

Imaginary Locales in Pynchon's *Vineland*

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Many reviewers expressed disappointment when Pynchon broke his long silence with the publication of *Vineland* (1990), possibly because they expected a novel with the intellectual conundrums of *V.* or *Gravity's Rainbow*.¹ This disappointment may even have stemmed from Pynchon's own creation of a canon by his tendency to use characters from one novel in another. But this very tendency—which earlier seemed to exclude *The Crying of Lot 49* from the canon²—helps to establish the centrality of *Vineland*. In pointing out that Pynchon seems to have been “less concerned with [Frenesi's] motives or feelings than . . . treating her as an allegory,” Edward Mendelson³ indicates that Pynchon may have violated his own rules for writing by starting, not with character, but with an abstraction.⁴ On the contrary, the locales of *Vineland*, whether the settings for past events or present action, provide keys to character development and thematic content. When Pynchon uses actual places in *Vineland*, he tends to leave them vague, usually mere names, as in the cases of San Francisco, Oklahoma City and Columbus, Ohio; but when he creates completely imaginary locales, he includes symbolic descriptions that give them thematic, satiric or political depth.⁵

John Leonard, among other reviewers, noted that Vinland is the name the Norse gave the North American coast around 1000.⁶ As a distant, romanticized land, Vinland connoted refuge, a haven after the harrowing crossing of the Atlantic. Pynchon's Vineland is also a refuge where fantasy, or at least the ignoring of reality, can shape a girl's education, keeping her from knowing the secrets of her mother, but it is a refuge surrounded and finally invaded by reality. Vinland became identified with Thule, the White Island or Blessed Islands of Western mythology; likewise, Vineland is associated with Tsorrek because it stands at the mouth of the river that, according to Yurok geography, flows from the land of the living to the land of the dead.⁷

Vineland and Vineland County are a curious mixture of the living and the dead, of Prairie and Weed Atman. The one name—Prairie Wheeler or, possibly, Prairie Flower Wheeler⁸—suggests the unlimited expanse of the earthy prairie and the vehicle that can traverse it; the other—Weed Atman—an oxymoron calling to mind something unwanted as well as the self or soul, the highest absolute of Hindu

philosophy. The word “vineland” suggests the labyrinthine interconnection of the two worlds, where spirit and flesh intertwine and interact in undifferentiated confusion, as in a land of vines—a confusion similar to what readers may experience when they discover that what appeared to be a naturalistic satire actually embraces a mythic world. The word “vineland” also suggests a grapevine, like the one through which the Thanatoids learn Brock Vond has died (380).

Vineland County is on the Northern California coast, somewhere between Eureka and Crescent City (317), near Del Norte and Humboldt Counties and possibly between them (3, 75). Sasha, telling Zoyd to go there to wait for the time when Frenesi will grow tired of Brock, says:

“You know, there’d be worse places for you and the ol’ bundle to live, have a home, beautiful country, only a short spin up or down 101 from everything, from the Two Street honky-tonks to the eateries of Arcata to the surfing at Shelter Cove, and you’d have a social life, ‘cause lately this mass migration of freaks you spoke of, nothing personal, from L.A. north is spilling over into Vineland, so you’d have free baby-sitting too, dope connections, an inexhaustible guitar-player pool?” (305)

Vineland Bay, protected by two peninsulas now joined by a bridge, lies at the mouth of Seventh River. An 1851 survey map prophetically called it “‘A Harbor of Refuge’” for ships caught in summer and fall storms (316). Alexei, whom Prairie meets at the end of the novel, “was on liberty from a Russian fishing boat that had had to put into Vineland for some emergency repairs to its generator” (377). The city now has an international airport on its southern side, “in a broad valley just inland from the Seventh River floodplain” (354), and a massive federal building (317), though “the various federal, state, county, church, and private charitable agencies . . . were the biggest employers . . . next to the timber companies” (321).

Vineland has grown up along a stretch of highway 101, still only two lanes through town, which merges with local streets North and South Spooner, and has “unsynchronized traffic lights” (318). Given the remaining redwood stands in the area, there are bars usually frequented by loggers, but between 1983 and 1984, the Log Jam in Del Norte has become a gay bar (5–8), and the Cucumber Lounge is now managed by the son of a San Francisco crime family (10). Just beyond the coastal mountains is Holytail, “about the last refuge for pot growers in North California” (220), where Zoyd flees from Brock’s renewed attack. Within the city are the characteristic bars and usual fast-food stores of California and the 1980s—the Lost Nugget on South Spooner (36), Country Cantonese, Bodhi Dharma Pizza (where

Prairie works), the Steam Donkey and the Fast Lane Lounge (318)—as well as the Vineland Palace, a fine hotel. Vato and Blood tow cars to Rick & Chick's Born Again auto-conversion shop (43-44). Vineland Lanes hosts the Northern California junior regional bowling semifinals (26). Though the local landscape company is The Marquis de Sod (46), the local grocery is the Vineland Safeway (47). People wanting to better themselves go to "night school or Vineland Community College" (321). As a rather typical coastal town, Vineland also has a "Corps of Engineers marina, with salmon boats, power cruisers, and day sailers all docked together, and spilling uphill from the shoreline a couple of square miles crowded with wood Victorian houses, Quonset sheds, postwar prefab ranch and split-level units, little trailer parks, lumber-baron floridity, New Deal earnestness" (317). There are no churches.

Vineland (the city and the county) is a metaphor for the 1980s American town. Here have converged the fads of the '80s. Parents are radical pacifists who refuse to eat bread because yeast died to make it (20) but have a child who dreams of setting up a chain of family "violence centers" (19). Others frequent a pizza parlor that specializes in inedible, fully wholesome pizza (45) but offers Tibetan chants reminiscent of spells "against invaders and oppressors" associated with the pot harvest (49). Zoyd eats Froot Loops covered with Nestle's Quik (3) and a Health Food Enchilada Special (25). He catches crawfish that will be sold as "Ecrivisses à la Maison and Vineland Lobster" (35). Developers have invaded the once quiet countryside, and "the infamous federal-state Campaign Against Marijuana Production [CAMP]" (49), under the direction of Karl Bopp, "former Nazi *Luftwaffe* officer and subsequently useful American citizen" (221), busily burns the last of the pot fields.

Everyone seems addicted to watching television, eagerly devouring reruns and old movies. Hector, "'one of the most intractable'" Tubefrecks in Vineland, has escaped from NEVER, National Endowment for Video Education and Rehabilitation (33), a sanitarium for severe cases of television addiction, to search for Frenesi, whom he wants to make the star of *Drugs—Sacrament of the Sixties, Evil of the Eighties*, a motion picture about the Revolution (342-43).

As a satirist of California—and by extension American culture—Pynchon makes Vineland a city of little depth, less intellect, a model of vacuity. He clearly delineates parts of his fictional city but shows that they have the substance of flats on a production set. This shallow surface can either stunt growth or lead to maturity. When Sasha recommends Vineland as a retreat, she tells Zoyd "how they all used to visit in the summers when Frenesi was little and how she'd love to explore, must have followed every creek on that whole piece of coast"

(305). Frenesi, a cousin of Sasha's remembers, would come back from those expeditions with reports "about rivers that weren't supposed to be where she found them, and of the lights on the far banks, and the many voices, hundreds it seemed, not exactly partying, nor exactly belligerent either" (320). But the vacuity that protects Zoyd and Prairie doomed Frenesi. Comfortable in a city of surfaces, she fell into illusions about film-making and completely absorbed the motion picture fantasies of her mother. "'[A]t first,'" she tells Hector, "'I thought they were all real, all I had to do was wait a little and I'd get to see every one of them on a screen someday.'" Until disillusioned by Weed's murder (which she helped orchestrate), she lived "inside some wraparound fantasy" (346). Prairie, unlike her mother, learns to cut through Brock's fatal charm (376).

Present action begins and ends in Vineland County. Until the present, it has seemed that, so long as Zoyd and Frenesi adhere to Brock's demands, Zoyd can peacefully protect his daughter from the conservative or governmental oppression represented by the DEA, Hector and Brock. Thus the place that at first seems to promise refuge from responsibility itself becomes the place Zoyd learns the responsibility of being a father. Ironically, Zoyd, while always friendly and usually with friends, is a loner, too absorbed by his love for Frenesi and Prairie to remarry or to leave Vineland. Like a zoid, he lacks clear individuality. To characters like Hector and Brock, he is too dependent on women—Sasha, his ex-wife, his daughter—to assert masculine independence. He has not, like Mucho Maas, whom he visits on his retreat from Los Angeles to Vineland, given up drugs or begun speaking out on "the evils of drug abuse" (311).⁹ Neither has he overcome his 1960s paranoia about the "enemy." He might still dress in drag and leap through windows, but he knows he is aging and a little silly (4, 11). He might still value his pot and hide with his planter friends in Holytail (220), but he acts quickly and decisively to protect Prairie, even though she objects to his chauvinism: "'Typical males,'" she complains, "'handin' me back and forth like a side of beef'" (53). Over the years, Zoyd has slowly earned the acceptance of the Traverse-Becker clan (321), built a home for his daughter (358), and, however unorthodox, become a local celebrity (14-15).

Pynchon begins to place Vineland in a broader cosmos when Zoyd travels up *Phantom Ridge Road* into the mountains to see RC and Moonpie, who live among "unlogged second-growth redwoods" on *Phantom Creek* (35). Before this slight, easily overlooked reference to another world, Pynchon has not indicated that Vineland and California may exist in a larger context. In fact, for the next hundred and fifty or so pages, he develops the novel *almost* as if it were a naturalistic satire

similar to *Lot 49*. When he does introduce the other world, he makes the transition by way of Yurok mythology. North of town along River Drive:

Once past the lights of Vineland, [Seventh R]iver took back its older form, became what for the Yuroks it had always been, a river of ghosts. . . .

For the Yuroks, who had always held this river exceptional, to follow it up from the ocean was also to journey through the realm behind the immediate. . . . [T]rails without warning would begin to descend into the earth, toward Tsorrek, the world of the dead. (186)

Here the terrain is much as Sasha describes it to Zoyd: "Half the interior hasn't even been surveyed—plenty of redwoods left to get lost in, ghost towns old and new blocked up behind slides that are generations old and no Corps of Engineers'll ever clear, a whole web of logging roads, fire roads, Indian trails" (305). Pynchon builds on this Yurok mythology¹⁰ to help locate the Thanatoids within Vineland County geography. The Thanatoid village of Shade Creek is "at the confluence of Shade Creek and Seventh River" (172); Thanatoid Village is "a shopping and residential complex a few miles further into the hills above Shade Creek" (320–21). Thanatoids had begun moving into the county while Frenesi was still a girl, though their major influx occurred after the end of the Vietnam War (320). The Blackstream Hotel, site of the Thanatoid Roast '84, is "hidden far from highways, up among long redwood mountainslopes where shadows came early and brought easy suspicion of another order of things" (219–20), where "shunpike tourists who had only a dim idea . . . of just how far from the freeways they'd come" occasionally blunder in (225). Van Meter, going to the Roast to play bass, "nearly lost his way in the dark but was guided by [the hotel's] own pale violet glow" (223).

The Thanatoids are somewhat ambiguous: Thanatoid, "'short for 'Thanatoid personality' . . . means 'like death, only different'" (170). On the one hand, Ortho Bob seems to suggest that Thanatoids are the ultimate victims of the 1980s: people who have condemned themselves to a pseudo-existence by watching so much television and who have so long fled from reality that they are metaphorically dead (170–71). On the other hand, the Thanatoids, like Weed Atman—who "'was gunned down in a alley'" (188) and was too preoccupied to get himself reincarnated (364)—are ghosts (though "'That word—around here it's a no-no!'", unable to find final rest because of "karmic imbalances" (173) and the desire to avenge the injustices they suffered while alive.

Pynchon universalizes the Yurok other world both through Vato and Blood, who act as intermediaries between the living and the dead, and through references to the Hindu and Buddhist concept of karma. V & B Tow is "nearly alone . . . in its willingness to tow away vehicles associated with Thanatoids and, inevitably, Thanatoid stories" (185). Leaving the Retreat and needing a place to hide, Takeshi and DL meet Ortho Bob, who tells them about the Thanatoids, and decide to settle in Shade Creek, where they open their Karmology Clinic. Though DL is skeptical at first about "'free-lancin' in 'karmic adjustment,' whatever that is'" (172), Takeshi takes her to the window to show her the sur-reality of Shade Creek as "a psychic jumping-off town":

Although the streets were irregular and steeply pitched, the entryways and setbacks and forking corners, all angles ordinarily hidden, in fact, were somehow clearly visible from up here at this one window—naive, direct, no shadows, no hiding places, every waking outdoor sleeper, empty container, lost key, bottle, scrap of paper in the history of the dark shift just being relieved, was turned exactly to these windows from which Takeshi and DL looked down at the first yawners and stirrers, begun now to disengage from public surfaces. . . .

Had they continued to watch from here as the sun rose, they would have seen the town begin to change, the corners of things to rotate slowly, the shadows come in to flip some of the angles inside out as "laws" of perspective were reestablished, so that by 9:00 A.M. or so, the daytime version of what was meant to be seen out the peculiar window would all be in place. (173)

The living dead and their shadowy town "beside the Sea of Death" (227) are concrete in a universe in which the living and the dead, whether metaphorical or literal, interact.

In this universe, the actions of the living affect the state of the dead, and perhaps vice versa. While driving Brock to the other world, Vato tells "an old Yurok story about a man from Turip . . . who lost the young woman he loved and pursued her into the country of death. When he found the boat of Illa'a, the one who ferried the dead across the last river, he pulled it out of the water and smashed out the bottom with a stone. And for ten years no one in the world died, because there was no boat to take them across" (379). Ten years after the resignation on August 9, 1974, of Nixon, who looms over both Vineland and the College of the Surf, time has come to set old disorders right. Brock cannot be defeated—demasculinized—by just anyone; only Prairie, having been educated by DL, knows how to overcome him, her words being stronger than his gun. Resisting

merely by denying (with the help of higher authorities who take away his legal power, Reagan thus undoing some of Nixon's damage [376]), she seems to bring the karmic imbalance back into equilibrium.¹¹ In *Vineland's* hybrid of Yurok, Eastern and Western geographies, Prairie undoes what was done to and through her mother, while Brock, unlike the man from Turip, becomes a boneless creature, no longer a threat to any woman.

The three other important imaginary locales in *Vineland*—the Retreat of the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives, Brock's Political Re-Education Program (PREP) camp, and the College of the Surf, site of the People's Republic of Rock and Roll (PR³)—are less complex than either Vineland or Vineland County but reinforce and explain the actions that take place there. More symbols of political views than places, the Retreat and the camp represent the feminist and fascist extremes of the novel. At the Retreat, women live free from male dominance. In contrast, at the "reeducation camp" (70), the embodiment of Brock's neo-Nazism, hippies—"men who had grown feminine" and "women who had become small children" (269)—undergo rehabilitation to turn them into productive citizens, and the male completely dominates the female, turning women into mindless playthings.

The mountainside Retreat—"above the fir forest, just beyond the coastal clouds" (166)—is in central California, somewhere south of Vineland. Leaving it, DL and Takeshi drive "for a while" while "[s]omber forested hills rolled by" (167). When they meet Ortho Bob *en route*, they decide to go "up" to Vineland County (172). Takeshi had reached the retreat by driving "eastward" from San Francisco (161); Prairie and DL, who also reach it from San Francisco, leave the Wayvone estate apparently around sunset (103) or in deepening twilight (105) and arrive under bright moonlight (108)—though it is still "evening" (109). It stands on a well-protected promontory in the mountains, approached by treacherous dirt access roads (107). The Senior Attentive, Sister Rochelle, is "a tall, fit, scholarly-looking woman" (108) whose name may suggest La Rochelle, once a center for Protestantism, besieged in 1572–73 and 1628 by the state-supported Catholic army. As La Rochelle harbored Huguenots, the Retreat is a haven for modern, secular heterodoxy, Sister Rochelle acting as a revisionist who rewrites mythology better to fit feminism. She implies that the Retreat offers a return to Edenic life: "'It was sleazy, slippery man,'" she tells Takeshi, "'who invented "good" and "evil," where before women had been content to just be'" (166). Though located in a particular place men can invade (190–91), the Retreat seems more mental than physical.

DL and Frenesi were once apparently lovers and certainly partners in 24fps, one in charge of security and the other of the camera. They met at a student riot when Frenesi, too intent on photography, failed to notice that she was alone between the lines of rioters and police; like a knight saving a damsel in distress, DL carried her out to safety (116). Their relation ends abruptly in Mexico after Weed's murder, PR's fall, and Frenesi's internment in PREP. DL listens like a confessor as Frenesi pretends to awaken from fantasy: "'How could we lose track like that,'" Frenesi asks, "'about what was real?'" (259). But, while Frenesi falls partly as a result of her sexual drives—"you know what happens when my pussy's runnin' the show" (260)—DL remains cool, detached until obsessed with the desire to kill Brock to avenge what he did to Frenesi, and, if not sexually unattracted to men, able to control her attraction. Before Takeshi takes DL from the Retreat, Sister Rochelle advises him, "'Don't commit original sin'" (166). Frenesi, tempted by "original sin," is punished by losing control over her own body when she becomes a sexual tool in the government's snitch program; DL, who demands the no-sex clause in her contract with Takeshi (163), remains free from "sin," fully maintaining her power of choice even when she and Takeshi renegotiate the no-sex clause. Frenesi gives Prairie up at Brock's insistence; when Brock wants to use Prairie to manipulate Frenesi, DL finds herself in the position of teacher, protector and surrogate mother—strong roles that almost mirror her earlier relation to Frenesi.

In two settings quite removed from most of the action of *Vineland*, Takeshi and DL also act as reverse images of Brock and Frenesi. In Tokyo, Ralph Wayvone has DL made over to look like Frenesi, even to the detail of fluorescent blue contact lenses, so she can murder Brock (140-41). Takeshi looks enough like Brock that DL is deceived until he screams "in street Japanese" when he climaxes (152). This scene in the Japanese brothel is a strange, almost comic parody of Frenesi and Brock's sex in Oklahoma City. In neither case does the woman really know her partner: a horrified DL flees from the stricken Takeshi; Frenesi, discovering that Brock controls her yet hoping in vain to redeem him, is horrified to realize he has coldly watched her decisive mental struggle (217). In both scenes, sex is deadly: DL delivers the Vibrating Palm, though she flaws its effectiveness by her lack of attention (154); Brock figuratively kills Frenesi by sapping her inner strength.

DL has the support of the women at the Retreat to strengthen and cleanse her. After she flees to the Retreat to confess her violation of ninja rules and Takeshi follows, they find forgiveness, penance, and life through the Puncutron and Sister Rochelle. Frenesi follows Brock's

orders and finds herself increasingly isolated and entrapped in his web. DL eventually takes Takeshi to meet her mother and (though concealing the no-sex clause) wins parental approval (380-81); Frenesi is rejected by DL and deplored by Sasha. DL and Takeshi become partners in the Karmology Clinic; Frenesi, after marrying and divorcing Zoyd, marries Flash and continues her life as a government snitch. The Retreat disciplines and strengthens DL, giving her the character to face a hostile world, the strength Frenesi lacks.

Like the Retreat's, the PREP camp's exact location is vague: "Maps were available up and down the street, few agreeing, none getting too specific about what was inside the ragged polygon at the end of the classified freeway, labeled only 'National Security Reservation'" (250). The convoy taking Frenesi from PR³, near Anaheim, to the camp travels north on FEER ("Federal Emergency Evacuation Route") along the "crestline of the Coast Range." The route runs "for hundreds of miles. . . . The convoy's destination lay hours to the north, in a wet and secluded valley" (249). The complex, built by the Corps of Engineers as the ultimate bomb shelter or detention camp of the Cold War, has its nerve-center and dormitories deep underground (255). After rescuing Frenesi, DL "hightailed it over to I-5, blasting on southward to I-80" (257). The descriptions of the camp are harsh, roughly angular or geometrical, with little softness in them: "Iron speakers up on stripped fir poles" (272); "A few dozen housing units, like model homes at the edge of newly subdivided acreage" (249); "rows of white columns suggesting national architecture and deathless temple" (255).

If the Retreat represents freedom from masculine bondage and morality, the PREP camp represents full fascist control. Here the self-righteous Brock seeks to brainwash opponents to make them dependent on the state. His aim is to examine "detainees in civil disturbances . . . for snitch potential," offer the likely candidates "a choice between federal prosecution and federal employment," and sell their contracts eventually to the FBI (268). As with Sister Rochelle, Brock's name helps to characterize him and his camp. A "brock," according to the *OED*, is "a stinking or dirty fellow . . . given over to 'dirty tricks.'" To "brock," according to Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, is "to bully." *Brocken* is German slang for "military uniform," as well as meaning "crumb" or "scrap." Confident of his role as an arm of the State, the fascist Brock, acting as his name indicates, stoops to any tricks, however unethical, to support his repression.

That Brock's plan sexually arouses him (268-70) further shows his opposition to the feminist ideals of the Retreat. Frenesi, who has a weakness for men in uniform—perhaps an "ancestral curse" (83)—is

seduced by Brock's charm and power. Named after an Artie Shaw hit (75), Frenesi is associated with various forms of popular culture, as befits a victim so fully immersed in Hollywood illusion that she may have little depth; but her name also echoes the French *frénésie*, "frenzy" or "madness," and indicates her destiny, the entrapment in fantasy that will lead her finally to fall completely under Brock's spell. At their first meeting, his crude puns speak to her weakness: "'Then a man in a uniform, with a big pistol, would have to make you come'" (201). Later, when talking her into planting a pistol on Rex, he argues:

"Sooner or later the gun comes out."

"I don't believe that."

"Because you never had the gun . . . but I always did."

"I wouldn't know how to use it." (240)

"Men had it so simple," Frenesi concludes: "When it wasn't about Sticking It In, it was about Having The Gun, a variation that allowed them to Stick It In from a distance"; and the narrator adds, "She would have hated to admit how much of this came down to Brock's penis" (241). "[H]omophobic" (214), "brutal, fascist" (217), "a monomaniac and a killer" (266), Brock sees himself as the ideal father, whose purpose at PREP is to keep the national family together by disciplining its wayward children (269). PREP is eventually discontinued, not because Brock fails, but because "'since about '81 kids were comín in all on their own askín about careers, no need for no separate facility anymore'" (347), and no need for a strict father any longer to coerce wayward children into becoming productive citizens.

By contrast with the simplicity of both these extremes—the Retreat and the PREP camp—the College of the Surf, Pynchon's stereotypical American college campus of the late 1960s, exhibits more descriptive variety, though it is not as rich as Vineland or Vineland County. The campus perches on a cliff top on "the brief but legendary Trasero County coast," adjacent to a military base and "bracketed by the two ultraconservative counties of Orange and San Diego" (204), close enough for demonstrators to hear the sounds of a rock concert in Anaheim Stadium (247). San Clemente is "just over the county line" (204), and the college boasts an unfinished Nixon Monument towering a hundred feet high and gazing inland over the campus, "a quizzical look on its face" (205). While Vineland borders on the spiritual world, the College of the Surf borders immediately on the political. While Vineland is near Thanatoid Village, the college was "ostensibly" founded to train conservative and "docile" students to work for the wealthy masters of dehumanized "official reality" (204-05), but turns

out to have been "an elaborate land developers' deal . . . disguised as a gift to the people" (209).

Much of *Vineland's* past action centers in or around the college, the stage for what suggests a secularized and oversimplified morality play. Treating Brock and Frenesi as mythic characters, Pynchon makes this setting the background for a tale of madness, directed by evil and helped by the state, of overthrowing and killing the absolute. It is a timeless story enacted here by young people who believe in their own invulnerability until gun shots shatter their delusions. Frenesi, once naively imagining the camera could somehow purify and that the images it captured would result in everyone's supporting the cause of justice and equality, is tempted by Brock, who clearly tells her he wants Weed's spirit: "'Anyone can deliver me his body . . . if that was all I wanted, you'd've been off it long ago'" (215). Calling her a "'medium,'" he delineates her role as the temptress who must destroy the "innocent" Weed (213-16). So she tells Howie and the unworldly idealist Rex that Weed "is an FBI plant" (234), a literal weed in the Revolution, and *plants* Brock's gun so Rex can murder him. More than just a tempter, Brock seems a mythic figure who does not compromise: he is extreme, even to his death and translation to the other world (379-80). Frenesi, unlike DL, is the loser.

Pynchon consistently gives children the ability to discern truth and to see through adult fantasies. For example, Justin, Frenesi and Flash's child, shocks his parents back to reality by stating the simple truth about the names missing from the computer: "'Maybe they all got their budget lines axed out'" (88). Penny, Jinx and Weed's daughter, almost ruins the plot to plant a gun by asking, "'Did Rex forget his bag?'" (244). An unnamed child on the plane Brock boards to return to Washington after Frenesi's escape from PREP sees the truth: terrified by him, she screams until he has her removed (277).

The fourteen-year-old Prairie, a product of both Los Angeles and *Vineland*, is enough of a child to share the directness and honesty of the other children in the novel but enough of an adult to mature from her discoveries. In Los Angeles, she and her old friend Ché were "[a]mong the first mall rats into Fox Hills" and, strongly influenced by old Hollywood crime movies, set out on a career of juvenile shop lifting (325-33). In *Vineland*, she has a job at the local Zen pizza parlor, although she is usually portrayed as preoccupied by her search for information about her mother—in spite of which preoccupation, she assures DL she has no intention of "'bargin' in on'" Frenesi's privacy (103). She is receptive to DL's story both because she needs to know why her mother deserted her and because she is already emotionally independent.

She first meets DL at the Wayvone estate south of San Francisco when she is in the ladies' lounge studying her face "that had always been half a mystery to her" (98). As with Oedipa's discovery of the muted post horn symbol in *Lot 49* (52), Pynchon stages the meeting between Prairie and her instructor in the only place where men cannot freely intrude. Also significant is the framing of this encounter in a mirror, where Prairie sees "another reflection, one that might've been there for a while, one, strangely, that she almost knew" (99). Just as Frenesi was a "medium" between Brock and Weed, DL, here mirrored so Prairie seems to know her, is the "medium" between Frenesi and Prairie. While perhaps Prairie recognizes DL from photographs her grandmother showed her, she may also recognize in the mirror a reflection of the image of her mother, the very image DL mentions moments later: "Just for a minute in the mirror there I thought you were somebody you couldn't possibly be" (100). This meeting in the mirror sets both women on new paths, Prairie to discover her mother's past, and DL to open a past she had hoped to leave behind (102-03).

The first part of her mother's story Prairie learns at the Retreat through Sister Rochelle's "'library of computer files'" (112), which contains government documents, newspaper clippings, transcripts and photographs. In all these, Frenesi remains vague, distant, an image without substance, although Prairie does come to know DL and Takeshi during this part of her education. Setting this part of the education in the Retreat establishes DL as the reverse, feminist image of Frenesi. The story is of learning lessons, failing to achieve self-control and seeking penance to overcome character flaws: it is the story of DL and Takeshi, of momentary failure and final success.

But Prairie learns a darker side of the story while viewing the films in the 24fps archives in Los Angeles at Ditzah Feldman's "Spanish split-level up a pleasant cul-de-sac on the high-rent side of Ventura Boulevard" (194), a vague but stereotyped place in an actual city. Here the story is the mythic tale of temptation and fall, the story of Weed-Frenesi-Brock in which Frenesi fails herself and thus becomes a sexual tool for the government. While the reader learns of Frenesi's life after her separation from DL and of her marriage to Zoyd (68-91, 268-322), Prairie learns nothing about how low her mother has actually fallen or why Frenesi left Zoyd when Prairie was still an infant. What she learns in Los Angeles is that her mother sold out, that having tried to insulate herself behind the scope of a camera, Frenesi could not cope with the actual brutality of the male gun. If Hollywood is the place where news quickly becomes fantasy and where fantasy seems to become real, Los Angeles is the place where Prairie must face what her mother did to her friends, even if it remains inexplicable (266).

Pynchon's account of the Thanatoid Roast complements his later description of the Traverse-Becker Reunion. Where the Roast trivializes death—thanks in part, according to Takeshi, to the influence of television (218)—the Reunion trivializes life. The purpose of the Roast is to remember the insults and injustices of the past (219); the Reunion celebrates the marriage of Eula Becker and Jess Traverse through a reading from Emerson (by way of William James) on the restitution of justice (369). The Roast introduces the living Dr. Elasmó, whom the dead Weed dimly recalls, to prepare for Brock's revelation or accusation that Elasmó had turned Weed into a snitch (240); the Reunion provides the excuse for Sasha, Frenesi and Prairie to come together and discover each other. The Roast opens the chapter that describes Weed's murder and DL's rescuing Frenesi from PREP; it marks, in the words of Zipi and Ditzah, the "'Goodbye to the land of make-believe'" (259). The Reunion frees Prairie from the past of her grandmother and mother so she can face Brock as an adult on her own; she tells her father she is "'[f]eeling totally familied out'" (374) just before she leaves for the woods where Brock will unsuccessfully accost her.

In Vineland Prairie maturely confronts her mother, though her grandmother reverts to childishness under the strain of the meeting (367–68). Prairie also interacts freely with the dead Weed Atman and with the boring Octomaniacs at the Reunion (366–67). Balancing between the living and the dead, between ugly reality and beautiful fantasy, Prairie has grown strong enough to insult Brock when he finally confronts her and to understand his fatal attraction after he has gone. Always full of possibility, Vineland becomes, at the end of the novel, the only locale where a character can safely join fantasy and reality, past and present, despair and hope. In short, as Desmond realizes for the reader (385), it is truly Prairie's home.

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Notes

¹For example, J. O. Tate found it "a bore and a chore" ("Sufferin' Succotash," *National Review* 30 Apr. 1990: 59), and Brad Leithauser said it was a "disappointment" ("Any Place You Want," *New York Review of Books* 15 Mar. 1990: 7).

²Several have found *Lot 49* either "apocryphal" or "intertestamental"—views that need to be updated after the publication of *Vineland*. See James Nohrnberg, "Pynchon's Paraclete," *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978) 160, and

Mendelson's editor's note on the same page for a brief account of how *Lot 49* seems to stand outside Pynchon's canon.

³"Levity's Rainbow," *New Republic* 9 & 16 Jul. 1990: 42.

⁴In finding fault with his own technique in "Entropy" and "Under the Rose," in the introduction to *Slow Learner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), Pynchon criticizes his "beginning with something abstract . . . and only then going on to try to develop plot and characters. This is simply, as we say in the profession, ass backwards" (17-18).

⁵In *The Crying of Lot 49* ([1966] New York: Perennial, 1986), San Narciso, with its symbolic Echo Courts Motel, plays much the same role (23-43). *Lot 49* also exhibits a concentration of themes similar to *Vineland*'s: the vacuity of but a fascination with television; the seduction or attempted seduction of the heroine by someone representing the power elite; and, in the lyrics of the Paranoids, a woman's need to save the forlorn male from his death-in-life.

⁶"The Styxties," *Nation* 26 Feb. 1990: 281.

⁷See T. T. Waterman, "Yurok Geographical Concepts," rpt. *The California Indians: A Source Book*, comp. and ed. R. F. Heizer and M. A. Whipple, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 472-79. *Vineland* may be at the mouth of the Klamath River, a central site in Yurok mythology, and the natural boundary between Del Norte and Humboldt Counties. In Waterman's maps reproduced in A. L. Kroeber, *Yurok Myths* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976), the Yurok territory exactly coincides with the supposed location of *Vineland* County (4).

⁸*Vineland* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990) 329.

⁹Mucho, no longer a disk jockey and by the early '70s no longer using drugs, went into record production "around 1967," after an amiable divorce (307-09)—that is, apparently two or three years after the events of *Lot 49*.

¹⁰As early as 1877, Stephen Powers, in *Tribes of California* (rpt. Berkeley: U of California P, 1976), noted the Yuroks' belief in transmigration of souls (59), a belief more recently discussed in greater detail by A. L. Kroeber and E. W. Gifford in *World Renewal: A Cult System of Native Northwest California*, excerpted in Heizer and Whipple 464-71. The *woge* (Vld 186-87) have some resemblance to the Thanatoids. According to Waterman, the *wo'ge* were immortals who "either turned into animals or left the country" whenever the Yurok appeared (479). Kroeber has collected many Yurok tales about the *woge*, including one from Pekwon Doctor called "He Brought Her Back from the Dead" (382-85) which may be a source for the story Vato tells Brock (379).

¹¹Joining Buddhist and Christian mythologies, *Vineland* combines the Eastern view of a personal cleansing of the soul from karmic imbalance before it is fit for *Amitabha* and the Western notion of salvation through vicarious sacrifice. Takeshi represents the Eastern process; Prairie seems to become the sacrificial figure who, by overcoming temptation, wins release for Weed, the daughter thus undoing what the mother had done.