Chants of Dispossession and Exile: the Yuroks in *Vineland*[1]

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In his most recent novel, Thomas Pynchon repeatedly refers to the customs and lore of the Yuroks, an Indian tribe settled in the northern California coastal region, the location of the fictitious Vineland county. Concepts from Yurok culture figure overtly and covertly throughout the narrative, offering interpretive possibilities for understanding the text as a whole. They contribute to a node of themes including money, death and childhood; they reveal some of the roads not taken by U.S. society; and they pose the question whether the very complexities of postindustrial America encourage a resurgence of so-called primitive ideological patterns in forming a *weltanschauung*.

Explicit references to the Yuroks appear mainly in connection with the enigmatic characters Vato and Blood. The first is embedded in the lengthiest passage on the tow-truck team, near the middle of the novel:

> [T]he river took back its older form, became what for the Yuroks it had always been, a river of ghosts. Everything had a name—fishing and snaring places, acorn grounds, rocks in the river, boulders on the banks, groves and single trees with their own names, springs, pools, meadows, all alive, each with its own spirit. Many of these were what the Yurok people called *woge*, creatures like humans but smaller, who had been living here when the first humans came. Before the influx, the *woge* withdrew. Some went away physically, forever, eastward, over the mountains, or nestled all together in giant redwood boats, singing unison chants of dispossession and exile, fading as they were taken further out to sea, desolate even to the ears of the newcomers, lost. Other *woge* who found it impossible to leave withdrew instead into the features of the landscape, remaining conscious, remembering better times, capable of sorrow and as seasons went on other emotions as well, as the generations of Yuroks sat on them, fished from them, rested in their shade, as they learned to love and grow deeper into the nuances of wind and light as well as the earthquakes and eclipses and the massive winter storms that roared in, one after another, from the Gulf of Alaska. (186)

The single deviation from Yurok mythology in this quotation is the "chants of dispossession and exile," which provide a link to Pynchon's

perennial theme of the preterite (allusions to *The Lord of the Rings* may be intended). The passage quoted above goes on to mention "Tsorrek, the world of the dead" (186), the path to which, we learn later, is so well-trodden by the multitude going there that it sinks into the ground (379). Furthermore, Vato and Blood know of a hippie interpretation of the *woge* which holds that they may have been reincarnated as porpoises (given the humanoid characteristics of the latter). This interpretation also has an eschatological dimension: the *woge* may return to set humans back on the right track if they go entirely astray: "And if we started fucking up too bad, added some local informants, they would come back, teach us how to live the right way, save us" (187).

The reference to Tsorrek is followed-up at the end of the novel when Vato and Blood carry Brock Vond to the abode of the dead while Vato tells him a Yurok story reminiscent of that of Orpheus and Eurydice. A young man follows his deceased love into the underworld and destroys the boat that ferries "the dead across the last river" (379). As a result, nobody in the world dies for ten long years, until the boat is repaired. While listening to this story, Vond notices that their road has been sinking into the ground and that it has reached the river of death. Vato tells him his bones will be separated from the flesh and remain there, which will take a certain time getting used to: "'You look a lot different, and you move funny for a while, but they say you'll adjust. Give these third-worlders a chance, you know, they can be a lotta fun'" (380).

Both passages (186–87 and 379–80) have affinities with Greek mythology. Besides the parallel to Orpheus's descent into Hades, the idea that nature is inhabited by conscious beings echoes the belief that nymphs, hamadryads, river gods and the like enliven nature (witness the observation ascribed to Thales that the world is full of gods). This belief is reflected in the *woge*, the race predating the human and resembling children, a resemblance we will discuss later. Moreover, both passages show a connection to *Gravity's Rainbow*, the hymn on whose last page ("With a face on ev'ry mountainside, / And a Soul in ev'ry stone" [760]) refers to conscient nature. And the realm of the dead presents an alternative to the transcendental redemption of the elect: the netherworld of the preterite is a spiritual third world.

What sources Pynchon used to familiarize himself with the Yuroks, we have no way to know at present. The research on which we have principally relied recommends itself for two reasons: it is easily accessible to the general reader, and it stems from acknowledged scholarly authorities. Thus we have used the work of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson—noting also the whimsical coincidence, if it is one, that he

shares his surname with the legendary Viking discoverer of "Vineland the Good," Leif Ericson. The following argument relies mainly on Erikson's article "Observations on the Yurok: Childhood and World Image" (incorporated in a slightly abridged version into his seminal study *Childhood and Society*).[2]

Erikson outlines a psychoanalytic approach to tribal culture on the basis of his own field work supplemented by anthropological studies. While his conclusions and explanations are of slight relevance to *Vineland*, some of his phenotypical observations are quite pertinent. For instance, by contrast with other Native American tribes (Erikson also analyzed the nomadic Plains tribes, unlike whom the sedentary Yuroks, being farmers and fishermen, have a centripetal world view), the Yuroks' thinking is extremely property-oriented. In fact, Yurok society was entirely structured by money well before the arrival of European explorers and settlers. Therefore, the contact with white culture did not mark a clash of incompatible socio-economic systems, but simply meant a conflict with "another group of greedy citizens" (258). Like the salmon, their main food source, which has a place in their heaven "across the ocean" from where it swims down the Klamath River, money too has a "home" in heaven from where it visits the tribe. Already in early childhood, Yuroks are encouraged to reflect about money. Overindulgence in food, for instance, is discouraged, and, instead, children are taught to think about money and how to acquire it (286). Everything has its price: thus, Erikson has to buy information from a shaman, who explicitly stresses that her initiation into the shamanic trade had cost two dollars. She relates that the main reason compelling her to take up the profession, despite strong initial revulsion against some of its aspects, was the sure prospect of wealth. In short, money has a constant presence in Yurok life. It helps to overcome adversity, to control sexual desire, to master hunger and thirst, and to occupy the imagination in times of idleness (286). Social rank is determined by money, and insolvency may lead to a kind of slavery (289).

The educational emphasis on money-making, which so fascinated Erikson in the Yuroks' upbringing, is familiar in Pynchon's texts.[3] In *Vineland*, College of the Surf originally stands for an educational philosophy that defines wealth and success as the ultimate aim in life. However, little is gained by construing a parallel to the Yuroks, since the American brand of Puritanism not only provides an ample blueprint but is a more likely source of inspiration. In this context, another aspect is more interesting—namely that in *Vineland* money has something like a "home" from which it cyclically appears like the salmon of the Yuroks. Simultaneously concrete and abstract, this

home, the computer issuing checks for Zoyd, Flash and Frenesi, is not merely a machine; it belongs to an impenetrable sphere comparable to the Firm in *Gravity's Rainbow*. A continuous cash-flow is strongly desired, but it depends on sometimes ominous and obscure rules. The causes of a rupture are open to speculation: individual misconduct is as likely a cause as is a general shortage or the austerity programs of a distant power elite as intangible as Wopekumeu, "the widower across the ocean" and creator god of the Yuroks.

As does *The Crying of Lot 49* (37), *Vineland* posits a relation between God and a computer: "We are digits in God's computer. . . . [I]t all lies beneath the notice of the hacker we call God" (91). Money functions, not as payment for work done, but rather as a bribe for certain behavior that establishes group membership. Once a year Zoyd demonstrates his social harmlessness to Vond by publicly jumping through a plate glass window, an act which guarantees his "mental disability check" from the authorities. His jumping is ritualistic in that it is meant to appease the powers that be and avert punishment. The ritual mixes two purposes: on the one hand, it underlines Zoyd's social marginalization by labeling him "mentally disabled"; on the other, it financially ensures his survival in society. To draw a parallel to the commercialization of Native American ritual dances may not be amiss: on the one hand, showcasing the exotic affirms the separation from modern society; on the other hand, it secures material reproduction in modern society. The annual rite of atonement and reconciliation with nature in older cultural practices is replaced with a personal ritual constituting and simultaneously nullifying the separation from society.

The computer knows no right of appeal. The decisions it submits are inscrutable and irreversible. As a result, Frenesi and Flash's helplessness when their government checks prove void is commensurable with that of people in mythic times confronted with the ill-understood workings of Nature and her deities. It seems integral to Pynchon's dialectics of the Enlightenment that the increasing complexity of social organization and information generates a reversion to mythic thinking.

Considering the special role of money in the society and the cosmology of the Yuroks, it comes as no surprise that this medium is used to defuse situations which may cause substantial crises in other cultures. For instance, all criminal offenses, including murder, can be expiated with cash payments. Concerning death, we find behavior that may seem strange to Western minds. Yuroks refrain from any reference to a dead person, since this is considered swearing—an offense, however, that can be rectified with an appropriate sum of money. This taboo leads Erikson to the question "whether the

temptation suppressed by this prohibition is that of calling the dead dead, powerless, gone, in other words, of eliminating them without remorse and anxiety" (295). Since the conciliation of the dead is necessary (otherwise the village cannot engage in the annual dance rites deemed essential for collective well-being), the surviving family members receive a recompense: the community agrees to pay the relatives a sum of money. Erikson explains this custom "as a community action which tells the dead: 'See, we have not forgotten you. We do not want to dance without remembering you'" (281). However, no money is allotted for those who have suffered a violent death, for their relatives are supposed to get indemnification, "blood money," from the guilty party. This demonstrates to what extent the entire Yurok system of justice, up to and including manslaughter, hinges on money. All offenses can be settled with the right amount of cash, since, as A. L. Kroeber points out, "Every possession and privilege, and every injury and offense, can be exactly valued in terms of property" (20).[4] Finally, the Yuroks distinguish between people who die from natural causes, who go underground, and those "killed with weapons [who] went to a separate place in the willows; here they forever shouted and danced the war dance" (Kroeber 47).

In *Vineland*, justice is presented as problematic. Only Takeshi and DL strive to achieve a weak semblance of it through their karmic adjustment business. Like the Yurok shaman pursuing her profession for the fees she receives, the duo gets into Karmic adjustment for the money (172–73). Takeshi and DL serve as mediators between the worlds of the dead and the living. In fact, the opposing drives of Thanatos and Eros are slyly alluded to in DL's initials, death and love being exactly what she means for Takeshi. In their karmology venture, the duo has not-entirely-specified dealings with Vato and Blood, who also mediate between the dead and the living. Vato and Blood (nearly) alone tow Thanatoid cars (185); they convey Vond to "the last river"; and they generally take to Yurok lore about Tsorrek. They provide Takeshi and DL with background information about Thanatoids from the Vietnam war: "who only talked about and who did what to certain officers they all seemed to have in common, and *why they had been led into the wrong place, and how many there were when the sun went down and how many when it came up* . . . some of it was war stories, some just happy horseshit, and some was the stunned headlong certainty that precedes talking in tongues" (179; emphasis added).

In some respects, the Thanatoids resemble those Yuroks who have suffered a violent death (Weed Atman, for example, first appears perched in a tree). Hence the passage emphasized in the quotation

above suggests both a remembrance of war experiences and a description of the transition to the realm of the undead and the daily increase of their ilk. For Thanatoids as for the Yuroks, there is a taboo on death. When DL refers to the Thanatoids as "'ghosts,'" Takeshi reprimands her: "'That word—around here it's a no-no!'" (173). And Ortho Bob Dulang, their first Thanatoid client when they undertake to plug the karmic market-gap, has a lengthy record of grievances, but "he always carefully—though it might only have been superstitiously—excluded death" (174). The solution Takeshi suggests for a karmic reconciliation is to accept an indemnity:

> "Fuck the money, rilly," Ortho Bob had stipulated, "just get me some revenge, OK?"
>
> "Go for the money," Takeshi pleaded, "it's easier." For example, revenge on whom? (174)

Again, the complexities of social relations lead to a relapse into simplistic or primitive patterns of behavior. Where the official agents of equity take the lead in perpetrating crime (the Department of Justice covers, in more than one sense, the activities of its employee Vond), a causal sequence reaching back to a responsible source cannot be unraveled. Personal guilt evaporates, escapes the established legal processes. Instead, society substitutes a financial recompense for the personal liability of a delinquent who represents it and acts on its behalf.

The Yuroks' preoccupation with money and ways to obtain it results in behavior that exceeds what is elsewhere considered common avarice. In their quarrels about money—in attempting to gain recompense or even when merely setting prices—the adults behave in ways other cultures consider childish. In this context, Erikson quotes the transcript of one of Kroeber's seminars, in the course of which, in rapid succession, the following language occurs: "whining around," "fussing," "bickering," "crying out," "self-pity," "excuses a child might give," "claimants who make themselves nuisances" (Erikson 295n.). Yet such forms of expression are not restricted to monetary matters; they can also be found in pantomimic scenes enacted by adults, and are an integral part of story-telling. The emotional impact of traditional and autobiographical tales is not only narrated but also performed. If the character in a story weeps, so does the narrator:

> Take the Yurok's ability to pantomime a crying helpless being or a deeply offended mourner. Does it mean that the Yurok anywhere within his technology is more helpless, more paralyzed by sadness, than are members

> of a tribe which does not develop these "traits"? Certainly not; his institutionalized helplessness *eo ipso* is neither a trait nor a neurotic symptom. It is an infantile attitude which the culture chose to preserve and to put at the disposal of the individual, to be used by him and his fellow men in a limited area of existence. (Erikson 295)

Tom Lehrer's "attempt to prolong adolescence beyond all previously known limits" is a cultural potential for the Yuroks compatible with mature behavior. To some extent, the adult always *also* remains a child, without any inherent contradiction.

The myths about the *woge* are of some importance here. This race of "elder ones," who were there before humans came, is invisible to adults; only children may see them occasionally. "Seeing" the "wise people" is taken to cause those ailments of children ("bad temper, lack of appetite, nightmares, delinquency, etc." [Erikson 260]) believed to result from transgressions by adult family members (practicing sorcery, adultery, etc.), although it is not quite clear whether these transgressions are real or fictitious. The shaman diagnoses a specific violation of the code, which, in general, is then confessed by one of the parents or relatives. In carrying the symptoms, the children become the direct victims of any misconduct within the clan: the sins of the parents indeed come down on the children. But it is not only shamanic practice which links the *woge* to childhood:

> The "wise people" are described as not taller than a small child. They are always "in spirit," because they do not know sexual intercourse. They are adult at six months of age, and they are immortal. They procreate orally, the female eating the man's lice. . . .
>
> [T]hey are visible and dangerous only for children because children are still fixated on earlier stages and may regress when the stimulation of the daylight is waning—then becoming dreamy, they may be attracted by the "wise people's" childishness and by the narcissism with which they thought they could be wise and be magic without social organization. (Erikson 260–61)

Erikson restricts his analysis to the childlike aspects of the *woge*. The "elder ones"' role in the social organization of indicating transgressions —real or fictitious—by adults seems less important to him. Yet, to some extent, children in the Yurok tribe are the agency overseeing adherence to rules and taboos. Symptoms accounted for in Western culture as infantile defiance, obstinacy, or the like are viewed differently in Yurok society. The children are not to be blamed, since their disorders are caused by specific offenses by adults (a rather

"modern" concept, revealing psychoanalytical principles in "primitive" ritual). In addition, the children see the *woge* involuntarily. Yurok children are thus cast in the role of the seismographs showing the current state of the family or clan.

While Erikson does not idealize Yurok childhood, he nevertheless takes it to be—despite rather rigid restrictions like unusually early weaning and an omnipresent materialism—a plausible if not superior alternative to modern patterns of education. The "neurotic" traits (neurotic by Western standards and the presuppositions of psychoanalysis) are merely a different form of educational conditioning:

> Our speculations insist that no consistent integrated cultural emphasis can develop without a specific conditioning—a specific variation of the universal expulsion from paradise—in early childhood; and that such a conditioning, in order to create people who can function as useful members of even the strangest culture, must aim for what we vaguely call a "strong ego," that is, a personality core both firm and flexible enough to maintain cultural and psychological *homeostasis*. (296)

The regression toward primitive or ritual patterns in *Vineland* is enhanced by the fact that all the characters somehow exhibit childlike attributes. The students of PR^3 (the People's Republic of Rock and Roll), the aged hippies, and even Vond ("the endearing adolescent" [216]) reveal a desire for regression or act out infantile wishes/anxieties, all directed toward disorder yet simultaneously deriving from a desire for order. This takes up a recurrent theme of Pynchon's that originates in "The Secret Integration." In his previous novels, only a few passages or figures are based on childhood patterns—"The Radiant Hour" in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example; in *Vineland* this theme is pervasive (possibly in connection with the continuing importance of media culture). The most obvious analogies with the infantile behavior of the Yuroks can be found in Zoyd, who does not merely act out his annual rite of transfenestration but also shows childish traits in his modes of expression. Like the Yuroks, he is quite capable of breaking into tears at anytime; weeping is one of his common forms of communication (see 297).

By contrast, Prairie's infancy has affinities with Yurok childhood. Weaned early (as a consequence of her mother's departure), Prairie is akin to a "wise child." On the journey to Vineland with Zoyd, she begins to communicate with her environment, the vegetation:

> Trees. Zoyd must have dozed off. He woke to rain coming down in sheets, the smell of redwood trees in the rain through the open bus

> windows, tunnels of unbelievably tall straight red trees whose tops could not be seen pressing in to either side. Prairie had been watching them all the time and in a very quiet voice talking to them as they passed one by one. It seemed now and then as if she were responding to something she was hearing, and in rather a matter-of-fact tone of voice for a baby, too, as if this were a return for her to a world behind the world she had known all along. (315)

Only children can perceive the *woge*, who are part of the environment; accordingly, Prairie can get into contact with the surrounding landscape. Of course, this contact is not verifiable; it just *seems* to take place. Yet even in this hypothetical form, the concept of a conscious nature attains some validation, as only two pages later ships' "log keepers not known for their psychic gifts" are said to have sensed "some invisible boundary" (317) when approaching the coastal redwoods.

This might lead to the conclusion that Pynchon joins the ubiquitous jeremiad against the destruction of our environment and touches it up with references to Yurok mythology (or Zen: in a novel containing a variety of Japanese elements, the latter can hardly be ignored). This rather banal reading has to be extended in various ways, since the redwoods in *Vineland* cannot simply be reduced to the term nature. As their age is repeatedly emphasized—"alive forever" (317)—they are closely interwoven with American history, a history whose witnesses are continually annihilated. In Vond's plan to assassinate Weed Atman, the exploitation of the redwoods serves as a metaphor for the collapse of PR^3: "'He's the key to it all, the key log, pull him and you break up the structure,' and the logs would disengage, singly and in groups, and continue on their way down the river to the sawmill, to get sawed into lumber, to be built into more America" (215–16). The conscious but unmoving redwoods are the inverse of the quite mobile but hardly pensive children, who are equally vulnerable to attack. Ecological destruction has its analogue in the radical annihilation of a non-conformist movement. With the redwoods, a part of the American past is obliterated; with PR^3, a possible American future.

But back to Prairie. Her ability to see the *woge* seems to be inherited from Frenesi, who had had similar experiences pointing to Yurok mythology. One of her relatives tells Zoyd about "young Frenesi the explorer and the reports she'd come back with 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). This description fits, not

only the local Thanatoid settlements, but also Tsorrek, anticipating its appearance in the last pages of *Vineland*.

Prairie's contact with the redwoods/*woge* occurs at a time that accords with the Yuroks' diagnostic understanding. Children's seeing the *woge* hints at an unsolved conflict among or a transgression by adults—in Prairie's case, the affair between Frenesi and Vond and her being forsaken by her mother. Like Yurok children, who in some respects complement their parents, Prairie is antithetical to Zoyd, his infantile modes of expression within otherwise adult social intercourse versus her serious communication with nature. But the similarity of Prairie's childhood to Frenesi's also fits the larger pattern introduced in "The Secret Integration": the once rebellious children will eventually, in sadness and distress, follow in their parents' footsteps.

Frenesi's fall from grace, symbol of America's ever-repeated fall by betraying its ideals in favor of dubious codes of law and order, is the inevitable result of her attempt to see Vond as "the endearing adolescent" who would allow her to "[return] him to the man he should have grown into" (216). The motif of "the road not taken," already evoked for America's lost Utopia in *Gravity's Rainbow* (556), is transferred to the individual sphere in *Vineland*. The road Vond takes is the one chosen by so many that it is trodden deep into the earth: it is the road to Tsorrek.

Inviting Vond to return at the end of *Vineland*, Prairie again follows her mother's hereditary lead (see 83). But Vond cannot come back, since he has entered Tsorrek, and thus it is not "'Mad Dog Vond'" (347)—no second day for him (see epigraph)—who finds her, but Desmond, her own stray dog. Prairie's role as a carrier of hope is seriously destabilized by this episode, even if idyllic connotations abound in the scene. The fall into the adult order, in her case again connected to sexual fantasies (Frenesi was sexually attracted to uniforms before she met Vond), seems inevitable. This reading is not the only possible one, but it is recommended by *Vineland*'s frequent allusions to a culture that idealizes a non-sexual childhood, as shown in the *woge*, and distinguishes adult life from this ideal.

Still, for the experienced Pynchon reader used to finales insinuating disintegration and impending apocalypse, the novel's ending is indeed novel. *Vineland* ends with a family reunion that promises a reconciliation clearly resembling a *happy* ending. The reunion transcends mere kinship ties; the clan of the Traverses and Beckers is supplemented by almost the entire cast of the novel. The sheer number of participants turns it into a family-style countercultural gathering that reaches out all over America, suggesting that almost everybody in one way or another has links to the counterculture. As

an annual reunion, it shows affinities with the cyclical ritual meetings in Native American cultures. It may be superfluous to draw parallels to the Yuroks in this context, but still it should be kept in mind that Vond is carried to Tsorrek during the reunion. But any attempt to explain the reconciliation comes up against ambiguities all too familiar in Pynchon. And here, indeed, it seems as if drawing parallels to the Yuroks helps expose complexities even if it does not solve endemic contradictions.

The recourse to family networks as well as primitive rituals signals an alternative to a fragmented and alienated modern American existence. What emerges is an idea of community different from the family concept sternly decreed by the so-called moral majority. Instead, it is a community criss-crossing the country with many-layered kinship and other ties, subverting all demarcations of in- or exclusion, and hence it is not to be confounded with the small town fabrications peopling Reaganite fantasies. "Secret Integration" may well be the watchword for the slyly conspirative character of this type of family.

However, this idyll is qualified by references to the Yuroks. The patterns Pynchon borrows from Native American culture hint at a version of primitive society imaginable as a counterpoint to modern experience, yet not a pure, more virtuous one basking in a glorified innocence à la Rousseau, but a tribal web including neurotic elements surpassing some of our modern equivalents. The psychosomatic reactions of the Traverse-Becker clan to their socio-political situation are identical to the symptoms Erikson observed in sick Yurok children. Likewise, the metaphors of the last unfaceable American secret are reminiscent of the well-trodden path to Tsorrek:

> And other grandfolks could be heard arguing the perennial question of whether the United States still lingered in a prefascist twilight, or whether that darkness had fallen long stupefied years ago, and the light they thought they saw was coming only from millions of Tubes all showing the same bright-colored shadows. One by one, as other voices joined in, the names began—some shouted, some accompanied by spit, the old reliable names good for hours of *contention, stomach distress*, and *insomnia*—Hitler, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Nixon, Hoover, Mafia, CIA, Reagan, Kissinger, that collection of names and their tragic interweaving that stood not constellated above in any nightwide remotenesses of light, but below, diminished to the last unfaceable American secret, *to be pressed, each time deeper, again and again beneath the meanest of random soles, one blackly fermenting leaf on the forest floor* that nobody wanted to turn over, because of all that lived, virulent, waiting, just beneath. (371–72; emphasis added)

A regress seems imminent here to a period when the potential to know the world is severely limited (the allusion to Plato's cave is obvious). The forces shaping and acting on humankind have retreated into an unfathomable darkness. Henry Adams's timid hope that twentieth-century man [sic] might yet learn to manage these forces is negated for society as a whole. Only a distant, inaccessible elite may possibly be up to the task; but this elite appears to have lost all human qualities and lineaments.

The revival of the past does not mean a return to a more natural way of life: the emerging world view compounds the problems of older and newer cultures. Mythic thinking is not an alternative capable of counterbalancing the deficiencies of a logocentric culture (as the New Age movement tries to suggest with references to Yin and Yang). It is merely the product of different, sometimes undecipherable, social processes. Consequently, *Vineland*'s "happy ending" is open to conflicting interpretations. It may point to a livable if problematic alternative; it may portray an inadequate gut reaction likely to widen the gulf between the power elite and the populace; or it may stage a last ritual destined to be superseded by a future governed solely by CAMP, the paramilitary campaign against marijuana production.

However, we want to highlight the reevaluation of childhood, since it may entail a revision of Pynchon's initial parameters for society. If the text allows for a glimmer of hope, it is because of Prairie, albeit she may be compromised. To modify Orwell slightly (it is no coincidence that the novel is set in 1984), if there is hope, it lies in the kids. As in "The Secret Integration," this proposition refers not to the next generation but to childhood as a state of mind. Here the threat of parental misdemeanor and time itself put a question mark on any attempts to bring about a thoroughgoing change. Each rebellion against a rigid order produces its own organization, which in turn tends to ossify—the catch-22 clouding Pynchon's texts since *Lot 49*. And an organization of youth is far more unlikely than even a Tristero System or a Counterforce.

But to some extent, the last pages of *Vineland* mitigate such pessimism. Despite the continued fascination with evil manifest in Prairie's unanswered summoning of Vond, there are hints of a harmony that might overcome this fascination. This possibility is obviously a result of Vond's disappearance, and while it cannot be the solution to all problems, still it provides a timeout for the counterculture. However, it is not the consolidated efforts of the "other America" but Vato and Blood who orchestrate this respite. A last, brief discussion of the two may exemplify the limits and problems of an approach like ours.

Vato and Blood, closely associated with the Yuroks, are also linked to a number of other motifs without being subsumed or adequately explained by any one or combination of them. They are connected to the Hippies and the Thanatoids, and their initials reflect Brock Vond's. At times they behave in a childlike manner, as when dealing with their ward, a Vietnamese woman whom they fear. Their theme song travesties that of a children's TV program: "It was the famous V & B Tow Company Theme, based on the Disney cartoon anthem '"I'm Chip!"—"I'm Dale!"'" (180). The anachronistic allusion to Chip 'n' Dale's 1989 recasting as Rescue Rangers not only mixes TV and business advertising, but also underlines Vato and Blood's function as helpers and mediators. They warn Zoyd of Vond's reappearance, help Weed Atman, and finally carry Vond off to the netherworld. In all of this they are as versatile, as flexible, and occasionally as funny as cartoon characters.

In fact, it is quite tempting to take them literally as car-toons: a pun on that major twentieth-century American symbol of mobility, the car, combined with an allusion to nutty, short animated-film comedies, Looney Tunes/Toons, embodying a zestful interplay of subversive jokes and harmless fun. For example, their loony tune, their theme song, changes its lyrics according to the situation. But it seems a risky undertaking to argue that Vato and Blood are sufficiently explained in labeling them the sources or harbingers of a new mythology for a mobile media culture which has inherited older mythological patterns. And to argue that their silly songs are somehow connected to the *woge*'s chants of dispossession and exile is no more than playful speculation, as it would be to conclude that the hippie predictions have come true, that at least two of the *woge* have returned to give the counterculture a hand. Interpretation carried further in this direction almost inevitably falls prey to the obsessed, paranoid reasoning driving some of Pynchon's most notorious characters.

Ultimately, Vato and Blood remain opaque and elusive. We can only register that they are bound to the larger topics of childhood and death, wherein one of the rules of correlation seems to be the time-transcending coincidence of the sacred and the profane.[5] This is thematized in the curious scene where Vond contacts the tow truck team after his car stalls: "And there was the telephone beside the road, and the lighted sign said DO IT, so he had picked up, and there was Vato at the other end" (378). Ironically, Vond now follows the old slogan of the Youth International Party belonging to the "childlike" counterculture he once persecuted for the state: "America says DON'T. The Yippies say DO IT!" Moreover, the telephone is reminiscent of a curious form of grave decoration, namely the receiver off the hook and

the inscription "Jesus called." That Vato is at the other end of the line harps on a salvation motif. But here again interpretation reaches its limits and peters out with the paulinic question of how far Vato and Blood resemble the peace of the author which passeth all understanding.

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Notes

[1]An earlier, German version of this essay appeared in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 40.3 (1992): 214–26.

[2]Another important source is A. L. Kroeber, particularly his widely used *Handbook of the Indians of California*, which includes a substantial, almost book-length article on the Yuroks. It was Kroeber—an eminent cultural anthropologist and, judging from his publication record, a major if not the foremost scientific authority on the tribe—who introduced Erikson to the Yuroks.

[3]See, for instance, *Lot 49* 113: "Having been since age 7 rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death."

[4]Kroeber (28) relates the story of four Yuroks accidentally killed on the job while working for an American. Their families first sought recompense, and, only after being denied, ambushed and killed the employer for revenge.

[5]This suggests a possible explanation of their nicknames: Vato may echo the Latin word for "seer," *vates*; the cultic significance of Blood is too obvious to need elaboration.

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