# Slade Revisited, or,
# The End(s) of Pynchon Criticism

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The editors of the WPI Studies series have chosen to reprint, sixteen years after its initial appearance, the first book of Pynchon criticism ever published, and one has to wonder why. I can think of three reasons, one good, the others not so good.

First, though, make no mistake: this is a reprint, not a "second edition," the editors' claims notwithstanding. The "fresh material" they promise (ix) proves to be negligible: a couple of pages of discussion of the early short story "The Small Rain," overlooked in the 1974 edition, and a brief afterword. It would, of course, have been a thankless task to update the references and bibliography to reflect sixteen years of busy Pynchon scholarship, and no doubt Slade was right not even to try to do so. But the consequence is that *nothing* here has been updated, so that, for instance, Mendelson's "The Sacred, the Profane, and *The Crying of Lot 49*" continues to be referred to as an "unpublished essay to appear soon" (157). *Caveat emptor.*

The first motive the editors might have had for reprinting this book is, it seems to me, an honorable one, namely filial piety: the impulse to recognize formally Slade's role as father of us all, the one who blazed the trail for everyone who has come after in Pynchon studies. Slade, write the editors, "in many respects set the agenda for subsequent studies" (viii), and this is so, for better and worse. The recurrent themes and structures of Pynchon's writing that Slade identified — entropy, Preterition, Manichaean dualities and excluded middles, and so on — have become *topoi* of Pynchon criticism, as have the passages from Pynchon that Slade chose to quote and gloss. Alec McHoul and David Wills have recently complained about the degree to which Pynchon criticism has come to rely on a narrow "canon" of mandatory quotations, a kind of Greatest Hits selection to which Pynchon critics return again and again, while many other pages of equal or greater interest never receive the attention they deserve.[1] Many of these

Greatest Hits are already in evidence in Slade's book. We find here, for instance, the passage about the "great airless arc" and Katje's allegorical understanding of it; the passage about the "purified shape latent in the sky," and the one about "temporal bandwidth"; the one about Slothrop's (and *his time's*) assembly or disassembly (whichever), and the one about "Mapping onto different coordinate systems"; the "stout rainbow cock" and, inevitably, the "old fans who've always been at the movies"; and so on (181, 184, 191, 198, 199, 203, 207).[2] But of course it is only with the unfair benefit of hindsight that we can speak of these as "canonical" citations. For Slade did not *adhere* to any received canon; rather, he helped to *establish* it, and if we have not had the courage or imagination to deviate from it since then, that is our own fault, not his.

One wants to think well of one's intellectual father, and it is gratifying to be reminded how thorough and well-informed a reader of Pynchon Slade was way back in 1974, how lively and accessible a style he had, and how seldom he was wrong factually (I caught no more than two or three errors of fact on this rereading; how many later Pynchon critics could claim as clean a record?). It is especially gratifying to note those places where Slade's anticipations have been borne out by subsequent developments. Thus, for example, Slade suggests that, instead of the postal conspiracy of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon might have done better to choose a more technologically advanced form of sabotage and resistance to official communications systems, namely that of the "black-box" (or "phone phreak") underground (120). This was in 1974, remember. Since then, of course, we have seen the emergence of "hacking," a still more advanced form of resistance to still more advanced communications technologies,[3] and alongside it a literature reflective of the values and milieu of the hacker sub-culture, namely cyberpunk. It is no accident at all that cyberpunk writers have adopted Pynchon as one of their own, a cyberpunk before the fact,[4] for reasons that will be perfectly clear to readers of Slade. Cyberpunk merely continues the trajectory of successive responses to technological change already projected by Slade as early as 1974.

If I am sympathetic to the pious motive of acknowledging one's forebears, I am more skeptical of another motive that might be imputed to the editors, namely that of calling our attention to insights or connections that subsequent scholarship has overlooked or undervalued in Slade's study, insights that might merit our reconsideration even a decade and a half later. If it could be shown that we had overlooked something of importance in Slade's book, that would certainly justify reprinting it now, but the fact of the matter is that Slade has been

pretty thoroughly picked over by those who have come after him. His very success in "setting the agenda" has meant that nearly every theme, source and connection he identifies has been fully assimilated into Pynchon criticism by now, and much of what he said first, and perhaps best, passes now for critical commonplace and the consensus view. No doubt this is unfair, but it is also inevitable; consequently, the newcomer to Pynchon criticism would be well-advised to turn first to the most recent synthesis of our cumulative knowledge—currently, say, Weisenburger's Gravity's Rainbow *Companion*—rather than back-tracking to the foundations of that knowledge in Slade.

Nevertheless, on rereading Slade one does encounter a few avenues of inquiry which, if not exactly overlooked by subsequent criticism, at least have not been explored as fully as they might be. One example is Slade's proposal that we think of the world of *The Crying of Lot 49* as (to borrow a formulation from Thomas Pavel) a "dual ontology"—not one world but two, world and anti-world—and that of *Gravity's Rainbow* as a plural world (125–31, 152, 168).[5] Another is his observation concerning the two-dimensional, cartoon-like qualities of Pynchon's characters in *Lot 49* in particular (133). Again, it is not as though these ideas have not resonated to a certain extent in subsequent Pynchon criticism (I have written about the plural-world structure of *Gravity's Rainbow* myself), but that they have not been taken as seriously or explored as thoroughly as they deserve.

Moreover, in the retrospective light shed upon the whole of Pynchon's earlier production by the publication of *Vineland* (which appeared too late for Slade to have had the opportunity to comment on it in his afterword), it is these two insights of Slade's—into Pynchon's dual and plural ontologies and his cartoon-like characterizations—that seem to acquire special salience and relevance. For, despite its relative sparseness and simplicity, compared to the sprawl of *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland* is in some ways even more conspicuously plural (which is perhaps only to say more *accessibly* plural) than its predecessor. Possessing no single consistent "world" or reality-norm, *Vineland* seems to fragment into a number of different *regions* of reality, each keyed on a different character, each inflected somewhat differently from all the others. These different reality-regions invite description, in this most TV-saturated of novels, in terms of the models of TV genres: soap-opera, game-show, cop-show, made-for-TV docudrama, and so on. Each genre-world posits its own repertoire of character-types and psychologies, all with that two-dimensional quality that is peculiar to popular-entertainment characterization; each obeys its own reality-norms, even to some extent its own separate physical laws. Thus, the region of reality around Zoyd Wheeler conforms to the

genre norms of TV sitcoms; the region around Brock Vond, to the norms of TV cop-shows; the one around Frenesi Gates and her second husband Flash, to those of soap-operas, and so on. There are also various transient cartoon-worlds, sometimes modelled on Warner Brothers cartoons, sometimes on Disney, sometimes on Robert Crumb, all of them, however, too inhospitable to human life to be "home" to any of the major characters of *Vineland*: like Toon-town in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, they might be interesting places to visit, but you wouldn't want to try living there.

In short, *Vineland* brings into sharp focus precisely those aspects of Pynchon's poetics that we have tended to overlook since Slade first brought them to our attention in 1974. While this may not exactly constitute an argument for reprinting Slade's book, it should at least encourage us to reread certain pages of it with renewed attention.

Finally, I can think of a third possible motive for reprinting Slade's study—the worst of the three. It is possible that Slade's book is being proffered as a model for how we could, or ought to, do Pynchon criticism in the '90s. If this motive figured in the editors' thinking in undertaking to reprint the book, or in Slade's thinking in agreeing to have it reprinted, then I find I am in vehement disagreement with them. I am (as I hope I've made clear) grateful for Slade's book, as I am grateful for some, though by no means all, of the works of Pynchon criticism that have followed in its wake. But I do not believe we need more such books now, or perhaps ever again.

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"A whole generation of scholars," writes David Porush in his jacket blurb, "will be reminded that Slade opened up and tamed the wild territory of Pynchon decipherment where we now reside so comfortably and which we take for granted." Here we have Exhibit A in my case for regarding Slade's book as a bad (I almost wrote "pernicious") model for Pynchon criticism now. Porush means this as a witty compliment, but he tells us more than he intends (unless he is wittier than I give him credit for, and the compliment is two-edged by design). Like a frontiersman (Crutchfield the westwardman?), Slade has undertaken to domesticate what is "wild" in Pynchon, making it possible for those of us who have come after to cohabit comfortably— too comfortably, I would argue—with Pynchon's texts. If Slade is the Wild-West pioneer, we are the civilizing schoolmarms who come along only after all the predators have been killed and all the aborigines confined to reservations.

Slade's purpose is to normalize Pynchon, to render Pynchon's texts indistinguishable from conventional novels. His tools are explication, willful reconstruction, and judicious censorship. No doubt this is a caricature of Slade's program, but not so broad as to be unrecognizable. After all, Slade says as much himself when he concludes that Pynchon, "in spite of his continual innovations . . . is a remarkably conventional writer, as evidenced by his preference for the omniscient narrator, the skillfully orchestrated leitmotif, the archetype, the picaresque plot, and the epic sweep of narrative" (222). Reading this, one's jaw fairly drops with astonishment, as it also does when Slade argues for Pynchon's affinities with—Thomas Mann! (167). In one sense, of course, Slade is right: Pynchon does deploy such conventional literary strategies as omniscient narration, leitmotifs, archetypes, and the picaresque, and he does share with Mann a certain thematic repertoire and a certain ironic approach to myth. Or rather, Pynchon's poetics can be *described* in such a way as to make such conventional categories appear relevant to his practice. To describe in this normalizing way, however, is to ensure that everything that is distinctive (and intractably difficult) in Pynchon's texts drops out of the account—everything that is *not* adequately captured by the categories "omniscient narration," "leitmotif" and the rest, everything that makes the experience of reading Pynchon radically unlike the experience of reading Mann.

Since Slade, others have argued, often more persuasively and with greater sophistication, for Pynchon's essential normality and conventionality (I am thinking especially of Kathryn Hume's *Pynchon's Mythography* [1987]). But no one has ever let us see more clearly what is at stake than Slade did when he considered whether to range Pynchon alongside Joyce or alongside Mann, and opted for Mann. At least with Slade we know exactly where we are: not out in the wilderness fringes of modernism with Joyce, but with Mann in its comfortable bourgeois suburbs, where the "common reader" (whoever that might be nowadays) can feel right at home.

Slade's program for domesticating Pynchon's wayward texts is twofold. First, he seeks to maximize semantic coherence and integration by forging (in both senses of the word) connections and discovering symmetries (or "dualities," "polarities," etc.). "Everything connects in [Pynchon's] fiction," Slade assures us, "sometimes with so audible a click that critics accuse him of too great a passion for symmetry through artificial linkages" (6); and *"Gravity's Rainbow* is about *connectedness*: Pynchon has created a universe in which everything is related to everything else, and he demonstrates relationships with a vengeance" (159). There is no denying, I suppose,

that *Gravity's Rainbow* is in some sense "about connectedness," but this formulation fails to acknowledge that it is also, and equally, "about" disconnectedness. If Pynchon demonstrates relationship, he also demonstrates non-relationship, and that "click" of everything falling into place is only audible insofar as one is intent on hearing it. The symmetries that Slade documents—North and South, paranoia and anti-paranoia, freedom and control, Outside and Inside, gravity and flight, Preterition and Election, Rossini and Beethoven, and so on (168) —are certainly "there" in the texts, in some sense, but so are many dissymmetries and loose ends. Reading Slade's reconstructions of Pynchon's connections, one tends to forget all the unassimilable residues, all the "waste" materials, that have had to be suppressed or disguised or (mostly) passed over in silence. Whose "passion for symmetry" is this, one wants to know, Pynchon's or Slade's?

In fact, Slade's complacency about the integration and connectedness of Pynchon's texts is contradicted by the visible lengths to which he must go to render these texts coherent at all. He normalizes them, first of all, by disassembling them (I am thinking here only of his handling of the novels) into a "foreground" adventure, focused on a conventional "protagonist" (Profane, Oedipa, Slothrop), and a "background" historical narrative (V.'s progress, the history of the Tristero, a more diffuse background in the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*). He assigns these disassembled parts to different chapters of his book, or different sections of the same chapter, usually the "background" story first, then the "foreground" (the order is reversed in the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*). While this arrangement admittedly makes for clarity in exposition, it also reflects certain dubious assumptions (dubious for any sophisticated narrative fiction, but especially for Pynchon's): that "foreground" can be disengaged from "background" without undue difficulty; that the "true" chronological order of events (*histoire*) can be unproblematically reconstructed from the confusion and chronological disorder of the presentation (*discours*); and that the obstacles to reconstruction posed by disorderly and subjectivized presentation are negligible, not worth taking into account.

This brings me to the second of the interpretive and reconstructive operations entailed by Slade's program. Slade normalizes Pynchon's texts by entirely eliding their formal levels—narrative structure, figurative language, style. If one were to read Slade without first having read Pynchon, one would never guess that there was anything distinctive or particularly daunting about the form of Pynchon's novels, when of course the one great undeniable fact of our experience of reading Pynchon (and which Pynchon criticism, before and after Slade, has always conspired to deny) is the conspicuousness and intractability

of his language and form. Reading Slade on *V.*, for instance, one would learn that the chapter set during the Fashoda Crisis was narrated from multiple points of view, but not how great an obstacle this poses to the reconstruction of "what really happened," particularly by comparison with the more "normal" exposition of this "same" episode in the story "Under the Rose." And if Slade is unwilling to acknowledge the degree of dislocation, he is certainly not in a position to speculate *why* such an oblique and disintegrative narrative strategy might have been employed in this particular episode.[6]

In short, Slade's approach is entirely content-oriented. He commits himself to giving an account of plot, themes, and sources (see the editors' introduction for corroboration), as though language and form were dispensable husks, to be used up and discarded as soon as one had grasped the fruit—that is, the content. Slade is self-conscious enough to apologize for this: since he aims to "trace themes" and "summarize plot," he has unfortunately left himself little space, he says, in which to consider "Pynchon's hyperdense metaphors, his felicities of style," or his humor (xix). This is not strictly true, as far as metaphors are concerned, for Slade does in fact analyze some of Pynchon's master-tropes—dts/DTs in *Lot 49*, gravity and the parabola in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and so on—but always at the thematic level, never descending to engage with the metaphorical texture of the texts themselves (and this despite his asserting, "there is little point in reading Pynchon if one is not a metaphor freak" [234]). As for "felicities of style," the closest Slade ever comes to analyzing Pynchon's absolutely distinctive, heteroglossic style is a couple of casually impressionistic sentences by way of conclusion (228–29). Language has been not so much overlooked as violently effaced here, confirming McHoul and Wills's comment that "a whole body of Pynchon criticism seems to have noticed the arbitrariness of the signifier in *Gravity's Rainbow* and, to put it mildly, panicked" (WP 50). Should one be disposed to dismiss this as exaggeration, one need only observe Slade's panic in the face, not even of arbitrary signifiers, but of any signifier whatsoever, to see that McHoul and Wills are merely reporting the true state of affairs.

So committed is Slade to his principles of semantic integration and the effacement of form that he is willing to sacrifice some of his best and freshest insights at their altar. Perhaps, indeed, this is one reason they have continued to seem so fresh: no one has ventured to follow up on them, frightened off by Slade's abrupt foreclosure of further discussion, as though he had erected a "Road Closed" sign at the point where he himself left off. This, it seems to me, is the case with his insight about the duality and plurality of Pynchon's fictional worlds.

Just at the point where it becomes clear how much of a threat ontological plurality poses to the putative semantic integrity of Pynchon's texts, Slade backs off: "For all of Pynchon's talk of edges and interfaces, the world he predicates is seamless and holistic" (208). It is an amazing about-face. Similarly with his observation about the two-dimensional, cartoon quality of Pynchon's characters: evidently alarmed by the implications of his own insight into the provocative flatness, depthlessness, abstractness, etc. of Pynchon's characterizations, Slade does an abrupt about-face to propose Pynchon as the spokesman for a redemptive "new humanism" (227–28). Since Slade, this has become (as McHoul and Wills bitterly complain) a sanctioned move of Pynchon criticism, whereby Pynchon is redeemed from charges of "nihilism" (whatever that might be) by a recuperative appeal to the humanist tradition and the recovery of the fully human subject (WP 14, 62).[7] This same old tired rabbit of humanism has been produced from the same old hat more times than one can easily count in the years since 1974; the only mitigating factor in Slade's case is that he was one of the first to perform this particular trick.

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If Slade is such a bad model for Pynchon criticism in the '90s, who, then, is a good model? At this point it is, I suppose, incumbent on me to suggest alternatives to what, since Slade, and partly through his example, has become the norm of Pynchon criticism. I can think of two recent books that suggest alternative ways forward. One has already been cited several times in this review, namely McHoul and Wills's *Writing Pynchon* (1990); the other is Dale Carter's extraordinary *The Final Frontier* (1988).

Slade, in his new afterword, suggests that *Gravity's Rainbow* lends itself to "deconstructive" and "postmodernist" readings (234–35), but the tenor of his remark indicates, not only that he is not himself interested in such readings, but that he is not very familiar with how such readings are conducted. This tends to corroborate McHoul and Wills's complaint about Pynchon critics' indifference to, and ignorance of, contemporary literary theory (WP 1). They do not themselves, however, aspire to counteract this indifference and ignorance by "applying" deconstruction to Pynchon's texts. Such a model of "application" would reflect, I suppose, something like Slade's understanding of deconstruction (and not his alone, I might add) as a method for producing new, but not necessarily improved, interpretations of texts.

What McHoul and Wills aim to do goes beyond this "application" model to a radical questioning and inversion of priorities between "theory" and "application," and between "theory" and its "object." They propose to think of Pynchon's fiction as itself in some sense "theoretical," in much the way we have been tutored by deconstruction to think, symmetrically, of texts of philosophy as "literary fictions." McHoul and Wills claim "the right to read Pynchon as philosophy," as a first step toward a possible levelling of all discourses, so that any text could potentially function equally well as "theory" or as theory's "object" (WP 10). They see no obstacle, for instance, to Pynchon's and Derrida's texts swapping functions, with Derrida's "fictions" being read from the position of Pynchon's "literary theory" (WP 11, 112). "We insist," they conclude, "that a work of fiction can be deployed in a theoretical field as something other than an example or instance but rather as an intervention" (WP 217).

The readings that result do not, perhaps, satisfy to the degree that McHoul and Wills's aspirations and polemics might have led one to hope they would (see Louis Mackey's review in *Pynchon Notes* 24–25). Nevertheless, their account of, for instance, the dts/DTs metaphor of *Lot 49* (WP 78–81) compares favorably with Slade's thematically-oriented reading of the same complex trope. McHoul and Wills's account, like their readings of Pynchon generally, does not clarify the text or resolve its cruxes, as Slade's aspires to do; rather, it frankly *uses* Pynchon's text (some would no doubt say *abuses* it) as a means to an end, a tool or vehicle or medium in the exploration (not resolution) and complication (not clarification) of metaphoricity itself.

Another, quite different and perhaps even incompatible "use" of Pynchon is to be found in Carter's *The Final Frontier*. This is not a work of literary criticism, but rather an essay in cultural history that (following the precedent of Carter's teacher, Eric Mottram) makes extraordinary use of literary texts—Mailer, Coover, Burroughs, but especially *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Gravity's Rainbow* is treated here as, in effect, an allegory of the emergence, from the ruins of the old European imperialist order, of a new, incipiently totalitarian order in the postwar United States. Or, more precisely, *Gravity's Rainbow* is treated as what Fredric Jameson has taught us to call a "cognitive mapping," adapting that concept from the urbanist Kevin Lynch.

This notion of cognitive mapping arises in the context of Jameson's discussion of the postmodern problem of how we are to represent to ourselves the world-system in which we live. That world-system, the system of late or multinational capitalism, is of a complexity and ubiquity that defy our best efforts to grasp and master it imaginatively, let alone to imagine ways of resisting and changing it. Current forms

of picturing this world-system—Jameson mentions social-scientific discourse, the cybernetic model or metaphor, and the thematics of paranoia and conspiracy, all three, of course, relevant to the case of Pynchon—have proven to be inadequate to our needs because they undertake to model the world-system at the level of content and theme alone, while what is really required is formal innovation which would make cognitive modelling possible at the level of form.   One of Jameson's few examples of the kind of cognitive mapping he has in mind is a piece of postmodernist architecture, namely the house that the architect Frank Gehry built for himself and his family in Santa Monica (1979).[8]  Carter seems to me to make a good case (implicitly, and without actually using the term) for thinking of *Gravity's Rainbow* as another such example of successful cognitive mapping.

Carter's Pynchon differs radically from the Pynchon of literary criticism, Slade's in particular.  For one thing, Carter seems never to have heard about the Greatest Hits album of Pynchon quotations, and consequently his selection of passages for commentary overlaps hardly at all with the generally-circulating canon of Pynchon selections, in the establishment of which Slade had such a hand.  The starting-point of his exposition, for instance, is, of all things, the episode of Slothrop's incursion, disguised as Rocketman, into the Presidential compound at Potsdam (GR 371–83), and his touchstone passage would appear to be the strange one involving the "long-haul" elevator manned (womanned) by "young Mindy Bloth of Carbon City, Illinois" (GR 735–36).  One of Carter's epigraphs from *Gravity's Rainbow* is so startlingly unfamiliar to me that I have so far failed to locate it in the text.  Of how many literary-critical books about Pynchon could it be said that they found passages worth commenting on that nobody had ever glossed before?

Carter makes every bit as good sense of Pynchon as Slade does (and as McHoul and Wills deliberately do not), but it is undeniably a *different* sense.  In general, where Slade is satisfied to identify a theme, source or relevant context, and leave it at that, Carter will always put that same theme, source or context *to work* in the explication, not of Pynchon's text, but of the "Rocket-State" culture for which *Gravity's Rainbow* serves as the cognitive map.  Thus, for example, Slade is content to note the "coincidence" of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s appearing at very nearly the same time as Anthony Sampson's nonfiction book *The Sovereign State of ITT*, and offers this as evidence of Pynchon's "topicality" (162).   Carter, by contrast, completely overrides the distinction between authoritative fact and "mere" fiction that is implicit in Slade's weak notion of "topicality," and proceeds to treat *Gravity's Rainbow* as, in effect, *more* authoritative

than "nonfiction" books like Sampson's, a *better* guide to the complexities of the American Rocket State because of its capacity for richly multidimensional allegorization.

Similarly, where Slade resorts to mythic archetypes to contextualize and interpret the assembly and firing of Rocket 00001 (174–75), Carter turns instead to the context of the subsequent development of Rocket-State culture, thereby transforming what, in Slade's hands, had been a transcendent, ahistorical, and ultimately nostalgic pattern into a tool of historical inquiry. And where Slade identifies the source of that strange Rocket-City elevator, tracing it (no doubt correctly) to one of Einstein's thought-experiments (209), Carter goes well beyond source-hunting, allegorizing the elevator and turning it into an elaborately detailed scale-model of the closed space of upwardly-mobile postwar America. This has to be sampled to be appreciated:

> it is this tensed enclosure—an American Dream surrounding or warding off an immanent nightmare—which Pynchon condenses as the 'intimate cubic environment' of the rising elevator near the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*[. . . .] Pynchon's elevator satirizes the post-war media marketing world of upward mobility as a pervasive but treacherous routine of consumable security. The Rocket State becomes an environment located, like Henry Miller's *Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), somewhere between insane asylum and shopping center. [. . .]
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> Thus at 'the end of the line' the elevator transports evacuees into 'some vast, very old and dark hotel, an iron extension of the track and switchery by which they have come here.' But traversing frictionless passages it connects this current accommodation with a 'very extensive museum,' a memory bank of 'many levels and new wings that generate like living tissue,' and at the same time (in the form of a 'mobile building') gives access to 'spectacles' of anticipation staged in a 'dingy little amphitheater['] surrounded by 'hundreds of thousands of . . . *spectators*, watching . . . to see if a new episode's come on yet.' [. . . I]t links a system of accession and plentiful ease, where 'numberless shelves, each one revealing treats gooeyer and sweeter than the last' invite you to '*go inside*,' with one of ominous restriction in which 'certain paths aren't available to you,' levels are 'somehow forbidden,' and halls are 'to be entered at one's peril.' [. . . I]t is engineered at the edge of present security and potential disaster: climbing 'window to window, too full of grace ever to fall' but at the same time 'propelling you with no warning toward your ceiling'; offering 'padded seats and benches' but also hanging like 'a moving wooden scaffold' in which furnishings no longer matter; presenting 'a whole issue of *Life* between stops' yet already at 'the end of

the line' where 'bricks and mortar showering down' may bring 'sudden paralysis as death comes to wrap and stun.'[9]

The manic quality of Carter's interpretive style is clearly visible in a passage like this one, but so is his superiority as a reader of Pynchon. For where Slade's gloss on this passage is no more than a meager notation of its alleged source, reflecting none of its strange, evocative, enigmatic details, Carter is able to turn many (though by no means all) of these details to good allegorical account. If it is a question of which critical discourse "matches" more adequately the density, complexity, and strangeness of Pynchon's own discourse (and McHoul and Wills have made it a question of just that [WP 1]), then Carter wins hands down.

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Slade deplores the use of Pynchon's texts as a site of competition among critical schools (234). What I have been offering, as alternative models of ways forward for Pynchon criticism, are precisely two competing examples of how we might "use" Pynchon.

Slade's objection implies (a) that he himself has no ulterior "uses" for Pynchon, and (b) that "using" literary texts for ulterior purposes is deplorable. I find both these assumptions dubious. First, Slade does, of course, "use" Pynchon: he uses him as High Art has typically been used in our time, as a kind of icon or fetish, the adoration of which has the effect of reciprocally shedding reflected glory on the devotee. Second, once we have recognized the fetishistic dimension of this devotion to the art-object ("masterpiece," "classic," "Great Book," what-have-you), we are in a better position to acknowledge the legitimacy of other, de-fetishizing uses, "transitive" uses of art-works for the accomplishment of purposes other than their glorification, whether these purposes be the skeptical, "philosophical" scrutiny of language or a historical inquiry into the development of the American Rocket State.

Slade himself is well aware that Pynchon is in danger of becoming "an elder statesman of letters" (235)—or, as I have preferred to put it, an icon or fetish—though he seems disinclined to accept any of the responsibility for having launched Pynchon on the road to elder-statesmanhood. We have already gone far toward fetishizing Pynchon's texts, and Pynchon "himself," as Joyceans have fetishized "their" author and his texts (though in the Joyce case this was done with the author's complicity and encouragement, which has not been the case with Pynchon).[10] What I am suggesting here is that we strive

to reverse the process, to *de*-fetishize Pynchon's texts by converting them from the *ends* of our critical discourse to the *means* for accomplishing something else, to make of them cognitive instruments rather than objects of cognition as, in their different and probably incompatible ways, McHoul and Wills on the one hand and Carter on the other have done. I am not, I hasten to add, advocating that Pynchon critics begin producing books cloned from *Writing Pynchon* and *The Final Frontier*, as we have long done in the case of Slade's *Thomas Pynchon*—an unlikely prospect in any case, given the idiosyncrasy, not to say crankiness, of these two books. But I am advocating adopting the fruitfully *instrumental* approach toward Pynchon's texts that we find in both *Writing Pynchon* and *The Final Frontier*. What such "instrumentalist" criticism might look like, I could not possibly anticipate; I can only say that I look forward to reading such criticism with an eagerness I could not hope to muster for yet another latter-day version of Slade.

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## Notes

[1]*Writing Pynchon: Strategies in Fictional Analysis* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990) 108–09.

[2]The original passages can be found in *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973) 159, 209, 223, 509, 626, 738, 760.

[3]See, e.g., Andrew Ross, "Hacking Away at the Counterculture," *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 107–34.

[4]See, e.g., the entries for *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* ("The best cyberpunk ever written by a guy who didn't even know he was writing it") in Richard Kadrey and Larry McCaffery, "Cyberpunk 101: A Schematic Guide to *Storming the Reality Studio*," *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*, ed. Larry McCaffery (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 17–29.

[5]See Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986).

[6]"In revising the short story ['Under the Rose'] for inclusion in *V.*," Slade writes, "Pynchon added extra characters and fragmented the narrative into multiple points of view, so that Arab natives become the filters for the action. The multiple points of view permit the events to be seen from different angles, although all of them vector eventually into the blankness of the desert which is Egypt" (38). One longs for Slade to spell out some of the implications of "Arab natives" becoming "filters for the action," particularly since this elaborate filtration system so markedly increases the difficulty of the chapter. Is it a case

of the empire striking back? a demonstration of the post-colonial reclamation of "native" rights to a point of view?

[7]This is a particularly unfortunate move in Slade's case since, apart from preempting all consideration of Pynchon's cartoon aesthetics, it also raises a barrier between Slade and those "disciples" of Pynchon whose coming, I have suggested, Slade seems to have anticipated, namely the cyberpunks. For an essential feature of the cyberpunk thematics of the "human" and "posthuman" is (as Peter Fitting has recently argued) a refusal of traditional negative valuations of the "cyborg" figure, i.e., the human/machine hybrid, of which examples abound in *V.* (V. as the "Bad Priest," Bongo-Shaftsbury with his throw-switch implant, Fergus Mixolydian wired to his TV set, etc.). Pynchon, writes Slade, "is careful to distinguish between the human and the technological, difficult though it may be to draw the line: the effort to do so is a constant in his work" (232). Well, the cyberpunks are *not* careful to distinguish between the human and the technological, and it is the effort to *blur* that line that is a constant of *their* work. If Pynchon really is as committed to traditional humanism as Slade (and many other critics since him) has assumed, then we can only conclude that the cyberpunks, for whom the "human" is at best hybridized, at worst utterly exploded and disseminated, have woefully misread their mentor. Myself, I'd trust the cyberpunks' "misreading" before I would the critics' humanist interpretation, but that's strictly a private preference. See Fitting, "The Lessons of Cyberpunk," *Technoculture* 295–315.

[8]See "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," and "Spatial Equivalents in the World System," rpt. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 1–54, and 97–129; also "Cognitive Mapping," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988) 347–60.

[9]*The Final Frontier: The Rise and Fall of the American Rocket State* (London: Verso, 1988) 85–86, citing GR 4, 49, 537, 674, 679, 735.

[10]This is one reason, incidentally, I have found proposals for Pynchonists to meet at some appropriate "Holy Center," as Joyceans meet in Dublin or Zurich or Trieste, so distasteful and retrograde—unless, that is, we could manage to hold such a meeting at, say, The White Visitation, or the Casino Hermann Goering, or Zwölfkinder, or, best of all, on Puke-a-hook-a-look-i Island . . .