threatens human life more insidiously than the war itself. The end-product of this establishment is the perfectly inanimate, inert man represented in

the novel by "the soldier in white." He strikes a terrible fear in everyone's heart and is the epitome of the image of their future. Yossarian the chief protagonist is under constant fear of being killed by "Them." "They" can be neither seen nor named. This fear of conspiracy is all-pervasive in the novels of the post-war era. It begins as a joke, like everything else, but ends as a decidedly confusing possibility. Under the domination of the military-economic institution and the mystery of *Catch-22*, Heller's paranoic world has all its typical characteristics. All energies are inverted and result in death and destruction instead of love, fulfilment, or renewal. The men alternate between making war and making love with Italian whores. They become frazzled wastelanders, characterized by an enervating and neurotic pettiness. The characters are divided by guilts, particularly over the value of their war efforts, and they are alienated, aimless and bored. They long for escape and even death — almost everyone does either die or disappear. Yossarian and his companions are close to being inert and are helpless in the face of a total disintegration of values. Life constantly leads to a reduction of all human dignity and measures man in terms of his mercantile worth. This is represented in *Catch-22* by Milo Minderbinder's business conglomerate. Many of the scenes depicted in the novel are shocking and show the violent methods used by the writer that set him

apart from the others. For instance, look at the scene of Yossarian stripping off his clothes to go to Snowden's funeral and to receive his medal. After Snowden has "spilled his secret" that when the spirit is gone man is mere garbage, Yossarian feels uncomfortable. He feels guilty in his military uniform and strips it off as a mark of protest. That is the only way by which he can give vent to his pent up disgust and frustration. He is approached by Milo, playing the role of a serpent offering him a piece of chocolate-coated Egyptian cotton. Yossarian as a Second Adam in naked innocence, rejects temptation, sitting on what he calls the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The real temptation is for Yossarian to submit to absurd exploitation and in doing so to give Milo the encouragement he wants to take advantage of all the men in the airforce base.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* too the protagonists move aimlessly across the various zones. Pointsman enlists Slothrop in the search for the Schwarzgerat (Rocket 00000) and sends him to a French resort. Slothrop undertakes the quest because he seeks the connection between Imipolex G and his past; it is a search for his identity. But unfortunately, later on, this quest becomes futile. He discerns that he is an extension of the very web from which he wishes to extricate himself. He is an unwitting tool of the

warmongering conglomerate of business cartels, scientists, and politicians whose power seems so omnipresent that they come to be collectively referred to as "Them." Slothrop is constantly being monitored; escape seems to be tortuous. Pynchon's recurrent theme of paranoia inhabits every convoluted niche of *Gravity's Rainbow.* There is no clear distinction between settings during and after the war because the destructive tendencies of the war continue even after its cessation. Slothrop's quest through the Zone convinces him that events are controlled by "Them." Even the cultural mindset is easily manipulated, for "They" dictate the messages that are transmitted by the media. The protagonists are watched and manipulated. Characters like Slothrop shift from discrete identity to a series of masks; they lose their resemblance to any sort of integral personality. During the course of his long journey he assumes different faces; the Pig-Hero, the trickster Hero, Rocketman, and the Fool in the tarrot deck. Even Yossarian in Heller's novel expresses his various personalities. We find Yossarian, the gunner on the bombing missions, Yossarian the lover of Nurse Duckett, Yossarian the triskter trying to seem sick to evade the bombing missions,and Yossarian the moralist.

Even though set at the time of the Second World War, in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon does not express his anger and aggression against the

Germans, as he expresses it against the Calvinist Elect of America. He openly and severely criticises the Calvinist Elects' overruling and repression of America's downtrodden -- the Preterites. Pynchon refers to Max Weber's theory of the routinization of charisma and the German sociologist's theories inform the condemnation of Calvinism that pervades the novel. The terrifying shadow of Catch-22 looms large over the horizon. It is the principle of non-reason by which bureaucracies and other absurd human institutions perpetuate themselves. It is the infinite capacity of the absurd to mask itself in reason, and to institutionalize itself in bureaucracy, so as to play one macabre joke after another on the ordinary human beings. The post-war world of *Catch-22* and *Gravity's Rainbow* is one of dominance and suppression. The military-industrial complex is consistently trying to choke the individuals. It is a world in which the human situation is coextensive with war. This world is impersonal, it is made of abstract systems. Institutions and structures make men behave irrationally; it makes them fight wars without considering the consequences.

Yossarian having been too stricken with horror to look straight in the face, was left in a state of anxious self-questioning from which it takes nearly the entire duration of *Catch-22* to recover. We can feel the struggles

an innocent mind undergoes against a violent, aggressive villain – the army. The post-war experimental novel increasingly speaks of individual men attempting to cope with the violence around them and in themselves. Absurdities of time and space specifically serve to point to the novels' timeless and universal reality – the individual's inalienable right to freedom. Yossarian is portrayed to be a threat to the system's absurd suppression of such a right.

Broadly speaking, these are the various levels on which Heller and Pynchon can be described as expressing the aggression in their novels. A host of postmodernist techniques are deployed by them for articulating this aggression at the formal level too.

Perhaps the most aggressive aspect of both the novels is its involuted time structure. The rapid changes between events back and forth in time with seemingly little regard for the reader's ability to follow the action clearly, has confused some and delighted many. Many of the events that have happened at the beginning are pushed off to the middle or even to the end. Some of the events are repeated. This is Heller's use of *deja vu* as a structural principle. These repetitions represent certain repressed desires, needs or memories that try to penetrate Yossarian's consciousness. Because

these desires and memories conflict with Yossarian's military obligations, he repeatedly censors them. Thus his realization of them takes a long time to come through. This is very essential for the novel's development. By denying a temporal order, Heller strengthens his portrait of a disordered universe. It is only fitting that a novel which deals with an apparently absurd and confused world should be written in an apparently absurd and confused style. *Gravity's Rainbow* also begins *in medias res* with the description of a falling rocket and a massive evacuation. But the reader is disoriented to learn that it is in fact a dream seen by Pirate Prentice. The reader who reconstructs a "real" scene in the novel's fictive world, is forced in retrospect to cancel the reconstruction he has made. Pynchon's aggressive narrative, obstructs and challenges the spatiotemporal connections of the well-made Aristotelian plot and represents for him yet another form of repressive order. For Heller and Pynchon, war is an unchanging condition of absurdity and terror and it would be a falsification to suggest that there could be any orderly development of this situation, in time, towards a resolution.

For the absurdist novelists the ultimate absurdity of life is suggested by a series of preposterous and ridiculous events, by characters who —

although described with apparent gravity — are distorted, exaggerated and caricatured. They undo the text by lexical distortions, meaningless puns, and insistent repetition of empty words, cliches, exaggeration, deliberately misplaced particulars, and juxtaposed incongruous details. In these works absurdity is revealed primarily through the device of comic exaggeration — the burlesque. For the contemporary novelists, burlesque is not only directed toward the external world, but it often becomes reflexive in nature. The author himself, the value of art and the possibility of language come under its purview.

Gravity's Rainbow contains allusions to twenty-five movies, nine directors and forty eight actors and actresses. Pynchon borrows descriptions, scenes and metaphors from the cinema. The cinematic is one of the best fictional techniques that he resorts to in the novel. He seems to be the first writer to have taken full advantage of the facts that all of our artistic, even perceptual sensibilities have been altered by the cinema. The scenes in the novel are altered rapidly and frequently and occasionally the film we are watching as we read breaks into slapstick. Even the chapters in some editions are divided by a series of squares which apparently are meant to represent film sprocket holes. The massive work also leans heavily on comic strips and science fiction.

What is emphasised is that all the aforementioned features find their place in the novels of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon. It is their way of expressing the aggression they feel against the existing social and literary order. These techniques may seem absurd to the world. Certainly, it is this absurdity that distinguishes them from the other writers of the postmodernist age. In the final analysis all that is traditional about *Catch*-22 and *Gravity's Rainbow* is their protest. Their technical innovations represent a radical departure from the fictional formulas of the past. Use of parody, the way language reinforces the absurdity it describes, and a structure that denies logical order, all constitute break-throughs that are violently new to the American novel.

Selected Bibliography

Selected Bibliography

Barth, John. "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction." *Atlantic Monthly* 245 (1980): 65-71.

Berressem, Hanjo. *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961.

Boyne, Roy and Ali Rattansi, eds. *Postmodernism and Society.* London: Macmillan, 1990.

Brooke-Rose, Christine. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.

Bryant, Jerry H. *The Open Decision.* New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1970.

Chambers, Judith. *Thomas Pynchon.* New York: Twayne, 1992.

Clerc, Charles, ed. *Approaches to* Gravity's Rainbow. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983.

Cowart, David. *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980.

Davidson, Michael. "Languages of Post-Modernism." *Chicago Review* 27 (1975): 11-22.

Davis, Gray W. "*Catch-22* and the Language of Discontinuity." *Novel* 12 (1978): 66-77.

De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading.* New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979.

Dickstein, Morris. *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties.* New York: Basic Books, 1977.

Doskow, Minna. "The Night Journey in *Catch-22.*" *20th Century Literature* 12 (1967): 186-193.

Eddins, Dwight. *The Gnostic Pynchon.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

Federman, Raymond. "Fiction in America Today or the Unreality of Reality." *The American Classics Revisited: Recent Studies of American Literature.* Eds. P.C. Kar and D. Ramakrishna. Hyderabad: ASRC, 1985.

Fekete, John. ed. *Life After Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture.* New York: St. Martins P, 1987.

Fiedler, Leslie A. "Cross the Border — Close that Gap: Post Modernism." *Sphere History of Literature in the English Language.* Vol. 9: *American Literature Since 1900.* Ed. Marcus Cunliffe. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975.

Fokkema, Douwe, and Hans Bertens. Eds. *Approaching Postmodernism.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Pantheon, 1970.

Fromm, Eric. *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil.* New York: Harper, 1964.

Galloway, David. "Postmodernism." *Contemporary Literature* 14 (1973): 398-405.

Gaukroger, Doug. "Time Structure in *Catch-22*." *Critique* 12 (1970): 70-85.

Golden, Robert E. "Mass Man and Modernism: Violence in Pynchon's *V*." *Critique* 14.2 (1972): 5-17.

Gordon, Caroline and Jeanne Richardson. "Flies in their Eyes? A Note on Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*." *The Southern Review* 3 (1967): 96-105.

Harris, Charles B. *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd.* New Haven: Connecticut College and UP, 1971.

Hassan, Ihab. *Contemporary American Literature 1945-1972: An Introduction.* New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973.

_____. *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Time.* Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1975.

_____. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Post-Modern Literature.* New York: Oxford UP, 1971.

_____. *The Post modern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture.* Ohio: Ohio State UP, 1987.

Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22.* New York: Dell, 1985.

_____. *Closing Time.* London: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

_____. *God Knows.* London: Black Swan Books, 1985.

_____. *Good as Gold.* London: Corgi, 1980.

_____. *No Laughing Matter.* London: Corgi, 1987.

_____. *Something Happened.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

Hendin, Josephine. "Experimental Fiction." *Harward Guide to Contemporary American Writing.* Ed. Daniel Hoffman. Massachusetts: Oxford UP, 1979.

Hite, Molly. *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon.* Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983.

Hume, Kathryn. "Repetition and the Construction of Character in *Gravity's Rainbow.*" *Critique* 33 (1992): 243-254.

_____. "Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in *Gravity's Rainbow.*" *American Literature* 60 (1988): 625-642.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction.* London: Routledge, 1988.

_____. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox.* Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1980.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response.* Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1978.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

Jung, Carl G. "Psychology and Literature." *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1972.

Karl, Frederick R. "Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*: Only Fools Walk in Darkness." *Contemporary American Novelists*. Ed. Harry T. Moore. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1964.

Kharpertian, Theodore D. *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean-Satires of Thomas Pynchon*. New Jersey: Associated UP, 1990.

Kiley, Frederick and Walter Mc Donald. "An Impolite Interview with Joseph Heller." *A Catch-22 Casebook*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973.

Klemtner, Susan Strehle. "A Permanent Game of Excuses: Determinism in Heller's *Something Happened*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 4 (1978-79): 550-556.

Klinkowitz, Jerome. *The American 1960s: Imaginative Acts in a Decade of Change*. Amherst: Iowa State UP, 1980.

Levine, George and David Leverenz, eds. *Mindful Pleasures*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976.

Lewis, R.W.B. *Trials of the World: Essays in American Literature and The Humanistic Tradition*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1965.

Locke, Richard. "*Gravity's Rainbow*". *The New York Times Book Review* 78 (1973): 1-14.

Lodge, David. "The Novel Now: Theories and Practices." *Novel* 21 (1988): 125-138.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1979.

Madsen, Deborah L. *The Post Modernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon.* London: Leicester UP, 1991.

Mailer, Norman. *Cannibals and Christians.* New York: Dial P, 1966.

Marshall, Brenda K. *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory.* New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

McConnell, Frank D. *Four Post-War American Novelists.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1977.

McHale, Brian. *Constructing Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

_____. *Postmodernist Fiction.* New York and London: Methuen, 1987.

Mellard, James M. "*Catch*-22, Deja Vu and the Labyrinth of Memory." *Bucknell Review* 16 (1968): 29-44.

Merrill, Robert. "The Structure and Meaning of *Catch*-22." *Studies in American Fiction* 2 (1986): 139-152.

Meyer, Eric. "Oppositional Discourses, Unnatural Practices: *Gravity's* History and "The '60s." " *Pynchon Notes* 24-25 (1989): 81-104.

Milne, Victor J. "Heller's 'Bologniad': A Theological Perspective on *Catch-22*." *Critique* 12 (1970): 50-69.

Moore, Thomas. *The Style of Connectedness: "Gravity's Rainbow" and Thomas Pynchon*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1987.

Morgan, Clifford T. *Introduction to Psychology*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1986.

Muste, John M. "Better to Die Laughing: The War Novels of Joseph Heller and John Ashmead." *Critique* 5 (1962): 16-27.

_____. "Singing Back the Silence: *Gravity's Rainbow* and the War Novel." *Modern Fiction Studies* 30 (1984): 5-23.

Nadeau, Robert L. "Readings from the New Book of Nature." *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979): 454-471.

Newman, Charles. *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation*. Evanston, Illinois: North Western UP, 1985.

Newman, Robert D. *Understanding Thomas Pynchon*. South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 1986.

O'Donnell, Patric. *Passionate Doubts: Designs of Interpretation in Contemporary American Fiction*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1986.

Olderman, Raymond M. *Beyond the Wasteland: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen Sixties*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1972.

Pavel, Thomas. "Tragedy and the sacred: Notes towards a semantic characterization of a fictional genre." *Poetics* 10.2-3 (1981) 234.

Pearce, Richard. "Pynchon's Endings." *Novel* 18 (1985) 145-153.

_____. "The Sixties: Fiction in Fact." *Novel* 2 (1978): 163-172.

Pillai, Sebastian Dravyam A. *Post-Modernism: An Introduction to Post-War Literature in English.* Tiruchirappally: Theresa Publications, 1991.

Pinsker, Sanford. "Heller's *Catch*-22: The Protest of a Puer Eternis." *Critique* 7 (1964-65): 150-162.

Poirier, Richard. "Rocket Power." *Saturday Review of the Arts* I (1973): 59-64.

Potts, Stephen W. "*Catch-22*" *Antiheroic Antinovel.* Boston: Twayne, 1989.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow.* New York: Viking P, 1973.

_____. *Slow Learner.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1984.

_____. *The Crying of Lot 49.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1966.

_____. *V,* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1963.

_____. *Vineland.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1990.

Quilligan, Maureen. *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre.* Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979.

Radhakrishnan, R. "The Post-Modern Event and the End of Logocentricism." *Boundary* 2 (1983): 33-60.

Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, eds. *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader.* London: Edward Arnold, 1989.

Ryan, Marjorie. "Four Contemporary Satires and the Problem of Norms." *Satire Newsletter* 6.2 (1969): 40-46.

Schaub, Thomas. *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1981.

Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellog. *The Nature of Narrative.* New York: Oxford UP, 1978.

Scholes, Robert. *Fabulation and Metafiction.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979.

Seed, David. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon.* London: Macmillan, 1988.

Siegel, Mark R. "Creative Paranoia: Understanding the System of *Gravity's Rainbow.*" *Critique* 18 (1977) 39-53.

Simmon, Scott. "*Gravity's Rainbow* Described." *Critique* 16 (1974): 54-67.

Singh, Sukhbir. *The Survivor in Contemporary American Fiction.* New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1991.

Slade, Joseph W. *Thomas Pynchon.* New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

Sniderman, Stephen L. "It was all Yossarian's Fault: Power and Responsibility in *Catch-22.*" *20th Century Literature* 19 (1973): 251-258.

Solomon, Jan. "The Structure of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*". *Critique* 9 (1967): 46-57.

Stark, John O. *Pynchon's Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information.* Ohio: Ohio UP, 1980.

Stonehill, Brian. *The Self-Conscious Novel: Artifice in Fiction from Joyce to Pynchon*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1988.

Sukenick, Ronald. *In Form: Digressions on the Act of Fiction*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Illinois U P, 1985.

Tabbi, Joseph. "The Wind at Zwolfkinder: Technology and Personal Identity in *Gravity's Rainbow*." *Pynchon Notes* 20-21 (1987): 69-90.

Tanner, Tony. *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

_____. *Thomas Pynchon*. London & New York: Methuen, 1982.

Thomas, W.K. "The Mythic Dimension of *Catch-22*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15 (1973): 189-198.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Cornell UP, 1977.

Tololyan, Khachig. "Seven on Pynchon: The Novelist as Deconstructionist." *Novel* 16 (1983) 165-172.

Walsh, Jeffrey. *American War Literature 1914 to Vietnam*. London: Macmillan, 1982.

Warren, James Perrin. "Ritual Reluctance: The Poetics of Discontinuity in *Gravity's Rainbow*." *Pynchon Notes* 18-19 (1986): 55-65.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Selfconscious Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1985.

Way, Brian. "Formal Experiment and Social Discontent: Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*." *American Studies* 2 (1962): 253-270.

Weisenburger, Steven. *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*. London: U of Georgia P, 1988.

Wood, David. "Timeless Death and Placeless Freedom in *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller." *Kyushu American Literature* 24 (1983): 45-53.