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The Function of Paranoia in Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow

Funkce paranoie v Pynchonově románu Duha gravitace

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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ABSTRAKT (CZ)

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá funkcí paranoie, která se nachází v knize Thomase Pynchona *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchonův román je rutinně považován za jedno z nejlepších děl Americké literatury, které vyšlo po druhé světové válce a žádná diskuse o této knize se nemůže vyhnout tématu paranoie. Použití slova *paranoia* sahá až do doby Hippokratovy a po staletích přidávání různých významů není již tento pojem omezen pouze na lékařskou komunitu. Poté, co toto slovo dosáhlo populárního použití neexistuje shoda ohledně definice tohoto pojmu. Nyní máurčitou svobodu, kterou Pynchon běžně využívá.

Paranoia v tomto textu odolává izolaci. Specifický přístup k pochopení její funkce závisí na třech částech. Nejprve musí čtenář identifikovat nesčetné formy paranoie rozšířené skrz *Gravity's Rainbow*. Dále je třeba pochopit, proč konkrétní příklad představuje formu paranoie ve fiktivním světě Pynchona. A konečně, čtenář musí rozeznat, proč je izolovaná forma paranoie přítomna a čeho chce Pynchon dosáhnout její přítomností.

Paranoia, která se nachází v *Gravity's Rainbow* nemá pevný význam. Toto je Pynchonovo vědomé rozhodnutí a jeho hlavním cílem je destabilizovat celý příběh, což je nesmírná síla paranoie, kterou Pynchon pravidelně používá. Proto se funkce paranoie v tomto románu točí nejvíce kolem nestability. Je to epidemie a porozumění funkce paranoie v tomto textu umožní čtenáři pochopit masivní roli, kterou hraje v tom, co je považováno za jedno z nejdůležitějších děl americké literatury, které vyšlo po druhé světové válce.

ABSTRACT (EN)

The present MA thesis focuses on the function of paranoia found in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon's novel is routinely considered one of the finest pieces of American fiction to emerge after World War II and no discussion of this book can avoid the topic of paranoia. Its usage dates back to the time of Hippocrates and, after centuries of addition, the term paranoia is no longer confined to the medical community. After entering popular usage there is no consensus as to how this term is defined. It now possesses a sort of freedom that Pynchon routinely exploits.

Paranoia resists isolation in this text. The specific approach to understanding its function is dependent on three parts. First, the reader must identify the countless forms of paranoia spread throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. Next, one must understand why a specific example from the novel represents a form of paranoia in Pynchon's fictional world. Finally, the reader must recognize why an isolated form of paranoia is present and what Pynchon hopes to achieve through its presentation.

The paranoia found in *Gravity's Rainbow* has no fixed meaning. This is a conscious decision on the part of Pynchon and its central goal is to destabilize the entire narrative, which is a central part of paranoia's immense power regularly employed. Therefore, the function of paranoia within this novel first revolves around instability. It is an epidemic and understanding paranoia's function within this text enables the reader to understand the massive role it plays in what is regarded as one of the most important pieces of American literature to emerge post-World War II.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The current political rhetoric within the United States forces the individual to acknowledge a crossroads the entire population faces. Mass shootings, racism, xenophobia, and immigration are topics vehemently discussed pitting people against one another. There are countless other issues facing this country. The rationality of proper discourse, to a large extent, no longer exists because of an interchangeable They and We depending on the person speaking. In short, the United States is a paranoid society with no available solutions needed to calm the current political, social, and cultural situation.

It is a rare occurrence for a novel to simultaneously gaze into the past and present complete with eyes focused on an unknown future by acknowledging the above statement, yet Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) is a rare piece of literature that accomplishes this feat equally adept at displaying the reach of America's paranoid tentacles into settings both inside and outside its national boundaries. Paranoia, and this needs emphasis, is not something new to the United States - it is part of the American psyche. The forthcoming examples are provided in order to highlight examples revolving around America's political, social, and cultural context within the twenty-first century and, in doing so, displaying why a discussion on paranoia is needed.

Bush v. Gore (2000) was a Supreme Court decision giving George W. Bush the state of Florida's electoral votes, which decided his presidency. Bush lost the popular vote. This is an excellent example that displays either mistrust or faith in the overall institution of American government entirely dependent on the personal choice of tribe. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 shattered the false belief of the United States as an invincible fortress. The invasion of

Afghanistan occurred shortly after these attacks with overwhelming public support¹ accompanied by a military incursion into Iraq two years later. The U.S. government's initial reasonings behind this war followed the same pretense as the former. That story would change numerous times.

The victor of the 2008 presidential election was Barack Hussein Obama. However, it is his "otherness" in regards to the default religion, gender, and race of America - meaning Christian, white, and male - that bears brief examination in regards to paranoia. One of many beliefs hurled at this mix-raced man identifying as African-American included an attack on religion. Many thought Obama identified as Muslim. He is Christian. The polls regarding this topic always differ depending on methodology. Segments of the population, and again this number will vary depending on the poll, believed Obama to be a Socialist and/or Communist with doubt cast as to whether or not this man was born in the United States. This harkens quickly back to post-September 11 Islamophobia, which continues to this day, and Cold War paranoia coupled with a heavy dose of racism and xenophobia. There were also demands for a birth certificate from certain elements of American society including the future president Donald J. Trump. The birther movement would continue throughout the entirety of Obama's presidency even after the release of a long-form birth certificate in 2011.

In Trump's June 2015 presidential candidacy announcement he asserted: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. ... They're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems with us."² They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists, and some, I assume, are good people."³ Trump's campaign slogan, and unofficial catchphrase of his presidency, is "Make America Great Again." That, again, means

¹ Frank Newport, "More Americans Now View Afghanistan War as a Mistake: Republicans most likely to say the war was not a mistake," *Gallup.com*, Gallup, Feb 2014 <<https://news.gallup.com/poll/167471/americans-view-afghanistan-war-mistake.aspx>> 14 Nov 2018.

² This is not a typographical or grammatical error.

³ Adam B. Lerner, "The 10 best lines from Donald Trump's announcement speech," *Politico.com*, Politico, June 2015 <politico.com/story/2015/06/donald-trump-2016-announcement-10-best-lines-119066> 15 Nov 2018.

numerous things entirely dependent on the individual with no clear consensus. His own words, from the 2017 inaugural address, make an interpretation of "Make America Great Again" either more difficult or easier to understand. It also exists in a sort of vacuum complete with the ability to alter as the situation demands. Trump stated the following in this address to the nation:

Mothers and daughters trapped in poverty in our inner cities, rusted out factories, scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation, an education system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge, and the crime, and the gangs, and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops now.⁴

After factoring in alleged or proven Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, which, if true, would amount to nothing short of information warfare, various protest movements, white supremacist violence, mass shootings with the debate that regularly follows, and the hotly politicized immigration issue then one has a decent understanding of the current political, social, and cultural climate in the United States as of now. This list is by no means exhaustive. And none of this is new.

Thomas Pynchon possesses a preternatural gift for understanding the force of destabilization that courses through the veins of the United States expressed by the above examples and many others left unmentioned. The individual attributes of any certain issue differ but play into the larger function of paranoia prominently displayed in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Paranoia in this text, and in the real world, is malleable and driven by instability. Brian Jarvis writes:

The metastasis of powerful global organizations, information glut, and omnipresent surveillance technologies provide the material conditions in which paranoid fantasy can flourish. However, it is worth noting that in Pynchon paranoia is almost always justified: there *are* huge conspiracies and people *are* being controlled and duped and surveilled.⁵

⁴ Politico Staff, "Full text: 2017 Donald Trump inauguration speech transcript," *Politico.com*, Politico, Jan 2017 <politico.com/story/2017/01/full-text-donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-233907> 15 Nov 2018.

⁵ Brian Jarvis, "Thomas Pynchon," *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945*, Apple Books, ed. John N. Duvall (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2012) 639-40.

This is the opinion of many critics, yet Jarvis seems to recognize the limitations of his own assertion. He then writes, "This key term [paranoia] is also problematized by its very ubiquity."⁶ That ubiquity is power within *Gravity's Rainbow* and only after unraveling the various aspects of this term can one begin to understand its authority regarding the function of paranoia within this text.

However, the focus should be on "an understanding." There is no shortage of studies on this novelist. Jarvis notes: "Pynchon criticism is almost as vast and variegated as the author's own writing."⁷ One should first recognize *Gravity's Rainbow* as an excellent example of the Barthesian writerly text defined here: "A 'writerly' text ... makes demands on the reader; he or she has to work things out, look for and provide meaning. ... It also makes the reader into a producer."⁸ This is a crucial approach to this novel. Pynchon oftentimes battles with the concept of meaning and, when this occurs, the reader must become active in excavating and analyzing conveyed information.

Postmodernism is another term associated with Pynchon and *Gravity's Rainbow* on a consistent basis. "Pynchon is routinely referred to as a quintessentially postmodern writer."⁹ There are a few elements of postmodern theory, if one can safely call it that, useful in understanding paranoia within this text. But the postmodern debate is best avoided. Its various meanings are too splintered to reach anything approaching a firm explanation. This is also a reductive approach when dealing with a novel such as *Gravity's Rainbow* that, with the exception of few theories, would never do justice to an explanation regarding the functional aspects of paranoia found in this text.

⁶ Jarvis 640.

⁷ Jarvis 635.

⁸ J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 725-6.

⁹ Jarvis 636.

Daniel W. Smith's "Introduction" to Gilles Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1998) asserts the following: "The fundamental idea behind Deleuze's 'critique et clinique' project is that authors and artists, like doctors and clinicians, can themselves be seen as profound symptomatologists."¹⁰ Paranoia's origins did originate in the medical community, while *Gravity's Rainbow* resides largely within the critical realm of literature. Therefore, the study of paranoia's function in Pynchon's text could benefit from both a critical and clinical examination as Deleuze envisioned. Smith explains a crucial part of Deleuze's methodology in the ensuing passage:

This encounter between literature and medicine was made possible, Deleuze argues, by the peculiar nature of the *symptomatological* method. Medicine is made up of at least three different activities: symptomatology, or the study of signs; etiology, or the search for causes; and therapy, or the development and application of a treatment.¹¹

Deleuze is quick to assert that the symptomatological method exists within the arts as much as it does to medicine.¹² This, in short, is a brilliant line of thinking perfectly equipped to enhance the various modes of paranoia Pynchon presents in this novel. The only problem lies with the application of a treatment because the core function of paranoia in this text is its destabilizing nature with the ability to mutate and then fragment into various forms as Pynchon dictates.

The second chapter's initial aim is to first confront paranoia from a historical, medical, and definable background. It is not possible to analyze its function in this text without knowledge of its origins. This is where, from the very beginning, one can find the scattering and destabilizing nature of this term that aids Pynchon's depiction of paranoia in this novel. The first subsection of this chapter deals with the concept of a "difficult book" leading to a brief discussion of "making sense." These debates are there in order to assist the reader's entry into the text from a critical standpoint due to the sheer volume of information found in *Gravity's*

¹⁰ Daniel W. Smith, "Introduction: 'A Life of Pure Immanence': Deleuze's 'Critique et Clinique' Project," *Essays Critical and Critical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso Books, 1998) xvii.

¹¹ Smith xvi.

¹² Smith xvi.

Rainbow. The overall approach is to examine each of the four sections within this text sequentially in order to impose some sort of rationality on the irrational beginning with a thorough analysis of Pirate Prentice's dream sequence. This also includes the different ways a first-time and seasoned reader might approach this opening. Still located within this first subsection a discussion on the nature of reality in a fictive world is present as knowledge now enters the argument before moving quickly to epistemology and the epistemological break. This enforces one central notion of Pynchon's paranoiac poetics: knowledge is a powerful currency in this text with imposed limitations.

The penultimate subsection of this second chapter revolves around Leo Bersani's exquisite essay "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature." This is, arguably, one of the most important essays written specifically on paranoia found in the critical discourse concerning *Gravity's Rainbow*. Bersani looks at paranoia from various angles that reinforce a central argument about its usage within this text: it is an inherently unstable word and Pynchon's meticulous usage only enhances that. An introduction to Tyrone Slothrop - the closest individual this novel has to a protagonist - also appears for the first time in chapter two's final subsection with the closing part of this chapter moving from "Beyond the Zero" to the second part of *Gravity's Rainbow* entitled "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering." However, the initial Pynchonian constructs found in this second chapter regarding the function of paranoia are of central importance because Pynchon consistently returns to these attributes oftentimes in an expanded form.

Liminality is one of chapter three's major topics. This pertains to Monaco and Nice in terms of actual place, but also involves Tyrone Slothrop's status as an individual. Monaco, in particular, serves as something close to a holding cell before Slothrop crosses what is no longer a national border in the traditional sense. Discussion involving Slothrop's loss of individualism and

power also begins in this chapter after factoring in domination, which adds another dimension to the fractured nature of Pynchonian paranoia. Fragmentation is also well underway.

Questions and answers, an offshoot of knowledge and power within this text, are found within the first subsection of chapter three. The loss of both facets contribute further to a sense of destabilization so heavily present within this text that then leads to an analysis on four maxims entitled "Proverbs for Paranoids" in this second subsection. The employment of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) also occurs in this subsection with the initial concern centered around facts and clarity.

A discussion on nationality, a pronounced element of Slothrop's continued fall into the role of the non-individual found in chapter three, begins in the third subsection. This ties into the depiction of the American Military Police Corps, Nazis, the Japanese, and John Wayne. Bertrand Russell writes in the introduction to *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* the following belief Wittgenstein asserts in this text: "First, there is the problem of what actually occurs in our minds when we use language with the intention of meaning something by it; this problem belongs to psychology."¹³ Exploring the psychological ramifications of this aforementioned encounter through a critical approach dealing with the non-individual Tyrone Slothrop is fascinating as is the discussion centered around Pynchonian freedom presented in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Erik. S. Roraback also provides useful information dealing with this matter.

In summary, Pynchon heaves the following at the reader during this third chapter: liminality, a loss of individualism, the non-individual, domination, fragmentation, questions, answers, facts, clarity, language, nationality, and freedom. This is a disparate group of traits that convey Pynchon's widespread approach in dealing with paranoia. None of this is logical nor is it

¹³ Bertrand Russell, "Introduction," *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Routledge, 2001) x.

supposed to be when the fractured nature of paranoia found in *Gravity's Rainbow* behaves in this manner.

The argument in this chapter's fourth subsection involves some of the Zone's formal constructs with the principal thought revolving around its status as a world within a world. Benedict Anderson's thoughts on "nation-ness" accompany Brian McHale's theories on postmodernism in strict relation to the Zone. The latter's thoughts on plural worlds is one of the few times postmodernism enters this argument. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* adds to the ideas involving the status of the state and the overall complexity Tyrone Slothrop finds himself in. The mass movement of people intermingles with Benedict Anderson's thoughts on "nation-ness" along with the treatment of history found throughout this subsection. Returning a final time to McHale in the penultimate subsection, the argument revolves around decentering and fragmentation before concluding this third chapter with the Deleuzian concept of "becoming" in relation to both the "scattering" of Tyrone Slothrop and the entirety of *Gravity's Rainbow* itself.

The penultimate chapter's principal aims are to show the various approaches Pynchon employs to methodically disassemble this text. After the "scattering" of Slothrop the reader faces many questions which undoubtedly includes the following: Why and how should this text continue? The first subsection addresses this. According to various critics Tyrone Slothrop holds *Gravity's Rainbow* together and the reader would logically think he permanently exits this novel after this "scattering," yet this does not happen. Pynchon then begins to destroy *Gravity's Rainbow*. In order to understand Pynchon's strategical methods used to shatter this novel the focus employs the Deleuzian concept of the spontaneous fragment found in the "Whitman" essay in chapter four's second subsection.

This analysis begins with Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake before moving onto Tchitcherine and Enzian. There is clear evidence of the Deleuzian fragment present in both examples. But Pynchon's central goal is to destroy this text by adding another layer of hostility for the reader. He achieves this, as Deleuze suggests, by writing in fragments with "The Story of Byron the Bulb" providing an excellent example. "The Story of Byron the Bulb" is coherent for the most part especially after comparing it to other incidents found in "The Counterforce," but Pynchon then chooses to weaponize language thus enforcing a further annihilation of logic.

The weaponization of language in chapter four's third subsection is found especially in the discussions on two subsections entitled "Shit 'N' Shinola" and "Mom Slothrop's Letter to Ambassador Kennedy" from the final episode in "The Counterforce." Language used in these subsections display a final and thorough destruction of this text. Wittgenstein's thoughts are again relevant as Russell, once more, points out in the introduction to *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "[T]here is the problem as to what is the relation subsisting between thoughts, words, or sentences, and that which they refer to or mean; this problem belongs to epistemology."¹⁴ Russell continues, "[T]here is [also] the problem of using sentences so as to convey truth rather than falsehood; this belongs to the special sciences dealing with the subject-matter of the sentences in question."¹⁵ Pynchon already went to war with epistemology, truth, and falsehood. He is the winning party.

The final subsection of chapter four, and of this thesis, discusses two points. First, the argument returns to Bersani's essay in order to discuss final questions and answers before moving into a treatment of "They" and "We" prominently displayed throughout this novel. These final questions and answers are important because no reader leaves *Gravity's Rainbow* without

¹⁴ Russell x.

¹⁵ Russell x.

various theories, interpretations, and questions. With each reading the cycle will continue. The setting, completely disregarding time once more, now moves to 1970s America in the final scene of Pynchon's novel.

Brian Jarvis writes, "A defining feature of Pynchon's fiction is the way it vigorously resists summation due to its scope, complexity, and openendedness."¹⁶ This is true to a degree. A complete and total summation of this novel is not attainable. But another defining feature found in *Gravity's Rainbow* is paranoia present in various forms that mutate constantly according to Pynchon's rules. This instability therefore characterizes the function of paranoia throughout the entirety of this novel even after its disassembling. There will always be another reading coupled with various interpretations and theories. Pynchon, the puppet master, seems aware of this while the reader can do nothing but submit to the paranoid madness found within the pages of this text presenting a world that increasingly looks not so distant from the one we currently inhabit.

¹⁶ Jarvis 635.

Chapter 2: Confronting Paranoia

2.1: Historical Origins

For centuries the term paranoia remained within the strict confines of the medical community. This is not the case now. It is a word used so frequently its entrance into the realm of colloquial speech is not debatable. Colloquial language, however, can distort a term mainly by way of addition and paranoia is no exception. Its various meanings currently reject reification by delving into the abstract resulting in a term, at times, undefinable depending on its usage. *Gravity's Rainbow* takes full advantage of this. Roger Mexico, in conversation with Pirate Prentice, states the following in the opening pages of this text: "It's a great swamp of paranoia."¹⁷ The reader needs no context in this example to ascertain the meaning of "paranoia" found in Mexico's statement thus granting this word a sort of linguistic independence. Paranoia's origins, which spans centuries, merits examination for two reasons. First, one needs to understand its evolution from a medical term into colloquial English now teeming with disparate meanings. Paranoia is also a dominant theme found in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Paranoia was first coined by Hippocrates around 460 BC.¹⁸ He did so by "putting the Greek words for 'beside' (para) and 'mind' (nous) to create a word that literally meant 'out of one's mind.'¹⁹ High fever, according to Hippocrates, exacerbated deliriums "that might include irrational fears about other people."²⁰ Paranoia's presence since that time remains prevalent by regularly appearing throughout literature and history.²¹ The forthcoming examples from more recent times will display further additions regarding paranoia's characteristics.

¹⁷ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage Books, 2013) 39.

¹⁸ Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman, *Paranoia: The Twenty-First Century Fear* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 21.

¹⁹ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²⁰ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²¹ Freeman, Freeman 21.

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) linked paranoia and depression together.²² "This association with depression is typical of the way paranoia was seen until the rise of professional psychiatry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."²³ Venturing into the eighteenth century the text *Nosologia Methodica* (1763), written by François Boissier de Sauvages de Lacroix, was "a hugely important work that attempts the first scientific classification of diseases."²⁴ A significant part of this book's focus was mental illness, which included paranoia.²⁵ "For Sauvages, 'paranoia' denoted a form of derangement, or madness, associated with high fever but also with dementia."²⁶ Johann Heinroth (1777-1843) then refined the meaning of paranoia by addition which included "delusions (or false ideas) that occurred without the presence of a fever."²⁷ The following is important to note: "Paranoia was still firmly locked into a discourse of madness, irrationality, and delirium."²⁸ It is within this discourse that "Heinroth made room for delusions that resulted not merely from physical illness but also from disorders of the mind."²⁹ Finally, Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) and Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926) regarded paranoia as a "symptom of psychosis"³⁰ thus adding to Heinroth's findings by further linking it with madness. This is the medical community's history of paranoia provided by Daniel and Jason Freeman's *Paranoia: The Twenty-First Century Fear* and the structure provided is enough to chart paranoia's growth from 460 BC to modern times before colloquial vagueness enshrouds this term.

²² Freeman, Freeman 20.

²³ Freeman, Freeman 20-1.

²⁴ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²⁵ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²⁶ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²⁷ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²⁸ Freeman, Freeman 22.

²⁹ Freeman, Freeman 22.

³⁰ Freeman, Freeman 23.

Given this structure let us now examine in totality the symptoms or causes accumulated from the medical community over the centuries. The forthcoming list is lengthy and varied. It encompasses high fever, deliriums, depression, derangement, and dementia. Delusions appear in two forms, both with and without high fever, that could stem not only from physical illness but also mental disorders. Irrationality, psychosis, and madness are also prevalent. However, each of these symptoms possess myriad meanings both in isolation and in the extended forms accumulated over centuries and collected here. From its inception to now paranoia is a scattered entity which grants this term immense power that Pynchon purposely exploits. Providing examples from *Gravity's Rainbow* using the aforementioned symptoms or causes ranging from Hippocrates to Bleuler and Kraepelin would not be a difficult task. But it would be tedious and ultimately worthless because Pynchon revels in the instability found in a word such as paranoia. In regards to the medical community one normally expects a certain amount of cohesiveness and that, as shown, did not occur. The addition of symptoms over time never led to a more concise meaning of paranoia as a medical diagnosis or term. Clarity became lost as its meaning expanded resulting in something more abstract and undefinable. This lack of cohesiveness also takes place whilst examining paranoia as a definable term in combination with its etymological roots from two well-respected dictionaries.

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Fifth Edition* provides two definitions. The first is as follows: "Irrational distrust or suspicion of others, especially as occurring in people with psychiatric disorders such as paranoid personality disorder and schizophrenia[.]"³¹ Regarding usage the example given is, "[P]aranoia about neighbors stealing from his vegetable garden."³² Paranoia's second definition from this dictionary involves, "Intense

³¹ *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Fifth Edition*, (Houghton Mifflin: Apple App Store, 2015).

³² *American Heritage Dictionary*, paranoia.

anxiety or worry."³³ For usage the example provided is "paranoia about losing her job."³⁴ The *Oxford Dictionary of English* also defines paranoia in two ways with the first being:

[A] mental condition characterized by delusions of persecution, unwarranted jealousy, or exaggerated self-importance, typically worked into an organized system. It may be an aspect of chronic personality disorder, of drug abuse, or of a serious condition such as schizophrenia in which the person loses touch with reality.³⁵

The second definition is simply "unjustified suspicion and mistrust of other people[.]"³⁶ "[M]ild paranoia affects all prime ministers"³⁷ is the sole usage example provided for both entries. Dictionaries for many people represent a sort of authoritative source when it comes to the meaning of words, yet there are key differences shown here depending on the dictionary. For Pynchon these divergences, however slight, are not problematic. They grant a certain amount of freedom as to the treatment and function of paranoia throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* because this term clearly lacks cohesion from a definable source. Things become even murkier after delving into paranoia's etymology stemming from the same dictionaries previously cited.

The provided etymology of paranoia from the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Fifth Edition* plainly states its Greek roots originating from the word *paranoos*.³⁸ This is also consistent with the *Oxford Dictionary of English*,³⁹ but the etymologies then begin to differ. *Paranoos* from the former is defined as "demented" from "para" meaning "beyond" with "noos" corresponding to "mind."⁴⁰ The latter defines *paranoos* as "distracted" with

³³ *American Heritage Dictionary*, paranoia.

³⁴ *American Heritage Dictionary*, paranoia.

³⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, (Oxford University Press: Apple App Store, 2017).

³⁶ *Oxford Dictionary*, paranoia.

³⁷ *Oxford Dictionary*, paranoia.

³⁸ *American Heritage Dictionary*, paranoia.

³⁹ *Oxford Dictionary*, paranoia.

⁴⁰ *American Heritage Dictionary*, paranoia.

"para" connected to "irregular" while "noos" still signifies "mind."⁴¹ There is a massive difference depending on the dictionary stemming from paranoos. "Demented" and "distracted" are in no way similar. One could argue this revolves around translation, and, even though that might be correct, it matters not. The instability previously mentioned is not only an issue involving paranoia's definition because it also infects its etymological origins. Therefore, everything about this word and, by extension, its function in *Gravity's Rainbow* is completely unstable.

2.2: Entering the Labyrinth

Upon publication in 1973 the New York Times review of *Gravity's Rainbow* describes Pynchon's novel as one of the "most difficult ... American novels in years"⁴² directly in the headline. This statement regarding "difficulty" seems clear and uncomplicated at first glance. However, one must ask the following question: What exactly is a "difficult" novel? This is a term loaded with subjectivity that differs amongst readers because it relies on the individual. *Gravity's Rainbow* is a novel that normally always appears on any list of "difficult books." This is relevant because in the decades since publication Pynchon's novel garnered a reputation marked by intimidation on the part of many readers well before opening this book. What, then, makes this such a challenging read? George Levine offers the following:

Pynchon's novels disorient. They offer us a world we think we recognize, assimilate it to worlds that seem unreal, imply coherences and significances we can't quite hold on to. Invariably, as the surreal takes on the immediacy of experience, they make us feel the

⁴¹ *Oxford Dictionary*, paranoia.

⁴² Richard Locke, "One of the longest, most difficult, most ambitious American novels in years," *The NYTimes.com*, The New York Times Company, 1996 <[nytimes.com/1973/03/11/archives/gravitys-rainbow-by-thomas-pynchon-760-pp-new-york-the-viking-press.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1973/03/11/archives/gravitys-rainbow-by-thomas-pynchon-760-pp-new-york-the-viking-press.html)> 4 May 2019.

inadequacy of conventional modes of making sense - of analysis, causal explanation, logic.⁴³

Difficulty seems closely linked to "making sense" in Levine's statement and Jonathan Culler concurs. For Culler "making sense" is dependent on a "process of making or producing sense by applying to the text a variety of hypothesis, contexts, and codes."⁴⁴ The most fascinating part of Culler's assertion is not about "making sense," even as it aligns quite closely with Levine, but the notion of producing sense or meaning, which then aligns *Gravity's Rainbow* quite closely with the Barthesian notion of a writerly text.

How does one approach a text such as this? There are, of course, countless entry paths into something so immense as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* but in order to gain footing, however precariously, it is necessary at first to delve into the opening section "Beyond the Zero" and locate the particular components initially responsible for the paranoid instability found within this novel. External sources other than textual evidence from Pynchon's novel are limited unless needed.

"Beyond the Zero" begins with the following depiction: "A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now."⁴⁵ Pynchon's usage of "screaming" and "sky" are both significant in the opening lines of this novel. The use of "screaming" is provocative, but there is no indication of what this "screaming" might be. The reader knows "it has happened before" but "it" is intentionally vague and whatever "it" previously was now differs. This is all the information given to this point. Only a seasoned reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* will have hypotheses that, at best, come close to interpretation.

⁴³ George Levine, "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction," *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003) 57.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Culler, "Toward a Theory of Non-Genre Literature," *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000) 51.

⁴⁵ Pynchon 3.

However, the problems inherent in these theories for both the practiced and first-time reader revolve around "might" and "could" after both words enter the pronounced instability that saturates this novel. A location is entirely absent. The date is not known. The reader enters this novel in the midst of something, but whatever that something may be is not given. Pynchon continues: "It is too late. The Evacuation still proceeds, but it's all theatre."⁴⁶ Again, the first-time reader arguably faces more disorientation while the experienced reader possesses mere guesses as to an explanation if one is present. In this example the most interesting facet is clearly "it's all theatre." Possible theories now morph into questions that exclude the first-time reader. Is it "theatre" because Pirate Prentice is dreaming everything read to this point? Could this "Evacuation" be nothing but a drill because this, whatever it may be, has happened before? Is Pynchon hinting at the ending of this novel with the use of "theatre" prominent in the final part of "The Counterforce" just after *Gravity's Rainbow* begins? None of these questions have anything resembling concrete answers. In this question/answer dichotomy the latter molds the former rendering each inseparable from one another.

Pynchon finally provides a tiny shred of verifiable information even as the reader with knowledge of this text knows this is Prentice's dream. The location is an unnamed city, but there is still nothing to identify exactly who "they" are just before the unnamed narrator poses the question: "Is this the way out?"⁴⁷ No. It most certainly is not in a figurative sense. This is a "progressive knotting into"⁴⁸ a whirlwind of paranoid instability and "not a disentanglement from"⁴⁹ anything. "The road, which ought to be opening out into a broader highway, instead has been getting narrower, more broken, cornering tighter and tighter ... [.]"⁵⁰ One can read this on a

⁴⁶ Pynchon 3.

⁴⁷ Pynchon 3.

⁴⁸ Pynchon 3.

⁴⁹ Pynchon 3.

⁵⁰ Pynchon 4.

literal level, which a first-time reader of this text would likely do, but the practiced reader knows not to. The previous quotations display a certain amount of self-reflexivity almost as if Pynchon is attempting to lure the reader into a game where he controls the rules in a constant flux entirely dependent on authorial whims. Reminding us once more of these rules he writes, "There is no way out. ... Screaming holds across the sky."⁵¹ Pirate Prentice wakes up. The dream ends here.

Prentice's dream, therefore, is the first entry point into *Gravity's Rainbow*. The instability that drives paranoia within this text is immediately present. Fiction is not reality and a dream woven into the opening of this text immediately raises questions about what constitutes the boundaries between the fictive world Pynchon presents and other realities embedded within this work. What are we to believe is "real" in *Gravity's Rainbow*? The presentation of Prentice's dream at the novel's outset becomes more complicated after Pynchon relays the following information. Pirate Prentice is a man who has a "strange talent for - well, for getting inside the fantasies of others: being able, actually, to take over the burden of *managing* them ... [.]"⁵² Prentice's dream, then mixed with the ability to manage the fantasies of others, comes close to abolishing the boundaries of what normally constitutes a fictive reality. There is no way of knowing with any certitude if that was in fact Prentice's dream when the possibility of another individual's fantasy could also be present. After factoring that into events deemed real, like the Banana Breakfast, suspicion and doubt concerning Pynchon's fictive reality is highly prominent. As Pynchon's novel progresses this opening scene becomes even more emblematic of what the reader will encounter because of the aforementioned qualities. *Gravity's Rainbow* antagonizes the reader with analepses, prolepses, and hallucinations, amongst other examples, that eschew anything approaching a fictive reality. The presentation of "other worlds" or, more precisely,

⁵¹ Pynchon 5.

⁵² Pynchon 13.

"worlds within worlds," are found most prominently in the third part of this text entitled "In the Zone" thus further disturbing the rules normally set forth regarding a fictive reality.

It is also true that *Gravity's Rainbow* resists anything resembling a firm and ordering structure because this is a central part of Pynchon's paranoiac poetics. The example regarding Prentice retains significance because its function is an opening attack on the author's part to disorient the reader. By placing Prentice's dream on the opening pages Pynchon gains the ultimate authorial freedom to disperse toyed notions of fictive reality with no warning. When stability is not sought for this fictive reality must manifest itself in various forms, which Pynchon easily accomplishes. This fictive reality then scatters and disperses as a weaponized form usually without warning leaving the reader to assemble the shrapnel into something that might approach coherence. However, this is not a text lacking thematic concerns. The instability evident in *Gravity's Rainbow* begins here and is an integral element in order to enter the paranoid chambers of this text. Next, Pynchon displays the presence of rockets through Pirate Prentice, which is another major thematic element found in this novel, that also functions as another possible opening into this labyrinth.

"What is it? Nothing like this ever happens. But Pirate knows it, after all. He has seen it in a film, just in the last fortnight ... it's a vapor trail. ... But not from an airplane. Airplanes are not launched vertically. This is the new, and still Most Secret, German rocket bomb."⁵³ This occurs mere pages from the dream sequence and the first-time reader is again facing some of the questions Prentice's dream caused. "What is it? Nothing like this ever happens." This is eerily reminiscent of the text's opening lines with key differences. One major difference is that the reader is now in a fictive reality that Steven C. Weisenburger locates as London on Monday,

⁵³ Pynchon 7.

December 18, 1944.⁵⁴ There is no verifiable information about what "it" may be except for Pirate's knowledge of the "Most Secret" German bomb. Concrete answers are entirely absent. Fear is readily apparent alongside possible acceptance of, in this example, a form of latent paranoia. This latency diminishes rather quickly after the next passage is relayed: "He [Pirate Prentice] won't hear the thing come in. It travels faster than the speed of sound. The first news you get out of it is the blast. Then, if you're still around, you hear the sound of it coming in."⁵⁵ This is the first mention of the V-2 rocket found in *Gravity's Rainbow* and this technology is rightly feared because it is a reversal of the norms concerning weapon technology thus inducing paranoia because of this oppositional dilemma between silence and sound. If one hears this bomb then death is averted because, in this instance, silence kills. Instability is now present even in the weapons chosen by Pynchon, which only adds to the pervasive fear while leaving any latent paranoia behind. The narrator then states the following: "Danger's over, Banana Breakfast is saved. But it's only a reprieve. Isn't it. There will indeed be others, each just as likely to land on top of him. No one either side of the front knows exactly how many more. Will we have to stop watching the sky?"⁵⁶

Pynchon now introduces another aspect of the paranoiac poetics found in the opening of *Gravity's Rainbow* which consists of a pronounced lack of knowledge, but he is careful not to let this stray into what one could deem ignorance. By withholding and providing knowledge or information at any given time a certain amount of power over the reader and characters within the text is even more apparent.

After receiving a phone call the following is relayed to Prentice: "The voice, which he's heard only once before - last year at a briefing, hands and face blackened, anonymous among a

⁵⁴ Steven C. Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* (Athens: University of Athens Press, 2006) 16.

⁵⁵ Pynchon 8.

⁵⁶ Pynchon 9.

dozen other listeners - tells Pirate now there's a message addressed to him, waiting at Greenwich."⁵⁷ Pynchon limits information in the preceding passage, but the provided elements are worth investigating. The voice on the other end of the phone is not new to Prentice, but this occurs after the concealment of his identity alongside the other people present in the room during a previous briefing. Whose voice is it? Why the need for such secrecy? It should not be a shock that the contents of the message in Greenwich are absent and the withholding of knowledge in this exchange thus exudes power over the reader.

Pynchon's next choice is interesting. He chooses to relay bits of Prentice's history regarding the ability to get into the fantasies of others, but, of course, whatever information relayed only results in more questioning on the part of the reader. This involves H.A. Loaf who is "the real owner of a dream he, Pirate, had had ... [.]"⁵⁸ The conflation of power and a lack of knowledge culminate here highlighted by the use of something called "the Firm,"⁵⁹ which does not escape realism. Corporations, especially in present times, routinely outsource "security" to private firms. The central problem is that the reader, both first-time and experienced, has no indication of what this "Firm" may be. The very name chosen by Pynchon revels in an anonymity so dense it approaches a generic status, and yet that is precisely where its power lies. It seems malicious especially after factoring in the world presented to this point by Pynchon, yet "seems" does not equate to "is." In this example the reader knows nothing of the "Firm" thus enforcing Pynchon's power dynamics when knowledge is withheld by adding to the paranoid structure of instability found throughout this novel. Prentice is now under observation by this anonymous "Firm" and Pynchon writes, "The first few times nothing clicked. The fantasies were O.K. but belonged to nobody important. But the Firm is patient, committed to the Long Run as

⁵⁷ Pynchon 12.

⁵⁸ Pynchon 15.

⁵⁹ Pynchon 16.

They are."⁶⁰ Pynchon continues by stating "the Firm was allowing Pirate only tiny homeopathic doses of peace, just enough to keep his defenses up, but not enough for it to poison him."⁶¹ This is close to the only information relayed involving the "Firm." A lack of knowledge, as previously stated, invokes power by a source thriving in anonymity over that of an individual in this example. This is a tool Pynchon regularly invokes and, in doing so, complicates matters by scattering information to a further degree.

The fight over knowledge withheld or given is, naturally, a much bigger debate in Pynchon's novel that also involves epistemology. "How do we know what we know?" is the question, arguably of course, most often posed when dealing with epistemology, but in the case of *Gravity's Rainbow* this is far too simplistic. Knowledge, as shown in the above example, is limited when dealing with Pirate Prentice, and that invokes a certain amount of power contingent on the amount of information being transferred from one source to another, which applies to many characters throughout this novel. This is where a basic definition of epistemology would be helpful and is as follows:

[T]heory of knowledge; the branch of philosophy that inquires into the nature and the possibility of knowledge. It deals also with the scope and limits of human knowledge, and with how it is acquired and possessed. It also investigates related notions, such as perception, memory, proof, evidence, belief and certainty.⁶²

Theories involving epistemology have, of course, expanded over the centuries. But, in light of the knowledge and power dichotomy shown in the isolated example involving Pirate Prentice this definition is apt for several reasons. First, there is no inquiring on Prentice's part involving the nature or possibility of knowledge or information. He deals with what "They" let him know.

⁶⁰ Pynchon 16.

⁶¹ Pynchon 19.

⁶² Thomas Mautner, ed. *Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 194.

The limitations placed on his knowledge - done purposely by Pynchon - adds further instability to the paranoia present in this text. The amount of information relayed to the reader through memory is miniscule. We know close to nothing about this briefing and only slightly more involving his fantasies used by the Firm thus rendering perception nearly moot. Proof, evidence, belief, and, above all, certainty are simply not present. In doing so Pynchon challenges centuries of thinking regarding epistemology by hostile subversion and this now begins the question as to the very function of knowledge found throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. In the traditional sense any sort of concrete meaning vanishes into an abstract concept. The assertion posited here is not to say knowledge does not exist in this text. It most certainly does. However, Pynchon has imposed a paranoid form of scattered madness on the attainment of knowledge.

Now, the reader must return to the routine question involving epistemology: How do we know what we know? The answer is simple: we know only what Pynchon allows the reader to know. The attainment of information seen as crucial in understanding this text is no longer a fixed notion and this open hostility towards the reader adds exponentially to an infirm structure one must understand in order to gain insights into the paranoiac poetics of this novel. Knowledge, lacking its origins provided by the above definition of epistemology, no longer resembles itself in this text as it approaches territory not that distant from an epistemological break in Bachelard's sense.⁶³ Pynchon thus achieves the conceptual reorganization regarding the entire field of knowledge⁶⁴ within the boundaries of *Gravity's Rainbow* and by doing so plunges the reader, both first-time and seasoned, into the paranoid inferno of uncertainty so pronounced in this text.

⁶³ David Macy, *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 113.

⁶⁴ Macy 113.

In summary, the above analysis is in no way an attempt at limiting what Pynchon accomplishes and further expounds upon with this text. It is there in order to show that within the opening pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*, all the while focusing on one character, Pynchon initiates certain themes that involve the function of paranoia applicable to the entire text. They will, of course, expand in a menacing fashion. Any talk regarding a "structure of paranoia" needs clarification as well. Examining this text on a micro-level enables talk of an illusory structure, but it is infirm and will shatter after moving on to other selections from this novel. The other issues present also in need of a brief summary includes the differences between the first-time reader's experience and that of the practiced reader, which applies directly to the dream sequence that opens this novel. The experienced reader does not face the shock of Prentice waking up out of this rather intense experience that was not "real." The question of what is "real" in a fictive reality is something employed throughout the rest of this novel and the first part of a fractured structure of paranoia found in this text's opening pages. This applies to both the first-time and experienced reader. Next, both readers deal with rocket technology, which is another major part of *Gravity's Rainbow*. This, too, is another entry way into the paranoid labyrinth that Pynchon provides us. Neither reader attains much information at this point in the text regarding the significance of rockets, but the details given are difficult to ignore. Knowledge is another topic *Gravity's Rainbow* presents and this is where the anything involving a firm structure in this opening sequence begins to scatter. The reader begins to question everything present, which is likely Pynchon's desired result. Finally, paranoia is in no way static in this text. It is open for interpretation. Leo Bersani's essay "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature" also begins by examining the term paranoia and it is through the argument of this critic the scattering nature of this term

and its applicability to this text will add more pieces to an infirm structure of paranoiac poetics intent on resisting any sense of centralized form.

2.3: Bersani, Paranoia, and *Gravity's Rainbow*

Bersani's essay begins in a very familiar place by examining the term "paranoia" and acknowledges the following: "The word *paranoia* has had an extraordinarily complex medical, psychiatric, and psychoanalytic history."⁶⁵ The central difference is Bersani's examination of paranoia in strict relation to *Gravity's Rainbow* and by attempting to add stability to this term he, knowingly, destabilizes it. He writes: "For all the shifts of interpretative perspective on paranoia, the word, faithful to its etymology (*paranoia* is a Greek word designating a disoriented or deranged mind) has always designated a mental disorder. At least until *Gravity's Rainbow*."⁶⁶ The last assertion is crucial. After presumably studying the history of paranoia Bersani admits that whatever knowledge accumulated over the centuries is not sufficient to cover its function in this text, which, again, approaches territory not dissimilar from an epistemological break in strict application to Pynchon's novel. Bersani is absolutely correct in stating that paranoia always fit quite neatly into that of a mental disorder and this initial attempt at simplification is commendable, yet it is the next statement that begins to show the levels of complication involved when dealing with Pynchonian paranoia. He writes, "All the paranoid thinking in the novel is probably justified, and therefore - at least in the traditional sense of the word - really not paranoid at all."⁶⁷ The most important aspect from the preceding statement is the recognition that paranoia does not function in its traditional sense and by abandoning this "tradition" it is exponentially less stable. Bersani adds, "I say 'probably' because Pynchon is less interested in vindicating his characters' suspicions of plots than in universalizing and, in a sense,

⁶⁵ Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature," *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003) 145.

⁶⁶ Bersani 148.

⁶⁷ Bersani 148.

depathologizing the paranoid structure of thought."⁶⁸ Pynchon, once more, attains further authorial freedom. When paranoia becomes universalized without seeming psychologically abnormal it also becomes a totalizing and subsuming force. Paranoia, then, is the new normal in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

This is the environment in which we meet Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop who, placed within a cast of hundreds, is the closest thing to a protagonist existing in this novel. We should not forget the first mention of Slothrop found in this text involves Teddy Bloat, in essence, spying on him. Slothrop is a man under literal observation and realizes almost immediately this is not something he can escape. It is certainly too much to insinuate the passive acceptance of everything because he routinely questions the odd happenings that consistently embroil him. His attempt at a discharge is laughable while his attitude retains a certain amount of nonchalance: "But now, rudely, here's that London again."⁶⁹ An excellent example of his observations mixed with a sense of acceptance is as follows:

But something's different ... something's ... been *changed* ... don't mean to bitch, folks, but - well for instance he could almost swear he's being followed, or watched anyway. Some of the tails are pretty slick, but others he can spot, all right. Xmas shopping yesterday at that Woolworth's, he caught a certain pair of beady eyes in the toy section, past a heap of balsa-wood fighter planes and little-kid-size Enfields. A hint of constancy to what shows up in the rearview mirror of his Humber, no color or model he can pin down but *something* always present inside the tiny frame, has led him to start checking out other cars when he goes off on a morning's work. Things on his desk at ACHTUNG seem not to be where they were. Girls have found excuses not to keep appointments. He feels he's being gently separated from the life he lived before going into St. Veronica's. Even in movies there's always someone behind him being careful not to talk, rattle paper, laugh too loud: Slothrop's been to enough movies that he can pick up an anomaly like that right away.⁷⁰

Given the traditional definitions of paranoia where does this extended description leave the reader? "Irrational distrust or suspicion of others"⁷¹ seems to fit as does "delusions of

⁶⁸ Bersani 148.

⁶⁹ Pynchon 135.

⁷⁰ Pynchon 135.

⁷¹ *American Heritage Dictionary*, paranoia.

persecution."⁷² Yet is there anything irrational about this? Are these mere delusions? Not in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Slothrop may have suspicions, but lacks firm evidence that any of this truly occurring. Therefore, Bersani is correct in asserting paranoia in the traditional sense does not comply with what is found in this novel. It is a universalized line of thinking in this text that is all-encompassing and unescapable.

However, the narration in the above passage, for example, leaves several questions in need of examination. For clarity one would hope for this information to be relayed in the first or third-person. It, of course, is not. An omniscient narrator seems to be what Pynchon throws at the reader in this extended section. Given that fact the reader has no idea who this narrator is which then places him in a delicate position especially when reading that block of text. There is an overwhelming urge to believe everything relayed above is true, but after examining it closer the reader is once more thrust into the realm of instability and uncertainty. This results in doubt that is a prominent feature regarding the function of paranoia within this text. Bersani writes, "The narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow*, it's true, lends his authority to his characters' paranoid suspicions; in fact, he frequently passes on information that justifies their worst fears."⁷³ This is completely accurate. In dealing with Tyrone Slothrop the previous passage is justified, at least in part, after the narrator passes on the following information found earlier in this text's opening section: "When Slothrop was discovered, late in 1944, by 'The White Visitation' - though many there have always known him as the famous Infant Tyrone - like the New World, different people thought they'd discovered different things."⁷⁴ First, Slothrop was "discovered" in 1944, but in order to further unsettle this, the following is included about "many" knowing him as the Infant Tyrone, indicating prior knowledge of this man, dating back to childhood complete with various

⁷² *Oxford Dictionary*, paranoia.

⁷³ Bersani 148.

⁷⁴ Pynchon 100.

theories that Pynchon refrains from elaborating on. This certainly does justify Slothrop's suspicions to a degree, but, at this point, are "suspicions" an accurate term to use? The problems inherent in this situation are manifold and it all depends on the way Pynchon relays information. There is no way to empirically state that one situation from the extended passage above is contingent upon another, yet to completely disprove it is also impossible. Slothrop has suspicions yet they can only remain in an area of uncertainty and this is the space in which *Gravity's Rainbow* thrives. When everything lacks certainty then that too loses value and one must seek another way to navigate this world, or completely disregard staples of being such as certainty and learn to navigate this milieu wherein Pynchon dictates the often bendable rules. The latter seems like the only choice for the reader and Tyrone Slothrop: "The cubicle near Grosvenor Square begins to feel more and more like a trap. He spends his time, often whole days, ranging the East End, breathing the rank air of Thameside, seeking places the followers might not follow."⁷⁵ This does not seem like a man with mental problems. Returning to the extended quotation previously supplied there is a high level of preciseness present in Slothrop's thinking. He chooses not to focus on one "suspicion" by elaborating on others as well. The second quotation reads more like resignation mixed with acceptance and realization. Something is happening to Tyrone Slothrop that he cannot name.

Bersani asks the following question: "Is there an actual place - on earth or in space, in life or in death - where paranoid suspicion can finally be satisfied, put to rest?"⁷⁶ He then answers his own question: "If such a place exists, the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* will certainly never enjoy its comforts."⁷⁷ For this text to function on Pynchon's terms Slothrop must not remain sedentary

⁷⁵ Pynchon 135.

⁷⁶ Bersani 154.

⁷⁷ Bersani 154.

because the central need is to break with the current situation in London. His arrival in Monaco achieves just that but, according to Pynchon's plan, nothing is put to rest.

Bersani makes another keen observation: "In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the discovery of connections is identical to the discovery of plots. The plotters get together - they 'connect' - in order to plot the connections that will give them power over others."⁷⁸ Interconnectedness, already a major part of "Beyond the Zero," emerges in "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" to such a degree ignoring it is impossible. For the reader it is already plainly evident but, for Tyrone Slothrop, becomes even more pronounced. Interconnectedness is now conflated, not unlike knowledge, with power over others adding yet another layer to Pynchon's paranoid poetics.

The plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* is already immense and closely approaching what can only be called "information overload." Bersani echoes this: "Just keeping track of all the plots - and their incredible interconnectedness - is a near impossibility."⁷⁹ The reader's grip holding on to any sort of traditional plot within this text is tenuous at best, yet this exactly what Pynchon wants to achieve.

The opening scene of "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" in Monaco comes close to achieving a sort of clarity for the reader even after displaying the interconnectedness that is another function of paranoia found within *Gravity's Rainbow*. The reader has previously come into contact with the characters that will emerge in this scene: Katje Borgesius, Bloat, Tantivy, and Octopus Grigori. However, it is their interconnectedness that Slothrop is not aware of. Now, on the beach with Bloat, Tantivy, and three "random" girls Slothrop thinks to himself, "This ought to be good for a bit of, heh, heh, early paranoia here, a sort of pick-me-up to face what's

⁷⁸ Bersani 149.

⁷⁹ Bersani 154.

sure to come later in the day. But it isn't. Much too good a morning for that."⁸⁰ Tyrone Slothrop is wrong due to limitations connected with knowledge that then spill over into interconnectedness that evoke power in Pynchon's text. Octopus Grigori appears and wraps a tentacle around Katje before Slothrop "saves" her. Paranoia begins here instantly by rejecting Slothrop's assumption this is something to face later in the day. Bersani adds, "Paranoid thinking hesitates between the suspicion that the truth is wholly obscured by the visible, and the equally disturbing sense that the truth may be a sinister, invisible design *in* the visible."⁸¹ Both lines of thinking clash here beginning with the crab's origins in what was a simulated design played out in the text unknown to Slothrop but not lacking suspicion. "Oh, that was no 'found' crab Ace - no random octopus or girl, uh-uh. Structure and detail come later, but the conniving around him now he feels instantly, in his heart."⁸² Before venturing further Bersani's points in regards to the previous passage deserves an attempt at disentanglement because both fit in this instance adding another layer of instability, which paranoia thrives off of. When analyzed there are two words present that create an immediate impact: "visible" and "truth." Bersani, perhaps knowingly, intends to show the complicated and duplicitous nature of these two words. What exactly does "visible" or "invisible" mean in the overall context of *Gravity's Rainbow*? Bersani, in essence, argues that "visible" and "invisible" are intertwined entities both in need of each other in order to create another facet of the paranoid thinking found throughout this book that is dialectical in nature. That is certainly difficult to refute. However, it is the use of the word "truth" that throws everything into another chaotic stratosphere. "Truth" already lost much of its traditional meaning within this text. Its meanings are various depending on the context. But this word, loaded with a very fixed meaning loses the stability of what, in essence, defines it. That is the central problem

⁸⁰ Pynchon 220.

⁸¹ Bersani 149.

⁸² Pynchon 224.

beginning in "Beyond the Zero" to "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" and onwards throughout the text.

One facet Bersani could add to his masterful essay is the malleability of truth and everything that can attach itself to it, such as facts and what we normally call reality, but almost everything loses meaning in *Gravity's Rainbow* and this incites fear on the reader's part. At the very beginning of "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" Slothrop "waits for a sudden noise to begin his first day, a first rocket."⁸³ A sudden noise is preferable knowing the situation Tyrone Slothrop is beginning to enter. The passage continues: "Aware all the time he's in the wake of a great war gone north, and that the explosions around here will have to be champagne corks, motors of sleek Hispano-Suizas, the old amorous slap, hopefully ... No London? No Blitz? Can he get used to it?"⁸⁴ The answer to that final question lies in the sinister hands of Thomas Pynchon.

2.4: Moving On

Slothrop's existence, especially in the opening episode of "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" is a transitional period for this man. His existence is liminal and will remain that way throughout most of "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" and "In the Zone." London had, however loosely, a sort of imposed rule over him. By pushing Slothrop's progress first through Monaco, Nice, and then into the Zone the scattering nature of paranoia in Pynchon's hands is nothing short of intensification. The world, as the reader knows it, loses solidification in the ensuing sections of the novel while Slothrop morphs into the non-individual. "Can he [Slothrop] get used to it?"⁸⁵ He must first navigate Monte Carlo and after entering the Zone that above

⁸³ Pynchon 215.

⁸⁴ Pynchon 215-6.

⁸⁵ Pynchon 216.

question no longer has relevance because it is essentially devoid of meaning as are truth, facts, and a fixed reality.

Chapter 3: Liminality, Fragmentation, and Tyrone Slothrop's Exit

3.1: Liminality, Domination, and the Individual

"Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" is a transitional section of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Tyrone Slothrop's existence is marked by liminality both in Monte Carlo and Nice. They both function as liminal spaces, but liminality is also a personal issue regarding identity to Tyrone Slothrop. The argument over the happenings on the beach involving Octopus Grigori continue with Slothrop speaking to Tantivy: "'Listen,' Slothrop talking into his highball glass, bouncing words off of ice cubes so they'll have a proper chill, 'either I'm coming down with a little psychosis here, or something funny is going on, right?'"⁸⁶ The ability to assert himself in this instance is important. He still retains individuality for now, but that quickly begins to evaporate.

Pynchon, as Slothrop is on his way to meet Katje, inserts the phrase "Welcome Mister Slothrop To Our Structure We Hope You Will Enjoy Your Visit Here"⁸⁷ from somewhere existing simultaneously both inside and outside the narrative. There are several issues involving liminality present here with the first being Slothrop's visit to this structure. First, he unknowingly enters this "structure" with the term "visit" implying the impermanence of Slothrop's current situation. Individualism begins to fracture because Slothrop's "visit" is also a simulation injected with domination. "Domination is the default condition in this novel's storyworld, and the clearest illustration of the extent to which They are both willing and technically able to control individual persons is Their use of Slothrop."⁸⁸ Domination and the loss of individualism, present since this novel's onset, now becomes another major part of Pynchon's paranoiac poetics. Destabilization must continue.

⁸⁶ Pynchon 228.

⁸⁷ Pynchon 231.

⁸⁸ Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger, *Gravity's Rainbow, Domination, and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013) 92.

After waking up with a night spent with Katje he finds all his belongings stolen. He returns to his hotel room and Slothrop encounters the following:

[He] finds it newly cleaned, perfectly empty, ready for new guests. "Hey...! Yanking out drawers empty as drums: every stich of clothing he owns is gone, including his Hawaiian shirt. What the fuck. Groaning, he rummages in the desk. Empty. Closets empty. Leave papers, ID, everything, taken."⁸⁹

Bloat then offers Slothrop a British uniform to wear. This is a brilliant metaphor indicative of the removal of individualism by domination that then begins a liminal transformation. These possessions identified him in an official format and, now, everything that makes Tyrone Slothrop an individual at this point within *Gravity's Rainbow* is no longer present. He is currently the non-individual. "Nobody ever said a day has to be juggled into any kind of sense at day's end."⁹⁰ This acceptance is either admirable or completely asinine. His very existence, defined by the British uniform, is liminal with fragmentation also now well underway. There will be other transformations Tyrone Slothrop is unaware of at this point. What will They do to him next? Dominating the non-individual as a function of paranoia in *Gravity's Rainbow* seems applicable complete with a set of rules dictated by Pynchon's menacing hands even as Slothrop's self-awareness seems to grow.

3.2: Proverbs for Paranoids and the Liminal Non-Individual

The term proverbs has various meanings but its usage in *Gravity's Rainbow* elevates it to something higher as opposed to "a short, well-known pithy saying, stating a general truth or piece of advice."⁹¹ Throughout "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" there are precisely four "Proverbs for Paranoids" in need of examination that further highlights the non-individual under attack. It is as follows:

⁸⁹ Pynchon 239.

⁹⁰ Pynchon 243.

⁹¹ *Oxford Dictionary*, proverb.

At the Casino Hermann Goering, a new regime has been taking over. ... Slothrop's own image of the plot against him has grown. Earlier the conspiracy was monolithic, all-potent, nothing he could ever touch. Until that drinking game, and that scene with that Katje, and both the sudden good-bys. But now -

Proverbs for Paranoids, 1: You may never get to touch the Master, but you can tickle his creatures.⁹²

Was the conspiracy ever monolithic? Perhaps for Slothrop, but not for the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow*. It was always an all-potent device, which Slothrop recognizes, that functions as part of Pynchon's paranoia presented in this novel. Paranoia can lead a person to an accepted conclusion in order to prove a lack of connectedness marked by pure randomness. Internal fallacies are common but, in short, most need and want to make sense of daily occurrences. However, returning to the first proverb, the Master controls, whom Slothrop can never touch, by allowing interaction with "his" creatures. The only power Slothrop gained is a slightly elevated level of self-awareness. An individual matters little to any master and Slothrop's current situation as a non-individual due to his possessions stolen thus make him even easier to manipulate.

Next, "Proverbs for Paranoids, 2: The innocence of the creatures is in inverse proportion to the immorality of the Master."⁹³ This reads like something out of a subverted holy text. Pynchon, always aware, then provides one of the many Puritan references found throughout this novel:

He [Slothrop] will learn to hear quote marks in the speech of others. It is a bookish kind of reflex, maybe he's genetically predisposed - all those earlier Slothrop's packing Bibles around the blue hilltops as part of their gear, memorizing chapter and verse the structures of Arks, Temples, Visionary Thrones - all the materials and dimensions. Data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God.⁹⁴

Both passages are immensely fascinating. Not even the Master's creatures can compete with his immorality. Next, the language attributed to Slothrop from Puritan times bear a striking

⁹² Pynchon 282.

⁹³ Pynchon 287.

⁹⁴ Pynchon 287.

resemblance to Pynchon's choice of vocabulary describing the current situation within *Gravity's Rainbow* with terms featured such as "structures" and "data." This then brings back the notion of liminality concerning the direction Slothrop is heading towards. Is he moving towards the future or fragmenting back into a past somehow intermingled with the present? Within any other novel this would be a pertinent question complete with an answer. But within *Gravity's Rainbow* time is another destabilizing force in which the present is always dependent on the past and vice versa. Pynchon presents time in layers or fragments as opposed to any strict chronology. Slothrop's recognition of the duplicity possibly present within the speech of others is also intriguing. He is by now the non-individual, but the total diminishment of his self-awareness is still not complete. This is a power struggle he will certainly lose, yet full awareness is absent. The subsequent proverb will highlight this to a further degree.

"Proverbs for Paranoids, 3: If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers."⁹⁵ Throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* Slothrop's questions rarely merit answers that could cause worry. He is incapable of asking the "right" question because just after doing so they can render it irrelevant. This, again, returns to the notion of knowledge and power presented in the preceding chapter. A brief discussion regarding clarity, as it pertains to this novel and specifically this proverb, is now necessary.

In the preface to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* his goal is as follows: "The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence."⁹⁶ First, the above "proverb" possesses clarity so, in isolation, it conforms to Wittgenstein's assertion. But examining this in a vacuum is not ideal. The third proverb needs the entirety of

⁹⁵ Pynchon 299.

⁹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 2001) 3.

Gravity's Rainbow for it to have any value whatsoever. Questions and answers are a central motif within this text combined with the manipulation of both originating from systemic problems involving knowledge and power. Practically none of the questions are clear and due to constant misdirection the same applies to answers given. Is this "proverb" something to pass over in silence as Wittgenstein suggests? The short answer is no, but Wittgenstein provides an excellent point. There is plenty of material within the pages of this novel the reader does pass over in silence. Therefore, is the reader asking the wrong questions? Are the answers provided by the reader useless due to the consistent instability of questions asked? One could answer both yes and no to the preceding questions with either being both correct and also incorrect. Pynchon's paranoiac poetics renders both questions and answers unstable. But we must remember that one of the central functions of "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" is its role as a liminal portal to another jarring world simply called the Zone. Slothrop is already a non-individual due to the theft of all his possessions and this theme continues. The reader must not pass over this in silence.

Pynchon writes, "Proverbs for Paranoids, 4: *You* hide, they seek."⁹⁷ This again passes the Wittgenstein test involving clarity, but only, once more, in isolation. Within the confines of *Gravity's Rainbow* meanings multiply and the scattering of information, a major function of paranoia in this text, disperses shrapnel of uncertainty further rendering this as another example of the Barthesian writerly text. It is often up to the reader to assign subjective meaning to the layers of information one is inundated with.

After an incident involving a tank at a party Slothrop, always in search of the most minute amount of clarity achievable, has the following conversation: "I saved a dame from an

⁹⁷ Pynchon 311.

octopus not so long ago, how about that?"⁹⁸ "With one difference,' sez Blodgett Waxwing. 'This [the tank] really happened tonight. But that octopus didn't.'"⁹⁹ Slothrop replies: "How do you know?"¹⁰⁰ The answer plunges the reader back into liminality as Waxwing retorts:

'I know a lot. Not everything, but a few things you don't. Listen Slothrop - you'll be needing a friend, and sooner than you think. Don't come here to the villa - it may be too hot by then - but if you can make it as far as Nice -' he hands over a business card, embossed with a chess knight and an address on Rue Rossini.¹⁰¹

Slothrop's exit from the liminal nature of Monte Carlo and then Nice will soon commence. However, there are other issues in need of treatment before this can occur.

3.3: Fear, Freedom, Facts

One of the more intriguing aspects as "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" wraps up occurs when Slothrop, sleeping in a hotel, encounters the following: "MPs, open up."¹⁰²

Pynchon continues:

American voices, country voices, high-pitched and without mercy. He lies freezing, wondering if the bedsprings will give him away. For possibly the first time he is hearing America as it must sound to a non-American. Later he will recall that what surprised him most was the fanaticism, the reliance not just on flat force but on the *rightness* of what they planned to do ... he'd been told long ago to expect this sort of thing from Nazis, and especially from Japs - *we* were the ones who always played fair - but this pair outside the door now are as demoralizing as a close-up of John Wayne (the angle emphasizing how slanted his eyes are, funny you never noticed before) screaming "BANZAI!"¹⁰³

This passage deserves a thorough unpacking. Fear is the first thing felt by the former Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop even though these are his countrymen. The political aspect present is also noteworthy. This is certainly a critique of American "idealism and the death culture it perpetuates, even as America is both its progeny and principle purveyor at the end of the

⁹⁸ Pynchon 295.

⁹⁹ Pynchon 295.

¹⁰⁰ Pynchon 295.

¹⁰¹ Pynchon 295.

¹⁰² Pynchon 304.

¹⁰³ Pynchon 304-5.

twentieth century."¹⁰⁴ Comparing the American Military Police Corps to Nazis and Japanese soldiers enforces that as does the usage of "fanaticism," "flat force," and the lack of debate surrounding the entitlement or "rightness" of what is happening in this instance.

Liminality is also present throughout this passage. Is Pynchon rendering the classic American cowboy John Wayne into a Japanese man? If so, this then straddles two figurative borders - East and West. But the emphasis on John Wayne's eyes as slanted is difficult to ignore. The same applies to the use of "banzai," which is a traditional Japanese battle cry. Further, Slothrop, in terms of his liminal nature, feels what a non-American must experience in such a situation for possibly the first time ever. What emotions at this moment are Slothrop likely to experience? Fear, again, is obvious, but the latent feeling of domination is also present. When added together another form of paranoia - fear through domination - is introduced as the self is pulled further apart. The American Military Police have no clue as to Tyrone Slothrop's identity and, at this point, the notion regarding his individuality is slowly slipping from his mind as well. He is morphing into an even stranger form of the non-individual while willingly accepting that because there is no other choice.

After this confrontation Pynchon reveals the following in one of several attempts Slothrop undertakes to regain his individuality. This, of course, never comes to fruition but the hope present is both equally devastating and hilarious: "It dawns on Slothrop, literally, through the yellowbrown window shade, that this is his first day Outside. His first free morning. He *doesn't* have to go back. Free? What's free?"¹⁰⁵ This is yet another term devoid of all significance within this text unless applied directly to this specific situation. Pynchon writes, "A little before noon a young woman lets herself in with a passkey and leaves him the papers. He is now an

¹⁰⁴ Jeff Baker, "Politics," *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, eds. Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman, Brian McHale (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012) 138.

¹⁰⁵ Pynchon 305.

English war correspondent named Ian Scuffling."¹⁰⁶ This is Pynchonian freedom. The young woman speaks, "'We have to play the patterns. There must be a pattern you're in, right now.'"¹⁰⁷

This, too, is Pynchonian freedom. Pynchon continues in a passage deserving a full quotation:

A week later he's [Slothrop] in Zürich, after a long passage by train. While the metal creatures in their solitude, days of snug and stable fog, pass the hours at mime, at playing molecules, imitating industrial synthesis as they are broken up, put together, coupled and recoupled, he dozes in and out of a hallucination of Alps, fogs, abysses tunnels, bone-deep laborings up impossible grades, cowbells in the darkness, in the morning green banks, smells of wet pasture, always out the windows an unshaven work crew on the way to repair some stretch of track, long waits in marshaling-yards whose rails run like layers of an onion cut end to end, gray and desolate places, nights of whistles, coupling, crashes, sidings, staring cows on the evening hillsides, army convoys waiting at the crossings as the train puffs by, never a clear sense of nationality anywhere, nor even of belligerent sides, only the War, a single damaged landscape, in which 'neutral Switzerland' is a rather stuffy convention, observed but with as much sarcasm as 'liberated France' or 'totalitarian Germany,' 'Fascist Spain,' and others ... [.]¹⁰⁸

This is also Pynchonian freedom found within *Gravity's Rainbow* complete with several issues needing examination that culminate with the above passage. First, the non-individual morphs yet again into an identity that is both everything and nothing. Second, the unnamed lady speaks of "patterns" with no hint of sarcasm. Finally, the extended passage quoted above is indicative of Pynchonian freedom in a controlled and chaotic manner. Destabilization is a central component found in the function of paranoia throughout this novel and Pynchon, again, achieves that. "The War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image."¹⁰⁹ Every image passes by in an ephemeral nature indicative of the hallucinatory manner this passage starts with. It is then fair to argue these images might not even belong to Slothrop. Returning to several of Wittgenstein's aphorisms at this point presents an interesting conundrum. "The world is the totality of facts, not of things."¹¹⁰ The passage above has nothing resembling facts. It is a subjective observation not

¹⁰⁶ Pynchon 305.

¹⁰⁷ Pynchon 305.

¹⁰⁸ Pynchon 305-6.

¹⁰⁹ Pynchon 306.

¹¹⁰ Wittgenstein 5.

so distant from expressionism. Freedom, filtered through the mind of Pynchon in this example, is terrifying. Next, "The world is determined by the facts, and by their being *all* the facts."¹¹¹ These, again, are subjective observations likely made by Tyrone Slothrop. One of the main features in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the lack of completeness especially when speaking of something as malleable as facts are in this text. Freedom, by its very nature, is a subjective notion entirely dependent on the individual and situation in Pynchon's novel. Further, Slothrop attains only brief bits of what any person would deem freedom in its broadest and most traditional sense. The liminal nature of the self as the non-individual aligns perfectly with Slothrop's next destination known only as the Zone. It is here where Tyrone Slothrop will completely cease to "exist in any kind of well-understood or canonical sense."¹¹² This is a conscious choice on the part of Pynchon as something well-understood would detract from the scattering and destabilizing force of paranoia which dominates this text. Pynchon discarded any notion resembling canonical sense long ago and the Zone will further escalate this. Erik S. Roraback writes, "A limited concept of rationality has thus become an end in itself. Human beings [including Slothrop] are used for all they are worth, as things in a world of things ... [.]"¹¹³

Wittgenstein posits, "It is obvious that an imagined world, however different it may be from the real one, must have *something* - a form - in common with it."¹¹⁴ The Zone is not an imagined world, but it does function as a world within a broader world throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is also difficult to empirically state which world within this text qualifies as the "real one." This common form Wittgenstein speaks of is exceedingly difficult to locate in the Zone. But as Tyrone Slothrop finally arrives the non-individual identifying as Ian Scuffling is still in a

¹¹¹ Wittgenstein 5.

¹¹² Erik S. Roraback, *The Philosophical Baroque: On Autopoietic Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2017) 194.

¹¹³ Roraback 195.

¹¹⁴ Wittgenstein 7.

liminal existence. The Zone will only heighten this existence after Slothrop recognizes he is no longer in Kansas and must face a new reality that will absorb him.

3.4: Some Formal Zonal Constructs

The notion of a world within a world is perhaps the easiest way to begin a discussion of the Zone's formal qualities and Brian McHale's chapter entitled "Pynchon's postmodernism" does a thorough job of expanding on this. However, before delving into McHale's work it is important to state that due to the lack of preciseness and, at times, outright murkiness involving postmodernism, postmodernity, and postmodern theory this debate will not enter the present discussion involving the function of paranoia in *Gravity's Rainbow*. McHale even recognizes postmodernism's inherent problems at the outset of his chapter:

Period concepts are moving targets, elusive and malleable, none more so than "postmodernism." When did postmodernism begin (if it ever did), and has it ended yet? Is there a postmodern period style, and if so, what are its features? Is it a specifically aesthetic, or does it apply to culture and society generally? These and other questions remain literally debatable and unresolved, perhaps unresolvable.¹¹⁵

Despite McHale's initial uneasiness there are several features present applicable to the Zone that function with no need of entertaining the postmodernism debate.

Under the subsection entitled "Another poetics of postmodernism, or, Pynchon's worlds" one of the first topics under examination is "Plurality of worlds."¹¹⁶ McHale then goes on to assert the following observation: "All narratives produce multiple possible worlds - potential state of affairs, subjective realities, plans, expectations, speculations, dreams, fantasies; but these are normally subordinated to a single actual world, which they orbit like satellites."¹¹⁷ To place this astute observation in the American literary tradition one must acknowledge the bodies of water found in many works by Melville and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. But this is

¹¹⁵ Brian McHale, "Pynchon's postmodernism," *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, eds. Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman, Brian McHale (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012) 97.

¹¹⁶ McHale 104.

¹¹⁷ McHale 104.

where Pynchon differs because his "novels proliferate such potential and subjective alternative realities."¹¹⁸ The Zone is an excellent example of this. How then does the Zone differ from London, Monte Carlo, or Nice? Each of the latter locations have a sense of order to them and one has some certainty involving national borders whereas the Zone has none. Steven C. Weisenburger dates the opening episode somewhere between May 16-18 shortly after Germany surrenders.¹¹⁹

Therefore, pre-war Germany was a territorialized state. During the war it began to lose this status. After surrendering it became, in theory, first a deterritorialized entity before becoming reterritorialized by the Americans, British, French, and Russians with each country in charge of certain boundaries not entirely fixed. This, to put it mildly, is a disorientating situation. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have an interesting take on this from the chapter "Savages, Barbarians, Civilized Men" found in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) that shows the complexity of the situation which rules the Zone. They write: "The despot challenges the lateral alliance and the extended filiations of the old community. He imposes a new alliance system and places himself in direct filiation with the deity: the people must follow."¹²⁰ There are parts of this argument, within the context of *Gravity's Rainbow*, that could apply to pre-war and wartime Germany, which is why the Zone now exists. Adolf Hitler, in this comparison, could function as the despot that vanquished alliances while attempting to impose a new system and the people of Germany largely followed. But the formal mechanisms of the Zone are much more complicated than this. Deleuze and Guattari then add another level of complexity to the preceding statement in order to show what a delicate situation one - Slothrop in this instance - finds himself:

¹¹⁸ McHale 104.

¹¹⁹ Weisenburger 178.

¹²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin Books, 2009) 192.

A leap into a new alliance, a break with the ancient filiation - this is expressed in a strange machine, or rather a machine of the strange whose locus is the desert, imposing the harshest and the most barren of ordeals, and attesting to the resistance of an old order as well as to the validation of the new order.¹²¹

One of the first times Pynchon mentions the Zone in this third section is as follows: "Signs will find him [Slothrop] here in the Zone, and ancestors will reassert themselves."¹²² Therefore, this man has no chance at breaking with ancient filiation and any alliances made will be ephemeral. Harsh ordeals certainly arise, but the old order is the same as the new order for Slothrop. The central difference is its scattered form. He attempts resisting the old order but in doing so only amplifies the power of the new order because they are essentially the same and will lead to his "end." The non-individual's liminal existence functions as a form of paranoia in the aforementioned quote from Pynchon's text when both new and old orders are the same and there is, and will never be, any hope for personal autonomy. However, Slothrop's predicament through the prism of Deleuze and Guattari is still nowhere complete. Harsh ordeals are the norm in this text and Deleuze and Guattari state: "The machine of the strange is both a great paranoiac machine, since it expresses the struggle with the old system, and already a glorious celibate machine, insofar as it exalts the triumph of the new alliance."¹²³

Now, let us briefly look at two forms of "systems" constantly antagonizing one another in this section of the text. Both the old and new systems are, once more, intertwined, yet this extends, at least temporarily, well beyond political implications. Slothrop's ancestral past, again, begins to reassert itself in the opening pages of "In the Zone" further fracturing the delicate position of the non-individual. Referring to both Slothrop and his ancestors, Pynchon writes, "Yet he feels his own, stronger now as borders fall away and the Zone envelops him, his own

¹²¹ Deleuze and Guattari 192-3.

¹²² Pynchon 335-6.

¹²³ Deleuze and Guattari 193.

WASPs in buckled black, who heard God clamoring to them in every turn of a leaf or cow loose among apple orchards in autumn ... [.]"¹²⁴ This is the same system incapable of expressing a new alliance due to an intermingling past found in this situation. Secondly, and most importantly, the result of a new alliance places Slothrop in the Zone - a place both everywhere and nowhere. Destabilization, one of the key functions found in the paranoia that saturates *Gravity's Rainbow*, is once more clearly present. With nothing to grasp onto Tyrone Slothrop is at the mercy of both Them and Pynchon with no chance of escaping the Zone intact because it will absorb, fragment, and then scatter him throughout this borderless area.

Another key facet of the Zone involves the absence of national boundaries. Benedict Anderson's classic text on nationalism *Imagined Communities* (1983) offers great insight into the importance of clearly stated nation-ness. He asserts that "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."¹²⁵ In immediate postwar Germany this is both not present or existing in an overwhelming manner contingent on the nations and people occupying this reterritorialized space that Slothrop is part of in a partial manner. Pynchon introduces a lengthy passage involving the mass of nationless people that begins:

The Nationalities are on the move. It is a great frontierless streaming out here. Volksdeutsch from across the Oder, moved out by the Poles and headed for the camp at Rostock, Poles fleeing the Lublin regime, others going back home, the eyes of both parties, when they do meet, hooded behind cheekbones, eyes much older than what's forced them into moving, Estonians, Letts, and Lithuanians trekking north again, all their wintry wool in dark bundles, shoes in tatters, songs too hard to sing, talk pointless, Sudetens and East Prussians shuttling between Berlin and the DP camps in Mecklenburg, Czechs and Slovaks, Croats and Serbs, Tosks and Ghegs, Macedonians, Magyars, Vlachs, Circassians, Spaniards, Bulgars stirred and streaming over the surface of the Imperial cauldron, colliding, shearing alongside for miles, sliding away, numb, indifferent to all momenta but the deepest, the instability too far below their itchy feet to give a shape to ... [.] [S]o the populations move, across the open meadow, limping,

¹²⁴ Pynchon 336.

¹²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 2006) 3.

marching, shuffling, carried hauling across the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois order they don't know yet is destroyed forever.¹²⁶ The form present here is full of various nationalities, but what do these nationalities matter in the Zone? They simply do not and therefore the form is essentially formless. A countless and formless mass of people are attempting to return to a way of life that no longer exists, as everybody tries to get "home." But what does "home" mean? The Zone has a way of rendering that word useless alongside the extended list of other terms that no longer possess a graspable meaning which Pynchon obliterates. This formless mass of postwar movement functions closer to an unnamed "event" which adds yet another injection of destabilizing paranoia to the mix.

Returning to "Beyond the Zero" Pynchon, through Pointsman, poses the following question: "Will Postwar be nothing but 'events,' newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of the history?"¹²⁷ First, it is important to note when Pointsman made this observation, again through Pynchon, the Zone did not exist. It appears out of the rubble Postwar creates. The Zone will not retain this form forever because this is a finite construction employed to emphasize disorientation. It is certainly not the end of history, but that is always contingent on the person writing history and which history one chooses to emphasize or ignore. Therefore, it does constitute a sort of "event" that is integral to this novel in which connections are both simultaneously made and severed. The Zone's place in history is entirely dependent on *Gravity's Rainbow*, which, in itself, is also nothing but an event.

To summarize, it is an impossible task to analyze every formal construct found in the Zone. The above examples are not complete, but a reiteration of some the formal constructs previously discussed is probably useful at this time. First, the Zone, as McHale asserts, is indicative of potential and subjective realities. Its place in this text clearly deviates from "Beyond

¹²⁶ Pynchon 651-2.

¹²⁷ Pynchon 65.

the Zero" and, to a lesser degree, "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering." The Zone is its own reality. Next, its existence is contingent on Germany formally existing as a territorialized state, losing that status, becoming deterritorialized and then reterritorialized by the occupying powers. The Zone is a new and uneasy alliance wherein both old and new orders function in an antagonistic manner to use Deleuze and Guattari's terms. Thirdly, the eradication of the Zone's borders and boundaries evoke a nationless entity. This also involves the mass movements of countless people from one point to another. It matters not where they intend to go because the only thing that now exists for them is the Zone. Lives formally known are forever shattered in this Postwar environment. Fourthly, the notion of history and events in relation to the Zone is another important feature. Its place in history, when dealing specifically with the Zone, is entirely dependent on its functionality as an "event" coming from a work of fiction such as *Gravity's Rainbow* which, in itself, also functions as an "event." Finally, one must look at the overall goal of the Zone that Pynchon employs. The dominant effect it has on the reader is that of disorientation resulting in a loss of a well-defined place thus enforcing paranoia when one no longer knows on which ground he stands.

3.5: Decentering and Fragmentation

Returning to McHale's "Pynchon's postmodernism" the idea of decentering is relayed under the general topic of "Some postmodernities"¹²⁸ that focus on theories of postmodernity as opposed to postmodernism. Again, there will be no debate on postmodernism, postmodernity, or what constitutes "the postmodern condition" made famous by Jean-François Lyotard. The various theories available are too numerous resulting once more in an argument characterized by a lack of clarity. However, McHale certainly has a valid point by positing, "Where modernists explored the alienation of the individual subject, postmodernists ... sought to capture the

¹²⁸ McHale 98.

experience of fragmentation or decentering of the subject."¹²⁹ The latter part of that statement is especially applicable to Tyrone Slothrop's situation. But the modernist view is also worth investigating only to show the heightened decentering and fragmentation that occurs in certain theories of postmodernity applicable to *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Tyrone Slothrop, as an individual subject, faces alienation but in a heightened and scattered form indicative of the rampant paranoia found in this novel. He is never truly alone. External sources and the nature of the Zone does not permit that. One could argue that is in itself one source of alienation, but consistently getting into the situations he does exhibits a willingness to fight and participate in whatever is forced upon him by external sources. "Paranoids are not paranoids (Proverb 5) because they're paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves, fucking idiots, deliberately into paranoid situations."¹³⁰ The modernist viewpoint crumbles further when accounting for the sheer number of people Slothrop consistently comes into contact with. Alienation, in its traditional sense again, is hard to argue against with so many people invested heavily in his daily activities. Focusing on internal alienation is a much more accurate approach that comes closer to McHale's theory. Slothrop's liminality is a prominent feature found especially in "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering," which was heavily analyzed in earlier sections of this chapter. But as Tyrone Slothrop moves through the Zone liminality morphs into exactly what McHale points out. He becomes a fragmented and decentered subject.

The presentation of different identities has occurred, but these were in the liminal stage. Liminality is complete and the decentering coupled with fragmentation of the subject commences with "In the Zone." The first of these identities completing both decentering and fragmentation is that of Rocketman. On once more hearing American troops Pynchon writes,

¹²⁹ McHale 99-100.

¹³⁰ Pynchon 349.

"For a minute he has the truly unbalanced idea of running out in the street and asking them to take him back, requesting political asylum in America."¹³¹ The self-awareness and fear - heavily present involving his first encounter with the American military - no longer exists. Self-awareness is also now gone. Speaking of nationality is useless as Slothrop knows not who or what to identify with. It is important to recall this is a man at least nominally in search of rocket technology and the origins regarding his own beginning. Säure, referring to the missile asks, "What do you want it for? Will your country use it against Russia?"¹³² Slothrop answers, "I don't want it. What do you mean, "my country"?"¹³³

The fragmentation and decentering of the subject continues at the Potsdam Conference. This is a major political and historical event as it decides, essentially, on the division of postwar Germany amongst the occupying powers. The political events, and their implications, do not seem to register with him because the decentering of the subject ensures that. The death of Roosevelt also never registered with Slothrop. Truman is now president. He then attempts to escape the decentered and fragmented existence that now defines him as he asks:

'Why didn't anybody tell me?' Slothrop was going into high school when FDR was starting out in the White House. ... Hoover he'd heard of, dimly - something to with shack towns or vacuum cleaners - but Roosevelt was *his* president, the only one he'd known. It seemed he'd just keep getting elected, term after term forever. But somebody had decided to change that.¹³⁴

Despite the political markers including the Potsdam Conference surrounding him this is not, outside of the brief reminiscence regarding Roosevelt, a situation that concerns him. His central mission is to find hashish in full Rocketman attire. But digging a little deeper into the above passage does help illuminate his current decentered and fragmented existence. Roosevelt was all he knew and with his death Slothrop's past continues to disintegrate. Trapped in this existence

¹³¹ Pynchon 428.

¹³² Pynchon 447.

¹³³ Pynchon 447.

¹³⁴ Pynchon 444.

characterized by the scattered non-individual is indicative of the function of paranoia within *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon relays the following observation: "Each driver thinks he's in control of his own vehicle, each thinks he has a separate destination, but Slothrop knows better."¹³⁵

Continuing his journey into a decentered and fragmented existence the following passage is indicative of Slothrop's fate whilst travelling towards Cuxhaven. "So Slothrop is borne, afloat on the water-leas. Like signals set out for lost travelers, shapes keep repeating for him, Zonal shapes he will allow to enter but won't interpret, not any more."¹³⁶ His refusal to interpret "Zonal shapes" is of the utmost importance because he no longer needs to. The highest level of decentering and fragmentation will soon commence but not before the reader grapples with the following exhortation that, at this point in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop accepts with complete fragmentation approaching soon. Pynchon writes:

Are You Really Supposed To Find Anything? What If It Is Death Tyrone? What If We Don't Want You To Find Anything? If We Don't Want To Give You Your Discharge You'll Just Go On Like This Forever Won't You? Maybe We Want You Only To Keep On. You Don't Know Do You Tyrone. What Makes You Think You Can Play As Well As We Can? You Can't. You Think You're Good But You're Really Shit And We All Know It. That Is In Your Dossier. (Laughter. Humming.)¹³⁷

None of this matters to the degree it once did. Tyrone Slothrop and the Zone are an intertwined entity with no separation possible and it is in the subsequent subchapter the Deleuzian sense of "becoming" is increasingly crucial to understand why exactly that is.

3.6: Deleuze's "Becoming" Zone

Gilles Deleuze's essay, collected from *Essays Critical and Clinical*, entitled "Life and Literature" provides powerful insight in relation to Slothrop and the Zone. He writes:

[L]iterature ... exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal - which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point: a man, a

¹³⁵ Pynchon 451.

¹³⁶ Pynchon 671.

¹³⁷ Pynchon 713.

woman, a beast, a stomach, a child... It is not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature only begins when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say 'I' ... [.]¹³⁸

The "I" Deleuze speaks of relates directly to Slothrop from "Beyond the Zero" through "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering" and up to his present location "In the Zone." One could argue in the opening two sections of *Gravity's Rainbow* there was some sense of an "I" found in Tyrone Slothrop. Liminality resulting into the non-individual stripped that from him by the end of the opening two sections. This removal of the "I" becomes more apparent the further Slothrop ventures through the Zone and according to Deleuze this is when literature begins. Deleuze continues: "Of course, literary characters are perfectly individuated, and are neither vague nor general; but all their individual traits elevate them to a vision that carries them off in an indefinite, like a becoming that is too powerful for them ... [.]"¹³⁹ It is true Slothrop exists on an individuated basis and is neither vague or general. He is, arguably, the closest individual representing a protagonist in *Gravity's Rainbow*, yet it is this issue of "becoming" involving Slothrop and the Zone's immense power of disorientation needing examination.

As Slothrop enters Cuxhaven Pynchon provides the description of the environs that will then provide insight into the Deleuzian notion of "becoming." Pynchon writes:

At nightfall the children roam the streets carrying round paper lanterns, singing *Laterne, Laterne, Sonne, Mond, und Sterne*... spheres in country evenings, pale as souls, singing good-by to another summer. In a coastal town, near Wismar, as he's falling to sleep in a little park, they surround Slothrop and tell him the story of Plechazunga, the Pig-Hero who, sometime back in the 10th century, routed a Viking invasion, appearing suddenly out of a thunderbolt and chasing a score of screaming Norsemen back into the sea. Every summer since then, a Thursday has been set aside to celebrate the town's deliverance - Thursday being named after Donar or Thor, the thunder-god, who sent down the giant pig. The old gods, even by the 10th century, still had some pull with the people. Donar hadn't quite been tamed into Saint Peter or Roland, though the ceremony did come to be held at the town's Roland statue near the Peterskirche.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, "Life and Literature," *Essays Critical and Critical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso Books, 1998) 3.

¹³⁹ Deleuze, *Life and Literature* 3.

¹⁴⁰ Pynchon 672.

This tradition, known as the Schweinheldfest,¹⁴¹ faces trouble this year and after prodding from several children Slothrop agrees to become the Plechazunga dressed in full costume: "The pig costume is a little startling - pink, blue, yellow, bright sour colors, a German expressionist pig, plush outside, padded with straw inside. It seems to fit perfectly."¹⁴² Of course it does.

In relation to Deleuze's "becoming" Slothrop has inserted himself into something inescapable. By agreeing to appear as Plechazunga he, perhaps unwittingly, is now a part of this town's mythology and history while quickly approaching a complete decentered and fragmented existence because the subject's "I" no longer matters. He is now Plechazunga and well on his journey to "becoming" forever Zone, which continues in the opening of pages of "The Counterforce." Pynchon relays the following information: "He's kept alone [in the Zone]. If others have seen him or his fire, they haven't tried to approach."¹⁴³ The obsession for some sort of stability is still vaguely present even as the Zone, a destabilized realm that only adds to the paranoia within this text, makes the uselessness of the entire situation apparent. "Why does he have this obsession with getting papers? What th' fuck are *papers* anyhow? ... DPs, offices burned, records lost forever - papers might not mean so much in Europe... waitaminute, so much as *where* Slothrop? Huh? America?"¹⁴⁴ And what if he had those papers? What good are they? The destabilizing force of paranoia, will continue and there is nothing Slothrop can do: "Past Slothrops, say averaging one a day, ten thousand of them, some more powerful than others, had been going over every sundown to the furious host."¹⁴⁵

However, in order to fully complete this transformation Deleuze, again in "Life and Literature," presents the following observation:

¹⁴¹ Pynchon 673.

¹⁴² Pynchon 673.

¹⁴³ Pynchon 737.

¹⁴⁴ Pynchon 738.

¹⁴⁵ Pynchon 739.

To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule - neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form.¹⁴⁶

Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop has "become Zone" due largely to decentering, the scattered and destabilized nature of the paranoid individual, and, in this sense, literal fragmentation each of which are intrinsic to this text. The dismantling of this man is complete as Pynchon adds:

At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection where the judges have come to set up a gibbet for a common criminal who is to be hanged at noon."¹⁴⁷

Slothrop, after "becoming Zone," is no longer distinguishable from his past trials or life that eventually led to this conclusion because, in short, they lose all significance at this point in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The Zone absorbed him and, venturing further into "The Counterforce," the complete and total fragmentation of Pynchon's work will also begin.

¹⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Life and Literature* 1.

¹⁴⁷ Pynchon 740.

Chapter 4: Disassembly

4.1: You Will Want Cause and Effect

The Zone scattered Slothrop throughout its vast environs. The war is over. What else can *Gravity's Rainbow* accomplish? The only sensible answer within the context of this novel is to further fragment this text to such a degree that it no longer resembles itself and Thomas Pynchon is more than ready to do that. But he does this methodically. What may appear random in certain episodes is anything but that. Pynchon has two reasons for doing this. The first is to assert authorial control with the second involving a final destabilization of the narrative in order to further disorientate the reader thus invoking fear, which are central features regarding the function of paranoia found in this novel. Pynchon writes, "You will want cause and effect."¹⁴⁸ This does not mean the reader will ever attain that information because the evocation of power is absolute in *Gravity's Rainbow*. "The Counterforce" contains enough familiar names to lull the reader into a false sense of comfort before fragmentation jars him awake by destroying that same comfort. The reader must fully confront the massive amounts of detritus accumulated throughout this novel.

Numerous critics have remarked on the disassembling nature found in "The Counterforce." Joseph M. Conte, writing on "The Counterforce," states "the narrative itself has begun to disintegrate."¹⁴⁹ David Seed's argument, from *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*, "suggests ['The Counterforce' represents] the very opposite of [an] orderly linear realistic narrative ... and implies that the novel begins to reverse its own assembly. The 'scattering' which Slothrop experiences could be taken as a metaphor for the fate of the text itself."¹⁵⁰ Harold Bloom argues, "Nothing holds or could hold *Gravity's Rainbow* together -

¹⁴⁸ Pynchon 786.

¹⁴⁹ Joseph M. Conte, *Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern Fiction* (London: The University of Alabama Press, 2002) 165.

¹⁵⁰ David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988) 215.

except Slothrop."¹⁵¹ Slothrop is now gone after his scattering found in the first episode of "The Counterforce." Or is he? Pynchon makes this impossible to answer when Slothrop makes seemingly random appearances throughout this final section.

There are, however, numerous examples involving fragmented text and voices that continue with the central focus on "The Story of Byron the Bulb," certain aspects of episode six, and finishing with unanswered questions as Pynchon's novel fully disintegrates. Interestingly enough, Gilles Deleuze, in an essay entitled "Whitman," focuses intensely on fragmentation found within American literature and, in order to make sense of that aspect found in "The Counterforce," his theories prove incredibly useful despite there being no mention of *Gravity's Rainbow* or Thomas Pynchon.

4.2: Deleuze and Fragmentation

Fragmentation, dealt with in the previous chapter, primarily focused on Tyrone Slothrop through a postmodern lens provided by Brian McHale. Gilles Deleuze's "Whitman" takes the idea of fragmentation further by applying it to the entirety of American literature. His ideas in this essay also apply directly to the narrative's fragmentation found in selected aspects of "The Counterforce." *Gravity's Rainbow* is a fragmented text with numerous storylines appearing and vanishing, which may materialize later or cease to exist. A reality of American literature, as Deleuze deems it, involves "spontaneity or the innate feeling for the fragmentary ... [.]"¹⁵²

One could speak of Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake but their story seemingly contains some sense of closure. Pynchon places emphasis on this closure in several examples. "'The War' was the condition she needed for being with Roger. 'Peace' allows her to leave

¹⁵¹ Harold Bloom, "Introduction," *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003) 3.

¹⁵² Gilles Deleuze, "Whitman," *Essays Critical and Critical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso Books, 1998) 60.

him."¹⁵³ Pynchon continues: "The paranoia, the danger, the tuneless whistling of busy Death next door, are all put to sleep, back in the War, back with her Roger Mexico Years. The day the rockets stopped falling, it began to end for Roger and Jessica."¹⁵⁴ But even this closure must fragment when Pynchon writes:

As it grew clear, day after safe day, that no more [rockets] would fall ever again, the new world crept into and over her like spring - not so much the changes she felt in air and light, in the crowds at Woolworth's, as a bad cinema spring, full of paper leaves and cotton-wool blossoms and phony lighting ... no, never again will she [Jessica] stand at their kitchen sink with a china cup squeaking in her fingers, its small crying-child sound defenseless, meekly resonating BLOWN OUT OF ATTENTION AS THE ROCKET FELL smashing to a clatter of points white and blue across the floor ...¹⁵⁵

The fragmentation present in the above passage is certainly spontaneous and meant to jar the reader out of any comfort zone that closure normally represents because Pynchon uses this in a hostile manner. He then reassembles the fragment into a more coherent form: "She's meant to go. ... Her [Jessica's] future is with the World's own, and Roger's only with this strange version of the War he still carries with him."¹⁵⁶

Another excellent example of spontaneous fragmentation involves the meeting between Tchitcherine and Enzian. Violence is probably the default outcome expected by the reader. This was a confrontation steadily constructed throughout a large swath of *Gravity's Rainbow*. That, of course, did not happen. Pynchon once more presents a deviated form of closure that intentionally falls apart under closer inspection. He writes:

Tchitcherine pulls in his trousers and climbs up to see if he can beg some food, or cigarettes. The black faces pass by, mba-kayere, some glancing at him curiously, others too involved with their own exhaustion, or with keeping a tight guard on a covered wagon containing the warhead section of the 00001. Enzian on his motorcycle stops for a moment, mba-kayere, to talk to the scarred, unshaven white. They're in the middle of the bridge. They talk broken German. Tchitcherine manages to hustle half a pack of American cigarettes and three raw potatoes. The two men nod, not quite formally, not

¹⁵³ Pynchon 744.

¹⁵⁴ Pynchon 744.

¹⁵⁵ Pynchon 744.

¹⁵⁶ Pynchon 745.

quite smiling, Enzian puts his bike in gear and returns to his journey. Tchitcherine lights a cigarette, watching them down the road, shivering in the dusk.¹⁵⁷

This, too, represents fragmentary spontaneity especially after considering Pynchon's method for the forced closure of this encounter. "This is magic. Sure - but not necessarily fantasy. Certainly not the first time a man has passed his brother by, at the edge of the evening, often forever, without knowing it."¹⁵⁸ Vladimir Propp would certainly approve.

The previous two examples present a clear example of the narrative's fragmentation. But Roger Mexico, Jessica Swanlake, Tchitcherine, and Enzian feature prominently throughout large parts of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Deleuze opens "Whitman" with the following statement: "With much confidence and tranquility, Whitman states that writing is fragmentary, and that the *American* writer has to devote himself to writing in fragments."¹⁵⁹ What then happens when the entirety of the text begins to disassemble itself? An examination of "The Story of Byron the Bulb" will now commence in order to answer this question.

Let us start first with its placement in the final section of the novel. Pynchon presents the story of Eddie Pensiero. There was no mention of this man throughout the entirety of this novel until now. Fearing a lack of connectedness is a major function of paranoia within this text. But Pynchon understands this and in order to at least temporarily thwart this line of thinking he presents the following passage:

Shivering is one of Eddie Pensiero's favorite pastimes. Not the kind of shiver *normal* people get, the goose-on-the-grave Passover and gone, but shivering that *doesn't stop*. Very hard to get used to at first. Eddie is a connoisseur of shivers. He is even able, in some strange way, to *read* them, like Säure Bummer reads reefers, like Miklos Thanatz reads whip-scars. But the gift isn't limited just to Eddie's *own* shivers, oh no, they're *other* peoples' shivers, too!¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Pynchon 871.

¹⁵⁸ Pynchon 872.

¹⁵⁹ Deleuze, Whitman 56.

¹⁶⁰ Pynchon 759.

The reader is at least somewhat acquainted with Säure Bummer and Miklos Thanatz. But the key issue here is who Pynchon left out and why. The obvious candidate is Pirate Prentice because his ability to get into the fantasies of others would fit perfectly in the above passage. Is this an attempt at erasing history? Another "Postwar event?"¹⁶¹ The answer is both yes and no. The former is a correct assessment due to the fact that if the narrative itself implodes a sense of history is relegated to a mere event must occur. The latter, as Deleuze might argue, is applicable due to the spontaneity of the fragment inherent in American literature and the American writer.

Regardless, this is the seemingly random information that frames "The Story of Byron the Bulb" while Pynchon continues this hostile onslaught. He writes, "The real War is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people. Only right now it is killing them in more subtle ways. Often in ways that are too complicated, even for us, at this level, to trace."¹⁶² And, in order to at least partially dispose of a complete lack of connectedness, he leaves the following: "Now it turns out that this light bulb over the colonel's head here is the same identical Osram light bulb that Franz Pökler used to sleep next to in his bunk at Nordhausen."¹⁶³ The reader, once more, should possess knowledge of both Nordhausen and Franz Pökler, with the latter's story also dealt with in a fragmentary nature scattered throughout the text. However, it is only now, after acknowledging the aforementioned framing device Pynchon employs, that an examination of "The Story of Byron the Bulb" can begin.

The opening paragraph deals with objects, people, and corporations as something inseparable. After being reassigned to Osram's Bulb Baby Heaven in Berlin¹⁶⁴ the narrator makes the following clear: "But don't let Them fool you, this *is* a bureaucracy first, and a Bulb Baby

¹⁶¹ Pynchon 65.

¹⁶² Pynchon 764.

¹⁶³ Pynchon 766.

¹⁶⁴ Pynchon 767.

Heaven only as a sort of sideline."¹⁶⁵ In this fragment the inanimate object is now animate and far from reluctant to assert control complete with plans:

Byron has had a vision against the rafters of his ward, of 20 million Bulbs, all over Europe, at a given synchronizing pulse arranged by one of his many agents in the Grid, all these Bulbs beginning to strobe *together*, humans thrashing around the 20 million rooms like fish on the beaches of Perfect Energy - Attention, humans, this has been a warning to you. Next time, a few of us will *explode*.¹⁶⁶

Power is a commodity within a system that abhors relinquishing any sort of control. The system, of course, fights back when Pynchon writes:

Is Byron in for a rude awakening! There is already an organization, a human one, known as 'Phoebus,' the international light-bulb cartel, headquartered in Switzerland. Run pretty much by International GE, Osram, and Associated Electrical Industries of Britain, which are in turn owned 100%, 29% and 46%, respectively, by the General Electric Company in America.¹⁶⁷

In this spontaneous fragment there are themes present proving interconnectedness, which, in this example, is somewhat troubling. Connectedness previously provided relief at times for the paranoiac but now provokes the complete opposite. This is the global economic system acting as one by blurring distinctions. It is extremely difficult after reading this passage to unequivocally state who owns what and by blurring distinctiveness Pynchon creates panic for the reader. Clarity is once more toyed with thus producing another form of destabilization. "But Phoebus doesn't yet know that Byron is immortal."¹⁶⁸ Byron, again, is asserting control by challenging the system. Harold Bloom writes, "He can never burn out, which at least is an annoyance for the whole paranoid System, and at most is an embarrassment for them."¹⁶⁹ Control is a central feature in the function of paranoia in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the denial of this represents a challenge, as Bloom argued, for the entire system. Observation must now occur: "As his burning

¹⁶⁵ Pynchon 767.

¹⁶⁶ Pynchon 768.

¹⁶⁷ Pynchon 769.

¹⁶⁸ Pynchon 769.

¹⁶⁹ Bloom, Introduction 3.

lengthens toward 600 hours, the monitors in Switzerland begin to keep more of an eye on Byron."¹⁷⁰ After lasting to eight hundred hours a "Berlin agent is sent out to ... transfer Byron."¹⁷¹ One thousand hours is when Pynchon focuses on the reassertion of control. He writes, "Byron has passed 1000 hours, and the procedure now is standard: the Committee on Incandescent Anomalies sends a hit man to Berlin."¹⁷² Byron does escape, yet it is difficult to state whether this is victory, defeat, or a combination of both.

However, one must return to Deleuze, and his notion of the spontaneous fragment. "The Story of Byron the Bulb" is miniscule when compared to the entirety of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The narrative is fracturing and that forces Pynchon to reassert authority and end this story under his terms.

His [Byron's] youthful dreams of organizing all the bulbs in the world seem impossible now - the Grid is wide open, all messages can be overheard, and there are more than enough traitors out on the line. Prophets traditionally don't last long - they are either killed outright, or given an accident serious enough to make them stop and think, and most often they do pull back. But on Byron has been visited an even better fate. He is condemned to go on forever, knowing the truth and powerless to change anything. No longer will he seek to get off the wheel. His anger and frustration will grow without limit, and he will find himself, poor perverse bulb, enjoying it...¹⁷³

Byron the Bulb continues his immortal existence that is either a blessing or curse, but the spontaneity of the fragment must end here. Immortality is a subversion of control not tolerated within the pages of Pynchon's novel.

4.3: Weaponized Language

As the reader wades into the sixth episode of "The Counterforce" complete with twelve different subsections the narration fragments further into Deleuzian bursts of spontaneity. It begins in the following manner: "Unexpectedly, this country is pleasant, yes, once inside it, quite

¹⁷⁰ Pynchon 770.

¹⁷¹ Pynchon 770.

¹⁷² Pynchon 771.

¹⁷³ Pynchon 776.

pleasant after all."¹⁷⁴ This is hideous misdirection on the part of Pynchon. *Gravity's Rainbow* is falling further apart and the only goal present here is to aid in that dissolution. Pynchon once more disregards any notion of a coherent time structure, which is consistent with past practice, with several characters reappearing in order to comfort the reader. Franz Pökler and Säure Bummer are once more present not entirely unlike the fractured lead-up to "The Story of Byron the Bulb." The major surprise is the return of Tyrone Slothrop. "So, for a time, is Slothrop, attempting to get through to the Argentine anarchist U-boat, now in unknown waters. The reason why is no longer clear to him."¹⁷⁵ His reappearance is also unclear to the reader.

In short, this is open and planned hostility towards the reader with language being Pynchon's weapon of choice. This episode is also hostile to any sense of interpretation that then produces an important question. Is it need of interpretation? The answer to that question is yes. Throughout the various subsections there are passages that may seemingly lack meaning but Pynchon's use of language is fascinating. It is also extremely hostile to the reader.

Wittgenstein argues, "Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is - just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced."¹⁷⁶ Under the subsection "Shit 'N' Shinola" Pynchon begins, "'Now,' Säure wants to know, 'you will tell me about the American expression 'Shit from Shinola.'"¹⁷⁷ The narrator then directly addresses the reader: "Well. *You've* heard the expression 'Shit from Shinola.' As in, 'Aw he don't know Shit from Shinola 'bout that.' Or, 'Marine - you don't know Shit from Shinola.'"¹⁷⁸ This is an excellent example of Wittgenstein's observation. Each word possesses meaning yet the

¹⁷⁴ Pynchon 798.

¹⁷⁵ Pynchon 807.

¹⁷⁶ Wittgenstein 22.

¹⁷⁷ Pynchon 814.

¹⁷⁸ Pynchon 814-15.

production of countless meanings can happen resulting in a different interpretation or completely devoid of meaning depending on the reader. If the focus is on "Shit from Shinola" the meanings splinter. Is this actual feces from a person or place named Shinola? What is Shinola? Would the study of each word's epistemology, already destabilized within this text, be of help? Perhaps, but then one must examine each word or words given responsible for the term chosen and this seems like an impossible task with no ending. The individual must assign meaning to this phrase. "Shit from Shinola" is heavily-coded American slang that, for the most part, has not entered the lexicon of twenty-first century expressions. This is a dead expression. And, in this case, the loss of meaning therefore occurs. Pynchon, intent on imposing order, then offers his own interpretation. He writes:

One implication is that Shit and Shinola are in wildly different categories. You would envision - maybe just because they smell different - no way for Shit and Shinola to coexist. Simply impossible. A stranger to the English language, a German dopefiend such as Säure, not knowing either word, might see 'Shit' as a comical interjection ... [.]¹⁷⁹

However, the terms or phrases to focus on are "one implication," "you would envision," and the interpretation a stranger to the English language might have.

Next, Wittgenstein states, "It is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the logic of language is."¹⁸⁰ Then, under the subsection "Mom Slothrop's Letter to Ambassador Kennedy" the logic of language is toyed with again. It begins: "Well *hi* Joe how've ya been. Listen: Jew-zeppy - we're getting edgy about our youngest again. Would you try bothering a few of those jolly old London connections just *once more*? ... Even if it's old news it'll be good news for Poppy and I."¹⁸¹ If one of the central features of language is to convey and attain information the logic found in the above passage proves Wittgenstein's assertion. With no background

¹⁷⁹ Pynchon 815.

¹⁸⁰ Wittgenstein 22.

¹⁸¹ Pynchon 808.

information found in this subsection the reader must first be aware of Ambassador Kennedy and this involves historical-coding. Steven C. Weisenburger, in *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion*, provides background information: "Joseph P. Kennedy (1888-1969) was the U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James from December 1937 until November, when he stepped down to 'keep America out of war.'"¹⁸² It is telling that an external source was needed in order to approach anything resembling logic in Pynchon's passage. But this logic is purposely flawed. The United States did not enter World War II until the end of 1941. Therefore, if this is Tyrone Slothrop's mother, of which there is no textual proof, is she addressing Kennedy as the acting ambassador? If so then none of this makes sense and continuing through this subsection the logic of language is again under assault. Pynchon writes:

Sometimes I think – ah, Joe, I think they're pieces of the Heavenly City falling down. I'm sorry - didn't mean this to get so gloomy all so sudden, it's just ... but it *isn't* beginning to fall apart, is it, my old fellow Harvard-parent? Sometimes things aren't very clear, that's all.¹⁸³

Nothing is clear regarding the logic of language when it is intent on adding to the destruction of this text. This subsection moves from topic to topic so quickly it is almost as if this mother is aware of the limited time left to express anything. Hostility to the reader on Pynchon's part now links with paranoia as the text and its language contributes to a refined sense of destabilization reinforced by the time period. The same applies to the next example: "Eventually Jack [Kennedy] and Malcolm [X] both got murdered. Slothrop's fate is not so clear. It may be that They have something different in mind for Slothrop."¹⁸⁴ John F. Kennedy died in 1963. Malcolm X died in 1965. The scattering of Slothrop occurs, according to Weisenburger, in 1945.¹⁸⁵ Where is the logic in this language? The syntax is fine, but outside of this there is very little to suggest

¹⁸² Weisenburger 348.

¹⁸³ Pynchon 809.

¹⁸⁴ Pynchon 816.

¹⁸⁵ Weisenburger 322.

this is a coherent statement. There could be numerous theories regarding Slothrop as this is a Barthesian writerly text, but the addition of Kennedy and Malcolm X renders the logic found in Pynchon's language obsolete. To be clear, *Gravity's Rainbow* is a text filled with analepses and prolepses. But the insertion of these three individuals boggles the mind by erasing any logic formed by language. Again, the only possible reasoning behind this must center on the disintegration of the text itself which is well underway. This is language bursting with hostility that in turn disorients the reader causing fear that links to the function of paranoia in this text. Pynchon presents a language outside of logic and he is not finished.

Wittgenstein argues, "Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes."¹⁸⁶ The final episode of "The Counterforce" and *Gravity's Rainbow* attempts to answer some of the questions in a somewhat logical manner regarding the reappearance of Slothrop when Pynchon presents several textual clues with the first being this statement. But the most pressing question is why now? He writes:

There is also the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly - perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, *his time's assembly* - and there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn't. The plan went wrong. He is being broken down instead, and scattered.¹⁸⁷

Chronological order is not how one disassembles a text as immense as *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon is aware of that and that is one possible reason for its placement in the closing pages of this novel. Yet, this not something the reader can ever empirically prove. This then leaves the reader in a state characterized by confusion, disorientation, and fear that only heightens paranoia. Where exactly is Pynchon intent on taking the reader? Perhaps to soothe these feelings Pynchon

¹⁸⁶ Wittgenstein 22.

¹⁸⁷ Pynchon 875.

continues with information regarding Slothrop. "... Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of the original scattering."¹⁸⁸ Is this an attempt at closure for Tyrone Slothrop? No. Closure is not something ever applicable for Slothrop. His very existence must lack coherence. Slothrop can appear, scatter, and reappear even if this emergence is within the mind - conscious or unconscious - of an individual person or group of people. The reader must remember: "It will all go on, occupation or not, with or without Uncle Tyrone."¹⁸⁹ But Tyrone's scattered fragments remain part of the Zone only until *Gravity's Rainbow* implodes, which will occur very soon.

4.4: A Reluctant Goodbye and Questions Without Answers

To conclude this chapter, it is now necessary to return Leo Bersani's immaculate essay, cited heavily in the second chapter, entitled "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature." He writes: "But why should we stop? In our paranoid criticism we will, after all, be running parallel to Slothrop, thus providing, if we are lucky enough, another model of unreadability, a convincing failure of self-knowledge, a defiant act of Slothropian Oedipalism."¹⁹⁰ Bersani is correct. Both the reader and critic will continue their respective forays into a text bursting with paranoia and providing no concrete answers. This is outright hostility planned by Thomas Pynchon through weaponized language present throughout the entirety of this text. The lack of clear answers also helps define paranoia's function in this text. Bersani continues: "It is as if we could know everything and still not know what kind of a text *Gravity's Rainbow* is."¹⁹¹

The constant binary of "We" and "They" finally also deserves attention. "The polarity of We and They in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a paranoid polarity, and They are all the more threatening

¹⁸⁸ Pynchon 881.

¹⁸⁹ Pynchon 883.

¹⁹⁰ Bersani 167.

¹⁹¹ Bersani 156.

in that We can 'know' them only through our suspicions about them."¹⁹² But who truly represents "We" and "They" in this piece of fiction written by a living person? The simple answer for "We" could represent the most obvious characters such as Tyrone Slothrop, Pirate Prentice, Roger Mexico, among others. The myopic explanation for "They" might include the global economic system, the war machine, Blicero/Weissman, or Laszlo Jamf, once more amongst many others. Bersani is effusive when asserting, under certain conditions, that Thomas Pynchon is the reader's "They."¹⁹³ However, there really is no room for one situated in the middle of "We" and "They" and that may, at times, include the reader.

Therefore, as the master architect behind this dense novel Pynchon represents both "We," "They," and everything in between complete with the ability to assert authorial control whenever the need is felt. "In paranoia, the primary function of the enemy is to provide a definition of the real that makes paranoia necessary."¹⁹⁴ There are moments throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* where he empathizes with the reader. One example is characterized by Roger and Jessica's entering a church. Pynchon then produces a stunning passage not entirely devoid of hope that the fear of war naturally brings out in a person. He then writes:

Tonight's scratch choir was all male, epauletted shoulders visible under the wide necks of the white robes, and many faces nearly as white with the exhaustion of soaked and muddy fields, midwatches, cables strummed by the nervous balloons sunfishing in the clouds, tents whose lights inside shone nuclear at twilight, soullike, through the cross-hatched walls, turning canvas to fine gauze, while the wind drummed there.¹⁹⁵

Pynchon can also appear in the middle approaching authorial neutrality, not unlike the reader at times, after producing something like the following passage: "Yet who can presume to say *what*

¹⁹² Bersani 155.

¹⁹³ Bersani 156.

¹⁹⁴ Bersani 156.

¹⁹⁵ Pynchon 152.

the War wants, so vast and aloof is it ... so *absentee*. Perhaps the War isn't even an awareness - not a life at all, really. There may only be some cruel, accidental resemblance to life."¹⁹⁶

But, more often than not, Pynchon is there to antagonize the reader by overseeing an inferno of paranoia principally characterized by destabilization in multitudinous forms. He is the Master intent on guiding the reader through this labyrinth. After Blicero/Weissman fires the rocket this is more than evident. Pynchon is the puppet master when the setting then switches to a 1970s American cinema and writes: "There is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you, or to reach between your own cold legs ... [.]"¹⁹⁷ Comfort was long ago destabilized by the consistent onslaught of paranoia, but, if now needed, please remember time is brief. Connect with that person next to you. Destruction is imminent and, as *Gravity's Rainbow* ends, an insurmountable obstacle that leaves nobody unscathed, which includes the mindless pleasures Pynchon meticulously accumulates to first construct and ultimately destroy this novel.

¹⁹⁶ Pynchon 155.

¹⁹⁷ Pynchon 902.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the closing pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*, even while the text is disassembling, Pynchon refuses to finish with the reader. Under the fragmented subsection "Orpheus Puts Down Harp" the setting is now 1970s America describing the Orpheus Theatre in California. He writes:

Laughter surrounds. Full, faithful-audience laughter, coming from the four points of the padded interior. You realize, with a vague sense of dismay, that this is some kind of stereo rig here, and a glance inside the glove compartment reveals an entire *library* of similar tape: CHEERING (AFFECTIONATE), CHEERING (AROUSSED), HOSTILE MOB in an assortment of 22 languages, YESES, NOES, NEGRO SUPPORTERS, WOMEN SUPPORTERS, ATHLETIC - oh, come now - FIRE FIGHT (CONVENTIONAL), FIRE FIGHT (URBAN), CATHEDRAL ACOUSTICS ..."¹⁹⁸

Pynchon inserts this passage towards the very end of this novel in order to highlight the easiness in which an individual is manipulated by accepting a simulation of voices dictated by another source of authority. One of this novel's most obvious traits is the cacophony of voices numbering in the hundreds,¹⁹⁹ which Toni Morrison has an interesting take on from a 1993 interview with the *Paris Review*. She asserts: "It's important not to have a totalizing view. In American literature we have been so totalized - as though there is only one version. We are not an indistinguishable block of people who always behave the same way."²⁰⁰ Pynchon combats any sort of totalizing view in *Gravity's Rainbow*. There are myriad points of view present. His novel also resists the "one version" Morrison finds problematic because this is a writerly text. However, there is the persistent question involving what voice the reader should follow especially after factoring in the following passage:

'We have to talk in *some* kind of code, naturally,' continues the Manager. 'We always have. But none of the codes is that hard to break. Opponents have accused us, for just that reason, of contempt for the people. But we really do it all in the spirit of fair play. We're

¹⁹⁸ Pynchon 897.

¹⁹⁹ Bloom 2.

²⁰⁰ Schappell, Elissa, and Claudia Brodsky Lacour. "Toni Morrison, The Art of Fiction No. 134." *The Paris Review*. 1993. <theparisreview.org/interviews/1888/toni-morrison-the-art-of-fiction-no-134-toni-morrison> 3 Aug 2019.

not monsters. We know we have to give them *some* chance. We can't take hope away from them, can we?"²⁰¹

The voice of the manager in the above passage belongs to Richard M. Zhubb who has a "habit of throwing his arms up into an inverted 'peace sign,' ... exposing in the act uncounted yards of white French cuff."²⁰² This gesture, according to Weisenburger, identifies Zhubb as Richard M. Nixon.²⁰³ Zhubb's appearance in this text is brief, but accomplishes two things. First, is this one of the voices the reader should follow? Nixon, presented through Zhubb, was a man known for manipulation and dishonesty. Next, it brings the reader back to the fictive reality of *Gravity's Rainbow* in which the present intermingles with the past that continues into an unknown future. There is another example exemplifying the above that Pynchon chooses to hammer the reader with once more involving Blicero/Weissman. "If you're wondering where he's [Blicero/Weissman] gone, look among the successful academics, the Presidential advisors, the token intellectuals who sit on boards of directors. He [Blicero/Weissman] is almost surely there. Look high, not low."²⁰⁴ The reader, after realizing this, is hit with another round of uncertainty that, by this point in the novel, provokes another wave of paranoia centering around the usage of a thinly-veiled president and the possibility of a Nazi occupying positions of power in a postwar world. But *Gravity's Rainbow* thrives on instability. Questions, all lacking clear answers, are again prevalent with no hope for closure amongst another wave of limited knowledge that only Pynchon can divulge. The reader, by now, should expect this.

Levine offers the following generality when speaking of Pynchon's novels [including *Gravity's Rainbow*]. He writes, "[C]ritics almost invariably respond to the novels with thematic readings that reduce variety to a fairly conventional structure."²⁰⁵ However, there is nothing

²⁰¹ Pynchon 897.

²⁰² Pynchon 895.

²⁰³ Weisenburger 382.

²⁰⁴ Pynchon 888-89.

²⁰⁵ Levine 57.

coherent about the function of paranoia found in *Gravity's Rainbow* with the only exception possibly being its consistent employment. It is an unstable term applicable in various situations that then grants Pynchon power with no restrictions. Instability is the central function that drives paranoia throughout this novel. Paranoia in *Gravity's Rainbow* includes a loss of individualism resulting in the non-individual. It infects knowledge, epistemology, the epistemological break, and etymology. Pynchon's onslaught of paranoia tackles various questions and answers with the latter at times resulting in altered versions of the former that, under the right circumstances, could continue on an infinite loop depending on how much punishment the reader is willing to absorb. Pynchon battles facts and clarity, which also includes Wittgenstein's concepts of language. Liminality, both as place and personal attribute, also contribute to paranoia's function in this novel. Fragmentation and decentering move the argument along with the nature of reality in a fictional environment joined by sporadic examinations of history and time. Power, fear, control, freedom, and domination also contribute to paranoia's functionality in this text alongside Pynchon's hostility to the reader and the weaponization of language.

The above summary featuring the various functions of paranoia within *Gravity's Rainbow* does not "reduce variety to a conventional structure."²⁰⁶ The focus is on paranoia's function throughout the entirety of this text and when dealing with such disparate attributes Levine's statement seems reductive. Pynchon's novel is a text wherein one must provide a sense of rationality to combat irrationality combined with producing, as well as one can, logic that confronts the illogical. Adding a sense of structure to a critical analysis of a text that oftentimes resists summation is perhaps the only time the critic or reader can confront Pynchon's hostility to the reader.

²⁰⁶ Levine 57.

However, Levine, aware of paranoia's immensity within *Gravity's Rainbow* then states: "If ... Pynchon not only describes but participates in paranoia, it is not the sort of selective paranoia that sustains itself by screening out the details that don't fit. It survives in the quest for the surprise or aberration that nobody ever noticed before."²⁰⁷ The function of paranoia within this text is in no way selective. It is vast and exemplified by the various ways it functions with nothing short of freedom. One of paranoia's key facets in Pynchon's novel is its ability to assimilate into situations that seem unrelated. Its very presence revels in surprise and aberration on a consistent basis as Levine suggests. The reader must not forget Pynchon is responsible for everything presented within this text and that includes the omnipresent reality of paranoia as it functions within *Gravity's Rainbow*.

However, literature of this magnitude should never be hermetically sealed off and confined to life within academia. The paranoia found in *Gravity's Rainbow* is emblematic of American society's past, present, and future. Its various functions found in Pynchon's novel could possibly aid in a more thorough understanding of the political, social, and cultural context present in the United States since its existence as the "New World." America is a paranoid nation and excluding the general reading public from this discussion would be elitism - an already loaded political term - at its finest. Richard Poirier's asserts the quite factual observation:

There has usually been a time lag between critical and general acclaim. Not that criticism has, by itself, kept up to mark. There is the conspicuous case of Melville, who wasn't taken seriously until 1921, and even Faulkner had the misfortune of being popular with his second-best novels, like *Sanctuary*.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Levine 57.

²⁰⁸ Richard Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003) 43.

Therefore, where does this place Thomas Pynchon and *Gravity's Rainbow* in the literary and cultural landscape that began in the twentieth century's final quarter while stretching into the twenty-first? A very unique position is the short answer.

Thomas Pynchon is not an obscure figure. He fits neatly into academia, while also possessing a widespread readership. *Gravity's Rainbow* was immediately met by praise collecting numerous accolades since publication and in the decades after. The New York Times named *Gravity's Rainbow* one of the best books published in 1973. It shared the 1974 National Book Award for fiction and was chosen as the fiction winner by the Pulitzer Prize jury in that same year. However, the Pulitzer advisory board rejected the jury's recommendation with no award given that year.²⁰⁹ Its stature only grew in the ensuing decades. Time Magazine's 2010 list of the best one hundred books written in English since 1923 included *Gravity's Rainbow*.²¹⁰ Richard Lacayo, commenting on this novel's inclusion in this list, had the following to say. "Among American writers of the second half of the 20th century, Pynchon is the indisputed²¹¹ candidate for lasting literary greatness. This book is why."²¹²

Outside of award juries and the critical sphere Pynchon also firmly exists in what many deem, often in a pejorative manner, as "popular culture." Pynchon, using his own voice with a paper bag over his head to conceal identity, made several appearances on the animated American television show "The Simpsons." *Gravity's Rainbow* - as in the actual book - was also featured on the same television series. Pynchon, and *Gravity's Rainbow* of course, are regular topics of

²⁰⁹ Peter Khiss, "Pulitzer Jurors Dismayed on Pynchon," *The NYTimes.com*, The New York Times Company, 1996 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/05/08/archives/pulitzer-jurors-his-third-novel.html>> 1 Aug 2019.

²¹⁰ Richard Lacayo, "*Gravity's Rainbow*," *Time.com*, Jan 2010 <entertainment.time.com/2005/10/16/all-time-100-novels/slide/gravitys-rainbow-1973-by-thomas-pynchon/> 2 Aug 2019.

²¹¹ "Indisputed" was chosen by the writer. This is not a misspelling.

²¹² Lacayo *Gravity's Rainbow*.

discussion found on numerous web pages and various social networks. CNN also ran a segment on this man in 1997.²¹³

Poirier has a similar view regarding Pynchon and *Gravity's Rainbow* differentiated by a pronounced sense of doubt that plays into the malleability of truth and perception, which were core functions of paranoia in Pynchon's novel. He writes:

Among the most remarkable facts about Thomas Pynchon is that if we are to believe the best-seller list, the selections of the Book-of-the-Month Club, the reviews, and the committee for the National Book Awards, then presumably we are to believe that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a popular book and, at the same time, that it ranks with *Ulysses* and *Moby-Dick* in accomplishment and possibly exceeds them in complexity. Something peculiar is happening here. A writer is received simultaneously into the first rank of the history of our literature and also as a popular novelist.²¹⁴

Poirier believes, if this is the case, there are questions needing answers about the culture from which *Gravity's Rainbow* came from.²¹⁵ But questions and answers, connected with knowledge and power, plunge the reader back into the whirlwind of paranoia Pynchon unleashes in this novel. "We don't want to stop the game, we don't want to get out of the rhythm, but what are we to do if we simply don't know enough to play the game, to move with the rhythm?"²¹⁶ There is no clear answer here just as Pynchon intended. The reader is under his control throughout the entirety of *Gravity's Rainbow* and playing the game by disregarding rules or tradition is perhaps the only strategy available to navigate this paranoid labyrinth of scorched earth set forth by Thomas Pynchon.

²¹³ "Thomas Pynchon CNN report," *Youtube.com*, Jul 2010 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9k_TNk2mtTA> 2 Aug 2019.

²¹⁴ Poirier 43-4.

²¹⁵ Poirier 44.

²¹⁶ Poirier 48.

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