

Listing Lists

John Mascaro

Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative, by Patti White. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1992. 187 pp. \$28.50.

A Companion to The Crying of Lot 49, by J. Kerry Grant. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994. 154 pp. \$25; pb \$12.95.

Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative is Patti White's ambitious attempt to apply elements of systems and information theory to those aspects of contemporary narrative represented by the presence and function of list structures in selected novels. The book tries to envision some of the open, dynamic, contingent and uncertain epistemologies of contemporary narrative as emblematic of systemic processes wherein systems nested within systems struggle with their own internal logic as well as with the threat of external or environmental intrusion through forms of noise or textual ambiguity. White is, all in all, a good reader and a good critic, though the book—and, ultimately, the reader—suffers some conceptual confusion stemming primarily from the difficulty of importing scientific or technological thought from its domain of origin into the realm of literature.

This approach, until recently quite fashionable and promising, is not without merit to be sure, but the appeal of science as a potential rosetta stone for literature and art might be on the wane as the new century dawns and the problems of literature remain as intractable as ever. Intractable in a good sense, of course, since the power of art stems precisely from its refusal to be ensnared by any external system of explication or explanation. And while the scientific thought White most heavily relies on—chaos and information theory—is attractive because it brings into the realm of science and technology the kind of partiality and indeterminacy essential to the life of a work of art, there is nonetheless an uneasy sense of a loose metaphor afoot, about which more later.

Gatsby's Party reads sections of four contemporary novels: Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, John Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor* and Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*. *Gatsby* itself, which also receives a good bit of critical explication, forms a kind of ordering

motif as well as bookending White's opening and closing chapters. Interspersed among the more literary chapters are chapters that draw connections between literature and relevant fields of science. The book's motivating impulse is the famous guest list compiled by Nick Carraway during the legendary summer of Gatsby's parties.

White introduces the book with a personal anecdote recalling how a friend once made a project of memorizing Nick's list and reciting it at social gatherings, primarily academic cocktail parties. For White, this use of the list is emblematic of the entire field of systems and relationality, and offers a link between a hermetically sealed, unread narrative and the social network engendered by the act of reading. The significance of the unnamed reader's act of memorization and recitation is complex:

At the cocktail party, the Gatsby list maintains relations in at least four information systems: (1) in the narrative about memorization, the recitation of the list marks the successful conclusion of the quest . . . (2) in the social system, the list is an information channel for messages about intellectual competence, academic eccentricity and/or appropriate party behavior; (3) in the literary system, the repetition of the Gatsby list continues an ongoing debate about the significance of the guest list in the *Gatsby* narrative; and (4) in the cultural system, the presentation of the list as a conceptual construct participates in discourses of recognition and epistemology. (3)

This rather heady quotation reveals something of White's style and her tendency to telescope systems of relations, although one might wonder how the act of recitation in and of itself might be said to contribute to any ongoing debate about the function of the list in Fitzgerald's novel. Indeed, the possibility that White overburdens her observations with somewhat too much significance grows throughout the book. Nonetheless, her many gambits at justification are interesting to contemplate. Thus, the at first random-seeming list of books she includes for critical commentary is justified by her desire to find lists which "exemplify particular acts of structuration [and] enable a discussion of systemic operations, pattern recognition, list construction and discourse formation within a context of literary interpretation" (4). But this description might well apply to all lists. The list, after all, is an Ur-structure, pre-literate, the backbone of oral narrative and the feats of memorization it requires. So why not Homer, the Bible, the Eddas? Because White wishes to "focus on list systems in contemporary fiction as a practical application of a systems-theoretical methodology" (4).

One of the many curiosities in the book is that White seems to assume a special relation between contemporary literature's use of lists

and the scientific methods and theories she applies to their study. She makes passing reference to such great list-makers as "Joyce, Sterne, Rabelais and Homer" (4), yet seems to believe the use of lists in the works of these past masters (though Joyce is as "contemporary" as any of the authors she studies, and literally contemporary with Fitzgerald) would somehow fail to demonstrate the literary effects she seeks. But why should this be so? White apparently assumes some special relation between the literature of a period and the science of that period such that an attempt to deploy scientific thought in the service of literary interpretation is bound by their mutual historicity. Perhaps an explicit argument could be made to this effect, but White does not make it. This is the author's prerogative, though again one might protest that the notion that only literature contemporary with the science of systems theory can be elucidated by that theory is itself ahistorical. The system of Newtonian mechanics, by predating relativity theory, does not escape the consequences of that theory.

Despite White's invisible assumptions about lists and systems theory, she offers some genuinely illuminating readings of her chosen novels. For DeLillo's *White Noise*, she uses chaos theory as an interpretive filter. She sets up her discussion by outlining a metaphorical view of the second law of thermodynamics whereby the ultimate entropic heat-death and decay of the universe into pure randomness (which White has a tendency to conflate with chaos, though they are different phenomena) might be seen as not inevitable and one-way. She draws on James Gleick's influential book *Chaos* (1985), which put chaos theory on the mainstream cultural map and initiated the now-diminishing fad for applying chaos as an interpretive grid to all sorts of cultural phenomena. White notes that "the new physics suggests that entropy is not a completely linear process, that especially in 'metaphorical' interpretations of the second law the increasing disorderliness of the universe is really a generative chaos which makes new structures possible and ensures that 'complexity flourishes'" (7; quoting Gleick).

DeLillo's use of lists in *White Noise* demonstrates this two-way process. White first draws a distinction between "intrasystemic" and "metasystemic" analysis. Information perceived as disruptive and conducive to chaos from within the system under study can be seen, from a perspective outside the system, as "a metasystemic restructuring of chaos, a recycling of precisely those dispersed and disordered elements which the characters experience as noise" (8). For White, DeLillo's strategy relies on his ability to restructure the intrasystemic noise of the novel as a way of dealing with the larger issue of "the millions of fragmented messages now compacted into the

waste system of American culture" (9). The key to this restructuring effort is the novel's use of lists, which repeatedly invade the narrative and threaten to overwhelm its characters' (though not necessarily the reader's) ability to discriminate between meaningful signal and random input. A number of types of these lists pervade *White Noise*. The main one, in White's view, is the series of three-word lists that enter the novel ambiguously. These "trilog" lists generally name commercial products ("Krylon, Rust-Oleum, Red Devil" [14]; "MasterCard, Visa, American Express" [15]), and White articulates a number of ways they affect the reader's efforts to control information flow. To the novel's narrator, Jack Gladney, the lists seem to be invisible—he does not consciously register their presence. White considers several possibilities for their origin: the lists are "non-conscious intrusions of circumambient noise . . . the noise [Gladney] confronts throughout the novel"; or the lists may be "products of Gladney's brain, but . . . he has no conscious control over their construction and placement"; indeed they may be "symbolic of a nervous system disorder" (13–14).

Ultimately, the lists are the reader's problem, the solution to which is itself indeterminate and unfixed. White sees them as serving "simultaneous functions: as noise, disrupting the narrative and problematizing the narrative situation, *and* as information, capable of being read within the surrounding episode and . . . modeling for the reader a metamorphic recycling program that turns noise into narrative" (15). Despite the malaise infesting the novel, this possibility of metamorphic recycling is, in White's view, perhaps DeLillo's thread of recovery. For her, in the end, "the novel is itself evidence that a program of recycling informational waste can be effective" (27).

White's ability to ring such extensive changes on DeLillo's use of short lists is impressive, though, as with every chapter in the book, the reader must plow through a quantity of extra-literary discourse before fully appreciating the aesthetic import of her analysis. In the discussion of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the best chapter in *Gatsby's Party*, much of such scaffolding is blessedly absent. Here she details two key scenes—one from early in the novel (Pirate's astounding banana breakfast), and one near the end (Roger Mexico and Pig Bodine's attendance at the Krupps' dinner party)—but her mode of discussion is more conventional than in the DeLillo chapter. The use of lists in *Gravity's Rainbow*, at least in these examples, is a bit easier to pin down. For White, these scenes demonstrate the use of the list as a means of opposition. Against the coercive and death-dealing force of the System, lists here generate a liberating counterforce with the power to free (though perhaps only temporarily) characters from a forced inclusion, or, literally, ingestion, by the official structures and strictures of authority.

Discussing the later scene first, White sees in Roger and Bodine's presence at the dinner party the confrontation between malevolent Order and liberating Chaos. She casts the scene in terms of an elaborate game, one of maneuver and counter-move, with high stakes—no less than life and death. Roger has been invited to the feast by his nemesis, Jeremy, the Beaver, the official lover—the fiancé—of Roger's true love, Jessica Swanlake (unfortunately misidentified here as "Jessica Swann" [43]). Realizing the sinister threat underlying the invitation, Roger takes along Pig Bodine. The two outlaws are, in fact, slated to be the true object of the feast, the "surprise roast" listed on the menu card. Here I must digress to register an objection to a note in which White, trying too hard to identify Pynchon with his characters, passes along the received notion that Roger and Pig are like "Pynchon himself, whose reclusive nature is . . . 'alien' to modern literary culture (and thus presumably beyond the law)" (151). Pynchon is not a recluse, but a skillful avoider of the almost irresistible media exploitation and distortion that in many ways *are* contemporary culture. It is not literary culture per se he avoids but mainstream culture. And while this may make Pynchon an anomaly, it says nothing at all about his relation to the law.

As White reads the dinner-party scene, Roger's dilemma centers on finding a way out of the fate awaiting him in the large barbecue pit at the end of the table. His two ostensible options—submission and resistance—are doomed to futility. White locates Roger's solution in the menu card itself, seeing the card as a structural reenactment of the terms of the feast. "Logic tells them that escape from the menu implies escape from the dinner party, since the functioning of the dinner party depends on the functioning of the menu." They effect this escape "by exposing and exploiting a *gap* in the menu" (45). This gap arises from the inclusion of human flesh in the form of the surprise roast Roger and Pig are destined to become. This inclusion, in turn, constitutes a breach in the taboo system of legitimate human consumption, and it offers a means for the two intended victims to seize control of the menu, and the situation, by a process of "disruption and deconstruction . . . that subverts and reinscribes the menu offered by the Krupp cartel" (46). Their disruption entails the creation of a list of playfully gross alternative "foods" (some examples: "snot soup," "menstrual marmalade," "clot casserole"). The construction and development of this counter-menu gradually discomfits and disarms the would-be cannibals by substituting one set of illicit foods for another. As White characteristically describes it, "Like an invading virus, the new items overwhelm the host after using the information structure of the host as their point of entry" (47).

Roger and Pig's alternative list highlights the transgressive nature of the original surprise roast; all their items also refer to the human body as an object of consumption, but strip away the genteel euphemism (substituting a different sort of trope by the rule that all items be alliterative) of a formally dressed but profoundly inhuman form of discourse. And it is the winning move, effecting Roger and Pig's escape.

White develops this line of thought by discussing structuralist analyses of the menu form connected to official vs. unofficial language. Her chief references here are Barthes and Bakhtin. But she has a tendency to layer footnotes, which are sometimes intrusive and not helpful. Her footnote (152) to a brief paraphrase of the Bakhtinian notion that marketplace language opposes official speech by reveling in grossness and obscenity compels her to reminisce about her school days when the classic rhyme beginning "Great big gobs of greasy grimy gopher guts" was an initiation rite among her playground friends. White seems to think the reader needs to have the entire song, which she dutifully includes (without, however, acknowledging that her version is one of innumerable variants—the one from my neighborhood, if I may venture, being more inventive than the version White cites—or that among many children the song was not at all an initiation rite, since it is incapable of truly grossing out children—though they may sometimes pretend to be grossed out by it for complex reasons known only to them—who revel in its unofficial and wondrous crudity).

More significant to note is that the recourse to systems-jargon which marks most of White's theoretical discussions and mars some of her close readings virtually vanishes during this, the most engaging section of the book. This fact offers a key to the entire enterprise of *Gatsby's Party*. The theoretical chapters read as though the pages lay under panes of glass; a thin, rigid barrier seems to intervene between the reader and the felt reality on the page. In contrast, most of White's readings of specific texts are quite insightful.

In addition to the Krupp dinner party, she analyzes another significant list in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the wondrous banana breakfast. Here, as in the Krupp scene, White shows how the text uses the list form—here the famously fecund recitation of exotic banana breakfast-fare ("banana croissants and banana kreplach, and banana oatmeal and banana jam and banana bread, and bananas flamed in ancient brandy," etc.)—to foment an opposition, a counterforce of breakfasters who become "the structural constituents of a limited, inevitably transient, anti-System collective" (53). And in her chapter on *The Sot-Weed Factor*, she presents the tour de force list of more than two hundred names, in French and English, for whore, and argues that Barth uses

this "gargantuan" list to call into question and highlight a number of central features of the act of reading itself, a "focal point for the reader's struggle for textual authority" (82). The sheer weight of this list indeed questions the very possibility of reading by pushing the reader toward exhaustion. Ultimately, "Under the stress of exhausted possibilities, Barth's list of synonyms for 'whore' pushes the word toward silence, whether it be the silence of fulfillment or the silence of despair" (83).

Throughout *Gatsby's Party*, some of White's best interpretive gestures are precisely those which silently move away from any connection to the notion of systems. "The activities of a system," she remarks, "are all directed towards establishing and maintaining form, whether the form be physical or conceptual, or some configuration of dynamic forces" (60). But doesn't this indicate that the real key to White's approach is form, which does not require system at all (since the system's entire existence is subsumed within the form)? A system is not the result or product of the laws of form, or if it is, it is so metaphorically. The properties of the forms of the texts she analyzes yield the interpretive results she derives, and these properties, which White describes through a discourse of systems, can also be seen more simply, with no real loss of information (or form), as the manifestations of relation. White defines a "textual system" as "constituted out of and by means of the relations existing between its narratological component and its artifactual one" (59), a valid structuralist thought. True, one can say "textual system" easily enough, but why is that preferable to saying "text"? Presumably the answer would be White's thesis, but the book concludes without ever quite providing an answer. In a larger context, do we have here the case of a scholar in the academic marketplace motivated to appeal to that dimension of an audience which experiences the larger culture's ultimately consumerist desire to have it (whatever "it," the object of consumption, might be) new, have it fashionably packaged, ahead of the curve? In popular literature, Tom Clancy does this whenever he researches his next novel; General Motors once did it by putting rocket fins on a Cadillac, and now does it by making a Cadillac Sport Utility Vehicle. Since, in White's terms, the goal of any system is to instantiate itself, then the textual system known as *Gatsby's Party* may be seen as an instrument of the literary academic system's need to maintain a constant flow of energy through its acceptance/rejection channels, which in turn validates and helps ensure the continuance of information flow between the literary academic system and the larger institutional system housing it, in turn ensuring the maintenance of that institutional system within the larger capitalist/consumerist culture system housing *it*. It is indeed one big

party, and one apologizes for the parodic turn, but it perhaps reveals the risk that—though White does eventually return to Fitzgerald's list, and through some deconstructive hijinks concludes that "no one was ever at the party at all" (139)—it might be hard in all this partying to find *The Great Gatsby*.

Yet many of White's close interpretations are valid (with the ironic exception of *Gatsby* itself, on which she is not so persuasive), as is her insight into the function of the list in contemporary fiction. The list is indeed a significant textual structure, one which, as White shows, can be morphed into infinite shapes and put to infinite uses. Not the least of these uses is to constitute an entire book. It is quite interesting to contemplate such an artifact, a list-book, in the light of White's attempt to understand the function of the list and the system in contemporary literature. It becomes even more intriguing to do so when the list-book itself is a work of criticism, an interpretive thrust at another literary work.

Using White as a guide, then, we might describe J. Kerry Grant's *Companion to The Crying of Lot 49* as a list system which attempts to isolate significant information nodes in Pynchon's novel and instantiate itself as a second order or perhaps complementary system aimed at rendering accessible the primary system which is Pynchon's text. There is a conceptual elegance to this combining of White with Grant's *Companion* since the novel Grant wants to clarify is itself complexly and overtly engaged in the question of systems—information systems, conspiracy systems, language systems, postal systems, epistemological systems, among others. Indeed, *The Crying of Lot 49* is one of the seminal works of contemporary fiction which engendered a contemporary critical focus on the scientific/literary nexus, giving the type of scientifically informed literary analysis White espouses something, as it were, to chew on. This criticism, which draws so heavily—too heavily at times—on scientific notions of indeterminacy, openness, uncertainty and complementarity, has the virtue of frankly embracing what is perhaps the key feature of postmodern literature: its indefatigable resistance to any totalizing system of critical interpretation. White aptly describes the affinity between her scientific viewpoint and literature:

In the end, the duality of systems analysis encourages interpretive hesitation: oscillating between inside and outside, enticed by internal functions that encourage and respond to the analytic gaze and simultaneously repelled by an external uncertainty that refuses all attempts at penetration, the student of systems inhabits a critical gap. From this position theoretical totalizations expose their fissures. . . . A natural and

culturally appropriate similarity thus exists between scientific paradigms for chaotic systems and deconstructive critical practice. (129)

Grant proclaims no desire to delve explicitly into either systems theory or deconstructive critical practice, though at times his notes touch on the former, and a number of the critics he cites are engaged in the latter. But in a curious way, Grant's *Companion* exhibits White's interpretive hesitation. He too finds himself oscillating between inside and outside *Lot 49*: inside in his effort to open the work to new or relatively new readers of Pynchon's fiction, and outside the work in his surveys of large chunks of the critical discourse surrounding the novel. Grant offers this criticism judiciously, with little attempt to engage his sources beyond correcting factual errors. Even when critics disagree, as they often do, on the meaning of a given passage or motif, Grant prefers to let the reader adjudicate.

This is not to say Grant has no point of view. Especially after reading White's book, one knows even a list is not a neutral text. The items Grant chooses to include as helpful companions to *Lot 49* sketch a map of his vision of the novel's significant features. Beyond that, in his introduction Grant is fairly explicit about the interpretive motives of his work: "The texture of the novel is so dense, its allusiveness so pronounced, its tone so varied, that only the perspective afforded by multiple readings can begin to serve the needs of the conscientious reader." And although he has consciously attempted to organize his glosses in "a pragmatic spirit . . . to resist the imposition of any single interpretive strategy," he immediately acknowledges that "certain biases in favor of my own range of assumptions will be detectable by the discerning reader" (xiv). Can he have it both ways? In a sense, yes, since his view of the novel centers on what he sees as Pynchon's effort to "[expose] the radical uncertainties that underlie our attempts to discern meaning in the signs that come crowding in on us every minute of our lives" (xv–xvi). Note the repetition of "discern/ing" in the two previous quotations. Even the discerning reader, apparently, is at a loss to discern with certainty. And of course the words "discern" and "certain" (or "uncertain") are related etymologically. And the reader's dilemma parallels Oedipus's, a theme to which Grant constantly refers. Her attempts to separate signal from noise, revelation from paranoia and, ultimately, meaning from emptiness are those of the reader as the novel multiplies possibilities and hovers always at the edge of—something.

One of the more interesting features of Grant's reading of *Lot 49* is his working of the religious motif in the novel. Although many critics he cites dismiss the notion that the novel has an overtly or non-ironic

religious dimension, Grant seems somewhat open to the alternative possibility, if never explicitly so. One must necessarily tread circumspectly in this decidedly secular postmodern era, but Grant early on notes a possible religious allusion. In his third entry, on the complexities of the name Pierce Inverarity, he approvingly cites Thomas Schaub, "who associates Pierce, via Peter, with 'petrus' or rock," and Robert Newman's description of "Pierce as 'a type of profane Peter'" (7). Grant might have begun even earlier, with his first entry glossing the name Oedipa Maas. After running through the Sophoclean and Freudian echoes of Oedipus, he points out Tony Tanner's connection of "Maas" with Newton's second law of motion and its definition of "mass" (5), but apparently does not recognize that the echo of "Mass" is equally available. A few pages on, in his gloss on the phrase "spoke the name of God," Grant refers to the line as "the starting point for a significant debate about the novel's religious attributes." The oppositional critics in this debate are Edward Mendelson, who "insists that 'religious meaning is itself the central issue of the plot,'" and Tanner, who "finds little promise of the sacred in Oedipa's appeal to what has become 'an empty word'" (9).

The religious theme wends its way through Grant's book, and ultimately occupies the last word, in his reading of the novel's closing scene, about which he characteristically notes, "Opinions . . . differ largely in terms of the weight given the religious associations that are undeniably present." Grant frames this gloss in terms of the allusions to Christianity's Pentecost and Annunciation stories and the question of whether, as Mendelson feels, there is evidence here "of the sacred nature of the experience Oedipa has undergone" (140) or whether, again, a more secular reading should prevail. I side with Mendelson on this one, and turn for support to another critically difficult scene, the scene which, from this perspective, forms the climax of the novel: the scene in chapter 5 between Oedipa and the old tattooed sailor. (The sailor recalls Melville's oracular Old Dansker in *Billy Budd* and the question of the religious impulse in that work, and the issue of Melville and religious revelation generally—think also of those Melvillean hieroglyphs which dot *Lot 49* and of old Mr. Thoth, named after the Egyptian god of thieves and writers, pointing to some of Melville's characteristic imagery—as a possible influence on Pynchon's thought.) This scene contains several of Pynchon's most noted images, as well as the articulation of metaphor and its connected conclusion regarding "high magic" in "low puns." The old sailor's DT's evoke a brief narrative commentary worth citing:

Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. (128–29)

As Grant notes, this passage contains a "list of emblematic figures" (112). Although this list is a brief one, White has given us a greater sense of the power of Pynchon's lists. These figures—saint, clairvoyant, paranoid, dreamer—are united by their special relevance to metaphor and to revelation. The text seems to assert here that metaphor is the vehicle (as well as the tenor) of revelation itself, and that revelation is real, perhaps even reality. Grant cites many critical renderings of this central passage, but these end up negating each other, leaving the reader to confront the text alone, as Oedipa confronts (and comforts—in fact, "blesses," as Grant puts it [115]) the sailor and her night of wandering. This passage is one of the most salient in Pynchon's entire body of work, for—dense, ambiguous, complex as it is—it seems to reveal explicitly the workings of his aesthetic and his conception of language. It is almost amusing to see the critics Grant cites wrangle with this passage, from Frank Palmeri's desire to alter "act in . . . special relevance to the word" to the flaccid-sounding "'exist in a special relation to language'" (112), to N. Katherine Hayles's contention that the relation between "inside, safe" and "outside, lost" would, if reversed, make the passage "easier to understand" (113). But of course the complexity and enigma are precisely the point. Pynchon can use only metaphor to explain metaphor: thrust, inside, outside, safe, lost are themselves metaphors. Language, as Voltaire remarked, is very difficult to put into words, but it seems clear (clarity—another metaphor) that the dt, the vanishingly small gap—occurring everywhere in Pynchon, as the W.A.S.T.E. emblems appear everywhere to Oedipa on this transforming night—is itself the leap of faith, ineluctable, through which the Word leaps, metaphorically, to the word.

Contention over the religious dimension of Pynchon's art will grow, one suspects, with time and the fading of *Gravity's Rainbow's* incandescence (and the continued production, we may hope, of new work). His once-unquestioned focus on the workings of worldly power may be subsumed by a deeper sense of the nature of representation,

the relation of word to Word, and the leap across the void. In a fascinating sequence in chapter 40 of *Mason & Dixon*, almost the very center of the book, Mason has fallen in with a motley crew of subversives, a counterforce known as “the Collectivity” (403). Engaged, or shanghaied, to repair their telescope, he drifts into conversation with them on the “Topick of Representation” (404), and the reader is drawn into considering in swift succession representation as simultaneously political, artistic and religious. This equivalence is effected by means of metaphor. Political “‘Virtual Representation’” of America in the British House of Commons evokes this commentary:

“Why,” exclaims the Captain, “’tis the doctrine of Transsubstantiation, which bears to the Principle you speak of, a curious likeness,—that’s of course considering members of Parliament, like the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, to contain, in place of the Spirit of Christ, the will of the People.”

“Then those who gather in Parliaments or Congresses are no better than Ghosts?—”

“Or no worse,” Mason cannot resist putting in, “if we proceed, that is, to *Consubstantiation*,—or the Bread and Wine remaining Bread and Wine, whilst the spiritual Presence is reveal’d in Parallel Fashion, so to speak,—closer to the Parliament we are familiar with here on Earth, as whatever they may *represent*, yet do they remain, dismayingly, Humans as well.”

. . . .

“Yet Representation must extend beyond simple Agency,” protests Patsy, “—unto at least Mr. Garrick, who in ‘representing’ a rôle, becomes the character, as by some transfer of Soul,—” (404–05; underscore-emphasis added)

(And as though subtly, perhaps subliminally, to underscore the religious resonance of this brief interlude of a chapter, a chapter which seems to add nothing to the plot of the novel, it concludes with the word “Salvation” [409]). We may see in this scene the three cruxes of Pynchon’s vision, worldly politics, artistic transformation and spiritual revelation, tied together by the mechanism, unrepresentable except indirectly, of metaphor. Perhaps it is the more naked revelation of this doctrine in the old-sailor scene of *Lot 49* that makes Pynchon, in retrospect, somewhat uneasy with that novel; it is, for this master of disguise and indirection, a bit too explicit. Such might be one way of explaining Pynchon’s abrupt dismissal of *Lot 49* in his introduction to *Slow Learner* (22), which is, I think, a quick little con.

Pynchon’s demurrer notwithstanding, Grant’s *Companion* nicely opens up—for novice reader or grizzled veteran—some of the endless

complexities of *Lot 49*. It makes a nice companion as well for White's *Gatsby's Party*. For one thing, it is, as noted, a list, and thus reflects further on the relation between list and narrative with which White is so concerned. For another, it deals with some of White's theoretical science. The longest gloss in the *Companion* (81–95), on the Nefastis machine, clearly explicates some of the connections among entropy, thermodynamics and information theory which White draws on, it must be said, far more abstrusely. In fact, Grant highlights precisely some of the difficulties a too easy merging of thermodynamic and informational entropy can cause, an error White sometimes commits when failing to keep her metaphors straight. The relation between science and literature will, of course, continue to unfold. And literary criticism, ever eager for complex reasons to embrace new tools, will continue to apply whatever seems workable as an interpretive lens. The two books under discussion keep us thinking, from perspectives highly theoretical to bluntly practical, about the relation between the two fields, and thinking even more so about each field's relation to what we have to call reality. Even if the most important truth of postmodern thought is the constructed nature of reality, we are still left with the begged question "constructed out of what?" Science and art themselves are ultimately metaphors, thrusts at what lies on the other side.

—University of California—Los Angeles