



LEHIGH
UNIVERSITY

Library &
Technology
Services

The Preserve: Lehigh Library Digital Collections

Thomas Pynchon's "v.": A Curious Landscape.

Citation

TOIA, ELAINE M. *Thomas Pynchon's "v.": A Curious Landscape*. 1986, <https://preserve.lehigh.edu/lehigh-scholarship/graduate-publications-theses-dissertations/theses-dissertations/thomas-pynchons>.

Find more at <https://preserve.lehigh.edu/>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Lehigh Preserve. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of Lehigh Preserve. For more information, please contact preserve@lehigh.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a manuscript sent to us for publication and microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted. Pages in any manuscript may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. Manuscripts may not always be complete. When it is not possible to obtain missing pages, a note appears to indicate this.
2. When copyrighted materials are removed from the manuscript, a note appears to indicate this.
3. Oversize materials (maps, drawings, and charts) are photographed by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each oversize page is also filmed as one exposure and is available, for an additional charge, as a standard 35mm slide or in black and white paper format.*
4. Most photographs reproduce acceptably on positive microfilm or microfiche but lack clarity on xerographic copies made from the microfilm. For an additional charge, all photographs are available in black and white standard 35mm slide format.*

***For more information about black and white slides or enlarged paper reproductions, please contact the Dissertations Customer Services Department.**

U·M·I Dissertation
Information Service

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

8616177

Toia, Elaine M.

THOMAS PYNCHON'S "V.": A CURIOUS LANDSCAPE

Lehigh University

Ph.D. 1986

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1986

by

Toia, Elaine M.

All Rights Reserved

THOMAS PYNCHON'S V.: A CURIOUS LANDSCAPE

by

Elaine M. Toia

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Lehigh University

1986

copyright

©1986

ELAINE M. TOIA

All Rights Reserved

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a
dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 14, 1986
(Date)

James R. Frakes
Professor in charge

Accepted May 14, 1986
(Date)

Special committee directing
the doctoral work of
Elaine M. Toia

James R. Frakes
Chairman

Elizabeth J. Jipe

Raymond J. Mundt

J. P. King

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Professor Frakes for his valuable guidance, time, and patience. I am also grateful to Professor Fifer and Professor Mundhenk for their helpful suggestions for revision. Finally, I would like to thank Dean King for his advice and very special encouragement.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	
Tourism: A Universal Principle of Uncertainty . .	4
Chapter One	
Stencilized Reality	17
Chapter Two	
A Scholarly Quest/A Remarkably Scattered Concept . .	69
Chapter Three	
Spinning a Yarn	99
Conclusion	
Metaphor: A Device, An Artifice	153
Works Cited	158
Vita	161

Abstract

Thomas Pynchon's V. is a metafictional text because it violates its bounds and extends its principal thematic concern, the act of human perception, to the world of the reader. Limited powers of perception dictate the characters' interpretation of external stimuli; similarly, the reader's limited vision and conventional notions about literature shape his responses to Pynchon's art. Both characters and reader, then, learn only what their mental apparatus permits them to learn. Consequently, their peculiar views of the world of V. are fictional.

In response to a world that defies understanding, the characters of V. construct psychological formulas for channeling and processing information from their environment. These formulas, or metaphors, are actually screening devices that admit only the ideas that support their established beliefs and block out any evidence that challenges their preconceptions and misconceptions. As a result, the characters' process of selection distorts

reality. Their fiction-making, or tourism on an individual scale, reflects their subjective worlds instead of the world of facts. The tenuous connection between what the characters believe is true and objective fact makes their relationship to their environment both problematic and thematically central to V.

Because Pynchon's characters fashion their knowledge according to pre-set formulas, they can achieve only a landscape or tourist's view of reality. V.'s reader also is in the position of tourist; even though he enjoys an observer's stance, his information about plot and characters is limited. The narrative's shifts in point of view and ambiguous, allusive language prevent him from solving V.'s mystery. Consequently, he, too, must create a model, or metaphor, to help him understand the novel's complex world. His metaphor, however, takes the form of his novelistic expectations: his general expectations of modernist fiction and his specific expectations of V.

These expectations are never satisfied; instead, they are repeatedly and simultaneously encouraged and frustrated by the text. Ultimately, the reader discovers that V. is not a modernist novel at all but is, instead, a metafictional text because it neither provides a consistent point of view nor represents a coherent fictional world. The reader finds that the narrator actually breaks the novel's frame and obscures the line

dividing fiction and fact.

Sensitive to V.'s frame-breaking, the reader abandons his customary novel-reading habits and modifies his role as objective critic. He suddenly discovers that he is a participant in the novel, trying, like the characters, to piece together an understanding of the plot. Responsible, then, for reconstructing V., he becomes co-creator with the author. Because his ideas are predicated partly on his past novel-reading experience, his conclusions sometimes lack a basis in the text. Consequently, the reader is forced to admit that his own act of perception is the process of making fiction.

Introduction

Tourism: A Universal Principle of Uncertainty

I

Thomas Pynchon's fiction explores the human act of perception inside and, paradoxically, outside the bounds of the literary text. Both characters and reader, because they are subject to and somewhat limited by their private visions, perceive, interpret, and assimilate experience from the human position between the certainty of facts and complete subjectivity, or unconsciousness. Charles Sanders Peirce labels this perspective "fallibilism" (Peirce 58), a term that gives rise to Robert Scholes's definition of the literary mode of fabulation and to his definition of the human state of consciousness (Scholes 8). Scholes asserts that subjectivity, the psychological world, is, necessarily, fictitious because it has no factual status outside the self (7).

"Reality is absolute for Peirce, but human attempts to signify the truth are relative" (Scholes 7). Certainly, the attempts of V.'s characters to identify the truth are relative because the characters' powers of

perception are limited. At best, their efforts to comprehend their environments may yield no more than an impression of objective reality called "belief," which is, surprisingly, "the enemy of truth because it stifles inquiry" (Scholes 7). And, because belief bears only a very tenuous connection to what is beyond the self, the characters' relationships to the external world become problematic and, in Pynchon's work, the thematic focus.

Peter Cooper notes that the new physics offers theories of relativity that point to the inadequacy of perception and the impossibility of knowing where human consciousness ends and external reality begins. Cooper quotes Werner Heisenberg ("Nearer the Truth: The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics," Graduate Journal 2):

"The familiar classification of the world into subject and object, inner and outer world, body and soul, somehow no longer quite applies, and indeed leads to difficulties. . . . The object of research is no longer nature in itself but rather nature exposed to man's questioning, and to this extent man here also meets himself."
(qt. in Cooper 135)

Perception, then, partially forms object; consequently, the act of perception accounts for the interconnectedness of the world of the observer and the world of the observed. In his attempt to understand, man always "meets himself," his own obsessions and illusions. As a result, he cannot validate his perceptions from a perspective

outside the arena of human vision. Uncertainty is all that is certain because "systems of knowledge and expression will always be unable to get beyond themselves and define their own grounds, and as such they are confining as well as limited" (Cooper 137).

Twentieth century technology has created a world no longer accessible by means of the human senses. Man in the post-Einstein universe knows that reality exceeds what he can sense. Heisenberg's 1927 "Principle of Uncertainty," for instance, states that man cannot determine both the probable location and the velocity of a single electron at once. If he tries to determine velocity, position becomes less determinable (Cooper 123). Max Planck discovered that light, although it exhibits wave-like tendencies, does not flow in a stream. Instead, electromagnetic radiation occurs in bursts of discontinuous "quanta" (Cooper 123). Although light is both wave in the macro world and bursts of "quanta" in the micro world, Cooper says that the scientist, who probes beneath the observable, uniform surface of the macro world, becomes aware of the disorderliness of the micro world (124).

The visible surface of the world veils discontinuous "quanta" of various sorts. Cooper notes that this is true of the world of Pynchon's fiction and that the reader of Pynchon's fiction must be struck by the tension between

mutually exclusive levels of reality:

A scientist probing the micro world of isolated subatomic events sees not order and stability but rather displacement and indeterminacy, disintegration and duality, violence and discontinuity. So does the reader of a Pynchon novel. Yet a scientist viewing the macro world of fields and systems sees interrelation and reciprocity, integration and uniformity, order and continuity. So does the reader of a Pynchon novel. (Cooper 124)

Pynchon's characters also are sensitive to and disturbed by this paradox. In an attempt to cope with the insecurities that arise from perceiving contradictory versions of reality, they form "mental constructs," or metaphors, which help them to organize their perceptions (Cooper 150). Cooper defends the use of metaphor as a controlling design for the flow of information and as the means by which education can take place.

Metaphor is analogous to a scientific theory or model that allows the researcher to predict the design of events even though he cannot precisely define those events. Heisenberg, in Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations (trans. Arnold J. Pomerans, 1922), quotes Einstein: "'It is the theory which decides what we can observe. . . . Only theory . . . enables us to deduce the underlying phenomena from our sense impressions'" (Cooper 165). Clearly, then, evolving a theory is, to a certain extent, prerequisite to understanding:

Of course metaphor does not define what a thing or situation "really" is but rather states--and

misstates--that reality in other terms. Metaphor can, however, provide an experiential truth by defining how something is perceived, or an operational truth by allowing one to act in some accord with a pattern of events, even if one cannot know the details of that pattern or the substantive nature of its elements. Metaphor thus offers much of what a contemporary scientist hopes for in a theory. (Cooper 154)

Metaphor, however, though it sensitizes the individual to certain information, also checks and distorts the individual's responsiveness to other stimuli. Unfortunately, metaphor can become a coordinate system or grid that permits only selected information to adhere to the perceiver's mental blueprint. In Pynchon's work, this ready-made formula becomes the official, national view held by one country of another and the basis for tourism. William Plater distinguishes between land, a country's native, objective reality, and landscape, the Baedeker version of the country--the necessarily falsified version generated and sanctioned by non-natives.

These tourists compose "a classless society" and "know only the world that is organized, systematized, assimilated, and predicted by the unspoken conspiracy of consensus" (Plater 69). The "conspiracy of consensus," the landscape version of the land arbitrarily selected by the Baedeker guidebook, insulates tourists from any real contact with the land so that they are confronted by illusion in a way they are not in their native land (Plater 70). Joseph Slade notes that the tourists'

protective Baedeker illusion is what has allowed Westerners to colonize, to establish control over the non-white races. Colonists believe that their formula, homogeneity, is a suitable replacement for diversity and, consequently, they seek to replace the real life of victimized natives with the anti-life of colonialism. The colonists' prescription for living, because it lacks variety, leads to entropic decay (Slade 69).

In V., an individual character's fiction-making, or subjective version of reality, is a form of tourism. Plater says that for Pynchon "the tour is more than a literary artifact; it defines man's spatial and human relationship with his environment and serves as evidence of a person's continuing existence" (70). The Baedeker landscape that prevents traveling tourists from acknowledging the humanity of the natives of countries they visit is analogous to the illusions tourists-at-home construct about other people and about themselves. Their protective screens allow them to avoid contact with others, as well as self-knowledge. By treating others and themselves as objects, they engage in, according to Tony Tanner, the "systematic and assiduously cultivated dehumanization of the human by the human" (City of Words 159). Tanner, although he does not label this psychological maneuver tourism, concludes that people abroad and at home seek to protect themselves from the

pain in their present lives and from the knowledge of death by constructing shields of fantasy. But, ironically, tourism, because it denies life and negates individual worth, is, in reality, the infiltration of death into life:

What Pynchon manages to suggest is that the fantasies we build to help us to live represent, in fact, an infiltration of that death we think we are so eager to postpone. They represent an avoidance of reality, by substituting for it a fetishistic construction. (Tanner, City of Words 171)

II

The reader of V., trying to make sense of the characters' dilemmas from a vantage point outside the text, certainly is aware of the characters' limited powers of perception. The reader is critical of the characters as they try to interpret their experience and may even be sympathetic to them because he may share their concerns. But the reader probably is not aware that he may actually be reading V. from a tourist's perspective. He may not be aware that his position as a reader of fiction, in several respects, is analogous to the position of Pynchon's characters. Like V.'s characters, for example, he is governed by a limited perspective. Like the characters, he occupies a psychological position between complete knowledge of objective reality and total immersion in subjectivity. Reading, then, like living, is a touristic

act because it is based on the activity of perceiving.

V.'s characters are tourists partly because they learn and act according to their private visions. The reader, however, is not left completely to his own devices to form his human position of "fallibilism" because, obviously, the author's narrative controls the reader's entry to the novel. Although the reader is, like the characters, surprised by turns of plot, he is, at the same time, detached from the world of the novel as he observes and analyzes the turns of plot with the aid of the implied author. The narrative's points of view, style, language, and framing techniques determine, to some extent, the reader's understanding of and response to the fiction.

Besides being manipulated by Pynchon, the prime mover of the elements of V., the reader also is at the mercy of every novel he has ever read. If he is an experienced novel-reader, his literary education has taught him to read according to certain formulas, which take the shape of traditional novelistic expectations. What he knows about literary conventions, allusions, and fiction-writing techniques helps him to construct his metaphor or model for processing and interpreting what he reads. Sometimes the reader is so confident of his literary expertise that he even tries to anticipate the author's next move and to beat him to his own creation.

So, because of and in spite of his expertise based

only on past experience and observer's stance, the reader is subject not only to his limited perspective but also to the narrator's manipulation. The reader must be satisfied with the limited information the narrator imparts. This is the plight of all readers of fiction, but the reader of metafiction takes on an additional burden. The modernist writer, though he may deny the reader an omniscient perspective, at least supplies a consistent viewpoint so that the reader can form a coherent although limited understanding of the novel. The metafictionist writer, however, refuses the reader a coherent vision of the work. He obliterates divisions in perspective within the book and even blurs the distinction between the fictional universe and the reader's world. Pynchon, for example, frustrates the reader in his attempt to contain V. within the bounds of fiction. The Pynchon reader finds himself trying to piece together a reading of the work, but this necessitates participating in the creation of the novel's world. The reader, then, becomes the novelist's co-creator because the novel's theme, the act of perception or fiction-making, violates the boundaries of the text in order to include him. Content and form are as indistinguishable as the fictional and real worlds. The act of creating fiction becomes the thematic and structural principle of Pynchon's art.

Linda Hutcheon says that the metafictionist writer

places the reader in the paradoxical position of participant-observer in order to coax him into critically examining his own fiction-creating impulses (19). His "making sense" of the novel is analogous to the paradigmatic human act of "making sense" of one's daily life, which is what the characters in a novel do (Hutcheon 30). All fiction (including metafiction) prompts this process of assimilation or synthesis. Only metafiction, however, exposes this synthesis as a lie by undermining the very structures that support it:

All novels . . . force the reader to work in the sense that he must imaginatively create a fictional universe out of the accumulation of fictive referents. If this is so, then one of the things modern narcissistic fiction has achieved is to have helped, through its thematization of this process, in the unmasking of what might be called the referential "illusion" of novelistic realism. (Hutcheon 102)

This "unmasking" of illusion is accomplished by the metafictionist, who persistently disturbs the reader's reading habits, reminds the reader of the text's fictionality, and calls attention to the reader's role in creating the fiction (Hutcheon 139).

Patricia Waugh agrees with Hutcheon that one of the aims of metafiction is the deconstruction of the world the fiction simultaneously builds. Waugh, however, extends the scope of this purpose to include the reader's arena--the world outside the text:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional

writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact [sic] in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh 2)

One way in which metafiction accomplishes "the problematization . . . of the concept of 'reality'" is through frame-breaking (Waugh 40). Built on the "sustained opposition" between the construction of the illusion and the laying bare of the illusion, metafiction creates fiction while making a statement about its creation. It frames fiction and simultaneously destroys the frame in an attempt to distance the reader. In more traditional literature, divisions between life and art, reader and novel, and reality and illusion are clear. Metafiction, however, shows that these dividers or frames are placed arbitrarily and underscores this arbitrariness by illustrating man's inability to separate fact and fiction.

Metafictionists can break the frame separating the reader's world and the fiction's world; also, they can transform the reader into a participant in the fiction's world by manipulating point of view. Though modernist writers subject readers to shifting points of view, they at least allow them time to adjust to changing

perspectives. Metafictionist writers, on the other hand, often set the "mutually contradictory 'worlds'" of the reader and the fiction against each other so that the prevailing viewpoint is often either impossible to determine or illogical (Waugh 101). Metafiction also breaks frames within the literary text. Fictional dreams and visions are often indistinct from the rest of the novel. When frames (similar to Chinese box structures) are violated, form and content become indistinguishable: "The alternation of frame and frame-break (or the construction of an illusion through the imperceptibility of the frame and the shattering of illusion through the constant exposure of the frame) provides the essential deconstructive method of metafiction" (Waugh 31).

The reader is subject to what Waugh terms the "technique and counter-technique" of metafiction (130). The reader is also subject to the text's setting up of expectations and subsequent undercutting of those expectations. The reader is a tourist and, like the characters, compelled to construct fictions because he is permitted only a superficial view of reality. The difference between the reader's experience and the characters' experience, though, is that the reader is reading the metafictional text and is aware of his position as fiction-maker while the characters are not aware that they are the creators of their worlds. The

reader is sensitive to the function of metaphor, the mental grid he uses to process information. Like Fausto Maijstral, the reader is a very special kind of tourist who "is always acutely conscious that metaphor has no value apart from its function; that it is a device, an artifice" (V. 326).

Chapter One

Stencilized Reality

In V., the concept of tourism is analogous to the act of human perception, or, more specifically, to the limitation of human perspective. Pynchon's characters compensate for their flawed, limited vision by constructing metaphors, psychological mechanisms that help them understand their complex and confusing environments. Responding to a basic human need to make sense of their experience (Hite 5), they use these mental formulas to pattern and interpret new information, which, without design, would remain arbitrary and meaningless. Although these metaphors do not conclusively define the world, they at least represent "the Situation" (Cooper 154).

Naturally, the characters' designs offer a distorted view of the external world because they presume to enclose and shape reality, which, by definition, is limitless and formless. Also, the designs are unreliable because they are derived from preconceived notions and past experience that may or may not be appropriate to the present. Also,

the designs are self-serving because they allow the characters to think and act according to comfortable and comforting notions. For example, Whole Sick Crew responses to external stimuli justify the members' beliefs. Even Benny Profane's non-pattern--his indiscriminate, generalized perspective--is a design that licenses him to obliterate his friends' private worlds and that frees him from the responsibility of love.

V.'s most blatant tourist, however, is Herbert Stencil. His metaphor, the V.-structure, is at least partially fictional because he attributes coincidence to cause and effect. His design is also self-serving because he is obsessed with making his experience support his "scholarly quest" (V. 61). Herbert's fiction-making, like the fiction-making of the Whole Sick Crew, is also life-denying and contributes to the decadence of the world of V. Because he justifies his life and even tries to explain the movement of Western civilization in terms of a concept, Stencil robs life of its vitality. As a result, his V.-metaphor, the antithesis of life, truly becomes "an adventure of the mind" (V. 61) or, in Tanner's terms, "the dehumanization of the human by the human" (City of Words 159).

The tourists of the Crew, Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and even the lady V. contribute to the world's inanimateness partly because they are governed by

obsession, illusion, and narcissism. The generalized street they travel is the dream landscape or coordinate system of their own psychological projections. The narrator of "V. in love" describes the terrain traveled by V. as a world created by Karl Baedeker of Leipzig: "Its landscape is one of inanimate monuments and buildings; near-inanimate barmen, taxi-drivers, bellhops, guides. . . . More than this it is two-dimensional, as is the Street, as are the pages and maps of those little red handbooks" (V. 408-9). Because they are tourists at home and abroad, the characters of V. are "'lovers of skins'" (V. 184). Protected from contact with the barmen, taxi-drivers, and bellhops, "the tourist may wander anywhere in this coordinate system without fear" (V. 409). The characters' tourism, though, is more than just a shield; it is also the psychological component of the world's decline toward entropy.

If human reality is no more than a mirror image of one's narcissistic imaginings, then Tanner is correct in saying that V.'s characters are unable "to love anyone outside their own fantasy projections" (City of Words 164). If tourists refuse to regard their environment as a source for new ideas and cannot establish relationships which are life-giving rather than life-denying, then they are, according to Eigenvalue, "'bound to run out of arrangements someday'" (V. 298). According to Melvyn New,

they must, then, "share in Pynchon's overarching construct of an entropic progress from animateness to inanimateness, from life to annihilation" (401).

The Whole Sick Crew helps to build the "overarching construct" of decadence in V. Individually and collectively, Crew members contribute to the world's physical and psychological decay. Prepared to jump from Rachel's window, Rooney Winsome announces to the world, to no one in particular, and to the reader that "'there is a word for all our crew and it is sick. Some of us cannot keep our flies zipped, others remain faithful to one mate till menopause or the Grand Climacteric steps in. But randy or monogamous, on one side of the night or the other, on or off the Street, there is no one of us you can point to and call well'" (V, 360). Winsome proceeds to list the Crew members and their obsessions and to offer reasons why they are non-productive members of society. For instance, even Slab, a talented painter, does not realize his potential. Although Slab "'has technical skill. . . . he is committed to Cheese Danishes'" (V, 360). The Crew's decadence becomes a celebration of the inanimate when the members raise \$300 to pay for Esther's abortion. A recent arrival to the Crew even suggests they save their money and throw Esther down the stairwell in order to induce a miscarriage. Of course the Crew does not approve of this plan but still supports Esther in her

decision to abort her child and, as Slab tells her, applauds her as a "'yo-yo champion'" (V. 353).

Crew members indulge in one party, which is repeatedly interrupted and resumed. They spout the same generalizations and the same stock phrases in response to all situations:

The Crew had developed a kind of shorthand whereby they could set forth any visions that might come their way. Conversations at the Spoon had become little more than proper nouns, literary allusions, critical or philosophical terms linked in certain ways. Depending on how you arranged the building blocks at your disposal, you were smart or stupid. Depending on how others reacted they were In or Out. The number of blocks, however, was finite. (V. 297-98)

Eigenvalue knows that "'mathematically . . . if nobody else original comes along, they're bound to run out of arrangements someday. What then?'" (V. 298). The narrator supplies the answer: "This arranging and rearranging was Decadence, but the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death" (V. 298).

The Crew members' generalized view of reality, which is expressed in "shorthand" via a few "proper nouns" and paintings of Cheese Danishes, provides the basis for the members' touristic fantasies. Their constructs or metaphors translate their experiences into what their culture has made recognizable and comprehensible. Mafia

Winsome and Shale Shoenmaker, for instance, create beauty according to the cultural definition. Champion of Heroic Love and author of pornographic novels, Mafia creates only stereotypical characters who fall into "disturbingly predictable racial alignment. The sympathetic--those godlike, inexhaustible sex athletes she used for heroes and heroines . . . were all tall, strong, white though often robustly tanned (all over), Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, and/or Scandinavian. Comic relief and villainy were invariably the lot of Negroes, Jews and South European immigrants" (V. 126). Schoenmaker, Esther's plastic surgeon, extols an ideal of female beauty, which happens to conform to "cultural harmony" and be "identical with an ideal of nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations" (V. 103). Schoenmaker's mental construct, however, is more dangerous than Mafia's, which finds expression only in her novels and in her bedroom; his is exercised on the willing victim Esther. Schoenmaker claims he remakes Esther's nose according to his own image of her soul, an abstraction which is a kind of "Platonism" (V. 296). Esther knows that he does not labor to "bring out the true, perfect Esther which dwelled inside the imperfect one" (V. 297). Instead, she becomes painfully aware that he is simply refashioning her face to exhibit his skill and externalize his fantasy. In addition, Schoenmaker,

in destroying what is natural and replacing it with his art, launches an assault on what is human. He claims he wants Esther's new nose to "harmonize" with her face (V. 103), but, as the narrator knows, "all that could harmonize with a face, if you were going to be humanistic about it, was obviously what the face was born with" (V. 103).

Benny Profane shares his Whole Sick Crew cohorts' inclination to seek an unchallenging way of life: he avoids original thinking. Tony Tanner's comment about Herbert Stencil, who constructs "protective screens for avoiding direct engagement with reality" (City of Words 164), applies to Benny as well. Profane's shields, though, are not impersonations, masks, and historical fictions as Stencil's are; instead, Benny's screens are his conceptions of the generalized Street and a generalized self. Benny's tourism springs from his fusing all streets into "a single abstracted Street," where he finds "your underage Marine barfing in the street, barmaid with a ship's propeller tattooed on each buttock, one potential berserk studying the best technique for jumping through a plate glass window (when to scream Geronimo? before or after the glass breaks?), a drunken deck ape crying back in the alley because last time the SP's caught him like this they put him in a strait jacket" (V. 10). The reader, then, is permitted Benny's view of

the street, a view that, because it is Benny's projection, grows increasingly surreal: "Underfoot, now and again, came vibration in the sidewalk from an SP streetlights way, beating out a Hey Rube with his night stick; overhead, turning everybody's face green and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V to the east where it's dark and there are no more bars" (V. 10). Because the elements of Benny Profane's vision are disparate and even frightening, his vision (the asymmetric V indicates Benny's one point perspective) has a nightmarish quality. Benny generalizes himself as he does the Street. He identifies himself with the class of schlemihls in order to protect himself from his own psychological and emotional life. The narrator describes Benny as something almost prehistoric and certainly too nondescript to have an identity: "a great amoebalike boy, soft and fat, hair cropped close and growing in patches, eyes like a pig's and set too far apart" (V. 36). Later, during Benny's and Stencil's raid on Eigenvalue's office, the narrator describes Benny as a kind of Kilroy figure. Benny, after scaling the side of the office building, "appeared and hung his nose over the edge of the roof" (V. 390). Hanging one's nose over the edge of a roof is impossible; the narrator is intent on making Benny seem less like a man and more like a concept.

Benny's incoherent vision of the Street probably

proceeds from his unconscious if not conscious wish to avoid differentiating among the Street's elements and learning from experience. Benny's roadwork has not taught him anything, probably because he rarely reacts to or synthesizes information:

Road work had done nothing to improve the outward Profane, or the inward one either. Though the street had claimed a big fraction of Benny's age, it and he remained strangers in every way. Streets (roads, circles, squares, places, prospects) had taught him nothing: he couldn't work a transit, crane, payload, couldn't lay bricks, stretch a tape right, hold an elevation rod still, hadn't even learned to drive a car. (V. 36-37)

Benny is preoccupied with streets physically and psychologically. Significantly, neither the concrete street nor his psychologically projected, metaphorical Street has changed either the outward, "amoebalike" Benny or the inward Benny, "his only function to want" (V. 37).

The novel's narrative frame indicates Benny Profane's stasis. His story begins with his vision of the Street and of the concrete street (East Main in Norfolk, Virginia) and concludes on the street of Valletta, which "was nowhere, but some of us do go nowhere and can convince ourselves into believing it to be somewhere" (V. 453). Relationships with Rachel Owlglass and Brenda Wigglesworth also supply the framework for the Benny Profane story, which, like the Whole Sick Crew parties, ends where it

begins. Spending the night at Pig's place in Virginia, Benny recalls his meeting with Rachel Owlglass, when she was between academic years at Bennington College. Rachel, although she changes during the course of V., was, when she met Benny, as shallow as Brenda Wigglesworth, whom Benny meets in Valletta at the conclusion of his peregrinations. As far as Benny is concerned, Rachel exchanges her humanity for the inanimateness of her MG. She paraphrases her textbook when she tells him that the quarry's "'dead rocks . . . were here before us and will be after us'" (V. 26). Significantly, Rachel's schoolgirl cant sounds the keynote of the novel and parallels Brenda's poem. The quarry's dead rocks point to the rock of Malta and to one of Pynchon's subjects: entropic day. The tourists of the world, including Benny, Rachel (when Benny meets her), and Brenda (who is on a Grand Tour, camera in tow, when Benny meets her on Malta), deny their own humanity and individuality when they attribute life to inanimate objects and immerse themselves in the generalized Street. Rachel's and Brenda's college-student rhetoric frames Benny Profane's experience; Brenda's poem, which concludes the Whole Sick Crew story, echoes Rachel's musing about the quarry and mentions the major themes, symbols, and motifs of V.:

"I am the twentieth century, . . . I am the ragtime and the tango; . . . I am the virgin's-

hair whip and the cunningly detailed shackles of decadent passion. I am every lonely railway station in every capital in 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 traveling clock which always tells the wrong time and chimes in different 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." (V. 454)

Brenda's art alludes to the lady V.'s comb, clock eye, removable parts, and "decadent passion"; it also unites the characters as tourists who lose their identity because they assume the qualities of their century.¹

Benny Profane, the "great amoebalike boy," is a tourist who works diligently at losing his identity (V. 36). He participates in the century's decline toward entropy by shielding himself from new information. He refuses to interpret his external world because he wants to keep his indiscriminate vision intact. Pynchon's narrative frame tells the reader that Benny's "inside" has not changed between his meeting Rachel and his meeting Brenda. When Brenda asks him if he has learned anything from his experience, Benny responds, "'No, . . . offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddam thing'" (V. 454). Benny's answer is "offhand," which also describes his manner, his treatment of people, and his refusal to accept responsibility. A self-serving tourist, Benny identifies himself with the world's schlemihls so that he can supply

a ready excuse for avoiding commitment. Because he refuses to think about people in particular, he can avoid establishing emotional ties with Fina, Paola, and Rachel. He welcomes being treated like an object. In response to Fina's attempt to communicate with him, he wonders, "Why did she have to behave like he was a human being. Why couldn't he be just an object of mercy" (V. 137). His self-deprecation allows him freedom from commitment. When Paola tells Benny he has dependents, he thinks, "No . . . she's out of her head. Not me. Not a schlemihl" (V. 378). Benny makes his schlemihlhood a convenience. He tells Rachel, "'a schlemihl like me takes and gives nothing back'" (V. 370). Benny purges himself of his individuality and, as Rachel says, amplifies his "'flabby, clumsy soul . . . into a Universal Principle'" (V. 383). Benny's allegiance to schlemihlhood, his tourist's fantasy, is selfish, but it becomes frightening when he connects it to a thematic concern of V.: life, a mask, is, from its beginning, in its demise. Benny warns Rachel that he is keeping no secret, vital self from her and that "'there's nothing inside. Only the scungille shell'" (V. 370).² Certainly the reader has already learned that the inner Profane and the outer Profane are identical, but, significantly, Benny makes this admission to Rachel "as if Shroud were prompting him" (V. 370).

Benny Profane, a tourist in his relationship with

people on a personal level, becomes a real tourist during the Feast of San 'Ercole dei Rinoceronti. Like East Main in Norfolk, Virginia, New York's streets are almost hallucinatory for Benny; the city forms "a mosaic of tilted street-surfaces that changed position according to sunlight, streetlight, moonlight, nightlight. . . ." (V. 139).³ Like other tourists (including Herbert Stencil), Benny is subject to his own peculiar vision, which cannot penetrate surfaces. The Feast, a "mosaic" whose components do not form an ordered, coherent pattern, is the appropriate setting for the externalization of Benny's tourism. The Feast allows Americans to be tourists but does not require them to leave home. They can experience an American-Italian culture that is even more removed from and more dream-like than the tourist culture offered to tourists in Europe. The Feast offers an unrehearsed performance of Puccini's Madame Butterfly, an opera that is itself an expression of tourism. Its subject is the romance of a geisha and an American ensign, and its language and melodies are Italian. It is significant that the narrator extends the tourist experience of Benny and his friends (they call each other tourists, lie about their ethnic origins, and even assume different names) beyond the narrative to the reader, who, suddenly, must assume the role of a participant at the Feast. The narrator notes that "someplace else the American ensign

and the geisha would be singing in Italian to the music behind them; and how was that for a tourist's confusion of tongues?" (V. 139-40).⁴

Benny Profane is mesmerized by the street's attractive surface and by the eyes of the girl he meets at the Feast. His experience with her is a tourist's experience; he cannot guess what she is thinking. In fact, her eyes function as a mirror rather than as a clue to her identity because they reflect only the surface of the street. Benny wonders, "who knew what went on in those eyes? They seemed to absorb all the light in the street: from flames beneath sausage grills, from the bridges of light bulbs, windows of neighborhood apartments, glowing ends of De Nobili cigars, flashing gold and silver of instruments on the bandstand, even light from the eyes of what innocent there were among the tourists" (V. 140). Benny can see only his own reflection, his own projections and obsessions, thrown back at him by his external world. As a tourist, he is unable to know anything outside these fantasy projections.

Benny gazes at his girl lying on the pool table: "In the dim light from the doorway, her fringed eyes seemed part of the felt. It was as if he were looking through her face to the surface of the table" (V. 143).

Benny cannot even see the New York woman because she becomes part of her background.⁵

Benny Profane can neither differentiate among the elements of his world nor grow mentally and emotionally; his limited perspective prevents his learning from his experience. Benny's particular mental construct, which governs what he absorbs, takes the form of an obsession with the inanimate world. He fuses and confuses the animate and inanimate worlds and, as Robert O. Richardson claims, even "foists off human qualities on the inanimate world" (53). Most critics conclude that Benny is simply the passive victim of the world of things and, consequently, is in the power of the entropic, life-denying forces symbolized by the lady V. Though this is accurate, it is also true that Benny confuses the human with the non-human; his elevation of the inanimate world to an almost human level and his denigration of the human world define his decadence:

When the human being assumes that the inanimate world is the only force that governs his life, when he attributes all initiatives to that world, when he seriously believes that the inanimate world shares his self-diagnosed malignancy, he is, like Benny Profane, decadent. (Richardson 50)

Certainly Benny's battle with things is comical.

Preparing for a day of yo-yoing on a subway, he

cut himself shaving, had trouble extracting a blade and gashed a finger. He took a shower to get rid of the blood. The handles wouldn't turn. When he finally found a shower that worked, the water came out hot and cold in random patterns. He danced around, yowling and shivering, slipped

on a bar of soap and nearly broke his neck. Drying off, he ripped a frayed towel in half, rendering it useless. He put on his skivvy shirt backwards, took ten minutes getting his fly zipped and another fifteen repairing a shoelace which had broken as he was tying it. . . . It wasn't that he was tired or even notably uncoordinated. Only something that, being a schlemihl, he'd known for years: inanimate objects and he could not live in peace. (V. 37)

It is significant that the narrator notes that Benny is not surprised by his mishaps. In fact, his accidents are so absurd that they seem at least partially willed. For example, listening to Rachel moralize about Esther's possible abortion, Profane "kicked inanimate tires, knowing they'd take revenge when he was looking for it least" (V. 358).

Even Benny's fantasies and memories reveal to the reader his obsession. One night at Pig's place in Virginia, Benny, bothered by a headache, is awakened by a "low, persistent growl," which grows more "ominous" and which, the reader learns, is the motor of Pig's motorcycle (V. 21). It is appropriate that this perception is Benny's. Obviously, Benny regards the motorcycle as a dangerous animal. In fact, the "enigma or sinister vision of Pig and that Harley-Davidson alone in an alley at three in the morning reminded Profane too suddenly of Rachel" (V. 22), who drove an MG with a "sinister growl" (V. 23). Though it is true that Benny met Rachel the way everyone else met Rachel, through the MG that nearly killed him, it

is also true that Benny, because he so often credits the inanimate world with having life-like traits, recalls the car's animal-like sound. Rachel, certainly, is fetishistic as she strokes and croons to her MG; nevertheless, Pynchon chooses to communicate to the reader this embarrassing scene (embarrassing for Rachel) by means of Benny's memory. Benny is at least as guilty as Rachel of attributing life to the inanimate world.

Benny Profane's tourism, its denial of selfhood and celebration of the inanimate world, is illustrated further by Benny's encounter with Shock and Shroud. A nightwatchman for Anthroresearch Associates, Benny is intrigued by Shock, with whom he feels "a certain kinship," since Shock is "the first inanimate schlemihl he'd ever encountered" (V. 285). Shock, the "marvelous manikin" that is "entirely lifelike in every way," is used to measure the effect of dropping heavy weights on humans (V. 286). Consequently, Benny sees him as a double. Benny endows Shroud, the manikin that measures radiation absorption in humans, with consciousness. Shroud comes to life by means of Benny's imagination and projection of life onto the inanimate. Shroud and Benny tell each other that neither has a soul; humanity, then, does not "have very far to go" before it is in the state Shock and Shroud are in (V. 286). The manikins are horrifying because their lifelike appearance is a mockery of life. The

synthetic objects, then, are emblematic not only of Benny's obsession with the world of things but also of the human race's decadence.

The concept of tourism provides an important link between the Benny Profane plot and the V. episodes. Members of the Whole Sick Crew, including Benny, perceive reality and act according to their obsessions and fantasy projections. Likewise, Herbert Stencil and, to a certain extent, Sidney Stencil also take tours that are, by definition, exercises in narcissism. Father and son order their experience according to their private formulas. It is difficult to generalize, however, about Sidney's preoccupation with design since the narration of his experiences in Florence is governed by his son's point of view. Nevertheless, the reader can reasonably assume that Sidney was concerned with defining The Situation in 1899 because the narrator notes that "Situation" is a term Herbert acquired from his father's journal (V. 153). Reflecting on the hopelessness of unraveling the Vheissu mystery and anticipating the moves of the Figli di Machiavelli, Sidney Stencil considers The "Situation . . . frankly appalling. More than that, it seemed to be irreparably bitched up" (V. 188). Sidney shows some insight in realizing "long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment. Since

these several minds tended to form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogenous, The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three" (V. 189). Still, Sidney's method for controlling The Situation is much like his son's penchant for Stencilizing reality. Since "the success or failure of any diplomatic issue must vary directly with the degree of rapport achieved by the team confronting it," Sidney develops a "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" (V. 189). The narrator's comment on Sidney's chorus-line method of espionage can apply as well to Herbert's V.-metaphor, which is for Herbert "a neat theory, and he was in love with it" (V. 189). Unfortunately, however, "neat" theories deny the complexity of any problem; they impose a pattern that may or may not account for all of the problem's facets. In addition, because the theory's governing design is fixed, it admits no change and denies the world's natural state of flux.

The need to mold reality to fit a self-imposed pattern makes Sidney a tourist. In fact, in the Epilogue, whose narrative is largely from Sidney Stencil's (rather than Herbert Stencil's) point of view, Sidney's

speculation on the role of Foreign Office agents shows that he is conscious of his tourist's perspective. Following Maijstral through the streets of Valletta, Sidney reflects that F.O. agents can obtain only "a warped idea of cities" because they do not contact the native life of a place (V. 468). The narrator describes Malta's "landscape" of "massive public buildings with characterless façades; networks of streets from which the civilian populace seems mysteriously absent" (V. 468). The bureaucratic world of the Foreign Office must be "an aseptic administrative world" if it is to accomplish its missions (V. 468). Agents must deny the humanity of people if they are to use the natives to their employer's advantage. Stencil must regard the Maltese dockyard workers, including Maijstral, as objects if he is to secure the information he needs. Furthermore, like all F.O. agents, he must discard his own identity in order to play his role convincingly. The distinction between self and role must dissolve if he is to become part of the landscape and survive.

In the Epilogue, Sidney's desire for order takes the form of an obsession with the past. "Soft-shoe Sidney" knows, logically, that his designs cannot circumscribe reality: "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 cope"

(V. 483). Stencil is distressed by the deterioration of the British spy network in Malta. His increasing difficulty in living in the present and his renewal of his affair with Victoria make Sidney prey to the "age's worst side-effect: nostalgia" (V. 488). Valletta is the appropriate setting for Stencil's retreat into his "hothouse time" (V. 489) because in Malta "all history seemed simultaneously present. . . . In London were too many distractions. History there was the record of an evolution. One-way and ongoing. Monuments, buildings, plaques were remembrances only; but in Valletta remembrances seemed almost to live" (V. 481). Valletta is so attractive to Sidney because it is "mere spectacle. She ceased to exist as anything quick or pulsed and was assumed again into the textual stillness of her own history" (V. 474).

Sidney can mold his history according to his memory because the past is finite and holds no surprises. Of course, Sidney is deceiving himself because memory betrays the past and because the past, the "hothouse time" nestled in the present, is, like a hothouse, unnatural and outside the flow of time. Sidney's "Florentine spring," then, is reborn "where all art objects hover between inertia and waking, all shadows lengthen imperceptibly though night never falls, a total nostalgic hush rests on the heart's landscape" (V. 486-87). Sidney fashions his reality to

fit his mental and emotional "landscape," and Malta becomes a literal and psychological pastoral. This "treacherous pasture" renders Sidney useless to the demanding present (V. 489). Sidney's effort to see according to a falsified view of reality governed by memory identifies him as a tourist, much like traveling tourists who see a "land" in terms of historians' fictions about the past (Plater 70).

Herbert Stencil is linked to many of V.'s other characters by his touristic vision: his view of the world according to and as the result of his own projections. Herbert's particular tourist perspective is aligned specifically with his father's tourism; both seek to unveil patterns in and ascribe significance to experience. Herbert Stencil's obsession with channeling information into his V.-structure is triggered by an entry in his father's journal: "'There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report'" (V. 53). Sidney's first sentence indicates that V. has significance that is not readily apparent. His next sentence, however, is more ambiguous. It implies either that Sidney knows "the answer" and is unwilling to put it into words, or that he does not know the answer and is reluctant to search for one. His son is prompted to

launch his own quest, regardless of which is true, because the act of searching for meaning is satisfying psychologically. As Thomas Schaub notes, Stencil's pursuit is "the effort to find within the world the meaning of the world" (80). Establishing meaning, of course, means attributing the logic of cause and effect to a sequence of events. Consequently, for Herbert Stencil, the notion of accident is intolerable. He would sympathize with Fausto Maijstral, who comments in his journal that "there is more accident to it [life] than a man can ever admit to in a lifetime and stay sane" (V. 320-21).

Stencil's search for V. is triggered by his need to find meaning. Fausto, ostensibly speaking about himself as a youth, probably is consciously referring to what prompts Stencil to pursue V.: "'You always look inside first, don't you, to find what's missing. What gap a 'vision' could possibly fill'" (V. 445). Stencil is a tourist because, like Benny, he creates a "vision," his conception of V., rather than a synthesis of external data. In fact, he excludes the data that do not support his mental structure. Stencil "felt (he said 'by instinct') when a bit of information was useful, when not: when a lead ought to be abandoned, when hounded to the inevitable looped tail" (V. 226). Obviously, the alternative to abandoning a clue is to follow it to the "looped tail," to

its origin: Stencil himself or, at least, Stencil's imagination in league with the outside world. The narrator, however, does not agree that instinct, as Stencil puts it, is the instigator: "Naturally about drives as intellectualized as Stencil's there can be no question of instinct" (V. 226). Instead, "the obsession was acquired" or consciously formed (V. 226).

According to Cooper, Stencil's subjective vision is his metaphor (model or theory in a scientist's terms) or formula that allows him to absorb stimuli and interpret reality. Cooper, unlike Tanner, who sees Stencil's V.-metaphor simply as obsession and a way to avoid truth, regards Stencil's machinations as an attempt to acquire knowledge. He insists that Stencil, in an effort to make events conform to his preconceived plan, misinterprets specific pieces of information but generalizes accurately. The lady V., whether or not she exists in the form in which Stencil creates her, can still be present in a force that has a hand in shaping the novel and the modern world:

Stencil's pursuit may be mad, foolish, and ridiculously exaggerated, but his basic question and methodology are not. He is not wrong in connecting V. with apocalyptic mass violence and conspiracy, or even in viewing her as an emblem of an ongoing force, the "particular shape" of which is "governed only by the surface accidents of history at the time." (Cooper 161-62 quoting V.)

It is true that Stencil wants to make V. a cause for specific events in addition to a guiding force. But, the

notion of V. as a general trend that describes its component random occurrences is valid. Cooper insists that V. may be a collection of random events, "but on the other hand, underlying randomness will add up to overriding regularity. Macro events build from accidental, haphazard micro events, but this does not mean that the macro events are accidental and haphazard themselves" (159). Herbert Stencil's perceptions certainly add up to a valid macro view of the twentieth century as far as the reader is concerned: "Herbert Stencil's obsession . . . should be judged not by how well it defines what things 'really are' apart from his observation of them, but by how well it describes symbolically our experience of the contemporary world" (Cooper 163).

Nevertheless, Herbert Stencil deludes himself when he tries to determine how things "really are." Evan Godolphin is enraged that his Florentine jailers persist in calling him Evan Gadrulfi simply because of a spelling error in his dossier. The Gaucho explains the bureaucrats' stupidity by saying that "'ideas are so novel to them. Once they get hold of one, having the vague idea it is somehow precious, they wish to keep possession of it'" (V. 192). Herbert Stencil, like the novel's other tourists, certainly does not wish to relinquish one of his precious ideas, particularly his idea about the identity

of the lady V. He fights to confine her within the boundaries of character rather than succumb to a definition of V. as "the recurrence of an initial" and a collection of "a few dead objects" (V. 445). The "dead" objects that Victoria, V., Veronica, Vera, and the Bad Priest incorporate into their bodies identify these individuals as the same woman with a coherent character. But, because he also wants to see V. as the presiding genius of entropy, Stencil ultimately must reject Fausto's account of the disassembly and death of the Bad Priest. He is certain that V. is the demon of Valletta in possession of the ailing Benny Profane. In fact, Stencil is hopeful that V. lives in the person of Mme. Viola, who owns a glass eye and has left Malta for Stockholm. She is the most recent candidate for the title, and her glass eye "will do for the frayed end of another clue" (V. 451-52). Stencil is, once again, in pursuit.

Herbert Stencil is further deluded because like his father, an historian who orders experience chronologically, Herbert focuses exclusively on serial relationships and misses analogical relationships. Molly Hite notes that "because he posits a developing 'plot' that has him in its clutches, he ignores the ways in which history repeats itself and remains unaware that his own actions mimic an earlier pattern" (51). Hite identifies duplication rather than a time continuum as "the governing

structural principle of V." (48). The Stencils, novel readers "adept at reading formulaic, 'stencilized' texts [,] . . . are incapable of reading a novel by Pynchon. They assume that the important ordering principles will be identity and causality, and so they miss the multiplying resemblances and the governing convention of doubling" (Hite 52). Consequently, Herbert Stencil would misread the novel because he wants to relegate all meaning to narrative thread.

The tourist compulsion prompts Stencil to "admit no configurations of experience that cannot be shaped into the pattern of his fantasy" (Tanner City of Words, 164). Ostensibly, of course, Stencil is glad he has abandoned his tendency to "random" movement for his newly "acquired sense of animateness," which allows him to work toward the completion of his V.-structure (V. 55). Paradoxically, however, the tourist compulsion also prevents Stencil from completing "the pattern of his fantasy" so that he can retain his vitality and avoid direct engagement with a world in flux. Stencil dreads finding V. because concluding his search would eliminate his reason for being:

Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to Stencil had become directed entirely inward, toward this acquired sense of animateness. Having found this he could hardly release it, it was too dear. To sustain it he had to hunt V.; but if he should find her, where else would there be to go but back into half-consciousness? He tried not to think,

therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid. (V. 55)

Stencil's technique of "approach and avoid" is self-serving psychologically. A tourist, he uses this technique to remain a stranger to himself. He always refers to himself in the third person, an idiosyncrasy that allows him to "appear as only one among a repertoire of identities. 'Forcible dislocation of personality' was what he called the general technique, which is not exactly the same as 'seeing the other fellow's point of view'; for it involved, say, wearing clothes that Stencil wouldn't be caught dead in, eating foods that would have made Stencil gag, living in unfamiliar digs, frequenting bars of a non-Stencilian character; all this for weeks on end; and why? To keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person" (V. 62). Stencil, bent on not knowing himself, assumes masks, as did his father the F.O. agent, in order to gain knowledge of the affairs of others. Stencil as any one of his eight impersonations in the Egyptian episode is Stencil in the third person. A "quick-change artist," he becomes the projection of the identity of each of the main event's eight observers. Consequently, Stencil is a tourist, divided from himself and using, instead of his own, the body and mind of a character he imagines.

Herbert Stencil's rendition of reality is dependent

on his "forcible dislocation of personality" and on his reconstruction of a past he can know almost nothing about. In fact, Herbert's preoccupation with the past, particularly his father's past, betrays his unwillingness to engage himself directly with his own present. In an effort to explain the past, Herbert forces events into patterns defined by certain academic principles, but the structure imposed by these theories falsifies reality. Nevertheless, the mental control Herbert feels as he manipulates abstractions comforts him because it permits him to rule out accident and to define the world according to his metaphor. The narrator calls Stencil's pursuit of V. "a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of The Golden Bough or The White Goddess" (V. 61). Stencil's penchant for scholarly activity and obsession with using the past as a generator of formulas to explain the present work together to form his V.-structure. Because exploring history allows him to create patterns, he is enamored of the past and does not notice, as Eigenvalue does, that if history were a piece of fabric, he would be "at the bottom of a fold" incapable of determining "warp, woof or pattern anywhere else" (V. 155). Each fold assumes more importance than the entire fabric; likewise, Stencil places importance on only the evidence that supports his V.-metaphor and ignores data that do not nourish his obsession.

Eigenvalue notes that "we are charmed by the funny-looking automobiles of the '30s, the curious fashions of the '20s, the peculiar moral habits of our grandparents. . . . We are conned into a false memory, a phony nostalgia about what they were. We are accordingly lost to any sense of a continuous tradition" (V. 155-56). Because Stencil is so "charmed" by the parts of the past that reinforce his design, he can create only a fictionalized version of his father's life. For instance, he wants to see V. as an incarnation of Graves's White Goddess--the combination of the Virgin and Venus, and the guiding force of Western civilization (Cowart 17). While the Virgin inspired twelfth century civilization, the goddess Venus represented ideal beauty during the Renaissance. Since Sidney Stencil and Victoria Wren were together in Florence, the birthplace of the Renaissance, and since Herbert wants to see Victoria as V., another manifestation of the White Goddess, Herbert Stencil sees fit to concoct (for Eigenvalue) a story that establishes a parallel between Victoria and the Venus of Botticelli's Birth of Venus. About to tell his tale to Eigenvalue, he muses that at the turn of the twentieth century, "V., whoever she was, might have been swallowed in the airy Renaissance space of that city, assumed into the fabric of any of a thousand Great Paintings" (V. 155). This passage prepares the reader for the association of character and

symbol, and the irony attendant on the association. First, the narrator's capitalization of Great Paintings alerts the reader to Stencil's readiness to intellectualize; he is already attributing to V. significance beyond her mortal existence as Victoria Wren. Second, Botticelli's painting typifies the spirit of humanism in Renaissance art: the elevation and glorification of the human world. The painting celebrates Venus's birth, and the Renaissance, the rebirth of classicism and humanism, marks the birth of modern times.⁶ Although Victoria's transition to V. also marks a birth, the birth of modernism at the turn of the twentieth century, it also marks the beginning of a decadence, the antithesis of the humanism that guided the ancient and Renaissance worlds. Ultimately, the irony is directed at Herbert Stencil, who develops the plot and thematic significance of the Florence episode on the basis of what he has read about the Renaissance. Unfortunately, however, its application to the Florence of Sidney Stencil's time is ludicrous. V. could not have been "swallowed" into Renaissance space because Sidney's year was 1899. In order to create his father's present, Herbert has had to imagine not only a past he could not have known but also an even more distant past that Sidney could not have known.

The Florence episode betrays Herbert's primary

concern: accumulating evidence to support his V.-structure rather than learning about his father's past. Herbert's allusions point to his propensity to define his world according to rigid academic codes. Herbert is particularly "charmed," probably, by being able to define the lady V. by means of an abstraction, a work of art. As the goddess Venus and the subject of a painting, she is not only a symbol but also a pattern in art, the antithesis of life. He seeks this sort of codified structure to discover meaning so that he can persist in approaching and avoiding reality.

A painting whose subject is the renewal of life, particularly a Renaissance painting like The Birth of Venus, is itself an approach to and an avoidance of reality. Renaissance art makes a point of realistically representing the human form while infusing it with an ideal, ethereal beauty. Herbert Stencil projects his obsession onto Signor Mantissa, who plots to steal The Birth of Venus from the Uffizzi Gallery. Yet as soon as Mantissa has the painting, his "entire love," in his possession, he abandons it (V. 210). He becomes too aware of the "painting's gorgeous surface" as a cover for the void hidden by the colors (V. 209) and realizes that Venus, especially because of her life-like beauty, is no more than a mockery of life. Mantissa has this vision because he recalls Hugh Godolphin's despair over losing

his dream of Vheissu. He associates the lantern light flickering over the surface of the painting with the light Godolphin claims he saw through the Antarctic ice illuminating the rainbow-colored corpse of one of Vheissu's spider monkeys. Hugh calls it "'a mockery of life, planted where everything but Hugh Godolphin was inanimate. . . . Vheissu itself, a gaudy dream. Of what the Antarctic in this world is closest to: a dream of annihilation'" (V. 206).

When Mantissa suggests to his friend that this nihilistic vision may have been an hallucination, Godolphin responds, "'Does it make any difference? If it were only a hallucination, it was not what I saw or believed I saw that in the end is important. It is what I thought. What truth I came to'" (V. 206). Truth for Godolphin depends on his subjective vision. His tourist's view of Vheissu, whose various shapes change "'the way clouds change over a Yorkshire landscape'" (V. 170) and whose skin is a "'gaudy godawful riot of pattern and color'" (V. 171), is analogous to Herbert Stencil's tourist version of reality. In fact, Hugh Godolphin's Vheissu, since it appears only in the chapters of V. that Herbert is responsible for, is not only similar to but is part of Herbert Stencil's obsession. The "'nothing'" Godolphin tells Mantissa he saw is the sum of Herbert Stencil's projections (V. 204). As Plater says, Stencil's

and the other characters' landscapes are dreams; their unreality is what V. (Stencil's landscape) is: a movement toward decadence, "a transfiguration of death" (142).

Like Mantissa's Venus and Godolphin's Vheissu, Kurt Mondaugen's obsessions belong to Herbert Stencil. Mondaugen's tale of his experiences in German Southwest Africa in 1922 is at least once removed from its source in "Mondaugen's story"; the reader receives the information via Stencil, who has heard the story from an intoxicated Mondaugen trying to recall what happened to him more than thirty years ago. This "Stencilized" version of Mondaugen's history is self-serving for Herbert Stencil. Ostensibly, Herbert, through his reconstruction of history, is trying to understand his father's past, but "Mondaugen's story" does not contribute to this enterprise. What Stencil really needs is another setting for the lady V. in order to support his own metaphorical construction. In fact, even the V.-story in "Mondaugen's story" is secondary to the chapter's treatment of Herbert's tourist obsessions. First, "Mondaugen's story," like "She hangs on the western wall," reveals Stencil's (and possibly Mondaugen's) obsession with the past as a crystallized order, a pattern that explains subsequent history. Just as fifteenth-century Florence directed, at least in a philosophical sense for Herbert, what happened in the Florence of 1899, the bloodbath of 1904 in

Southwest Africa plays a significant role in the uprising in 1922. The participants in the Siege Party at Foppl's villa are so fascinated by recollections of (or tales of) von Trotha's 1904 victory that they allow their collective memory to supplant the present. Foppl is so enamored of the aggressive colonialism or tourism of the German imperialist government of 1904 that he "seemed under compulsion somehow to recreate the Deutsch-Sudwestafrika of nearly twenty years ago, in word and perhaps in deed. 'Perhaps' because as the siege party progressed it became more and more difficult to make the distinction" (V. 240-41). Certainly the fact that what happens to Kurt Mondaugen occurs mostly in dreams that confuse his present and a past to which he is a voyeur obliterates present time. His perceptions are those of a tourist and, consequently, are evidence of Herbert's motivating psychological need.

Stencil's plotting mind also requires conspiracy, which is projected onto and nurtured by Mondaugen's collusion with Vera Meroving. Herbert introduced Victoria as the center of a plot in Florence, where she becomes a confidant of Hugh Godolphin. In the Southwest Protectorate, Vera Meroving also appears to be in league with Godolphin and Kurt Mondaugen. For Godolphin, she regenerates memories of Vheissu and, for some reason, tries to establish control over him. Kurt feels that a

conspiracy between him and Vera is conceived the moment they meet. Significantly, their bond is predicated on an act of violence.⁷ Kurt and Vera both become aware of the violence done to the Bondels in the courtyard of Foppl's villa. Their shared knowledge and their unwillingness or inability to stop the bloodshed bind them in guilt and implicate them in the murder of innocent Bondels:

All at once, as he'd been half-expecting, cries of pain lanced a morning quiet that had known only visiting kites and wind, and the dry rustling of the exterior veld. Mondaugen knew, without having to run and see, that the cries had come from the courtyard where he'd seen the crimson stain. Neither he nor the woman moved. It somehow having become part of a mutual constraint that neither of them show curiosity. Voila: conspiracy having passed between them. (V. 236)

Later, Vera, who, according to Mondaugen, wants to establish control over Godolphin for reasons unknown, tries to weaken the old man psychologically and emotionally by convincing him that Kurt is his son Evan. Kurt thinks

She apparently wanted Godolphin, for reasons he could only guess at, though her desire seemed to arise out of a nostalgic sensuality whose appetites knew nothing at all of nerves, or heat, but instead belonged entirely to the barren touchlessness of memory. She had obviously needed Mondaugen only to be called (he might assume cruelly) a long-ago son to weaken her prey. (V. 255)

Obviously, Herbert Stencil, who is reporting this information to Eigenvalue, is the person who wants the

conspiracy to exist. His narrative combines, in his own tourist's fantasy, the elements of Mondaugen's obsession: a fixation on the past and a paranoid fear of plot. An ill and feverish Mondaugen is unable to separate his hallucinations from reality:

As the partying rushed in phantasmagoria at and around their supposedly insulated turret, into blur, there had grown increasingly more visible one unwavering projection on the wall of night: Evan Godolphin, whom Mondaugen had never seen save by the dubious fluorescence of nostalgia he didn't want, nostalgia forced on him by something he was coming to look on as a coalition. (V. 260)

"Mondaugen's story" links Mondaugen's fantasy projections specifically to Stencil's obsessions but also ties them to the novel's theme of tourism through mirror imagery. Mondaugen sees the reflections of Vera Meroving and Lt. Weissmann in a mirror, but since he does not actually see the lovers, since the mirror was "angled to reflect the interior of a room around the next corner," the images could be products of his imagination (V. 238). In fact, the narrator comments that when Weissmann closes the door, "it was as if Mondaugen had dreamed them" (V. 238). Once again, the image may be the projection of a tourist's subjective vision; Mondaugen is having the experience, but Stencil wants to see Vera as party to a conspiracy. Her image framed with Weissmann's suggests to Mondaugen on an unconscious level, and to Stencil and the reader on a conscious level, that the two share

information that may solve the mystery of V. The mirror in this passage also functions, however, simply as a reflecting device, which reveals to the tourist nothing but the world's surface. Like Benny Profane at the Feast of San 'Ercole dei Rinoceronti, Mondaugen cannot achieve insight; he is granted only a superficial knowledge of Vera.

The tourist's surface view is implicit in the code received by Mondaugen's sferics receiver and broken by Lt. Weissmann: "The world is all that the case is," the first proposition of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, which appeared in German in 1921. Wittgenstein's thesis is that the meaning of a system cannot be derived from the system itself; in order to be valid, meaning must be determined by a model or design outside the system (Schaub 82). If, however, human beings have no access to a system beyond their concrete world, then they remain unable either to probe their "case" or to understand their world on a more than superficial level. Consequently, the code Mondaugen receives undercuts "Mondaugen's story," which is part of Herbert Stencil's effort to impose an order on his reality and explain experience by means of his metaphor. Ironically, Stencil can be no more than a tourist; he is eternally frustrated in his attempt to assign meaning to events because he has no choice but to construct his design for meaning, his

V.-structure, from the world he knows.

Like "Mondaugen's story," "V. in love" uses the mirror image as the projection of a subjective vision. Mélanie's and V.'s mirror images, however, are more than just reflections of their fantasy worlds; they are the means by which the women actually transform themselves and each other into objects. As a result, they are self-denying, life-denying tourists, whose fetish-constructions represent the violation of the animate world by the inanimate.

The narrator of "V. in love" introduces Mélanie l'Heuremaudit to the reader almost as if she were a part of the inanimate world. Her eyes are "dead. . . . the color of freezing rain" (V. 394). She is an object as far as her Paris audience and her personal acquaintances are concerned. When she arrives at ballet rehearsal, M. Itague, the stage manager, calls her "fétiche" (V. 395). Her stage name, Mlle. Jarretiere, identifies her as an object that adorns; certainly she adorns herself with garters and hose of various colors and designs, her own fetishes that give her pleasure and create her identity. Upon meeting Mélanie, the lady V. tells her, "'You are not real. . . . Do you know what a fetish is? Something of a woman which gives pleasure but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket . . . une jarretière. You are the same, not real but an object of pleasure'" (V. 404).

Mélanie is preoccupied with herself as an object. She has a sexually arousing dream in which she becomes a wind-up doll. Her dream transforms her into one of the automata in Satin's ballet, L'Enlèvement des Vierges Chinoises (The Rape of the Chinese Virgins). Appropriately Mélanie is a dancer, whose art is visual. A dancer, the most narcissistic of artists, depends on mirrors in order to gauge success in rehearsal. Mirrors, which cover the walls of rehearsal rooms, are necessary in Mélanie's work, but they also clutter her apartment and are vital to her pleasure. The morning of the day she meets V., she awakens in her Su Feng costume, becoming "excited as soon as her eyes recognized the image in the mirror" (V. 403). Mélanie is so divided from herself that her mirror image, which functions as an entity that is not part of Mélanie, is all that can affect or arouse her. V.'s first overture to Mélanie is unsuccessful. She tells Mélanie that as Su Feng, doll-like and stylized, she will "drive Paris mad" (V. 404). But Mélanie's "eyes would not respond. Not with fear, desire, anticipation. Only the Mélanie in the mirror could make them do that" (V. 404).

Mélanie is the most narcissistic of all of V.'s tourists. Like Herbert Stencil, she can respond to only her own obsession, but unlike Stencil, who at least needs external circumstances to form his private metaphor, Mélanie requires only the projection of her own image.

Her subjective world is solipsistic and running down, like the automaton she becomes in her dream, because she accepts no stimulation from the outside world. Logically, then, a love affair for Mélanie would take the form of a lesbian relationship. The narrator says that "Lesbianism, we are prone to think in this Freudian period of history, stems from self-love projected on to some other human object. If a girl gets to feeling narcissist, she will also sooner or later come upon the idea that women, the class she belongs to, are not so bad either. Such may have been the case with Mélanie" (V. 407).

Mirrors seem to be more important in V.'s and Mélanie's affair than either of the human participants because "certain fetishes never have to be touched or handled at all; only seen, for there to be complete fulfillment" (V. 408). Porcépic's description of the lovers "is a well-composed still life of love at one of its many extremes: V. on the pouf, watching Mélanie on the bed; Mélanie watching herself in the mirror; the mirror image perhaps contemplating V. from time to time. No movement but a minimum friction. And yet one solution to a most ancient paradox of love: simultaneous sovereignty yet a fusing-together" (V. 409). Apparently, this arrangement satisfies both V. and Mélanie; V. has her fetish and Mélanie has her other, her mirror image, which becomes a voyeur. V., in turn, becomes "a real voyeur to

complete the illusion that her reflections are, in fact, this audience" (V. 410). The multiplication of mirrors extends Melanie's audience and thus adds to her excitement.

This "still-life of love" is the union of V.'s and Mélanie's fetishes with the inanimate world. Love in the loft in Grenelle is life-denying because it is made possible only by the intrusion of the inanimate into the living world. The narrator remarks that V. may be "aware of her own progression toward inanimateness--the fetish of Mélanie and the fetish of herself to be one. . . . It was a variation on the Porpentine theme, the Tristan-and-Iseult theme, indeed, according to some, the single melody, banal and exasperating, of all Romanticism since the Middle Ages: 'the act of love and the act of death are one.' Dead at last, they would be one with the inanimate universe and with each other. Loveplay until then thus becomes an impersonation of the inanimate, a transvestism not between sexes but between quick and dead; human and fetish" (V. 410). V.'s and Mélanie's love is part of the world's process of entropic decay because it is consumed by and undifferentiated from the inanimate world. Their love-fetishism, "a colony of the Kingdom of Death" planted in the world of the living, is also aligned with tourism: "their love was in its way only another version of tourism; for as tourists bring into the world

as it has evolved part of another, and eventually create a parallel society of their own in every city, so the Kingdom of Death is served by fetish-constructions like V.'s, which represent a kind of infiltration" (V. 411).

The death of Mélanie is a stylized, artistic conclusion to "V. in love." The ballerina dies as Mélanie and as Su Feng, both "'doll-like'" and as "'a chaos of flesh'" (V. 404). Su Feng's death, her merging with the inanimate world, is represented artistically by the "'orchestral barbarity'" of Porcépic's score (V. 413). At the moment Su Feng is impaled on the point of a pole, "Porcépic's music was . . . almost deafening: all tonal location had been lost, notes screamed out simultaneous and random like fragments of a bomb" (V. 414). The girl Mélanie, however, is literally impaled at the crotch because she has neglected to protect herself with a metal device that fits the pole's point. Her metaphorical death becomes her actual death; the orchestra's "winds, strings, brass and percussion were indistinguishable as blood ran down the pole, the impaled girl went limp, the last chord blasted out" (V. 414). Appropriately, Mélanie dies during a representation of the sexual act, which, in life, was her tourism.

The tourists in both the present-time chapters and in the history chapters are united in their movement toward entropic decay and in their obsession with the inanimate

world. Their similarities tend to diffuse their identities; Cooper says that their "defining contours dissolve in the general malaise" because the characters gradually take on the characteristics of an increasingly mechanistic society (47). To a certain extent, Benny Profane's and Herbert Stencil's "defining contours" are unclear and their identities indistinguishable from their worlds. The reader cannot know Benny, whose exterior is his interior; Benny refuses to develop more than a tourist's perspective because he wants to protect himself from obligation and from a possibly dangerous world. The reader cannot know Stencil, whose various masks transform him into someone else and shield him from direct engagement with reality. For the reader and for themselves, Benny and Herbert are generalizations; Rachel's accusation that Benny has amplified his soul to a "'Universal Principle'" can be directed as well at Stencil (V. 483).

In addition, both Benny and Herbert generalize about their experience; they see the world in abstract terms. It is true that Benny's thinking is chaotic while Herbert's is patterned, but, for all his design-making, Herbert can manipulate almost any information to fit his pattern. Plater says that the conclusions Stencil draws are typically touristic and superficial; the information he seeks is "conventionally encyclopedic--that is, both

comprehensive enough to construct a world and common enough for general reference. Like the details of any tourist guide, the facts that Stencil accumulates correspond to the V.-structure in direct proportion to his preconceived perceptions" (74). The men of the Whole Sick Crew and Herbert Stencil collect information that is common and comprehensive and use it to mold their perceptions of women. Paola Maijstral and the lady V. suit the men's fantasies because their symbolic weight can accommodate many obsessions at once. Paola is coveted by Pappy Hod, Benny, Pig, McClintic, and Rooney. A Maltese, she is an ethnic mixture; she even becomes Ruby, the black whore McClintic Sphere loves. When Rooney discovers her disguise, he asks Paola if she isn't "'something we can look at and see whatever we want? Protective coloration?'" (V. 350). Like Paola, the lady V. assumes a kind of "protective coloration" for Herbert Stencil. She is "a remarkably scattered concept" by the time Stencil becomes "caught up in compulsive yarning" about V. in a whorehouse in Nice, as a pilot, as an old fisherman in Mallorca, and as a tango dancer, who, in Rotterdam, commands the rain to stop (V. 389). Stencil's conception of himself and of V. is so fragmented and general that he leaves "pieces of himself--and V.--all over the western world" (V. 389).

Stencil's lack of discrimination is evident not only

in his fictions about V. but also in his reason--or lack of reason--for attempting to resolve the ambiguities surrounding his father's death in Valletta. Although Herbert "'tried to tell himself meeting V. and dying were separate and unconnected for Sidney,'" he realizes, as he tells Benny, "'not so. Because: all along, the first thread, from a young, crude Mata Hari act in Egypt--as always, in no one's employ but her own--while Fashoda tossed sparks in search of a fuse; until 1913 when she knew she'd done all she could and so took time out for love--all that while, something monstrous had been building'" (V. 386). Stencil's account of V.'s whereabouts from 1899 to 1919 have no bearing on his father's death. Benny is justifiably confused when he asks, "'You are expecting to find this chick in Malta? . . . Or how your father died? Or something? Wha.'" (V. 386). Equally confusing are Stencil's reasons for wanting Benny to accompany him and Paola to Malta. When asked, he tells Benny that he needs a "'buffer zone'" between himself and Paola (V. 387). He also responds, however, "'Why not you'" (V. 387). "Why not" is the inevitable response offered by all members of the Whole Sick Crew as justification for any action or point of view. Stencil tells Benny that any of the Crew would respond "Why not" to an invitation to Malta; so Stencil, then, must inadvertently align himself with the indiscriminate Crew

members. When asked by Benny why he searches for V., his response is simply "'Why not'" (V. 386).

Stencil's movement, then, is as yo-yoing and as meaningless as Benny's. It is significant that Stencil's and Benny's communication takes place in Chapter 13, "In which the yo-yo string is revealed as a state of mind." Pynchon unites more than Benny's and Stencil's movements in this chapter; their "state of mind" is expanded to include the drifters they meet after they steal the dentures from Eigenvalue's office. The nightmarish scene that concludes the chapter makes yo-yoing universal among the world's tourists. Benny and Herbert take refuge in Central Park after the break-in; the narrator comments that "all manner of life moved in the dying shrubbery around them" (V. 392). A homosexual confronts a plainclothesman; the homeless ask which day of the week it is. The participants in this surrealistic scene seem to float in an all-encompassing time or non-time as do Benny and Stencil. Appropriately, the chapter concludes with Benny's reference to the 5 p.m. shuttle and Stencil's immersion in the past. When Stencil says that it is Paris, 1913, Benny's tourist response is, naturally, "'Why not'" (V. 392).

Pynchon yokes the two plot lines of V. structurally and thematically in Chapter 13. Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane, the characters that provide the novel's two main

focal points, define their world according to their tourist view. In fact, Stencil and Benny tend to absorb only the experience that comfortably fits the shape of their obsession: the world is tending toward an inanimate state. Benny's fear of things prompts him to bestow part of his humanity on inanimate objects and, in return, to take on some of the properties of inert matter. In this way, Benny regards himself as an object. Herbert Stencil also partially relinquishes his humanity by approaching and avoiding his own identity. His preoccupation with the inanimate takes the form of the metaphorical construction V., the prevailing spirit of entropic decay.

V.'s tourists define themselves and interpret their experience according to their private mental constructs. Although their theories should help the characters to understand their worlds, these formulas often prove instead to be obstacles to learning. Illogically, the tourist depends on certain rigid codes to make sense of a world in flux. Consequently, because the tourist can respond to only his own illusions, he becomes, according to Fausto Maijstral, a "dreamer, only an inconsequential shadow himself in the landscape, partaking of the soullessness of these and other masses and shadows; this is 20th century nightmare" (V. 324). Fausto recognizes this "nightmare" as man's decadence, his falling away from what is human. Fausto sees poetry, the act of metaphor,

as a means of salvation. Richardson agrees with Fausto that art is humanizing; metaphor can make the inanimate animate, an endeavor necessary to stave off decay in a world like that of V. (54).

Notes

¹The narrator, in turn, undercuts the thematic concerns of the novel by having Brenda make a paper airplane of her creation and sail it across the room.

²The scungille shell, Benny's metaphor for his inner life, recalls the Gaucho's description of Venus in Botticelli's painting: Venus stands "in half of what looked like a scungille shell" (V. 178). Benny's language links his emptiness to the void beneath the painting's surface.

³Benny's perception of the streets' constantly changing surfaces, particularly the streets he travels at the Feast of San 'Ercole dei Rinoceronti, provides a structural and thematic link to Hugh Godolphin's perception of the brilliantly colored, constantly shifting surface of Vheissu. Both surfaces, because they are so attractive, mask the void and mock life.

⁴Significantly, the narrator directs this question to

the reader, who experiences the scene "someplace else," away from the characters.

⁵Like Vheissu, the girl's eyes reflect the colored lights of a surface, which seems to move when the lights change. Also, the girl is associated with the lady V. because of her attraction to violence. She leaps from the pool table when she hears that a rumble is brewing. She and the other girls watch the street riot "eagerly, as if each had kicked in on a pool for who'd draw first blood" (V. 144).

⁶In "She hangs on the western wall," the Gaucho comments that the Figli di Machiavelli will stage "'the most wonderful festa this city has seen since Savonarola was burned'" (V. 192). The Gaucho's reference to Girolamo Savonarola recalls another transition--the Florentines' transformation into fearful, religious zealots under Savonarola's influence (1489-1498). Savonarola, a Dominican monk who arrived in Florence in 1489, denounced the Florentines for their libertine ways and worldliness. During the decade preceding his public hanging and burning in 1498, he stirred his followers to burn books to show their commitment to renouncing their sinfulness.

Savonarola was strong enough not only to take over the government of the Republic but also to influence

Botticelli, whose art changed dramatically as a result of Savonarola's influence. Botticelli's work after 1490 does not have the vitality of his earlier work. His later paintings concentrate on making moral judgments, and the women of his later paintings are more austere. Possibly Stencil, who is responsible for the allusion, is connecting Victoria's transformation to V. with the change in Botticelli's women (Hartt 295).

⁷Herbert Stencil has already associated the lady V. with violence: Victoria Wren stood "enchanted" by the riot stirred by the Figli di Machiavelli in 1899 (V. 211).

Chapter Two

A Scholarly Quest/A Remarkably Scattered Concept

Like V.'s characters, V.'s reader must acclimate himself to an objective reality apart from his subjective world. As a participant in life and reader of novels, he tries to construct a mechanism for interpreting the multiple and diverse worlds both outside and inside the bounds of fiction. The reader may expect to be confused outside the novel because he has only his own mental construct for reference in this sphere. Inside the novel, however, he probably anticipates a sense of order he does not in fact have. His own touristic obsession dictates his need to see pattern as evidence of meaning, but he probably needs guidance as he tries to make sense of the novel's complexities and ambiguities. The reader wants the elements of fiction to help him construct a reading of the novel.

The reader of V., however, is not given structural signposts. Instead, he is anchored only by what seems to be Pynchon's principle of uncertainty. Plater says that

the "Heisenberg principle has to do with defining one's own existence in terms of familiarity and strangeness--certainty and uncertainty--and the particular problem of observing one's own relationship with a dual reality" (102). Certainly, if there is a comparable Pynchon principle, it involves the same process: the characters attempt to define their psychological worlds and, in this way, to establish their ties to the world outside the self. The reader, observing the characters for whom he has sympathy and in whom he sees himself, tries to find meaning in an alien world and also attempts to piece together the world in which they function. In this way, he tries to satisfy the demands fiction makes on readers as well as the demands readers make on themselves. "Defining one's own existence," then, becomes the thematic and epistemological focus of V.

Trained to read for the purpose of interpreting and armed with the knowledge that pattern equals meaning, the reader probably is too eager to uncover the design he believes is obscured by V.'s surface ambiguities. Pynchon exploits the reader's readiness to engage in puzzle-solving--to succumb to the human tendency to perceive patterns that may or may not objectively exist (Cooper 40); like Nabokov, Pynchon builds complex narratives, which seem to have interlocking clues, in order to encourage the reader. Pynchon also supplies

characters who share the reader's goal and whose own thought processes provide models for the reader's synthesizing activity: "With this tantalizing web of partial revelation, both [Pynchon and Nabokov] inveigle the reader into mimicking solipsistic and paranoid protagonists who isolate themselves . . . in the course of their epistemological quests" (Cooper 40). Pynchon's plot and use of metaphor give the characters' fictions (and the reader's fiction) credibility; nevertheless, Pynchon's narrative surface still withholds "from the reader any final certainty, any firm ground of knowledge, any sure means for determining reality" (Cooper 40).

V. encourages the reader's traditional novelistic expectations. The plot promises resolution, and complex allusions and metaphors promise revelation about the lady V. The novel reader, sensitive to the narrator's references to history and myth, wants not only to connect the various appearances and disguises of V. throughout history but also to grasp her symbolic significance and arrive at the meaning of the novel: "While Herbert Stencil searches for clues to the meaning of the woman V., accumulating his notecards, his sources, his linkages, we, as readers, parallel his activity, making our own accumulation, driven by the same urge to fit the pieces together to arrive at the meaning of the novel V." (New 399).

It is true that Herbert Stencil's "mad time-search" supports the reader in what he wants to believe: the pieces of V.'s puzzle fit together (V. 406). At the same time, however, Pynchon's manipulation of plot and layering of allusions deconstruct the myth they build about the lady V. The novel's events encourage the reader to connect the 1956 chapters to the history chapters for the purpose of establishing plot unity. The candidates for V.-incarnation in 1956--Paola Maijstral, Fina Mendoza, and even the rat Veronica--provide links to the past; obviously, Pynchon wants the reader to consider the possibility of their symbolic or, at least, allusive value. Still, the reader must notice that Pynchon's narrative undermines itself even as it develops. Plot connections, coincidences, and juxtaposition of events often are ludicrous and humorous. Sometimes, the narrator even mocks the reader as well as Stencil for seriously considering the notion that the plot is cohesive.

The narrative encourages the reader to view Herbert as a guide through V.'s intricacies but embarrasses him for seeking guidance from "a quick-change artist" (V. 61).

Herbert is the reader's link to four of the six history episodes, which reveal information about the lady V.--information that is difficult for the reader to regard as insignificant. V.'s attributes, which associate her with mythic and literary figures outside the novel, help

to build the V.-story but do not provide conclusive proof of her existence as a transcendent power. They merely entice the reader to probe Stencil's "hothouse" obsession (V. 448).

V.'s plot, because it abounds with coincidences and references to V., both inspires the reader's faith and sparks the reader's skepticism. Intrigued by the corresponding situations, characters, and themes of the two time-schemes, the reader wants to use causal analysis to connect the present of Benny Profane to the history chapters. Primarily, the reader is tempted to attribute Benny's preoccupation with the inanimate world and the current world's disintegration to the force of V. While yo-yoing on the subway, the sleeping Benny has a dream about his own disassembly, a dream inspired by a story he had heard about a boy who had a golden screw instead of a navel. Apparently, the boy finally was able to remove the screw with a screwdriver, thanks to the advice of a voodoo doctor in Haiti. Certainly, the reader connects this tale to the disassembly of the Bad Priest in Malta. Fausto writes that the children of Valletta even dug the star sapphire out of the Priest's navel with the point of a bayonet. Benny's dream about the boy somehow fuses with his dream about his own disintegration into inanimate parts, which include a "clock of a heart" (V.'s eye is a clock) and a "sponge brain" (V. 40). These parts "litter

the pavement" and are "scattered among manhole covers" as he walks down the street (V. 40). Benny draws a parallel between his dismemberment and the universal movement toward death, the transformation of the animate into the inanimate. He compares himself to an elephant, whose living body has the potential to bring forth inanimate figurines after death: "Was he [Benny] returning like the elephant to his graveyard, to lie down and soon become ivory in whose bulk slept, latent, exquisite shapes of chessmen, backscratchers, hollow open-work Chinese spheres nested one inside the other?" (V. 40).

The reader might surmise that the lady V. prevails over this process of decay; one of her modern-day surrogates, Josephina Mendoza, actually does watch over the sleeping Profane as he dreams his peculiar dreams on the subway. Benny and the reader are forced to acknowledge Fina's control, not only because she initiates conversation with him when he wakes up but also because she apparently saves him from being crushed between the doors of the subway car. When the doors close and trap Benny, "Fina's eyes went wide like her brother's. With a frightened little cry she took Profane's hand and tugged, and a miracle happened. The doors opened again" (V. 41). Like the lady V., Fina seems to possess superhuman powers. At least, she possesses, the narrator says, a "quiet field of force" (V. 41).

Pynchon's narrative builds the reader's hopes of connecting the disparate elements of the two main plot lines even while it frustrates those hopes by incorporating coincidences and occurrences that defy belief. In some instances, the reader is encouraged to establish connections between the Benny Profane plot and V.'s history, and, at the same time, to regard those connections as ludicrous. Father Fairing, who, the reader learns in the Epilogue, knew Veronica Manganese in Malta, is the Father Fairing who established a parish for rats in New York's sewers. Apparently, Fairing fell in love with a rat named Veronica, to whom he sometimes refers in his journal entries simply as V. Certainly, the reader rejects any connection between the two Veronicas. Nevertheless, Benny Profane has an almost religious experience while on alligator patrol in Father Fairing's parish. He corners his prey in a space that seems like the nave of a church and whose walls seem to throw off a phosphorescent light, an unexplained, "uncomfortable radiance" (V. 122). Benny, like the reader, waits "for something to happen. Something otherworldly, of course. He was sentimental and superstitious. Surely the alligator would receive the gift of tongues, the body of Father Fairing be resurrected, the sexy V. tempt him away from murder. He felt about to levitate and at a loss to say where, really, he was" (V. 122). The reader, too, is

at a loss to determine whether the light is real and whether more than the execution of another alligator occurs.

Pynchon manages to keep the reader off balance. To prevent the reader from harboring any hope of seeing New York's sewer life as significant, Pynchon has Herbert Stencil encounter Zeitsuss and his alligator patrol. In fact, Stencil is even hit by a stray bullet and mistaken by Zeitsuss for one of the sewer patrolmen. Stencil, always willing to believe that accidents happen by design, learns about Fairing's Veronica. He has already discovered, by reading his father's Paris dossier, that a Paris sewer worker once saw a woman who might have been V. on one of the sewer tours. Stencil is eager to establish a link between Father Fairing's parish and V., but the reader, at this point, is not. In fact, the absurdity of Stencil's hopes makes the reader reject Stencil, at least temporarily, as a model clue-gatherer and view him instead as a humorous character obsessed with making events fit his preconceived pattern. The reader takes the cue from the narrator, who regards Herbert ironically: "Smiling his father's Foreign Service smile" for Zeitsuss, Herbert is pleased with himself for discovering valuable information (V. 132). "Having been lucky with sewers once," Herbert assumes that the information Zeitsuss will give him will be useful (V. 132). Herbert's formula for

filtering and interpreting his experience is in place; however, the reader's mechanism, at this point, is not.

V.'s history chapters also play with the reader's plot-making impulses. Pynchon makes the reader alternately, or even simultaneously, certain that history proceeds according to a preordained plan and that events do not conform to a logical scheme, ominous or otherwise. For example, the reader expects the Florence episode to have at least three purposes: to develop the character of V., to clarify the mystery of Vheissu, and to explain the connection between V. and Vheissu. Once again, the narrative promises more than it delivers. "She hangs on the western wall" advances the plot significantly but, simultaneously, chips away at the coherence that starts to build. Signor Mantissa plots to steal The Birth of Venus, the Gaucho plans to storm the Venezuelan Consulate, and old Godolphin is under surveillance because of his connection to Vheissu. The men's obsessions are intriguing and humorous; the narrator makes them even more ludicrous by maintaining an ironic distance. When Mantissa describes his elaborate plan to disguise himself as an Uffizi workman, roll up Botticelli's painting, place it in the hollowed-out trunk of a Judas tree, and leave the museum unnoticed, the reader must agree with the Gaucho that Mantissa is a lunatic. The reader is equally distanced from the Gaucho, though, whose plan is simply to

bomb the Uffizi and take the painting by force.

The reader also has ambivalent feelings about the Vheissu plot. The reader knows that Vheissu is "'a bedtime story or fairy tale after all'" (V. 193); nevertheless, the reader remains interested in Vheissu because Victoria Wren is so intrigued by Godolphin's tale. Possibly, then, Vheissu will reveal the significance of V. At this point, Pynchon introduces Mme. Vogt, who plays, naturally, the viola da gamba. Her son owns a factory, which, besides being a center for Florence's spy ring, produces medieval and Renaissance musical instruments. Mme. Vogt imagines she had an affair with Palestrina during her youth. Since the year is 1899, the reader knows that this is impossible. Still, her fantasy connects her to a past that is larger than her own. Although Mme. Vogt is a comic character, Pynchon at least hints that, like the lady V., she is more important than she appears to be. For no apparent reason, she accosts Ferrante, her son's colleague in espionage, with her knowledge of the Vheissu affair. Ferrante cannot imagine how she obtained her information. She tells him that only Florentine spies, Hugh Godolphin, and the Royal Geographic Society of London know that a barbaric race is building a network of tunnels beneath the Antarctic ice and that Venezuela is a code name for Vheissu, which is a code name for Vesuvius. Ferrante knows that the Geographic Society

has already speculated about the existence of volcanoes in the Antarctic; in fact, Mme. Vogt sounds like one of the Society's publications as she gives Ferrante a report on the size and condition of the tunnels. As the reader laughs, the reader is, like Ferrante, unnerved by Mme. Vogt rattling off this information.

"She hangs on the western wall" does not offer the reader a model sleuth. The reader rejects senile Hugh Godolphin, Soft-shoe Sidney, Mme. Vogt, and Ferrante as candidates for synthesizing intelligence. Instead, the modernist reader is far more willing to depend on his own powers of interpretation and even on his own talent for fiction-making. Superior to the characters simply because he knows more, the reader is struck by Ferrante's offhand remark to Mme. Vogt that Vheissu could stand for Venus. Naturally, the reference to Venus has implications for the reader that it does not have for Ferrante. Similarly, the reader is mildly interested in Ferrante's musing about the piece Mme. Vogt plays as he leaves her: he lets "himself wonder, for no good reason, if it had been composed by Palestrina" (V. 198). Precisely because Ferrante has "no good reason" to wonder about the music's composer, the reader has every reason to wonder about the connections of which the characters are not aware. Simply because he has privileged information, the reader suspects that the narrative holds more than its surface reveals. The reader

must contend with his dual vision: he must be scornful of and intrigued by the narrative's attempts to create interest in what may lie beneath its surface.

The novel's conclusion also makes the reader feel that the events of V. are both meaningful and random. Malta provides the logical setting for the tying up of the two major plot lines. Herbert Stencil chooses to go to Malta because his father died in Valletta, but the crew of the Scaffold is marooned on the island by chance. Sailing through the Straits of Messina, the Scaffold hits an unknown object that may or may not have protruded above the water's surface. "Pure accident" is responsible for the crew's stopping at Malta to have the vessel repaired (V. 432). Certainly, this turn to the plot pleases the reader, who might prefer to think of the accident as somehow fated by a superior force (like the force of V.) in an effort to unite the novel's main characters in Valletta, the city of V. The reader needs to find cause for what happens as much as the Navy does. The Navy's official report states the cause of the accident as "'hostile marine life'" (V. 432). The narrator encourages the reader to attribute the conclusion to a force beyond the immediate world governed by accident: "The Navy would rather blame something alive preferably human and with a service number than pure accident. Fish? Mermaid? Scylla, Charybdis, wha. Who knew how many female monsters

this Med harbored?" (V. 432). The same passage, however, also undercuts its own suggestion. The narrator's diction is the diction of Benny Profane, who is not even aboard the Scaffold at the time of the accident. The suggestion that the monster could be "Scylla, Charybdis, wha" could be Benny's attempt at humor.⁸ The reader is off-balance once again because the joke is followed by what may be the narrator's more serious concern: no one knows which female monsters wait at Malta.

At the novel's conclusion, the major characters reassemble in Malta, "a clenched fist around a yo-yo string" (V. 444). Pappy Hod of the Scaffold crew, at Malta by accident, encounters Benny and Paola, also by chance. Pappy Hod and Paola are reunited, and their potential for subsequent marital happiness meets the reader's expectations of the traditional comedic plot ending. It seems fitting that Paola gives her husband her comb with "five crucified Limeys--five Kilroys" (V. 443). Presumably, this comb is a legacy from V.; Fausto, in his Confessions, has already informed the reader that a little girl received the Bad Priest's comb. The reader, however, must fill in the missing links that the narrator omits: that Paola was the little girl and that the comb she gives Pappy is the Bad Priest's comb. Because the reader expects closure, he is willing to help create the plot: the accident that made the Malta reunion possible was

fated, and the comb that once symbolized an evil force is now the peace offering that signifies the transformation of V.'s destructive power into Paola's love. The narrative, at least on the surface, satisfies the requirement of comedy: V. is reborn in Paola as a regenerating rather than life-denying power.

This thematic closure seems at once plausible and facile. Similarly, the reader also may be torn by Pynchon's disposal of Herbert Stencil at the novel's conclusion. It seems fitting that Herbert should be drawn to Malta because Valletta is the scene of the Bad Priest's and Sidney Stencil's deaths; it also is fitting that Herbert should confront Fausto Maijstral, who owes his existence, Fausto feels, to Sidney Stencil. Sidney had convinced Fausto's father to return to Carla, Fausto's mother, who almost committed suicide while pregnant. Somehow, Fausto knows this; he admits to Herbert that he "'made it into this world through the good offices of one Stencil'" (V. 444). Pynchon also uses the encounter between Fausto and Herbert, however, to undercut the notion that the novelistic connections are feasible. The dialogue between Fausto and Herbert actually undermines Herbert's conclusions. For instance, when Stencil questions Fausto about the death of the Bad Priest, Fausto indicates that he does not necessarily share Stencil's view that the Bad Priest is the lady V.; Fausto refers to

her (it) as "'your V.'" (V. 446). He even mocks Stencil, who is desperate for clues and tokens, when he jokingly cautions Stencil against placing "'a notice in the agony column: anyone participating in the disassembly of a priest--'" (V. 446).

Actually, even though the reader probably would like to see loose ends tied the way Stencil would, the reader has no choice, at this point, but to distance himself from Stencil and agree with Fausto Maijstral that "V. was an obsession after all, and that such an obsession is a hothouse: constant temperature, windless, too crowded with particolored sports, unnatural blooms" (V. 448). The reader knows, as well as Stencil does, that the Maltese Father Fairing is the Father Fairing of the rat parish, but the reader also knows that Stencil overreacts to this news. Because Benny killed an alligator in Fairing's parish, Stencil makes a great inductive leap: Herbert assumes that V. and the rat Veronica are connected and that V. is in possession of Benny Profane's body and responsible for his illness. The reader finally must agree with Fausto, who tells Stencil, "'You are as sick'" (V. 450). The reader suspects that even Stencil knows that his clue-tracking is overdone. Before Stencil leaves Malta for Stockholm, he almost admits, in a note to Fausto, his excessive behavior, when he says that Mme. Viola's glass eye "'will do for the frayed end of another

clue'" (V. 451-52).

Once again, however, Pynchon throws the reader off balance. The novel's ironic structure entices the reader to believe that design governs plot, theme, and narrative frame. In Chapter Sixteen, "Valletta," one "frayed end" of a clue leads Stencil to a girl who once owned a glass eye. She tells Herbert that she threw it into the sea. The narrator's comment is that Sidney's charm has fled "under the same sea, back to its owner" (V. 446). The reader cannot understand the remark because he, at this point, does not know that Sidney drowned off the coast of Malta. He can surmise only that the narrator is establishing a comparison between Herbert, who can only smile "uncertainly" at his clue, and Sidney, a successful Foreign Office agent who could charm information from his prey (V. 446). The device of the Epilogue, however, permits the reader knowledge superior to that of the characters. The reader learns what Herbert does not: that the events in Valletta in 1919 bear a frightening resemblance to the events in Malta in 1956. The reader learns that Sidney was killed by a waterspout while on board Mehemet's xebec. This sea accident parallels the accident that brings the Scaffold to Malta in Chapter Sixteen, the final chapter of the novel proper. Also, the Epilogue concludes the novel with the reconciliation of Fausto's parents, just as Chapter Sixteen brings about the

reunion of another Maijstral with her husband. Each Stencil is responsible for the survival of one of the marriages; Sidney convinces Maijstral to return to Carla, and Herbert, because he brought Paola to Valletta, is inadvertently responsible for Paola's and Pappy's reunion. The reader also learns that just as Paola is a guiding force in Chapter Sixteen, V. provides the mythic backdrop for and generates the power governing the novel's characters in Malta, 1919. For centuries, the goddess Mara has had Malta in her power; in 1919, Veronica Manganese seduces Sidney Stencil, an agent of the British Foreign Office. In fact, the reader may think even that some mysterious power allows Veronica to conjure the waterspout that kills Sidney.

The echoes of 1919 in 1956 may coax the reader to conclude that the characters are unaware of the force that controls them. Even though Herbert Stencil has hints of the existence of V., he has no sure evidence of the scope of the design that unites his time to the past he is so anxious to define. On the other hand, the reader may suspect that he is in possession of this evidence because he has the narrator's information. The reader may subscribe to the novelistic assumption that the world of the fiction can be understood by the perceiving consciousness and that the reader can formulate a reading of the novel, which, obviously, is different from and

truer than the view any of the characters would have. Nevertheless, the narrator, upon whom the reader depends for assurance of V.'s existence, ultimately cannot offer this proof. V.'s final paragraphs are delivered from the perspective of an objective observer who refuses to supply reasons for Sidney's demise. On June 10, 1919, as Mehemet's xebec passed Fort St. Elmo, "a shining Benz was observed to pull up near the wharf" (V. 492). The reader supplies the connection: Veronica is in the car because a "black-liveried driver with a mutilated face" emerges and waves (V. 492). The narrator, however, does not state that Veronica Manganese is presiding; the narrator merely supplies the circumstances that tempt the reader to this conclusion. The narrator even omits revealing who observes the black Benz.

The deliberate vagueness of the passage makes the only identified observer the reader. In fact, the last paragraph is a direct address by the narrator to the reader: "Draw a line from Malta to Lampedusa. Call it a radius. Somewhere in that circle, on the evening of the tenth, a waterspout appeared and lasted for fifteen minutes" (V. 492). After the waterspout sinks the xebec, the Mediterranean's "subsequent surface phenomena--whitecaps, kelp islands, any of a million flatnesses which should catch thereafter part of the brute sun's spectrum--showed nothing at all of what came to lie

beneath, that quiet June day" (V. 492). Pynchon's narrative, like the Mediterranean's surface, does not offer revelation. The narrator's objective stance does not permit the reader to penetrate the language. Consequently, the reader is permitted no more than a detached, tourist's perspective of "surface phenomena." His attempts to use the plot as one means to establish meaning are frustrated.

The narrative both builds and undercuts the reader's expectations about the plot by hinting that what happens depends on cause and effect and, at the same time, by suggesting that events do not conform to a pattern. Similarly, the narrative, dense with allusions to myth and literature, teases the reader into attempting to define character in terms of cultural heritage. The experienced novel-reader wants V. to offer more than a plot, even if sense can be made of the sequence of events. Like Herbert Stencil, the reader is not satisfied with surface meaning.

Both sleuths feel that the surface context hints at the existence of an underlying design. It is this surface, tangled with coincidences and embedded with allusions, that entices the reader to pry open the narrative to search for the completed patterns.

The novel's principal ambiguity that hints at pattern is, obviously, the significance of V. She can be what Stencil's and the reader's touristic vision makes her:

the incarnation of Graves's White Goddess. The lady V. certainly has the trappings of Graves's ur-woman. Joseph Fahy notes, for example, that Graves's White Goddess Marian sports a comb and a mirror and that Graves considers Botticelli's Venus to be of her cult.⁹ Also, Marian has many names and assumes various forms. Often, she demands male human sacrifice as part of her worship (Fahy 8). Stencil and the reader recall that Victoria, V., Veronica, Vera, and the Bad Priest enjoy annihilating men in one way or another. Fahy goes on to establish physical comparisons between Pynchon's V. and Graves's White Goddess.¹⁰ The reader, unlike Joseph Fahy, probably will concede that V. is not the White Goddess; however, in an attempt to organize his own thinking process, resolve ambiguity, and transform the novel into a harmonious whole, he, perhaps, will make V.'s character and symbolic significance "a scholarly quest after all" (V. 61).

The lady V.'s progression from Victoria Wren to the Bad Priest suggests some sort of reincarnation. It also suggests that, since V. seems to metamorphose and assume different identities, her spirit existed before 1899. If so, then the lady V. in Pynchon's novel transcends character and time. She may even be another version of Mara, the goddess who has presided over Malta for more than two thousand years. Mehemet, the sailor who, in the Epilogue, takes Sidney Stencil to Malta, serves two

important functions: he provides an account of what may be V.'s mythological and historical ancestry and recapitulates the novel's major themes.¹¹ He tells Sidney about Mara, whose identity is founded in fact. She has lived from biblical times to the present: "'She nursed the shipwrecked St. Paul--as Nausicaa and Odysseus--taught love to every invader from Phoenician to French. Perhaps even to the English, though the legend loses respectability after Napoleon. She was from all evidence a perfectly historical personage'" (V. 461). In 1565, the sorceress Mara was taken captive by the Turks. In retaliation, she cast a spell on the Sultan's eunuchs and harem women. She restored potency to the eunuchs and inaugurated lesbianism in the harem. She also cast a spell to liberate her city of Valletta, then under Turkish rule. The Maltese won the war, history reports, because of "bad reconnaissance" (V. 464). Legend, however, holds that Mara hypnotized the Sultan and detached and placed his head in the Dardanelles on a course to Malta. The head issued to the Turkish general governing the Turkish stronghold of Malta the order to retreat.

The reader is tempted to believe that Mara is reincarnated in V. Certainly, parallels exist between the goddess of Malta and the lady V. pursued by Herbert Stencil. Mara, a species of vengeful love goddess, has demonstrated her power over men. Like Mara, Victoria Wren

uses love to pursue her own ends and then disposes of men like the spy Porpentine when they become bothersome. Mara's spell on the Sultan is similar to Veronica's spell on Sidney: both men are used and then rendered impotent in their political spheres. Mara and V. also foster lesbianism--Mara in the Sultan's harem and V. in her own domestic sphere.

Probably the most important similarities, however, are the women's abilities to transform themselves and to exert their wills to serve their own purposes. Mehemet has enumerated Mara's identities; the reader and Stencil are aware of V.'s transformations during her lifetime. In fact, the reader is even permitted to witness Victoria's metamorphosis into V. in Florence, 1899. Cowart describes the change alluded to in "She hangs on the western wall" as the movement from a religious, medieval world guided by the Virgin to a secular, modern world inspired by Venus (17). He also notes the changes that actually do take place in Florence, 1899: the deflowered Victoria becomes V., and the world, which, "sometime between 1859 and 1919 [,] . . . contracted a disease which no one ever took the trouble to diagnose," moves into the twentieth century (V. 461).

Cowart calls Florence the ironic setting for "the pupal stage of the being that will embody the culture's decadence" (18). Victoria (V.) relies on her

Machiavellian virtu, "a desirable and lovely thing purely for its own sake; and it became more effective the further divorced it was from moral intention" (V. 198). Her exercise of "individual agency," particularly effective and exciting because it is amoral, allows her to create or at least contribute to the century's chaos and decay, just as Mara's power permitted her to create havoc in the Sultan's domestic life and undermine his military strategy (V. 199). Both women are destructive because they are divorced from "moral intention."

It is not surprising, then, that Mehemet should be spokesman for modern physics and that he should summarize, in the Epilogue, V.'s major theme. He admits that the world changes but adds that "'the world and we . . . began to die from the moment of birth'" (V. 459). His appraisal of the political arena could describe the parties and conversations of the Whole Sick Crew members. He tells Sidney Stencil that the "'noisy attempts to devise political happiness: new forms of government, new ways to arrange the fields and workshops'" remind him of the sailor he saw off Bizerte in 1324 (V. 459). The sailor's diligence in painting the side of the sinking ship was nothing more than a futile attempt to cover the void, to protect humanity from the knowledge that "'The only change is toward death. . . . Early and late we are in decay'" (V. 460).

Mehemet's knowledge of myth and physics seems to point to him as a reliable source of information. The reader, particularly one trained in the modernist tradition, is eager to make both thematic and structural connections in order to construct a reading of V. He can associate the decadence of V.'s modern world with that of Mara's Valletta. In addition, the modernist reader is pleased to see the Florence chapter and the Epilogue as parallel episodes. Florence, 1899 is echoed in Valletta, 1919, where Sidney Stencil, a victim of nostalgia, renews his love affair with Victoria (Veronica). In addition to employing the same cast in both chapters, Pynchon highlights the major characters' and the reader's touristic obsession: the need to see pattern as evidence of meaning. In both Florence and in Valletta, however, human psychological design is exposed as a lie. Mehemet's sailor's painted ship is another version of Signor Mantissa's Venus and Hugh Godolphin's Vheissu. The modernist sensibility will use Mehemet's "yarn" to validate Godolphin's Vheissu as the "epistemological theme" of V. (Patteson 23).

Paola Maijstral also helps to satisfy the reader's expectations of the V.-mystery. Mara, V., and Paola can be seen as incarnations of the White Goddess. Like her predecessors, Paola has an identity that seems to violate the limitations of character and enter the realm of myth

and symbol. Like Mara and V., Paola is the obsession of men and, in this way, is connected to the ur-woman or Virgin-Venus figure. The narrator hints that Paola has symbolic weight that the characters of the Whole Sick Crew do not, by presenting her as a storybook character. She is Maltese, and the narrator tells the reader, "you suspected any nationality, for Paola knew scraps it seemed of all tongues"(V. 14). Paola seems to belong simultaneously to the Whole Sick Crew and to the realm of myth. She is the wife of Pappy Hod and an East Main barmaid, but, at the same time, she is different from the other Beatrices at the Sailor's Grave. Even though the reader first sees Paola via Benny Profane's non-discriminating consciousness, the narrator still manages to suggest that she is almost a vision of something otherworldly as she approaches Benny and Pig "through the night's accumulated smoke" (V. 15). Although she "looked like an East Main barmaid" and Pig labels her the way he would label any of the Beatrices, "'Good stuff,'" the narrator asks the reader, "What was it about the prairie hare in the snow, the tiger in tall grass in sunlight?" (V. 15).¹²

Though the allusion to Dante's Beatrice is humorous in its application to the other barmaids, it is significant or, at least, suggestive when attached to Paola Maijstral. Beatrice was Dante's guide through

Paradise; Paola is a teacher for McClintic Sphere, who learns to love, and a potential teacher for Benny Profane, who does not learn to abandon his schlemihlhood. She is a teacher for Pappy Hod, who, even though he "described her for the deck apes' amusement down in the boatswain's locker of the U.S.S. Scaffold," spoke "however with a peculiar tenderness, as if slowly coming aware, maybe even as the yarn unlaid, that sex might be more of a mystery than he'd foreseen and he would not after all know the score because that kind of score wasn't written down in numbers" (V. 15). Paola also functions as a guide for Herbert Stencil; she supplies him with her father's Confessions and accompanies him to Malta, where he thinks he must find V.

The reader is primarily interested in Paola's connections to the lady V. In the novel's first chapter, one year prior to Herbert's journey to Malta, Paola teaches the men at Morris Teflon's apartment a French song that sounds as though it could have been sung by the tourist V. The lyrics translate, "Tomorrow, the black morning, I close the door in the face of the dead years. I will go on the road, bum my way over land and sea, from the old to the new world. . . ." (V. 19). The singer of this song seems to be the archetypal tourist, who, by linking the old and the new worlds, transcends time. Interestingly, the translation is supplied not by Paola

but by the narrator, who the reader might assume has knowledge superior to that of the characters. Once again, the reader is alerted to Paola's potential to be more than she appears.

This potential seems to be fulfilled when, after journeying individually to Malta, Paola and Pappy meet by accident or by design--reader's choice. If by design, Paola resembles Odysseus' Penelope, who remained patient and faithful while waiting for her husband to return from Troy. Penelope knitted a shroud during the day and undid her work each night to save herself from her suitors and to preserve her chastity. Paola tells Pappy that she "'will sit home in Norfolk, faithful, and spin. Spin a yarn for your coming-home present'" (V. 443). Because she owns the comb that the reader believes is a legacy from the Bad Priest, the reader is tempted to regard her as a new, but very different, V. Instead of consorting with the forces of entropic decay, Paola allies herself with the regenerating power of love that makes possible the novel's (excluding the Epilogue's) comedic ending. Penelope, who seems to progress toward her own spiritual death by day, reverses her fate by undoing her work each night. The reader, willing to draw a parallel between the two wives, might see Paola Maijstral as the antidote to the lady V. and the savior of her friends through love.

Pynchon's plot and characters encourage the reader to

build up and, simultaneously, to break down Herbert Stencil's V.-story. Pynchon keeps the reader guessing by confusing him with coincidences, which, if seen in a particular way, add up to design, and by allusions to literature and myth, which, when attached to V. and to Paola, make the women more than characters. These coincidences and allusions are filtered through the reader's mental grid, which makes the connections and associations to complete the pattern. The reader is primed to seek satisfaction for his novelistic expectations; however, these expectations define him, partially at least, as a tourist like Herbert Stencil: even though the reader receives only a surface view of reality, he, nevertheless, processes his surface view of the lady V. to fit his plan.

Notes

⁸Benny Profane makes a similar attempt at humor when Stencil tells him about the possibility of V.'s existence in Valletta. Stencil asks Benny if he should bring V. a "'peace offering,'" and Benny responds, "'Wha. Box of candy, flowers, ha, ha'" (V. 389).

⁹Fahy uses the analogy between Graves's goddess Marian and Botticelli's Venus as the basis for his argument that the reader's understanding of V. is dependent on a knowledge of The White Goddess: "V. is . . . a mythological conception which greatly depends on the information contained in The White Goddess" (9).

¹⁰Fahy notes that the hair and feet of Graves's White Goddess were sources of her power. The Bad Priest has removable hair (Graves says that women with magical powers who cut their hair will not be able to cast spells), and, in the Epilogue, Veronica Manganese laments not having detachable feet. In fact, Fahy even asserts that "a mythical explanation exists . . . for the ritual

dismemberment of V." (14). He compares the Bad Priest's desiassembly to Perseus' removal of an eye and a tooth from the Fates. Perseus destroyed their power just as the Maltese children killed the Bad Priest by removing her hair and feet, and by prying loose her false teeth and star sapphire navel (Fahy 14).

¹¹Mehemet is the appropriate spokesman for Mara's mythology because he himself is a mythic figure. He tells Sidney Stencil about sailing his "xebec through a rift in time's fabric" and, in 1324, encountering a sailor painting the side of his sinking ship (V. 45).

¹²The lady V. is connected to Beatrice in Florence, Dante's birthplace. Victoria Wren stands at the intersection of Via del Purgatorio and Via dell 'Inferno as she congratulates herself on her virtú and metamorphosis into V.

Chapter Three

Spinning A Yarn

V.'s reader may want plot, character, setting, and theme to form a coherent novel. He may also want V.'s surface narrative ultimately to yield meaning or an interpretation of plot, character, setting, and theme. Pynchon, however, thwarts this traditional, typical approach to novel-reading. He also explodes the modernist notion that, in spite of the allusive and elusive quality of the text, the reader can figure out what the fiction means.

Certainly, the narrative surface encourages the reader to search for connecting tissue; at the same time, however, the narrative undermines the reader's attempt to penetrate its surface and form patterns. The narrator's arbitrary clues and conditional language--language that sets up propositions for the reader--deny the possibility of an omniscient perspective and make the only available viewpoint limited, at best. For instance, because the reader is denied access to the consciousness of the lady

V., he obtains only a surface view of her character. Finally, the reader is forced to realize that he is confined to a tourist's view of reality not unlike the views of Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil. Nevertheless, because he is trained in the modernist tradition, the reader hopes, at least, to arrive at an understanding of the novel's prevailing consciousness.

V., however, does not provide even this much satisfaction. Instead of leading the reader to an examination of a vision, the novel's product, "Pynchon's V. leads one quite readily into an examination of the critical process because it is so profoundly concerned with the human need to order fragments" (New 399). The readers of both modernist and metafictional texts are tourists in the world of the fiction because both are permitted only a limited knowledge of the characters' worlds. The reader of a metafictional text like V., however, is forced to admit, as well, the limitation of his understanding beyond the fiction's boundaries. When the narrator assaults the laws of fiction by dissolving the barriers between art and life, the reader must be ready to acknowledge his role as tourist both inside and outside the literary text.

V.'s language, allusions, and structural complexity intrigue the reader who wants to understand the lady V. The narrator of the Benny Profane chapters, Herbert

Stencil, Fausto Maijstral, Kurt Mondaugen, and Sidney Stencil help to shape the reader's knowledge. What the reader learns, though, is limited and distorted; language and point of view work together to prevent the reader from penetrating the narrative surface of V. The reader has access to only the novel's linguistic surface, which, for the reader, is "all that the case is." Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus addresses the relation of world and meaning; in fiction, Schaub notes, this liaison is expressed as the relation of language and meaning. If the reader can hope to understand the world of the novel only through language, then it is language that sets the limit to meaning. In his introduction to the Tractatus, Wittgenstein says that "'the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather--not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to set a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought)'" (qtd. in Schaub 81). We cannot know the unthinkable--what is beyond the power of language to declare. Therefore, that which can be contained or limited by language, what can be said, is what, for Pynchon's reader, has potential meaning or form: "It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense" (qtd. in Schaub 81).

Wittgenstein argues that all that happens within the world must be accidental from a perspective inside the world. What happens is also limited by what can be expressed in language of some kind. Meaning or design, however, can be imposed only by a point of view outside the world. This does not mean that events, the events of V., for instance, are necessarily accidental. It means "only that events are accidental insofar as what we can say about them, not that history--could we know it--is in fact accidental" (Schaub 82). Pynchon's language places the reader precisely on the border of accident and design. V.'s conditional language makes it impossible for the reader to determine whether or not events compose a pattern: "Pynchon's fiction perches exactly on that threshold, masking a self-conscious use of metaphor ('a thrust at truth and a lie') to concern itself with both sides, the sense and the non-sense. His use of Wittgenstein, therefore, seems to rest upon Wittgenstein's keen awareness of language as a film between the two" (Schaub 82).

Pynchon's text is metafictional because it forces the reader to perceive from his vantage point on this dividing edge. His position makes him, in terms of perspective, both participant in and observer of the fiction. Pynchon does not supply an omniscient narrator who can trace patterns and supply answers. Consequently, because

Pynchon's language is ambiguous, the reader cannot know the truth about the lady V. or about Signor Mantissa, for that matter. Mantissa, for example, has eyes that "were streaked and rimmed with the pinkness of what seemed to be years of lamenting. Sunlight, bouncing off the Arno, off the fronts of shops, fractured into spectra by the falling rain, seemed to tangle or lodge in his blond hair, eyebrows, mustache, turning that face to a mask of inaccessible ecstasy; contradicting the sorrowing and weary eyeholes" (V. 159). The verb "seemed" makes reality a matter of perception. Sunlight from the Arno does not clarify the subject--in this case, Signor Mantissa. Instead, it fractures, tangles, and turns Mantissa's face into an inscrutable mask, which teases the observer with contradictions.

This observer is the reader; the passage is directed to the reader, making him the tourist-observer of Mantissa's surface:

You would be drawn inevitably again to those eyes, linger as you might have on the rest of the face: any Visitors' Guide to Signor Mantissa must accord them an asterisk denoting especial interest, though offering no clue to their enigma; for they reflected a free-floating sadness, unfocused, indeterminate: a woman, the casual tourist might think at first, be almost convinced until some more catholic light moving in and out of a web of capillaries would make him not so sure. (V. 159)

Pynchon's narrator offers "no clue" to the mystery of

Mantissa's sadness because it is unimportant. What is significant is the reader's experience of the passage. Simply because the linguistic surface is a barrier to meaning it commands the reader's attention. Because the reader cannot quite penetrate the language to get to meaning, he is compelled to analyze his own experience, or process of perception.

In V., the reader's touristic experience of the fiction becomes more important than the plot itself. In Chapter Three, "In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations," the lady V. is introduced in the person of Victoria Wren. Supposedly, she supplies the novel's meaning or "holy center" (Hite 24); surprisingly, not one of Stencil's eight impersonations helps solve her mystery. Because the narrative surface shifts with each new "Stencilized spectator," the focus, as Schaub notes, is on the linguistic surface rather than on the scene beyond. Stencil's impersonations obscure rather than clarify what they witness for the reader; as a result, the reader attempts to tear at the narrative's surface to find the V.-story underneath (Schaub 79). What's more, the Stencilized observers do not even pretend to care much about Victoria Wren. If the observers are intrigued at all, they are curious about the Porpentine affair, which seems tangential to the main plot as far as the reader is concerned. As a result, the reader can obtain no more

than a superficial view of Victoria.

Frustrated in the attempt to move beyond language to meaning, the reader is denied knowledge of Victoria's inner life in the Egyptian episode. In "She hangs on the western wall," however, the reader is permitted at least limited access to Victoria's consciousness. The exploration of her thoughts seems to provide the reader with valuable information about the V.-story; however, a close examination of the narrative leaves the reader, once again, "stalled at the interface between the facts--the printed words--and what those facts may mean" (Schaub 103). The facts are that Victoria is estranged from her family because of her affair with Goodfellow in Egypt, that she has vowed never to return to England but instead will live as a citizen of the world, and that she still wears the comb she purchased in Cairo. Because the reader thinks that this comb can be traced throughout V.'s history and throughout the novel until it finally reaches the hands of Pappy Hod, he, naturally, wants to attach significance to it. Still, however, the reader cannot know whether or not the comb is an identifier of V., a mark of V.'s power, or, simply, another recurring dead object. Pynchon's noncommittal narrator even refuses to clarify Victoria's motives in buying the comb, which "may have been as instinctive and uncomplex as those by which any young girl chooses a dress or gewgaw of a particular hue

and shape" (V. 167). Pynchon's use of the auxiliary verb certainly inspires the reader's speculation that, possibly, Victoria's purchase was premeditated and, consequently, part of a larger plan. Even if the comb serves only as an identifier, it might be an identifier of Graves's White Goddess (Fahy 8).

Victoria Wren's obsession with power could betray her as an incarnation of the White Goddess. She wants Hugh Godolphin to trust her "less perhaps from concern for him than from some obvoluted breed of self-aggrandizement which read the conforming of events to the channels she'd set out for them as glorious testimony to her own skill" (V. 199). She fancies her skill is so great that she wants to make Hugh Godolphin and her imagined younger version of him "part of the vast system of channels, locks and basins she had dug for the rampant river Fortune" (V. 199). This passage indicates that Victoria actually controls Fortune--in her own mind, at least. It also suggests that she is preoccupied with the possibility of the reincarnation of a strong spirit or "individual agency" from the past (V. 199). In Hugh Godolphin, she sees not a senile old man but, instead, the youthful Hugh, whose "image regressed twenty or thirty years, like a wraith which nearly merged outlines with its counterpart: young, potent, possessing mighty sinews and sensitive hands" (V. 199).

The narrator tells the reader that Victoria perceives "a second and more virile self flickering about old Godolphin" but only suggests that she herself might be reincarnated. The narrator makes the suggestion: that an ancestral memory plots thought and action and that one's spiritual double can come to life for no particular reason:

If there were, as some doctors of the mind were beginning to suspect, an ancestral memory, an inherited reservoir of primordial knowledge which shapes certain of our actions and casual desires, then not only her presence here and now between purgatory and hell, but also her entire commitment to Roman Catholicism as needful and plausible stemmed from and depended on an article of the primitive faith which glimmered shiny and supreme in that reservoir like a crucial valve-handle: the notion of the wraith or spiritual double, happening on rare occasions by multiplication but more often by fission, and the natural corollary which says the son is doppelgänger to the father. Having once accepted duality Victoria had found it only a single step to Trinity. (V. 199)

The "crucial valve-handle" in the "reservoir" of knowledge may be for Victoria the notion of the double: a being that may be replicated "on rare occasions." Certainly the doppelgänger principle can explain V.'s reappearances throughout the novel. The presence of the Father and the Son of the Trinity would support Victoria in her contention that this "multiplication" or "fission" is "needful and plausible."

The notion of reincarnation is inherently

deterministic; replications manifest characteristics of the original. Successive incarnations of the lady V. retain the essence of Victoria Wren. The "doctors of the mind," the Jungian psychologists, believe that the individual psyche partakes of the "ancestral memory" and, therefore, is at least partially predetermined. The existence of V. in Herbert Stencil's world is synonymous with the existence of a pattern that will be illuminated according to a preconceived but unknown schedule of carefully-timed coincidences.

The reader might want to apply the principles of reincarnation and determinism to the historical V.-candidates in Pynchon's novel. The problem is that this passage, which at first seems to provide clarification, actually supplies no answers. The narrator does no more than set up a proposition--a possibility: if an "inherited reservoir" or collective unconscious shapes human behavior, then Victoria's commitment to Catholicism stems from what is anchored in that reservoir--the doppelgänger control. The passage's syntactical and metaphorical intricacies may coax the reader to work at its unravelling simply because it seems complex enough to promise valuable information. The if-then proposition, however, does not offer factual information. So, the mystery of V. remains. The reader does not penetrate the language to discover meaning; instead, he is once again

stalled on and by the narrative surface.

The narrator in "She hangs on the western wall" again sets up circumstances in which Victoria Wren could be a species of White Goddess. "Enchanted" by the rioting of the Figli di Machiavelli, Victoria seems to be the only female and the only stable force among the men impassioned over Botticelli's Venus or "'the female named Liberty'" (V. 211): "It was as if she saw herself embodying a feminine principle, acting as complement to all this bursting, explosive male energy" (V. 209). The narrator's "as if" draws an analogy between Victoria and a universal principle but does not actually state that even she sees herself as its embodiment. The reader knows for certain only that she remained "inviolate and calm" as she watched the bloodshed "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" (V. 209).

Like the narrator of the Florence episode, the narrator of "V. in love" sets up propositions that allude to the lady V.'s symbolic function. The reader, who was privy to some of Victoria Wren's thoughts, does not have access to V.'s consciousness. The narrator allows the reader only an external view of V., whose face and manner never betray her emotions. The reader is frustrated in the attempt to learn anything about the woman who always seems "expressionless, poised like one of her own

mannequins" (V. 401). The reader is allowed to enter Mélanie's mind but does not particularly care about Mélanie. He would, however, be interested in Mélanie's impressions of and feelings toward V. Significantly, these are absent because Mélanie is so self-absorbed; V. has importance for Mélanie only as her mirror image.

The reader is placed securely in a tourist's position, observing from the distance imposed by the narrative. The narrator's conditional language refuses, once again, to let the reader penetrate the surface of the lady V. While the Florence episode implies the power of Victoria/V. (if she is a manifestation of the White Goddess) to direct the course of civilization and control Fortune, the Paris episode focuses on V.'s alignment with the forces of entropic decay. At the age of thirty-three, V. may no longer be the world's guiding spirit; instead, she may be just another of the world's helpless victims, as individual agency, virtú, is replaced by a concept:

If she [V.] were Victoria Wren, even Stencil couldn't remain all unstirred by the ironic failure her life was moving toward, too rapidly by that prewar August ever to be reversed. The Florentine spring, the young entrepreneuse with all spring's hope in her virtú, with her girl's faith that Fortune (if only her skill, her timing held true) could be brought under control; that Victoria was being gradually replaced by V.; something entirely different, for which the young century had as yet no name. We all get involved to an extent in the politics of slow dying, but poor Victoria had become intimate also with the things in the Back Room. (V. 410)

Stencil and the reader are in a position to appreciate the irony of V.'s situation. V.'s alliance with the inanimate world, "the things in the Back Room," has not shielded her from the forces of decay. In fact, this alliance has forced the submission of her individual virtú to the destructive power of V.

Nevertheless, this irony exists only "if she were Victoria Wren." The narrator's conditional language, once again, frustrates the reader's attempt to link Victoria and V. Likewise, the connection between V. and the forces of decay is also conditional. Still, the link remains a possibility, especially if the reader believes that the lady V. makes her final appearance as the Bad Priest. If V. is the Bad Priest, then her increasing fetishism has transformed her into a being with removable, inanimate parts. And, if V. is the Bad Priest, then Pynchon's irony develops an added dimension: as both the reader and Stencil know, the Bad Priest's death during the bombing of Malta in 1945 was death by Fortune, which Victoria felt she had the necessary virtú to control.

Pynchon's use of irony and rearrangement of episodes in V.'s history reinforce the reader's conclusion that V.'s history begins with Victoria's birth and concludes with the Bad Priest's death. Irony and structure also interact in another way. The reader's access to information about V.'s demise, information that the

Parisian V. cannot have, permits him superior knowledge. Consequently, he is even more likely to overlook the narrator's conditional language and model his expectations after Stencil's view of V.'s character. The reader, particularly the modernist reader, enjoys his ironic viewpoint. He is undoubtedly pleased with the notion that V., whose design seems to have been controlling the movement of Western civilization for centuries, suffers death by an accident that falls outside the scope of her plan.

V.'s various reincarnations may suggest that the lady V. is at least associated with if not the genius of some cosmic plan. Certainly Herbert Stencil feels that his investigations reveal conspiracies that depend on her cooperation. He is certain that his seemingly chance discovery of every clue that moves him closer to V. is plotted. "V. in love," however, suggests the opposite: V. does not control Fortune as she thought she did; instead, she, too, is subject to the execution of a plan even she cannot anticipate. The irony, then, is that V., akin to inanimate forces, actually has contributed to the power of the inanimate world by means of her own fetishism and, therefore, to her own demise. It is actually the inanimate world that divests her of her individuality and replaces it with a generalization. Personal virtú gives way to V.

It is possible, then, for the reader to conclude that Victoria/V. suffers a fitting ironic demise at the hands of the powers she thought she supported and controlled. Her will bends to forces to which her fetishism consciously or unconsciously contributed. Her life (mortal and mythic), based on her own plan, is aborted by the Fortune her virtú sought to control. V.'s death as the Bad Priest is paralleled by Mélanie's appropriate death as an object of pleasure, a work of art. Pynchon's implicit comparison of the deaths of the two lovers almost validates the reader's interpretation that V. suffers a fitting modernist end. Still, the reader must not forget that this ironic conclusion is simply the fulfillment of his novelistic expectations based on the narrator's "if" and on Pynchon's rearrangement of the chronology. Pynchon's "conditional prose at the interface" is the connecting tissue that does not necessarily connect fact and fiction (what the reader makes of the facts). Instead, it places the reader in the position of knowing the facts but not knowing for certain what those facts may mean (Schaub 104). Once again, the reader is maneuvered into the position of tourist, seeking, like Stencil, external validation of his own beliefs.

Pynchon's linguistic surface prevents the reader from arriving at a definition of the lady V. Nevertheless, the modernist reader knows that not achieving a satisfactory

understanding of a character does not preclude constructing a reading of the novel. New says that the reader wants to give in to his "need to understand that work, in actuality to master and subdue it" in order to satisfy his "human need to incorporate all fragments into an imagined whole" (397). If the reader subscribes to modernism, which is both a world view and an aesthetic, then the reader will honor one of the movement's tenets: human external reality, disordered on every level, can be ordered intellectually by the harmonizing imagination in life and in art (Hite 5). And, since one way to "subdue" the fiction and find its artistic design beneath its surface is to understand the novel's prevailing consciousness, the reader embarks on an analysis of point of view, which controls his view of the novel's principal subject, the lady V. After all, the reader knows from experience that modernist texts focus at least as much on the developing consciousness of protagonists, like Virginia Woolf's Lily Briscoe and Henry James's Lambert Strether, as on the fiction's plot. Consequently, the reader of V. is coaxed, once again, into seeking fulfillment of another of his novelistic expectations: that an examination of the protagonist's psychological life will allow the reader to synthesize the elements of the fiction and to construct a coherent reading of the novel--that narrative voice is both the most important

element of and primary subject of the fiction.

Pynchon, however, once again undermines the reader's endeavor. In V., the most obvious candidate for the role of principal synthesizing intelligence is, of course, Herbert Stencil, but Pynchon frustrates the reader's attempt to see Stencil as "aestheticizing instrument" (Waugh 24). The author's metafictional device of frame-breaking (Waugh 29) in the history chapters prevents the reader from containing Stencil's point of view within boundaries. The narrative blurs the distinctions between Stencil and his disguises, Stencil and his sources, and Stencil and a less limited narrator. Consequently, the reader is unable to compartmentalize Stencil's fiction-making; Stenciled versions of history and history itself are indistinguishable. The reader ultimately cannot separate fact from fantasy in V.

An additional frame in Pynchon's novel is broken or blurred: the frame that divides the world of the novel from the world of the reader. The reader cannot use Stencil's "imaginative reconstructions" (Hite 61) of history to study either history or Stencil's psyche because the narrative's external frame dissolves. The emphasis, then, must shift from the novel as a product to fiction-making as a process. When the narrative's point of view destroys the fiction's frame and enters the realm of the reader, the reader's own fiction-making process

becomes part of the novel's scope. The reader, then, is not only similar to V.'s other tourists because he cannot define the lady V., but he also becomes one of the novel's tourists because he persists in building his own "imaginative reconstruction" of V. according to his novelistic expectations.

Metafiction minimizes the modernist focus on consciousness in order to emphasize the fictionality of the text (Waugh 14). Pynchon does so in V. partly by undermining Herbert Stencil as a historian. Because Stencil is plot-ridden, he naturally sees history as a web of interrelated events ripe for his causal analysis. Stencil is misguided in this enterprise. The reader, attempting to read Pynchon's novel this way, is also misguided because V. is metafiction, and, as Waugh notes, "Metafiction suggests . . . that writing history is a fictional act, ranging events conceptually through language to form a world-model" (48). Stencil is incapable of synthesizing the past into a harmonious whole, first, because he consciously and unconsciously approaches and avoids his subject and, second, because historical people and events "are always recontextualized in the act of writing history. Their meanings and identities always change with the shift in context" (Waugh 106). As a result, "there is no way to distinguish fact from Stencilian fiction" (Hite 6).

The reader is checked further in his attempt to understand the history chapters because, as Hite notes, Stencil is responsible for only four of the six chapters, and the chapters lack consistency in point of view (60). Also, because four have their source in Stencil's knowledge and are told in 1956, they are linked to the present, and the reader's attempt to place them on a narrative line is frustrated (Hite 62). The reader expects a history to proceed chronologically, but V.'s history does not. Consequently, the history chapters produce a static rather than dramatic effect: "for all its preoccupation with history, V. is static and spatial rather than dynamic and progressive. It is the presence of the past that signifies, not an obscured chronology that relegates history to nonexistence except as a residual force or influence" (Hite 49). Each history chapter, which functions by means of duplication and analogy, is limited because it is only "a linguistic membrane between us and what really happened," but, nevertheless, it is "a tissue without which there would be no connection at all" (Schaub 77).

André Gide said that "'Fiction is history that might have happened. History is fiction that did happen'" (qtd. in Boyd 66). Unfortunately, separating fact from fiction in V. is not the reader's only challenge. In V., the reader must also attempt to isolate a perceiving

consciousness from the remaining narrative. For instance, Stencil's contributions to history are not solely his. The history chapters are not Herbert Stencil's first-person narrations or even third-person narrations limited to Herbert's point of view. The Egypt, Florence, South-West Africa, and Paris episodes are the creations of a narrator who combines Herbert's perceptions, interpretations, and obsessions with a more objective viewpoint. The reader would like to be able to extract Herbert's view from the narrative and label it fact or fiction, reality or fantasy. This, however, is impossible because Pynchon allows the history's internal frame, which would have delineated a perceiving consciousness, to dissolve.

Chapter Three, "In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations," is, ostensibly, the product of Herbert's knowledge. Because that knowledge is undefined, however, the chapter's narrative frame also remains unclear. Having read his father's "veiled references" (V. 63) to Porpentine in the journal, Herbert, "drowsing" on the sofa in Bongo-Shaftsbury's apartment, apparently is responsible for the ensuing narrative (V. 63). The reader is told that Herbert commands very few facts; most of the chapter is "impersonation and dream" (V. 63). The Egyptian episode, then, is not simply a combination of fact and fiction; it is also the

collaboration of consciousness and unconsciousness, waking and dreaming. The reader is at a loss to determine just how Stencil's thoughts are transcribed into the words on the page. If Stencil is dreaming, then the narrative is molded largely by a more objective narrator observing Stencil. If Stencil's eight personalities are the result of a more conscious effort, then the line between narrator and Stencil is still obscured because the narrative is not in Stencil's voice. Contributing to the confusion of perspectives, the "general technique" of "'forcible dislocation of personality'" prevents the reader not only from knowing exactly what Stencil perceives but also from understanding Stencil, who, in this chapter, is always in disguise (V. 62).

Certainly, it is possible for the reader to link Stencil's eight impersonations to his preoccupation with the century's increasingly threatening inanimate forces. The observers of the Porpentine affair are increasingly subjective and meditative; they grow less concerned with the English tourists and more concerned with their own touristic obsessions. As the external plot becomes less decipherable, the reader becomes more suspicious that reality is being filtered through Stencil's mental grid. The first two observers, Aïeul and Yusef, are observers of only what appears to be the chapter's central drama. Maxwell Rowley-Bugge is a more reflective center of

consciousness, whose awareness of his own tourism and the tourism of others at least touches on Pynchon's thematic concern: universal tourism is linked to the process of entropic decay. Stencil's concern with the power of the inanimate world is further developed in Waldetar, the conductor on the Alexandria and Cairo express. He witnesses Bongo-Shaftsbury's disclosure of himself as a mechanical doll to the frightened Mildred and the irate Porpentine.

The subsequent dislocated personalities also illustrate Stencil's obsession; the reader might choose to view them as elements of Stencil's consciousness. Gebrail, Girgis, and Hanne, however, are also representative of the world of the novel, which is in a state of decay whether or not Stencil perceives it that way. In fact, the conclusion of Waldetar's section, which provides the transition to Gebrail's section, makes it impossible for the reader to segregate Stencil's obsession from the surrounding deterioration. The passage is, ostensibly, Waldetar's musing (i.e. Stencil musing in disguise), but its substance is so different from what have been Waldetar's concerns until this point that it is unlikely that the perceptions belong to Waldetar. Also, the radical shift in point of view suggests the presence of another narrator who actually addresses the reader: "The point of the green triangle is Cairo. It means that

relatively speaking, assuming your train stands still and the land moves past, that the twin wastes of the Libyan and Arabian deserts to right and left creep in inexorably to narrow the fertile and quick part of your world until you are left with hardly more than a right-of-way, and before you a great city" (V. 82). The tone of the passage is surprisingly like that of the narrative voice of the Epilogue that concludes V.: "Draw a line from Malta to Lampedusa. Call it a radius" (V. 492). The voices are the same; since the Epilogue cannot be Herbert Stencil's creation, then the language concluding Waldetar's section cannot be Herbert Stencil's language either. The line dividing Herbert's consciousness and the viewpoint of another narrator blurs because Herbert's thoughts cannot be isolated.

The narrator's direct address breaks an additional frame: the frame dividing the world of the fiction and the world of the reader. This passage forces the reader to participate in the fiction and identifies Stencil's, the narrator's, and reader's concerns as the same: the inanimate world overpowers the animate world until one is left with no more than "a right-of-way," which is defined by the reader's one-point perspective from a train moving toward the end of the track, the vanishing point on the horizon.

The perspective of the reader, then, is fused with

the narrator's perspective and provides the transition to the perspective of Gebrail, who, in section five of Chapter Three, knows that the "desert creeps in on a man's land. . . . It happens, nothing else. . . . no hostility in the desert. Nothing" (V. 82). This section of the Egyptian episode is more clearly the vision of one impersonation. Still, Gebrail's thoughts could be the thoughts of Herbert Stencil or even of the narrator of the Benny Profane chapters. For example, the observation that "the house begins to fill with desert, like the lower half of an hourglass which will never be inverted again" could also belong to Stencil, who sees V. as the guiding spirit of entropic decay or to the narrator of the 1956 episodes, who is explaining the second law of thermodynamics (V. 83). The growing desert is connected to the passing of time; the irreversibility of the world's process of decay is the root of Stencil's obsession but is also the novel's thematic underpinning.

Like the Egyptian episode, "She hangs on the western wall" and "Mondaugen's story" illustrate Stencil's obsessions but have broken narrative frames that do not perform their function of assigning each obsession to the appropriate consciousness. In both cases, Stencil apparently is telling Eigenvalue what he has learned from other sources. The Florence episode, for example, is based on what Herbert has extracted from his father's

dossier. The reader knows, however, what Stencil, using the third person to speak about himself, knows: "'Most of what he has is inference'" (V. 155). Once again, then, the reader is frustrated in the attempt to separate what probably happened in Florence at the turn of the century from Stencil's fantasy. And, once again, the reader must give up hope of identifying Stencil's thoughts. The chapter's frame offers a curious mixture of two views: Stencil's and another's. The narrator's observation that "Florence only a few summers ago had seemed crowded with the same tourists as at the turn of the century," for instance, is the narrator's and not Stencil's (V. 155). Certainly, Herbert has no way of knowing what the Italian tourist season in 1899 was like. The narrator's next speculation, however, can belong easily to either the narrator or to Stencil: "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" (V. 155). Stencil, obviously well-read on the subject of the Renaissance, would have no difficulty seeing V. as the subject of a Renaissance painting. It is also true, though, that the narrator, aware of Stencil's fascination with design, would have no difficulty commenting on Stencil's pattern-making.

Scholarly quests have taught Stencil enough to permit

him to see V. and Botticelli's Venus as reincarnations of the White Goddess and to understand the iconography of Renaissance art. Nevertheless, the reader hears the voice of another narrator throughout Chapter Seven; details about geography, history, and the Uffizi's floor plan imply the presence of a more omniscient observer. Although Herbert Stencil is capable of offering details, minute details like the precise measurements of Botticelli's canvas "enter Pynchon's work not simply as decoration but as functional elements of fiction" (Plater 129). Besides, the preponderance and accuracy of details in the Florence episode arouse the reader's suspicion that Herbert might not know the city's streets and bridges well enough to plot Signor Mantissa's escape route from the Uffizi. At the very least, the narrator's scrupulous attention to details unnerves the reader, who would like to believe that the chapter's events are framed only by Herbert Stencil's consciousness.

The reader experiences greater difficulty in sorting data in "Mondaugen's story" because the South-West Africa episode confuses fact and fiction even more than the preceding chapters do. Also, the reader becomes increasingly aware that "Mondaugen's story" cannot be told exclusively from either Stencil's point of view or, for that matter, from a combination of Stencil's and Kurt Mondaugen's perspectives. The reader feels the presence

of a better informed consciousness that seems equally comfortable in 1904, 1922, and 1956. This perceiving eye commands details that obviously are unavailable to either of the character-narrators, who, because of the limitations imposed by their character status in V., cannot pretend to be omniscient.

Herbert Stencil acquires the South-West Africa story from Kurt Mondaugen, a Yoyodyne engineer, who, at the Rusty Spoon, "yarned over an abominable imitation of Munich beer, about youthful days in South-West Africa" (V. 228). The reader's information about the past is colored first by Mondaugen's imperfect memory, second by Mondaugen's intoxication, and third by Stencil's interpretation and report to Eigenvalue. The dentist-therapist's single interruption of Herbert's story voices the reader's most obvious reservation about believing Stencil's rendition. Eigenvalue cannot quite understand how Mondaugen could have repeated accurately conversations he had thirty-four years ago: "'I only think it strange that he should remember an unremarkable conversation, let alone in that much detail, thirty-four years later, a conversation meaning nothing to Mondaugen but everything to Stencil'" (V. 249). Eigenvalue's remark intimates that Stencil's report is Stencil's fabrication; the reader probably agrees, since any information about the lady V. means "everything" to Stencil. The narrative

supports this conclusion: although Stencil "listened attentively" to Mondaugen's yarn, "the next Wednesday afternoon at Eigenvalue's office, when Stencil retold it, the yarn had undergone considerable change: had become, as Eigenvalue put it, Stencilized" (V. 228).

Stencilization of reality is obvious in "Mondaugen's story." Herbert Stencil's obsessions about Vera (V.), conspiracy, and threatening forces of the inanimate world permeate the African scenes. Even Stencil's view of Stencil colors what Mondaugen supposedly has reported about his own personality. Mondaugen was able to escape the "common dream" imposed on the guests at Foppl's villa by "Foppl the siege party's demon" because of "his peculiar habits of observation" (V. 255). Probably Herbert Stencil would credit himself with unusual powers of perception, which he would, in turn, project on to the acknowledged source of information on the German South-West Protectorate, Kurt Mondaugen. Still, the reader cannot assume that "Mondaugen's story" is governed entirely by Stencil's interpretation. The chapter's frame-breaks and modulating tone make it impossible to credit the episode to a single point of view.

Chapter Nine's disjointed narrative and confusion of perspective create a surreal atmosphere. Lines between imagination and reality, waking and dreaming, are blurred; people seem to appear and disappear suddenly. For

instance, old Godolphin, who suddenly materializes at Mondaugen's side one evening, accosts the engineer with stories about his Antarctic expeditions. The narrator does not prepare the reader for this encounter or for Kurt's encounter with Vera and Hugh. It is as though Mondaugen conjures the scenes and dialogue that provide the necessary accompaniment for Stencil's, the novel's, and his own preoccupations. Exploring the villa one day, Mondaugen encounters the famous pair discussing the 1904 siege and Vheissu: "He [Mondaugen] took to roaming the house at odd hours, at loose ends. Like the 'eye' in his dream of Fasching he now found he had a gift of visual serendipity: a sense of timing, a perverse certainty about not whether but when to play the voyeur. A taming, possibly, of the original heat with which he'd watched Vera Meroving in the earlier days of the siege party. For example, leaning in bleak winter sunlight against a Corinthian column, Mondaugen could hear her voice not far away" (V. 246). This fiction (or reality as the case may be) may be proof of Herbert Stencil's preoccupation. Still, it is difficult to credit Stencil alone with its creation.

In "Mondaugen's story," then, the line dividing objective reality and imagined reality is unclear. Likewise, the division between consciousness and unconsciousness is obscured. Delirious with fever,

Mondaugen dreams about Foppl's 1904 days. His dreams and hallucinations probably incorporate, to an unknown degree, stories Foppl has told him about his experiences in von Trotha's service and about his horse, Firelily. Consciousness and unconsciousness merge, however, when Kurt sees in his room Hedwig Vogelsang astride a male Bondel named Firelily. The shift in time from 1904 to the present implies that the incident occurs while Kurt is conscious, but its improbability suggests that Kurt is still dreaming.

Kurt's dreams fuse more than his conscious and unconscious experiences; they also merge his present with a past that is not his. Apparently, his "habits of observation" are so "peculiar" that he dreams about a past he has neither experienced nor knows extensively. The narrator says that "if dreams are only waking sensation first stored and later operated on, then the dreams of a voyeur can never be his own" (V. 254-55). Mondaugen has no idea whose dreams he dreams. For instance, he dreams that the Hereros revolted when, under Leutwein's administration, their cattle were confiscated and given to white settlers. The narrator tells the reader that Mondaugen has no idea where the dream came from and then suggests Foppl as a possible source. Interestingly, the dream is told in the first person. Of course, the reader cannot identify its narrator. The reader, trying to

pinpoint the episode's single perceiving consciousness and, for that matter, the chapter's only perceiving consciousness, must eliminate both Mondaugen and Stencil as choices. Mondaugen admits his ignorance of 1904 events, and Stencil, though he may have read about the German South-West Protectorate, could not have supplied the details that compose Mondaugen's dreams without first-hand experience. The chapter is controlled by a narrator who orchestrates Stencil's and Mondaugen's perceptions with his own.

The reader senses the presence of a narrator who knows much about history and who knows, probably, where the chapter's internal frames that divide consciousness and unconsciousness should be placed. The narrator, however, refuses to place them for the reader, who is never certain when Mondaugen is sleeping. The reader cannot decipher Kurt's dreams because they incorporate what Kurt could not have experienced. The reader's task grows even more difficult when the dreams confuse 1904 history with the novel's other time-frames. In these dreams, the narrative voice seems to have a more omniscient perspective. For example, Kurt dreams about Fasching, the German Carnival of Mardi Gras, which, like Foppl's siege party of 1922, takes "human depravity as ordinate" (V. 243). In his dream, Mondaugen finds himself in a beer hall, where "young, old, students, workmen,

grandfathers, adolescent girls drank, sang, cried, fondled blindly after same and different-sexed alike" (V. 244). The beer that "spilled at the far end of the table and swept the table's length in a great foam cascade" could be the beer that spills from foam-rubber breasts at the Sailor's Grave during Suck Hour (V. 244). The narrative voice is difficult to determine because the Fasching dream easily could be of Foppl's siege party (whose elements may compose part of Mondaugen's dream since the party is actually taking place around him) or of a Whole Sick Crew bash.

The narrative voice is questionable also because the Fasching dream's thematic underpinning is the irreversibility of the world's movement toward complete decay. The beer hall's clock, which "ticked terribly loud in strange waves of silence that swept regularly over the company," is a reminder of mortality (V. 244). The room's smoke casts the party participants' faces in "the same curious whiteness: concave cheeks, highlighted temples, bone of the starved corpse there just under the skin" (V. 244). The image could have been conjured by Stencil in his report to Eigenvalue because Stencil is obsessed with the disintegration of the animate into the inanimate. The image could also belong to the narrator of the Benny Profane plot, which illustrates the same obsession and which would exist with or without Herbert Stencil's

presence in the novel.

The undefinable consciousness that narrates Mondaugen's dream seems to comprise several points of view which are not clearly delineated. This narrative technique, frame-breaking, also obscures the transition between Mondaugen's dreaming and waking life. Kurt dreams that Vera Meroving appears at the Fasching Carnival, which seems to turn into a celebration of the dead. She whispers "'Come'" and leads him through "narrow streets, hardly lit but thronged with celebrants who sang and cheered in tubercular voices. White faces, like diseased blooms, bobbed along in the dark as if moved by other forces toward some graveyard, to pay homage at an important burial" (V. 244). The narrator's next sentence supposedly reports what happens when Mondaugen regains consciousness, but it provides no transition to 1922: "At dawn she [Vera] came in through the stained-glass window to tell him that another Bondel had been executed, this time by hanging" (V. 244). Vera's informal entrance into Mondaugen's room almost seems to be part of a dream. Her first words to Mondaugen, "'Come and see,'" echo his Fasching dream (V. 244). Nevertheless, the reader can be reasonably sure that Mondaugen is conscious because she wants to show him the Bondel hanged in the villa's garden.

The next paragraph marks an abrupt shift in tone. The narrator, who offers the reader an analysis of General

Lothar von Trotha's military expertise and statistics on the number of Hereros killed in 1904, seems to be writing a history textbook. Certainly, this paragraph, which indicates another frame-break, could not be the product of either Mondaugen's or Stencil's knowledge. Even if Stencil is a historian, it is unlikely that he knows the results of the official German census taken several years after the massacre. The paragraph's final sentence illustrates yet another shift in tone away from this newly-established objective stance. After reporting that von Trotha managed to kill 60,000 Hereros, the narrator comments that "This is only 1 per cent of six million, but still pretty good" (V. 245). The sarcastic tone departs from the dispassionate tone of the textbook historian and more closely approximates that of the narrator of the Benny Profane plot. At the same time, this snide narrator seems to be in league with the reader, who understands the allusion to the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis during World War II. In addition to extending into the world of the reader, this editorial comment breaks the frame established by time. The chapter, ostensibly about the year 1922 and really about the events of 1904, suddenly breaks into the future. Once again, the text's unexplained shifts in tone undercut the reader's efforts to contain the narrative within a single consciousness.

As "Mondaugen's story" continues, Kurt dreams less

about his own experience and more about South-West Africa during von Trotha's regime. In fact, Kurt is increasingly the voyeur and presumably dreams about Foppl's experience under von Trotha's command. Mondaugen's dreams, however, show change not only in content; they show change in style and in point of view as well. The narrative of the chapter's dream sequences grows less disjointed and more coherent. While his early dreams about the past are surreal, the later dreams are clearer and told from a more consistent, and sometimes omniscient, point of view. For example, at one point, the narrative shifts abruptly from Mondaugen's observation (or hallucination) of Lt. Wiessman stealing oscillograph roles to another of Kurt's South-West African 1904 dreams. Once again, an objective narrator does not provide a transition to prepare the reader for the shift; an objective narrator, however, does take control of Kurt's dream and, in fact, even opens up the narrative to include the reader in the fiction. The reader, who has already been made aware of the connection between the brutal acts of 1904 in Africa and the Third Reich's war crimes, is now made to acknowledge the timelessness and universality of humanity's criminal acts against itself.

The first sentence of the dream sequence supposedly is Mondaugen's (Foppl's) rationalization for killing the natives; yet it is also a rationalization directed beyond

the narrative's boundaries to the reader: "One could as well have been a stonemason. It dawned on you slowly, but the conclusion was irresistible: you were in no sense killing. The voluptuous feeling of safety, the delicious lassitude you went into the extermination with was sooner or later replaced by a very curious--not emotion because part of it was obviously a lack of what we commonly call 'feeling'--'functional agreement' would come closer to it; operational sympathy" (V. 261). The specific "'functional agreement,'" in this case, exists between the Hottentot prisoners, and Foppl and his cohorts. A prisoner who refuses to play by the rules and to bear his subjugation and humiliation in silence is mutilated and killed. But punishment for insubordination unites "the destroyer and the destroyed"; in fact, their tacit agreement seems to be part of the cosmic plan, or at least the plan determined by German colonial policy: "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 [Foppl], and he and every other black he would henceforth have to kill slid into alignment, assumed a set symmetry, a dancelike poise" (V. 264).

This "dancelike poise" is the universal Dance of

Death in which the Hottentot prisoners, von Trotha's men, and all of V.'s tourists participate. Foppl observes that the line of prisoners from the side "always looked medieval, the way the chain hung down in bights between their neck-rings, the way the weight pulled them constantly toward earth, the force only just overcome as long as they managed to keep their legs moving. . . . How many can understand the resemblance he saw? In his village church in the Palatinate was a mural of the Dance of Death, led by a rather sinuous, effeminate Death in his black cloak, carrying his scythe and followed by all ranks of society from prince to peasant" (V. 262). The Dance transcends time and unites all people regardless of their culture and social rank. Significantly, the allusion also unites the narrator of this chapter with Stencil and with the narrator of the Benny Profane plot. Following Slab's suggestion to go yo-yoing on the subway during rush-hour, Stencil sees "Vertical corpses, eyes with no life, crowded loins, buttocks and hip-points together. . . . All wordless. Was it the Dance of Death brought up to date?" (V. 303).

Humanity commits crimes against itself. Refusal by Lothar von Trotha, Foppl (and, by extension, Mondaugen), and the yo-yoers on the 5 p.m. shuttle to acknowledge the humanity of others makes those others invisible as human beings and visible only as objects. Only private

touristic fantasies and "father colonial policy" can make them real (V. 267). Humanity's efforts to annihilate itself are aided by the assault from the inanimate world. The movement of the universe toward a state of entropy is V.'s thematic thread and one of the principal concerns of "Mondaugen's story." The process of deterioration is described in the South-West Africa episode by an omniscient narrator, who, once again, has access to knowledge and can create details beyond either Stencil's or Mondaugen's ken. Kurt Mondaugen's final dream (once again, the transition from waking to sleeping is missing--the dream begins immediately following Foppl's and Vera's song) transcends not only Kurt's and Stencil's consciousness; it also pushes against the frame of the novel itself and enters the world of the reader. While direct address previously had functioned to permit the reader to draw an analogy between his world and the world of V., here, direct address actually places the reader in the position of the protagonist and makes him feel as though he were part of the fiction:

Just as its own loose sand was licked away by the cold tongue of a current from the Antarctic south, that coast began to devour time the moment its soil was arid; salt bearing winds, chilled by the great Benguela, swept in off the sea to blight anything that tried to grow. There was constant battle between the fog, which wanted to freeze your marrow, and the sun: which, once having burned off the fog, sought you. Over Swakopmund the sun often seemed to fill the entire sky, so diffracted was it by the sea fog. A luminous gray tending

to yellow, that hurt the eyes. You learned soon enough to wear tinted glasses for the sky. If you stayed long enough you came to feel it was almost an affront to be living there at. (V.266)

The reader, a participant in the Dance of Death, is one of the destroyed because he is in the place of Foppl, pursued by both the fog and the sun. He is also one of the destroyers: the narrator's substitution of the pronoun "you" for "he" throughout the dream sequence begun by this passage is unnerving. (The antecedent of the pronoun "he," presumably, is Foppl, although the reader does not know this for certain until the end of the sequence, when the "he" rides Firelily.) In fact, abrupt shifts from third to second person jar the reader from his complacency and non-involvement, and implicate him in the crimes against the natives: "He'd [Foppl] been deceived, that was his first thought: it wasn't to be like the army. Something had changed. The blacks mattered even less. You didn't recognize their being there in the same way you once had. . . . The harbor needed dredging; railroads had to be built inland from the seaports. . . . the colonists were now obliged to improve what they had taken" (V. 267). Clearly, the blacks will be used to improve the land that was stolen from them, and enforced labor will destroy them: "And so, as you moved among them, you were forced to look at them as a collection: knowing from statistics

that twelve to fifteen of them died per day, but eventually unable to wonder which twelve to fifteen: in the dark they differed only in size, and that made it easier not to care as you once had" (V. 268). The reader, to whom the passage is addressed, is in the place of the protagonist: Foppl, or Mondaugen by extension. He is guilty of colonialism on a smaller scale.

In this way, the reader is tied to the narrative thematically and structurally. Thematically, the narrator includes the reader in the world of the novel--a world in which "humanity was reduced to a nervous, disquieted, forever inadequate but indissoluble Popular Front against deceptively unpolitical and apparently minor enemies, enemies that would be with him [Foppl] to the grave: a sun with no shape, a beach alien as the moon's antarctic" (V. 274). Structurally, the chapter's metafictional frame-breaks place the reader in the position of both victim and victimizer. The novel extends into the world of the reader and implicates him in Foppl's guilt. The reader's efforts to identify the chapter's governing perspective are frustrated because the narrator, when he addresses the reader directly, does not belong exclusively to the world of V. The reader's difficulties are compounded because the consciousness responsible for shaping "Mondaugen's story" resembles Herbert Stencil's consciousness yet incorporates a vividness and an

omniscience that would be impossible for even the scholar Herbert to attain.

"V. in love" incorporates even more perspectives than any of the other Stencilized histories embrace. The fiction is four times removed from its source, which is, for the first time in the novel, V. herself. Herbert, drinking with Benny and "yarning" about V., concocts the fiction of V.'s life in Paris. His ideas are prompted by his father's journal; apparently, Porcépic told Sidney what V. had confided to him about her affair with Mélanie. Ostensibly, V.'s life in Paris is the product of Herbert's "compulsive yarning" to Benny on the evening they steal the dentures from Eigenvalue's office (V. 388). Possibly, the Paris affair is just a follow-up to Herbert's tale about V.'s giving tango lessons in Rotterdam.

It is possible, however, that there is another, more elusive controlling consciousness here. In fact, this reporter actually intrudes to address the reader familiarly when he identifies Melanie's lover as V.: "If we've not already guessed, 'the woman' is, again, the lady V. of Stencil's mad time-search" (V. 406). The narrator's collusion with the reader, the world outside the novel, shares with him the observer's stance. The narrator goes on to comment on the lady V. and on Stencil's creation of her: "Not only was she V., however, but also V. in love. Herbert Stencil was willing to let the key to his

conspiracy have a few of the human passions" (V. 407). Actually, this passage identifies two co-creators of the V.-mystery. First, Stencil is the creator of "his conspiracy." Second, because the narrator points to the lady in Paris as the object of Stencil's quest and comments on Stencil's creation of her, he (the narrator) is also claiming his own authority in the creation of the V.-story (or at least of the Paris episode). The reader, then, once again must decipher a narrative with a dual perspective. He again faces the impossible task of separating Stencil's view of V. from another perspective on V., which, in addition, has an objective view of Stencil.

Herbert Stencil's daydream of V. at seventy-six also indicates the presence of a narrator besides Stencil. Herbert as a character is again brought into the chapter's fictionalized history. When the narrator tells the reader that Stencil

departed from his usual ploddings to daydream a vision of her [V.] now, at age seventy-six: skin radiant with the bloom of some new plastic; both eyes glass but now containing photoelectric cells. . . . Perhaps--Stencil on occasion could have as vile a mind as any of the Crew--even a complex system of pressure transducers located in a marvelous vagina of polyethylene; the variable arms of their Wheatstone bridges all leading to a single silver cable which fed pleasure-voltages direct to the correct register of the digital machine in her skull. And whenever she smiled or grinned in ecstasy there would gleam her crowning feature: Eigenvalue's precious dentures. (V. 411-12)

The narrator's humorous view of Stencil's absurd dream forces the reader to be aware of Stencil in his role of character rather than or, at least, in addition to his role of narrator. The reader is also distanced from Herbert, however, because he realizes that Stencil's vision must be a fantasy if he believes that V., the Bad Priest, died on Malta before she reached age seventy-six. The narrator allows the reader to doubt the reliability of a man whose obsessions permit him two versions of the truth: V., according to Fausto's Confessions, must have been killed during the bombing of Malta, and, at the same time, V. must live on if she is to maintain her status as guiding spirit of the world's forces of decay.

Also, the narrative further discourages the possibility of seeing Stencil's view as the controlling vision because any discussion at all of Herbert Stencil's speculating on V.'s life in Paris just before World War I catapults the reader out of 1913 and into 1956, where the character Stencil is subject to the scrutiny of both narrator and reader. The link to 1956, V.'s present time, is effected by the comparison of Stencil's "vile" mind to that of a Crew member and by the reference to Eigenvalue's dentures. In the chapter preceding "V. in love," the reader was entertained not only by Stencil's far-fetched stories about V. but also by his and Benny's bumbling, dumb luck in stealing the dentures Stencil believes once

lived in the mouth of V. Because the reader knows how ludicrous Stencil's conclusion is, the narrator's description of V. grinning in ecstasy to show off "her crowning feature: Eigenvalue's precious dentures" is a mockery of Stencil.

Pynchon deliberately confuses Herbert Stencil as character and Herbert Stencil as narrator. The equally deliberate confusion of Herbert Stencil's consciousness and a more objective perspective makes point of view in "V. in love" incoherent and inconsistent. Point of view in "The Confessions of Fausto Maijstral" and in the Epilogue, however, is not inconsistent, possibly because these chapters are not colored by Herbert Stencil's view. Fausto's first-person narrative shows the author's understanding that the passing of time has altered Fausto's perspective on the past and on himself. Conscious of the deaths of his previous selves, Fausto I, II, and III, Fausto knows that no man has a "right to set forth any self-memory as truth" because "memory is a traitor: gilding, altering" (V. 307). In fact, Fausto's act of writing this acknowledgement also relegates his Confessions to the past and to a former self. In his letter, he warns his daughter: "Already you see: the 'is'--unconsciously we've drifted into the past" (V. 307). "Gilded and altering" as the narrative is, the reader can at least appreciate its coherence and learn something

about its creator's mind, the "aestheticizing instrument" (Waugh 24).

Similarly, the point of view governing the Epilogue is consistent. Once again, Herbert Stencil has no hand in creating the narrative. Instead, the narrative is third-person, limited to Sidney Stencil's consciousness. In fact, the reader, who has access to Sidney's thoughts, learns that Sidney distrusts his own touristic impressions of the cities he visits as F.O. agent: "What a warped idea of cities one got in this occupation! If no record of this century should survive except the personal logs of F.O. operatives, the historians of the future must reconstruct a curious landscape indeed" (V. 468). The modernist reader can acclimate himself to a limited perspective of the world of the novel. He can also appreciate the character's acknowledgement of his limited vision. He can especially enjoy the irony directed at Herbert Stencil, who is guilty of trying to reconstruct history according to "the personal logs of F.O. operatives." Sidney's indirect criticism of his own journal undercuts each of V.'s history chapters that Herbert had a hand in creating. Even if Herbert had been faithful to his father's logs, he still would have been faithful to no more than a tourist's view.¹³ Unlike his son, Sidney knows that history can be nothing more than a "curious landscape."

Sidney shares the term "landscape" with the Epilogue's narrator and with the narrator of "V. in love." In fact, the Epilogue's narrator quotes a passage of Sidney's journal that seems to summarize tourism in V.: "we carry on the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street. The Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future" (V. 468). Tourists including Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, V., Sidney Stencil, and the world's F.O. agents seem to be living in a present time that has nothing to do with their own present time. They live according to their mental clocks, which revivify the past in the present, and according to their fantasies, which they project onto the present to create a "dreamscape of the future."

Sidney's terms are borrowed from the novel's characters: Benny lives on the concrete street and in the psychological Street, and Herbert and Sidney make their lives a hothouse. As a result, Sidney's log entry seems to provide the reader with a thematic overview of V. Nevertheless, it is interesting that several sentences earlier Sidney undermines the effectiveness of his own journal. Why, then, would Pynchon permit Sidney's

personal log to be the vehicle for this significant communication? Why wouldn't Pynchon allow a more objective perspective this observation?

Possibly, Pynchon, once again, wants to frustrate the reader's attempt to arrive at a definitive reading of V. Even though point of view in the Epilogue has the consistency the other history chapters lack, the Epilogue still refuses to provide the reader with answers. An omniscient narrator's analysis would help the reader more than Sidney Stencil's editorializing does. Sidney admits that his log helps to create the "landscape" of history; Herbert, in turn, uses this "landscape" to create his own fiction. Likewise, the reader, subjected to a narrator who refuses to do more than hint, is compelled to restructure the fiction according to his own expectations.

Even though the Epilogue is limited to a consistent point of view (Sidney's), it is metafictional because ultimately it requires the reader to assume the responsibility of creation. The novel's tourists must create "the dreamscape of the future," and the reader, who occupies positions both inside and outside the literary text, must put together the story of V. without the help of an omniscient narrator. Apparently, Veronica Manganese is the 1919 version of the lady V. She owns the telltale comb, and she even has an eye with a clock-iris and a navel with a star sapphire. The reader learns about the

star sapphire because Sidney Stencil learns about it. It is unusual, however, that the reader's knowledge comes after the fact. The narrator's comment that Sidney had "not been surprised at the eye; no more than at the star sapphire sewn into her navel" forces the reader to guess that Sidney has already seen both (V. 487). The reader is placed in the position of tourist inside the fiction because he is not told but left to surmise that Veronica seduces Sidney at her Maltese villa.

The reader's view is not the view of a detached observer beyond the case of the world. The narrator, limited to Sidney's vision, tells the reader that Sidney has removed Veronica's shoes when she expresses her desire for detachable feet: "'See my lovely shoes,' as half an hour before he'd knelt to remove them. 'I would so like to have an entire foot that way, a foot of amber and gold, with the veins, perhaps, in intaglio instead of bas-relief. How tiresome to have the same feet: one can only change one's shoes'" (V. 488). By the time the reader reads this passage, Veronica has been without her shoes for thirty minutes. The reader receives the information after the action takes place; consequently, the reader must reconstruct the scene and, again, conclude that Sidney and Veronica are having an affair.

Like the tourist Sidney, who is prey to nostalgia and whose past becomes his present, the reader can understand

the present only when it has become part of the past. In fact, the reader learns only what has become part of the "hothouse" of the past since the past can be known only through the limited perspective of Sidney, who transforms 1919 into the "Florentine spring" of 1899 (V. 486). This means that crucial information about V., like most of the Epilogue, is filtered through Sidney's consciousness. The scene at the villa is disjointed, fragmented, and lacking in transitions because Sidney, at this point, is an F.O. agent whose perceptions are dulled by the "total nostalgic hush" that "rests on the heart's landscape" (V. 487). Since Sidney has given up trying to make sense of what is happening to him, the reader can turn to neither a reliable protagonist nor to an omniscient perceiving eye for a solution to the V.-mystery.

Unlike most of the Epilogue, V.'s concluding paragraphs, which report Sidney Stencil's death, are delivered by an objective, dispassionate narrator. Nevertheless, the reader still is not given conclusive proof that the power of V. is responsible for Sidney's demise. The narrator says only that a "shining Benz was observed" near the wharf at Fort St. Elmo on the morning of June 10, 1919 as Mehemet and Sidney sailed by (V. 492).

The waterspout that killed Sidney materialized that evening. The reader may or may not assume that Veronica, even if she is the mysterious V., had a hand in making

design appear to be accident. (The reader does not even know if she was present on the wharf. The reader knows only that a Benz and its driver were.) The detached narrator refuses to provide the reader with an answer. The "surface phenomena" of the Mediterranean and of Pynchon's prose reveal "nothing at all of what came to lie beneath" (V. 492). The reader, if he is seeking a subtext for the case of the world, must supply it. In short, he must, as Henry James says, "'do quite half of the labour'" (qtd in Tanner, Thomas Pynchon 12).

Richard Patteson says that "Pynchon's fictional territory might be said to lie along the perimeter which divides knowledge from non-knowledge. As long as the perimeter itself cannot be clearly defined, one cannot possibly distinguish between what is known and what is not known" (29). This territory created by plot, character, and narrator refuses to help the reader solve the mystery of V. The novel alternately encourages and frustrates the reader's hopes to define V. The narrative surface, rich with allusions to history, literature, and myth, coaxes the reader to turn to his cultural context for answers. At the same time, the fiction undermines the reader's efforts to look beyond the text's language; the limited point of view that controls the narrative denies the reader access to what Pynchon's fiction may mean. Consequently, the reader's view of the characters' world

is predicated only on his own perceptions, misconceptions, and novelistic expectations. The reader, a tourist inside the text, is permitted a view of *V.* hardly more satisfying than the view the characters have.

The modernist reader, however, is accustomed to coping with limitations on his view of reality as long as he can still put together a reading of the novel. In fact, he even understands that ambiguity, one of the tenets of modernism, is the point precisely because the twentieth century novel's controlling vision rarely is omniscient. Still, the reader probably wants to understand this controlling eye; more than likely, he wants to absorb the world of the novel according to its angle of vision.

V., however, does not permit the reader this comfort.

Pynchon shakes the reader from his passivity by refusing to provide a consistent angle of vision. In fact, although *V.* seems to satisfy the reader's requirements for a modernist text, Pynchon's novel is, instead, "an imitation of a novel, revivifying the ideas of plot, coincidence, and narrative chronology by twisting them to what seems their breaking point" (Golden 10). The reader, at a loss to construct a view legitimately according to the elements of fiction, must now actively participate in the creation of the fiction.

Forced to generate the connections necessary to

constitute a new reading, the reader outside the text must acknowledge his own fiction-making impulses. These impulses, which help him to co-create literature or simply to perceive, allow him to "explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (Waugh 2). Thomas Pynchon's V. is a metafictional text because it makes the paradigmatic human act of creating fiction (simply through perception) both within and beyond the bounds of fiction a thematic concern. The narrative accomplishes this goal by positioning the reader, by shifts in point of view and frame-breaking, as both inside participant and outside observer. Pattenon notes that Pynchon "clearly implies that we [readers] fill the void beyond the perimeter [of knowledge] with illusions that pass for truth" (29). The reader's act of "spinning a yarn" becomes V.'s thematic echo.

Notes

¹³It is interesting to speculate whether or not Herbert Stencil had read Sidney's Maltese journal. If Stencil had read anything at all of his father's experiences in Malta, why didn't he construct a Malta history episode?

Herbert admits to Benny that he has been afraid to go to Valletta. The narrator of the Egyptian episode likens each "seed of a dossier" to a scungille shell (V. 62). The island of Malta, however, is "the little dark deep right there in the midst of the tame shellfish, down in which God knew what lived" (V. 62). It is unclear, however, whether the "dark deep" means that Herbert has not had access to his father's Maltese dossier or simply that Herbert, who has seen all of V.'s cities, has chosen not to visit Valletta. The narrator in Chapter Three notes that "Herbert had never been [to] and knew nothing at all about" Valletta, but this does not preclude Herbert's having read the Maltese journal (V. 62). Herbert knows almost nothing about his father's experiences in other cities; yet he acknowledges having

read the dossiers and constructs a corresponding V.-story.

Whether or not Herbert has read the journal from Malta, his waiting so long to visit Valletta indicates that he has chosen to avoid rather than to approach V.'s city. The reader learns more about V. in the Epilogue than in any other history chapter because the detached narrator is more willing to approach V. than Herbert would have dared.

Conclusion

Metaphor: A Device, An Artifice

Both characters and reader take tours in V. Both construct learning mechanisms that help them to perceive their worlds, translate what they see into terms they can comprehend, and interpret their experience. Naturally, these mechanisms, these models or metaphors, are fallible because they are human creations; nevertheless, they are also necessary because they supply the Pynchon characters and reader with their only means of making sense of the modern world or of V. As a result, human effort yields only a falsified view of reality that combines self and world and that lies somewhere between subjectivity and objective fact.

The tourists in V. use their private formulas to make sense of the external world, but these formulas, or psychological grids, admit and process only the external stimuli that support the characters' preconceptions and misconceptions. These tourists use their designs to

screen out information incompatible with mental blueprints already in place and adopt "Soft-shoe" Sidney's chorus-line method of living and working in the world (V. 189). Herbert Stencil, for example, ignores information that contradicts his definition of the lady V., and he makes mere hints of her existence indisputable facts. Benny Profane does not seem to head his own chorus line, but his non-design is, in fact, a design--the generalized Street, which sanctions his indiscriminate, haphazard life.

Thomas Pynchon, however, does more than make tourism V.'s thematic concern; he also makes it the novel's structural principle. Human fiction-making, an act of perception and, sometimes, of survival, is the thematic focus both inside and outside the literary text. Pynchon places the reader in the position of tourist, who is caught up in V.'s plot as he participates in Herbert Stencil's quest for a solution to the V.-mystery, but who, at the same time, observes Herbert Stencil's dilemma from his reader's stance outside the novel's bounds.

Like the characters', the reader's acts of perception are dictated by his mental grid. Because he is in the process of reading a novel, his construct takes the form of his novelistic expectations. The reader's knowledge of myth, history, and literature, as well as his sensitivity to the author's manipulation, determines his responses to the novel. So, though interested in Herbert Stencil's

ideas and in the clues at Stencil's disposal, the reader also is confident of his own ability to extract meaning. He depends on his ability to formulate his own reading of V., which, simply because he is observing rather than living in the world of V., is different from, superior to, and, probably, an ironic comment on the characters' visions.

This reader is, more than likely, trained in the modernist tradition and a subscriber to the notion that it is the artist's and, finally, the reader's task to make sense of a chaotic world (in the artist's case) and of a chaotic novel (in the reader's case). Consequently, the modernist reader is not disturbed when he discovers that Pynchon's novel ultimately does not yield a coherent view of the lady V. because a coherent view of the lady V. is not the point. The modernist reader does expect, however, that a coherent view of the world of V. is the point--that an exploration of point of view and an examination of narrative structure will yield understanding of some sort.

Pynchon's text, however, frustrates precisely this expectation. Understanding is the point but as a process rather than as a product or body of knowledge. Because V. is metafiction and obliterates the boundary between the world of the fiction and the world of the reader, reality outside the text is part of the fiction. Because the reader finds point of view limiting, inconsistent, or

multiple at crucial points in the novel and a deterrent to understanding, he must draw on his own novelistic expectations and on those the narrative teases him with in order to construct a fiction that makes sense. As Raymond Federman says, "the reader will be the one who extracts, invents, creates a meaning and an order for the people in the fiction. And it is this total participation in the creation which will give the reader a sense of having created a meaning and not having simply received, passively, a neatly prearranged meaning" (14). Because the reader is a participant-observer, the novel's thematic focus and the reader's focus split: the fiction takes place simultaneously inside and outside the text's bounds and the reader must be, simultaneously, the literature's critic and co-creator.

By defining the act of human perception as fiction-making, Thomas Pynchon draws attention to the fact that what one can know is limited to what one can contain in a design. And if what one can know is no more than what one can express in a metaphor of some sort, then language (or another form of expression) sets a limit to human knowledge. V. seems to incorporate what Federman claims will be the primary purpose of fiction of the future: "to unmask its own fictionality, to expose the metaphor of its own fraudulence, and not pretend any longer to pass for reality, for truth, or for beauty" (8).

This notion, of course, is not new to contemporary American writers. Tanner notes that American writers have always "felt how tenuous, arbitrary, and even illusory, are the verbal constructs which men call descriptions of reality" (City of Words 27). Certainly, Pynchon does not let his reader forget that metaphor is "a device, an artifice"; he even undercuts his own novel in its attempt to convey meaning (V. 326). In fact, Thomas Pynchon and his readers, if they are to give meaning to life by means of "its recounted form, in its verbalized version" (Federman 8), "must reconstruct a curious landscape indeed" (V. 440).

Works Cited

- Boyd, Michael. The Reflexive Novel: Fiction as Critique.
London: Associated U.P., 1983.
- Cooper, Peter L. Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and
the Contemporary World. Berkeley: U. of California
P., 1983.
- Cowart, David. Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion.
Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P., 1980.
- Fahy, Joseph. "Thomas Pynchon's V. and Mythology."
Critique 18 (1977): 5-17.
- Federman, Raymond. "Surfiction--Four Propositions in
Form of an Introduction." Surfiction: Fiction
Now and Tomorrow. Ed. Raymond Federman. Chicago:
Swallow P., 1975. 5-15.
- Golden, Robert E. "Mass Man and Modernism: Violence in
Pynchon's V." Critique 14 (1972): 5-17.
- Hartt, Frederick. History of Italian Renaissance Art.
Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969.
- Hite, Molly. Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas
Pynchon. Columbus: Ohio State U.P., 1983.
- Hutcheon, Linda. Narcissistic Narrative: The

- Metafictional Paradox. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier U.P., 1980.
- New, Melvyn. "Profaned and Stencilized Texts: In Search of Pynchon's V." The Georgia Review 33 (Summer, 1977): 395-412.
- Patteson, Richard. "What Stencil Knew: Structure and Certitude in Pynchon's V." Critique 16 (1974): 30-44; rpt. Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon. Ed. Richard Pearce. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981. 19-29.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. Principles of Philosophy. Vol. 1 of Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce. Ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. 8 vols. Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1931-58.
- Plater, William. The Grim Phoenix. Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1978.
- Pynchon, Thomas. V. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1963.
- Richardson, Robert O. "The Absurd Animate in Thomas Pynchon's V.: A Novel." Studies in the Twentieth Century 9 (Spring, 1972): 35-58.
- Schaub, Thomas. Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity. Urbana: U. of Illinois P., 1981.
- Scholes, Robert. Fabulation and Metafiction. Urbana: U. of Illinois P., 1979.
- Slade, Joseph W. Thomas Pynchon. Writers for the 70s Series. New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1974.
- Tanner, Tony. City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970.

New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

---. Thomas Pynchon. London: Methuen, 1982.

Waugh, Patricia. Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of
Self-Conscious Fiction. London: Methuen, 1984.

Vita

Date of Birth: August 21, 1952

Place of Birth: Orange, New Jersey

Parents: Alphonse J. Toia and Rose M. Toia

Education

1986 Ph.D. in English, Lehigh University
1976 M.A. in English, Lehigh University
1974 B.A. in English, Douglass C. (Rutgers U.)

Teaching

1985 Allentown College of St. Francis De Sales
1978-1985 Teaching Assistant, Lehigh University
1977-1978 Warren Hills Regional High School
1977 Northampton County Area Community College
1976-1977 Learning Achievements, Inc.

Honors

1983-1984 Packard Fellowship, Lehigh University
1982 Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation
Scholarship
1974-1976 Academic Scholarships, Lehigh University