

**OF ENTROPY AND CHAOS THEORY: A STUDY OF  
THE SELECT NOVELS OF THOMAS PYNCHON**

A Thesis

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award of the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in

**ENGLISH**

By

**YUNA LI**

**11812520**

Supervised By

**DR. DIGVIJAY PANDYA**



**L** OVELY  
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**2021**

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Yuna Li

**Date:** 22nd June, 2021

**Name:** Yuna Li

**Regd. No. 11812520**

**Place:** Lovely Professional University

**Counter Checked by:**

Dr. Digvijay Pandya

## CERTIFICATE

I hereby affirm as under that: The thesis presented by Yuna Li (11812520) entitled *Of Entropy and Chaos Theory: A Study of the Select Novels of Thomas Pynchon*

- 1) Submitted to the School of Social Sciences & Languages, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
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**Advisor Name & Signature Dr. Digvijay Pandya**

**Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021**

**Mob & Email ID 9829033837, [digvijay.24354@lpu.co.in](mailto:digvijay.24354@lpu.co.in)**

## ABSTRACT

The thesis entitled: *Of Entropy and Chaos Theory: A Study of the Select Novels of Thomas Pynchon* is focused on the study of the influence that entropy and chaos exert on the characters, the civilization, and the universe in the novels by Thomas Pynchon. Thomas Pynchon explores the order and disorder in the life and universe and articulates his metaphysical vision through combining scientific concepts into his literary works and employing some new stylistic literary devices based on postmodernism. In this study, entropy serves as a tool to explore and investigate the themes of death, decadence, and the end of American civilization, and Chaos Theory is borrowed to dig out the uncertainty, randomness, and alienation, the postmodern theory of Fredric Jameson is applied to investigate the texts in terms of postmodernism literary devices employed in the novels, such as intertextuality, magic realism, black humour, disintegration, broken communication, metafiction and formlessness of the plots.

The research has been qualitative and is based on content and the textual analysis of the novels of Thomas Pynchon, and the comparative textual study is employed as the main tool to analyze the role of entropy and chaos in the novels,

There are six novels by Thomas Pynchon chosen in the study, they are *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), *Against the Day* (2006), and *Bleeding Edge* (2013), through which the detailed analysis is done achieving the main objectives of the thesis: to trace the emergence of the socio-political situation of America in the Post World War; to explore the deterministic role of entropy and chaos that lead the protagonists to paranoia and the fracture of identity; to examine the operational process of the Chaos Theory and its impact in the novel; and to explore the postmodern vision of Thomas Pynchon. The objectives above are achieved through the analysis in terms of the images of death and stagnation in the novel *V.*, loss of self and the fractured identity in the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, entropy and apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow*, chaotic roles of the money and conspiracy in *Bleeding Edge*, anarchism in *Against the Day*, as well as subjugation, power, and the loss of miraculous and magic ability in

the modern world due to the development of technology through the analysis on the disorderly epical journey in *Mason and Dixon* as follows:

There are seven chapters in the thesis, Chapter One entitled: **Brief Candle: Thomas Pynchon and His Novels' General Characteristics**, which gives a brief introduction about Thomas Pynchon because he avoids the public which leaves the only piece of information about him, and this chapter gives a detailed analysis on his novels' general characteristics in terms of pessimism and nihilism of Thomas Pynchon, cause and effect as structuring pattern of the novels, cross-purposes in Pynchon's novels, dissonance and fragmentation, noise and entropy, symbolism, imagery and allegory, and three main characteristics of Pynchon's novels: paranoia, the absurd quest, and antagonism.

Chapter Two entitled: **The Images of Death and Stagnation in *V*** in which Pynchon applies "inanimate" to describe the human relationships, and the people in sick American society are in the lust for the material amenities and show passion for inanimate things, such as metal, rocks, fossils, and shells to fuse with their physical flesh and sew a sapphire on the belly button, Pynchon uses the typical symbolism to strengthen that the ladies *V* are more and more mechanized and dehumanized and constructs the mystery *V* and its different incarnations as images of inanimate and decadent lives. The inanimate state in the novel is conformity to the ultimate state of entropy—heat-death in the universe, the inanimate process of the characters hints at the operational process of entropy.

Chapter Three entitled: **Loss of Self and the Fracture of Identity in *The Crying of Lot 49***, in which the issues of the loss and fracture of identity in the technological world are analyzed, Oedipa Maas struggles with the multiplicity of life just like the other characters with multiple roles which reveal the identity is inherently fragmented. Pynchon opines that human beings have to endure uncertainties and ambiguities of life under the influence of entropy and chaos operating in the universe. Pynchon reinforces the idea of identity being a sort of fantasy, and giving up fantasy means giving up identity. At the end of the quest for the Trystero, what Oedipa Maas has experienced, what she has seen, and what she has heard on the trip make her fail

to distinguish what is reality and what is fantasy, but this confused mental state releases her from the anxiety and tension of searching, she even doesn't hope to find the answer and only sits on the auction without expectation and quest, by which Pynchon intends to tell the readers that the meaningless is the meaning of the world.

Chapter Four entitled: **Entropy and Apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow***, in his masterpiece, Pynchon applies the nuclear attack and wars to predict the decay of human being's civilization expressing the apocalyptic vision, the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* can be described as a nihilistic novel in which the most fatalistic apocalypse is the symbol Rocket 00000, and Pynchon translates the apocalypse in a secular way as wars, mass death, and the holocaust. The protagonist Slothrop's identity disintegrates into the pieces with the multiple roles at the end of the novel, which explicitly demonstrates the multiple meaning equals meaningless. The philosopher Nietzsche opined that desire for death and power trapping Western culture itself was the main cause of Western cultural nihilism.

Chapter Five entitled: **Exploration of The Disorderly Epical Journey in *Mason & Dixon*** in which Pynchon unfolds the history of America through the journey of two protagonists Mason and Dixon, he laments the loss of miraculous and magical ability due to the Enlightenment science and the devaluation of the powers and civility of a man with the growth of machine and technology. In the novel, the Age of Reason degenerated into mere machinery, the faith of the people in magic, in god, and in religion declined sharply. Pynchon describes the horrible scenes of slavery which result from the subjugation and powers related to the huge profits.

Chapter Six entitled: **Chaotic Roles of Money and Conspiracy in *Bleeding Edge***, Pynchon chooses a brand new angle to depict the root cause behind the 9 /11 attack, he doesn't contribute the reason to the religion or different ideology but demonstrates from the angle of conspiracy between the government and the terrorists. In the novel, he identifies the Internet as the locus of lots of conspiracy in the reality about the 9/11 terrorism attack, the novel is structured through the lust for money of the people in the modern world, and society is saturated with chaotic passion and crazy for money, the characters show paranoid and weird behaviors, all of this

degeneration in the moral value and people's slavery for money have resulted from the Capitalisms which conforms to Entropy and Chaos theory.

Chapter Seven entitled: **Anarchism in *Against the Day*** studies anarchism in the reality and the disintegration of the characters in the novel. Pynchon opines that the politicians and the capitalists take control of the power institutes and are using it for raking huge profits against the interests of citizens in the modern world, the politicians and capitalists make an empty promise of future development for the people who blindly believe in the magic bubble blown by the government, and the bubble is doomed to be broken, as a result, the young generation trapped in the modern world is with the destiny of becoming "simpletons".

In Conclusion, the study demonstrates how each main objective is achieved through the analysis of the novels chosen in detail; Pynchon's attitudes towards the universe, the history, science, and humanity in the modern world are discussed and made a conclusion; The relevance and the significance of the study are given in this part, in which the enlightenment and the direction for humanity in the chaotic world are included.

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*Yuna Li*

**Yuna Li**

(11812520)



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## Introduction

Regarded as a postmodern American novelist, Thomas Ruggles Pynchon abandons the optimism of the 19th century, plenty of concepts from science are employed to examine the modern discomforts that plagues contemporary Americans, and Thomas Pynchon borrows some concepts from science to probe the cause and symptoms or impact brought about by the entropy and Chaos in the human being's life. In his novels, some typical postmodernism techniques can be found, such as multiplicity, ironies, paradox, intertextuality, and the self-conscious style, through which Thomas Pynchon reveals the relation to a world where multiplicity takes the place of unity. This thesis chooses Thomas Pynchon to study the entropy, chaos theory based on postmodernism under the inspiration of Steven Weisenburger, in *Fables of Subversion* (1995) he opines that "It is impossible to conceive of postmodernism in literature without reference to Pynchon's fiction" (258), Brian McHale observes that without Pynchon's work "there might never have been such a pressing need to develop a theory of literary postmodernism in the first place" (97) in "Pynchon's postmodernism" *Postmodernist Fictions* (1987). The paper will study Thomas Pynchon and his novels with postmodernism characteristics.

In Thomas Pynchon's literary works, it is obvious that his idea about the combination of the concept of science and literature is inspired by some writers and artists, one of them is Henry Adams, in his book *The Education of Henry Adams* (1905), he propounds the chaotic modern world in the lack of certainties, the notion exerts the deep influence on the Thomas Pynchon who codes with a deterministic order pervading in the civilization and universe.

Another one is Norbert Wiener, in his book *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1967), which proposed the concept of entropy about stagnation, downward trend, and disorder operating in the chaotic universe. As Wiener observed: "The universe is going downhill" (58). Entropy and Chaos Theory are two premises to understand Thomas Pynchon's novels, in this study, the following six novels will be analyzed: *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Mason & Dixon*

(1997), *Against the Day* (2006), and *Bleeding Edge* (2013), and entropy and Chaos Theory serve as tools to measure that decline and the process of being inanimate death, the universe's going downhill and disorder, and man's confrontation with the loss of self, disintegration under the influence of entropy and chaos. Pynchon turns to scientific concepts, philosophic notions and employs entropy as a metaphor to describe the process of the universe's going downhill and the decline of human civilization. The employment of the concepts of entropy and chaos in the novels reveals to us that the author cares about how his characters react when they are confronted with death and disorderly reality. In *Entropy*, Thomas Pynchon argues that: "We must get into the step, a lockstep toward the prison of death. There is no escape. The weather will not change" (6), which confirms his blackness.

Another important theorist exerting a profound influence on Thomas Pynchon is Rudolf Arnheim, who describes the effect of the Second Law of Thermodynamics on arts in *Entropy and Art: Essays on Disorder and Order* (1971), his combination of the concept from Thermodynamics and art inspires Pynchon to introduce the scientific concepts to the literature and his novels to measure the social life and human being's civilization.

Thomas Pynchon himself, as a scientist and a litterateur, has explored the chaos theory operating in the universe and the life of characters. Chaos is deterministic and has a mathematical effect, it is inevitable that even chaotic event leads to order in nature and the behavior of people. The matter in the universe is amorphous, but the artists always struggle to impose a pattern on the amorphous pattern, to bring order out of chaos. Edward Norton Lorenz, as a pioneer of chaos theory, introduced the strange attractor notion and observed that the behavior of human beings is unpredictable.

According to postmodernism, there is a gap between the present and the future; the present determines the future, but it is difficult to predict how much the present will change and affect the future, which reveals the unpredictability in reality. The chaos will be observed in all human activities. Pynchon realizes that a random series of events occur in this universe, but all the chaos does produce a form of

identifiable order. The history of mankind shows that order will appear out of the chaos and so he creates all his characters that are thrown into the world of his novels to carry out their eventful journey of life battling with the irrevocable forces of nature and life.

The thesis entitled: *Of Entropy and Chaos Theory: A Study of the Select Novels of Thomas Pynchon* studies that Thomas Pynchon brings an amazing revolution to fiction by applying scientific concepts combined with some new stylistic literary devices to explore the order and disorder in the life and universe. In the book *Thomas Pynchon* (2003) by Harold Bloom, he writes that “Pynchon surpasses every American writer since Faulkner at Invention; Pynchon’s greatest talent is his vast control, a preternatural ability to order so immensely an exuberance at invention” (76).

The characteristics of the novels by Thomas Pynchon match the postmodernism notion of Fredric Jameson who is a great American philosopher and critic who propounded the theory of postmodernism in his seminal book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. This book of Jameson excited great interest among the cultural critics and the reviewers because of his revolutionary ideas in this book. He attempts to analyze the cultural production from the perspective of “high modernism.” Jameson explores the culture of modernism and differentiates it from postmodernism. The basic argument of Jameson is reflected in society’s cultural forms. Postmodernism is characterized by the integration of commercialism, advertising, and cheap culture into people’s character. Another argument is that postmodernism is simply more advanced modernism. Postmodernism has generally criticized the hermeneutical model of inside and outside, ideology and metaphysics. Jameson has discussed in detail the issues relating to the postmodern condition. And he adopted the concept of simulacrum of Jean Baudrillard and expressed his discontentment with the current historical situation. Postmodernity today has transformed the historical past into what he called pastiche. According to Jameson, postmodernity is “an immense dilation of culture’s sphere; the sphere of commodities, an immense and historically original acculturation of the Real” (Jameson x).

## Chaos Theory in Physics and Literature

Chaos theory, a physics concept from quantum theory, is the study of apparently disordered systems to find an underlying order. As a concept of physics, chaos theory may be a strange concept for the ordinary people, however, the butterfly effect in chaos theory is familiar to us. The butterfly effect demonstrates that it is sensitive to the initial condition, a small initial condition (a butterfly flaps its wings) can cause a considerable effect (tornado). The physicists observe that the whole process of the butterfly effect is characterized by unpredictability and uncertainty, because no one can predict that each butterfly's flapping can finally lead to a tornado since there are plenty of attractors in the complicated and long process from a wing flapping to a tornado, and during which a very small change occurring to any attractor will make a big difference. In other words, Chaos theory demonstrates that very small and seemingly insignificant individual effects can exponentially compound with other effects and give rise to disproportionate impacts, in view of its high sensitivity to the very tiny change, Chaos Theory indicates that randomness and uncertainty become somewhat compatible because of the long-term unpredictability in the literature.

Edward Lorenz propounded the Chaos Theory for the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. James Gleick's *Chaos* makes the theory popular, *Making New Science* (1987) first introduced the principles and early developments of chaos theory. With the emergence of the computer revolution, huge amounts of data can be analyzed and Chaos Theory has been investigated from many angles by natural scientists. Many physicists use Newtonian classical physics which rely on determinism, and for the physicists, determinism refers to the situation in which predictable outcomes are brought about by known initial data, but Chaos is the science of surprises, of the nonlinear and of the unpredictable, it teaches us to expect the unexpected, Chaos Theory focuses on non-linear systems and the unpredictability, which shares the common characteristics with postmodernism.

As the pioneer of Chaos Theory, Edward Norton Lorenzo introduced the strange attractor notion and observed that the behavior of human beings is

unpredictable. After finding a consolidated place in the scientific context, chaos theory finds its way through the literary and cultural domains as a result of its convergence with postmodernism. In modern times, Chaos Theory has expanded to International Relations and literature as well. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the famous Chaos Theory became popular, and Henri Poincare, Yoshisuke Ueda, and Edward Lorenz took a keen interest in the combination of Chaos Theory and art and literature and humanities. The physicists like Edward Otto and Mark Spano observe that the wild, complicated, and unpredictable are the result of Chaos theory operating in this universe. The physicists noted the chaotic conditions in the external physical world and their impact on the mind and sensibility of human beings and their institutions. The Chaos Theory has become popular with the development of computer science which has the amazing ability to process a huge amount of data. Natural scientists have intensively studied the operation of the Chaos Theory and Entropy.

The writers of literature apply Chaos theory as a new and promising tool to explain the weird and occurring behaviors of human beings and set a connection between the human behaviors at random and Chaos Theory which is also used to explore the inner world of the characters in the fiction. Based on the common characteristic of Chaos theory and postmodernism, literature and science have an increasingly closer association, Chaos theory is mingled within the postmodern culture in literature. For Pynchon, determinism refers to that the characters' fate is arranged against their free will due to the impact of entropy and chaos, and the unpredictability is translated as uncertainty, ambiguity, and randomness in Pynchon's novels.

The novels of Pynchon reveal that man is confronted with two external forces; entropy and Chaos which are operating together in the universe. In this study, it is argued that the theory of Chaos is universal and Pynchon depicts the impact of entropy and chaos on the mind and sensibility of his characters. And Thomas Pynchon focuses on the unpredictability of Chaos Theory in his novels to depict the life of characters and enlighten humanity in the chaotic world.

## Entropy in Physics and Literature

Entropy is a concept from the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and a comparison between the First and Second Law of Thermodynamics is necessary here for a better understanding of entropy. The First Law of Thermodynamics is called conservation of energy which is familiar to us, and it argues that the energy cannot be created or destroyed, so the energy in the universe is a keep constant. The Second Law of Thermodynamics argues that the quantity of heat in the universe can be destroyed and some heat cannot be converted to mechanic work, which will lead to the disorder in the universe, and as more and more heat is destroyed, the ultimate state will be in a heat-death which means the end of the universe. Entropy as a measuring rod of the quantity of destroyed heat can only increase but not decrease in the physics field. Entropy is applied to more fields of human study with the efforts of scholars from all walks of life.

Entropy in communication theory is defined as a measure of the efficiency of a system as a code or a language in transmitting information whose ideas are applied to biology to analyze the genome and applied to EEG analysis in the medical field, and recently the ideas of entropy are introduced to more fields, such as marketing, nursing and so on.

In this study, the combination of entropy and literature is revolved around. Webster defines entropy as “the ultimate state reached in the degradation of the matter and energy of the universe: state of inert uniformity of component elements; absence of form, pattern, and hierarchy.” From the description of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the definition in Webster, the main characteristics related to entropy stand out: disorder, degradation, heat-death, and the end of the universe. The scholars in the literature field find that entropy is not only the phenomenon in the universe but also can be applied to social science and civilization. They employ entropy to examine some phenomenon in the human being’s life.

In literature, according to Norbert Wiener, he translates the characteristics of the concept of entropy into stagnation, downward trend, and disorder operating in the universe, and he observes: “the universe is running downhill” (Wiener 58). The

writers in the literary field borrow entropy as a tool and metaphor to depict the image of death, inertness, nihilism, the devaluation of the faith, dehumanization, and so on in the modern world.

Pynchon is an excellent model in the combination of scientific concepts and literature, and his most well-known short story *Entropy* offers an interesting look into the creative themes as well as into Pynchon's narrative strategies and the context of much of his metaphors that would later crystallize in his novels. In his first story *Entropy* (1960), Pynchon offers us a profound vision into the nature of human civilization and the universe, as well as the nature of order and disorder. The story is set in Washington, D.C. in 1957 during a single day of false spring. The story presents two characters, Callisto, a man dictating his memoirs to his girlfriend, Meatball Mulligan and his party. The party symbol is used to depict a much-disorganized system where girls sleep in bathtubs and people are entering through fire escapes. There is chaos in Callisto's apartment. At least in thought, the apartment is sealed away from the outside influence. Here, Callisto and his girlfriend Aubade live in an enclave of isolated. Pynchon sets the party on the edge of chaos with the increase of noise in the party and the drunkenness of the people. The images of the dying bird and "smashing the window" symbolize chaos and disorder. Callisto is a paranoiac, obsessed with the coming apocalypse in the form of the heat death of the universe. *Entropy* as Thomas Pynchon's first important short story sets the basic tone for his following novels, and its sophisticated structure has been paid tribute to. Given Pynchon's subsequent novels one interest which the story possesses is its combination of a modern scientific concept with fiction. Pynchon's *Entropy* sets the basic themes for his following novels. In this study, efforts are made to get an insight into the mind of Pynchon employing the principle of entropy in all his major novels. Pynchon shows his interest in the scientific law of thermodynamics to highlight the order and disorder operating in the universe. He presents his own worldview in a unique style and structuring his plots by employing the tools of meta-fiction. Pynchon employs plenty of fantastic, such as magic realism, surreality, and the forth, to help the characters escape from the reality, to help us have a better understanding of realities from different angles, and to protest against stagnation.



As an excellent mathematics student, Pynchon employs many scientific concepts, especially, the Second Law of the Thermodynamic system to examine the order and disorder in human civilization and the universe. That's one of the reasons why there are plenty of plots showing us the reality from different perspectives in Pynchon's novels. Rudolf Arnheim, inspiring Pynchon to have a combination of scientific concept and literary novels, observes that the novels of Thomas Pynchon depict the theme of chaos and entropy in his novels, according to Arnheim, the entropy principle in *Entropy and Art: Essays on Disorder and Order* (1971) is defined as follows:

It follows that the entropy principle defines order simply as an improbable arrangement of elements, regardless of whether the macro shape of this arrangement is beautifully structured or most arbitrarily deformed; and it calls disorder the dissolution of such an improbable arrangement. (Arnheim 13)

From the description, entropy can be understood as a disorder. Even a chaotic state has its own order rules and organization which are not clear to us, rules, and organization, therefore, the entropy cannot serve as a measure of disorder, entropy is a measuring rod of that decline. It is more critical to understand Pynchon's narrative better only when a disordered system is regarded as a more natural order. According to Pynchon, we are in times of plastics, paranoia, and dominated by the system.

At the very beginning of the novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon writes: "A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it now" (3). Thomas Pynchon warns human beings of the possibility of human civilization hinted at by the possibility of a V-2 rocket may fall at any time. The rocket V-2 is a sign of a disaster for humanity and civilization. The frequently occurring screaming of a rocket in the novels reminds the readers of the signature sentence: "Call me Ishmael" in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1850). In his novels, Thomas Pynchon depicts the themes of "Negative Sublime" discarding the "Divine Sublime" which his contemporaries Hemingway, Norman Mailer, and Faulkner believed in. Pynchon explicitly uses the concept of entropy and notions from

information theory to deal with the negative sublime for his purposes by which he creates a narrative aesthetic in compliance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Thomas Pynchon's panoramic insight is revealed by the usage of postmodernism device—intertextuality, in his novels, he borrows a lot from other fields, such as music, history, politics, anthropology, science, and technology. Lots of criticism goes to Pynchon's novels for his sensational way to the state of contemporary American fiction, for his being academic, for the inconsistency of characters in the novels, and his non-linear plots which are extremely unfriendly to the readers. One of the reasons lies in the entropy in his novels not only serves as a vital reference but also the important factor organizing his novels.

### **Review of Literature of Past and Present**

Hanjo Berressem in his *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text* (1993) discusses the novels of Thomas Pynchon relying on the theories of Gilles Deleuze. His comparative study of Deleuze and Pynchon gives new direction in reading and understanding the bulky fiction of Pynchon through the metaphysical and philosophical approaches.

David Cowart in his *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (1980) discusses the modernism of Thomas Pynchon who rejected the old techniques and evolves a new style of writing for the modern American generation. He traces the influence of Joyce, Wilde, and Eliot on Pynchon who evolved new literary devices to deconstruct history.

Bernard Duyfhuizen in his *Narratives of Transmission* (1992) observes that Pynchon is a novelist of gigantic proportions, in postwar American literature, his works are significant in terms of polymathic knowledge, expression about outrage, and obscenity in the novels.

Amy J. in her *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (2001) observes that Pynchon is influenced by the metaphysical ideas of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1850) "*Call me Ishmael* (1947)." In his famous novel, the same psychological terror is expressed in the opening of the novel which begins with:

“What screams across the sky”. This fear and terror of uncertainty of life and fall out of life is expressed through the metaphor of negative Sublime in all his novels.

Luc Herman published *Concepts of Realism* (1996) and observed that Pynchon writes bulky novels and his *Against the Day* (2009) is based on the genre of Menippean satire. Pynchon gives a blend of many genres and his novel becomes a heteroglossic narrative including different voices and multiple discourses. The plot of the novel is packed with episodes of early espionage, adventure, love, and revenge. Pynchon gives a bewildering fabric of the film, theatre, and popular songs in this novel. He masters allusions and parodies.

Kathryn Hume (1984) reviewed the famous novels of Pynchon: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Against the Day* and *Gravity's Rainbow* found the loss of center in his novels. Each novel of Pynchon seems a warning to humanity of the imminent breakdown of culture and the decay of civilization. Kathryn observes that Pynchon is an iconic author of American postmodernism.

Brian McHale (1987) in his book *Postmodernist Fiction* explores the literary devices used by Pynchon in his novels and observes that he made many innovations in postmodernist fiction. His vision is apocalyptic as he talks about the imminent decay of American culture. The novels of Thomas Pynchon give us an insight into the present, past, and future of mankind.

Deborah L. Madsen (1991) investigates the pervasive vogue of imagery, symbols, and the scientific terms used by Pynchon in his novels. She has discussed the metaphysical style of Pynchon comparing it with the metaphysical poems of John Donne.

Steven Weisenburger is the author of *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* (2006), *Modern Medea* (1998), and *Fables of Subversion* (1995), lashes at Thomas Pynchon since his novels are difficult, sometimes to the point of hermeticism, demanding unexceptional attention. The learned critic is critical of Pynchon's irresponsible frivolity, obscenity, and sexism, misogyny, and homophobia.

Rodney Taveira (2011) in his article “Still Moving *Against the Day*: Pynchon’s Graphic Impulse,” talks about the interest of Pynchon in history, geography, science, and mathematics, and cinema. His interdisciplinary approach has enriched his fiction.

Georgios Maragos (2016) discusses the unconventional prose style of Pynchon; the break of communication as found in Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*. He wrote the article “A Medium no Longer: How Communication and Information Become Objectives in Thomas Pynchon’s Works.” He observes that Pynchon also uses the language of visual art in his novels.

Michael Harris (2008) in his essay “The Tao of Thomas Pynchon,” explores the spiritual aspects in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Against the Day*. The learned critic observes that Pynchon depicts the atmosphere of chaos; death and imminent decay of civilization in all his novels.

Douglas Kessey (2003) in his book *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins* contains twelve papers from a Pynchon conference held in London in 1998. In all these essays the critics and the learned scholars of Pynchon reinterpret the novels of Pynchon from a fresh perspective in the context of American culture, his attitude towards death, love, sex, political hypocrisy, and growing human degradation.

Jessica Lawson (2010) discusses in detail the loss of center and unconventional prose style of Thomas Pynchon in her article “‘The Real and Only Fucking is Done on Paper’: Penetrative Readings and Pynchon’s Sexual Text.” She has discussed the complicated relationship between *Gravity’s Rainbow* and its characters in the novel. She offers valuable insights into this profound set of questions about the novel: “how we get inside it, how it gets inside us, and who exactly comes out on top” (249).

Manlio Della Marca (2014) deals with quite another kind of fluid in his essay “Fluid Destiny: Memory and Signs in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*”. He observes that Thomas Pynchon was influenced by the philosophical ideas of Marx and

Zygmunt Bauman. He discusses the tests of Pynchon from the philosophical point of view relying on the ideas of Bauman.

Francisco Collado-Rodríguez (2010) explores the scientific and mathematical laws used by Pynchon in structuring his plots. He has reviewed Pynchon's novel *Against the Day* to investigate the loss of center in his novels.

### **Research Gap in the Past and the Present Research**

This study is new as no full-length study is available in the research papers and the books of criticism of Thomas Pynchon. All these research articles and books published on Thomas Pynchon around the world only give a touch on analysis on the various issues, and the characteristics of sexuality, the post-modernism, his metaphysical philosophy, and the meta-fiction in his novels. In this study, the law of entropy and chaos theory structuring his plots are explored to give a detailed explanation of the issues, symptoms, and causes afflicting the characters. And this study gives a systemic analysis of his introduction of scientific concepts into his literary work and how the entropy and Chaos theory influence every respect in the reality.

### **Main Objectives**

1. To trace the socio-political situation of America in the Post World War.
2. To explore the deterministic role of entropy and Chaos that brings paranoia and deflation of self in the protagonists of Pynchon.
3. To examine the operational process of the Chaos Theory and its impact in the novels of Thomas Pynchon.
4. To explore the postmodern vision of Thomas Pynchon.

### **Main Issues Taken in the Thesis**

1. The main focus is to explore the theory of entropy and chaos depicted in the novels of Thomas Pynchon.

2. To explore the randomness of the universe in which the characters of Pynchon struggle for survival.
3. To explore the use of postmodern techniques of Thomas Pynchon such as intertextuality, magic realism, black humor, disintegration, broken communication, metafiction, and formlessness of the plots.
4. To explore the vision of the determinism of Thomas Pynchon.
5. To investigate the operation of chaos and disorder in the universe and the impact on characters.

### **The Novels of Thomas Pynchon Taken in This Study:**

1. *V.* (1963)
2. *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)
3. *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)
4. *Mason & Dixon* (1997)
5. *Against the Day* (2006)
6. *Bleeding Edge* (2013)

### **Research Methodology**

In the research project, the comparative textual study is employed as the main tool to analyze the role of entropy and chaos in novels. The research has been qualitative and is based on content and the textual analysis of the novels of Thomas Pynchon. The postmodern theory of Fredric Jameson is applied to investigate the texts of Thomas Pynchon. The theory of entropy is applied to explore and investigate the themes of death, decadence, and the end of American civilization. The Chaos Theory is applied to explore the ambiguous, uncertain, and chaotic life of the protagonists of Thomas Pynchon.

The study mainly focuses on the role of entropy and chaos theory that govern the system and operate at all levels; the conflict between order and disorder is explicit in American society. The operation of entropy and chaos results in the disruption of life; there is no certainty and stability of life as all the characters struggle to escape from the forces of entropy. The original works of Thomas Pynchon and the critical articles on Pynchon are examined from a fresh perspective to fill the research gap. The data is collected from the libraries in China and India and some other digital libraries around the world.

This study analyses novels of Thomas Pynchon based on postmodernism literary devices. The textual analysis is to be done to explore and investigate the scientific and metaphysical vision of Thomas Pynchon who explores the forces of change and transformation in his novels. Thomas Pynchon employs new techniques such as the Law of Thermodynamics and Poisson's law of distribution and the Chaos Theory to depict the randomness of the universe and the uncertainty and ambiguity of human existence.

The research follows the guidelines of the latest 8th edition of the MLA style sheet.

## **Chapters**

### **Introduction**

**Chapter I Brief Candle: Thomas Pynchon and His Novels' General Characteristics**

**Chapter II The Images of Death and Stagnation in *V***

**Chapter III Loss of Self and the Fracture of Identity in *The Crying of Lot 49***

**Chapter IV Entropy and Apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow***

**Chapter V Exploration of the Disorderly Epic Journey in *Mason & Dixon***

**Chapter VI Chaotic Roles of Money and Conspiracy in *Bleeding Edge***

**Chapter VII** *Anarchism in Against the Day*

**Conclusion**

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## Chapter One

### Brief Candle: Thomas Pynchon and His Novels' General Characteristics

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon is a prominent American novelist who revolted against the traditional novelists and explored the malaise of contemporary society from the perspective of the theories of science and mathematics. Following the postmodernism theories of Fredric Jameson, Pynchon wrote meta-fiction and broke away from the tradition of realism Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Heller, and Norman Mailer. His novels are non-linear in structure and are called panoramic writing with multiple subject matters, genres, and themes, such as history, music, philosophy, chemistry, mathematics, and the forth. Pynchon published *Gravity's Rainbow* and won the 1973 U.S. National Book Award for fiction and became an international celebrity.

Thomas Pynchon started writing in early life; he was the product of the elite culture of New York as he was born in 1937 in New York. Pynchon raised many important questions on his fiction but avoided direct interviews and also the photo session. He wouldn't like to participate in activities and very little information is available about him and his early life. The newspapers featured his short stories and he never showed any enthusiasm about the success of his stories. He joined the engineering stream at Cornell University and joined U.S. Navy. He studied English at Cornell University and took a keen interest in literature. Pynchon is an enigma to his friends and his novels are perplexing to the readers.

Pynchon appeared on the literary scene with his short stories such as *Entropy* and *Under the Rose* published in 1961. He was writing his famous novel *V.* in 1963 which got him a famous National Book Award. This was the real beginning of the name and fame of Thomas Pynchon. Pynchon moved to Mexico and here he wrote his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49*. Two great masterpieces *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *V.* (1963) established Pynchon as a great postmodernist of America. The reviewers and the critics condemned both of his novels and claimed that both of them are unreadable. They are "turgid and obscene". Pynchon was disheartened and he took

seventeen years to complete the next novel *Vineland*. Pynchon married Melanie Jackson, the granddaughter of President Roosevelt, who belonged to the elite class of America. The novels *Mason & Dixon* (1997), *Against the Day* (2006), and *Inherent Vice* (2009) brought him great fame and established him as a great American novelist. Herman and McHale observe that “the novels of Pynchon deal with many complex and controversial issues of modern American society. He has expressed a wider range of interest from Marxism to structuralism and new historicism” (7). In this study, the main focus is on the theory of entropy applied in all the major novels of Pynchon and his vision to explore the mysteries of the universe. Thomas Pynchon is a serious novelist who wrote novels to bring order out of chaos and investigated the pervasive vogue of the forces of fragmentation, chaos, and disenchantment.

In *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (1983), Molly Hite examines a variety of notions about order and disorder, the deterministic and tragic destiny crushing the characters in the novels of Pynchon, which is crucial to have a profound understanding of Pynchon’s narrative in which they describe the different ways to know better the forces controlling the fate of people and bulldozing his characters.

Due to Thomas Pynchon’s unique educational background and working experience, he uses technical references in the novels and delivers the readers different and multiple message, his thought effected by his special education leads his novels to a profound philosophy in the novels, his logic engineering mind fills his novels with technical, physical images which are regarded as no relationship with literature, in the essay “Order in Thomas Pynchon’s *Entropy*”, David Seed observes that: “the application of entropy on the social sphere is a very romantic notion connected to progressive moments of history” (8). Not only the concept of entropy is applied in his novels, but there are also more concepts and images from mathematics, physics, chemistry, music, and the forth can be found in the novels which is an important element baffling the readers, another element baffling the readers is that there are multiple narrators and characters in the novels. The plots are constructed in an extremely complicated way since his novels are with the nature and characteristics

of meta-historical retellings. The non-linear narratives, multiple narrators, and characters are combined in the novels to build a labyrinth that baffles readers much.

As an engineering student, Thomas Pynchon recognizes the dangers that the technological development exerts on humanity, and he depicts the images of automatization in the novels, such as Rocket V-2, dynamite which serve as signals of both the blessing and curse of civilization. Mark Currie in his book *Postmodern Narrative Theory* observes that: “in the novels of Pynchon three main elements of postmodern literature are found; namely diversification, deconstruction and politicization” (89).

### **Pessimism and Nihilism of Thomas Pynchon**

Under the influence of the concept of entropy describing nihilism and the heat death, Pynchon is obsessed by the pessimistic vision of life and the universe, so the main characters in his novels are gripped in despair and experience the alienation of ambiguity, and the main tone of his novels is in the gloom of death and the decline of civilization. Although from the superficial perspective, the plot of the novels shines the glow of hope, the nature of the novels is revolved around death and desperation.

Pynchon follows his special style to depict the self and identity of the individuals in his novels that finally slip into deflation and disintegration inevitably. All the novels by Thomas Pynchon express the motif of the declining trend of human moral values with the development of technology and commercialism, which results in the deflation and degeneration of human beings.

The conspicuous characteristic of Thomas Pynchon is the pervasive vogue of nihilism and pessimism. He was greatly impacted by *The Decline of the West* (1918) by Oswald Spengler. Pynchon shows himself unusually ingenious in techniques in presenting his themes in his eleven novels loaded with historical episodes, remarkable disruption, and fragmentation in the plots. He doesn't write about just one theme, but he depicts multiple points of view, his characters are intellectual, rational but the victims of entropy and disorder. Each of his novels is in a quest for meaning, but Pynchon employs the elements of science and Chaos theory to depict the existential

challenges of the defeated characters. The characters of Pynchon take an ambivalent attitude toward learning the meaning of their experience. They long to make the connections, but at the same time they are afraid that they might make them. Pynchon allows his characters to confront the transcendental power that imposes an order on the world. Molly Hite in her book *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* opines that all the novels of Pynchon depict a transcendental and scientific vision of life and the universe as the plots are complicated, and the multiplicity of events and characters reveals his concern about the interworking of genre and structure.

The novels of Pynchon give a blending of two worlds: “a man-centered world” and “a God-ordered universe”, and this combination poses a dilemma, the characters in his novels have to confront the reality that the order essentially is illusory. Like his heroine Oedipa Mass, Pynchon sets out to project a world, but soon he recognizes that a world is sufficient human reality should contain all kinds of possibilities. The fictional world of Thomas Pynchon is pluralistic and is governed by a rigid design, and often there are conflicting ideas of order. In the novels, Pynchon projects a complicated world not easy to negotiate. The world depicted in all these novels is most bizarre, surreal and evokes a multi-layered reality. Pynchon supports the postmodern culture as his formidable novels force readers to think anticipating in ways of humor, insight much that has changed in the literary theory. David Cowart opines that Pynchon’s most profound teachings are about history as myth, as a rhetorical construct, and as false consciousness. The vision of Pynchon is encyclopedic as he wrote the novel after novel borrowing from history, science, and philosophy. Each of his novels is engaging, metahistorical reading; the influence of German culture is quite apparent in the plots of his novels.

In his novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon opines that it is a “salad of despair” (5). From the surface, Pynchon covers the plot with hope, in essence, the characters in the novel are confronted with the struggle in a life full of death and despair. Wiener argues that: “The fundamental part of physics, in other words, cannot escape considering uncertainty and the contingency of events” (13). They all experience “the alienation of ambiguity” including Stencil Sr., the process of decay and the disintegration of American culture are the basic tones of the novel. Pynchon

produces some special situations which are hostile to individuality to put the characters in the challenges to deal with the “contingency”. All the novels by Thomas Pynchon express the motif of the declining trend of human values with the development of technology and commercialism, which results in the deflation and degeneration of human beings.

### **Cross-purposes in Pynchon’s novels**

The characters of Pynchon live in a world with three dimensions: past, present, and future, their lives are characterized by disorder and uncertainty, the universe is inert and “may have a quality we can call logic. But logic is a human attribute after all; so even at that it’s a misnomer. What is real are the cross purposes” (Pynchon, “V.” 455). Bovine tells Tyrone *Gravity’s Rainbow* that “Everything is some kind of plot man” (603). Pynchon creates confusion by the events of cross-purposes in which the characters are caught, the ironies and paradox dominate the plots that are disintegrated, there is a disconnection between the past and the present, and in the novels there are full of scattered historical events baffling the readers and trapping the characters’ mind in the confusion, however, “this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom” (603). The continuity established by Pynchon is just part of the thermodynamic metaphor and “any Situation takes shape from vents much lower than the merely human” (455).

### **Dissonance and Fragmentation**

Thomas Pynchon realizes that everything is fluid, uncertain, and going downhill in life and the universe, the collapse of the American Dream reveals it is inevitable for values to go into fragmentation and disintegration, Pynchon depicts the values upheld by the pioneers are eroding in the modern world and this social reality falls in dissonance. In the world of novels of Thomas Pynchon, there is only decay and disintegration. In the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas is playing a role of an “alien”, Pynchon observes thus: “The Situation is always bigger than you, Sidney. It has like God its own logic and its own justification for being and the best you can do is to cope” (“V.” 455). In the novels of Pynchon, the real present appears as an “impasse”, Pynchon said that “it’s all theatre” (1), which creates the illusion

making readers or characters blur the line between reality and fantasy. Just like Sidney Stencil makes a valuable comment on life and art when he walks in the Strada Street in the novel:

Such was the topological deformities of this street that one seemed to walk through a succession of music-hall stages, each demarcated by a curve or slope, each with a different set and acting company but all for the same low entertainment. (441)

In Sidney Stencil's eyes, the street is like a theatre where reality is like a play in which the events that happened in life are on display, the characters lose the ability to distinguish what is real and what is fantastic. The characteristics of the novel *V.* matches the characteristics of postmodernism: plots are with non-serial events, without a storyline, and without traditional plot structure, there are full of broken communication in the novels, there is no past, no future, but present which brings about the timelessness in the events. All Pynchon's characters suffer from dissonance, uncertainty, they are trapped in a space where they can't distinguish between fantasy and reality. For example, the main protagonist in the novel Herbert arrives in Valletta at last, he has an allusion that V is everything, is everywhere in life. V with multiple meanings has no certain meaning by which we are able to sense the meaninglessness of human existence. The character's quest for V is doomed to be in vain and to be meaningless at last which is determined by the force of Entropy and Chaos operating in the universe and human life. Some physics content mentioned in Pynchon's novels, such as, Poisson distribution, Maxwell Demon experiment, and Chaos theory, tells us the degrees of probability, the random nature throws the characters in the bewildering uncertainty which is the main cause of the alienation of the characters. Disconnected events without time and space trap the people in an abstract reality facing disorder and decay. Herbert says in the novel: "No time in Valletta, No history, all history at once" (456). Pynchon depicts the social realities with a nature of dissonance, fragmentation, and decay in his novels.

In this study, the nature of Pynchon's universe and the trapped nature of the protagonists of Pynchon in a closed system are highlighted. In the novels of Pynchon,

the quests of his protagonists are through the desolate landscape and the world of shadows, his characters suffer from conspiracies and paranoia which hints at the disorder and chaos in the universe. Patricia Waugh suggests that the characters in Thomas Pynchon's novels spare no effort to escape from their life and fatality with the "vast proliferation of counter-systems and counter-games suggests one way of eluding the apparent predetermination of the structures of the everyday world" (Waugh 39). Tony Tanner (1982) in his book *Thomas Pynchon* also sets Pynchon's work "in that line of dazzlingly daring" (91) and rejecting "allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretation" (Todorov 33). Reading of the novels of Pynchon reminds the tales of horror of Edgar Allan Poe as the elements of fantasy are dominating in his plots. In the novels of Pynchon, multiplicity and unpredicted changes are signified by the metaphor chaos and entropy: "the pull towards entropy signifies the tendency of an organism to move towards stability, where the organic merges with the inorganic and where separate units fuse together" (Jackson 80).

Pynchon has his perception of fatality and doom of life and believes that such events are inevitable in the universe. He narrates these events through the metaphor of fantasy and illusion, Pynchon's protagonists show their strength pursuing quests to the point of delusion. They are given possibilities, but at the end of their journey they all drown in an abyss. The mystery of the universe remains a puzzle for them as the characters of Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* are doomed to wait endlessly for the arrival of Godot, which plays an important role in understanding Pynchon and his metaphysical arguments, his plea for individuality, creativity, and fantasy. Pynchon uses entropy as a metaphor to depict the gradual tendency of society to decline and fall apart.

### **Noise and Entropy**

The language of Pynchon's fiction is not commonplace but like the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter, he uses cliché, unconventional proverbs, and ambiguous images to articulate the nature of order and disorder and the disintegration of society. Each plot of Pynchon in his narratives introduces two very different characters struggling in two opposed environments. This juxtaposition is crucial in his novels

because it creates tension between two states: one relatively disordered and the other relatively ordered. From this tension, the plot derives its play with the concept of entropy. The First Law of Thermodynamics is that of the conservation of energy while the second law states that the entropy of a closed system will always tend to its maximum. Pynchon introduces many characters; in *Mason & Dixon*, he introduces a galaxy of four hundred characters, some of them only for a brief moment. In this sense, Pynchon's novel is overcrowded with names and concepts, and information and thus emerges as disorganized, chaotic as the overall entropy increases.

Dialogues in Pynchon's fiction are a source of an increasing disorder. The protagonists express their ideas in short and crisp sentences; the conversation is brief and effective. The characters are often uttering nonsensical things out of context, sometimes only sounds like "Aarrgghh," "Oaf!" and "Wha". The dialogues of the characters in the plot become senseless and distorted. In this sense, the reader has no choice than, in the words of the character: "Duke —\_Just listen, [... ]\_You'll catch on" (Pynchon 95). The characters are experiencing noise that conceals the meaning of individual utterances. In his novels, the elements of "Ambiguity", "Redundance", "Irrelevance" and "Leakage" dominate the plots. The dominant feature is noise. "Noise screws up your signal, makes for disorganization in the circuit" (91), it is a noise that functions as an entropic device, the dialogues become disordered and arbitrary. Taking this into account Michel Serres in his book *The Parasite* writes that: "Noise is part of communication, part of the house. But is it the house itself?" (Serres 12). Pynchon is using noise and the disruption of dialogue in his novel to convey messages. Pynchon is exploring the connection between noise and entropy. In his novel *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon uses the metaphor of historical decay into extremes and creates a narrative structured in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

### **Maxwell Demon in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon**

In the philosophy of physics James Clerk Maxwell is the father of the theory of "Maxwell's demon". This theory is based on the thought process linked with the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Maxwell's Demon is a thought experiment in



which two chambers filled with different temperature gas, there is a small door between the two chambers which controlled by an invisible demon, he controls all the activities by the means of opening and shutting the door quickly, as a result, fast molecules with higher temperature can pass through the door into the other chamber with lower temperature. Maxwell's demon reflects the determinism and random in the literary works, there is a loss of pattern and consistency in the novels of Thomas Pynchon; the characters struggle in chaos because the ending of his plots does not resolve any situation but are kept in a skewed relation so that meaning is not visible in the storyline. Pynchon relies on deep philosophical ideas beyond the understanding of the common readers. His heavy plots and ideas startle and confuse readers multiply as there is no direction and the language is ambiguous.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon follows the Poisson Distribution Law used in statics and gives the mathematical details to depict the randomness of the universe. The novel begins with the fear of the V-2 rocket. Lt. Slothrop investigates the sites of the bomb Pynchon gives the example of Poisson Distribution through the episode of V-bomb distribution. Pynchon comments thus: "Only a classical Poisson distribution, quietly neatly sifting among the square exactly as it should...growing to its predicted shape..." (56), the plot evokes feelings of fear, paranoia, and uncertainty afflicting the characters.

### **Symbolism, Imagery and Allegory**

The concept of entropy is one of the concepts from the Second Law of Thermodynamics that states that entropy only can increase and never decrease, therefore, all the things in the universe tend to be in disorder and sameness. Entropy as a system to demonstrate the way of even heat distribution in a system, as a result, is related to decay and disorder in the universe as well as human civilization. According to the thought experiment Maxwell's Demon, Imagin there are two chambers isolated from the rest of the universe, one chamber filled with low-speed air molecules is connected to the other chamber filled with high-speed air molecules by a small door, According to the Second Law, entropy will never decrease, the high-speed and low-

speed molecules would appear evenly in the two chambers. Just like John Nefastis explains to Oedipa Maas:

Since the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have to put any real work into the system. So you would be violating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion. (17)

Most Physicists in history only thought that Demon did or did not “put any real work into the system.” While Nefastis argues that:

Entropy is a figure of speech, then, a metaphor. It connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. The Machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally, but also objectively true. (20)

Pynchon published his novel *V.* in 1963 using the concept entropy in the plot. The language of the novel is ambiguous as the dialogues are loaded with unconventional images symbolizing chaos and disorder. Repeated readings of the novel take the readers nowhere and as David Seed observes: “I should confess that I have no idea what “V.” is about and I have read it twice.” Pynchon takes up the theme of the major anxieties of the Cold War era. Pynchon narrates those historical events that led the world to the verge of destruction. The critics of Pynchon observe that the word “V” refers to Pynchon’s gloomy apocalyptic vision of the universe. Like Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, Pynchon writes about the possibility of total extinction of human civilization. David Seed observes that “in the novel *V.* Pynchon expresses his pessimistic and nihilistic vision of life and the universe” (Seed 110). Benny Profane the main protagonist is a hopeless schlemiel, Benny Profane is a sailor discharged from the U.S. navy, to make his living, he joins Alligator Patrol whose duty is to kill the alligator in the sewers in New York, The plot of the novel is structured around the force of entropy as the world depicted in the novel is running down. The elements of ambiguity and uncertainty; fate and doom freely operate in the novel. The novel *V.* hinges on the theme that “humanity is on the verge of destruction” (Pynchon 79). There is a gradual process of deterioration and

dehumanization. A mysterious woman called V controls the plot. Pynchon has taken up the issue of the destiny of the twentieth-century human civilization narrating the events of the past and the possible occurrence of the events in the future as well. The quest of Herbert Stencil to find out a mysterious figure is full of romance and wonder. His search for the mysterious V is a tiresome and mystifying experience. Franz Pokler is not allowed to meet his daughter in *Gravity's Rainbow*, similarly, Herbert Stencil confronts the dilemma and struggle to find an unknown V. Seed observes that Pynchon is giving a collective image of all the inanimate and unknown things of the universe through the metaphor of V. As the novel progresses it is found that V is not simply a mysterious woman, but all the tragic and comic episodes are narrated through her search. Benny Profane is fed up and in desperation, he remarks: "Offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddamn thing" (491). He is a static character as Frederick Karl argues that Profane always "ends up in stagnation" (303). Profane has not settled in life and he learns nothing.

Thomas Pynchon's novels are full of the smell of death which carves the theme of nihilism, for example, he refers to Foppl's Siege Party of 1922 borrowing events from Edgar Allen Poe. Pynchon sets up a link between Prospero's ball and Foppl's announcement "There is more than enough food, good wine, music and ... beautiful women. To hell with them out there. Let them have their war. In here we shall hold Fasching" ("V." 248). Foppl's eternal Fasching and Prospero's masked ball share similar tragic ends, decay, and death. Kurt Mondaugen sees the party degenerate into "dream" (274), "phantasmagoria" (276), and death. Pynchon refers to Shakespeare's play *Tempest* alluding to Prospero's masked ball, the party of Foppl symbolizes decadence and nostalgia. The world of the novel *V* is closed governed by the forces of inertia, decadence, and death. Pynchon argues that there is no continuity, no logic to the history through the tongue of Fausto in the novel, decadence is an obvious movement toward death and the images in characters lead to alienation in the end, and the text makes clear that: "nostalgia is identified as age's worst side-effect" and it "increasingly difficult to live in the real present" (529). The vitality in the life of human beings is in a decreasing state with the characteristics of "retreat, decadence, and death" (32). The keywords "siege" and "decadence" in the novel

describe the gradual end of civilization; the environment of chaos and disorder in which all characters are trapped. Dudley Eigenvalue describes the nature of metaphysical entropy and the Whole Sick Crew as decadence. “This sort of arranging and rearranging was Decadence, but the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death” (317).

San Narciso, an imaginary place in Thomas Pynchon’s second novel *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), is “a city of true continuity and as having no Boundaries” (147), being a little different from the other novels of Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* has some sorts of linear narrative structure and with some more clear expression and information than others. In the plot, Oedipa Maas is a simple housewife who is lost in the hostile world and leaves behind her cozy but boring life with the purpose of the origins of a mysterious postal system Tristero. On the quest journey, Pynchon arranges plenty of individuals with weird and absurd acts, they live in the world of the 1960s characterized by anxiety. Oedipa lives in a “hyperbolically banalized world” (Hite 73). Pynchon presents Oedipa Maas as an ordinary individual full of anxiety in the modern world, Mucho Maas, Oedipa’s husband, is a thin-skinned used car dealer then turned radio DJ, his name Mucho with “much” inside hints that Mucho stands for the most common people in the modern world, and Mucho’s living and mental state is also the most ordinary individuals.

Paranoia is the main theme in *The Crying of Lot 49* under the influence of entropy and chaos. Paranoia is the definition that “a psychotic disorder characterized by delusions”. In the novel, Oedipa Maas had developed relationships with Pierce Inverarity, Oedipa’s former boyfriend, who pointed Oedipa to execute his estate. His will guides Oedipa to step the quest which is linked with the entropy in that it enhances the open end. Due to the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the pessimistic vision of life and the universe of Thomas Pynchon, her quest for meaning is destined to go nowhere, she finds the world and life are meaningless as she tries to find the meaning behind reality. Guided by the will of Pierce Inverarity, Oedipa in a peaceful life with her husband chooses to be a different Oedipa, Her new role as an executress is challenging for her. She is supposed to

learn intimately the books and the business, go through probate, collect debts, inventory the assets, get an appraisal of the estate, decide what to liquidate and what to hold on to, pay off claims, square away taxes, distribute legacies. (10)

An isolated system's entropy level could be deduced by using the concept of Maxwell's Demon in the 19th century which was created by James Clerk Maxwell. The system got more organized by classification of different particles of the system by an entity referred to as demon and was manifested to sort the particles. A key part of the plot and narrative is played by Maxwell's demon in the novel. Most notably, the last section in the current chapter of the text of *The Crying of Lot 49* explores the specific way. In the novels, the concepts of entropy are combined with the demon to demonstrate the cause of the uncertainty.

Oedipa's quest journey starts from the fictional city of San Narciso where Pierce built his business empire. On the long journey of an unfruitful quest, Pynchon composes a lot of characters suffering from paranoia to come in contact with Oedipa. Oedipa comes across a young musician Miles who is a member of a rock group named "The Paranoids" (15). Miles thought that Oedipa just wanted to find physical pleasure in him, but Oedipa soon regards Miles as a paranoiac. Their interaction creates distrust which is the main atmosphere of anxiety in the sixties. One of the characters, Metzger, a lawyer of Pierce Inverarity in the novel, helps Oedipa to deal with the financial affairs related to her ex-boyfriend, but at last, his help only brings Oedipa more anxieties. There is a detailed plot in the novel that shows the conspiracy, when Oedipa Maas has a date with Metzger, he mentions that he was a child actor. Then at once, at the very moment of his description, the channel on the TV just is playing a movie with Metzger inside. Oedipa opines it is beyond the coincidence, it is "...all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction *plot*" (18). The plot seems coincidental but reveals the conspiracy in the society which the novel intends to transfer to the authors. Oedipa again thinks of her dilemma at the end of the novel. As she says: "It was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like mobiles right and left ahead, thick, maybe endless" (148). She believes that all sifting and sorting is agonizing. The facts multiply and the

results are always of uncertainty which is one of the main characteristics in a society full of chaos. Oedipa doesn't find the solution and realizes that she serves as Tristero's Demon, which is why Tristero should exist.

The novel is full of ambiguity as the Oedipa-Metzer relationship remains mysterious and Metzger shows only vague hints, thus "things grow less and less clear" (26) for Oedipa. Pynchon expresses his fluid and uncertain vision of life and the universe through the role of Metzger. David Seed expresses that the "novel contains both doubt and uncertainty in virtually every piece of information given" (Seed 125). Shawn Smith in his book *Pynchon and History* notes that *The Crying of Lot 49* observes that the themes and tones are inherently religious (Smith 17). Tristero is represented by the W.A.S.T.E. symbol, a muted post horn, perhaps signifying that the mythical end will come unnoticed. Pynchon's fictional worlds are waiting in this sense for the ultimate rundown. In *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, Molly Hite argues that *The Crying of Lot 49* is "fundamentally a quest narrative" (89) and that "his novels do not provide the end as promised, but rather an image of it" (90). According to her, the absence of a clear end in *The Crying of Lot 49* creates a tension between meaning and its absence that will be prolonged. Although there is no definitive ending in *The Crying of Lot 49*, there are conclusions and closures everywhere. The truth in Pynchon's novels is entropic too, fluctuates between states of high and low order.

*The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* share a close link between entropy and chaos with an opening end. Much has been written about *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and its complexity. The novel's themes have been explored by many critics. Pynchon's surreal novel starts in London during the V-2 bomb attacks. The screaming of the rocket "has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now. It is too late" ("*Gravity's Rainbow*" 2). Those are the opening words of the lengthy novel. The sound of the V-bomb is transformative and metaphysical. The fact that the scream is heard only after the bomb has reached its end is used throughout the novel as a recurring theme. It is an apocalypse without warning, one that came before it was prophesied. It is a fatality, connected to the gravitational force, a phenomenon that gave the novel its name. Similar to gravity's rainbow, the parabolic mark left on

the sky by the ascending rocket, the novel follows its own parabola. It starts in war-time London to introduce Tyrone Slothrop, who is keeping a map tracking all his sexual adventures. It is this map that starts *Gravity's Rainbow's* exploration of the human condition, for the locations on Slothrop's map somehow match the locations where the bombs fall. This discovery propels Slothrop into the heart of Germany where he tries to find the mysterious Rocket 00000. The plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* unfolds the mysterious working of entropy.

The main outcome of the novel is a conflict between order and disorder and the working of the forces of entropy governing the events of the plot. The main attention is focused on the loss of center in the universe and the theme of disorganization. As Molly Hite argues that "Pynchon's narratives are set between their mythical beginning and a prophesied apocalypse" (132). It is argued that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a typical novel of Pynchon that uses disorganization and the concept of entropy and noise as an aesthetic tool to portray the state of human society. The meaning of life can be traced only through the images of disorder and chaos.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Slothrop takes the task of re-invention further to extremes. Towards the end of the novel, Slothrop is dissolved, due to entropic processes, he ceases to be a unified entity. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, he becomes a set of multiplicities, individualized parts. Molly Hite argues in *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* that it is a parody and comedy of form. But the fact is that *Gravity's Rainbow* is ultimately a serious novel. The plot of the novel gives a critique of the profanities of the past, present, and future, an exploration of power and a tragedy of the human condition. Similar to the Rocket 00000 it posits itself as an exclamation mark over humanity, conveying that the inevitable end could come sooner than expected. It is here where the notion of entropy crystallizes. Through entropy, Pynchon conveys his compassion for the marginalized and oppressed.

## **Paranoia**

In all Pynchon's novels, the impact of entropy and the Chaos Theory is explored as all his characters suffer from paranoia and the absurdity of life. Their

quest for life leads to their disintegration and dissolution of self. The absurd quest itself is traced extensively in Thomas Pynchon's novels, the occurrence of paranoia and the presence of disorder in the fiction of Thomas Pynchon. Both paranoia and chaos essentially concern the search for meaning in a world that is otherwise unbearable.

In the novels, Pynchon divides the people in the fictional world into the Elect and the Preterite, the former refers to the people chosen for salvation, and the latter are those passed over and tacitly chosen to damnation, which instills the conviction that the forces unseen strive to realize the individual's predetermined damnation, and therefore paranoia "substitutes for the divine plan a demonic one" (Sanders 178). Paranoia desires connections leading to a controlling force, ultimately, to a global conspiracy. In the novels of Pynchon, paranoia can be viewed as the best way to suit the world which consists of conspiracy, and the world is under the control of some ambitious people with the ability of omniscience and omnipotence, also they manipulate history, through the novels of Thomas Pynchon, we can detect the hint of their manipulation from different angles.

The notion of conspiracy and the consequent anxiety is engrained within 60s America, an atmosphere that Pynchon explores. In lieu of the series of assassinations of the Kennedys, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, the American common people began to have a doubt that all of this is a part of a conspiracy. This suspicion seems to be rooted in the inability of the public and Pynchon's characters to understand society, resulting in a continuous search for a motive or a connection between events that unravel them all. Molly Hite argues that "Pynchon's fiction is driven by the trope of the absent center, in the form of a central insight illuminating a unitary idea of order" (qtd. Simons 211). Therefore, "both Pynchon's key characters and his readers become involved in unfulfilled searches for the underlying logic of the world of the novel or searches for... a total theory" (Simons 211), stemming from the "the subjective difficulty of representing the power of global capitalism" (211). For Pynchon's characters, the existence of a global conspiracy depends more on the inability to understand the magnitude of global capitalist society, fundamentally lacking a central guiding entity.



Pynchon's characters, therefore, exist in paranoid reality. However, the opposite may also be true, termed by Pynchon as anti-paranoia: "if there is something comforting-religious, if you want, about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (qtd. Bersani 103). Either everything is related or nothing is, which Brian McHale explains as: "paranoia and anti-paranoia, the world as over-interpretable and as uninterpretable: these are the poles between which Pynchon's characters, plots, represented world, and narrative voice oscillate..." (223). Due to the characters' inability to understand the driving force within their society, they continuously oscillate between two, perhaps equally absurd, conclusions on reality. Anti-paranoia is deemed more terrifying than paranoia because malign reason is preferred by Pynchon's characters to a lack of reason. "Either they have put him here for a reason, Slothrop speculates during 'the anti-paranoid part of his cycle,' 'or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that reason'" (qtd. Bersani 103). The reason is, therefore, necessary to cope with reality, even if only in the guise of "hidden orders behind the visible" (qtd. Bersani 103). Therefore, paranoia is the source of meaning and the "desired structure of thought" (qtd. Bersani 103). Pynchon's characters strive to make sense of the world, yet are unable to do so. Moreover, Pynchon suggests that paranoia is desirable because it at least grants the presence of meaning in life. Both states of seeming absurd. Thomas Nagel writes that "the sense that life as a whole is absurd arises when we perceive, perhaps dimly, an inflated pretension or aspiration which is inseparable from the continuation of human life and which makes its absurdity inescapable, short of escape from life itself" (718). It is the inherent lack of meaning that is absurd and unbearable for Pynchon's characters. Absurd is defined as the characteristics of the universe and the reality in which are chaotic and purposeless, mankind attempts to make sense of the meaning, but all is in vain. The desire for reason is similar to Pynchon's paranoia. Moreover, Nagel writes that "if there is a philosophical sense of absurdity, however, it must arise from the perception of something universal-some respect in which pretension and reality inevitably clash for us all" (718). Anti-paranoia shares similar doubt, wherein a significant connection becomes arbitrary. However, Slothrop chooses paranoia and so does Absurdism advocate not succumbing to the futility of the individual. Instead, the

individual applies meaning, even if only as a pretense to make the situation of life bearable. Therefore, paranoia and Absurdism concern the means with which to cope in an otherwise unbearable world, if only essentially by means of pretension.

Paranoia is a kind of mind that is the main characteristic of the protagonist in the novels, the reason why so many characters suffer from paranoia lies that a disordered mind matches the disorder world. Just as “the need for an acceptance of life which then can be a way out of an otherwise hopeless maze” (536). Similar to Pynchon’s writing, paranoia implies the disorientation of the characters, and it seems to be Kafka’s hope that paranoia will bring about acceptance which turns the world from a senseless maze into a world that simply is. Nagel, too, argues that the absurd confrontation “need not be a matter for agony unless we make it so” (727). This confrontation is actuated “by the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary or open to doubt... These two inescapable viewpoints collide in us, and that is what makes life absurd” (Nagel 718-719). Paranoia arises from this undermining of the seriousness in which man undertakes life and, more importantly, is regarded as the only option when confronted with disorder reality. Therefore, paranoia within Pynchon’s writing is necessary to accept the human condition, as through mental disorder man’s intolerable stress and deflation can be eased.

### **The Absurd Quest**

Pynchon has a special liking for the “Quest” model and applies the ancient literary motif and narrative paradigm to varying degrees and angles in all of his works, which may become the master key to his interpretation. As the famous writer W.H. Auden (1961) said: “To look for a lost collar button is not a true quest: to go in quest means to look for something of which one has, as yet, no experience; one can imagine what it will be like but whether one’s picture is true or false will be known only when one has found it” (40). And why the search has become the oldest, most profound, and most popular literary motif and narrative paradigm of Pynchon? The reason lies in that it transforms the subjective individual experience of man into a symbolic representation of historical significance. Pynchon’s first novel *V.* features

two protagonists Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane from two parallel and occasionally intersecting development clues. In particular, Stencil's search for the secret and meaning represented by the V code is the most symbolic. *The Crying of Lot 49* published in 1966 tells the story of California middle-class housewife Oedipa Maas, who pursued the underground postal system WASTE in the process of investigating Pierce's legacy. Although her quest was limited to northern and southern California, Pynchon pointed out that the heritage she was investigating turned out to be America. The magnum opus *The Gravity's Rainbow* published in 1973 has been recognized as a metaphorical labyrinth of *Ulysses*. Among them, U.S. military officer Tyrone Slothrop's investigation of the German V2 rocket base and the interpretation of its landing plan again inherited Pynchon's narrative model of the quest. In 1997, *Mason and Dixon*, which became a sensation in the literary world again, still relentlessly followed the narrative strategy of the legendary expedition and used 18th century English to reproduce the British astronomer Charles Mason and the land surveyor Jeremiah Dixon's exploration story. In the novel, the New World is regarded as a mysterious treasure house of various dreams. Those are the shape and direction of the land, the flow of the river, the display of miracles, all of which are texts-need to be understood, mastered, and read. And memory, when Mason and Dixon made these explorations and surveys on the earth, they also looked forward to the day when they could have the same understanding and grasp of the sky.

All the major novels of Pynchon are quest novels as the characters are engaged in exploring the cause of the mystery of life and the universe in which they live and struggle to survive. Thomas Pynchon came under the influence of Fredric Jameson and Henry Adams. He was a mathematics wizard and beloved in the law of thermodynamics and the Theory of Chaos operating in the universe. In all his major novels the characters suffer from paranoia in their struggle to look for a connection in the world. Their struggles of life end in despair as absurdum is a consequence of the futile search for meaning in a meaningless world. Similar to anti-paranoia, Absurdism expresses the disconnection between the individual's relation to the world and arbitrariness in action. As a consequence of this awareness, paranoia and absurdism share the theme of a quest for knowledge and being. This quest is undertaken even if

only as a pretense to distract the individual from succumbing to the realization that truly no forces are at work. Elaine B. Safer writes that Thomas Pynchon's novels:

Directs attention, with sharp-edged humor, to people's quest for meaning and fulfillment in the twentieth century, a time when many have become upset by the repeated failure of their dreams and aspirations. This continued yearning and frustration helps set up an absurd perspective, absurd by Camus' definition, which focuses on a "divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, [the] nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together." (Safer 107).

The continued yearning and frustration are central to the absurd quest which leads to their mental disorder in the chaotic universe. Camus (1955) writes in the *Myth of Sisyphus* that the "mind's deepest desire is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity" (17). Within Absurdism, the individual seeks knowledge in order to understand and Camus continues, "Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal" (17). The inhumanity of the world and its consequent incomprehensibility is that which causes frustration within the absurd. Moreover, Camus states, "the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought" (19). This echoes Pynchon's paranoia, wherein events in the world are reduced to humanized intent because that is understandable within the structures of capitalist society. The absurd quest consists of a journey in which epistemological and ontological questioning is integral. According to Brian McHale, epistemological and ontological questioning is central to Pynchon's fiction, due to "an increasing perception that the world and reality are unstable and therefore there is no point in questing for reliable knowledge" (McHale 123). Pynchon's characters are nearly always wound up in a quest to uncover or to discover, but of which the goal degrades into abstraction and only questions of being remain. Safer states that "in Pynchon's earlier novels, the main characters, and the reader as well, search for life's meaning and hope. Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Stencil in *V* quest for some form of order and fulfillment in the face of absurdity" (107). The absurd quest is manifested within

Herbert Stencil in *V.* Herein, Stencil quests after V., an elusive entity he comes across in his father's secret intelligence papers, believing V. to be connected to global conflict. Herbert's father, Sidney, notes that "there is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she" (Hausdorff 259). In the style of the absurd quest, Pynchon's "single central image is abstract, the letter V which subsumes multiple meanings... and undergoes a number of transformations in the course of the narrative" (259). In the end, perhaps the most viable explanation for V.'s elusiveness is that V. is simply non-existent. Integral to the quest is the problem of interpretation. Deborah Madsen in *The Postmodern Allegories of Pynchon* opines that "Pynchon exploits the idea that 'things ought to add up to' such an ordinary signified in order to motivate the quest for unity and meaning amidst chaos. What Pynchon exploits is the cultural determination of the desire for complete certainty in all things" (Madsen 20). The quest for unity and meaning requires interpretation to find it: all connections must add up to some form of unified truth.

The absurd quest may then be nothing more than the search for order within disorder. As Cowart writes "Pynchon ultimately reveals nothing more than the entropic acceleration of disorder. No pattern palliates our plight" (7). Yet, despite the apparent futility, the characters persist in their quest. It is in this that the absurdity of the quest may be recognized. The quest is futile: Herbert will never find V. as a tangible and satisfying resolution to his searching. However, Hausdorff writes that though "meaningless the search may be, it is self-propelling, providing its own rationale. Most terrifying is the possibility that he might discover V in that event, the search and the activity would end, and he would be forced to lapse into inertness" (263). Echoed here is Camus and his myth of Sisyphus, wherein Sisyphus persists in lifting the rock up the mountain as that task gives temporary his purpose. According to Hausdorff, it is this sense of purpose that is important, whether in terms of survival or the search for individual meaning. This is "the legitimate alternative to the 'inertness' of modern man in a mechanized world" (268). The act of questing in itself grants meaning and purpose to life.

Therefore, the absurd quest is also a personal undertaking, wherein Pynchon describes numerous individuals who, in the face of a meaningless society, embark

upon a purpose of their own. “God knows, how many Stencils have chased V. about the world” (Hausdorff 266). However, Pynchon also suggests that this quest is not a viable solution, as it is “no more and no less a depersonalized obsession than all the others” (266). Obsession still does not grant Pynchon’s characters any real purpose in life. When the quest is over, the world will again become meaningless. The notion of pretense, as discussed earlier in paranoia and Absurdism, is therefore present within the nature of the absurd quest. Pynchon suggests that the quest is a privilege, the world doesn’t care about it. The opposite reality would be unbearable, and indeed Hausdorff writes “viable delusion thus becomes a survival tactic in a world running out of alternatives” (268). The absurd quest, therefore, involves the futile desire for unity and order, and yet this personal undertaking becomes the only viable alternative, or delusion, to a meaningless world.

Pynchon’s writing tends to be categorized as Black Humour, a movement in which “the novels and stories written by such authors as Pynchon, John Barth, Joseph Heller, Bruce Jay Friedman, and Gilbert Sorrentino, among others, tended to present events that were grim and terrifying but to deal with them in a wildly humorous manner” (Kellman 28). The more tragic and confrontational realities of the world are coupled with humor and Jerome Klinkowitz explains that black humor writing arose as “an accommodation by laughter to the world’s insanity and a deliberate refusal to find any new forms in fiction appropriate to the strange new worlds they described” (271). Black humor writing explores the inherent absurdity of man’s place in the world, thereby depicting its senselessness and the disorientation caused for its characters. The absurd, therefore, is prevalent within black humor and indeed O’Neil writes, “the absurd finally, insofar as it is a comic rather than a tragic mode, is always an expression of black humor, and even in its tragic emphasis remains a fertile source of latent entropic humor. All the forms of black humor discussed so far, in short, tend ultimately towards the absurd...” (160).

## **Antagonism**

Antagonism is immersed in the novels of Thomas Pynchon. From the perspective of religious theology, the Elect are people who are chosen by God and can

be saved at Armageddon. The Preterite are, of course, people who are not chosen by God and ignored by God. In terms of social strata, the Elect are the social elites and successful people. The representatives in the novels are often political brokers, economic plutocrats, and even technocrats. They manipulate people's thinking and actions by controlling course power. The Preterite are those lower-level "untouchables" who are controlled, ignored, ridiculed, or even abandoned.

In Pynchon's novels, the world is full of metaphors and hints, full of conspiracy, threats and crimes are always more than commitment and redemption. This powerful, intangible, and impenetrable control method represented by the Elect is a kind of conspiracy. It permeates all aspects of social life, inhibits people's original thinking, suppresses people's natural nature, and tightly confines people in the cage.

Pynchon has always favored the Preterite, although they are ordinary or even humble, they are brave, dignified, and daring to resist the ruthless system, order, and elite groups. They are an unyielding power of confrontation. Pynchon imagined that in 1998, forty years later, IBM would dominate the world. In the new world order, artists will become valueless and positionless untouchables, just like the Whole Sick Crew in *V.* and the "WASTE" underground postal system in the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, but in the eyes of Pynchon, they are the hope of the future world. The last chapter of his *Gravity's Rainbow* is called "The Counterforce".

### **Entropy and Chaos Confronted with Characters**

All the characters in the novels of Thomas Pynchon are confronted with the impact exerted by entropy and chaos in the universe. Take Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* as an example, he is constantly changing his identity in the novel. Slothrop has multiple identities; he is the war-time Casanova, he emerges as a spy, the mythical Rocketman, and many other personas that he adopts to get rid of the mysterious *They*. All these changes eventually lead to a "gradual disintegration of Slothrop" (140). He starts dissolving until towards the end of the novel he loses his identity, as Molly Hite writes "he is no longer a unified character" (Hite 113). He becomes a set of individualities. Through changes of appearance, Slothrop loses *control* over his self. Due to gravitational forces, he has torn apart until he can no

longer be comprehended even by his friend. Only a few people can see Slothrop anymore.

The novel is full of events of various sub-narratives and narrative voices. Slothrop's disintegration forms the core of the novel. Smith argues that "Slothrop disintegrates and this is a major political event after the war. Slothrop falls into an order to be able to manipulate him" (Smith 38). Hite suggests that the novel reflects the path of Slothrop's breakdown and fragmentation. The presence of entropy is visible throughout the text. Hite, Smith, and House argue that Pynchon uses "Slothrop's disintegration to depict the pervasive vogue of entropy. Deleuze and Guattari observe that disintegration is an evolution into such a body without organs. Slothrop is still present at the end of the novel and makes occasional appearances. Slothrop lives without the body, his presence is non-linear and decentralized, he achieved his equilibrium through paranoia, and the level of entropy of his self is at its maximum. *Gravity's Rainbow* follows an identical path as Slothrop's deconstruction. Towards its end, it becomes a body without organs of its own. In the last part of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the increase of ellipses reaches its maximum. The entropy of the text dissolves the structure into a more natural, decentralized one.

### **Interconnected Systems**

Intertextuality is one of Pynchon's trademarks, it is present through all of his novels. Firstly, *Gravity's Rainbow* is taken as an example, the level of intertextuality in the novel reaches a whole new level, whether it is the historic headlines used in the novel or references to scientific concepts, used as an authentication function. As Molly Hite argues that "Pynchon's novels are obsessed with connections" (32). Hite further explains that Pynchon's "novels depend on the premise of centerlessness" (33). It is through this centerlessness, through the deconstructed narrative, that the novel connects and creates meaning. *Gravity's Rainbow* has no traditional structure; there is a definitive center. Hite remarks that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a novel of interconnectedness. Minor narratives in the novel gain significance when put into context. Thus, the Hiroshima bombing is mentioned only in the form of a newspaper



headline. It gains significance when connected with Slothrop's earlier encounter with the Japanese man Morituri, who remembers his home city of Hiroshima:

I want to see the war over in the Pacific so that I can go home. Since you ask. It's the season of the plum rains now, the Baiu when all the plums are ripening. I want only to be with Michiko and our girls, and once I'm there, never to leave Hiroshima again. I think you'd like it there. It's a city on Honshu, on the Inland Sea, very pretty, a perfect size, big enough for city excitement, small enough for the serenity a man needs. (905)

The horror of war is thus fully exposed in the novel by non-linear foreshadowing or by stories from the past. Slothrop's response to ascending V-2 bombs, the mysterious erections that start his whole journey towards self-annihilation, are revealed to be reflexes resulting from experiments conducted on baby Slothrop. He reacts to Impolex G, a mysterious plastic that plays a vital role in the construction of Rocket 00000.

In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon also applies plenty of scientific methods and the readers encounter the woods and the hills; storms and thunderstorms in the text *Mason & Dixon*, Intertextuality makes the novel obscure, the plot so boring and ambiguous, and the novel is packed with errors of spellings and punctuation and uncommon words and the plot of the novel is a journey in the wilderness of America.

It is claimed by the critics that the novel *Mason & Dixon* is a comment on the movement of Enlightenment. Brooke Horvath observes that *Mason & Dixon* gives an insight into the mind and sensibility of Pynchon. The very beginning of the novel gives "an illusion of Depth into which for years children have gazed as into the illustrated Pages of Books" ("*Mason & Dixon*" 5). Reverend Wicks narrates the story of Mason and Dixon who spent with his sister's family in Philadelphia in the winter of 1786. He could stay there with the condition that he would entertain the children. As the narrator of the novel, Cherrycoke tells the readers and his sister's children about Mason and Dixon and their romantic and enchanting stories in Cape Town, South Africa. The children ask him many questions relating to truth, doubt, morality, and historiography. Cherrycoke thus mirrors the vision of Pynchon portraying a

galaxy of characters. Pynchon integrates American history into the novel's narration by application of anticipation and memory. Pynchon articulates his longing for a better future for the Americans condemning the folly of his ancestors. Through the depiction of humanity tragedy, such as imperial expansionism, war, slavery, colonization, Pynchon depicts a kind of anti-saga, a comedy of human misconduct, therefore, there are a great variety of historical events in *Mason & Dixon*. However, it is not a heroic account of national development and progress. Thomas Pynchon gives a comment upon the present day based on the historical conditions of the American past. In the story of Mason and Dixon, Pynchon arranges for the Reverend Wick's Cherrycoke to tell their line across America during the Advent season of 1786. He exposes the brutal history and "bare mortal World" (345). Mason and Dixon discuss astronomy, geometry, surveying, and so many branches of knowledge. Mason and Dixon exhibit the tendencies of the paranoid, doubtful, hopeful, and apocalyptic. Mason, standing for the science in the novel, believes that "a cryptick Message" (59) is hinted through the planets' movements in the universe. His conviction is reported thus: "They who control the Microscopick control the world" (663). Mason emerges as a believer in scientific methods that seem "paranoid":

Suppose a secret force of Jesuits, receives each Day a summary of Observations made at Greenwich and transcalculates it according to a system known to the Kabbalists of the Second Century as *Gematria*, whereby Messages may be extracted from lines of Text sacred and otherwise. (479)

When talking to Dixon, Mason says that "when 'tis all done I shall only return to Sapperton, no wiser, and not know if any of this 'happen'd,' or if I merely dream'd it" ("*Mason & Dixon*" 610), his remarks is just like an echo to Benny Profane's "offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddamn thing" ("V." 491). Pynchon struggles to find a form in a formless world as he remarked in *Gravity's Rainbow* that "We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky" (268). Mason and Dixon are on a journey in a wilderness: "There is writing on some of the Structures, but Mason cannot read it. Does not yet know it is writing. Perhaps when Night has fallen, he will be able to look up, to question the Sky" (771).

Pynchon narrates the fantastic dream of Mason imitating Edgar Allan Poe and employing the elements of dream and fantasy. Mason and Dixon are the interpreters of America. Mason and Dixon give their own interpretation of the past, present, and future echoing the theory of entropy. There are two important scenes describing the forces of entropy; Dixon's coming across some Kabbalists who tells him that America "was ever a secret Body of Knowledge — meant to be studied with the same dedication as the Hebrew Kabbala would demand" and "Forms of the Land, the flow of water, and the occurrence of what used to be called Miracles, all are Text to be attended to, manipulated, read, and remembered" (487). Mason and Dixon struggle to find order in chaos and apply various methods to decode the center. Their main attempt is to overcome the darkness engulfing them to shed sunshine into the depressing darkness and to demystify the New World. Pynchon clearly treats America as a text in *Mason & Dixon* marked by "a great disorderly Tangle of Lines" (349). The fragmentation within *Mason & Dixon*'s America symbolizes the dominating role of entropy in the plot of the novel. The plot is packed with many conflicts: "Religious bodies here cannot be distinguished from Political Factions. These are Quaker, Anglican, Presbyterian, German Pietist" (293).

Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* is set in 2001 focusing on the horrifying events of 9/11 in America. Pynchon's characters in this novel function as nodes of information distribution during the terror attacks. They review the historical events from a fresh perspective highlighting the domination of entropy and the helplessness of man. *Bleeding Edge* presents Maxine who is like Oedipa of *The Crying of Lot 49* in her to explore and investigate business fraud. Maxine steps on his quest journey and unfolds the worldwide conspiracy by the means of the internet and power in the governments and the terrorists. Like Oedipa she is witty and cunning and daring. She continues her investigation by following clues and footage. Maxine realizes that she is in the grip of the forces of entropy as she is trapped in an endless "junkyard," a "dump, with structure" ("*Bleeding Edge*" 226). In her struggle to investigate the business fraud she is confronted with the presence of chaos. Pynchon believes that all Americans are in the grip of entropy and the world is heading towards total disorder. The metaphor of entropy plays a central role in Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*. The image of the total

disorder is presented through the terror attacks of 9/11 in a new style by Pynchon. Pynchon gives the cosmic view of the terror and refers to the demolition of the Twin Buddha statues by Al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan. Just like Maxine's friend says: "Twin Towers, Twin Buddha's: both religious... believing in the Invisible Hand of the market that runs everything" (338).

## Chapter Two

### The Images of Death and Stagnation in *V*

Due to his special working experience and educational background as an engineering major, Thomas Pynchon appeared on the literary scene in the 1960s starting a new movement in American fiction breaking completely from the traditional realistic fiction of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Joseph Heller who celebrated the glories of war. He had come under the influence of Vladimir Nabokov who was his Professor at Cornell University from where he graduated. In view of Thomas Pynchon's attitude to the development of science and technology, he belongs to an age full of creation and aesthetic coherence.

Pynchon was quite aware of Nazi totalitarianism, the threat of total destruction of the atomic bomb, and the gradual devastation of the natural environment couldn't be optimistic. He rejected the plot, character, structure, style, and other elements that are used to divide literature in the traditional methods. He wrote novels to depict the meaningless of existence, underlying void and chaos, and entropy operating in the universe. Pynchon's novels are a fine juxtaposition of elements of science fiction, fantasy, satire, myth, modern physics, and advanced mathematics. His complex novels feature enormous casts of strange characters whose interrelated misadventures and parodies signify the chaos and indeterminacy of modern civilization. Tony Tanner observes that "the fiction of Thomas Pynchon is a reaction against the modernist literature represented by Eliot, Joyce, Yeats, and Proust" (6). Thomas Pynchon's novels are typical works for scholars to analyze the characteristics of postmodernism.

Thomas Pynchon was well acquainted with the New Criticism of which the leading critics were John Crowe Ransom, Allan Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and R.P. Blackmur. Pynchon was not satisfied with the cult of modernism as he was in search of a medium that could depict the complex malaise of contemporary American society. Andreas Huyssen in his book *After the Great Divide, Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1966) observes thus: "Postmodernism was never a rejection of modernism per se, but rather a revolt against that version of modernism which had been domesticated in the 1950s" (190). The novel *V*. is the product of its time

chronicling the existential anxieties of the people living in the Cold War era. Pynchon refers to those historical events in this novel that led the world to the verge of a disaster affecting the whole of human beings. David Seed comments thus: “The possibility of Armageddon which hovers constantly in the background of *V*...remains firmly in that background” (Seed 110). The force of entropy envelops all characters in the novel, which leads the world and life of characters are gradually descending and stepping towards the downhill. With the increase of entropy, all sides of life are invaded by inanimate factors, humans struggling in the less active world are still not aware of less space for themselves. David Seed observes that Pynchon is quite ambiguous in his approach of depicting entropic decay as he emphasizes the process of decay “both suggesting and contradicting it” (Seed 115). The human race is heading towards total annihilation as the process of entropic decay has started. The mystery around *V* and different incarnations can be constructed as the inanimate image. Stencil’s specialized view of history is an expression of insidious activity.

### **Stagnant Symbol of V**

Tony Tanner expressed his dissatisfaction at the storyline of *V*. thus: “I should confess that I have no idea what *V*. is about, and I have read it twice” (123). The novel is conspicuous for ambiguity, multiplicity and meta-fiction, and nonlinear development of the storyline. The main problem with Pynchon is his unconventional and ambiguous style of missing traditional names for animate beings with names of chemical elements or other nonhuman objects. The first million dollars question is who is *V*? The symbol “*V*” has many connotations; it can also mean victory; to two vector lines colliding to place vessels on a white, blank page, *V* also refers to Vheissu, a region that symbolizes gaudy glamour dressing a void. *V* evokes the names of Venus and the Virgin. She is the female principle of the universe and is all women, who can be both feminine and masculine. *V* also represents the meeting of Eros and Thanatos occurring as pairs of sexual partners. Significantly, *V* occurs in many concrete situations in real characters, personas, and places. She is Beatrice; she is a woman of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The contrast is obvious in a world that is controlled by machines. *V* is also Rachel Owlglass, a rich girl who lost her virginity.

V has numerous names; she is secretary, receptionist, nurse, mistress of Shale Schoemaker, M.D who is a plastic surgeon who tattooed thousands of freckles.

The word V can be interpreted in infinite ways; it can mean victory, V may refer to a V-8 engine, velocity, V-1, the destructive bomb used by the Germans during War. V may refer to Veronica, Vesuvius, the rat, Venezuela, Volcano, and Valetta, and the V with multiple signified suggests that V is more than one certain thing, more than the name of a woman. Stencil pursues V and in this process of investigation, he is able to look at the historical events where the tragic and comic elements are blended. Stencil is able to explore the reality of the imminent decay of mankind, just like Profane ends “up in stagnation” (303).

Thomas Pynchon wrote his first novel *V* following the theories of Fredric Jameson and the novel consists of some short novels held together by hinges. Seven of 17 chapters are revolved around the quest for an unknown woman named V. The word V is very ambiguous and suggests so many things in the novel. Pynchon chronicles many myths, stories, histories, and scientific facts to achieve meta-fiction. The letter V serves as an indeterminate signifier in the narrative, which can represent various things, while the woman V represents a transcendental image. The word V may also stand for Virgin with Biblical reference and the two characters are Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil. The storyline covers two important phases of the novels; the present tense, the period from 1953 to 1956, and the second period focuses upon Victoria Wren belonging to the period of 1942. The first story follows the track of Benny’s meanderings from Norfolk to New York and finally to Malta. In the novel, Benny Profane is resigned from the army, is an ex-Navy man; an elusive schlemiel whose main activity is to move up and down the east coast. His Yo-Yo is a central image in the novel *V* and the title of the novel is linked with the search of V. The yo-yo is referenced more than twenty times in the plot and it acts as a symbol of Profane’s state of mind who is helpless without a goal in his life, he just meanders like a human yo-yo. Yo-yo is a symbol of uncertainty, in Profane’s life, each person he met can be an attractor resulting in a different change in his life which leads to uncertainty. Pynchon refers to Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus who says: “History is a

nightmare from which I am trying to wake” (34). For Pynchon, history is like a doll of the power and bounces up and down, in that way the continuity is denied.

### **Juxtaposition of Conflicts**

Benny Profane is in a quest with no definite direction and makes no effort to keep away from the friends from his old Navy destroyer *The Scaffold*. He is an unsettled man like a yo-yo with no particular ambition in his life. He found a job in New York City’s Street Department to kill the alligators in the sewers. In the course of the narrative, Pynchon also refers to the various violent episodes of the World Wars. Hence the episodes of the plot of the novel are connected with modern America’s wild parties sinking into chaos and exhaustion. The main theme of the novel is the operation of entropy and chaos found at every level. Thomas Pynchon depicts many scenes revealing the decline at different levels and some new aspects of decline, and some situations are further into chaos or close to death. Different types of death scenes are portrayed range from garbage dumps in the modern world to the desolation of the moon in actual deserts. Pynchon’s main concern in this novel is to search out a principle of order in the modern world. There are usually two different characters to balance two opposite forces developing in his novel. Benny Profane lives in New York in the 1950s which is a part of the disordered world. He is aimless and directionless as his yo-yoing reflects his random activities and riding the subway shuttle between Grand Central Station and Times endlessly. More than half of the novel is devoted to searching for V herself. Stencil’s search is devoted to various times and various places and it is a challenging job for Pynchon to bring order and keeping the events in order. Young Herbert Stencil describes his chaotic information as “impersonations and dreams”. Interestingly, Stencil has vowed never to give up and continue his journey of a search expedition. Stencil is not discouraged by the challenges as he vows never to give up. He says: “To sustain it he had to hunt V; but if he should find her where else would there be to go back into self-consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search” (55). From which we can observe the inner world of the protagonist, there is a juxtaposition of conflicts in Profane’s mind, on one side, he is eager to figure out what V is, on the other side, he is in panic when picturing the end of the search, he is gripped in the tension of chaotic



reality and disorderly mind, he just loses himself on the journey of the quest, and the journey becomes the way to escape from the reality.

Pynchon paints the world full of greed, conspiracy, intolerance, and entropy which is both human-engineered and cosmically imposed. Pynchon's *V.* is using names and images to chase the meaning of life itself including death. The search is optimistic, a quest in a sense for the Holy Grail in modern terms with the elusive V as the goal. McClintic Sphere is a jazz musician and he utters the famous catchy phrase: "Keep cool, but care" ("V." 236), this is also the central theme of novels by Thomas Pynchon as a progenitor of postmodernist irony. Thomas Pynchon is an expert to show us the real historical event in postmodernism perspectives through the novel. McClintic Sphere utters this catchy phrase when the famous civil rights movement of 1956 is in full swing and Pynchon refers to the famous one-year-long bus boycott of Montgomery. His lover Paola is a prostitute and her husband is an American sailor, she has planned to go back to Malta when she knows the confessions of her father. McClintic Sphere knows her profile and tells Paola he has been "blowing a silly line all this time and he must keep cool, but care because nobody is going to step down from heaven and square away....Alabama, or South Africa or us in Russia" (393).

Sidney Stencil, Herbert Stencil's father, is a British official, he was murdered "under unknown circumstances in 1919 while investigating the June disturbances in Malta" (18), in view of his mysterious death, his son Stencil's existence is only for the quest for mysterious V, according to Thomas Pynchon's writing style, the quest is without end and resolution, just leads the protagonist nowhere and to loss of self. The most essential part of the novel *V.* is the dilemmas faced by Stencil and there is no answer to the question he raises in the novel. The real identity of V remains elusive; the details provided by Stencil are flimsy and fictional and the truth about V remains elusive. James Joyce describes the nature of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as his sin giving clue after clue, rumor after rumor and the search remains fruitless. Similarly, in the V section, Pynchon says that: "Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations" (61). All eight characters are personae for Stencil as the dentist Eigenvalue comments on his story: "In a world such as you inhabit, Mr. Stencil, any cluster of phenomena can be a conspiracy" (154). The story

of the antics of V and her love affair with Melaine is narrated, but this story further adds to the confusion. Pynchon like Beckett depicts the absurdity of life thus: “Nothing at all is happening here.” Like Jerry of Edward Albee’s one-act play *The Zoo Story*, Stencil meets Benny Profane on a Central Park expressing his alienation and anguish:

“How quiet,” said Stencil.

“Quiet. It’s like the shuttle at 5 P.M.”

“No. Nothing at all is happening in here”

“So what year is it”

“It is 1913,” said Stencil.

“Why not,” said Profane. (392)

Pynchon has created suspense about the identity of V; she may be a woman or maybe a place or could be neither. At one place Pynchon calls it “a remarkably scattered concept” and in another part, he says: “it is the ultimate Plot Which Has No Name”, the readers only are trapped in the ambiguity of language. Pynchon applies scattered individual identity to transfer the scattered concept and scattered image of the world which reflects the result of entropy and chaos. The plot is full of puzzles as the readers wonder where the pieces fit. Pynchon refers to the “lull between the collapse of the dot-com and the terrible events of September 11” with a view to intensify the thematic significance of the theme of “nothingness” Tony Tanner in his book *City of Words* (1971) points out that Pynchon is indebted to Henry Adams propounding his theory of history:

Adams wanted a theory which would act as a trail in the thickest forest of history....A philosophy, a theory of history, a law of thermodynamics-any one of these may be a trail and their significance may reside not so much in their verifiable applicability as in the human compulsion to formulate them. (153)

Pynchon's theory of history is central to the plot of *V*. Pynchon illustrates that it is impossible to see history as an empiric, as cause and effect, as Stencil thinks and tries to do. The approach of Stencil is misleading as no answers are available. His approach only intensifies confusion. Stencil views history as inanimate facts and he arranges these facts into a pattern. He sees history as linear and logical. A minor character Eigenvalue sees most clearly: "Perhaps history this century ...is rippled with gathers in its fabric such that if we are situated, as Stencil seemed to, it's impossible to determine warp, woof or pattern, Zeitsuss, a superintendent of the New York sewer to Stencil an apocryphal rat named Veronica" (133). All the characters in *V* have their history. Doctor Stencil finds no significance in anything: "no situation had any objective reality" Profane depicts the dilemma at the center of the novel; he explores the underlying pattern, order of the world. Stencil is bewildered to know that the entire course of history consists of a series of accidents.

### **Nihilism of V**

Human beings live like Profane in a universe of brute, meaningless existence. Pynchon depicts a world of fragmentation and uncertainty through mythic allusions. Stencil observes contemporary history with the main characteristics of uselessness and anarchy. In describing Stencil's quest for V, Pynchon describes Stencil's quest for V referring to "the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*" (61) thus referring to the mythical search for an order of the older generation. The protagonist Stencil's obsession is ambiguous and the entire story of *V*. is just a fabrication of his inventive mind. He doesn't even seem eager to connect all the pieces of information collected by him as his strategy is summed up in the motto "approach and avoid" (55). If lady V is conceived as a mythical symbol of modern history and culture, then the message she conveys is a very frightening and appalling one. She is associated with violence and the process of dehumanization. In the dark parody of Pynchon, the vision of order and coherence collapses and V is nothing but a series of events of history; symbolizing a series of coincidences.

In the ninth chapter, Pynchon narrates Mondaugen's story to depict an intricate pattern as the scene shifts to German Southwest Africa in 1904. The

historical event of the ruthless suppression by the German forces of a rebellion of the native Heroes and Hottentots is reported by Pynchon. This suppression of the German forces symbolizes the decimation of the Jews during World War II. During the suppression of the rebellion, the narrative centers on a strange bond that develops between the victims and the executioners. Pynchon uses the phrase “functional agreement” or “operational sympathy” (261). The scene describes the inhuman cruelty of the Germans; violence, cruelty and oppression are inescapable parts of history. Pynchon argues that each death “is only one unit in a seemingly infinite series” (263). Pynchon describes the scene of violence thus:

After Fleische, with the trip of his sjambok, had had the obligatory sport with the black’s genitals, they clubbed him to death with the butts of their rifles and tossed what was left behind a rock for the vultures and flies. (263)

The scene of death and destruction is heartrending as the brutal and wanton killing is described in realistic language by Pynchon. The killing has been a mere habit for Firelily’s rider, “Usually the most you felt was annoyance”. Pynchon talks of the loss of moral order of the universe thus:

Things seemed all at once to fall into a pattern: a great cosmic fluttering in the blank, bright sky and each grain of sand, each cactus spine, each feather of the circling vulture above them and invisible molecule of heated air seemed to shift imperceptibly so that this black and he, and he and every other black he would henceforth have to kill slid into alignment, assumes a set symmetry, a dance-like poise. (264)

In the novel *V*, Stencil plans to emulate his father’s spy practice in the past by which we can smell some factors of a spy novel. He belittles this practice: “cloak for a laundry sack, dagger to peel potatoes” (62). The spying mission of Stencil is quite ambiguous and it may mean nothing. At the very outset of the spying mission, he is curious if *V* is something existing, it is “an adventure of the mind” (61). In his book *From Cliché to Archetype*, Marshall McLuhan discusses the nature of the classic detective novel:

The narrative is scrambled in the detective story; it is deliberately interrupted and lacking in important connectives that the psychological novel relies upon to reveal character. When the character is pushed to a conventional extreme and provided with an inclusive bounding line that contains all facets of the character at once, the narrative function is displaced. (McLuhan 89)

Thomas Pynchon, as a postmodernist, is an expert at combining the ambiguity of the chaotic narrative with suspicious conjunctions to show the complex characters in the plot on the basis of the unstable plot in the novel *V*. Such narrative mimics reality while also depicting graphics in a disconnected world. Stencil's quest is to imitate the imaginary logical system that humans use to guide life. David Cowart (1999) in "Pynchon and the Sixties" pointed out that the Stencil's search is a product of motivation, which is more complicated than the detective form of positivism:

Literary quests, with the exception of detective stories, tend naturally to reflect the great and traditional questions about the human condition: whatever the religious certainties of the cultures that produce quest literature, it tends to express man's existential anxiety. (Cowart 100)

*V* is with multiple meanings, so Stencil's quest for the unknown *V* is something greater than any single person's quest; his quest is a kind of metaphysical form. As a human, Stencil's task is short of specific functions and not an objective connection. He seems like the mysterious appearance that haunts him day and night. The structure of Pynchon's novel *V* is ambiguous, it depicts the rise of technological culture. It is obvious that Thomas Pynchon's understanding of the interaction between humans and technology borrowed from the works of Norbert Wiener. Wiener discussed the nature of the communication between humans and machines in his book *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Wiener opines that "it is possible to interpret the information carried by a message as essentially the negative of its entropy, and the negative logarithm of its probability" (Wiener 31). Pynchon believes that communication is more and more empty which results in more waste in a society full of disorder and chaos.

In the novel *V.*, “most of the characters avoid confronting the human reality of other people and themselves, by all manner of depersonalizing strategies” (Mendelson 23). Human identity becomes problematic as the plot of *V* progresses. The jazz musician McClintic describes the post-war Harlem situation thus: “Everything got cool, no love, no hate, no worries, no excitement. Everyone in a while, though, somebody flips back. Back to where he can love...” (Pynchon, “*V.*” 293). Love, hate, worries, excitement, such sentiment and emotion are the basic personalities and human reality, but the people in the novels are lacking them, the absence of such “human reality” leads to the people’s mental disorder—paranoia, social chaos and anarchy. Pynchon highlights the futility of life and human existence through the drunken sailor scenes in the novel that are interchangeable. The comical acts are filled with novels in which some characters’ names are familiar. At the beginning of the novel, Benny Profane seems not an important role compared with other minor characters without standing place in the story.

In the sixteenth chapter Pynchon dramatizes the dialectical relationship between individual chaos and systematic order presenting “a Kilroy image amid the chaos of wild sailors” (436). Among the crew of sailors gathering like machines, Kilroy lives at home. The graffiti is called “inanimate. But grandmaster of Valetta tonight” (436). Usually, the sailors’ life is always uncertain and chaotic, as the hierarchical structure that controls them, chaos is familiar and mechanical. In the scene of the brawl, officer Dahoud brings order out of chaos by forcing the sailors to get into formation. Pynchon observes that order and disorder are inevitable parts of this universe and human beings have to endure uncertainties and ambiguities of life. Kilroy is not shocked by the sudden change in structure. He gives a message of chaos and disorder. Lila Graves points out the necessary difference which separates the character in *V.* from the conceit that compares it to the mechanism: “Ultimately, Pynchon distinguishes between the forces which shape human behavior and those which determine the course of the physical universe” (Graves 72).

Peter Cooper argues that novel *V.* hints at a red herring pattern to motivate readers to explain the novel based on philosophical conceit. Peter Cooper argues thus: “Observation is not only deficient but actually disruptive, and yet some version of

reality must be fabricated to fill the yawning void of the unknown.”(Cooper 153). This doesn't mean that *V* has no meaning in the plot, the novel has a multiplicity of meanings. The novel shows a broad vision and narrative ending, but Pynchon doesn't give a concrete solution to overcome the uncertainty and absurdity of life and a complete universal philosophy cannot be achieved through the analytical method. That's to say that, “The surfaces of Pynchon's fiction have depth but remain impenetrable” (Schaub 139). Pynchon's *V* is a construction of “surfaces” which is too complicated to find the underlying form. Richard Patteson praises Pynchon for these ambiguous surfaces “Knowledge itself cannot exist without form. Formlessness implies meaninglessness, as Pynchon knows” (21).

In the novel, Pynchon uses ambiguous and unconventional adjectives such as “schlemihl” and “profane” which become interchangeable in the course of the plot and create formlessness. The meaningful adjectives are used as the names of the characters to predict their behaviors in the story. for example, Schlemihl gets drunk and spoil the chances at a romantic affair, for a character with the name of schlemihl is expected to behaviors foolishly like a schlemihl, A character with a name of profane is doomed to be a mad man acting like a fool, the real protagonist is Stencil in the novel *V*. and his quest for *V* becomes an allegory. Thomas Pynchon argues thus: “These satiric exaggerations are an expression of outrage against a culture which habitually sought control over the world and the world's manifold variety” (Schaub 142).

In the chapter “Caries and Cabals” Dudley Eigenvalue gives the analysis of Stencil's psychology thus: “Cavities in the teeth occur for good reason. But even if there are several per tooth, there's no conscious organization there against the life of the pulp, no conspiracy. Yet we have men like Stencil, who go about grouping the world's random caries into cabals” (69). Pynchon mixes history with personal achievements and opinions and visions of the characters. He narrates the struggles of Garibaldi in Italy who fought for the freedom of his country thus: “Destruction, pillage, rape, chaos. They can take us over, stage a coup set up a junta. What better place? They remember Garibaldi in this country. Look at Uruguay. They will have many allies. What do we have? You, myself, one cretin of a clerk and the

charwoman” (79). Such details paint a vivid conspiracy in the world, and the ridiculous action and description give us a further understanding of meaninglessness in paranoid life. The futility of quest, struggle, and life symbolizes the downhill of civilization and the universe. In the plot of *V.*, the characters are reduced to mechanical abstractions; to the titles and the functions accordingly. Robert Newman argues that Pynchon contempts regulative logic in his novels: “Pynchon attacks the empirical determinacy that dominates the western world view through his satire of characters that rely on it” (Newman 8). Herbert Stencil devotes himself to the search for meaningless V but with multiple meanings. The quest becomes a self-conscious plot-making strategy that makes reduces the protagonist to a mechanical urge for fulfillment. He follows V as an “obsolete, or bizarre, or forbidden form of sexual delight” (Pynchon, “V.” 61). Stencil’s search is bizarre and ambiguous due to the multiple V, his search shows a mysterious force that keeps him from finding the meaning of V. Pynchon describes Stencil thus:

A stranger in this landscape, it never occurred to him to ask whose brain he was in. Perhaps his own. They were fever dreams: the kind where one is given an impossibly complex problem to solve, and keeps chasing dead ends, following random promises, frustrated at every turn, until the fever breaks. (218)

Herbert Stencil is a postmodern character occupied with discovering the identity of a lady who is first initial V. Interestingly, her name appears in the journals of his father. He is the son of a detective whose name was famous as Sidney; the famous spy of the British government. Stencil has got an assignment to establish the identity of a woman V and all his efforts are directed for the search of V in the tradition of the literary sleuth. V is embodied so multiple meanings that Stencil can’t be sure of the meaning, at the very start, he thought V is his mother, but then he fails to know anything for certain, V may be Vera Meroving, may be Veronica the Rat. As more V appears, he can’t be sure of her name, gradually he becomes to have an illusion that V may be just the 22<sup>nd</sup> letter of the alphabet. Pynchon describes a priest attempting to convert rats in the New York sewers to believe in God, the weird behavior happens in Florence in the 1990s, the symbol V comes into Stencil’s quest



as Victoria Wren and has something to do with the theft of Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus*.

In the third chapter, Stencil "awakens to the realization that he is in pursuit of scholarship" (61) in his dream. He just realizes that his journey is meaningless but a conceit. Pynchon highlights the meta-fictional nature of the novel through the double awakening of Stencil. He describes himself as a tool making him away from his identity. He spends his whole life in the quest for V which might be nothing but an imitation of his father, but he also imitates his own function: he admits that he is what he calls "Forcible dislocation of personality in order to keep himself in place" (62). Pynchon uses the third person to discuss the character in the novels. "He wished it could all be as respectable and orthodox as spying" (62). However, even a spy has a clear goal, Stencil's quest is vague. It is obvious that "he is looking to connect with his dead father after neglecting to write to him before his death" (63). The letter "V" appears throughout the plot of the novel and Pynchon gives many images to describe the significance of the letter V. Pynchon has thrown the ball giving a challenge to Stencil to find out V who has several names; V first appears as Victoria Wren in Egypt in 1898. Her name is that of England's queen, a goose and symbolic mother. She wears an ivory comb, on which five crucified English soldiers are carved. The comb is the signal of the Hindu goddess Kali who is a destroyer of evil forces to protect the innocent, in other words: Kali is both succors and devours. Here the appearance of Victoria Wren refers to the Fashoda Crisis in 1898 which is an imperial territorial dispute that happened between the British and the French in Africa, V first appears as a young woman whose name is Victoria Wren, who is the girlfriend of a spy with the name of Good Fellow. She has a sister with the name of Mildred at the age of 11, she likes to collect rocks, minerals, and fossils, but which is a fact has predicted V's later fate. She loses her vivid energy in her life in the pursuit of more and more materialism, at the end of life, what she obsesses is only some hard and cold rocks, minerals, and fossils without her soul, even without her flesh.

The letter V suggests many things; it suggests a theme, a clue, an impression but there is no clarity about the images as there is no system of logic. William Plater argues that quest acts play a vital role in the novel: "Though Pynchon relies heavily

on parody and satire in V, the forms of paranoia are too important merely to be ridiculed” (192). Pynchon builds the structure of the novel around Stencil’s quest but ironically there is no coherence in the search of Stencil. The plot is not chronological and most of the plot has no effect on the results. There is no end visible of the search as Kenneth Kupsch observes: “Since the author has asked the question, ‘Who is V?’ is it not reasonable to expect, to demand even, that the answer?” (428). The end of the quest is frustrating and confusing.

In the novel, the two protagonists Ben Profane and Herbert Stencil just start aimlessly respectively their different journeys and quests while their conclusions are ambiguous. Profane proclaims “he had not learned a goddamn thing” (454). Stencil goes on his search for V though the results are discouraging. William Plater discusses the motivation of Stencil thus: “the pursuit is all there is to Stencil’s life. It keeps him animate and therefore he must take it seriously...” (191). There is definitely metafictional self-awareness in Stencil as he takes the search very seriously, as he emerges as a searching protagonist in the novel. His description is related to the narrative structure, the physics of Wiener relates to the closed system. Stencil is senior in age and the course of his search, he becomes inanimate. The search of Stencil is not as tightly closed like a trap in his mind. His humanity stems from his animation with flaws. The profane human nature is concealed by contradictory logic. Tony Tanner comments thus: “Profane is as unaware of clues and indifferent to patterns as Stencil is obsessed with them” (29). Profane’s views about other characters are also ambiguous. The word “inanimate” is employed to describe the objects even people without soul and spirit, though they still are alive in an animate state. He is fatalistic as he says: “things don’t want; only men. But things do what they do, and this is why Profane was pissing at the sun” (26). Pynchon calls Profane “the schlemiel”; he is the prototype of the human and the “inanimate” language plays a vital role in the plot. Benny Profane is not a traditional hero like a Super Hero; he is not Superman, Spiderman, or Captain Marvel. He came in contact with Rachel Owlglass and came under her spell: “He was about to approach her when he saw her left-hand snake pale to fondle the gearshift. He watched and noticed how she was touching it....He didn’t want to see any more” (29). He questions certainty while

maintaining a predictable lifestyle. His name is “the equivalent of a snapshot view of experience” (Newman 5).

Profane is a person like a robot in the modern society, his thought makes him conscious, but he still is the “schlemiel” identity. Profane believes that he is in self-control and the clues in the novel reveal that he is not due to determinism. His faulty principles make him a sick searcher as he reduces Rachel to a mechanism too. Profane avoids keeping a close relationship with women by the way of regarding them inanimate. He is irritated by the lifestyle of Rachel as his language is cynical: “She talked about Bennington, her alma mater. She talked about herself” (25). The description of Rachel is biased as the passage about her is filled with details that prove cursed subjectivity. In her social position, she is berated and dehumanized. Racial stereotypes represent a racist culture in America, with the symbol of “Negro maids” and “Orientals.” Rachel is described as a mindless product from the American family. Pynchon lashes at the artificial dating culture of the dancing girls in the story. Profane tells that it is impossible to marry Rachel who is controlled completely by her parents, just like a marionette needs to be allowed and like “the illusion at least of having played the field; so necessary to a girls’ emotional development” (25). When Rachel falls love in with Profane, but he leaves her. Profane judges himself at this point: “I don’t change Schlemihls don’t change” (383). Profane has a contemptuous view of Rachel who writes about her at a party: “You felt she’d done a thousand secret things to her eyes. They needed no haze of cigarette smoke to look at you out of sexy and fathomless, but carried their own along with them” (41). Profane’s reaction irritates Rachel, but he is adamant and nothing can convince him, he has to accept his inanimate status to hide his self-destruction. After comparing Profane’s discrimination against women to Stencil’s search for V, we can say: “Profane might not like a world in which people treat themselves and each other as objects and in various ways replace the animate or human with the inanimate, but he does not or cannot resist it, and it could be said that he is a part of it ... another of the country’s children” (Tanner 49). Profane’s devaluation of Rachel traps her in an inanimate status. He explains his attitude three hundred and fifty pages later: “I only started to think being a schlemihl, about a world of things that had had to be watched out after I saw you alone with the

MG. I didn't even stop to think it might be perverted what I was watching. All I was scared" (394). However, she showed the complexity of behavior. She drives dangerously and rejects men's advances but asks Profane to keep her informed so that she might learn more about his life and keep informed. The character of Rachel is revealed through the memories of Profane, "though he would rather forget" (22). Rachel's appearance at the very beginning of the novel reflects her nostalgic biases. Male characters in the novel demonstrate a "certain point of view" (Bloom 86). But "Rachel Owlglass has promise...She offers Benny, whom she pursues, the chance to experience the coming lings of love. She projects a physical desire stronger than ego" (Bloom 85). Pynchon has portrayed the character of Profane employing all the grotesque devices borrowed from Bakhtin. Profane has "pig eyes set in "pig-pouches", his perfect woman is a robot:

Somebody, please God, there would be in all electronic woman. Maybe her name would be Violet. Any problems with her, you could look it up in the maintenance manual. Module concept finger's weight, heart's temperature, mouth's size out of tolerance? Remove and replace, was all. (385)

Profane manipulates his philosophy assigning inanimate status to Rachel. His description of Paula shows Profane's bias for women in the beginning chapter. Paula is an incredible being: "That young wife, Paula. She'd said sixteen, but no way of telling because she had been born just before the war and the building with her records destroyed, like most other building on the island of Malta" (14). The simple description demonstrates the complicated history of Paula. It is not clear whether she was born in Malta as the destruction of her records created confusion about her story, maybe she loses her parents when she was a kid or Pynchon ignores her history on purpose. She has strong emotions for Profane. When she meets Profane for the first time, Paula has just been away from her husband. Profane doesn't seem to care. "Half because he believes a woman is only half of something there are usually two sides" (18). Profane "uses a functional statement to split a woman into half that is half of a man. Paula sings in French, plays guitar, responds to lust, and bad relationships" (19). Profane avoids sexual intimacy with Paula because he has no faith in love and sex.

Profane employs simplifications to avoid the close relationship with Paula: “Instead of the recognition of love, there are only the projected fantasies of lust” (Tanner 23). Profane’s avoidance of intimacy with Paula is a kind of avoiding confronting reality, which is a strategy of dehumanization employed by Thomas Pynchon.

The narrative structure and characteristics of *V.* reveal the vague essence of the world where the protagonists and readers live in. The novel comes to an end with the following description: “any of a million flatnesses which should catch thereafter part of the brute sun’s spectrum,” “all of which show nothing at all of what came to life beneath” (492). Pynchon has discussed the vision of Benny Profane thus: “Profane was sure that the world would be worse off without mothers like that in it. He stayed in the kitchen an hour, while night came long, wandering through this field on inanimate food, making bits pieces of it animate, his own” (379).

In Pynchon’s novels, Pynchon intended to leave the origin of the protagonists missing, or just neglect to describe anything about the mother of characters, which hints at the loss of origin of individual identity. Stencil is on the quest trip for V, he intends to find some truth about his mother—his origin, however, the theme of loss of identity of what the Profane said: “the world would be worse off without mothers.” Benny Profane performs multiple roles in the novel; he becomes an alligator hunter in the sewers of New York, he also plays the role of a watchman who has conversations with the computer SHROUD, a traveling companion whom Stencil takes to Malta. At his middle age, he devotes himself to studying the text and documents related to histories, such as letters, journals, and meeting people who are also ignorant of the existence of a woman. He never finds out about her on the entire journey. He views his life in terms of his perception of other living things. Pynchon has given us a fine blending of fantasy and realism. Godolphin has: “a nose bridge of ivory, and a paraffin and celluloid chin” (100), and “the white wig, an artificial foot, a set of false teeth, the shape of a clock” (343). The portrayal of Stencil is done employing surreal techniques by Pynchon. His search inverts order and old mythologies. Stencil is depicted as a male Isis hoping to recover parts of the dismembered Osiris. Stencil is also the battered child of the American society seeking his parents, the father is weak, his legacy is some facts, some friends, which the son may use but not redeem. The

mother is a vicious adulteress who has abandoned him at birth. The son is sterile. His seeds are dossiers, the compilation of which barely keeps him alive. He is a mad and neurotic fearful archivist of the period before the apocalypse. The characters of Pynchon behave and act like Machiavelli who is sneaky, cunning, and lacking in moral code, and there are two forces dominating the plot; virtue and *fortune*, will and fate. V can be a voyeur and in a political riot in Florence in the novel *V*:

He saw a rioter...being bayoneted again and again....She stood...still her face betrayed no emotion. It was as if she saw herself embodying a feminine principle, acting as a complement to all this bursting, explosive male energy. Inviolable and calm, she watched the spasms of wounded bodies, the fair of violent death, framed and staged, it seemed, for her alone in that tiny square. From her hair, the heads of five crucified also looked on, no more expressive than she. (193)

Pynchon has used his nihilistic vision of love and sex in the novel *V*. Mara is the spirit of a woman who is portrayed thus: “In her face is always a slight bow to the nose, a wide spacing the eyes....No one you’d turn to watch on the street. But she was a teacher of love after all. Only pupils of love need to be beautiful” (462). Pynchon has dramatized the artificial and lustful love affair of Rachel Owlglass and Profane in the novel. She is alone in the world living in a void. She opposes Esther to have an abortion which she thinks will astonish Esther’s capacity for heterosexuality. She shows a physical desire much stronger than her ego. In desperation she murmurs to a seduced Benny:

Women are older than you, we learned inside you once: the fifth rib, closest to the heart. We learned all about it then. After that, it had to become our game to nourish a heart you all believe is hollow though we know different. Now you all live inside us, for nine months, and whenever you decide to come back after that. (370)

Although in her murmurs there is full of feminist confidence, between the lines the Pynchon reinforces the feminist desperation in gender inequality. Each character suffers desperation, paranoia, loss of identity resulting from the nature of the

entropy in the universe, no matter how hard they struggle for their whole identity with esteem and all is in vain.

Pynchon has written two small novels describing the social activities of V, she was known as the Lady V in 1913 before World War I. She fell in love with a ballerina and in this part of the novel Pynchon gives his historical view. Indeed, at the moment when collective violence is about to erupt in the history of Western civilization, V has his knack to turn the moment up. Pynchon also depicts the collapse of traditional love and the emergence of postmodernist sex and lust thus:

If he believed in Heroic Love, which is nothing really but a frequency, then obviously Winsome wasn't on the man end of half of what she was looking for. In five years of marriage, all he knew was that both of them were whose selves, hardly fusing at all, with no more emotional osmosis than leakage of seed through the solid membranes of contraceptive or diaphragm that were sure to be there protecting them.  
(126)

V. is constructed of several discrete narrative units. The central one is the account of Benny Profane's life from Christmas, 1955, until the fall of 1956, the time of Britain's trouble in the Suez. Benny, a self-proclaimed schlemiel, is incompetent, especially in dealing with machinery, and utterly passive without hope, direction, plan, and energy. His various activities are a kind of yo-yoing traveling back forth between New York and Norfolk or riding endlessly on the York subway. At one point he is given a job as one of the crews of alligator-hunters in the New York sewer system. Supposedly baby alligators, given one Christmas to thousands of children in New York and later flushed down the toilets, had begun to multiply in the labyrinth of sewers and became such a threat to the city that they had to be hunted down shot.

### **V Slipping to Inanimate State**

Pynchon has given the phrase "inanimate" to define all human relationships. In 1898, the sister of V, Mildred spent up most of her time gathering pieces of the inanimate things, such as, metals, rocks, fossils, and shells to fuse with her physical

flesh: V had an ivory comb nailed in her hair in 1899, and she had glass eyes and sewed a sapphire on her belly button in 1913. She was a cyborg with prostheses, tattoos, and various inanimate fragments on her body in 1943. The different mini novels trace the history of V's descent into mechanization and her loss of identity and individuality. Pynchon has referred to all the important historical events after World War II and the forces that led to the decline of Western civilization. Pynchon has given a graphic picture of the growth of violence and bloodshed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the continuous trends of human degradation; lust for money and the decline of moral values. Pynchon hinted that the mechanization of the West would only foster sensitivity. In this novel, Pynchon proposes the Virgin Mary as the meditation of the robot. In another way, the electric generator replaced the Virgin as the main symbol and characteristic of the era. McLuhan observes that "Pynchon has taken the Virgin as the West's most important Transcendental Signified and her to become the Mistress of the Inanimate. The narrative of Pynchon is not based on facts because Stencil's texts and documents which he uses to reconstruct the history of V are questionable" (56). The documents collected by Stencil contain distortions, exaggerations and rumors. His places, peoples and entities are historically incorrect and misleading. Perhaps Stencil is paranoid since there is nothing but V in his mind. Pynchon's *V* is a postmodern novel for more Stencil struggles to collect the documents like mythical Isis he recedes from the grasp and increases doubts in the minds of the readers. Kant observes that all "human knowledge is predetermined in advance by the limitations of the mind's faculties" (123). Kant further argues that historical layers of biases hinder the pursuit of objective understanding, so the knowledge of the text appears misleading and faulty away from reality and the truth. Pynchon is also not sure of the existence of V as he says in the novel:

But V, whoever she was, might have been swallowed in the airy Renaissance spaces of that city assumed into the fabric of any of a thousand Great paintings, for all Stencil was able to determine. He had discovered, however, what was pertinent to his purpose: that she's d been connected, though perhaps only tangentially, with one of those grand conspiracies or foretastes of Armageddon which seemed to have



captivated all diplomatic sensibilities in the years preceding the Great War. *V.* and a conspiracy. Its particular shape is governed only by the surface accidents of history at the time. (70)

Pynchon's novel *V.* is a postmodern novel with a plot with two sets, one set in the present of 1956 and the other set in the past of 1890. The first part of the novel presents details of the life of Benny Profane and his close friend Pig Bodine's adventures and their friends' fate and story on a scorching summer in New York by which Pynchon discovers the mysterious world. The plot of *V.* brings confusion and takes the readers into the illusion which is far away from reality and into a labyrinth.

Perhaps history this century, thought Eigenvalue, is rippled with gathers in its fabric such that if we are situated, as Stencil seemed to be, at the bottom of a fold, it's improbable to determine wrap, woof or pattern anywhere else. By virtue, however, of existing in one gather it is assumed there are others, compartmented off into sinuous cycles each of which come to assume greater importance than the weave itself and destroy any continuity. Thus it is that we are charmed by the funny-looking automobiles of the 30s, the curious fashion of the 20s, the peculiar moral habits of our grandparents. We produce and attend musical comedies about them and are conned into a false memory, a phony nostalgia about what they were. We are accordingly lost to any sense of continuous tradition. Perhaps if we lived on a crest, things would be different. We could at least see. (70)

Pynchon's novel is a portrayal of the wasteland of postmodern America. Like John Barth's famous novel *Giles Goat-Boy*, Pynchon's *V.* is the harrowing tale of the sick American society where people are running after the material amenities of life and express their love for inanimate things. Thomas Pynchon's *V.*, like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, is about the impending doom of humanity.

Many members of the Whole Sick Crew seem to have the similarity in their mind and behaviors, for example, Pig Bodine is similar to Benny Profane, the women

Esther/ Mafia/Paala and so on appear to be different facets of only one woman, they are just like one same person in different dresses and appear on the different occasions. As the search for V progresses, the plots and stories about the search become increasingly mysterious and horrifying. Pynchon employs the mad and illogic language of crazy people obsessed with Dionysian vision and hallucinations to describe the vision. With strange historical events and the perfect combination of fact and fantasy, he is never sure what is real and what is illusory. Pynchon's idea includes moral relativism which has common with paranoia:

He decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in it at any specific moment. Since these several minds tended to form a total or complex more mongrel than homogeneous. The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditional to seeing its world in only three. Hence the success or failure of any diplomatic issue must vary directly with the degree of rapport achieved by the team confronting it. This had to the near-obsession with teamwork which had inspired his colleagues to dub him soft-shoe Sidney, on the assumption that he was at his best working in front of a chorus line. (86-87)

Saul Bellow's novels are known for the unity of the plots, but the novels of Pynchon are known for diversity and multiplicity. There is a lack of inwardness in Pynchon's *V* and the lack of center and the main focus of Pynchon is on the theme of decadence. Being tagged as a postmodernist writer, which means Thomas Pynchon fills his novels with fragmentation, self-conscious language, changing forms, loss of identity, and some other elements of postmodernism characteristics. In Thomas Pynchon's novel *V.*, there are dualism structures including a minimum of two intersecting storylines running in parallel. The first storyline involves Benny Profane wandering everywhere and his wandering intertwines with the journey of Herbert Stencil. Stencil only has one purpose for his life: To discover the mysterious woman named V who Pynchon puts at all kinds of social and political events. Like Dos

Passos' epical novel *the U.S.A.*, Pynchon's *V.* has a non-linear narrative in structure dramatizing the theme of decadence and disintegration and chaos:

To have humanism we must first be convinced of our humanity. As we move further into decadence this becomes more and more difficult....Decadence is a falling away from what is human and the future we fall less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories. (188)

Brenda surprises Profane by making the historical declaration that she represents the values of the twentieth century. Profane looked at the pattern of the rug. "I am the twentieth century," In response to the arguments given by Profane. He begins conversation seeking inspiration thus:

I am the ragtime and the tango; sans serf, clean geometry. I am the virgin's hair whip and the cunningly detailed shackles of decadent passion. I am a very lonely railway station in every capital of Europe. I am the street, the fanciless buildings of government, the café-dansant the clockwork figure. The jazz saxophone, the tourist-lady's hairpiece, the fairy's rubber breasts, the travelling clock which always tells the wrong time and chimes in a different key. I am the dead palm tree, the Negro's dancing pumps, the dried fountain after tourist season I am all the appurtenance of night keys. I am the dead palm tree, the Negro's dancing pumps, the dried fountain after tourist season. I am all the appurtenances of night. (454)

### **Stagnation of V**

Pynchon's first novel *V.* is the primary allegorical symbol of postmodern culture defining an increasingly meaningless world. Stencil's search suggests that he is afraid of people who tell about the unacceptable things going on in the world. There is nothing like truth in this world and thus, writing novels denoting heroes finding the truth is absurd as suggested by Pynchon. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the early

1970s, the events that took place in the western world are symbolized by “V”, which is present in Pynchon’s allegory. The vision about the apocalypse in the world is found by the effects and reasons revealed by Pynchon as he talks about the concepts of V as explained in history which depends on the novelistic moment. The V is referred to as a sign of the invalidity of Postmodern American Society in the novel.

The plot suggests the downward movement leading toward total annihilation. Pynchon proves through example that life moves forward to the chaotic state, then tends to uniformity and deathlike sameness from the healthy and normal diversity, the critical analysis of the text of *V* shows that there is a continuous journey to entropy. The ultimate state of entropy is represented by Absolute Zero means complete heat death in the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Pynchon uses entropy in his novels as a metaphor to reveal the downhill movement of the human world. The letter V implies that as life approaches the endpoint, and the time that humans going to stasis is decreasing, V is thought to rotate like a vortex in which life force collapses inward in the abyss of inertia and death. The conspicuous symptoms of degeneration in the novel are seen in the collapse of communication. The critics called this process death of communication. In his novel *V.*, the V is like the trumpet bell. And the post horn stands for the failure of communication. Pynchon imitated Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* where the characters employ broken communication, there are pauses and they use clichés and jargon in their communication. Obviously, Thomas Pynchon also borrows a similar style of language in his novels, his characters also use clichés, some private signs, body language, and some verbal shorthand which are obscure to the readers. Pynchon uses lots of abbreviated language in *The Whole Sick Crew*’s dialogues with the purpose of blocking their communication which has lacked meaning and is nonsense. The characters in the novel can’t have normal communication and they fail to have the ability to love, only a few characters are capable of love but are frustrated constantly.

In the novel *The Crying Lot of 49*, the heroine Oedipa Maas is willing to love but her struggles fail as she loses her lover. There is a complete failure of human communication in *V.* and *The Crying Lot of 49*. The characters in *V.* prefer to choose

some inanimate objects instead of human beings. This priority of inanimate objects endorses anti-life forces and speeds the final victory of the V. Rachel Owlglass exhibits her gross materialism in her relation with the schlemiel hero Benny Profane. The love for inanimate things has reached the extreme point where the characters even incorporate inanimate things into their bodies. Rachel is crazy about material things; she is fond of gearshifts and calls her car a “stud”. Fergus Mixolydian, a member of The Whole Sick Crew, has a pair of wires connected to a television set on his wrist and has transformed himself into an extension of television. Lady V, the main character in the novel *V.* replaces her organs with glass, gold, sapphire, and plastic restoration devices.

In Chapter 5, the power of life yields to inanimate things he had a pair of wires connecting to his television set installed on his wrist. Fergus has become an extension of television. Lady V is the main character in the novel *V.* who is seen using some metal or plastic devices to replace her organs, such as her eyes, teeth, and navel, which is a vital symbol of that the forces of life completely surrender to the non-living things. Pynchon has given many scenes of perversion and brutality in the plot of the novel, but the interesting thing is the attitude of the characters who prefer non-living and inanimate things and refuse to acknowledge their own humanity and that of others. In the novel *V.* examples of voyeurism abound, and Pynchon clarifies the role as a voyeur. The world of the *V.* has neither normative value nor spiritual meaning. Only the empty form can survive, one example is Victoria Wren in the perverted Catholicism whose religious sensitivity developed in a bizarre and fanatical direction. She saw Christ in all her lovers and participated in Black Masses to stimulate her "religious" feelings. She attained education in a convent and developed a nun-like temperament but lack of moral and ethical notions. Another example is a Navy seaman named Pig Bodine. He claims to follow the rule of conduct which guides him he should pursue the chaos of officers' wives rather than the wives of the others. Most of the characters live in the world of nightmares because of their fantasies and craze for inanimate things. Pynchon was greatly influenced by Henry Adams's *The Education of Henry James* and Pynchon wrote his story *Entropy* to depict the world of chaos and the impending doom of human civilization. Adams feels shocked at the

great power of the dynamo, meantime, also has doubt about human being's control power over the dynamo. As a symbol of destruction, for example. V-2 rocket in the novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, the watch with a second hand in the novel *Mason & Dixon* and the dynamo in Pynchon's early novels in the name of Yoyodyne all hint the destruction to civilization and human beings. Pynchon depicts the growing decadence and random motion of chaos in the universe in his novel *V*.

The random motion of chaos in the universe is the last stage of motion before the ultimate state of entropy—the stasis of absolute zero. In the allegory of Pynchon's novels, the rocket, the watch, the internet, and Yoyodyne are the emblems of destructions of power brought forth by modern technology whose nature favors death, decay, and devaluation of faith.

Pynchon depicts innumerable versions of reality in the plot of *V*. There are countless interpretations, but we cannot find one which can interpret what is going on. Herbert Stencil takes facts that suit his reality into his consideration. In the novel, Pynchon has depicted dual, polarized editions of reality which dramatizes the “hothouse” of Callisto. In Pynchon's mind, there is an important land called Vheissu, which is a hidden place with shining clothes covering the eternal void, the Vheissu is put at the center of the universe and the heart of allegory of the Pynchon's novels. Michael Harris in *Thomas Pynchon's Postcoloniality* has explored the various causes that shift the plots of Pynchon from past to now and from one spot to another. Pynchon's novels show a lament about colonialism. Harris argues that each novel of Pynchon can be read as a “historical mapping” but from the people who “have little faith in history” (Harris 200). Harris praises Pynchon's “mode of presentation” as “deft uses of historic detail, irony, sarcasm, parody directed at the colonizers” (202) and speaks highly of his “precise knowledge of the language, culture, and ideology of the particular colonized people” (202).

To conclude, Pynchon's novel *V*. is a portrayal of the sick and decadent society of America as the characters in the novel are like robots crazy for material things and reject the real-life force. They are for inanimate things and have no interest in the truths and values that pillow human civilization. The novel is an allegory of

decadence and fragmentation of the postmodern American culture. The search for V of Herbert Stencil is ambiguous and far removed from reality; the search is the product of his fantasy and imagination.

### Chapter Three

#### Loss of Self and the Fracture of Identity in *The Crying of Lot 49*

In the beginning, the critics and the reviewers of Thomas Pynchon took very little interest in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), they praised Pynchon for his clever display of broken communication, vocabulary but condemned Pynchon for lack of insight in the novel. David Seed observes that beneath the veneer of flashy, sophomoric verbal humor Pynchon dramatizes the sick and decadent American culture. Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* takes its place in a series of classic situations. The plot begins with Genesis and soon Pynchon takes the readers to the Garden of Eden and encompasses the struggles of such figures as Oedipus, Hamlet and Faust who are bedeviled by the forces of entropy and chaos. Pynchon puts his faith in scientific theories such as the law of thermodynamics, entropy and information theory when he was at Cornell University. Pynchon produced *Entropy* and explored the operation of entropy and chaos in the universe. Pynchon was influenced by Sadi Carnot, Lord Kelvin, James Maxwell and August Kronig who showed keen interest in the law of thermodynamics. Pynchon follows the physical idea that heat in the universe cannot be converted to work completely. When Pynchon published his *The Crying Of Lot 49* two articles appeared; James Hall's *The New Pleasures of Imagination* (1970) published in *Virginia Quarterly Review*; James Dean Young's *The Enigma Variations of Thomas Pynchon* published in *Critique Studies in Modern Fiction* (1970), In all these articles the reviewers noted the scientific theories in the plot of *The Crying Of Lot 49* departing from the traditional modern writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer. Pynchon is a notable postmodernist novelist who wrote for forty years giving evidence of his versatile genius and an acute understanding of the malaise of contemporary American society. Thomas Pynchon is one of the most important figures of postmodernism in literature and is praised as a typical postmodern writer, and novels are widely praised for redefining postmodernism. Meantime, some criticize his novels as vulgar, puzzling, and mocking noble culture. It is this blend of styles that makes Pynchon special and different in the literature. That's why Brian McHale even suggests in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* that without Pynchon's work "there might never have been such a



pressing need to develop a theory of literary postmodernism in the first place” (97). Pynchon’s redundant writing style put readers in a labyrinth. His works are huge and complex, ranging from detective stories to meta-historical retellings with more than 400 characters in one novel.

Thomas Pynchon is a postmodernist novelist; his novel *The Crying of Lot 49* is an interesting study of self and identity formation. Pynchon begins from René Descartes’s theory of identity and explores also the Freudian theory of Id, ego and super-ego. Thomas Pynchon’s ambition in the novel is to deconstruct the unified self through the plenty of characters and their weird actions, illogic mind, and absurd things that become the main parts of the analysis in the paper.

In his book *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, Mark Currie observes Thomas Pynchon analyze the self and identity in a postmodern way in the novels, Currie eliminates the idea that the concept of postmodernism can be determined, as he argues that Pynchon deals with the issues of the loss of self and the fracture of identity. There are three important features of the fiction of Thomas Pynchon; diversification, deconstruction and multiplicity. The identity of his characters is fractured as the characters are confused and directionless. According to the characteristics of identity in the postmodernist representations, identity is decentered and divided, Pynchon proposes two ways to look at identity in novels, the first way conforms to Jacques Lacan’s theory of the other, to view identity as relational to the other. The second way is to view identity from the events the individual experience in his whole life, that is to say, individual stories make up his identity. Pynchon employs the two different ways a lot in *The Crying of Lot 49*.

On the journey to cope with her ex-boyfriend’s estate, Oedipa Maas is trapped in a worldwide conspiracy and experiences different subcultures and comes across different types of weird people while tries to make it clear of the underground postal service system Trystero, which is the center of the plot Pynchon doesn’t tell the reader the conspiracy is a factual joke or an illusion. Oedipa Maas’ journey in America reminds us of the other famous journey in the Greece Myth—Odyssean, even the names share the similarity, but what are different lies in their task and result. Oedipus

is a great hero and achieves his dream, while Oedipa Maas ends up on an auction without any real achievement except for the loss of identity. Thomas Hill Schaub's comments describe *The Crying of Lot 49* in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* as follows "unique... because of its insinuation that the text itself is a kind of plot perpetrated upon the reader, containing a secret meaning known only to the author. This is to speak of the novel's effect rather than to suggest there is such a secret yet to be discovered" (32).

*The Crying of Lot 49* of Pynchon is different from the novel *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* in form and structure since this novel follows a little traditional structure and is more or less friendly to the reader with not so many obscure remarks. The central metaphor of the novel is the thermodynamic concept of entropy referring to the calcifying decay of life and energy on a scale that may be global. Entropy is the principle within irreversible processes. Pynchon argues that the universe must suffer "heat-death". In *The Crying of Lot 49*, entropy is a metaphor for exceptional range and emotional power. Oedipa Maas is the main heroine of the novel and through her journey, all the major ideas are articulated. The plot of the novel *The Crying of Lot 49* gives Pynchon's unique writing style following the pattern of the postmodernist stylistic techniques. Pynchon provides a detailed treatment of complicated scientific concepts. Pynchon discards the traditional style and gives a moving narrative and strangely named characters. Paranoia is one of the most important and conspicuous themes in *The Crying of Lot 49* which refers to "a psychotic disorder characterized by delusions of persecution, will or without grandeur, often strenuously defended with apparent logic and reason" (Horney 123). Paranoia exerts huge influences on the actions, thoughts, and fate of the characters in the novel. During Oedipa Maas tries to disclose the secret behind Trystero, she is in the grip of reality and entropy force. Most of the characters in the novel are lost in the weird and even not friendly world of America in the 1960s. That's the reason why "We don't know much about Thomas Pynchon. We don't know how he writes. We don't know what he has in mind" (Pearce 1). The critics observe that he is a notoriously difficult writer to understand. His complex and very learned prose creates problems for the readers. The modern world in Pynchon's description is always full of weird behaviors, confusion, and

chaos, problems. In addition, he seems to have a clear understanding of how environments influence individuals and their perceptions. Oedipa Maas is probably the most developed and charming role among his all-female protagonists created in his novels.

The opening of the novel *The Crying of Lot 49* is very simple and straightforward introducing Oedipa Maas as an average woman leading a mundane life. She attends “Tupperware parties” (1). She is just like an ordinary housewife living a boring life, does her routine cooking and cleaning around the house every day. Pynchon presents her as an average individual, and her marriage is with a used car dealer D.J. Mucho Maas. She once had a relationship with Pierce Inverarity. The main focus of the novel is the search for the truth of Oedipa Maas and her concern to explore the world of Trystero with whom she comes in contact. She is portrayed as an unprepossessing housewife in suburban Los Angeles. She has been pointed as the co-executor of the will of her ex-boyfriend Pierce Inverarity, a wealthy industrialist and her former lover. Oedipa Maas stumbles across evidence of a subversive mail system called W.A.S.T.E in her attempt to untangle the affair of Pierce Inverarity. Pynchon has given a detailed analysis of this older postal system as the system symbolizes the ultimate heat death of the universe. This society fell into disarray and apathy during the French Revolution. Many members migrated to America, but Trystero continued working in support of the Confederacy. The technology in the novel is shown to be ambivalent, one side technology, for the human being, is the way to realize transcendence, the other side is also the source of fragmentation of individual identity. Oedipa Maas goes through these phases herself. She transcribes information promiscuously and she has to confront delusions and lies of the people. Information in the novel is like multiple-meaning, but multiple meaning is no meaning, too much chaotic information makes Oedipa Maas confused in the quest and completely lost in the real world.

Douglas Hofstadter is a famous cognitive scientist who has explored all the important aspects of the “self” and “I”. In his book *I Am a Strange Loop* he says that “we self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages are little miracles of self-

reference” (Hofstadter 363). At the moment of Dr. Hilarius’ being arrested by the police, Oedipa Maas becomes confused about the events she has experienced:

I came, hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy. “Cherish it” cried Hilarius, fiercely. “What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don’t let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be. (113)

By which Pynchon strengthens the notion that identity is a kind of fantasy, and abandoning fantasy means giving up identity. Freud believes that identity consists of the Id, ego, and super-ego. But in a postmodern representation of identity, Freudian ideas are also discarded. Oedipa says: “Shall I project a world?” (64). “project the world” means project the reality, in Oedipa Maas’s mind, the reality and identity fade into the fantasy, the Trystero muted horn also strengthens the notion of identity as a kind of fantasy. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* contend that the readers often identify themselves with the protagonist in the novels. Essentially, “It is to give oneself a world of fictional people, to start to let one’s identity merge with that of fiction. It is, finally, also to create a character for oneself, to create oneself as a character” (Royle 70). Oedipa’s journey is important as her identity is unfolded: “Change your name to Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard; she advised her reflection in the hall; the light of that afternoon’s vanity mirror. Either way, they’ll call it paranoia” (141). Pynchon mentions the feature of changing names and in the plot of the novel, most of the names are changed following the postmodernist culture. Pynchon makes Oedipa Maas serve as a signal of female Sophocles Oedipus Rex in the novel. David Cowart in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* observes that Pynchon borrows from Webster, Heywood, Marston and Massinger to make the plot complex and to present the fluid identity of his characters. Oedipa Maas is caught in the net of conspiracies as she thinks of herself:

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to; an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing

his seizure. Afterward, it is only this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (76)

The heroine Oedipa Maas is anxious to find that everything that has lured her but also avoided her will not tell her the truth, since there is no absolute truth in the universe, her quest is doomed to fail to find the truth in the novel. The search for essential meaning is also Oedipa's search for his identity, the search for the meaning in the meaninglessness of the world is doomed to lead her nowhere, and the search for identity is doomed to failure in the fragmented world in which entropy plays the main role. Oedipa considers muddles: "She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided" (150). She is in a fix to understand the mystery behind truth; and failed to make a clear that everything in a world can be part of a conspiracy or it is just a fantasy in her mind, her husband tells her to "just be yourself" (114) indicating that there will not be the valuable message to be discovered is in her story. Conspiracy is also part of the entropy force in the human being civilization in Pynchon's novels. It cannot be denied that Pynchon is indeed indebted to the theory of entropy.

In the novel, Pynchon arranges for many characters in dual status, shift from occupation to another by which he demonstrates the dual identities, for example, Oedipa is both a housewife and severs as a detective to try to find the truth of the secret postal system Trystero; her husband Mucho Maas originally sells cars later he is a DJ. Dr. Hilarius becomes a psychiatrist from a doctor serving Nazi. Metzger shifts his profession from an actor to a lawyer; and vice versa for Manny Di Presso who is from a lawyer to an actor. Multiple characters play more than one role in the novel by which Pynchon depicts the multiplicity of identities revealing the fragmentation of

identities. When Oedipa knows she is called on to inherit her ex-boyfriend Pierce's estate, the following idea just occurs to her:

What did she so desire to escape from? Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all. Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else? (11-12)

The words "captive maiden", "incidental", "no reason", "no apparatus" "superstition" and so on in the Oedipa Maas' mind leave the reader the impression of chaos and disorder, and such words reveal that her mind is stuck in the messy state, she is eager to escape it, but the harder she struggles, the deeper chaotic state she is stuck in. When discussing the play with Oedipa, Driblette deems that reality is not practiced, but something inside his mind and language loses meaning to him. Driblette says:

That's what I'm here for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, why care? They're rote noises to hold line bashes with, to get past the bone barriers around an actor's memory, right? But the reality is in this head. Mine. I'm the projector of the planetarium, all the closest little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also. (62)

When Oedipa Maas mentions the absurd names in the Jacobian plays when she talks with director Randolph Driblette, in essence, these words are meaningless, because Driblett is the "projector of the planetarium" similar to Oedipa when she had a terrifying experience of losing her self-ego in the bathroom of Metzger's motel. In

the novel, Thomas Pynchon says “At some point, she went into the bathroom, tried to find her image in the mirror and couldn’t. She had a moment of nearly pure terror. Then she remembered that the mirror had broken and fallen in the sink” (29). In our life, a mirror is a special object which makes us reflect upon ourselves, in the novel, the mirror is an important sign of an object to identify ourselves, when a person stands in front of a mirror, a person himself is like his ego, and the image in the mirror can be in reference to the “other” which matches the Jacques Lacan’s theory of the other. Therefore, the terrible loss-ego of Oedipus is not only a horrible moment of loss-ego but also a terrible moment of losing the world in which she lives. There are multiple cracks in a broken mirror, which may represent better the true identity than a whole mirror because identity is inherently multi-faceted and cannot fit a single subject. Pynchon even takes the idea of multiple cracks of identity further in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in which the main protagonist Slothrop’s identity broke into many characters and roles, in the end, even cannot be collected again into one single person by his friends.

This loss of identity is further depicted by Thomas Pynchon in the novel when Oedipa has a talk with her husband Mucho Maas’ leader Funch. When mentioning Mucho Maas who has been a member of the LSD experiment of Dr. Hilarius, Funch said “They’re calling him the Brothers N. He’s losing his identity, Edna, how else can I put it? Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people, you know? He’s a walking assembly of a man” (Pynchon 115). Here, Mucho is called Brothers N only as a sample in the experiment, in such a way, Pynchon enhances the loss of identity, in essence, and everyone in the reality is just like Mucho in the experiment. Mucho’s name with much inside literally means many ordinary people in the reality. The remarks of Funch obviously point out that Mucho is losing his identity, when he mentions Wendell who is less himself and more generic implying Wendell loses his identity just more like a creature only with generic characteristics but without his own thought or his soul. “Wendell is full of people when entering a meeting room”(116), which means Wendell is like an ordinary person with multiple roles, in reality, multiple roles mean multiple identities, in daily life, each person has multiple roles to act: a man can

be a leader or employee in the company, can be a father, a husband, a son and the forth, it is tough for an average man to balance each role he has to act as, furthermore, it is hard to balance his multiple identities split in his every role in the life, finally, he just loses his identity and is confused that who he is.

Oedipa fails to know who she is as her vision of life is ambiguous. She emerges as a resilient and silent person and Pynchon has dramatized her reaction to the failure and victory, including her affections and her indifference. The novel *The Crying of Lot 49* is shorter in scale than *V.* and Pynchon has reversed the process that *V.* describes. Pynchon depicts a “world of triviality and exitelessness” (170). The pattern of *The Crying of Lot49* offers “maybe even...a real alternative to the exitelessness, to the absence of surprise to life that harrows the head of everybody American you know” (170). Hidden order in the plot of the novel refills Pynchon’s fictional world with energy, adding to the world’s complexity. His novel *V.* demonstrates the 500 pages of decline and decadence, but his novel devotes 200 pages of recovery. The main object of *The Crying of Lot 49* is one lady’s quest for a postal system of communication, but the system offers potential access to “transcendent meaning and a reason that mattered to the world” (181). Oedipa has “all manner of revelations, but they are not in the manner of most recent fiction, and certainly not the kind of revelations that her name might suggest: they are hardly about...herself” (20). In Pynchon’s novels, he ignores the protagonists’ relation with their parents by which the loss of identity is stressed, there is no description about Oedipa Maas’s parents, as a result, she shows no emotion for her parents.

In the novel, Oedipa learns that she has been called on to execute the estate of Pierce Inverarity, therefore, she sets out to make clear the complexity of the estate of Pierce Inverarity and soon discovers that there are repeated patterns of meaning. She goes to the town where the interests of Pierce Inverarity had been focused on. Oedipa has a bird view upon “the ordered swirl of houses and streets” and finds some meaning confusing her:

She thought of the time she’d opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses



and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity...There were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate...Now a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding...She seemed parked at the centre of an old religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken. (24-25)

Actually, the postal system and the streets (stands for the real world in which the people live) share the same image of “circuit” which is like a labyrinth, its complication is beyond the protagonist Oedipa Maas’ understanding, just like the conspiracy in the reality is too complicated to follow for the ordinary people like Oedipa. How can it be possible for the characters to live in the labyrinth reality to find what they are searching for? The answer is negative, the people are doomed to be lost themselves, lose their identities, be gripped in the force of entropy and become paranoiacs on the journey of the quest.

A map of Inverarity’s housing developments on the TV reminds Oedipa of the first sight of the town in sheikh: “Some immediacy was there again, some promise of hierophany” (31). Oedipa finds out the Trystero “a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty; that is, everything profane; for the official government delivery system” (170). As a postal system, Trystero implies the connection and relation in the real world. Ironically, at the end of the quest for a communication system, Oedipa Maas is left alone to be confused that which one exists, which one is fantasized about between herself and Trystero.

How had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, may be endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets, there would either be a transcendent meaning,

or only the earth...Ones and Zeroes... Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or more. Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there was either some Tristero behind the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America... (181-182)

In her efforts to uncover the Tristero, Oedipa decides to give some order to Inverarity's tangled interests. Oedipa plans "to bestow life on what had persisted" of her late ex-lover, soon she is confronted with the reality that more meanings and more complicated relationships are available in the open market. Pynchon chronicles everything "she saw; smelled, dreamed remembered, would somehow come to be woven The Tristero" (81). Oedipa Maas tries to give up the quest and stop the quest for the meaning: "She had only to drift, she supposes at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced that it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix" (104). However, when she goes to San Francisco at night she finds extensive evidence of the Tristero existence. At the end of the novel, Oedipa loses her activity, even the most shocking events can't arise her interest: "Even a month ago, Oedipa's next question would have been 'Why?' But now she kept a silence, waiting as if to be illuminated" (152).

Oedipa's journey projects her independent mind and strong individuality. Her detective skill exhibits androgynous qualities and she easily embraces them. She feels tired when she struggled to find a new version of "The Courier's Tragedy", but she never got tired of having sex with Metzger. Oedipa's promotion to detective status as a housewife is a submission to the female culture as understood by E. V. Miller. In the novel, Oedipa thinks that she acquires knowledge in an imperialist way, just like she says in the novel:

Suppose, God there really was a Tristero then and that she had come on it by accident....She might have found The Tristero anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entranceways, a hundred alienations, if only she'd looked. (179)

In this detective novel, Pynchon explores the redundant nature of detection. Oedipa Maas finds that detection in life is irrelevant. Chesterton states that “The Christian has to use his brains to see the hidden good in humanity just as the detective has to use his brains to see the hidden evil” (qtd. Mendelson 195). This states the problem of Oedipa Maas in the novel, because she fails to find the alienation and incoherence in the world. Oedipa’s husband, Mucho Maas, as a DJ, suffers a lack of faith in his job: “I just don’t believe in any of it” (12). Oedipa’s quest makes her think of her husband “watching one of his colleagues with a headset clamped on and cueing the next record with movements stylized as the handling of chalice, censer, and chalice might be for a holy man...Did Mucho stand outside Studio. A looking in, knowing that even if he could hear it, he couldn’t believe in it?” (25). The nightmare of alienation and nothingness tortured him much, just like he says: “We were a member of the National Automobile Dealers’ Association. N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky. I used to wake up hollering” (144). He takes the drug to escape from a nihilistic void; the psychiatrist Dr. Hilarius had given the drug to Oedipa Maas to conduct an experiment Bridge; not a bridge to connect to the outside world but “the bridge inward.” Oedipa realizes that it would be a terrible thing if she takes the medicine Dr. Hilarius gave her. Dr. Hilarius himself strays away from the purpose of faith, as a former Nazi doctor, he tries to make up for the Nazi past developing a “faith in the literal truth of everything Freud wrote...It was a kind of penance...I wanted to believe, despite everything my life had been” (134). His obsession and strain trap him in paranoia. Pynchon has also given a reference to Randolph who directs the play in which Oedipa performs the role and he hears the name Tryster. He is stuck in the fantasy of nihilism which is regarded as the only way to lead to order. In the play, he directs “the reality is in this head. Mine. I’m the projector in the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stages coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also” (79). In directing plays Driblette “felt hardly any responsibility toward the word, really; but to...its spirit, was always intensely faithful” (152). Driblette suffers from nihilistic despair and in the end, he commits suicide by walking into the sea.

Oedipa Maas and Pierce met Jesus Arrabal on their trip to Mazatlan. Jesus Arrabal is in exile. Oedipa knows that Arrabal is hostile to Pierce and he tells her that Pierce is an anarchist. Symbolically his name means “Jesus of the slums.” The description of Arrabal is very simple in the novel, but his specific purpose is to convey the conflict between the Big Bad and the “Other.” Pynchon has depicted the scene where Oedipa dances with the deaf-mutes in a hotel. Pynchon doesn’t give concrete evidence of the death of Inverarity in the novel, he leaves the reason for his death in an unclear state, maybe Inverarity dies from murder or just from a natural cause which is not important, and his death is not the focus of the novel but merely serves as an impetus of the plotting process. Pierce began to act illogically, for example, he called Oedipa Maas in the very early morning, maybe at “three or so one morning” (2), and “began to ramble on in a series of comedic voices while discussing imaginary people and ideas” (3). His conspicuous weird and paranoid behaviors foretell Oedipa’s paranoid acts later in the novel.

Thomas Pynchon describes the main protagonist in a high satire in the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*: “Oedipa Maas, a woman who finds herself enmeshed in a worldwide conspiracy, meets some extremely interesting characters and attains a lot inconsiderable amount of self-knowledge” (97).

Oedipa sets out to search the secret of Pierce’s estate in San Narciso, in the fictional city, it seems the citizens are trapped in a kind of delusion. Oedipa Maas comes across Miles representing the rock group “The Paranoids” (15), after briefly talking with Miles, Oedipa identifies him suffer from paranoia, Pynchon just sets Miles in a minor role in the novel, and his appearance and relation with Oedipa are very important to establish an image of “Pynchon and the Sixties” the “atmosphere of....distrust” (Coward 7).

Another character Pynchon introduces is Metzger as a symbol of “anxieties” (Gleason 12). Among hundreds of characters depicted in the novels by Pynchon, Metzger can be regarded as the first character to encourage “depressing experiences” (Gleason 12). After Oedipus agrees to engage in sex games to discover how the storyline was resolved, Metzger still spots that “things became less and less clear”

(*The Crying of Lot 49* 26). Through this special character Metzger, Thomas Pynchon reveals to the reader a world that is full of both doubt and uncertainty in “virtually every piece of information” (Seed 125).

Oedipa Maas’ quest is a quest for decoding the Trystero, each time the appearance of the sign of the muted post-horn can be understood as decoding of Trystero. The first time Oedipa meets the muted post-horn is in the “scope bar”, which is the most significant and vivid scene in the novel, since then, the serial appearances of Trystero begin. These symbols look like impressive graffiti but are full of mystery and importance. Throughout the novel, the post-horn symbols continue to appear more and more frequently. Frank Kermode suggests the continual appearances “an intent to communicate” (Kermode 164). The Trystero is a company and signal of communication in the novel, but what exactly to communicate and who to communicate with are kept void and uncertain. Each time the symbol of post-horn appears, Pynchon just arranges for Oedipa to meet one person suffering from a different type of paranoia. In the bar, Oedipa meets Mike Fallopian is a representative of the people with “less imaginative paranoia” (Coward 7), the people with such paranoia do not care about the global conspiracy, but completely irrationally worry about the domestic cover-up. Fallopian, as an extreme right-wing activist, doesn’t apply the postal service of the government, and on its supporter’s claims exercises “systematic abuse” (Pynchon 35). He tells Oedipa that he doesn’t use the government postal service and chooses an alternate postal system Trystero, his remarks arouses Oedipa’ curiosity and lures her to set out to discover the world of the Tystero is “languid, sinister, blooming” (36), which finally subverts her original understanding of the world and subverts her perception of the operation of the universe. The more signs appear before Oedipa Maas, the more weird people she meets, the more she suffers from paranoia in the brand new and unfamiliar circumstances. No matter how illogic and absurd what Fallopian said is, Oedipa just has little doubt about what he said, and gradually, her mindset is similar to a copy of Fallopian’s mindset. In Pynchon’s novels, nearly every character even the very minor one serves as a representative of a form of paranoid thinking.

In Pynchon's opinion, the knowledge in the modern world only can mislead people to the loss of direction, and too much knowledge can disturb the people in the mind and bring about a chaotic state in the mind, which results in the mental disorder called paranoia, it is no coincidence that there are more and more people suffering from paranoia, especially for the most knowledgeable people, the information and knowledge is a kind of as "the systematic conspiracy of reality" (28) in "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon" by Richard Poirier. The character Metzger is a good example of Pynchon's attitude to knowledge. As a lawyer of Pierce, he acquires lots of knowledge which is related to Pierce Inverarity's mysterious business ventures. And he is disturbed and misled and overwhelmed by the knowledge.

Pynchon employs the postmodernism device metafiction to create the play-in-a-play in the novel, the play *The Courier's Tragedy* in the novel is an early "source of illumination" (Grant XV) to have a better understanding of the Tristero. The play in the novel serves to reflect the main plot and also a device used "to quicken its pace" (17) in *The Crying of Lot 49* by Pynchon. The play *The Courier's Tragedy* is about two contrary forces trying to destroy each other's kingdoms and flashes a symbol of a "once-knotted horn" related to Tystero, which can be regarded as a "message in the system" (Kermode 165), each message is not an isolated existence, each symbol of mute post-horn appearing on a different occasion, and each person Oedipa contacts, all them come to form a kind of conspiracy which leads her to go on the quest which is doomed to be fruitless, leads her to be completely lost in the chaotic world and makes her in a mental disorder to match the disorderly reality. "The director of the play, Randolph Dribbette, absolutely refuses to discuss the Tristero. He is not included in the original 17<sup>th</sup> century text" (Pynchon 56). Dribbette has created an "aura of ritual reluctance" (56) in the world and advises Oedipa to "hide a tape recorder in his bedroom, see what I talk about from wherever I am when I sleep" (56). He appears to know about the fact clearly that Oedipa is "attempting to create a projection of coherence on the world" (Simons 7). Oedipa is very concerned about the meaning of Tristero, so she seriously and publicly considered Dribbette's suggestion to explore his own life and even tried to have love affairs with him. Luckily, she never has to follow this proposal again, the novel tells that the encounter with Dribbette,

everything which Oedipa “saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero” (58). Patrick O’Donnell states that Oedipa Maas seems to doubt that “she is part of something bigger” (191) which seems to swallow her life. In the beginning, her reaction to these ideas seems entirely reasonable, but they can also be seen as avoidance. She even begins to doubt her ex-lover and checks Inverarity’s will again to attempt to make it clear if he might have tried to “leave behind an organized something after his own annihilation” (58), Oedipa has a “deep ignorance of the law, of investment, of real estate, ultimately of the dead man himself” (Pynchon 58). Her mind and life are both involved around the Trystero, the only possible distractions from the Trystero which is a double-edge sword may be compassing the refuge of reason and terrible dead ends without turn and vent.

From the angle of the refuge of reason, after the secret behind Trystero is disclosed, Oedipa can return to her real life and end the quest without meaning and end. However, it also becomes a dead end after encounters with weird men on the long quest journey, Oedipa realizes that she can’t make clear the Trystero in the chaotic world filled with paranoia. Oedipa seems to be trapped at the point where she tries discovering the nature and origin of Trystero but no longer just out of curiosity. She desperately longs for a way to escape a “closed system of perception” (Mangel 92). Therefore, in the following occasion on which post-horn appears, Oedipa doesn’t put forwards “blunt questions” (Pynchon 61) as “they would get her nowhere” (61). When Oedipa spots a scientist Stanley Koteks drawing the mute post-horn symbol of Trystero, she depresses her desire of eagerness to get an explanation from him and keeps silent instead of direct inquiry about the symbol. Even if Oedipa doesn’t look for the meaning of Trystero deliberately, the traces of Trystero begins to become more and more visible throughout the city with more hints to manifest themselves.

More and more hints appear to Oedipa: “A nursing home resident she encounters wears a signet ring with the post-horn symbol engraved on it” (67), “A bronze historical marker at a scenic lake which Oedipa visits commemorate a 19<sup>th</sup> century ambush of postal workers by masked marauders” (64), “a stamp expert discovers the symbol hidden on a stamp out of Pierce’s large collection” (71). Oedipa is going through what Bernard Duyfhuizen in “Hushing Sick Transmissions

Disrupting Story in *The Crying of Lot 49*” correctly asserts is “information overload” (88). Although she encounters more and more signs of Trystero, the true meaning of them is still “continually postponed” (Gleason 97). The deep worry looms to Oedipa, “she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself” (69). Pynchon does not offer more clues to understand the events that occur in the world in the novel. However, Oedipa realizes that everything happens not only out of coincidence. Although “coincidences blossom” (80) and some important things hidden behind are gradually being discovered, Oedipa realizes gradually that the Trystero is “nothing but a sound, a word” (80) which refers to nothingness. After rationalizing what she has experienced on the journey of the quest for Trystero, she is increasingly certain of the possibility that Trystero references nothing. Her mind is obsessed with Trystero which she now realizes it maybe stand for nothing, therefore, she tries to prove her idea about Trystero then it may “go away and disintegrate quietly” (81) and drive it from her mind. The fresh understanding of Trystero is a turning point for her quest, since then, the essence of the quest for Trystero changes. Anne Mangel argues that “in the wake of discovering evidence that the Trystero organization is, or was a part of the world. Oedipa’s task has shifted from merely sorting through Pierce’s estate and seeking clues which will help guide her to understand the possible hidden worlds” (126). More and more hidden worlds reveal to Oedipa as more and more signs of Trystero appear to her, it is increasingly difficult for her to discern what is real and what is fantastic in the chaotic world. Everything hidden behind is different from what it was in her mind. Petillion compares California to a “wilderness” (Petillion 155). This wilderness, hinting at the untamed and dangerous nature, which includes “drunks, bums, pedestrians, pederasts, and the walking psychotic” (96) reveals to us the image of decayed America and the lost modern world. Oedipa Maas wanders in the streets, every item and every person she meets on the street journey reveal the Trystero in her mind, in the novel, the signal of muted post-horn relating to Trystero appears in the gay clubs, at the bus stop, in the bar, on the plate, in the squatter’s flat, even the Chinese herbalist stores, the abundance appearance of signs of Trystero completely bewilder Oedipa who fails to recognize whether they are real or fantasy. In the novel, Oedipa shifts her role to a detective from the role of housewife, however, her



detective journey deprives her ability to be a detective due to failure to recognize what is real and what is imagined. Which not allows her to go on her quest journey to discover more hidden information and make a clear of the hidden reality. Like a paranoiac, she intends to understand the reality around her in a certain way and thus she has failed to get her ability to “discern between what she sees in her mind what she witnesses with her eyes” (Bergh 5). There are more examples, such as Oedipa is convinced she sees “a man, perhaps a man, in a black suit...watching her” (86) when she wanders in Chinatown. She is convinced that children’s game contains “dates from a secret history” (87) when she watches some kids playing the game in the street. David Seed argues that the world for Oedipa becomes “a kind of text which Oedipa struggles to read” (Seed 133).

To some degree, we found that the paranoid thought and delusions did not fight against Oedipa, instead, it is beneficial to her, and she finds something to do with the chaotic world in which she lives. Once she becomes one of the “nutty broads” (92), she will be more relaxed. That is to say, be paranoia is easier for her to live in a disorderly world. In *Providence, Paranoia, and the Novel*, Leo Braudy notes that “the paranoid person feeds his or her paranoia by any means, but supporting a delusion is primarily accomplished when an individual deliberately places himself in paranoid situations” (632). If participation can strengthen certain ideas, then it is possible for one person to face dangerous and strange situations fearlessly. Oedipa gives a wonderful example to match such an idea. When she pays a visit to her psychiatrist, attempting to reason about her way utilizing all that she witnesses.

Ironically, due to the paranoia, Dr. Hilarious yields to his unusual fantasies and has changed from a respected experimental psychiatrist to a terrible person, which shows us how mad a person can become after losing contact with reality, the example of how unbalanced a person who has no contact with the society. He demonstrates himself trapped in a mental state which is “fragmented in the extreme” (Bergh 2).

As Dr. Hilarious points at Oedipa’s face with a rifle, he tells her that he tries “to remain in relative paranoia” (101) and tries to escape the arrest for imagined crimes during the war. Pynchon regards the society should be shamed on it and it is

the society or it is America that makes him a societal victim “lost in his own individual way in the suddenly unfamiliar frontier of America” (Bergh 2). Oedipa “manages to take control of the situation by apprehending his gun” (102), Oedipa’s reaction is unbelievable for any ordinary individual, it is difficult to distinguish her reaction is out of bravery or paranoia, however, it can’t be denied that it is vital to keep Oedipa alive and make her survive in the chaotic world.

Not only Oedipa suffers from paranoia and loss of identity, but those individuals she meets on the journey to solve the Trystero mystery are virtually lost than she is, there is a long list of such individuals in the novel, such as her Mucho Maas loses his personality and identity becomes a sample in the experiment and “a whole room full of people” (106). Metzger runs off “with a depraved 15 years old” (114). The playwright commits suicide maybe because something “had to do with the Tristero” (121). The experience she goes through and the individuals’ stories make Oedipa left in a state of panic and feel she is stuck in the dilemma, she senses that she seems “fluttering out over an abyss” (117) that subverts what she understood about the world before. According to O’Donnell, probably they are true “victims of sinister global machinations stretching across millennium” (191) who guide Oedipa to keep being a paranoia but a normal people with normal sanity. Oedipa “fears for the security” (120) of anyone around her. She thinks to herself that “*they* got rid of Hilarious and Mucho and Metzger” (121). Although she continued to search for Trystero’s history in museums and university archives, Oedipa’s research about Trystero ultimately is fruitless for “beyond its origins, the libraries told her nothing” (122).

At the end of the novel, no matter how much Oedipa attempts to escape the control of the evil forces and is eager to erase the Trystero occupying her mind a lot, she spares no effort to jump out of the state of paranoia and fails in the end, then the idea of suicide occurs to her, she regards suicide as an only way to set her free and step out of her trouble which traps her in the abyss. To portray her plight more clearly, she can go on connecting with the hostile world by means of paranoia, or she can break away from it. Finally, Oedipa keeps her choice of continuing her life but fully aware of her obvious illness that “they’ll call it paranoia” (128).

Usually, people think paranoia is “more generally: any unjustified or excessive sense of fear; *esp.* an unreasonable fear of the actions or motives of others” (“paranoia”), while Bersani observes that in novels by Pynchon, paranoia functions more “as if it were merely synonymous with something like unfounded suspicions about a hostile environment” (99). By which we can say Pynchon’s paranoia originates from the perception of a threatening entity. The paranoid always searches for connections and “other orders behind the visible” (qtd. Bersani 100), which are hostile to him. Events are suspect for the paranoid and Pynchon depicts that this lies in “the quest of the protagonists that disintegrate their self and fracture their identity. Hindrances are related to a perpetrator, or indeed, as is a frequent joke, to the perpetrator behind the perpetrator, the mob behind the mob” (“*Inherent Vice*” 248).

Oedipa was finally completely bewildered by her quest for Trystero which means nothing, at the end of the novel, Trystero is kept undiscovered and Oedipa is trapped in the state of loss of self and frustration without getting any answer she is searching for. In “Unfinished Business--Thomas Pynchon and the Quest for Revolution,” Paul Coates supports this end for “the fact that no revelation concludes the book...fits ...its thematic design” (87). Richard Pearce gives an explanation in “*Pynchon’s Endings*” that Oedipa “may have become paranoid and discovered the totalitarian underpinnings of Western democracy” (150). However, only it is likely that she may become paranoid. Oedipa herself really wants to know what happened to her and she has been a victim during the journey. She tries to make it clear in the second person whether

you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness and concealed density of dream! Onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies...or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you...so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond j Just a practical joke. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull. (Pynchon 128)

Pynchon doesn't allow the readers to discern the complete truth. There is no clear answer, Pearce argues that it is more reasonable that "while Oedipa develops, and while she goes about as far as it is possible to go in her quest for the secret of the Tristero, she goes nowhere" (147). She is indeed a changer, and her quest leads her to discover a brand strand world which she never understands fully. The paranoia in the novel serves as a vital tool for us to have a better understanding of other themes and other motifs in the novel. Mendelson argues "everything in *The Crying of Lot 49* participates in either the sacred or the profane" (112). At the beginning of the novel, Oedipa's dull and peaceful is with a profane nature, whereas her later quest for the secret behind her ex-lover's estate and discoveries regarding the Tristero are sacred. On the quest of the journey, she suffers from paranoia that "is a secular form of the Puritan consciousness" (Sanders 181). This means the paranoiac and Puritan or other religious both seek to find the original force which governs or determines the things in the world, what is different lies in that the latter will find the original force comes from God, while the secular paranoiac only can find the same force comes from "...conspiracy, governed by shadowy figures whose powers approach omniscience and omnipotence" (177). In this sense, "paranoia can be compared to a non-theistic belief, which accepts human controlling levers behind the scene" (Braudy 632). Suppose the person suffering from paranoia can be regarded as a religious one, then Oedipa may be called a saint.

To conclude, through a brief description Pynchon shows us Oedipa's transformation from a normal and innocent housewife to a detective, the will of her ex-lover is just like a hoax luring her aware of and permanently mentally destroyed by an absurd reality and finally become a paranoia, the signal of Tystero seems to be a Holy Grail which is a fantasy waiting for Oedipa to discover, such quest is doomed to lead her to go nowhere but lose herself,

*The Crying of Lot 49* novel itself severs as a dark and meaningless exploration of a conspiracy including paranoia. To a degree, in the chaotic and disorderly world, it is reasonable for characters like Oedipa to survive and understand what they experience in their life characterized by paranoia is to be a paranoiac.

Each novel of Thomas Pynchon deals with the distinction between living and dead matter. “the most precious possession you have”(2); hence each novel deals with the frequent blending of animate and inanimate. The major characters of Pynchon, Herbert Stencil, Oedipa Maas, and Tyrone Slothrop represent matter alive though there are external forces destroying life. Pynchon uses metaphors of life and death to depict the anxieties and psychological anguish of his characters. Stencil symbolizes the pattern for life, while Sloth is an acronym for the awe of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Pynchon has depicted the operation of order and disorder exploring the role of the universe running down; life is deterministic and planned and is unpredictable. Pynchon argues that “things are going to get worse before they get better” (282). Pynchon comments thus:

If the entropy of each element in some crystalline state is taken as zero at the absolute zero of temperature, every substance has a finite positive entropy, but at the absolute zero of temperature, the entropy may become zero, and does so become in the case of perfect crystalline substances. (188)

The novel presents Mr. Thoth who is old, sleepy, and indolent as Oedipa felt “as if she had been trapped at the center of some intricate crystal and on days of a certain temperature and Mr. Thoth felt close to God” (67). Oedipa’s search for information entails death and destruction; she is determined to bring order to Inverarity’s interests but encounters members of a deadly conspiracy. Arrabal is depicted as an anarchist and promoter of disorder (entropy) whose playwright namesake depicts perversion and death. The novel ends with her brooding: “those symmetrical four” possible truth. Such symmetry and order refer to uncertainty and she explores and finds a series of events as a string of binary oppositions. In the world of Oedipa Maas, there is no certainty and everything is chaotic and disorderly.

In postmodern aesthetics and moral philosophy, there is always a concern to explore the relationship between the individual as “self” and the “Other” Michel Foucault (2000) and Jurgen Habermas (1990) in his book *Moral Consciousness Communicative Action* took up this discussion. Foucault used the model of power and

in his lectures and books, he established a connection between “Self” and “Other.” The “Other” exerts a great influence on connecting the external world to the subject. Habermas defines this relationship in terms of subjectivity and stability. He observes that “thought processes within individuals facilitate the connection of the subject and the Other in communicative discourse” (Habermas 2). The novel *The Crying of Lot 49* deals with such a relationship; Pynchon explores the role of the subjects in relation to an external world on which they attempt to impose order or meaning. Oedipa Maas expresses her plight seeking the connection between the thinking self and the Other. Through Oedipa, Pynchon suggests an alternative theory of connecting the individual to the community. Her quest is deterministic; she struggles to establish the nature of Pierce Inverarity’s will and his connections to the Trystero. Oedipa is torn between order and disorder, between variables of conditionality and un-conditionality. Oedipa uses her reason and sensibility to explore the complex web of Trystero, but she finds that phenomena offer “outward patterns with a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate” (Pynchon14). Oedipa fails in her venture especially when she applies the values and principles of Enlightenment such as reason and analysis. Oedipa remembers that Pierce said to “keep it bouncing...that’s all the secret keep it bouncing” (18) Pynchon, exactly following Foucauldian approach. Even the bouncing technique fails as she cannot determine the nature of her interpersonal relations. Habermas suggested the methodology of bridging the gap between the Self and the Other through reason and freedom. Pynchon looked at “a sunrise over the library slope at Cornell University that nobody out on it had seen because the slope faces west” (1). Pynchon stresses Oedipa’s education at Cornell to depict her faith in reason and scientific analysis based on the theory of Newton. Her viewing the sunset, her analysis of nature

Here, Pynchon stresses Oedipa’s education at Cornell to draw attention to her Enlightenment and Newtonian approach to imposing order upon phenomena. Oedipa’s viewing of the sunset, peering to the west, can be read as a figurative harkening back to the philosophies and ideologies that have developed American thought. This system of cause and effect analysis is the methodology that she seeks to utilize as she attempts to understand the intricacies of Pierce’s will. Roseman,

Oedipa's and Mucho Maas's lawyer, outlines this rational, analytical methodology for her when she visits him at his lawyer's office. Oedipa must "learn intimately the books and the business, go through probate, collect all debts, inventory the assets, get an appraisal of the estate, decide what to liquidate and what to hold on to, pay off claims, square away taxes, distribute legacies" (10). Oedipa Maas must methodically and analytically research Inverarity's estate, collecting as much information upon it as possible in order to organize and make sense of Inverarity's legacy. This approach should yield ostensibly an effect that would explain Pierce's holdings. Indeed at the beginning of chapter three, she fully expects to be able to decipher his estate "logically" (31). Oedipa adds that "that's what would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, logically, together. ... As if ... there were a revelation in progress all around her," and "much of the revelation was to come through the stamp collection Pierce had left"(31), the stamps which ultimately place her on the trail of the Tristero, the underground mail organization, which seems to be connected to Pierce's estate.

## Chapter Four

### Entropy and Apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow*

The masterpiece *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) of Thomas Pynchon is essentially a historical novel covering some important periods of human civilization and expressing the apocalyptic vision of the novelist who employs the postmodernist literary devices to dramatize the mood of decadence and despair. Thomas Pynchon sets the story amidst the Second World War. Pynchon's versatile genius manifests in his depiction of a wide range of subject matter and the application of postmodern literary techniques of fragmentation, paranoia, and interpretation. The novel is based on many parallels, oppositions, and double structures in the content, characterization, and themes. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon enjoys involving his characters in a cosmos in which no absolute truth and no singular concept can survive in the postmodern American society. Pynchon dramatizes a society where the certainty of life is a luxury and the characters are thrown into a universe in which certainty is a luxury that no one can reach.

The plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* revolves around the mysterious Rocket 00000 as well as around Tyrone Slothrop. Molly Hite notes that "the novel has more than 300 fully developed characters" (13). Its vast scope covers an immense sample of themes ranging from thermodynamics to Godel's theorem, from music to a critique of the mercantile society of America. Pynchon has also depicted the sub-themes such as Byron, the light bulb and the diversions disturb the unity. Shawn Smith notes, *Gravity's Rainbow* makes use of syntactic slippage and ellipses to achieve a certain aesthetic incompleteness, a disordered, entropic plot. Consider the following passage:

But here it is possible to see the whole shape at once, not for me. I'm not that far along-but many know it is a clear presence...shape isn't really the right word....Let me be honest with you. I'm finding it harder to put myself in your shoes. (307)

Pynchon uses ellipses and slippages to convey the impossibility of communication. It is difficult to find out any meaning due to the novel's all-inclusive



nature. In other words, Pynchon is rephrasing here his earlier stances on information theory. *Gravity's Rainbow* destroys any attempt at conveying meaning in its traditional, organized form. The message of the novel is transmitted in mutated forms. The novel makes use of the extra-linguistic reality of the word. The language of *Gravity's Rainbow* communicates through absences and local entropies through the noise. The beginning part of the novel "Beyond the zero" signifies this leakage of the fictional into the real. Shawn Smith argues that the very end of the novel is witness to the transformation of the narrative (Smith 71). Smith further argues that: "Slothrop's fragmentation replicates the novel's formal strategy in miniature. The exponential increase of formal fragmentation in this section establishes incompleteness as a meta-historical commentary on historical perception" (123). Slothrop is seen dissolving and re-inventing thus transforming the novel into transcendental forms that build on ideas of disorder, or entropy, in a struggle to create meaning. The plot draws from Henry Adams's idea of "universal decline". Pynchon the historical events of World War II to depict a gradual universal decline of the civilization.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon exposes the crises of postmodern American society through the description of apocalyptic narratives; the looming threat of nuclear disaster. T S Eliot's *The Wasteland* can "connect nothing with nothing" (Eliot 47), while the multiple characters in the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* are trying to look for the relationship between everything in a "progressive *knotting into*" (Pynchon 3). Although apocalyptic narratives are the main theme of the complicated novel, Pynchon doesn't materialize the apocalyptic events, he only sets and subverted the apocalyptic events by the way of a counter transcendence which is mainly expressed as a text in nature but not as a fact. Pynchon is an expert at utilizing postmodernist literary devices, for example, intertextuality, in the novel, he follows the model of *Moby Dick* of Melville and borrows so many images, themes and nuances from Melville to mirror the malaise of postmodern America. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the German V2 rocket is a critical symbolic analogue of *Whale* by Melville who uses whiteness and light image to explore the deep tragic themes and characters, while Pynchon uses scientific terms to express metaphysical viewpoints. Pynchon gives a flood of images and metaphors to depict the traumatic experiences of his characters in

an encyclopedic style. Pynchon has a deep understanding of the zeitgeist of postwar and the cultural spirit of the mercantile American society. Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* advertises the classic "doom of the World" on the pattern of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Pynchon has chronicled the paranoid atmosphere of the Second World War and the Cold War introducing a multiplicity of characters leading a hellish life being threatened by the tension of the doomed days. The plot is full of symbols of apocalypse such as falling rockets, warring nations, and the terror of anarchy symbolizing the final annihilation of the world. The most menacing situation is the threat of the rockets as Pynchon envisages the imminent doom of the world. The apocalypse becomes a suspended moment of textual indeterminacy. The novel's penultimate moment of utter nuclear annihilation strangely ends un-apocalyptically into bouncing-ball singsong. Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) is a highly apocalyptic narrative; its eschatological vision eludes the definition.

Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is too subversive to admit the materiality of such an event that supersedes human mentality. The apocalypse loses its materiality as both a historical event and a textual moment in Pynchon's narrative not because of any postmodern subversive strategy or a skeptical or periodic logic. *Gravity's Rainbow* has its apocalyptic moments but is textually erased by the way of the promotion of a counter-discourse of transcendence. Apocalypse, in Pynchon's text, is subverted but never replaced by agnosticism as an alluring alternative for knowledge. Knowledge takes the form of technology in the human world. The destructive nature of this technological knowledge is epitomized in the novel by rockets. Hence the plot of the novel evokes a doomed atmosphere of war and paranoia.

The rocket is the icon of the novel itself. Rockets hover over the entire action of *Gravity's Rainbow*, both literally and metaphorically, as the human means of death and the apocalypse. Highly destructive V-2 rockets keep striking London throughout the novel, establishing a dense atmosphere of the apocalypse. The rocket is not only the ultimate product of technological progress in the twentieth century but figures as an emblem of the age's apocalyptic mind. It endorses the two contrary phenomena that shape the human condition: apocalyptic determinism and transcendence. Its

ascension represents the human desire for transcendence which is betrayed by Newtonian gravity. The determinism of gravity is bound by apocalyptic fall. Thus, to universalize this implication of the rocket into belief and ritualism, Pynchon invokes Tarot symbolism and Cabalist mysticism to mythicize, the 00000 rocket. Blicero, the human initiator of the apocalypse, has the tarot card of the Tower which Pynchon reads in Freudian terms as a phallic figure denoting Eros and life. Yet, due to its heavy Biblical history as a religious emblem, it is also taken, according to Pynchon, “any System which cannot tolerate heresy: a system which, by its nature, must sooner or later fall. We know by now that it is also the Rocket” (762). Similarly, the Tower as Rocket figures in the Cabalist system of mysticism as combining both the divinity of creation and the agency of human destruction. The path of the tower on the Cabalist Tree of life is one of victory and sex. It is haunted by two evil demons or Qliphoth which are the Raven of Death and the Poison of God. Because the rocket conceals the Tree of Life whose ten paths or Sephiroth correspond to the rocket countdown, the critic Dwight Eddins (1984) finds the rocket as the “sacred guarantor of return is thus co-opted by technological mysticism” (179) as part of a one-way process designed to thwart the renewal of life, which Captain Blicero disparages as “this cycle of infection and death” (738). This is precisely how the rocket works as an agent of the apocalypse. It entraps life within an eschatological cycle of eternal return to what the Zone-Hereros calls “holy centers.” Pynchon reads the rocket as the ultimate avatar of the teleology of death in the system of Cabalist mysticism. He says that new order of demons evolved, working their peculiar evil of the path of the tower, He expresses this in Cabalist terms:

The Ravens of Death have now tasted of the Poison of God...but in doses small enough not to sicken but to bring on, like the Amanita muscaria, a very peculiar state of mind... They have no official name, but they are the Rocket’s guardian demons. (762-3)

These demons represent, in Blakean terms, the ideologies and philosophic paradigms of the post-Enlightenment west that produced the rocket gospel of war and apocalypse. The association of the rocket with the System lies in their shared same implication—apocalypse. This is elucidated later in the Kekulé section. Kekulé, the

German chemist who discovered the structure of aromatic chemicals, dreamt of “the Great Serpent holding its tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the World” (419). Pynchon compares the rocket to the Biblical Serpent which is capable of bringing death and destroying for human beings, the rocket image reminds us of the destruction of civilization. Pynchon, however, creates the dream into an extended allegory on the postmodern condition. Pynchon’s allegory may be long but worth quoting in full here:

The Serpent that announces, “The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning,” is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to violate the Cycle. 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 it’s 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. (419)

The Serpent is related to the evil, detriment, and lust in Bible, the rocket in the novel becomes the image of the phallic and Serpent, Pynchon spares much space in the novel to sexuality description which reminds the readers that reason why *Gravity’s Rainbow* was turned down by members of the Pulitzer Prize, the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop’s sexual act map matches the rockets dropping sites, the ridiculous plot about sexuality in the rationalized culture just emphasized death but not love, the more sexuality a culture contains, the more sexuality loses its love power, too much pornography, and commercialization appeared abundantly in the culture of post-war to prophet the apocalyptic vision.

Pynchon weds science with religious discourse to rationalize the apocalypse in modern terms. He borrows the term “entropy” from thermodynamics to fashion the genesis of the apocalyptic ending of the life cycle. Entropy is one of Pynchon’s favorite metaphors for human existence in the twentieth century. Entropy denotes a thermodynamic process that accounts for “the slowing down of a system, the calcifying decay of life and available energy on a scale that may be minute or global” (Harold Bloom, 12). If the Biblical inception of the history of mankind is built on the evil and sin that the Serpent brought into the primordial innocence before the Fall, entropy, as a scientific term, accounts for the inevitable destruction of this fallen world and that this destruction is even latent in its very material foundations. Thus, by extending this principle of entropy one can logically deduce that “the universe itself must eventually suffer a heat-death, reduced and simplified to a lukewarm system in which no energy may be used for any purpose” (Bloom 13).

Such a reading of the system as fatally entropic can account for the rocket as a system, as both follow entropic rules that ensure apocalyptic destruction. The serpentine rocket flies in an attempt to break the circle of the earth in what amount to a transcendence of the earthly limitations. Yet, its attempt is doomed to failure by the law of entropy. Once it consumes its energy it comes under the grip of gravity. Its fall ensures destruction in the human world. Pynchon, here, conveys a secular mode of apocalypse in spite of the rich Biblical reverberance in this passage. The critic Lee Quinby (1994) describes “this mode of apocalypse as history —moving towards entropic inertia ... This is the dystopian view that history has exhausted itself. The irony is that we live on beyond morality or meaning” (34). This kind of apocalypse is quite different from the Biblical or theological apocalypse in that it is utterly nihilistic and denies any possibility of human salvation by whatever power in the universe. The critic Lois Parkinson Zamora (1989) further suggests that “this apocalyptic mode is used by Pynchon as a reaction against the anthropomorphism of traditional apocalypse in favor of the black mechanism of a purely physical world that is irreversibly running out of energy” (54). He employs entropy as a metaphor for envisioning the apocalyptic mode. The absence of redemption from this entropic vision of the apocalypse nullifies any eschatological or stereological possibilities

characteristic of the Biblical apocalypse. Time no longer proves redemptive or regenerative in this kind of apocalypse. This nihilistic attitude of the apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow* is concretized by employing it in the form of cautionary tales of technological hubris, notably, the rocket as an agency of nuclear apocalypse at the end. Because the rocket is itself a product of another system of beliefs, the rhetoric of apocalypse it comes to express is both an era-bound and a trans-historical system. Pynchon's framing of his apocalyptic vision with war narratives is meant to epitomize the cosmology of the apocalypse as wish fulfillment of the human will lead to death. However, Pynchon's World War II remains a historical fact but is completely devoid of its apocalyptic significance, at least, on the level of textual representation. His war never disrupts history radically in terms of ends and beginnings. It only leads to another Cold War and to the creation of the Zone, which is a psychic state of unreality existing only in the war zone of Europe during 1944. Slothrop, Pynchon's sometimes central character, reflects on the essence of the Zone as he walks through it as follows:

Maybe for a little while, all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up. (566)

The determinacy of the apocalypse is over in such an imaginary state. The only interplay allowed in such a state is that of temporality. The very historicity of the apocalypse is negated as the ultimate end of the all-dominant logos of temporality. The absence of the apocalypse as a force in the world of the Zone is best seen in the negation of the distinction between the Elects and the Preterites, those chosen for salvation and those doomed to damnation. Such a negation would undermine the very notions of eschatology and soteriology that make up the orthodox Judeo-Christian traditions of the apocalypse, where the eschaton means the end of times, judgment day which itself guarantees soteriology who is saved. This is but a manifestation of Pynchon's vision of life as a perpetual transformation rather than a series of violent disruptions. He makes this clear when he uses for his epigraph of *Gravity's Rainbow* a quotation from the remarks of Wernher von Braun, the Nazi and NASA rocket

engineer, before the July 1969 Apollo moon launch: “Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of spiritual existence after death.” Most of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* commentators mistakenly take this as a manifestation of Pynchon’s Gnosticism knowledge as the sole agency of human redemption. Steven Weisenburger (1988) in his authoritative *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* asserts that “this epigraph is used to epitomize the idea that science is another of the means humans use in the attempt to surmount ‘extinction’” (15). He further goes on to state that this scientific endeavor “will soon correspond with other disciplines represented in the novel” (15). The point of weakness in such interpretations is that they stop at the word ‘transformation’ in the epigraph forcing Braun and Pynchon into a straight-jacket Agnostic position. Reading this ‘transformation’ in the context of the whole epigraph, indeed of Braun’s whole speech, will show that this transformation is not a process of salvation or preservation against annihilation, it is rather a process of transcendence whereby the man transcends the limitation of physical existence into the salvation of spiritual freedom. Transformation as transcendence is not mystical as it requires the agency of death as a threshold to the ultimate liberation from materialism and history. Extinction in the form of ending and apocalypse is inescapable as it conditions and directs historicity and human mentality. Material salvation through knowledge is impossible as such. It can only momentarily subvert the inevitable. True salvation can only be attained through death transcendence. Pynchon seems to read death as a phenomenon of cultural metaphysics. Pynchon makes this clear in *Gravity’s Rainbow* when he says:

The persistence, then, of structures favoring death. Death converted into more death. Perfecting its reign, just as the buried coal grows denser, and overlaid with more strata—epoch on top of the epoch, city on top of the ruined city. This is the sign of Death the impersonator. (169-70)

Defined by war and material production of historicity, Pynchon distances death as the Cartesian Wall of Western philosophy and history. Blicero, and Weissmann, one of Pynchon’s most fiendish characters, describes the Western

obsession with death as the ultimate way to attain the salvation of the apocalypse as follows: “Europe had found the site for its Kingdom of Death, that special Death the West had invented” (736). Pynchon speaks of the Kingdom of death and the Biblical tradition of the apocalypse tracing the history thousands of years. Wars are waged and mass deaths are committed in the pursuit to establish the kingdom of God on earth via apocalypse. Western culture as such has come to be obsessed with the wish to death and power that such philosophers as Nietzsche diagnosed as the primal cause of Western cultural nihilism. Furthermore, Blicero makes clear the apocalyptic overtone of his speech soon when he speaks to his cherubic lover Gottfried as he loads him into the ultimate weapon of the apocalypse, the 00000 rocket: “I want to break out – to leave this cycle of infection and death. I want to be taken in love: so taken that you and I, and death, and life, will be gathered, inseparable, into the radiance of what we would become” (737). Thanatos prevails as Eros is banished to oblivion under the inescapable grip of the logos of death. This failure of the bond of love points to the degree Western culture is obsessed with death as a new start via apocalypse. This is the result of Calvinist indoctrination of death as the cultural index of Original Sin. However secular might be these obsessions underlie the apocalyptic Pynchon narratives in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Human reality is fallen. It becomes a vicious cycle of life and death because of Man’s original sin. The love that Blicero highlights as salvation is not secular or spiritual, it is the love of God that is described as ‘radiance’ which means either the majesty of God or peace, spiritual peace. Blicero inscribes a process of transformation of being into the original state of light and peace before the original sin and the fall. This is a transcendence of the earthly into the divine and, according to Blicero, it can be achieved through bringing the Biblical apocalypse on earth. It is through this apocalyptic transcendence that Blicero can be reunited with his lover outside the boundaries of life and death in eternity. Blicero’s firing of the rocket is but one example of the ritual murder that is committed in the name of religion for such action, according to Dwight Eddins in *Gnostic Pynchon* (1984) “symbolizes an artificial apocalypse, engineered to celebrate the religion of Gnostic artifice” (23). The human-engineered apocalypse is never redemptive and wish-bound as it remains historical and self-destructive. The death that Blicero strives



to transcend through the rocket is the ultimate end for the rocket is betrayed by gravity and becomes the agent of the death that it was employed to transcend.

Blicero uses violent disruption to realize his dream of the apocalypse. The ideology underlying this dream might be perverted, but its end is highly suggestive. He uses the 00000 rocket to target America. The invocation of America as the site of the apocalypse is very significant in the conceptualization of the apocalypse as a process of cultural metaphysics. Just prior to his sentimental speech on achieving transcendence with Gottfried, Blicero describes the imperial process that signifies the creation of the Kingdom of Death in Biblical and historical terms:

America was the edge of the World. A message for Europe, continent-sized, inescapable. [. . .] In Africa, Asia, Amerindia, Oceana, Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old metropolis. (737)

Pynchon delineates the corruption of the American dream through the contamination of the European will to power. America as the “New Eden”, as the early settlers had envisioned, has strayed away from Eden and become a garden of evil. It lost its utopian spirit of cultural innocence through the process of imperial self-fashioning after the historic-religious models of post-Enlightenment Europe. The equation of “empire” with “death” affects the cultural poetics of apocalyptic historicity. This death is conceptual rather than actual. It is apocalyptic as it is meant to fulfill eschatological ends. Essentially, there is an apocalyptic empire playing a vital role on early and exerting an important influence on the politics, in reality, the very empire is related to God’s design for human beings and offers the imperial seat to Christ, in the end, it is such an empire that lies at the center of apocalyptic. This is a peculiarly western tradition that started with the Roman Empire and descending through modern European imperial powers to the United States in the twentieth

century. The centrality of the apocalyptic vision to the American imperial discourse is established by the early European settlers in America. Zamora (1989) puts forward such a vision by claiming that “the earliest Puritan texts attest to constant attempts to unite apocalyptic theology and American history: The New World is directly associated with the culmination of history” (Zamora 9). Clearly, the New World as the site of a re-created Eden offered the early puritan settlers the opportunity to enact the apocalyptic narrative attending the typology of the earthly Eden in the Bible. This Biblical idea becomes America’s manifest destiny. But with the corruption of this Promised Land with material ideals of the Old World America loses its ability to give the fulfillment of redemption brings to the fore the question of the time and place Armageddon would occur. Thus, failure engenders quest and expansion because if “New England failed to resolve into the Promised Land, some other place would be found, and the Puritan eschatological hopes would reconstitute themselves as America expanded across the continent” (Zamora 9). It is at this moment that the American colonial discourse became imperial in the European sense of the word.

The Promised Land of the puritans became an empire, a “Kingdom of Death”, in Pynchon’s words. The “death colonies” says Pynchon above, expanded into the “kingdom of death,” because expansion and colonialism entail death and displacement of the colonized inferior races. Alternatively, the concept of Manifest Destiny, which was coined in the 1840s to justify the American expansion westward, is no longer heralding the redemptive eschatology of a divine apocalypse. This is an ironic reversal in history as well as in literary representation highlighted by the absence of divine redemption and coupled with a purely human agency of the awaited apocalypse. *Gravity’s Rainbow* advances a purely secular apocalypse through a purely human cataclysm, producing a dystopian vision of America that ultimately mocks the very concept of Manifest Destiny of the early Puritan settlers in the New World. *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, is not unique in this vision of the secular or ironic apocalypse. It merely reproduces the historical consciousness of the post-WWII era. “Since the end of World War II,” says cultural historian Daniel Wojcik (1977), “visions and beliefs about the end of the world appear to have become increasingly pessimistic, stressing cataclysmic disaster as much as previous millenarian visions

emphasized the imminent arrival of a redemptive new era” (98). The transcendental, millennial vision of America as a redemptive paradise or the New Eden became more bleak and apocalyptic in the second half of the twentieth century. The secular apocalypse hinges on the destructive capabilities of human beings. Such apocalyptic scenarios tend to describe unredemptive worldly cataclysm initiated by human ignorance, unchecked technological progress, or chance natural mega disasters. The sinister human potential for evil underlies all these causes. Secular apocalypse, therefore, tends to emphasize human nihilism regardless of its causes or ends. One of the most widespread and most fatalistic secular apocalyptic scenarios imagined is the vision of the world destroyed by nuclear weapons. The inevitability of the nuclear apocalypse is, no wonder, the major shaping force of the fatality that colored the modern imagination.

Wojcik notes that “the Images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, Vietnam (rendered by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola as *Apocalypse Now*) give unalterable contours to the landscape of contemporary memory. Apocalypse is no longer a dark shapeless terror, but a statistically documented event, complete with date, time, and place” (Wojcik 98). The violation of the divine origins of the knowledge rationalizes the horror of the apocalypse so as to undermine its teleology. The violation of the divine origins of the apocalypse subverts it into an arena of human history as an event solely shaped by human agency. This subversion of the teleological into the history in the Biblical apocalypse is one of the strategies that Pynchon employs to bring about an apocalyptic closure in his text. In an episode of the fourth part of *Gravity's Rainbow* subtitled —Streets, Slothrop finds a piece of newspaper with the nonsensical headline “MB DRO / ROSHI” (707). The context of the passage makes it obvious that the whole headline must be —A BOMB DROPPED ON HIROSHIMA. The historical reference coincides with Slothrop’s dark forebodings on looking at the destroyed buildings in an unspecified German city. He feels as if wandering through a destroyed city that has itself been the target of some such nuclear bomb:

Perhaps there is a new bomb that can destroy only the insides of structures. Here he speculates about what would later be described as

the effect of the H Bomb. This moment is prophetic of the apocalyptic implicature of such a weapon for Pynchon's ironic narrator strangely muses why was he looking upward? (706)

The skeptical tone of this sudden remark is clear and loud. The heavenly plan of redemptive apocalypse is no longer valid in the face of this utter nihilism of the newly invented nuclear apocalypse. Alternatively, this gesture of questioning relocates the origins and intent of the apocalypse from the inevitability of a divinely foretold closure to the relativity of human agency. This means that the apocalypse, as Pynchon imagines it, is no longer a teleological terror for doomsday loses its unitary nature as the ultimate divine closure of human time. The Biblical Armageddon has become a mere uncalculated side-effect of human technological progress. Hiroshima might be a distant event in the margins of *Gravity's Rainbow*, but the 1973 Los Angeles is a textual space for the inevitability of the nuclear apocalypse. The 00000 Rocket that Blicero launches late in 1945 transcends time as well as geography to target this American city in an alternate present where the American president Richard Nixon is caricatured as Richard M. Zhlubb, night manager of the Orpheus Theatre.

Pynchon's choice of Los Angeles is significant. He did not choose Boston or New England as the seat of the early settlers of America to symbolize the failure of their theological vision of the "New Eden" and the promise of "Manifest Destiny." By choosing Los Angeles he achieves a double effect: First, he chooses Los Angeles because it is the cultural seat of present-day America, a city where secularized America is at its best. It is the negative end of the process of the transformation of the theological conception of the new Land into the mundane and the existential. Second, the invocation of the word "angels" in the name of the city is highly evocative of both the debasement of the Puritan ideals for America and the rocket association with the Biblical apocalypse. Los Angeles means "the angels" in Spanish, the full name is "La Ciudad de la Reina de Los Angeles" which means the city of the Queen of the Angels. The Virgin Mary in the Bible is also referred to as the "Queen of the Angels" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed.). The city has never been up to its name and it is the icon of the modern secular American mind. The departure with the

ideals necessitates a completely different apocalypse. The frequent references to the falling rocket as the “angel of death” indicate that the impending apocalypse is pseudo-theological in essence. Pynchon borrows from the theological terminology of the Biblical apocalypse but subverts them by putting them in a paradoxical context. It is a nuclear attack and Pynchon uses Biblical imagery to describe it to remind the reader that this is not a mere human-caused annihilation but a form of deschatological apocalypse, one that is more retributive than redemptive. Pynchon describes such an apocalypse in the following terms: “But it was not a star, it was falling, a bright angel of death. And in the darkening and awful expanse of the screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see ... it is now a close up of the face, a face we all know” (775). This death, mere death as annihilation as opposed to the vanity of human wishes that the “star” comes to represent. Pynchon alludes here to either the habit of wish-making at seeing a falling star (meteor) or that star described in the Biblical prophecies as the herald of the apocalypse that God shall certainly bring about at the end of time. Either way, the very possibility of any human expectation or hope of a divine apocalypse is mocked with the denial of any chance for even an illusory escape into wistful wishing for transcendence or, at least, an aversion of the nihilistic doom. The denial extends further to encompass the very possibility of imagining the rocket as a falling star to simulate a divine herald or omen of a God-ordained apocalypse. Nevertheless, the apocalypse does not materialize, at least on the pages of the novel. This final scene is supposed to bring about a kind of apocalyptic closure to Pynchon’s encyclopedic narrative. But *Gravity’s Rainbow* resists such closure in favor of a more open and ambivalent ending. The rocket is suspended in its last delta-t over the roof of the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles while the bored audience is agitated to resume the night movie after a bulb burns out. It seems that Pynchon freezes the whole scene like in the movies as a personal wish to avoid the unavoidable at least textually. Critics of the literary apocalypse find this avoidance to represent the apocalypse, especially the nuclear one, an event common among novelists. They either stop short before it happens or inhabit a liminal space after the disaster. The hypothetical space of the nuclear holocaust is beyond the literary imagination. Authors can only skirt the edge of such a horrible disaster because they are quite helpless to comprehend or represent it. The nuclear apocalypse

can only be approached by indirection because it challenges the very foundation of the human imagination.

Unlike apocalyptic narratives, the nuclear disaster excludes the possibility of a narrative structure because annihilation alludes to narrative closure. This should also account for the relative absence of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki from such a vast compendium of contemporary apocalyptic narratives as *Gravity's Rainbow*. The disordered letters of the newspaper headline that Slothrop strikes upon in the ruins of a German city testify to the impossibility of textualizing the event. Slothrop is also caught in the whirlpool of complexity. Tony Tanner observes that the reality in the novel is fictitious and the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* is packed with ambiguities. The plot unfolds the vastness of the fictive world chronicling the metaphysics of Thomas Pynchon. The main question is whether order exists in the novel. There seems to be no ordering principle as the plot is structured around randomness. Readers cannot transition from a certain ideal "emptiness" to a satisfying sense of fulfillment but will participate in a process in which any insight will cause different puzzles. An instinctive action in the novel is panic, desperation, and endless fear of impending doom. The characters belong to a comic strip or a film cartoon. A group of mice in a laboratory maze, suddenly become cartoon mice with imitation Brooklyn accents. Two characters approaching the very heart of darkness in the novel are suddenly described as "sneaky-Peteing like two cats in a cartoon" (508), one of the characters uses "classic gangster head –move gestures" (530). Pynchon has applied paranoia to almost all of the major views revealed in the novel: scientific, mystical, religious, and political. The main concern of Pynchon is to depict Gravity rainbow as a nihilistic novel refuting the order and system. The random nature of the universe is depicted by Pynchon as there is no structure in the novel.

Similarly, the American apocalypse never materializes on Pynchon's pages because it is put in a dead time that falls beyond the boundaries of human temporality and language. But such a transgression of chronology and location and the attending suspension of the apocalyptic ending requires a suspension of disbelief in the Coleridgean sense. Such moments of suspension belong exclusively to the fantastic which is not unfamiliar in Pynchon's fiction. Pynchon, writes Douglas Fowler (qtd.

Patell 126-7), “does not enter into any covenant with the reader as to ‘what is real and what is fantastic’”. His novels are weird and illusionary in nature, not accidentally or symbolic. If we think that his novels are limited to the world of experience, we will misread his novels. The transgression of the familiar with the unfamiliar and the realistic with the hyper-realistic has long been recognized as the most pertinent aspects of the fantastic in literature, but with postmodernism, such transgression attending the fantastic became itself a textual strategy to problematize the thin line between textuality and discourse. Postmodernism uses the fantastic to deconstruct this line by postulating a process of deconstructive self-fashioning. Jacques Derrida’s famous battle cry “There is nothing outside the text” and that reality is nothing but the product of contending discursive practices that attain ideological hegemony in the grip of textuality have become the commonplaces of postmodern mentality.

Everything in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, as such, becomes an inscription of the trace of the apocalypse. The text may try to avert the apocalyptic doom through temporal transgression but its very politics remain essentially apocalyptic. Gravity mediates temporality doing essentially the deferral job of textuality itself. The rocket as an expression of the apocalyptic desire of humanity is caught in a process of textual deferral shifting its signifier into the universality of the nuclear holocaust. Upon its launching from Germany in late 1945, the 00000 rocket is already the product of a constellation of competing for apocalyptic discourses such as the system, science, and religion ....etc. The ascension of the rocket through death/desire is betrayed by the “Counterforce” of gravity/textuality. It falls outside the main story in the margins of the text which is the presence of the act of writing. The apocalyptic rocket is self-fashioned into a “fallen star” bringing in a reminiscence of the Biblical doom. Michael Seidel (1978) opines that “the final page of *Gravity’s Rainbow* reveals the satirically entropic order. There is no holy grail, no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, only a parodic transcendence” (210).

It is not only that the materialism of the natural law of entropy counters the spiritual transcendence over matter and death that man is born to seek but also recycles the inevitable apocalypse of the fall over human history. This process of self-fashioning displaces narrative closure into a sort of perpetual counter-transcendence.

The gravity's angel thus escapes history into the historicity of the apocalypse which always shadows human destiny. It should be noticed that this textual displacement into the historicity of the apocalypse takes place at the moment the film projector broke down in the Orpheus Theatre. The light that bums out in the film projector freezes the frames of history. Pynchon critics have taken this point in the novel as a crucial starting point for a reading of the novel as a movie being watched by the readers as an audience in the Orpheus Theatre. In view of the heavy reliance on techniques associated with 1940s cinema and the frequent references to such movies. The structure of *Gravity's rainbow* as a movie is not evident until the last few pages, and indeed, not obvious until the last page, where "The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent" (760). Significantly enough, the last character to be introduced in the book is associated with the cinema business, the Orpheus Theatre manager, Richard M. Zhubb. His tormented experience as a theatre manager is an extension of the rocket rider. He is driving down the Santa Monica Freeway encased in his car, fears a dry cleaning bag, "a plastic shroud, smothering me to death" (756) His nightmare, in Scott's words, "parallels, parodies, and brings up to date the more "real" vision on the screen of Gottfried encased within the "erectile plastic" Imipolex G and that encased in the just-launched rocket. The cinema style of the book can only seem arbitrary without recognition of this structure" (210) More specifically, the cinematic space is used in *Gravity's Rainbow* to fashion the text of the novel as a visual spectacle. Like the theatre that stages it, the apocalypse becomes a visual spectacle too for the reader/audience. This gives art a priori over the atrocity. The audience is impatient with the broken projectors. They hurriedly shout "Come-on! Start-the-show! Come-on! Start-the-show!" (776). The audience simply can't bear the painful reality of the impending nuclear apocalypse. They, instead, prefer to recoil in the virtual reality of the cinematic space of the novel where death is no more than an act of textual eclipse.

Evidently, Pynchon is trying to construct the apocalypse as a media spectacle with the purpose of resisting the conventional readership of the apocalypse as inevitable. Pynchon, in this respect, seems to draw on the theories of French Receptionists popular in the 1960s. French theorist Guy Debord in his influential



work *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) shows the extent to which the media reconceptualizes the consumer's image and perception of reality. In the consumer society, the media culture has dominated the society as people are taking interest in a new world of entertainment, information, and consumption, which ultimately shapes their thought and action into a sort of false consciousness. According to Debord (1967):

When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs. (18)

What experience we got and even daily life itself, including our thought and understanding of society, and how we react to external circumstances, is under the influence of the spectacles of media culture and the consumer society. The readers/audience of *Gravity's Rainbow* never experiences the apocalyptic event of the rocket falls firsthand. It is marketed to them as a movie image meant for consumption. They never show the normal signs of alarm of the natural human bent for self-preservation. Instead, they are bored and shout to hurry the resumption of the flux of imagery via the movie projector. This is an addiction to the consumption of images. Debord speaks to this effect when he describes "the continual production of media spectacles by the consumer culture as a sort of a permanent opium war" (44). This negative process is meant to stupefy reality and distracts them from the most important work about their life and future which is the recovery of their life potential through the avenue of creative work. The spectacle, as such, is integrally connected to the capitalist concepts of separation and passivity. Once the individual submissively consuming spectacles he/she is estranged from actively producing one's life. The relevant person of the spectacle, for Debord, "is thus the spectator, the reactive viewer and consumer of a social system based on submission, compliance, and the cultivation of marketable difference" (78). Pynchon seeks to promote resistance strategies for this passive submission to the culturally generated commodity images as in the case of the

quasi-nature of the apocalypse at the end of the novel. War and the larger pattern of the apocalypse are staged but never enacted in the space of the novel. One way to do this is through the shaping of the novel itself as a media or visual spectacle by playing on the idea of the novel as a theatre.

Throughout the novel, the repetition of the word theatre becomes increasingly noticeable as part of Pynchon's strategy to create visual spectacles through his cinematic writing style, thereby creating his own theatrics. This is quite evident in the opening sentences of the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* opens in a suspenseful, cinematic fashion with the statement, "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 it's all theatre" (3). The reader experiences a cinematic close-up rather than a chunk of narrative by engaging his/her gaze and ultimately draws the reader into the scene—they are drawn in and feel a sense of paranoia and terror because they are unaware of the exact threat. Such indefinite experience and terror are usually associated with the human sense of catastrophe and apocalyptic events in general. This is why the word "theatre" is always associated in *Gravity's Rainbow* with the staging of the apocalypse. The subsequent dozens of times references to this word throughout the bulk of the novel culminate in the final reference to the Orpheus Theatre at the end of the novel. The theatre by now becomes an icon for the convoluted space of the novel itself as a visual spectacle where the apocalypse is simultaneously inside and outside. The danger of the real apocalypse of the nuclear holocaust is being warded off because the audience/readers are sheltered inside the movie theatre, inside their culturally marketed fantasies. They see but never participate. This is more akin to the spirit of the biblical apocalypse where the human is helpless in front of the inevitable and the divine. Acceptance of the divine is similar to the submissive acceptance of the marketed images of the media culture in that both are commoditized images that make the human reality sedative to pain and nihilism. We accept the authority of the Biblical image of the apocalypse passively because it is disseminated by an ultimate authority which is divinity. Similarly, we accept the media image of the authority but are part of our desire to belong to the accepted norm of socio-cultural hegemony.

Pynchon prefers to apply another postmodernism literary device: the meta-fiction in his novels, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon creates a cinema where the nuclear bomb appears on the screen which confuses the reader much, but the application of device enhances the characteristics of postmodernism and uses fiction in the screen to intensity the fiction in the novel world, which puts the readers of the book and the audience in the cinema in the fantasy and averts the real description of great tragedy brought about by atomic bombs as well.

Pynchon observes that meditation on time is the best available option for the self in the face of nihilism. He forebodes meditatively: “There is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you, or to reach between your own cold legs...” (775). The significance of this sentence and its timing have been overlooked by almost all of Pynchon’s commentators, although it is crucial for our understanding of what happened to the apocalypse on the last page of the novel. It establishes its meaning through intertextuality with T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” This poem which has been glossed twice in the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* is the acme of the Western obsession with time. Prufrock is haunted with an incessant anaphoric repetition of “there is a time, there is a time”, but actually nothing happens. Life as a web of signifying practices is effaced in the passive flow of temporality. The dream-like night journey of Prufrock is similar to the audience of the Orpheus Theatre watching a night movie in that they both experience life as simulation. Their divorce with the real precludes any possibility of redemption through apocalyptic events. Temporality, instead, is left to fulfill this role. It is appropriate, therefore, for life to end, in this scheme, with a whimper rather than a bang. The song which closes the novel seems to advance this reading a step further. Pynchon himself intrudes finally to ask the audience and readers alike to sing together a seventeenth-century hymn by “William Slothrop, centuries forgotten and out of print, sung to a simple and pleasant air of the period” (775). He asks them all to follow the bouncing ball:

There is a Hand to turn the rime,

Though thy Glass today be run,

Till the Light that hath brought the Towers low

Find the last poor Pret'rite one . . .  
 Till the Riders sleep by ev'ry road,  
 All through our crippl'd Zone,  
 With a face one'ry mountainside,  
 And a Soul in ev'ry stone... (776)

Various critical interpretations have been advanced or suggested for this song and why Pynchon chooses to end his book with it. However, most of these interpretations hinge on the song's relation to the frequently quoted German poet Rilke in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Judith Chambers (1992), suggests that "in ending the book with song, Pynchon not only suggests that the poetry of our language is not dead", instead, but he also echoes Rilke's words in "sonnet 3," Book 1: "Song is existence." She follows Martin Heidegger's interpretation of these words "to sing the song means to be present in what is present itself". Which means: 'Dasein, existence'" (Chambers 273).

John Dugdale (2003) believes that Rilke's poetry is used by Pynchon to further harrow the terrors of the imminent apocalypse in the world of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon's opening words: "A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now" (3) can be an imitation of the beginning of *Duino Elegies*, "who, if I cried out/screamed (*schriee*), would hear me among the angelic orders?" (2).

Maybe Yeats's impression of *The Second Coming* and the scream at the end of the world will be added. And the last paragraph of the novel describes the "bombing of Los Angeles, draws on the happy failing of the last line of the *Elegies* it was *not a star*, it was falling, a bright angel of death" (760). Dugdale identifies the rocket with Rilke's cry and suggests that "Pynchon's screaming condenses Rilke's cry with the response from the angelic orders he cries for; that the V2 rocket and the later the ICBM are presented as the incarnation of the terrible Angel of the *Elegies*."

Indeed, Pynchon later quotes Rilke's poetry where the Angel is equated with a destructive apocalypse of divine Judgment:

These tall, these star-blotting Moslem angels ... *o wie spurlos zertröte ein Engel den Trostmarkt* ... German dreams of the Tenth- Elegy angel coming, wingbeats already at the edges of waking, coming to trample spoorless the white marketplace. (341)

Significantly, the Tenth and final Elegy is with a happy end “falling, is the one favored by Blicero, the admirer of Rilke” (97–102) who launches the Rocket 00000 descending on the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles. Consequently, it is not difficult to see how does Pynchon inscribes this vision of Rilke in his concluding Puritan. The “Hand” ensures the survival of life by turning down the Hour-Glass for a new start when the rocket (Towers) falls. No rebirth or eschatology accompanies this survival. Temporality simply reins unchallenged inscribing expired life in the dark corridors of the archive of historicity and memory. Although this is supposed to be a Puritan lyric, it is very difficult to describe the “Hand” to God, i.e. Providence. It must be the hand of nature that checks the apocalyptic drift of time to ensure the survival of humanity. This is further supported by the reference to the “poor Preterite” inline-four which rules out any possibilities of an eschatological apocalypse. The Preterites, those ordinary people, simply perish but never become Elects, those who receive the salvation of God after the apocalypse. After all, the author of this lyric, we are told earlier in *Gravity's Rainbow*, had written a whole book on the Preterites called *On Preterition*. In this book, William expresses his sympathy for the down-trodden Preterites. He even discusses holiness for the “second Sheep”:

You can bet the Elect in Boston were pissed off about that. And it got worse. William felt that what Jesus was for the elect, Judas Iscariot was for the Preterite. Everything in the Creation has its equal and opposite counterpart. How can Jesus be an exception? Could we feel for him anything but horror in the face of the unnatural, the extracreation? Well, if he is the son of man, and if what we feel is not horror but love, then we have to love Judas too. Right? (565)

The book brought the anger of the Puritan community in Boston on William Slothrop because “nobody wanted to hear about all the Preterite, the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation” (565). The book was banned and ceremonially burned because it is a stark denial of the eschatology of the biblical apocalypse. Thus, after highlighting the Preterites as the only hard reality in this fallen world the lyric proceeds to the “Towers”, which stands for the rocket or the destructive power it represents in the Cabbalist mystical system, brings annihilation rather than redemption to the Preterite. There is no Elect nor Soteriology in the mass death that the rocket brings to the “Zone”. The “Zone” as the human world is described as “crippled” in the sense of spiritual paralysis. However, this spiritual stasis is no enough cause to bring the world a redemptive apocalypse. All is there is the pastness of the past. Fossilization, physical and spiritual, is the evident end of humanity. The final line brings the lyric to its climax. The human world is denied the mercy of change. The word “stone” is a symbol of the stasis of this world or that transcendence, in its neo-platonic sense, is no more attainable in such a world. Here the word “stone” refers to the human body as an eternal prison for the soul. Even death cannot redeem this soul of its stony prison. This simply is a pointer to the complete absence of a divine force in this world. It is a world of natural processes of atrophy beyond the salvation of God. Once its force reaches absolute zero it becomes atrophied as cold as a stone.

The song might have established the text’s resistance politics to the totality of apocalyptic closure but never fully completing it. Pynchon’s invitation for communal singing is the ultimate step to bring this resistance to completion. The orality of the song reaches deep into the collective consciousness of the community to invoke the long-repressed primordial instinct of self-survival. Judith Chambers (1992) once again provides the lead here when she comments that “this Orphic singer, whose poetry has revitalized the word and the world, has taught his readers how to sing. Appropriately, he ends the book with an open invitation to continue the singing, for singing is existence: ‘Now Everybody’” (274). The act of coral communal chanting while reminiscent of the church space is meant to bring in full interplay the dialogic potential of the act of singing to contest the cold death of image consumption in the

post-industrial American society. The fashioning of the dialogic at this point in the novel interrogates the marketing of the apocalypse as image consumption as false consciousness.

The apocalypse, therefore, remains a delayed, if not suspended, moment in *Gravity's Rainbow* for Pynchon, according to Stacey Olster (2009), is not “preaching the end of the world or a break in history. On the contrary, the very number of apocalypses in his work only proves that the ultimate moment of apocalypse has not yet arrived” (82). Therefore, the idea of the apocalypse in the world of *Gravity's Rainbow* reveals the meaning seems not to be objective. Olster relates this to the fact that Pynchon's concept of history is deeply grounded in the Puritan sense of history and that his “musings on apocalypse are only twentieth-century versions of those earlier exhortations with which his ancestors were quite familiar” (Olster 82). But such an approximation is even hard to realize because Pynchon's sense of history is never redemptive in the Puritan's sense. Because secular history is predestined to end with the apocalypse, it manifestly moves towards redemption in the divine sense of the word. On the contrary, Pynchon does not envision history in this redemptive way. History, for him, is both secular and subjective. It does not obey any divine plan and operates on a level different from that of theology. Pynchon, himself, makes this clear in *Gravity's Rainbow* when he states on the tongue of one of his numerous characters that “Our history is an aggregate of last moments” (173). Pynchon's model of history is based on crises rather than the conventional apocalyptic fall and rise as classically envisioned by Arnold Toynbee and W. B. Yeats. No wonder that the apocalyptic moments in *Gravity's Rainbow* never fall in a pattern or line of progress. They are ameliorated in the flux of history as little disruptions. They never re-orient history into any moment of death and re-birth like the Biblical apocalypse.

Furthermore, the god as the controller in puritan theology gives way to a secular version of the controller as the indefinite “Them”. And they are “patient, committed to the Long Run” (16). This leaves people to bewilder not only the truth of history but also the nature and scope of the apocalypse. “Each plot carries its signature,” Pynchon says. “Some are God's, some masquerade as God's. This is a very advanced kind of forgery. But still there's the same meanness and mortality to it

as a falsely made check. It is only more complex” (540-1). This should account for the failure of literary criticism to pinpoint the exact nature and extent of the apocalyptic element in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In his seminal essay “Pynchon’s Paranoid History,” the critic Scott Sanders (1975) provides the following tabularized differences between Pynchon and the Puritans:

It is clear here what Pynchon is doing in *Gravity's Rainbow* is to translate the religious ideology of the Puritan into secular terms. But the list above misses one important item in Puritan theology which is the apocalypse. Pynchon translates this item in his novel variously as war, holocaust, entropic recession, fall, false transcendence, and ultimately, historical nihilism. (Sanders 188)

Ultimately, Pynchon’s apocalyptic narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a secular one where the theological ethos is subverted to show their incompatibility with the modern Western philosophical conception of the world. With the absence of a god or a divine power at the center of this world, the classic biblical apocalypse narrative loses its teleological status as an eschatological act of divine redemption of a fallen world. In Pynchon’s hand, it becomes an expression of human nihilism. The inevitability of such nihilism can never be evaded unless it is the wistful inscape of textual transcendence into the space of media spectacle. The structure of the novel is surreal and this creates ambiguity in the mind of the readers. Beaverboard Row is described thus in surreal language: “It seems to be some very extensive museum, a place of many levels, and new wings that generate like living tissue though if it all does grow toward some end shape, those who are here inside can’t see it” (537). Then there is another character Brigadier Pudding who leads a hopeless life attempting an understanding by way of attempting to get the meaning of anything that takes place around him through the effect-cause logic. He expresses his frustration thus: “Sure make it”, he only mutters every day: “It’s changing out from under me. Oh dodgy, very dodgy” (76). Pynchon depicts the connectedness that can be sensed in the scene of eternal uncertainty in the universe but can’t be grasped by the conscious mind. Pynchon uses the ideas of Einstein, Bohr who pioneered relativity theory and quantum mechanics. The Chaos Theory takes its experimental data from the most



commonplace systems but opens a much wider field. It is impossible for Slothrop to catch the significance of the ideas in Chaos, but he does intuitively feel them around him and he senses that “big globular raindrops, thick as honey, begin to splat into giant asterisks on the theory”, the extraordinarily difficult problems of predictability results from the simplest systems. He isn’t going to look. “Nobody ever said a day has to be juggled into any kind of sense at day’s end” (294). There is a turning point at this stage that Slothrop departs from his fellow quarter Oedipa Maas. She is an intelligent but divided soul driven to confusion as she cannot form into a meaningful pattern. Enzian also suffers from the same agony as “he is assaulted by an overflow of details which swirl like a fog, each particle with its array of forces and directions...he can’t handle them all at the same time if he stays too much with any he’s in danger of losing others” (326). Slothrop finds himself in the stasis of despair, “the level you reach, with both feet in, when you lose your fear, you lose it all” (159). Slothrop struggles to enjoy freedom as Pynchon says: “a clutch mechanism between him and Their iron-cased engine far up away in a power train whose shape and design he has to guess at, a clutch he can disengage, feeling then all his inertia of motion, his real helplessness...it is not exactly unpleasant, either” (207).

Roger Mexico observes that “cause--and--effect has gone too far, and must strike off at some other angle” (88). Slothrop suffers confronts a new dilemma to confront the morass of detail that fills the Zone. Symbolically Slothrop is trapped in a balloon unanchored, the balloon floats without control or destination. Pynchon depicts the scene thus: “There is no action the balloon can take. Binary decisions have lost meaning in here” (335). Slothrop expresses his helplessness as he considers anti-paranoia “where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long...Either they have put him here for a reason, or he is just there. He isn’t sure that he wouldn’t actually, rather have that reason” (434). Slothrop dramatized the connection between the two extremes. He is quite satisfied with the situation. The guarantee of plot and conspiracy will not be completely unwelcome. He is aware of the complexity of the situation and accepts the mess of chaos and disorder but simply expresses his reaction to the situation. He gets a new identity when he gives up gambling in Casino. Pynchon expresses his dilemma thus: “Why are all you folks

helping me like this? For free and all? Who knows? We have no play the patterns. There must be a pattern you're in right now, Oh!" (257).

Pynchon is trying avoiding to make the idea into a resolution in a dogmatic way. It is acknowledged "that patterns, orders must exist arrangements for warmth, love, food, and simple movement along roads" (290). The movements and the actions are unpredictable as the balloons drifting across the Zone. Pynchon clearly depicts the chaotic condition of the universe of Slothrop: "Is this the way out? Faces turn to the windows, but no one dares ask, not out loud" (3). At the very beginning of the novel, Pynchon sets out the landscape of an endless maze: "Ho, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into" (3). Pynchon gives the menacing images and symbols in the novel to describe the scenes of terror. Ishmael's assertion is important to note: "Could annihilation occur to matter, this was the thing to do it" "rings as true for the V2 rocket as if does for the whale" (385). These remarks require an attitude looming the novel, hinting that it is necessary to inhabit rather than to solve. As the plot progresses all solutions and resolutions become useless. Life looks insignificant; there is only chaos and disorder prevailing everywhere and all the characters are in the grip of chaos. The novel is full of images of destruction and annihilation as the external forces transcend man's physical limitations. Pynchon expresses the reality thus:

The world's a ship on its passage out...into the world is a rocket on its passage out is to quite literary pronounces the world's condition as we have known it for quite some time now. In the duality of its usage and meaning, there is both a premonition of death and a hope for the restoration of order. (38)

Critic Stephen C Weisenburger observes that "the action of Gravity's Rainbow plays out over nine months, with the climax of the book that taking place on Easter an April Fool's Day, when the Rocket 00000 is fired at the end of the novel" ( 11). Pynchon dramatizes the whole situation thus:

But the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it; in combat, in the

tunnel, on paper; it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable...and heretics there will be; Gnostics who have been taken in a rush of wind and fire to chambers of the Rocket throne....Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter; rivets, burner cup and brass rose, its text is theirs to permute and combine into new revelations, always unfolding...Manichaeans who see two Rockets, good and evil, who speak together in the sacred idiolalia of the Primal Twins (some say their names are Enzian and Blicero) of a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the world's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle. (727)

This paranoia is the basic cause of restlessness and helplessness of Slothrop who is struggling to explore reality in vain. This paranoia is regarded as the best option: "If there is something comforting; religious, if you want about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (434). The rocket means something for every character of the novel; all track under its gravitational force, to some degree. Pynchon states thus: "The idea of the rocket taking on many shapes to conform to ideas about it, even 'on paper'", is Pynchon's opinion on the "new revelations of the rocket god" (727). Pynchon gives a fine juxtaposition of the "classical religious language with rocketry. The rocket is linked to the Kabbalah alchemy, the Torah, and good and evil" (727). Pynchon has created a metaphysical situation. This transcendental way of exploring the life and death of the universe is based on his faith in The Chaos Theory, quantum mechanics, and relativity. He has given a world view that he worries about:

They will all be sought out. Each will have his personal Rocket. Stored in its target-seeker will be the heretic's ECG, the spikes and susurrations of heartbeat, the ghost-blossomings of personal infrared, each Rocket will know its intended and hunt him, ride him a green-doped and silent hound, through our World, shining and pointed in the sky at his back, his guardian executioner rushing in, rushing closer. (727)

The powerful “personal Rocket” (727) will find all resistance. The heartbeat of each target person will become part of a search mechanism. The new Rocket can relentlessly keep track of its targets which guarantees each target person’s “personal annihilation” (727). The system is a combination of insidious forces of “Them” gathered in companies that control technology and populations, as well as selfish political, state, and business entities. Technology is powerful. Pynchon says in the novel:

That something so mutable, so soft, as a sharing of electrons by atoms of carbon should lie at the core of his life, struck Jamf as a cosmic humiliation. Sharing? How much stronger, how everlasting was the ionic bond where electrons are not shared, but captured, Seized! And held! Polarized plus and minus, these stable it was, such mineral stubbornness! (577)

Jamf’s “cosmic humiliation is explained as being caused by a common chemical reaction” (577). Pynchon has depicted the cosmic threat in the novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*:

The manipulations of molecular structure are the most insidious ways in which humanity, through technology and economic power, has attempted to play God in creating and destroying nature. Imipolex G is ‘God’ upon the two inventions by Jamf that attempt to subject the human ‘I’ as ‘God’ upon the molecular universe. (212)

Scientifically, the rocket is powerful and has an insidious effect on the human mind. The author thinks: “This ascent will be betrayed to Gravity, capitalization the G in God”. He further reiterates: “But the Rocket engine, the deep cry of combustion that jars the soul, promises escape. The victim, in bondage to falling, rises on a promise, a prophecy, of Escape” (758). In these sentences, the capitalization of the words are the most important: Gravity, Rocket, and Escape, they are promoted as biblical concepts; Rocket, a new, fabricated messenger of divine power, escaped from a teleological perspective Gravity, a force that has newly transcended the force of Nature.

To conclude, in the nihilistic novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon depicts the vivid and typical images carrying the meaning of apocalypse: the rainbow in the title and the rocket in the novel exerting endless panic and desperation looming to the characters. The rainbow and the rocket share a similar track from ascent to descent, which symbolizes the development trend of the universe as well as the civilization and puts emphasis on the downward trend in the universe due to the entropy. The rocket, as a product of scientific development, brings humanity endless angst, fear, desperation, complete detriment, and destruction in the end, especially, its pending fall intensifies such negative emotion in the novel. Pynchon doesn't put the horrible image of the rocket falling in the text, he expresses that the disastrous end resulting from the science and technology development is too insidious to imagine, by which Pynchon gives a warning to humanity struggling in the chaotic world.

## Chapter Five

### Exploration of the Disorderly Epic Journey in *Mason & Dixon*

Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* (1997) is a postmodernist novel articulating the order and disorder; chaos and entropy operating in the contemporary world. Pynchon unfolds the history of America with his historical view through the journey of Mason and Dixon, Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* observed that "The culture of the past is not only of the memory of mankind but our own buried life and study of it leads to a recognition scene, a discovery in which we see, not only our past lives but the total cultural form of our present life" (346). *Mason & Dixon* is a historical novel capturing the apocalypse of the American imagination. The text of the novel follows a double perspective; it looks at the past of the American Revolution and looks forward to it from a position ten years after the historical event. The plot of the novel spreads a wide range in terms of time and space.

The novel *Mason & Dixon* is conspicuous in its uncanny tone; a weird blending of eighteenth and late-twentieth-century colloquialism. Thomas Pynchon uses deft touch to get the creating characters recognizable style in eighteenth century in terms of dress and spoken English in the novel, and the author Pynchon reveals to us the characters living in contemporary and colonial times. The novel is structured around anticipation and memory integrated into the narration of the novel. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* reflects the historical conditions of the American past but at the same time, it is a comment on the present American life. The novel is not a heroic tale of man's achievements; of historical progress following the timeline but a sort of anti-saga, a comedy of human mistakes dealing with war, slavery, colonization. The plot is all-inclusive; contains the elements of meta-fiction depicting the tale of brutal crimes "committed by the 'Stronger against the Weaker,' the consequences of which are still resonant in today's world" (Pynchon 7). *Mason & Dixon* crosses all boundaries of postmodern fiction in reflecting the past of American and the world. The novel is also an opinion on the present and a yearning for a better future; condemnation of the past follies of humanity. The novel is an expression of a bleak future. Pynchon gives a catalogue of crimes "committed by the 'Stronger against the Weaker' the

repercussions of which are resonant today” (7). The main story of *Mason and Dixon* is told during the season of 1785 by Wick Cherrycoke, the main narrator of the story narrates “our brutal history and our bare mortal world” (345). In Pynchon’s opinion, history is like a succession of time events, so his story has no traditional beginning, middle, and end with a nonlinear storyline, Cherrycoke chronicles the lives of the astronomers and surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon as they travel to the Cape of Good Hope, to the island of St. Helena of the Brazilian coast, and back to their English homeland on various commissions from the Royal Society. The main narrative concerns Mason and Dixon’s commission to survey what would become their famous Line to settle a boundary dispute between Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware in colonial America. The plot involves their interactions with Cherrycoke.

In the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment is reproduced in the text with a galaxy of characters representing from every corner of the globe. Pynchon shows us a “thick description” of documented history where Pynchon vividly describes Jenkin’s ear, the Transit of Venus, Jesuits in Quebec, the scenes of slavery of the world. His interest in historical fiction is inspired by his reading of the postmodern thinker Fredric Jameson. Jameson observes in his book *Postmodernism* that postmodern writer may owe his interest in history not to personal curiosity, but rather to aesthetic necessity: “postmodern producers of culture have nowhere to run but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture” (Jameson 17). Thomas Pynchon is called a pioneer of postmodern fiction like Kurt Vonnegut and John Barth; his novels challenge readers to think and perceive in ways that anticipate with humor, insight, and cogency. David Cowart opines that in the novels of Pynchon a new view of history and culture is formed. History is used as myth, as a rhetorical construct, as false consciousness, and as a mirror of national identities. Jameson has also talked of postmodern manipulation:

The postmodern historical novel with all its false chronologies and made up-chronicles and genealogies, constitutes a referential use of fiction to free ourselves from the irrevocability of the facts of the history manuals and institute simultaneity of multiple worlds. (182)

Under the influence of postmodernism view, Thomas Pynchon arranges his novels in a nonlinear structure, different perspectives interweave together, and two or more narrations are put in juxtaposition and mixed, jumped in the novel.

The main features of Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* are "speculation and possibility" (McHale 44). Indeed, Pynchon is an expert to recreate the actual. There is a fine juxtaposition of fantasy with the real truth with the fiction and the novel is filled with references to the history of the eighteenth century. He also expresses his opinions about the Catholic Church. Pynchon punctures the supremacy of the Catholic Church narrating the real story that happened to two court astronomers who were put in jail and killed only because when the king needs a holy sign as a "Child of Heaven" (624) needed to know of such events beforehand, but the two astronomers could not predict an eclipse. Thomas Pynchon shows us an absurd religion and power at that time through such description.

The plot of the novel is populated with a galaxy of historical figures such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin on the two protagonists' journeys. In view of his pessimistic history view, Pynchon describes the miserable condition of the slaves in Cape Town, Bencoolen, North America, and slaves of color and caste. Pynchon brings to life the old facts of history with character and narrative. Pynchon considers and responds to history cognitively and emotionally, his novel *Mason & Dixon* animates what might have happened but not what happened. With the fertility of imagination, Pynchon revives the old history of the West and its rationalism with scientific interests. He also uses the elements of mystery and romance featuring talking dogs, wax automata, and Jacques Vaucanson's mechanical duck. Pynchon takes the readers from the human world to the animal world; from animal to machine world through employing the technique of postmodern magic realism. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon uses new technologies to establish a relationship between the beast and human beings. Natural phenomena, such as the transit of Venus in South Africa and the application of Dixon's will in North America, have eliminated this relationship and reestablished the natural linear relationship. The natural phenomenon. Like Adamov and Ionesco, Pynchon gives infinite possible meanings in



his text. Pynchon's terse remark in this regard is worth quoting: "Who claims Truth, Truth abandons" (350).

The plots of Pynchon transcend time and space; the novel sets an unsettled boundary existence in terms of three narrative objects: time, space, and nature. Ironically, Mason and Dixon, the main characters in the novel, traveled around the world to follow the transit of Venus with the purpose to settle the boundary. The novel represents a cultural landscape of the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. In a wonderful scene, Pynchon describes the 18<sup>th</sup>-century tobacco den and asks: "What'll it be" and replies: "Half and a half please, Mount Kenya Doule-A with Jaya Highland, perhaps a slug o' boiled milk as well...?" (298). In a wonderful scene when Mason is occupied with his wife's death, he finds Dixon enjoying the drinks. Mason discovers his friend Dixon wishing to shrug off the talking dog's magical skills: "mayn't there be Oracles, for us, in our time?" he asks, "Gate-ways to Futurity? That can't have died with the ancient Peoples. Isn't it worth looking ridiculous, at least to investigate this English Dog, for its obvious bearing upon Metempsychosis if naught else..." (19). Pynchon dramatizes history, he refers to the consequence of scientific rationalism; order and disorder operating in all ages and in all times, and the power of entropy in the random universe. Historiography of Pynchon is linked with the actual and the things in the imagination, both are very similar to the postmodern sensibility; on the one hand, they ignore the Earth and the pleasure of speed. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* dramatizes a history re-imagined and reading the novel is like paying a visit to Charles Wilson Peale museum.

Pynchon enjoys portraying the supernatural scenes and sites of worldwide cities and states. William Emerson is presented as the teacher of Jeremiah Dixon who taught him to fly. In a historical sense, Emerson had a few students and they were lost due to his decline to join the Royal Society as well as his bad temper. Pynchon established a connection between what took place in the 18th century and what Pynchon exaggerates. Timothy Tox of Pynchon is a fictional poet bearing a close resemblance to Joel Barlow of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century poet. Supernaturalism; magic realism and other postmodernist techniques give an epic dimension to *Mason & Dixon*. Pynchon has presented the conversing ghosts to intensify the supernatural atmosphere

of the novel. Benjamin Franklin is a character who never sleeps, and Jenkins's ear that listens are some of the supernatural events of the novel. He uses the weird elements as proof of the reasonable universe. In the novels, the LED is a recurring character verbalizing the coexistence of rational and irrational reality. In *Mason & Dixon* low-class people get the opportunity to experience global events such as the Transit of Venus. The characters in the novel are caught up in a mechanical society, and their ambitions are of no avail, and Dixon, as a just surveyor, is in confusion that why he can have cooperated with astronomer Mason. Mason has a melancholic disposition because his wife has recently expired. The novel deals with the historical subjects, the function of the Royal Society, the scientific interest, and the role of Mason and Dixon are bestowed with life, desires, and quirks. In 1752 calendar reform was an initiative of Enlightenment and Mason and Dixon found flaws in culture and nature. Mason is obsessed with the "lost days" described by Wicks Cherrycoke as "a chronologic wound" (555). Interestingly, the correction and maintenance of time resound throughout *Mason & Dixon*. Pynchon has expressed an awareness of the difference between scientific and a more pre-modern sense of time: "To his must, all days run alike, the same number of identical Seconds, each proceeding in but one Direction, irreclaimable..." (27). Pynchon's Mason is the conduit for time concerns: he began to quiz himself insomniac. Time moves like a shuttlecock as all events are unfolded incoherently following scientific linear technology. Dixon was given a watch by his teacher Emerson and this watch was a constant source of tension and worry for him. Pynchon writes: "The Enlightenment hope for overall rationalization via simplistic classifications and drawing arbitrary lines and false boundaries has proved counterproductive" (37). According to Fredric Jameson, anachronism is an important factor of postmodern fiction and anachronism amounts to a critique of rationalism by many critics of Enlightenment. The role of Cherrycoke, R.C., Pig-Belly Bodine is important in this respect. Cherrycoke advises at the beginning of his journey to avoid smoking dope, though if it must be smoked, "do not inhale" (10). Some characters come straight from the twentieth century, like a squinting, puffing popeye-like character who bellows, "I am that which I am" (486). Mrs. Eggslap belongs to the world of the modern world and she is well-versed with modern music, she says:

“Sometimes...It’s hard, to be a Woman” (621). Interestingly *Mason & Dixon* exhibits as “historiography meta-fiction”:

The novel emerges as an ideological construct as it explores the status and function of the narrative. Pynchon narrates the borders between historiography and fiction; explores the status and function of narrative as an ideological construct shaping history and forging identity rather than merely representing the past. (Hutcheon 216)

Pynchon’s narrative is considered an ideological construction of social reality. The novel is full of events of the past and the present; Pynchon has exploited all sources from sea adventures to the old fables and missing the events of the political and social reality: Pynchon remarks thus:

What I am principally interested in are the “Provisions for Survival in a World” less fantastic mentioned by the Learned English Dog. Fang claims that dogs “go on as tail-wagging Scheherazade’s...nightly delaying the Blades of our Masters by telling back to the tales of their humanity.” (22)

Pynchon depicts the eighteenth-century age filled with a religious yearning for fictional and mythical things. Pynchon has used the postmodern technique of magic realism to structure his novel. The Age of Miracles is juxtaposed with the Age of Enlightenment as one in which “folks believed that all kinds of things had been possible which were no longer so. Giants, dragons, spells were common in the Age of Miracles”. Pynchon expresses his views on God and religion and Church in the novel *Mason & Dixon*. Mason broods over the role of the Church in life and he derives a message from the book on Job when he “let fall open” (742). He thinks of his freedom and his Bible in the observatory: “that God hangeth the earth upon nothing” (742). “The laws of nature had not been so strictly formulated back then. What had once been true working magic had, by the Age of Reason, degenerated into mere machinery” (16). In the Age of Enlightenment the faith of the people in magic, God, and religion declined sharply. The people believed that the heavens were above man, up past the stars. Cherrycoke while says the following to the LesSpark family:

The New Religion had crested better than twenty years before...by the seventeen sixty; sixties we were all well into a Descent, that grew more vertiginous with the days, ever toward some great trough whose terrible depth no one knew. (261)

Pynchon fearlessly adds supernatural elements to the plot of his novel *Mason & Dixon*. In the world of Mason and Dixon dogs, clocks, yeast, and mechanical ducks have the ability of speech. And apparitions, golems, and were-beavers inhabit the forests of America. The text is dominated by phantoms, extra-terrestrials, and otherworldly visitants belonging to the fairy world. The presence of the flying mechanical duck and the LED enhance the magical and supernatural effects in the novel. Interestingly, they are modeled after real historical prototypes. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon introduced magical elements. A miracle is defined by Jesus Arrabal as: “another world’s intrusion into this one” (120), the phrase echoed by Oedipa Maas: “If miracles were...intrusions into this world from another, the kiss of cosmic pool balls” (124). His concern with miraculous extends throughout the novels of Pynchon and reached to peak in *Mason & Dixon*. The novel is full of magic things, referred to by Wicks Cherrycoke as “might-it-bes, and if-it-weres-not to mention What-was-that’s” (618). Brian McHale puts this thus: “Like the World of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, with its angles, its voices from beyond its revenants and cases of demonic possession, the world of *Mason and Dixon* is all but overrun by interlopers from elsewhere”(McHale 56). Pynchon shows his worries about the loss of miraculous and magical possibilities cause by Enlightenment science. Pynchon tries to reconnect the lost possibilities in America by dramatizing the scene of magic and miracle in his novel. The protagonist in *Mason and Dixon* feels the magical and miraculous loss in his explorations. Cherrycoke gives the commentary on colonial America thus:

Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?...in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allowed Expression away in the restless slumber of these Provinces, and on Westward, wherever ‘tis not yet mapped, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,...serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for

subjunctive Hopes, for all that may yet be true,...Earthly Paradise,  
Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom... (345)

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, street performances are characterized by magical and mysterious spectacles, just like talking dogs to entertain the spectators. Jacques Vaucanson who was a French inventor did invent a mechanical duck having its special digestive system. Pynchon exploits all these natural and gives the image of the collapse of civilization, apocalyptic theology and the rise of global capitalism and loss of human values; the death of magic and the miraculous, and the scene of the hollowness of American society. In *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon gives an analogy to describe the false prophets living in the contemporary American society who believe they be able to master the universe unnatural magical and supernatural elements in his novel to achieve magic realism in imitation of the novels of Gabriel Marquez who wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salmon Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*. This unique artificiality of the world of Pynchon is a conspicuous feature of his illusive verisimilitude. In *Mason & Dixon*:

Here is a paradise of Chance; an E.O Wheel big as a roundabout,  
Lottery Balls in cages ever a-spin, Billiards and Baccarat, Bezique and  
Games whose Knaves and Queens live, over Flemish Carpets, among  
imported Chippendale Gaming Tables, beneath Chandeliers secretly,  
cunningly faceted so as to amplify the candle-light within, they might  
be children playing in miniature at Men of Enterprise, whose table is  
the wide World, lands and seas, and the Sums they wager too often,  
when the Gaming as halted at last, to be reckoned in tears. (421)

From which we are supposed to spot the superficial and hollow joy flooding in the contemporary American society, people are indulged in the games and gambles, they are fanatic about the superficial physical joy, and blindly believe they will win the lottery or the game, but when the game is over, initial hollow joy is replaced with tears. This image is the epitome of the degradation of civilization in American society, also the sign of civilization's going downhill in the universe.

Mason contemplates upon the ideas of Locke, Paine, and the French Enlightenment and thinks of the future of civilization. Dixon expresses his ideas on political powers controlled by some groups:

I knelt, transfixed. I would have done whatever he bade me. Twas the only time in my life I have felt that Surrender to Power, upon which, as I have learned after, to my Sorrow, all Government is funded. Never again. No more a Maiden as to that; and thankee all the same. (312)

Dixon expressed his desperation, disappointment, and hopelessness when confronted with the power of political groups. With the development of technology, people are yearning for freedom and democracy from the new political system, however, the more conspiracy, the more powerful political groups appearing in the society. The civilization seems more developed from appearance, but more deteriorated inner side. Mason also thinks over the implications of that power which capital represents: "I discovered the Rulers who do not live in Castles but in housing less distinct, often unable to remain past Earshot of the Engines they own and draw their Power from" (313).

Pynchon borrowed heavily from *Ulysses* of James Joyce and used the images of entropy and the chaos operating in the random universe, he comes closer to the thoughts of Diderot: "In Diderot it is this oscillation between the two poles of freedom and necessity which brings the circle of our thought and existence to completion" (Cassirer 72). Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and His World* advocated free fiction and Pynchon imitates the theory of carnivalesque of Bakhtin. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* contains many elements of Bakhtin's carnivalesque; it has no plot; it is a juxtaposition of fantasy and romance as each character is free to do anything. The main hero and the narrator of the novel Wicks Cherrycoke narrate how he met Mason and Dixon after he was arrested for seditious printing. He was put into prison where he lost his mind and felt that:

My name had never been my own; rather belonging, all this time, to the Authorities, who forbade me to change it, or withhold it, as it were a

Ring upon the Collar of a Beast, ever waiting for the Lead to be fastened on. (10)

Cherrycoke lost his identity under the great power of the Authorities, names become another symbol of identity in Pynchon's novels, each protagonist in the novel *V. Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and so on changing their names constantly, or the same symbol carries multiple-meaning, all of them are related to names. When the characters feel their names have not been their own belongs but become belongings to the power and the authority, their identity has fallen into fragments. Cherrycoke was sent "for the best of Medical reasons" (10) to the ship with an "Engine of Destruction" (10) where there were a compass and "certainty thirty-four guns worth of Disaster and only one lesson" (10). Cherrycoke experienced the loss of self, he told the tale of America on request and he started his narration by giving the details of Britain without personal freedom. Without freedom in Britain. Governance and subjugation serve as the main theme of the novel. Pynchon expresses his concern through Maskelyne's dream of an "Investiture" (731); Franklin being looked upon as an "Ancestor of Miracle, or of wonders, which pass as well with them" (488). The novel *Mason & Dixon* suggests that human interest is what produces, Pynchon gives a strong message that "Men of Science may indeed be "simple tools of others, with no more idea of what they are about, than a Hammer knows a house" (669). However, human beings just neglect the problem of knowledge, the knowledge produced by humans limits the freedom of people, deprives humans of miraculous life, and traps humans in the loss of self.

### **Anachronistic Elements: Uncanny Atmosphere**

Pynchon incorporated the elements of chaos and disorder in his novels and borrowed heavily from magic, science and religion, and astronomy. The absurd is quite provoking. The factors of anachronistic elements in the plot brought about the conspicuous disruption of historical realism and ruined the distinction between the past and the present. Pynchon has mixed the facts in the history into Mason and Dixon's story disrupting the historicity of the novel. Pynchon comments thus:

History is not Chronology, for that is left to lawyers; nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People. History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as the Power of the other; her Practitioners, to survive, must soon learn the arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit; that there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past we risk, each day, losing our forebears in forever; not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All, rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common. (349)

At the very beginning of the novel, the debut of the L.E.D is to be against the notion that human beings are superior to animals. He states that all dogs have the ability to improve their behavior to follow the command of their masters. The L.E.D tells Mason that “we dogs know how to evoke from you, Man, one day at a time, at least enough Mercy for one day more of Life” (22). For dogs, it is vital to reflect on human actions because they rely on humans. The dog says that his kind “nightly delays the Blades of our Masters by telling back to the tales of their humanity” (22). He thinks if a dog acts like a human, it will survive in the human world. A person’s higher status comes from his natural morality. The L.E.D. asks the basic question: “What was a man before the invented words and learned languages? An animal of a particular species” (13). Vartanian examines the role of man and the beast. La Mettrie says: “the kind of knowledge obtainable about beasts equates being with dog, and it provides at the same time a basis for comparison, thanks to the same equation between them and us” (63). Vartanian opines that man’s behaviors determine his nature: “The human animal, like the nonhuman one, is what I can do; its activity is its essence; its abilities define its nature” (64). He focuses on the materialist thinking of human beings: “the attempt to understand humans by the same means used to understand beasts has the collateral effect of dissolving the established social and moral values that stratify humanity” (64). Human behavior in the novel occurs in the context of the Materialist debate, so it is very significant how humans act with each other. Considering the superior position of man over beasts in matters of morality, the



characters in *Mason & Dixon* understand the causes of disorienting and destabilizing effects. For if a beast gets an opportunity to have the same soul as a human, then it will be difficult to determine which of the two creatures is morally superior. The early debut of the L.E.D. in the novel is with the purpose of the determination of these uncertainties.

Pynchon introduces modern coffee houses; and Dixon orders a “Mount Kenya Double A, with Java Highland” that can allude to the modern Starbuck drinks. Pynchon puts some modern product placement into his novel giving references to the “sale of Herbal Essences Shampoo” (358). The narrative is saturated with such comical episodes and in the words of the LED, “Tis the Age of Reason, rrrf? There’s an explanation at hand, and no such thing as a Talking dog,-Talking dogs belong with Dragons and Unicorns. What there are, however, are Provisions for Survival in a World less fantastic” (22). The scene of the talking Norfolk the Learned English Dog or Fang are fine examples of anachronism. Pynchon refers to the tales of *The Arabian Nights* to intensify the atmosphere of dream, wonder, magic, and romance. Pynchon brings the dream element thus:

One night I dream I have come to a Bridge across a broad River, with small settlements at either approach and in its center, at the highest point of its Arch, a Curious Structure, some nights invisible in the river mists, Lanterns burning late-a Toll-House. Not everyone is allowed through, nor is paying the Toll any guarantee of Passage. The gate-keepers are members of a Sect who believe that by choosing correctly which shall dwell one side of this River, and which the other, the future happiness of the land may be assured. (529)

Fang suggests that the story produces a common experience and a common sense of mortality, and from which a moral system comes into being. The magical and interesting words of Fang suggest that storytelling is important to the development of civilization including the evolution of the human species. Stories, myths, folk tales, or historical events serve humanity and make existence meaningful and purpose and deliver values. The statement of Fang discloses the main thematic concern of Pynchon

that is representation. Pynchon enjoys defying the conventions of historical realism with magical and anachronistic elements. *Mason & Dixon* establishes a global communication network through the character of Captain Zhang who is a Chinese-Jesuit. A system of pulleys and leaves that uses the stars to flash messages in the night sky, is more than a physical mechanism. Emerson names it during a paranoid rant: “what your line-running Mate Boscovich also wants is a number of Jesuit Observatories, flung as a Web, all over the World War it seems” (223).

In this web of time appears a running joke about *feng shui* in *Mason & Dixon*, a joke with serious thematic and narrative echoes. Pynchon is referring to the 1990s painting of a museum. The concept is anachronistic running into forward and reverse. Captain Zhang *feng shui* practitioner brings to the novel both ancient and New Age mysticism with a practice parallel to the surveyor’s and astronomer’s arts in their goal of aligning the environment with human needs. In the first meeting, Zhang says: “Terrible *Feng Shui* here. Worst I ever saw. You two crazy?” (542). The Zhang plot leads into *Mason & Dixon*’s most bizarre vortex which deconstructs the very concept of a linear narrative or historical chronology. Zhang appears in the novel unexpectedly and soon becomes the main character of the novel. The scientific and rational elements of the 18<sup>th</sup> century are exposed and ridiculed by Pynchon. He rejects the capacity of narratives to recreate the past suggesting that historiography may not be realistic. Paradoxically, the artificial nature of *Mason & Dixon* is the main appeal for the credibility of the text. Cherrycoke ridicules all the major characters including Mason and Dixon, Maskelyne, Le Marie, and Emerson, and interestingly Mason and Dixon are confused about whether they stand for Science or Religion. In *Mason & Dixon*, Thomas Pynchon intertwined so closely the ideas of science and Reason that each loses what might make it distinct from the other. Maskelyne observes thus: “Reason, or any Vocation of it...the Pursuit of Science” (135).

Dixon is not divorced from religion and he seems to confound the two when he said to Mason and Maskelyne that “Newton is my Deity” (116). The protagonist Mason describes the characteristic of his age in such a way “with its Faith in Mechanical Ingenuity” (449). Nevertheless, Mason and Dixon cannot avoid changing their beliefs from religion to science. They find faith gravitating towards technology.

Modern people are full of confidence in technologies such as second-hand watches, bullet guns, and new astrometric instruments. Pynchon believes that unlike religion these new technologies urge man to give his heart to the culture of getting and spending pushing culture toward commerce and industry: “For Commerce without Slavery is unthinkable and slavery in South Africa and North America in Mason and Dixon is impossible without technology” (198). Pynchon’s novel reveals that each person has a “conscious denial of everything that Reason holds true” (769), which is a powerful agent of action. There are numerous scenes in the novel of contradictory and anachronistic episodes in the novel giving a blend of fantasy and rationality. Mason and Dixon are found potting the Transit of Venus in South Africa and their plotting of the Western Line from Philadelphia are unnatural acts. In the actions of Mason and Dixon technology is used to perpetuate supernatural acts. These unnatural actions are intended to allow people to regain the certainty they get lost when La Mettrie destroys the link between God and human beings. Therefore, certainty technology seems to be expected to become the basis of human moral behavior. Pynchon believes that it is impossible to rely on modern technology with total certainty. Emerson’s motion watch can prove that this uncertainty depends on reason and rationality. Mason and Dixon believe that rationalism is an unnatural move for that rationalism employs technology to violate the laws of nature. Michel Foucault pointed out in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* that the role of investigation: “The investigation was the sovereign power arrogating to itself the right to establish the truth by a number of regulated techniques” (225). During the Dutch colonization of South Africa, few reliable tools are for these purposes, but only a watch with a second hand. People could employ this technology to achieve the certainty of life, Pynchon comments thus:

During an interrogation, someone will wish to note the precise time that each question is asked, or action, by a clock with two hands; not because anyone will never review it, perhaps to intimidate the subject with the most advanced mechanical Devises of its time, certainly because Minute-Sealed Accuracy is possible by now, and there is room for Minutes to be entered in the Records. (156)

Pynchon has inserted in the text letters, journal entries, field book reports, and unpublished sermons. Although the text shows the basic characteristics of traditional historical novels in the description of past events, many forms of particularity require people to focus on Pynchon's creation of history. Pynchon has put his faith in reason and analysis. Pynchon refers to the episode when Vaucanson's duck explains that the worst moment is when the scientist does not show the machine to the people. The duck is the symbol of excessive reason and science. Pynchon puts his faith in nature and wisdom and he wants an individual to exist and survive not as a mere shadow: "Whatever they must represent, yet do they remain, dismayingly, Humans as well" (404) in the language of the novel. Pynchon argues that "We pay more attention to the superfluous than our cold Chronologies" (696). In *Mason & Dixon*, there is no straight flow of events. Pynchon believes that the old stories are vehicles of ideologies and they have served as tools to explore the complexities of the universe. Cherrycoke narrates the bulk of the tales in *Mason and Dixon* and his tales are "for their moral usefulness" (7). Pynchon's novels are considered subversive or anti-historical because of their opposition to all forms of authority and doubts about technocrats, economics, and government power. Pynchon shows his apocalyptic vision of World War II, depicting the paranoia and death culture engendered by the nuclear age evoking the death and disintegration of the age of science. Pynchon exposes the world of technology and the scientific rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment in *Mason & Dixon*. Pynchon believes that the scientific development that occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not create a reasonable world but encouraged the European powers to wage an imperial war to establish colonies; enslave the people and oppress them. Pynchon has dramatized the horrible scenes of slavery in the text of *Mason & Dixon*. The novel vividly portrays the history of two hundred years of slavery; Cherrycoke narrates the heartrending tale of the disruption of culture; the destruction of folk culture and the magic and miracles of the tribal people. Cherrycoke's moral lesson:

The boundaries we create between classes, nationality, gender, and race are imagined. The Line does not merely have democratic physical borders across the landscape; it marks imagined boundaries of difference between groups from which distinct ideologies and

consequently oppositional identities emerge. As Captain Zhang persists, “all else will follow as if predestined, unto War and Devastation.” (615)

From the description about the boundaries, Pynchon is against the boundaries between classes, gender, race, and the forth created deliberately by human beings, boundaries not only distinct the ideologies, minds, genders, but the most influential results boundaries bring about are discrimination, unfairness, alienation between human beings, arrogance, also “Other”. The boundaries lead to misunderstanding and conflict, which lead to war. Nearly all the causes of the conflict, no matter the conflict between the religions or the nations, are rooted in the boundaries. The main purpose of Pynchon in *Mason & Dixon* is to subvert ideologies and to advocate the egalitarian global world view. Ricoeur contends that any ideological discourse promoting integration constitutes the “cultural imagination” (3). He contends that ideology is a symbolic representation of reality. Ricoeur subverts the traditional concept that ideology is always opposed to social reality: “what is most fundamental is not the distortion or dissimulation of praxis by ideology. Rather what is most basic is an inner connection between the two terms” (Ricoeur 10). The concept of reality is reproduced by the means of a narrative representation of the fusion of fact and fantasy; of literal and figurative.

### **Time Consciousness and Watch in *Mason & Dixon***

Pynchon expresses his typical time consciousness in his novel *Mason & Dixon*; time moves spiral forward creating an imperfect cycle generating its linearity. The recursive structure of the novel is unique and makes meaning possible in the midst of so much motion. Dixon makes many attempts in the novel to explain the meaning of the message of the watch. When Emerson gives him the watch for the first time Dixon feels like being told something, but the narrator tells Dixon’s history with Emerson: “has been one of many such messages, not necessarily clear or even verbal, which Dixon keeps failing to understand” (318). Having treated the watch as a message, Dixon tries to interpret what “it might be confident to him” (319). He even pictures that Emerson presents him with a bunch of legal papers “embossed with

some intricate Seal, which if not read properly will bring consequences Dixon cannot voice.” In Dixon’s dream, Emerson is “reading Dixon’s Thoughts” and “Watch wishes to speak, but it only struggles, with the paralyzed voice of the troubled Dreamer”. Nonetheless, the salvation of Dixon lies in understanding the Message: “Only in the daylight does he begin to hear the watch saying: ‘When you accept me into your life....into your stomach’” (321). The message of the watch remains muddled and the absurdity of life, here chaos and disorder of the universe are linked with the muddled nature of the messages of the watch. Pynchon creates a paradox of reality through reimagining time, its motion, and its impact on the mind and sensibility of the characters. R.C. is the only person in the novel who internalizes the watch and clearing the ambiguity about the watch. And the reason he ate the watch is speculated, he describes his experience thus: “The Moment presented me had less than one of the Creature’s Ticks to decide” (323). Pynchon expresses the anxiety of Dixon in deciphering the meaning of the message of the watch. Despite its perpetual motion, the watch initially seems to rupture time and stand outside it. The Watch symbol is written to subvert art and technology; it literalizes “the instant’s ostensible negation of time by retorting: There wasn’t time” (322). The Watch has magical powers and Pynchon uses the literary devices of magic realism in the novel. After R.C. asks “What were my choices?” The R.C. asks: “the Watch was either bewitched by Country Women in the middle of the night; for monthly blood, Names of power or perfected, ops, by means might any Watch be, over years, small bit by bit to its present mechanical state by Men, in workshops and the daytime. That was the sexual choice the Moment presented; between those two sorts of Magic” (323). In America, what happens next still depends on what came before, but history moves too quickly for anyone to determine what the past means. Pynchon presented Emerson who could teach students to fly. Cherrycoke narrates “Dixon’s trip to Virginia where he meets Thomas Jefferson at a tavern” exposing Dixon to “the unmediated newness of History.” Pynchon depicts Dixon enjoying the company of the political wits and raises his glass: “To the pursuit of Happiness, a phrase used by Thomas Jefferson during his political career” (326).

The obsessive centralizing of time in the novel is like nostalgia. Charles Mason is portrayed as the novel's center of consciousness. He is depressed over the death of his wife and in the course of the plot, he takes every occasion to revisit the time of their life together through dreams and memories. The visitations of his wife are described by Pynchon as her waking visions. Pat is inevitably linked with the present refracted through the lens of its 1990s present. Indeed *Mason & Dixon* is a conspicuous nostalgic story of past time. Boym comments thus: "Nostalgia is longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (xiii). With its anachronisms, the storyline of *Mason & Dixon* executes a time that never existed, for its realistic historical representations. The novel is a peculiar blend of events of the "past and the present against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (Boym xv). The setting of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is less associated with history and progress than the 1990s and the plot offers a pre-modern sense of time. The confusion about time is further enhanced when the readers find the details of slavery taking center stage in this novel. Pynchon uses a strange literary device of thrusting the late twentieth century back into the eighteenth century. The narrative structure of the novel includes formal imitations of documentary evidence such as letters, diaries, field reports, and unpublished sermons. The text shows the essential characteristics of traditional historical novels through detailed and accurate descriptions of past events. *Mason & Dixon* strikes nostalgia due to its pastiche of style. Pynchon has both idealized and dehistoricized the past, Dennis Lensing observes thus:

Pynchon chose to enact nostalgia in order to parody its emptiness, or rather, in order to satirize its ineffectuality. Thus the novel transcends the merely nostalgic in order to perform precisely the historical. (183)

Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* depicts two worlds with the elements of utopianism and nostalgia. Pynchon chronicles multiple experiences in the novel. Mason and Dixon encounter giant vegetables in a landscape that are described as a hallucination, but such fantastic scenes also describe the "New World of Utopia". In Section Two entitled "America," Mason and Dixon arrive at the shore near Philadelphia. Here they first hear and see the New World, a world already filled with the noise of the human population but still rendered as "primitive." They hear:

Hammers upon nails, Wives upon husbands, the ring of Pot-lids, the jingling of Draft chains, a rifle–shot from a stretch of woods, lengthily crackling tree to tree and across the water... An animal will come to a headland, and stand, regarding them with narrowly set Eyes that glow a moment. Its Face slowly turning as they pass. America. (258)

In Pynchon's novel, there is all-pervasive use of the subjunctive case to project that history is not a collection of crude facts but history can be re-imagined. The main silent feature of the novel is the "subjunctive space of wish and desire of the hypothetical and the counterfactual, of speculation and possibility" (McHale 44). Pynchon describes post-colonial America as exposing and ridiculing the oppression of the slaves. In Cape Town, Mason and Dixon arrive and find food a primary site of colonial control and native subversion. Dixon feels that Cape Town is an entrance into an underworld. He is surprised to notice the primitive culture in Cape Town. The local whites notice his "unconcealed attraction to the Malays and the Black slaves; their Food, their Appearance, their Music, and so, it must be obvious, their desires to be delivered out of oppression" (61). Dixon is shocked to see the strict curfews governing the white interaction with the native and slave-born sections of the town. The restrictions represent a standard response to native and slave populations. These restrictions are aimed at restricting language and the means of communication, Food in the novel is described as a signifier of power at the center of the oppressive colonial power of the government of Cape Town. The colonial rulers believe that which is foreign, exotic is dangerous and therefore must be avoided to establish colonial hegemony. Hence Food in Cape Town is considered as the symbol of colonizing power as language is the form of cultural expression and identity. Mason and Dixon closely observed the prevalence of slavery at Cape Town and at St. Helena and in America. They notice that the wage workers are going home as their life is hard and miserable. They find that liberalism is a hoax as the colonial power in the colonies is growing inhuman and destructive. They see the struggle for power and the struggle for the survival of the slaves. Mason and Dixon also notice how excessive ambition pays its way with petty promises of advancement and favors. Human beings are deluded that they are "free" but they remain enslaved and oppressed. Dixon is



shocked to find the abuse of the slaves forced into prostitution and the oppression of the marginalized people. He notes the constant use of mutton as the centerpiece of meals in the Vroom household, most often the hind parts of the sheep, which

over the course of its late owner's life...has grown not merely larger and more fatty, but also, having absorbed years of ovine Flatulence ever bowing by, to exhibit a distinct Taste, perhaps prized by cognoscenti somewhere, though where cannot readily be imagined.  
(79)

Pynchon gives a realistic account of Cornelius Vroom's women flirting with Mason and Dixon creating a true historical situation of the tribal past. The slave women try their best to drive Mason and Dixon into their beds. The images of smoke, pipe, sexuality create an atmosphere of the primitive age of the world of slaves and their sexual oppression and subjugation. The reference to *Dagga*, a typical brand of wine, cleaned, graded, and ready to inflame passions is realistically described in this section. *Dagga* is the "real Dutch gin, *ketjap*, arrived Express from indo-China and Pineapple, Pumplenose, Tamarind; a hundred flavors, a thousand blends" (77). Dixon notices the atmosphere of hatred and discrimination; travel is prohibited after certain hours and a curfew is imposed for certain people. The prohibition is not a matter of puritanical attitudes on the part of the Cape Dutch. In their own bars and clubs, the Cape Dutch are supplied with the wide varieties of narcotics, pornography, and prostitution rampant in the colony. Dixon observes the slave trade which is inhuman and oppressive. Cornelius Vroom has "forbidden his daughters to eat any of the native Cookery, particularly that of the Malay, in his belief that the Spices encourage Adolescents into 'Sin' by which he means 'Lust that crosses racial barriers, the mixtures of spices symbolic of the mixing of the races, and so taboo'" (62). The restriction on food then comes to mirror the standard colonial restriction of language and governance of interaction between colonizers and colonized. Pynchon has described the fear psychosis of the colonists in *Mason & Dixon*. They are treated as the "Other" as all are subjected to violence and human degradation. Dixon's trip to the Espresso bar and reference to Jesuit conspiracy to destroy Feng Shui are some of the instances of colonial politics. Pynchon also lampoons "world-historical

individuals” like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin in this section of the novel. There is a great diversity of interpretations. The critics condemn *Mason & Dixon* calling it a “reckless Monologue” (308). Ironically, *Mason & Dixon* follows the principle of inspiring spontaneity and anti-positivism, aiming to avoid certain “unfriendly to Worlds alternative to this one” (359). By which Pynchon delivers the signal that Mason and Dixon are always worried that they will be controlled by uncontrollable forces. Dixon observed that man and his environment are in a state of incomplete prediction, repetition, or rigidity. Dixon believes in confronting the complicated life and avoiding “reducing Possibilities to simplicities” (345), he urges not to move from “subjunctive” to “indicative” (677) and to avoid “reckless Monologue” (308). Dixon sees in The Cape Town what Mason cannot: “Indifferent to Visibility, wrapped in the melancholy winds that choir long, persists an Obsession or Siege by something much older than anyone here, an injustice that will not cancel out” (68).

Pynchon’s vision in the novel is cosmic; he thinks of constructing other possible worlds and grapples with the problem of creating new frontiers as he envisages human beings struggling to protect freedom. There are many passages in the novel where Pynchon makes it clear that when one cannot govern, one will compromise. There is always a trend in the world of impinging on the freedom of others. Dixon finds that the Dutch are deprived of their natural emotions, even sexuality turns into commerce and the city is like a machine, and everything is origin from profit in Cape Town. The trend is to control and operate it “from a single point” (68). There is some self-proclaimed master who tries to dominate others and turn the joy of others into sorrow: “excesses of ill-treatment are transformed to Joy and that excesses of Well-being at length bring an Anguish no less painful for being metaphysical” (151). Pynchon refers to the entropy that deviates from the dark side of the Enlightenment. The main metaphor of Pynchon is to establish entropy to defeat these hierarchies of accumulated power. But Pynchon is positive: “It always wins. Here is the deviance from previous works, and I will leave it as unscientific as to place it in his voice” (759).

At the end of the novel, Mason gets along with himself and his family and regrets his absence but instills a sense of purpose and possibility in his son. He assures him that his behavior is purposeful, he revalues love and friendship. He has been able to find a meaning of life and concludes that machines cannot solve the problems of life and suggests that increasing control and prediction of natural and celestial phenomena has led to the ancient obsession's back with prophecy. With the development of the novel, people saw that desire drove the heirs of feudal liberation to enslave people. Pynchon believes that no one in this world could understand the working of nature: "We were not meant to play Theatrical Roles" (353). Diversity in life and the universe is real; "power may be borrowed, as needed, against repayment dates indefinitely" (317). Nature works on certain principles; it can take good action and seek cover up when evil is found. Pynchon observes that in a system, the solution used to rely on eliminating the time rate in the storage problem.

There is a gift in man of making agreements, contracting in order to pool resources and have a common view of the opportunities and obstacles in the material space they share. This is the other face of the Line. Although it might be an unhealthy structure; a conduit of evil. (701)

Dixon notices that there are two facets of man; one prefers to cooperate, and the other likes to manipulate and do harm to others. The division of labor in society is impeccable, they face dangers and adversity. Man always struggles for power and position and profit: "pursued and none escape, however long and fruitful be the years till the Shadow creeps cross the Sill-plate, its Advent how mute". "Human kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting-known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night and any who see them out of Disguises are instant" (769), Pynchon has depicted a harmful structure in the accumulation of power in *Mason & Dixon*. He bewails the devaluation of the powers and civility of a man with the growth of machines and technology. The relationship between Mason and Dixon and their social relationship is depicted in the plot of the novel. Pynchon has also pointed out Mason's deism and makes the statement that "Christ is pure uncertainty" (511) as deism is reading the impossibility of a powerful nature. He laughs at Maskelyne's

chase for the “Phantom Shape” (772). He has “ascended, descended, even condescended, and the List’s not Ended nut has not yet transcended a blessed thing” (746). He comes to believe that: “Doubt is of the essence of Christ” (511). Dixon knows that coercion can make faith difficult. He wants to explore the mysteries of the stars like Dr. Faustus of Marlowe: “the Rulers with Divine powers eventually drove their unchosen away something styling itself” (534). Dixon has noticed the profit hunting, greed, and lust for power prevailing everywhere. The human being’s behavior focuses on some unnecessary cultural construction, such behavior betrays its original intentions but ensures their power and profits:

There may be found, within the malodorous Grotto of the Selves, a conscious Denial of all that Reason holds true. Something that knows, unarguably as it knows Flesh is sooner or later Meat, that there are Beings who are not wise, or spiritually advanced, or indeed capable of Human Kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting- known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night, and any who see them out of Disguise is instantly pursued, and none escape, however long and fruitful be the years till the Shadow creeps cross the Sill-plate, its Advent how mute. Spheres of Darkness, Darkness impure, Plexities of Honour and Sin we may never clearly sight, for when we venture near they fall silent, Murderings must be silent, by Potions and Spells, by summonings from beyond the Horizons, of Spirits who dwell a little over the Line between the Day and its annihilations, between the number’d and unimagin’d, between common safety and Ruin ever solitary. (769)

To conclude, Pynchon’s novel *Mason & Dixon* is structured around the forces of entropy and chaos operating in the universe. He has explored the power lust of modern man and the eventual loss of human values dramatizing the imminent collapse of human civilization. Pynchon is concerned about man’s quest for certitude and his inability to find plausible answers and the novel talks about the need to find hope in transit instead of reaching the destination. Man is depicted as a tragic figure groping in the darkness and being threatened by impending doom because of the powerful

forces of entropy and chaos. He reinterprets history and finds that there is nothing more dangerous than classical liberalism doing its best to limit the hierarchical structure, in which the time rate is not eliminated from the power store: “it may produce some Symbol of People who won’t care a rat’s whisker about his Borough, who will indeed sell out his Voters for a chance to grovel his way to even a penny’s worth more. The advantage in the World of Global Meddling he imagines as reality” (405). *Mason & Dixon* operates in the void where chaos is a reality and certainties are not available. The novel is a treatise of man’s failures and the loss of hope and faith in the material and technological world. It is a chronicle of how possibilities are reduced to uncertainties and how the struggles of man end in despair. There is no one unifying principle: “Facts are but Play-things of lawyers” (349). Here, all doubts about nude Positivism were immediately eliminated. In turn, Cherrycoke plays a so-called unreliable main narrator, he just often describes events he did not experience himself and adds more small details at the request of the audience. There are multiple voices in the novel and none of them gets an authority; the confusion multiplies as there is a mixture of stories and folk tales; legends and scientific facts; dreams and rational facts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There are fictional plots and strategies, and historical people speak in unison with supernatural creatures and dreams are as real as the awakening moment. Words have multiple meanings; everything is disintegrated; the speakers are haunted by old memories and nothing is in their control because of the power of chaos and disorder.

## Chapter Six

### Chaotic Roles of Money and Conspiracy in *Bleeding Edge*

Just as physicists have a keen interest in studying the dynamic behavior in a physical system “chaotic”, the writers of literature share the keen interest in describing human behavior at random which is caused by Chaos theory. In the world of fiction, Chaos Theory is employed as a new and promising tool to dig out the inner world of the characters and their institutions. Dylan Kissane (2007) observes that “the assumption of chaos can assist in explaining the variety of habits and recurring behaviors of the characters that struggle in society and in this random universe for survival and in quest of their identity” (92). The physicists uses the Theories of Newton and declares that nature is deterministic which refers to the situation where known data leads to predictable results. Pynchon believes that this universe is controlled and governed by entropy which has an impact on the life of the people living in this society. In Pynchon’s novels, the plots, the fate of characters and the psyche state of protagonists are determined, controlled, and governed by the forces of Chaos and Entropy.

The texts of Pynchon are investigated relying on the theories of Chaos and Entropy. Pynchon believes that noise in communication gives entropy an opportunity and allows entropy to produce uniformity. The function of communication is to build relationships and the effort at communication intends to produce order, differentiation, and individuality. But in the world of *Bleeding Edge* communication failed. Language is inadequate to convey the full truth about contemporary reality. Pynchon’s novels are attempts to create conditions depicting the real struggles of the characters in the hostile universe. Edward Mendelson (1978) avers thus: “Pynchon is always pointing towards the real conditions of a world more serious than the world in his imagination: pointing towards, not embodying, not displacing” (4). Michael Crichton (2016) believed that “prediction was just a function of keeping track of things. If you knew enough, you could predict anything. That’s been a cherished scientific belief since Newton. Chaos Theory throws it right out the window” (123). The brilliant writer Crichton expressed the revolutionary nature of Chaos Theory that

led to the evolution of non-linear plots and postmodern conventions. James Gleick (1987) supports that “linear systems are such that you can take them apart and put them together again; the pieces add up. Nonlinear systems generally cannot be solved and cannot be added together” (23). Fredric Jameson stated that in all the postmodern novels the trend is to create nonlinear plots. The novels of John Barth; Kurt Vonnegut; John Updike and Thomas Pynchon depict nonlinear plots.

In view of some of the important features of Chaos Theory in the literature are weirdness, disturbances, and unpredictability in the long term. Such writing exhibits a diffusion of linear chronology and the important features are repetition and variation. No wonder that the behavior of the characters of *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Bleeding Edge* are erratic and they suffer from the inner turmoil exhibiting the impact of the Chaos Theory. It can be explained that the characters' psychic development reflects a sort of orderly disorder in the novels by Thomas Pynchon. Brian Mchale, Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson observe that indeterminacy, multiplicity, and ontological ambiguity are the main characters in the postmodern fiction of Pynchon. Social systems and present society can be analyzed through the tool of Chaos Theory; it is found that systems move from order to disorder, from generation to destruction and dislocation and disruption, and the underlying rules of the dynamics in the reality. All these elements are found in abundance in the novels of Thomas Pynchon.

The reviewers and the critics of Pynchon had divergent views about Pynchon's novel *Bleeding Edge* (2013). *Bleeding Edge* belongs to the class of 9/11 novels written by John Updike, Don DeLillo, and Claire Messud. The novel is set in the New York of the dot.com bubble. There is almost no pessimistic opening sentences novel. This novel is designed around holidays. “It's the first day of spring, 2011” (1), by which Pynchon reminds us of the famous sentence of T.S. Eliot “April is the cruelest month”. Pynchon deals with the issue of ambiguous post-9/11 return to normalcy gesture toward “resilience and indifference.” Pynchon explores the role of historical forces; chaos and entropy dominating the life of people through the plot intertwined historical narrative of 9/11 and the Internet. The novel is described as a critique of neoliberal ideology. The novel depicts a brand new territory through this

intertwined narrative adopting the dominant tropes of the 9/11 novel. The plot of the novel *Bleeding Edge* is a story of conspiracy examining neoliberal ideology. Peter Knight in his book *Conspiracy Culture* (1990) argues that “conspiracy narratives are often underpinned by an ideology of American exceptionalism in the same way the official narratives are” (Knight 167). At the beginning of the novel, documentary filmmaker Reg Despard tries to set up a link with the main protagonist Maxine. He is “making a corporate film for an IT security firm ‘Hashslingrz’ headed by Gabriel Ice, a billionaire” (10). This discloses a web of connected plots that highlight links between mysterious Hashslingrz and a video shooting agent.

Joseph Darlington argues, “the first attempt in Anglophone literature to open up and explore the events of over a decade earlier, September 11, 2001, as a historical event” (242). Pynchon has chronicled the trauma of the people affected by the great American tragedy exhibiting the helplessness of man against the inhuman and destructive forces of nature. David Cowart hailed *Bleeding Edge* as “the 9/11 mini genre” as the novel occupies a unique place in all the works by Thomas Pynchon. Don DeLillo in his article “In the Ruins of the Future” published in *Harper’s* in December 2001 discussed “narratives” and “counter-narratives” arguing that “the internet is a counter-narrative, shaped in part by rumor, fantasy, and mythical reverberation” (35). Pynchon’s *Bleeding Edge* is typical and differs from Updike’s *Terrorist*, in themes and styles; the novel is full of a historical narrative of the transformation of the internet. *Bleeding Edge* supplies a multiplicity of themes identifying the internet as the locus of many conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11: “Out in the vast undefined anarchism of cyberspace, among the billions of self-resonant fantasies, dark possibilities emerge” (Pynchon 327). Pynchon relies on the use of anarchism building the narrative of the internet into the story of 9/11 describing the aftermath of the tragic event. Deep Archer is the prominent deep web interface representing a vital stand of its rhetoric moving from utopian openness to familiar surroundings: “Yuppified duty-free shops, some for offshore brands...Advertising everywhere” (354).

Maxine is the main character in the novel; she can enjoy the normal and cozy like the others in America and she’s not sure whether her father is still alive. The story is revolved around the family of Maxine whose sons and husband are the weird,



familiar and attractive characters in the story. Pynchon's focus in this novel is not on abstractions like death, power, and history. In the novel, Pynchon depicts his theory about innocence which includes a bunch of silly jokes, naive ideologies, and false actions, whether in the online city built by the sons of the protagonists. The novel *Bleeding Edge* depicts the bursting of the dot.com bubble and the traumatic consequences of the 9/11 Attacks. The writer Thomas Pynchon exposes the period after post-9/11 exposing the corruption of the internet: Eric Outfield the disillusioned hacker expresses his rhetoric thus:

Keyboards and screens turning into nothing but portals to Web sites for what the Management wants everybody addicted to, shopping, gaming, jerking off, streaming endless garbage...and it won't end till the Internet; the real one, the dream, the promise is destroyed. (432)

Cowart observes that Pynchon has exposed the hegemony and the corruption of the global capitalists, he "favors indirect representation of events so immense so infamous as to have created their mythology" The main story of *Bleeding Edge* is seismic in nature as Pynchon expose the extreme greed of the corporate sector. The plot of the novel describes the milieus of the tech sector and the linked subcultures from gaming to hacking communities. The Americans encounter multidimensional aftermath after the tragedy of 9/11 in America. Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* is a New York novel exploring the life of the people of the underworld and Silicon Alley depicting the neoliberal currents of the private sector.

Thomas Pynchon introduces an adjacent conspiracy theory in the novels through the description of Maxine's husband's noticing plenty of abnormal options on Airlines and its weird subsequences on three days before 9/11attacks, the complex conspiracy plot seems more perplexing as the novel unfolds the complicated relationship among the characters such as Maxine's father and brother, an ex-Mossad agent and her friends Heidi Czornak, a professor of popular culture, and March Kelleher, a longtime political activist and "weblogger." Their complicated relationship and their mysterious occupation blend together to enhance the conspiracy in the novel. Maxine's father ultimately takes a position on collusion that begins to

represent the novel: “these guys are WASPs, Mormons, Skull, and Bones, secretive by nature. Trained sometimes since birth, never to run off at the mouth. If discipline exists anywhere it’s among them. So, of course, it’s possible” (325). *Bleeding Edge* puts the readers in the world of the possibility and conspiracy and unfolds the conspiracy operated by the power behind the public play, which is completely different from what it seems to the ordinary people. When the chase begins to slow down, Pynchon describes more surreal and charming bits of prose, for example, as the catch-up speed decreases, the surreal and beautiful fragments in the prose are gradually filtered:

Sometimes, down in the subway, a train riding on will slowly be overtaken by a local or an express on the other track, and in the darkness of the tunnel, as the windows of the other train move slowly past, the lighted panels appear one by one, like a series of fortune-telling cards being dealt and slid in front of her...After a while, Maxine has come to understand that the faces framed in these panels are precisely those out of all the city millions she must in the hour be paying the most attention, in particular those whose eyes actually meet her own...At some point naturally, she begins to wonder if she might not be performing the same role for some face looking back out another window at her. (39)

Pynchon has dramatized the deviant behavior of the characters and their perversion in the pursuit of money. The important money culture and its insidious effect on the mind of the characters are dramatized by Pynchon in conformity to the Chaos Theory. In this chapter, the forces of money and the greed and degradation of all the major characters are explored through the lens of the Chaos Theory which *Bleeding Edge* treatises, it is a novel about fractured time, lost meanings, and the absurdity of the human living status and psychic state. There is a pervasive representation of money operating as materiality on the levels of plot and style. The novel is structured through the hunt for money of the characters; the mad pursuit of money offers an insight into the mind of the characters. In the world of *Bleeding Edge*, politics, technology, culture, and society is determined by the chaotic lust for

money of the characters who throw the values in the sky and exhibit paranoid behavior. Money culture and its accumulation are associated with moral values and their loss. The subversive power of money is dramatized in *Bleeding Edge* to expose the fraudulent practices of the characters. Money exhibits a tendency towards moral corruption and remains an economic and symbolic tool determining the capitalist system in the novel. *Bleeding Edge* depicts the forces of “post-late capitalism” (308). Money in *Bleeding Edge* is elusive which is “diabolically hard to comprehend the words and which is of no particular substance and may be of no substance at all” (Buchan 17). Karl Marx in his theory of money has talked about the cultural impact of money. Money matters in life and it has eroding effect on the mind and sensibility of the individuals. Pynchon gives references to all forms of money; modern paper money and coins symbolizing money power. But with “the advent of electronic fund-transfers the link between inscription and substance was broken. The matter of electronic money does not matter” (Shell 1). There are references to historical events of the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis in the US leading to homelessness and violence. Computer glitches can destroy millions of dollars through fraudulent transactions, which is the warning of the destructive consequences of a monetary digital economy is given by Pynchon in the novel. “Money is normative in both senses of economic and moral value, and it is a medium of exchange, a mediating device” (13). The normativity and flexibility of money are investigated by Terry Eagleton in *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991). Money “has no identity; money transcends all principles; it enslaves people and puts them on the wrong track leading to their dehumanization” (Eagleton 16). Money is subversive and leads to the inequality and disintegration of society. In *Bleeding Edge* Pynchon shows the anti-capitalist viewpoint; the novel is a grand narrative dealing with the corrupt ethic of hackers. “All for free. Hacker ethic. Each one doing their piece of it, then just vanishing unaccredited” (69). March Kelleher is an important character in *Bleeding Edge* who denounces capitalism as “a pyramid racket on a global scale, the kind of pyramid you do human sacrifices up on top of, meantime getting the suckers to believe it’s all gonna go on forever” (163). Money urges people to sit there “counting a lapful of greenbacks” (162).

Gabriel Ice is “one of the boy billionaires who walked away in one piece when the dotcom fever broke” (10), March Kelleher serves as the Savior of the labor force in the novel. And someone who is “practically synonymous with U.S. security arrangements” (Pynchon 371). The world of *Bleeding Edge* is the world of capitalism depicting the degradation of man and the impact of the concept of entropy and Chaos Theory. In the novel, everyone despises the norms of human values in the lust for money in society. Capitalism has the characteristics of tragedy and farce, its popular social problems and injustices, for example, “U.S. engineered regime changes, children with AKs, deforestation, storms, famines, and other late-capitalist planetary insults” (378) revealing the internal contradictions. Capitalism is regarded as the first system of production in civilization with the only purpose to achieve economic penetration in the society which also can be applied to the world in the novel. Like William Gaddis’s famous novel *JR* (1975) Pynchon’s *Bleeding Edge* is pervaded by money culture and determines the actions and thoughts of the characters. The main heroine of the novel Maxine Tarnow is a fraud examiner who investigates the fraudulent dealings of money. Maxine’s job is too difficult because she exposes the destructive global network in the novel. Pynchon uses many monetary metaphors and references to highlight the significance of money and money matters. At one point Maxine finds herself “drifting into unprofitable thoughts” (390). About Tallis’ involvement with Gabriel Ice, which is depicted as having been “bought and sold into world March will never give up her hatred” (119). Pynchon has used monetary language to depict the inner feelings of the characters. In the first scene when Maxine notices thus:

Unsheltered people sleep in doorways, scavengers with huge plastic sacks full of empty beer and soda cans head for the markets to cash them in, work crews wait in front of buildings for the super to show up. Runners are bouncing up and down at the curb waiting for lights to change. (2)

Some people must make their living by garbage and others do manual labor to survive and to pull in the capitalist society. The novel describes the class conflicts and the plight of the labor class leading a hellish life in America. New York is the hub of

the real estate business and the city has become a busy market for traders and investors, and the city is described thus:

Thing is, is it's such a nice building, terra-cotta facing, not as ornate as commercial estate could get a century ago when the unit was going up, but tidy and strangely welcoming as if the architects had actually given some thought to the people who'd be working there every day. But it's too nice, a sitting duck, asking to get torn down someday soon and the period detailing recycled into the décor of some yup's overpriced loft.  
(42)

Even the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center didn't do anything to test the greed situation in America: "You'd think when the towers came down it would've been a reset button for the city, the real estate business, Wall Street, a chance for it all to start over clean. Instead look at them, worse than before" (387). The aftermath of the 9/11 attack proves the statement that "There's always a way to monetize anything" (349) because at the same time the businessmen are "thinking about all those buildable lots where the demolition's already been done" (388). The visitors at Ground Zero come to the conclusion that the environment is full of corruption and the degradation of human values. Such passages in *Bleeding Edge* condemn the capitalist that always attempts to commoditize everything in reality and they argue devaluation of value and the loss of their identities are the results of the pursuit of money. Pynchon uses monetary metaphors to depict the disruption of moral values, the decay of the ethical values: the devil of murdered Lester Traipse is "doomed to wander those century-old corridors until accounts are balanced, or for eternity. Whichever comes first" (370); Eric Outfield is "leaving only an uneasy faith that he may still exist somewhere on the honorable side of the ledger" (433). When a "close-up-of credit cards, all laid out like a fortune-teller's tableau" (178) appears on the screen, Igor says that the place "is where it goes off books" (376) to talk about that something is beyond secular cause and effect. Money dominates all the relations and all the episodes of the novel *Bleeding Edge*. The novel can connect the global economies and reveal that money is associated with the corruption of moral values as the millions of men in the world are impacted by the false values of money culture and their behavior

turns deviant. Intoxicated by wealth and power, the business tycoons of America exploit and oppress the labor class. Pynchon depicts the galore and glamour of money; the characters are lost in money earning and spending; fashions; styles of life and show of money are important features of the novel. Felix Boinureaux is wearing “either a triple-digit power haircut, carefully designed to lull observers into false complacency with their appearance till it’s too late, or else he cuts it himself and fucked up” (141). There are images of expensive cigars and other luxurious things in the novel depicting the money world of New York City and thus the novel is a critique of Marxian “commodity fetishism”. Pynchon has depicted the relationship between Maxine and her husband Horst. The major characters in the novel are rich people who least bother the moral values. It is possible for Maxine to be an occasional “real-estate envy attack” which leaves her confused that “maybe I’m in the wrong business? And yet she can come up with the tuition at Kugeblitz” (4). Money is the prime motivation of Maxine; she is an idealist who works for the greater good “providing ancient wisdom beyond earthly limits for money”. Maxine tries her best to earn money but she tries to keep her morals innocent, not slaved by money. She ran her “gravely afoul of the ACTE code of conduct, which Maxine, in fact, had been skating up to all and all along the posted edges of for years” (17). Her professional corruption seems to be justified. Maxine is a subtle and complex character of Pynchon. Pynchon has depicted double standards of morality in the novel; the traditional morality and the morality of money culture. Maxine struggles to do the right thing, but she is not always morally sound. Just like Sportello commits a cruel murder in the novel *Inherent Vice*, Maxine also becomes aggressive and resorts to violence. She is not behaving like a normal human being because of the impact of Chaos on her life. She also loses her cool temperament screaming, “Motherfuckers.” Maxine is a case study who is far from morally pure and even has “a halo of faded morality, a reliable readiness to step outside the law and share the trade secrets of auditors and taxmen” (17) and Maxine even cannot live up to the CEE expectation to be “the one incorruptible still point in the whole jittery mess, the atomic clock everybody trusts” (18). Shawn describes her work thus: “all ethical tripwires” (182). Maxine is shocked to notice that lots of innocent people do some illegal deals guided by evil forces. Maxine is not at all innocent as she also succumbs to money. Maxine

claims that her work is “always a plus to a find a moral dimension”, but she is not certain “Maybe it’ll help you appreciate some funny numbers” (63). When she is confronted with the inequalities of global capitalism, she is uncertain in her behavior and looks confused and bewildered. Horst expresses his reaction thus:

“How could it be? How could predicting market behavior be the same as predicting a terrible disaster?”

“If the two were different forms of the same thing”

“Way too anti-capitalist for me, babe.” (320)

Maxine is one member of the leftist family, but her practical life has nothing to do with anti-capitalist sensibilities, and neither does her work. Maxine hates Gabriel Ice; the symbolical portrayal of capitalism. She praises March Kelleher because she “doesn’t have a price” (137). When Gabriel Ice asks March to quit harassing him through her blog, she rejects his proposal in uncertain language:

Tell you what, next time I see March, I’ll ask her why she isn’t speaking more highly of your company, and then when she spits in my face and calls me your bitch and a corporate sellout and so forth, I’ll be able to ignore it “cause down deep I’ll know I’m doing a big favor for a swell guy. (137)

The morality of Maxine is ambiguous in the novel and she is “on moral pathways that would make a Grand Canyon burro think twice” (6); she sells out values for money though she struggles to remain innocent and clean in monetary transactions. The tensions of her life are explored as she tries to resist the temptations to sell out and lands “on the honorable side of the ledger” (433). Lester owes a debt that is not payable in “U. S. dollars” (175) and “loses his life, his shy, wronged soul” (259).

No wonder, the relation to money determines the behavior and thinking of the characters in the novel. The characters are not serious about moral principles; selling one’s conscience for money is a sin. Money in the novel is the most influential and

vital factor and the most ethical issues are decided by money. Maxine's relation to Windust is also regulated by the money factor. "The engagement with an obligation in recent Pynchon constitutes an ethical system" (939). Pynchon's characters have no choice outside the system of monetary ethics. In the capitalist world of *Bleeding Edge*, each character in the slave is bound to the money culture and must realize workable ethics in the system that is nihilistically leading to the disintegration of man. Nietzsche observes that man is basically good-natured, but the impact of Chaos and Disorder make him sinful. In the world of *Bleeding Edge* greed is not a sin but "the perimeters of ordinary greed overstepped" (90).

### **Chaos and Disorder: The Deviant Behavior of Characters**

Money represents satanic forces that corrupt the mind of all the major characters in the novel. Money occupies the field of metaphysics and functions as metareality gradually. Horst aptly remarks that "predicting market behavior in the novel is the same as predicting a terrible disaster" (230). Pynchon has given an insight into the behavior, of the characters who use all fair and foul means to accumulate money, Ian Stewart's famous science book *Does God Play Dice?* (1989) gives this phrase "texture of reality" referring to the fractal form found in nature by chaos theory. The phrase refers to both the actual form related to currency culture and their textual representations in the analysis. Pynchon does not view reality as textuality but as a physical field accessible to the human mental world. The human mind can develop a sense of reality and the novel *Bleeding Edge* is an attempt of Pynchon to re-express the form discovered by Chaos theory in the language which plays a role to provide metaphors to the writer to delineate the humanist perspective with the purpose of having a better understanding of the working of the human behavior; his choices and considerations and the portrayal of the chaotic spectrum. Examples of chaotic behavior have been found in the fluctuations of the behavior of the characters. Money acts as fundamental and inclusive access to the characters affecting and determining their roles in politics, society, culture, religion, and technology. The novel depicts the monetary metareality immanent to the world it structures the events. Money offers no external framework in *Bleeding Edge*, but it is the real soul of the plot. All aspects of life; all relations are determined and regulated by money. Culture is quickly dissipated



early on by March: “Culture, I’m sorry, Herman Goring was right, every time you hear the word, check your sidearm. Culture attracts the worst impulses of the moneyed, it has no honor, it begs to be suburbanized and corrupted” (56). Gabriel Ice shows expensive works of art in his mansion “not coherently enough to suggest the passions of a collector, more like the need of an acquirer to exhibit them” (124). Money evidently determines culture and politics and regulates all relations of the individuals. In the novel, Pynchon has explored the relationship between human beings and techniques. The sentence “We’re beyond good and evil here, the technology its’ neutral eh?” (89) seems ridiculous. Pynchon describes the struggle of Deep Archer in the novel. March states “the time has come for the Information to be free; the young people are going to transform the whole society and the greedy fuckin dot. Comers are crazy to mint dollars” (116). *Bleeding Edge* doesn’t present any romantic view of the world and the Internet in no way is leading to freedom and equality at all. Each American is busy accumulating money flouting all norms of decency, cultural values, and subverting human relations. Maxine’s father argues thus: “Call it freedom; it’s based on control” (420). Eric gives the real picture of the galore of Web sites the people are becoming crazy for shopping, gaming and accumulating endless garbage through Internet” (432). The novel is immersed in the technology with capitalism, even the title *Bleeding Edge* is a kind of technology which lends its funding as the “crazy shit VCs used to go for” (78). The money hunters and greedy vulture capitalists are busy with making money flouting all norms and values; they are “always in the market for bright ideas from any source” (150) and it is “seed and angel money” (72) that motivates the characters. The world of *Bleeding Edge* is driven by money which is described as the transcendent force. The market has replaced religion in America. Mervin explains: “For more than you would dream. Nothing dies anymore, the collectors’ market, it’s the afterlife, and yups are its angles” (435). Shawn observes the destruction of the Twin Towers by the Taliban thus:

The Trade Center towers were religious too. They stood for what this country worships above everything else, the market, “always the holy fuckin market”

“A religious beef, you’re saying?”

It’s not a religion? These are people who behave the Invisible Hand of the Market runs everything. They fight holy water against competing religions like Marxism. Against all evidence that the word is finite, this blind faith that resources will never run out, profits will go on increasing forever, just like the world’s population; more cheap labor, more addicted consumers. (338)

March Kelleher has the same ideas when he expresses the opinion that it is the State government that triggered the terrorist attacks of 9/11. He replies in the following way: “Forget doing it to your own people, why would anybody do this to their own economy?” (318). He lashes at the money-minded and greedy nature of his people who have turned animals in the mad pursuit of money” (318). The dark religion of capitalism is the main villain of the novel and religion is no longer a source of moral and spiritual sustenance for the Americans. A German cab driver cries out: “Fucking Jews” (122) and then prepares for the Rapture. The religious talks in the novel also center on money. Pynchon lashes at Christianity in satirical language: “The Baby Jesus is managing the portfolio of earthly affairs, and nobody begrudges Him the carried interest” (285). Pynchon describes the scene when Maxine goes shopping with her friend Cornelia:

“You’re on. Gotta warn you, though, I’m not much into shopping for recreation.”

Cornelia puzzled, “But you...you are Jewish?”

“Oh! Sure”

“Practicing?” now

“Nah, I know how much to do it pretty by now”

“I suppose I meant a certain...gift for finding...bargains?”

“Should be written into my DNA, I know, But somehow I still forget to fond material or study the tags, and sometimes”, lowering her voice and pretending to look around for disapproval. “I have even...paid retail?”

Cornelia pretending to grasp, faux paranoid. “Please don’t tell anyone, but I have actually now and then...discussed the price of an item in a shop. Yes, sometimes, incredibly they’ve even brought it down. Ten percent. Nearly thirty once, but that was only the one time, at Bloomingly’s back in the eighties. Through the memory is still vivid”

So...as long as we don’t rat each other out to the ethnic police...  
(152)

Like technology and morality, religion is not a source of spiritual sustenance in the novel as all the characters exhibit their slavery for money. In the world of *Bleeding Edge*, Chaos is predominant and religion and metaphysics have no place because money has appropriated their place. The world *Bleeding Edge* is governed by the religion of capitalism and Chaos Theory determining moral values and Maxine is one of the most active characters. Horst observes that the world of *Bleeding Edge* is governed by the erratic behavior of the market which has brought about “a nearly error-free history of knowing how certain commodities around the world will behave, long enough before they themselves” (21). Maxine emerges as a mystic who has the power to access reality behind reality and understand their casual relations. Maxine has the art of reading money and she views paranoia as “the garlic in life’s kitchen, right, you can never have too much” (11). Maxine experiences a paranoid moment when she looks at the decertification letter of the Association:

Alarmingly, what Maxine noticed for the first time was the Association seal, which showed a torch burning violently in front of and slightly above an opened book. What’s this? Any minute the pages of this, maybe allegorically The Law, are about to be set on fire by this burning torch, possibly the Light of Truth? Is somebody trying to say

something, the Law in flames here, the terrible inflexible price of Truth...That's it! Secret anarchist code messages. (18)

Maxine reads books and realizes in “normal company records-daybooks, ledgers, logs, tax sheets” (10) the tables in the books enlighten her to make some rational judgment. Maxine is one of the people who can read the real world by tracking certain content in accounting. The secretary of Maxine Dayton goes to get the Public Accountant certificate and has the ability to deal with a case by finding what “they were hiding ...in the spreadsheets” (360). Maxine gains completely different and new ideas on an Excel file: “It was luck, really luck I happened to take my reading glasses off, and suddenly, blurry, but there it was, the pattern. Just way too many the damn empty cells” (401). Maxine has the talent to read this meta-text because she has “acquired a number of software kits, courtesy of certain less reputable clients, which have bestowed on her superpowers not exactly falling within Generally Accepted Accounting Practices, such as thou shalt not hack into somebody's account, thou shalt leave that sort of thing for the FBI” (173). Pynchon depicts Maxine's ability to access monetary meta-text in the metaphysical language of hacking. Maxine is the only character in the novel who explores the greedy nature of the people around her. Igor inquires her about Bernie Madoff's investment plan, which was found the most severe financial fraud in history.

“One to two percent per month.”

“Nice average return, so what's the problem?”

“Not average. Some every month.” (140)

Igor uses metaphysical terms to interpret Maxine's insights as “gifts”, but she replied, “Any idiot, nothing personal, could see this” (140) Maxine employs interpretative tools to detect frauds, and the people trying to move funds “without leaving a trail” and those trying to transfer money with a general “cover your tracks attitude” (38) keeping struggle in the novel *Bleeding Edge*. Pynchon has depicted the complicated global conspiracy in the novel reflecting the pervasion of the mind of characters. Maxine is able to detect the phony data:

Soon enough, drilling down, she begins to pick up other tells. Consecutive invoice numbers. Hash totals that don't add up. Credit card numbers failing their Luhn checks. It becomes dismayingly clear that somebody's taking money out of hashsligrz and starbursting it out again all over the place to different mysterious contractors, some of whom are almost certainly ghosts, running at a rough total to maybe as high as the high sixes, even lower sevens. (42)

Gabriel Ice is another character in the novel who uses analytical tools to cover up his tracks; He even tried to circumvent the records of his fund transfer through the Hawala system, Reg described it as following:

“a way to move money around the world without SWIFT numbers or bank fees or any of the hassle you'd get from Chase and them. A hundred percent reliable, eight hours max No paper trail, no regulation, no surveillance”

“How is this possible?”

“Mysteries of The World, Family-type operations usually. All depending on trust and personal honor.”

“Gee, I wonder why I never ran across this in New York.” (81)

Pynchon depicts the deviant behavior and perversion of mind of the character who is engaged in the hawala transactions after 9/11 attack on America. Hawala transaction is processing some money transaction usually which is related to some illegal activities, Hawala transaction is without a record of illegal transactions and it is a unique modern technique based on trust but are very useful for funding terrorism. Gordon Slethaug in his book *Beautiful Chaos: Chaos Theory and Metachaotics in Recent American Fiction* (2000) points out that Pynchon has incorporated Chaos Theory in his novels in several different ways. Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* relies on metaphorical structures based on order and randomness. Slethaug talks of “metachaotic” use of metaphors in the novel as he argues:

The use of metaphor is arguably least complex or grounded in the specifics of scientific theory, for metaphors are applicable to general expressions of order and disorder rather than to specific manifestations of new theories and practices. (Slethaug 164)

The metaphor of hawala is a “metachaotic metaphor” symbolizing the moral perversion of the terrorists who use illegal transactions for terrorist funding. Pynchon has depicted the fear psychosis of the American and in the words of Ballard “hawala” operations appear to be unbelievable. Hawala was routinely described as a “system without records” (2). Ballard further adds that the hawala deals have no religion and morality as their main function is to make money in legal or illegal ways. In the work of Thomas Pynchon, chaos theory and entropy serve as a metaphor to present the link between the individual and the culture and nature, to present the relationship between the present and the past, and to present the balance between innovation and identifiable limitations in literary structure. The impact of chaos on the behavior is depicted through the effective metaphor of hawala in the novel. Hawala is described as a “system without records: it has no central filing system because its records are as distributed as the system itself”. Nicholas Windust gave Maxine a dossier which includes:

A dozen pages on attempts to follow the money through the hawala set up Eric discovered, beginning with Bilhana Wa-ashifa Import–Export in Bay Ridge, thence via the re-invoicing of shipments into the U.S. of halvah, pistachios, geranium, essence, chickpeas, several kinds mobiles and telephones, MP3 players and light electronics. (261)

Maxine exposes all the fraudulent dealers as she challenges Windust’s organization: “nowhere in your own vast database can you find contact information for even one professional liar?” (264). Maxine discovers many irregularities in the money transactions, but she knows that the whole system is corrupt and the market conditions are uncertain: “We short the shares. Ziggy reframes the terrorist attacks observing that they are not politically motivated but are the result of economic

activity that is profitable to certain people. Maxine tries to solve the riddle of fraudulent money transactions and the lust for money of the people. She is baffled to know the facts and cries out: "Who was doing all this trading?" (234). Maxine's investigation is not out of the purpose of history or politics but finance. She gives an insight into the perversion and moral degradation of the characters. The chaos in the life of characters is depicted through their association with money and moral corruption. Money is a potential weapon to control the activities of others and to capture power. Too much money becomes a cause of the sufferings of the characters and the example of Gabriel Ice is conspicuous. He is a billionaire, but money becomes a cause of his anguish and despair. Lust for money is limitless and like a burning fire, it goes on increasing. Maxine finds that rich people get trapped in the rat race of becoming richer and often indulge in hawala transactions. Money is beneficial to those who try to expose the distortions of those who are too wealthy to be persecuted: "too big to fail." Money is cancer and those who are after it is bound to suffer.

To conclude, Thomas Pynchon's novel *Bleeding Edge* is a dramatization of the Chaos Theory and its insidious effect on the life of characters. The main focus of Pynchon is on the erratic behavior of money forces and the deviant behavior of characters running after money and indulging into all malpractices such as hawala and illegal transactions. Pynchon has used scientific ideas as stools to investigate reality. The figure depicts a complex and unpredictable structural reality that the characters such as Maxine and Ice Gabriel interact with. Pynchon has used the chaotic and disorderly metaphors in the novel to describe the ups and downs of money culture, the function of the organizations, and their accumulation of money and struggle for power. The text deals with the ambiguity of life and roles of order and randomness.

## Chapter Seven

### **Anarchism in *Against the Day***

The plot of the novel Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* covers multiple events borrowed from science, history, philosophy, and other branches of knowledge with its vast landscape just as the characteristics of the prior novels by him. It seems that all literary styles have also become materials for Pynchon's parody: such as juvenile adventure stories, science fiction, western pioneer stories, comic strips, thriller crime novels, detective spy novels, tramp novels, obscure pornographic books, etc. What Pynchon shows in the book is the arbitrary imagination and exploration of human beings for a certain possibility at a certain stage in history. The experience to read it is indeed overwhelming. John Rothfork (2016) expresses his experience of reading the novel *Against the Day* thus:

We have the feeling of gazing down at the pastel and pastoral fields that go rolling all the way to every horizon, the inner American Sea, where the chickens schooled like herring, and the hogs and heifers foraged and browsed like groupers and codfish, and the sharks tended to operate out of Chicago or Kansas City, the farm-houses and towns rising up along the journey like islands, with girls in every one ... out in the yard in Ottumwa beating a rug, waiting in the mosquito-thick evenings of downstate Illinois, waiting by the fencepost where the bluebirds were nesting for a footloose brother to come back home, after all, looking out a window in Albert Lea as the trains went choring by. (Rothfork 71)

The novel takes the murder of Webb Traverse, the foreman, and anarchist in the Colorado mine, as a clue, and revolves around his two sons' revenge. The characters in the book also include hot air balloon pilots, gamblers, corporate giants, drug addicts, naive and decadent people, scientific madmen, shamans, psychics, magicians, spies, detectives, female adventurers, and Professional killers. Their various adventures are all over most countries and regions in the northern hemisphere,



at the turn of the century, their journey covers, Britain, Venice and Vienna, the Balkans, Central Asia, Siberia when Tunguska Explosion occurred, New York, Mexico, post-war France, Hollywood in the silent film era, and one or two places that were not marked on the map.

In *Against the Day*, Pynchon locates his historic interest in the time of modernization, scientific revolutions, Puritanism, the Enlightenment, global economy, industrialism, information explosion, simulation are full of the novel from the beginning and end. Henry Veggian argues that Pynchon transforms “the genealogical authority of the modern historical novel” (206). The novel is a massive epic and includes five parts: *The Light Over the Ranges*, *Iceland Spar*, *Bilocations*, *Against the Day*, and *Rue du Depart*.

Pynchon hints to the reader the tone of anarchism at the very beginning of the novel, he observes that “Anarchists and heads of state like Archduke Franz Ferdinand, are natural enemies” (51). Pynchon describes the tragedy of World War I in a typical postmodern style. He refers to Ryder Thorn who was a crew member of the ship *Inconvenience* in 1905. Ryder Thorn acts as a time traveler from the future, and he attends “the ukulele workshop that summer at Candlebrow University” (551). Ryder gives courage to the crew members:

“You boys spend too much time up there in the sky. You lose sight of what is really going on in the world.” As dreamy adolescents, “You think you drift above it all, immune to everything”. (553)

The Chums are warned in a pessimistic tone as follows: “You have no idea what you’re heading into. This world you take to be the world will die, and descend into Hell. And the most perverse part of it is that the Victorian combatants in WWI will all embrace death. Passionately” (554). Ryder proves the young men are “Not Bosch, or Brueghel,” but “League on league of filth, corpses by the uncounted thousands” (554). They are presented as simpletons living in Chicago City: “You are such simpletons ... gawking at your Wonders of Science, expecting as your entitlement all the Blessings of Progress, it is your faith, your pathetic balloon-boy

faith" (555). The Chums stands for the youth in the novel, however, they are related to the words, such as "death", "descend into Hell", "league of filth", "simpletons" and so on, the youth is the hope of the world, and the hope of human being in the future, Thomas Pynchon foretells us the pessimistic world in the future through these negative words. He argues that politicians and capitalists make a blank promise of future development for the people who blindly believe in the magic bubble blown by the government, and the bubble is doomed to be broken, the young generation trapped in the modern world is with the destiny of becoming "simpletons".

In the modern world, the politicians and the capitalists take control of the power institutes including the government, and they are using it for their own benefit against the interests of citizens who are depressed and taken advantage of for the politicians and capitalists' interests. In the novel, Pynchon delights in presenting the nightmares indirectly or directly resulting from the political system "even if the balloonists chose to fly on, free now of the political delusions that reigned more than ever on the ground" (19). In the sprawling plot there emerges the scenes of falling of civilization as humanity is involved in a worldwide war between "the Plutonic powers of capitalism and proletariat labor dedicated to dreams of paradise and freedom promised by anarchy" (176). According to Alan Trachtenberg, the "historic period of the Gilded Age as characterized by struggles between labor and capital [that] raged on the ground of culture" over "the meaning of the nation itself" (78). In the foreword to Robert H. Wiebe's *In The Search for Order 1877-1920*, David Herbert Donald opines "that these years witnessed a fundamental shift in American values, from those of the small town in the 1880s to those of a new, bureaucratic-minded middle class by 1920" (vii). In the novel *Against the Day*, Pynchon stresses "the rhetoric of antithetical absolutes between these two views denied even the desirability of any interchange, much less compromise or conciliation; the issue was civilization versus anarchy" (Wiebe 96). Pynchon's vision is panoramic and epical as he chronicles in his novel the antagonistic voices are heard of many "juvenile heroes ... hurling themselves into those depths by tens of thousands until one day they awoke, those who were still alive, and instead of finding themselves posed nobly against some dramatic moral geography, they were down cringing in a mud trench swarming with rats and smelling

shit and death” (1024). The plot of the novel foreshadows the events of the First World War which “demolished each major premise about civilized international behavior” (Wiebe 263) and viewed businessmen and politicians as elites and saw their victory. The plot marks the collapse of Victorian values dramatizing the scene of the visit of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in the 1893 Chicago World Fair. This is an era of turmoil in the Western world where invention and imagination go hand in hand, adventure and greed go hand in hand. In the United States in the 1890s, the development of science and the application of new technologies became the trend of the times. Scientists represented by Edison became popular heroes and symbols of success. Consumer culture and capital giants appeared. Urban society began to take shape. The scene reached its peak in the Jazz Age of the 1920s. In Europe at that time, the shadow of war had already appeared, and humankind seemed to be unaware of the great disaster. The royal Archduke’s faith is shaken as he expresses his disgust when he tells his real desire: “What I am really looking for in Chicago ... is something new and interesting to kill.” He wishes to hunt the Hungarians in America: “The Chicago Stockyards might be rented out to me and my friends, for a weekend’s amusement?” (46).

Pynchon gives the images of violence and savagery in the novel. Scarsdale has killed Webb and the kids of Traverse Reef, Frank, and Kit seek to avenge the murder of their father. The quest of Kit is worth mention here; Jared Smith views Kit’s traveling through China and Tibet as a “mock pilgrimage”. He mocks that Kit’s journey is a parody since Kit still is with a colonial view of power versus anarchy. He says “Kit does arrive at some level of spiritual enlightenment, but it is unclear whether that enlightenment is representative of Buddhism or any other Eastern religion” (443). In the novel, it is maintained that life without state administration comes along with the idea of the abolition of money in a dream of total freedom with anarchists. It is the state administration that controls firmly the money and gradually has control of the nation through dictating the type and quantity of money, just as Wiebe expresses about the anarchists’ view of Pynchon: “Money was power; conspirators had controlled the nation by dictating the type and quantity of legal tender [gold]; a people’s currency [silver] would send power along with money back

into the communities” (98). It is pertinent to add that the novel of Pynchon describes “a Christian and often specifically Catholic set of doctrines,” Gnosticism is with the subversive energy of the orthodoxy, therefore, Pynchon likes to invoke the gnostic view and conceives his views on the evil historical issues in the world. Based on postmodernism, Pynchon opposes mechanical commands and also is against a Modern theory to explain that the understanding and explanation of history are more than one, the historical events that happened in the past is possessed with the current meaning only through “various discourses, ideological theories, opinions, or narratives” (States 544).

Colin Hutchinson also gives his comments thus: “Pynchon at the last moment substitutes the more hopeful notion that ‘grace’ (the last word of the novel) is available not in utopian projections of the future ... but in the boisterous, anarchical communal life-in-the-present” (184) and claims “the work’s stoical, but cautiously optimistic, alternative conclusion” (184). Which we can see in the novel *Against the Day*, Thomas Pynchon aims to oppose the imperialist and longs for the realization of anarchist’s freedom and tries to not only modify the historic events to cause historical chaos but also to clarify the institutional power of the new imperialism and put forward opposition to the established order of our era.

In the novel *Against the Day*, Pynchon gives a line between “Anarchist” and “Not Anarchist.” The Anarchist camp is divided into several categories in the novel and Anarchism subsumes Luddism. Pynchon gives the image of dynamite to describe the destructive nature of capitalism just like the image of the rocket in the novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In the novel, dynamite as an important signal is “both the miner’s curse, the outward and audible sign of his enslavement to mineral extraction, and the American working man’s, his agent of deliverance, if he dares to use it” (Pynchon 87). The English Luddites were against and ruined modern machines, hammers, and other tools in protest symbolizing economic oppression and exploitation of the capitalists. Luddites struggled for the human dignity of labor. Pynchon expresses his socialistic vision thus:

The currency of the owners is money, a direct contrast to the dynamite currency of the anarchists. The novel, as if to emphasize this binary, includes the anarchists in the narrative as actual narrators and centers of consciousness. The novel also features actual textual and physical spaces for anarchism, such as the Anarchist's saloon and the headquarters of the political society humorously acronymed as "T.W.I.T." (219)

Pynchon has created a galaxy of characters who are ambiguous and contradictory; they are losing themselves in the chaotic world bewilderedly. Lew Basnight, a detective, is on a mission to catch the Kieselguhr Kid as Pynchon states: "Later he made it back to the Anarchist's saloon, and there, as he'd half expected, was this customer giving him one of those unfinished business looks [...] 'Buy you a beer?' Depends if you've come to your senses yet" (181). There is another character Basnight known as a drifter as he is never settled and moves from place to place in the quest for order and settlement. He is like Tyrone Slothrop and Oedipa Maas symbolizing the "drifting center of consciousness" McHale writes in *Postmodernist Fiction* that "postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects" (11).

As Graham Benton in his article "Daydreams and Dynamite: Anarchist Strategies of Resistance and Paths for Transformation in *Against the Day*" contends that "Anarchist platforms suggest strategies for change involving the implementation of nonauthoritarian and decentralist alternatives" (193). Benton also contends that the predominant theme of *Against the Day* is the emergence of the forces of anarchism: "The novel treats anarchy and anarchists hundreds of times. We are witness to anarchist bombers, anarchist hunters, and anarchist preachers who frequent anarchist saloons, anarchist coffeehouses, and anarchist spas" (193). Benton argues that the foe of anarchism ruins the moral and the positive strength of the novel:

I read the tension that is generated in *Against the Day* on the level of genre as a textual embodiment of the tension on the level of historical interpretation. That is, the resistance of realism by fantasy is

reproduced as a resistance of the forces of rationalization and totalizing empirical systems. (193)

Pynchon's words come into conflict with the historical period foregrounded in each novel, the plots with the chaotic nature and narrative structures combine into effect. From which, disorganization is associated with anarchy. And the loss of identity and traumatic experience are also the side effects of the state administration, Pynchon presents the character of Yashmeen Halfcourt who hides in Vienna and is living incognito. He expresses his traumatic experiences thus in the novel:

It went on for a month. Those who had taken it for a cosmic sign cringed beneath the sky each nightfall, imagining ever more extravagant disasters. Others, for whom orange did not seem an appropriately apocalyptic shade, sat outdoors on public benches, reading calmly, growing used to the curious pallor. As nights went on and nothing happened and the phenomenon slowly faded to the accustomed deeper violets again, most had difficulty remembering the earlier rise of heart, the sense of overture and possibility and went back once again to seeking only orgasm, hallucination, stupor, sleep to fetch them through the night and prepare them against the day. (805)

The last three words "Against the day" here just echoes the name of the novel *Against the Day*, from which the traumatic harm to the heart of the individuals struggling in the chaotic world is revealed deeply, they are eager to escape from their desperation and torture in the reality, to escape from the life confronting them, to escape from the day through the physical pleasure, hallucination and sleep at night to against the day, or against the political system, to escape from the trauma resulting from the modern world under the control of the state administration to pursue their mental freedom and look for their lost identity.

Kit Traverse takes part in both anarchist politics and terrorism in Europe and realizes himself trapped in a mirage looking uncertain and confused: "Kit went down to the Downy Dworzec and got on a train headed west, though soon he went across the tracks onto another platform and waited for the train going east till after a while he

was getting on and off trains bound for destinations he was less and less sure of” (1080). The two trains with opposite directions he got on and off, he completely lost himself under the depression of the modern society under the rule of the powerful government which is usurped and wielded by the politicians and capitalists for their private profits. He comments on Lake Baikal thus:

The other side of this Baikal, he understood, was accessible only to those of intrepid spirit. To go there and come back would be like living through the end of the world. From this precise spot along the shoreline, it was possible to “see” on the far shore a city, crystalline, redemptive. There was music, mysteriously audible, tonal yet deliberately broken into by dissonances—demanding as if each note insisted on being attended to. (1080)

In the novel *Against the Day*, Pynchon aims at ontology to restore the so-called loss of the “big ideas” to uncertainty and indeterminacy which shares the same notion with Chaos Theory. The plot attempts to make the uncertainty and indeterminacy in the postmodern era a positive and constructive force that opposes the traditional idea. He focuses on “indeterminacy” and “loss,” and attempts to convert to “possibility,” and “deeper understanding.” The conspicuous characteristic of *Against the Day* is its encyclopedic dimensions and multiplicity of layers. Pynchon has created a large number of people who are committed to anarchism in ideology and politics. Webb Traverse stands for the force of anarchism while Scarsdale Vibe represents the force defined by capitalism, they are the socio-economic antithesis historized by Pynchon, Traverse commits an act of anarchism or Luddite but Vibe enjoys power by the capitalism. The political layers of the novel cannot be denied. Interestingly, the plot is set in a special era in which the development of industrialization, the plenty of inventions as well as modernism has brought about tremendous changes that seem to promise a bright future for the human being, and the characters long for a better future. The novel *Against the Day* opens with the tone of optimism; hope and faith and enthusiasm which are set in the prosperous Chicago World Fair in 1893. The hydrogen airship of the Chums and their excitement about the Fair is expressed in these words by Pynchon: “Fair’s great Ferris wheel, alabaster

temples of commerce and industry, sparkling lagoons, and the thousand more such wonders, of both scientific and an artistic nature” (*Against the Day* 3) shows us an optimistic attitude to the development of science and technology. Pynchon describes the passion and excitement of the Chums and “the electrical glow of the Fair” (21) symbolizing the coming of the twentieth century. One of the characters is extremely excited as he puts it “to light our way into the coming century” (59). This enthusiasm mirrors the excitement of Negroponte, Bolter, and Landow as they are ready to embrace the digital revolution. Pynchon refers to the name of Web Traverse and the link between the background of the novel *Against the Day* and the start of the digital age is established. Pynchon gives the images of light; electricity, and gas; of Google and Wikipedia, and the scientific experiments to suggest “luminiferous Aether” (58). Indeed, there is a “Ray-rush” into “the next untamed frontier” (121), and “there are Nikola Tesla’s experiments with electricity” (99). There are numerous images of science, technology, and progress of the digital age and internet revolution: the Chums discussion of “global streaming; of electromagnetic lines of force and movements of populations and capital” strengthens the motifs of development and massive transformation. Pynchon calls the phenomenon in the novel “World System” which is special “for producing huge amounts of electrical power that anyone can tap into for free, anywhere in the world” (33). Then Pynchon invokes the mood of pessimism in the novel as he states:

By now the city outside was saturated in shadow, the women gliding away in loose robes and horsehair veils, the domes and minarets silent and unassailable against unwished-for depths of blue, the markets wind-ruled and deserted. (767)

Soon this scene of light and brightness of hope and optimism changes into pessimism despair and death. The images of fragmentation and dissonance are visible in this part of the novel. The dark side of world history is hinted at by Pynchon. One side is optimism and the prosperity of the Fair, the other side shows also “signs of cultural darkness and savagery” (22). Pynchon refers to the opposition of light and darkness as Thelonious Monk says: “It’s always night, or we wouldn’t need a light



and the opposition between innocence and idealism and corruption” (262) is clearly mentioned. When Chums visit the Fair, the disgrace and the corruption of progressive idealism are mentioned. In Chapter Four, several characters discuss the issues of darkness, fragmentation, and dissonance engulfing people. They talk about “the parade of modern inventions, all spirited march tunes, public going ooh and aah.” The people feel that “someplace lurking just out of sight is always some lawyer or accountant” (33). Web Traverse gives in the novel thus stating that “capitalism may have decided it didn’t need the old magic anymore” (79). Pynchon mentions the Chicago stockyards. A friend of Chums observes that it is here “where the Trail comes to its end at last, along with the American Cowboy who used to live on it and by it” and “where the frontier ends and disconnection begins” (53). The metaphor of fragmentation and disconnection is very significant as it symbolizes this disconnection in Marxian terms and terms of the history of ideas. Pynchon also hints at a confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in this part of the novel. The novel *Against the Day* thus reflects what Terry Eagleton calls the “crackup of a whole civilization” (“*After Theory*” 64). As the plot of the novel progresses the concept of light, which was originally linked to the optimism of the fair, is connected with the power of disconnection, fragmentation, and dissonance. Pynchon follows Linda Hutcheon’s theory of historiography metafiction and uses the events of history to depict the contemporary malaise of the age through the images of darkness, death, and loss in the society under the control of the power institute. For instance, the Tunguska event in 1908 is depicted as a “heaven wide blast of light” (779). The First World War is expected and related to the pass of the Belgian agent who “had seen into the fictitiousness of European power...in the terrible trans-horizonic light of what approached” (542). Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness* gives the images of darkness and primitive death and violence describing the fall of civilization. Kurt cries of “The horror! The horror!” (79) and Marlow’s remark about England “And this also... has been one of the dark places of the earth” (Conrad 5) is in the mood of pessimism. Pynchon describes the death of humanity talking of the chemical weapon in World War I and regards that “it is light here which is really the destructive agent” (953). And everything “somehow...the earlier, the great, light had departed, the certitude becomes broken” (551) in modernism. Pynchon gives the images of

darkness and savagery to highlight the collapse of civilization. Civilization is creative, but the government is not creative, the emergence of government makes civilization decay and collapse.

Pynchon portrays the dark Zone of human civilization giving a warning about the negative sides of progress and capitalism. Chums encounter Luddites and expose his animalism and savagery thus: “You are such simpletons at the fair, gawking at your Wonders of Science, expecting as your entitlement all the Blessings of Progress” (555). Birkerts expressed his fear of the age of Space, Google, and Wikipedia thus: “We embrace the computer revolution, the information highway, with the zeal of children presented with a new toy” (196). It is pertinent to note that the novel *Against the Day* is a real summing up of all the issues raised in his earlier novels. In every novel by Thomas Pynchon, quests are the main theme, for example, Stencil’s hunt for V, Oedipa Maas’s quest for Trystero, Slothrop’s quest for the rocket, and so on. In this novel, the search for the mysterious land of Vheissu is also highlighted. There are references to Prairie’s search for her mother. The quests in *Against the Day* reveal hopes and quests described in his earlier novels and the messages of Pynchon scattered in the plot can be found. The characters relapse into nostalgia and resist to ultimate truth. In the novel *Against the Day*, the main quests are Wren Provenance’s quest for Aztlan; the quest of Chums for Shambhala. There is also a reference to Webb Traverse’s quest for avenging death by his sins. His sins are struggling to find the real meaning of life and their quest for the certainty of life is a conspicuous feature of the novel. Pynchon has given the epic journeys of his characters and they are seen fighting against the forces of darkness and chaos.

### ***Against the Day* as a Map of Major Novels of Thomas Pynchon**

The novel *Against the Day* is like a map guiding us to an analysis of all the major novels by Thomas Pynchon and the way they reflect the notion of entropy and disorder exemplified in the second law of thermodynamics. In *Against the Day*, Pynchon explicitly employs the concept of entropy and the Chaos Theory to create his narrative aesthetic subject to the second law of thermodynamics. Entropy serves as an organizing element and the conceptual framework. An analysis of the specific

workings of entropy and the Chaos Theory in the Works of Pynchon provides a better understanding of the themes and issues. His novel recreates reality from different fictional angles. Pynchon borrows the concept of entropy and chaos as metaphors to depict a disorderly and chaotic universe. Pynchon expresses his bewilderment about reality by challenging the rules, norms, elements of nostalgia pain, and black humor. He employs fantastic to escape the existential realities of the absurd world. Pynchon uses the metaphor of Maxwell's demon to depict the trends toward stagnation and death. Pynchon's *Against the Day* is a postmodern novel developing incongruous patterns reflecting anxiety and the evolution of hallucination and paranoia. Pynchon usually arranges his plots in a desolate land, presenting the metallic atmosphere and shadow world of the night, symbolizing chaos, fantasy, and death. Just like Patricia Waugh argues that "Pynchon's fiction suggests an effort to escape fatality with the vast proliferation of counter-systems and counter-games suggests one way of eluding the apparent predetermination of the structures of the everyday world" (39).

The characters of Pynchon are in their quest to explore the hidden conspiracies suggesting disorder and paranoia. Tony Tanner observes that the novels of Pynchon are set "in that line of dazzling daring" and abandoning "allegorical as well as poetic interpretation" (91). *Against the Day* by Pynchon is reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James' night fantasy, dramatizes diversity and change: "the pull towards entropy signifies the tendency of an organism to move towards stability, where the organic merges with the inorganic and where separate units fuse together" (Jackson 80). The desire and quest of the characters in the plot lead to disorder and chaos which lie under the appearance of unity, Pynchon states in his story *Entropy* as follows:

In American consumerism discovered a similar tendency from the least to the most probable, from differentiation to sameness, from ordered individuality to a kind of chaos. He envisioned a heat-death for his culture in which ideas, like heat energy, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy; and intellectual motion would, accordingly, cease. (89)

The critics expressed their divergent views about the novels of Pynchon. Gore Vidal in his essay *American Plastic: Matter of Fiction* compared Pynchon with John Barth because his fiction is disorganized containing the elements of postmodernism. Vidal also criticizes the inconstancy of the characters of Pynchon (Vidal 98). Pynchon borrowed heavily from Melville's novel *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* both in structure and inner workings. For Melville, The scam full of the society represents what is going wrong in American society and the power of the capital is changing the pattern of the United States, turning everything into commodities. The plot of *Against the Day* is disorganized and consistent in its non-linear chaos. The characters are scared of homogenization, globalization and confront a paralyzed world that is short of novelty and fantasy bringing about cultural exhaustion and death. In his story *Entropy*, Callisto is psychologically obsessed with the coming of an apocalypse in the form of the heat death of the universe. Molly Hite published her book *Ideas of Order in The Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (1983) and explored the role of entropy and chaos theory in his novels. She explores various notions of order and disorder connected to entropy. Hite observes thus:

Pynchon's narratives are about order: about its presence or absence; about order as object of desire, dread, fantasy, or hallucination; about what order means, how it is apprehended, and what it entails, His characters look for the hidden structures of their experience that will reveal how events are connected, how everything adds up, what it all means; and these structures reduplicate, oppose, or stand in some other relation to the overall structure of the narrative. (Hite 4)

Pynchon was influenced by Norbert Wiener's book *Human Use of Human Beings* dealing with cybernetics and information theory, and there are apocalyptic themes mirroring the conflicts of the characters in the novels of Pynchon. Wiener demonstrates a broad philosophical background and draws a vision for the future from this knowledge.

Emily Apter in her essay "On Oneworldness: or Paranoia as a World System" gives her own justification about the novel contending that Pynchon's fiction

“coincides with an American paradigm of one worldedness hatched in the 1960s zenith of Cold War paranoia” (387). The Chums are confused and bewildered and his quest is fruitless and horrifying as he feels the presence of chaos and disorder at the end of the novel. Allen Thither indicates “science is almost always involved in any depiction of madness” (Thither 265). There is always a suspicion that fatal doom could be prevented in Pynchon’s narratives and the fantasy seems an illusion. Fredric Jameson gave a detailed analysis of the culture of postmodernism in his book *Postmodernism* exploring the new literary devices such as intertextuality, pastiche, magic realism, and black humor. The conspicuous feature of the narratives of Pynchon is the use of intertextuality; the plot is loaded with images and metaphors drawn from old folk tales, history, and myths creating confusion in the lives of the characters. Entropy is expressed in the form of confusion in *Against the Day*. Basnight’s boss expresses his views of enlightenment thus:

Enlightenment is a dodgy proposition. It all depends on how much you want to risk. ... It happens, of course. Out of the dust, the clouds of sweat and breath, the drumming of hooves, the animal rises up behind the field, the last you’d expected, tall, shining, inevitable, and passes through them all like a beam of morning sunlight through the spectral residue of a dream. But it’s still a fool’s bet and a mug’s game, and you might not have the will or the patience. (Pynchon 239)

The plot of *Against the Day* is full of hundreds of references and its comprehension is not an easy task. For example, the Chums are tortured by the “suspicion that somewhere...they had missed something essential” (427), and Frank Traverse is depicted, “...maybe what you think you’re looking for isn’t really what you’re looking for. Maybe it’s something else” (307), the novel *Against the Day* reflects the basic reading concerns: fundamental anxieties in academic reading, which also confronting modern man. In the book *How to Read a Page* by I.A. Richards, he describes the fundamental anxieties as follows: “That suspicion of a missing clue is paralyzing” (14).

The panoramic nature of the plot is quite visible as there are innumerable layers and issues confronting humanity today. The varying interests act as a reminder of varying ways to fight with the forces of darkness; fragmentation and dissonance. The people in the quest for mysterious Shambhala restate that: “one of the Chums notes that the Trans-Siberian Railroad is about access to Shambhala” (259). One of the characters in the novel says: “a giant *railway-depot*, with thousands of gates disposed of radially in all dimensions, leading to tracks of departures to all manners of alternate Histories” (682). Pynchon remarks that “Hundreds ... of narratives, all equally valid” (682). The hermeneutic process is complicated and the hundreds of characters in the novel show the multiplicity of the novel, which are the significant characteristics, and the comment that “each will have their personal rocket” (741) is quite significant.

The novel *Against the Day* is a critique of historical follies of the past, present, and future. It is an investigation of power and a tragedy of the human condition conveying the inevitable doom of civilization. Pynchon argues that the power of entropy and the theory of Chaos is supreme in the universe. Following the ideas of Henry Adams, Pynchon states that the decomposition of the universe is inevitable. Pynchon conveys through this novel his compassion for the marginalized and oppressed. He argues that the cruelty and fatality of the word can be understood only through sadistic jokes and mass death, songs about the penis, and dissolution of the main characters, and the novel reflects the psyche of the modern age. *Against the Day* can be regarded as the guide of Pynchon’s entire work because it includes most characteristics of the novels of Thomas Pynchon. As a whole, it is remarkable for its anarchism, multiplicity, fragmentation, and dissonance.

Pynchon gives the image of the railway tracts to describe the multiplicity of layers. The plot can be interpreted in various ways as there are multiple themes representing the various interpretations imposed in the text. The author Pynchon celebrates darkness; pessimism; anarchism; fragmentation and dissonance leading to the fall of civilization. It is well-known that “something in the darkness opposed to daylight certainty” (828). The plot has talked about the fall of the universe. Pynchon observes thus:

This is our own age of exploration ... into that unmapped country waiting beyond the frontiers and seas of Time. We make our journeys out there in the low light of the future and return to the bourgeois day and its mass delusion of safety, to report on what we've seen. (942)

Pynchon emerges as a “Luddite and an iconoclast: he is a Luddite in his warnings against premature predictions, against an overeager and starry-eyed embracing of new gadgets, and the dehumanizing effects of technology” (34). It is pertinent to note that the novel ends on a hopeful note than his earlier novels. He has exposed the corruption prevalent in the world through the metaphor of Fair. In essence, the corruption of the optimism of the Fair serves as a sign of a fall from grace. The end of the novel shows expectation and salvation: “the Chums of Chance fly toward grace” (1085). Pynchon talks of “a world every day more stultified, which expected in codes and governments, ever more willing to settle for suburban narratives and diminished payoffs” (876). Pynchon hopes that the artists can keep “trying to redeem the world one little rectangle of the canvas at a time” (744). The novel *Against the Day* begins with the departure of the Chums of Chance’s airship and so does the end of the novel, which is a signal as a novel of departures. There are numerous scenes of touching departures and goodbyes: The conspicuous are the scenes of departures of Mayva and Kit, Mayva and Lake, Merle and Dally, Cyprian and Yashmeen, Dally and the Zombinis, Yashmeen, Günni, and Kit, Kit and Reef, Kit and Dally, Cyprian and Yashmeen, Frank and Wren, Cyprian, Yashmeen and Reef, and Dally and Kit. Departure is used as a “denial of inevitability, an opening out from the point of embarkation, beginning the moment all lines are single up, an unloosening of fate as the unknown and perhaps the uncreated begins to make its appearance ahead and astern, port and starboard, everywhere an expanding of possibility...” (821).

The pattern of the age of science; space; touchingly and digital information technology is used to structure the plot of *Against the Day*. Pynchon follows Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon in his use of historical events to structure the plot of *Against the Day*. He uses the ideology of Luddism which originated in a series of

uprisings in Britain in 1811. The Luddites were a loosely organized political institution.

The Luddite is a class-warrior, for whom technology is merely a frontline of combat. The author expresses his own distrust of the politico-technological establishment: Luddites today are no longer faced with human factory owners and vulnerable machines. As well-known President and unintentional Luddite D.D. Eisenhower prophesied when he left office, there is now a permanent power establishment of admirals, generals, and corporate CEOs, up against whom us average poor bastards are completely outclassed, although Ike didn't put it quite that way. (Pynchon 123)

To conclude, critics, such as Elaine B. Safer, Leo Bersani, and Don Hausdorff, have addressed the occurrence of anarchism, paranoia, anti-paranoia, and also the presence of disorder in the fiction of Thomas Pynchon. Anarchism, paranoia, and chaos essentially concern the search for meaning in a world that is otherwise unbearable. Government connections leading to a controlling force, and ultimately, to a global conspiracy and “offers the ideally suited hypothesis that the world is organized into a conspiracy, governed by shadowy figures whose powers approach omniscience and omnipotence, and whose manipulations of history may be detected in every chance gesture of their servant” (Sanders 177).

In the chaotic world, under the control of the government and powerful system, Pynchon's characters are absurd and unbearable due to the inner lack of meaning. The novel *Against the Day* depicts the forces of chaos and disorder; the forces of conspiracy, anarchy, and disintegration. In *Against the Day*, not to mention that the upcoming world war is the biggest conspiracy, even the mysterious Tunguska explosion in history has also been stained with conspiracy. The prominent representative of this evil and powerful force is the big plutocracy. Scarsdale Wilbur is one of the few and downright bad guys in Pynchon's works, the most ruthless mine owner, the embodiment of the evil of capitalism. In order to suppress the resistance of the miners, he hired someone to assassinate Webb; in order to make huge profits like



the Morgan Group's use of Edison's invention, he lured scientist Nikola Tesla to fail, so he did not hesitate to fund his enemy's son, a child prodigy. Kit went to Yale, hoping to get a huge profit return.

The characters are confused and bewildered as they are thrown into a waste landscape struggling to survive in a cruel and harsh world. And the characters are put in the category of "class beings" but human beings which depriving of their identities, Webb Traverse, an anarchist standing for liberty and freedom, was killed at the beginning of the novel, the anarchist's death reveals the defeat of anarchism against the government in the reality and the desperation for the individual freedom. The younger's behaviors are deeply influenced by the government's empty promises when they fail to identify the false promise, the Chums are in the skyship full of hopes and excitement at the very beginning, but at the end of the novel, they have to float to the grace, which reviews that they have to leave here disappointedly to go on looking for the grace or Shambhala. And paranoia is also the psychic experiences of the younger "simpletons". The mental harm to the characters results from the powerful and hierarchical system that drag the characters into the abyss of tragedy.

## Conclusion

The present study entitled: *Of Entropy and Chaos Theory: A Study of the Select Novels of Thomas Pynchon* explores the pervasive vogue of entropy and chaos operating in the universe and governing the life of the people in modern society. In this study, the operation process of entropy and chaos and their impact on the humanity are investigated and explored profoundly through the analysis of the six novels by Thomas Pynchon: *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), *Against the Day* (2006), and *Bleeding Edge* (2013).

Thomas Pynchon is a postmodernist novelist, and he rejects the traditional literary devices employed by Ernest Hemmingway, Norman Mailer, Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner. In the novels, he employs the ideas of Chaos Theory and entropy to structure his plots. The study digs out the causes of modern malaise through the analysis of the symptoms of the malaise plaguing contemporary Americans in the novels. Under the influence of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the entropy and chaos operating in the universe are the keynotes of the novels by Thomas Pynchon. The non-linear structure of the novels reflects the fragmented nature of the universe. Owing to his engineering educational background, Pynchon adopts a panoramic writing style by introducing a large number of subject matter, genres, and themes, such as physics, chemistry, history, music, and mathematics into the novels. Plenty of scientific concepts are borrowed in the novels, therefore, Pynchon's novels are loaded with the images of reality and scientific facts to depict the malaise of contemporary society in the novels. Entropy, Chaos Theory, and postmodern techniques as the main pillars of the plots and the main premise have been analyzed to help to have a better understanding of Pynchon's novels in the study.

After examining the novels of Pynchon by employing the method of textual analysis in the study, the main objectives are achieved respectively as follows:

The emergence of the social situation of America after the World War is traced through the analysis of the historical events in the novels, America began to

step in the era of great material prosperity with the development of science and technology, the scientific development has brought the superficial prosperity while it has been undermining the inside core value of the humanity and civilization. Capitalism and commercialism have been playing vital roles in the modern world, which have driven humanity to be in a passion for money and inanimate materials step by step, and the human being's lust for money is dehumanizing people. And the scientific development has stimulated the powers to wage wars, to establish colonies, and to enslave and oppress people, therefore, the governance and subjugation became dominant in America then, which is reflected in Chapter Five, the novel *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon unfolds the history of America through the journey of two protagonists Mason and Dixon, he laments that imaginative and magical ability is fading due to the Enlightenment science, and he bewails the tendency of the human powers and civility of a man is declining sharply with the growth of machine and technology. In the novel, the Age of Reason degenerated into mere machinery, and the faith of the people in magic, in god, and in religion declined sharply. Pynchon describes the horrible scenes of slavery which result from the subjugation and powers related to the huge profits. Moreover, in Chapter Six, Pynchon chooses a brand new angle to depict the root cause behind the 9/11 terrorism attack in the novel *Bleeding Edge*, he doesn't contribute the reason to the religion or different ideology like John Updike but demonstrates it from the perspective of conspiracy between the politicians and the terrorists. And in Chapter Seven, the anarchism as a product of rebellion against the scientific development, governance, and subjugation in the novel *Against the Day*, Pynchon opines that the politicians and the capitalists take control of the power institutes and rake in exorbitant profits against the interests of citizens in the modern world, the politicians and capitalists together make an empty and seemly bright promise about future development to the people, especially the youth who blindly believe in the magic bubble blown by the government, but the bubble is doomed to be broken, the young generation trapped in the modern world has to face the destiny of becoming "simpletons".

The study explores the deterministic role of entropy and chaos through the analysis of the nihilistic image in the novels In Pynchon's magnum opus *Gravity's*

*Rainbow*, Pynchon applies the nuclear attack and wars to predict the decay of human being's civilization expressing the apocalyptic vision, the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* can be described as a nihilistic novel in which the most fatalistic apocalypse is the symbol Rocket 00000, and Pynchon translates the apocalypse in a secular way as wars, mass death, and the holocaust. The protagonist Slothrop's identity disintegrates into the pieces with the multiple roles at the end of the novel, which explicitly demonstrates the multiple meaning equals meaningless. The philosopher Nietzsche opined that desire for death and power trapping Western culture itself was the main cause of Western cultural nihilism. Furthermore, the novel *V* is analyzed in Chapter Two in which Pynchon applies "inanimate" to describe the human relationships, and the people in sick American society are in the lust for the material amenities and show passion for inanimate things, such as metal, rocks, fossils, and shells to fuse with their physical flesh and sew a sapphire on the belly button, Pynchon uses the typical symbolism to strengthen that the ladies *V* are more and more mechanized and dehumanized and constructs the mystery *V* and its different incarnations as the inanimate and decadent images. The inanimate state in the novel is conformity to the ultimate state of entropy — heat-death in the universe, the inanimate process of the characters also hints at the operational process of entropy.

To reveal the operational process of entropy and Chaos Theory in the novels, the study analyzes the doomed tragic fate of the characters, their suffering from paranoia and deflation of self, the process of downward tendency of the civilization, and the devaluation of humanity's faith, the lack of certainty in the world and civilization, deterministic order, spontaneity in which contradictory possibilities co-exist in each novels. in Chapter Two, it is analyzed that the novel *V*. hinges on the theme that humanity is on the verge to destruction by a list of typical image of dehumanization of ladies *V*, they become more and more depraved from the original innocence at the very beginning, each *V*'s appearance serves as an incarnation of degradation in terms of their behaviors, their different identities, finally, they become completely inanimate in soul and their flesh bodies are gradually replaced with the metal and rocks, their process of degradation and inanimateness corroborate the operational process of entropy. In Chapter Three, the issues of the loss of self and

fracture of identity in the technological world are revolved around in the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas struggles with the multiplicity of life just like the other characters with multiple roles in the novel revealing the identity is inherently fragmented. Pynchon opines that human beings have to endure uncertainties and ambiguities of life under the influence of entropy and chaos operating in the universe. Pynchon reinforces the idea of identity being a sort of fantasy, and he states that giving up fantasy means giving up identity. At the end of the quest for the Trystero, what Oedipa Maas has experienced, what she has seen, and what she has heard on the trip makes her fail to distinguish what is reality and what is fantasy, but this confused mental state releases her from the anxiety and tension of searching, she even doesn't hope to find the answer, and she only sits on the auction without expectation and quest, by which Pynchon intends to tell the readers that the meaningless is the meaning of the world, the order is within the disorder, which is the nature of entropy and chaos in the universe. And in Chapter Six, the novel *Bleeding Edge* is structured through the lust for money of the people in the modern world, and society is saturated with chaotic passion and crazy for money, the characters show paranoid and weird behaviors, all of this degeneration in the moral value and people's slavery for money have resulted from the Capitalisms, and the degradation is in conformity to the nature of entropy and Chaos theory, the process of degradation is the operational process of entropy and Chaos theory.

Through the analysis of the six novels of Pynchon, a well-ground conclusion can be made about his pessimistic attitudes towards the universe, history, science, and the humanity in the modern world due to the force of entropy and chaos operating in the universe as follows:

The attitude towards the universe, the nihilistic nature of the universe lays the tone of Thomas Pynchon's literary works and is also a vital key for understanding his novels. He believes that due to the impact of entropy, the universe will eventually be in a heat-death state, and human civilization will eventually decline and also reach its ultimate state of heat-death. Based on the understanding of Chaos in Quantum Theory, Thomas Pynchon borrows some experiments on probability repeatedly in the novel, such as Maxwell Demon, Poisson theory, etc., to illustrate the uncertain nature

of the universe and the civilization, which traps the protagonists in the confusion and bewilderment. To sum up, Thomas Pynchon's attitude towards the universe is pessimistic and nihilistic.

The attitude towards history, Pynchon deems all the people can consider and respond to history cognitively and emotionally, even though there are plenty of historical events in his novel, the historical events are beyond the record of what happened exactly in the past, and it animates what might have happened, by which we can catch Pynchon's emotion for nostalgia and utopia. Pynchon believes that history is a history of confrontation of forces, conflicts and conflicts, and modern society is always composed of opposing forces. Therefore, his novels always revolve around the conflicts of two polarities: such as counterculture and hegemony, utopia and dictatorship, nature and technology, entropy and order, eros and death impulse, the conqueror and the oppressed, etc. Through the novels, Pynchon contemns and scorns official version of history and gives the reader alert of the truth of the history. Pynchon rebukes the follies that result from capitalism and imperialism.

The attitude towards science, Pynchon explores the impact of Chaos prevailing in the universe on the life of people. He applies symbolism to warn human beings of the possibility of destroying human civilization. The rocket V-2 and dynamite symbolize both the products of the development of technology and a nightmare or a curse for human beings, which reveals Pynchon's pessimistic attitude to the industrial society and civilization of human based on entropy in the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The development of science and technology including the emergence of the computer revolution has brought tremendous change in the life and culture of people, however, in Pynchon's eyes, he rebukes that the development of science and technology deprives humanity in the commercial society of their miraculous ability and leads to the devaluation of the powers and civility of the man. In another way, the development of science and technology accelerates the increase of entropy in the universe and our civilization.

The attitude towards humanity in the modern world, the main protagonists in the novels, such as Oedipa Maas, Slothrop, Stencil, Mason and Dixon, and so on, all

just step on the quest journey for the meaning and connection to the world, but due to the deterministic and chaotic nature of the universe and the meaningless of the reality, their quest journey is nothing but merely a trip leading to them nowhere and trapping them in the chaotic mental state which is called paranoia. The other characters in the novel experience weird stories and are obsessed with the illogic behaviors, therefore, Pynchon intends to transfer the readers that message that the people in the modern world suffer from loss of identity and fail to find the goal and meaning of life, as a result, they turn to the search for physical pleasure through sex and alcohol. Paranoia is regarded as a reasonable way for them to survive and escape from the disorderly world.

The study examines that Thomas Pynchon follows Fredric Jameson and adopts a series of postmodernist literary devices, such as intertextuality, magic realism, black humor, disintegration, broken communication, metafiction, and formlessness of the plots to reveal the chaotic and deterministic nature of the universe and society, to escape from the reality in a mess and to “against the day”.

Pynchon’s novels have always been known for their weird ideas, obscure language, and complex themes. And Pynchon’s novels involve themes, such as entropy, chaos, paranoia, quest, the Elects/the Preterites, conspiracy/confrontation to varying degrees, comic irony, fragment collage, intertextual parody, and subversion, the iconic features of postmodern novels, such as deconstruction, are also the device he prefers to.

The three main characteristics always go through his novels: Paranoia, the absurd quest, and antagonism. The characters’ quest for meaning leads to their paranoia, disintegration, and dissolution of self. Essentially, the paranoia and absurd quest in the disorderly reality concerns the search for meaning in the meaningless world. Thomas Pynchon puts his characters in a paranoid situation that can be regarded as an escape from reality full of conspiracy and an escape from the world controlled by some powerful people manipulating history.

The absurd quest, as a symbol of the human being’s existential anxiety, involves the futile desire for unity and order, which may become the master key to

understand Pynchon's novels. The absurd quest revolves around yearning and frustration, but the goal of the quest is doomed to degrade into abstraction under the impact of entropy and chaos operating in the universe. The quest journey for meaning and order in the chaotic and meaningless world is a tragic and ridiculous quest, however, at the end of the quest, the protagonists are unwilling to end the quest, instead, they are frightened to end the quest, because it is more terrifying for them to find what they are searching on the quest, they would like to quest on knowing it is doomed to be in vain.

Antagonism is another main characteristic of the novels of Thomas Pynchon. He expresses the antagonism by the means of introducing two different protagonists with opposite purposes in the novels, which stands for the opposing forces and becomes the two polarities of conflicts, such as, Profane and Stencil in *V.*, and Webb Traverse who stands for anarchist for liberty and Scarsdale stands for the force from the Capitalist for profits, the conqueror and the oppressed, the Elect and the Preterite. Through confronting forces in the novels, Pynchon expresses his pessimistic attitude towards the abhorrent history full of conflicts and follies.

### **Relevance of the Study**

In this study, the main focus has been put on portraying the destructive impact of Entropy and Chaos prevailing in the universe. Since Pynchon is a scientist with a mathematical education background, when he investigates the role of the law of thermodynamics in the life of people, he firmly believes that there is no certainty or security in reality based on the characteristics and nature of entropy and Chaos theory. The civilization is running downhill and at any time the bubble of human civilization can burst out. Pynchon gives the message of nihilism and pessimism to society through his characters. In the world of Pynchon, families are disintegrating; people are under the stress and all adventures are meaningless and life is hopeless. His novels are postmodern conspicuous with the themes of disintegration and dissonance. McHale observes that the greatest gift to the society of Pynchon is the concept of "decentered subjectivity" as his novels feature neglectful parents and families are seen disintegrating. The characters are haunted by feelings of angst, loss, and death.



In Thomas Pynchon's novels, he concerns more about alienation, death, the risk of science, and the limits of knowledge. In the modern world, life is insecure as the families are disintegrating; the future is uncertain and challenges in life are innumerable. Man needs a strong moral strength to confront existential reality. Only those who are strong in mind and spirit can be able to survive, and man is supposed to reduce their passion for money and inanimate things. Computer, electrical gadgets, and digital activities are not a source of happiness but the main cause of alienation and absurdity in the modern world. Oedipa continues her quest for knowledge and Stencil exhausts his energy in his quest for V. However, all the quests are fruitless and meaningless. Man should learn to survive in the harsh universe where forces of Entropy and Chaos are operating. Pynchon gives his painful vision of life and the universe. In Oedipa's journey of California; the readers become conscious of the disintegrating of culture. Pynchon argues that all knowledge is deficient; all struggles are futile and all hopes of man are destroyed in despair, by which Pynchon gives people in modern world enlightenment that we are supposed to avoid philosophical conceit and respect the uncertainty in the universe to keep the ability for reverence. Life is significant and man must keep active and avoid being inert to survive in the chaotic world full of uncertainty, to slow down the speed of entropy, some active measures related to negentropy should be introduced into the modern world.

Some enlightenment for the pandemic of Covid-19 wreaking havoc around the world can be got from Pynchon's novels, and it seems that entropy and Chaos are showing their insidious power more sharply and violently in the global pandemic exerting a severe threat to human being's safety, normal life, and global economy. The characteristics of Chaos are obvious in the pandemic: everything is in uncertainty and in chaos. The politicians' conspiracy is witnessed around the world and their political decision mostly is power-oriented and profit-oriented as a result of balancing between the loss of economy and the safety of the people during the pandemic. Although plenty of countries immediately block their borders, cut off flights with other countries, and limit the flow of people, the invisible and terrifying virus still is spreading like a mysterious force to every corner of the world and causing the infection and death of a large number of people. The pandemic has accelerated the

rapid increase of entropy operating in the universe and reality in a special way. The increase in the value of entropy is irreversible, but humans can slow down the increase of Entropy in the pandemic by the goodness of human nature, to love, to help each other, and to care about each other, such as to supply the necessary and urgent medical materials to the areas in need and to have a cooperation in terms of the vaccine and cure, which is timely enlightenment from Thomas Pynchon's novels to the people nowadays.

### **Significance of Study**

The study about Pynchon's novels is more comprehensive and different from others in terms of exploration of the operation of entropy and chaos dominating the plots of Thomas Pynchon, exploration of the different symptoms resulting from the entropy and chaos theory in each novel expounds the understanding of entropy and chaos in postmodernism writings and extends the boundaries of postmodernism by emphasizing how entropy and chaos influence the spirit, faith, and fate of human beings struggling in the modern world. And the study adds new dimensions to the research domain and offers a better and fresh understanding of the combination of scientific concepts and literary works and social sphere, which widens the horizon in the literary criticism and offers a new study angle for the related scholars.

The study inspires the readers to get the awareness of the postmodern issues such as anxiety, chaos, and entropy prevailing in the universe, though the devaluation of morality and the people's faith in religion are saturated in the chaotic universe resulting from the force of entropy and chaos, which is irrevocable, Pynchon points out the direction and the solution to slow down the speed of increase of entropy in the chaotic world. The answer lies in the introduction of negentropy to the chaotic world: more love, more care, more respect, and more trust between people, the system should give individuals more opportunities to own their free will which has been deprived by the power system, and the harm to the psyche exerted by industrial development is supposed to be eliminated. People are supposed to regain the miraculous and magic ability and to keep the reverence for nature. The development of civilization can be more sustainable only when it is people-oriented but not profit-oriented or power-

oriented. There is a saying on the internet that can be quoted here as enlightenment: “People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason why the world is in chaos is that things are being loved and people are being used” (qtd. Green).

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### List of Publications

Sno.	Title of paper with author names	Name of journal / conference	Published date	Issn no/ vol no, issue no	Indexing in Scopus/ Web of Science/ UGC-CARE list
1.	Entropy and the Fantastic: Chaos and Disorder in <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> of Thomas Pynchon (Yuna Li)	International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering	April 2019	ISSN: 2277-3878, Volume-7, Issue-6S5	Scopus
2.	The Ghost of Entropy: An Analysis of Epical Journey in Pynchon's <i>Mason &amp; Dixon</i> (Yuna Li)	Journal of Critical Review	June 2020	ISSN:2394-5125, Vol 7, Issue 16	Scopus
3.	Entropy and Apocalypse: The Trapped Protagonists in Pynchon's <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> (Yuna Li)	The Achievers Journal	October-December 2019	ISSN (online):2395-0897/ISSN (print):2454-2296. Volume 5, Issue 4	UGC
4.	Women Symbolized and as Conspirators (Yuna Li)	Foreign Language Teaching and Culture Studies Symposium	Presented June 2019		
5.	Entropy and Chaos in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon: A Comparative Study (Yuna Li)	Comparative Literature and Cross-cultural Research Symposium	Presented December 2019		