

Letter to Richard Pearce
in Response to "Pynchon's Endings"

Laurence Rosenhein

First I should ask you to excuse this letter, which I have little or no business writing, not being a literary scholar of any sort. But I guess I have a bit of Moses Herzog in me, mentally composing letters to people in misguided attempts to improve the world, and sometimes I even send them.

I read your essay "Pynchon's Endings" in Novel [18:2 (1985), 145-53] and was disturbed by the connections you try to make between modern physics and Pynchon's themes. I don't claim to understand his novels all that well, although I do like them enormously. Perhaps, as a scientist myself, I have a somewhat proprietary feeling about quantum mechanics, although I don't claim to understand that all that well either. If anything, I think I am out to save it from misapplication: this is not, I think, the first time I have seen a confusion about the philosophical significance of quantum mechanics, so I want to see if I can express what bothers me.

You write that Pynchon's mind is "imbued with quantum mechanics"; this is no doubt true. But it is important to remember that Pynchon's mind is imbued with a lot of things--from world history to opera to the New York subway system. Personally, I think that technology occupies a far more prominent place in Pynchon's mind than do the various facets of theoretical physics. Yet because it is his style to let his novels embrace as much of Western civilization as possible, and maybe because he loves to needle the reader with playful tropes, modern physics with its non-intuitive character does make its presence felt in his oeuvre. And because we are so unused to seeing references to hard science in literature, we are perhaps encouraged to overemphasize its importance here.

There are two issues to consider: first, whether the developments in quantum physics of this century

really can help us interpret the world we live in, and second, whether Pynchon makes use, rightly or wrongly, of such relationships. I claim the answer to both is no.

The results of quantum mechanics, field theory and relativity are indeed startling and worthy of note, even by a non-scientific public. They also have little, if anything, to do with everyday experience. Only when we do experiments involving subatomic particles does the uncertainty principle step through the curtains into the footlights. However, we do not gain any direct insight into human nature from subatomic particles. This much, I assume, we can agree upon. The question then is whether the development of the uncertainty principle and whatever other aspects of theoretical physics you want to include help us to understand ourselves and our relationship to nature, in what must be a metaphorical way. Do they give us insight into something we did not know before their discovery? Can our feeling for the uncertainty of life be rationalized by the existence of a corresponding principle of physics? Is the fact that we come up with different explanations for events illuminated by the dual nature of matter?

We often think of the Newtonian, billiard-ball picture of nature as deterministic; and it is, in a theoretical sense. We can compute the motions of planets (and rockets) to any level of precision corresponding to our ability to measure them. But for complex systems in which many particles interact, there can be no prediction of the outcome. We cannot forecast the shape of a breaking wave, and it is unlikely that we will be able to even with another generation or two of computers. Progress marches on in this area: a book [The Eudaemonic Pie] was published this year, based on fact, about a group of scientists who had a system for beating Las Vegas by transmitting the initial conditions of a roulette wheel throw to a hidden computer, which would return a good number to bet on. Instead of reaching the purgatory of Heisenberg, we are approaching Newton's paradise. But we obviously cannot arrive there. In the (almost) limiting case, who would ask the most

powerful computer to calculate from a mass of cooling gases (assuming we knew the initial position and velocity of each molecule) the synthesis of life, the form of intelligent life, the letter I am writing to you now? Pynchon specifically acknowledges this: the can of hair spray which, early in The Crying of Lot 49, takes an unscheduled journey (parodying Oedipa's own?) has a predetermined trajectory: "God or a digital machine might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel; but she wasn't fast enough.*"

In their very interesting but frustrating book, Order Out of Chaos, Ilya Prigogine (Nobel Laureate in chemistry) and Isabelle Stengers make the claim that this sort of computation is theoretically impossible, on the basis of microscopic arguments and not simply aggregate behavior. Although I frankly don't understand their discussion of the key part of this argu-

* Does the rather peculiar emphasis on detail in this scene mean that now Pynchon is invoking the kinetic theory of gases as an important metaphor too? Later, in the Berkeley hotel, Oedipa briefly becomes a molecule in a sample of ideal gas. A freshman chemistry student, making his way through the giddy juxtaposition of topics deemed important for the first semester, will learn about ideal gases just before atomic theory, and might well think of them as equally significant in every sense--and why not? Henry Adams: ". . . he was led to think that the final synthesis of science and its ultimate triumph was the kinetic theory of gases; which seemed to cover all motion in space, and to furnish the measure of time. . . . Thus, unless one mistook the meaning of motion, which might well be, the scientific synthesis commonly called Unity was the scientific analysis commonly called Multiplicity. The two things were the same, all forms being shifting phases of motion." This sets off a prolonged stream of pessimism that moves into psychology: "The mind, like the body, kept its unity unless it happened to lose balance, but the professor of physics, who slipped on a pavement and hurt himself, knew no more than an idiot what knocked him down, though he did know--what the idiot could hardly do--that his normal condition was idiocy, or want of balance, and that his sanity was unstable artifice," and proceeds accordingly so that a couple of chapters later he writes, "The child born in 1900 would, then, be born into a new world which would not be a unity but a multiple. . . . He could not deny that the law of the new multiverse explained much

ment, it does not seem to require quantum behavior of matter, despite some parallels they find with quantum formalism. (On the other hand, I believe that a current area of research entails linking the second law of thermodynamics to quantum mechanics. And it is also true that, at some level, the uncertainty principle prevents us from knowing the position and velocity of particles accurately enough to enable us to calculate their future as aggregate. These points are academic.)

To bring my case to a more human scale, it can be noted that the Titanic sank in 1912--a decade and a half before the uncertainty principle was announced. That disaster has been a symbol of the mistake we make when we claim absolute certainty--and as ever, our lives are filled with Titanics (some of them miniature, of course); and public officials decline to be certain about anything, a case in point being the invocation of cost-benefit studies in analyzing the risks of a nuclear power plant accident.

It is hard to make a similar argument about complementarity because I would say it is not part of our everyday experience; we know very well that contradictory impressions of objects, people, or events are really perceptual problems due to our limited capacity to collect and process information, or due to the use of differing criteria, depending on time

that had been most obscure, especially the persistently fiendish treatment of man by man; the perpetual effort of society to establish law, and the perpetual revolt of society against the law it had established; the perpetual building up of authority by force, and the perpetual appeal to force to overthrow it. . ." etc., ". . .but the staggering problem was the outlook ahead into the despotism of artificial order which nature abhorred." But by this point, the observations are being derived from something more fundamental than just kinetic theory, and I will warm to this subject below.

At any rate, even if his notion of the science was not quite on track, he seems to have pulled out the "significant" ideas anyway. Had he lived another decade, one wonders what new depths of gloom Adams--who didn't hesitate to generalize from atoms to society--would have been thrust into by the advent of quantum theory.

frame, value systems, past experience, etc. We know Hitler cannot have been a hero and a monster, although it may have been hard for some people to tell at one time. We know that the use of atomic weapons to end WWII cannot have been a godsend and the beginning of the end of the world.

Writers may indeed highlight the problems we have in making choices by designing fictions in which the choices are more prominent than the resolutions. This becomes a literary device and should be taken as a comment on our psychology rather than on the world we live in. Novelists did not have to await the revelations of modern physics to know this. In The Turn of the Screw (1898), we cannot decide on internal evidence whether the children are in communion with ghosts or even whether the ghosts are real. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, the characters, according to the narrator (who is not Wilder, exactly), die either by sheer accident or by the will of God. Yet when the novel is done, the dilemma is not resolvable, though it may have become unimportant. (Interestingly, the Friar who conducts an experiment which will pin down one explanation not only fails in this attempt, but is burned at the stake for his efforts. And the governess who tries to force the truth in a final confrontation with Miles apparently causes his death. There is the uncertainty principle with a vengeance!) Wilder's novel appeared in 1928, one year after the diffraction experiment demonstrating the dual nature of electrons, but it is doubtful that he was current enough on physics to have been influenced by that result.*

* One might play this game ad infinitum, I would imagine, limited only by one's reading, which in my case doesn't allow me to get too far. But for instance, I could wonder if part of the resonance (a word which is itself borrowed from science) The Secret Sharer (1910) had for me was connected in a metaphorical way at all with the phenomenon of virtual particles, so important to current physics and possibly intimately related to the existence of the universe. I mean, if it had been written today, wouldn't it be only a matter of time before someone pointed this out?

It occurs to me that part of the appeal of the three short works I've dragged into this discussion is their depth, even in the absence of a clear moral judgment on the part of the author; that

But is Pynchon influenced by such phenomena? It would be easy to say that he is influenced by everything, his manner tending toward the encyclopedic. There is a distinction to be made between those parts of our culture that really have influenced him and that he chooses to incorporate as important themes in his plots, and the other parts which he seems to think ought to be part of his narratives because they are "there": in a sense, nothing that is part of our consciousness can be unimportant. I guess Joyce pioneered that proposition, and indeed an interest in science does appear in Bloom's thoughts. (I wouldn't know about the use of science in Finnegans Wake, but Gell-Mann has given that novel a kind of retroactive relevance by fishing the word "quark" out of it.) Because he includes the equation for the catenary in V. does not, unusual as it is to find mathematics inserted into a novel, necessarily mean Pynchon sees some deep significance in this. Nor does it mean even that he has a deep understanding of the science of statics; anyone can look up such an equation. It may be that he included it to give verisimilitude to Maijstral's narrative. It does reinforce one of the themes of the chapter and the novel: "From the quick to the inanimate," and in a characteristically clever way. But I think also involved is an appreciation for the esthetic value of the equation--both for how it looks on the page and for the elegance of what it expresses. This is part of his style.

The influences which are fundamentally important to him seem to be directly acknowledged in his books--Henry Adams, Machiavelli, Weber.**

is, one cannot look for the conventional feelings of right and wrong behavior on the part of the characters, yet their plights, when presented from the narrator's perspective, induce us to think about a wide range of life's big problems. Pynchon's works go as deep as any of these, yet one always feels the presence of the author's moral eye, squinting slightly and watching over the events more in sorrow perhaps than in anger. The conclusion I'm trying to come to, I think, is that metaphors from theoretical physics are if anything going to be less important when such judgments are being made.

** To be honest about it, I get this mainly from the critical essays I have read, not from a reading--a first reading, anyway--of the texts.

Actual references to modern physics are, I think, minimal. One character is named Eigenvalue. Another (Mexico) deals in the mathematics of probability, but his is a strictly classical approach. If Pynchon were particularly interested in quantum mechanics, one might expect to see some characters doing research in that field, which would provide a natural opportunity to do some riffs on it. But actually, while scientists of various sorts populate his books, none are of the basic, theoretical breed. Instead, he brings on engineers, technologists, doctors, applied scientists and quacks of all sorts, none of whom show any evidence of even knowing about quantum mechanics. Schoenmaker, Mondaugen, Chiclitz, Hilarius, Koteks, Nefastis, Pointsman, Mexico, Pökler, Jamf. I think this is very significant because it reflects where Pynchon's true interests lie. (In a way, the only "pure" researchers are his main characters, Stencil, Oedipa Maas, and Slothrop. They are driven by an intense need to know, but are not sure of what they are looking to find.) There is little internal evidence to indicate otherwise, and we ought to be careful about "stencilizing."

Science has, of course, changed our lives in ways that are much easier to elucidate than whatever deep symbolic difference Newtonian vs. wave mechanics may make to us. I think it should be evident that the fact that a superior culture can destroy an inferior one (I use the terms in the military sense) as completely as necessary, or the fact that one can have the shape of one's physiognomy changed at will interests Pynchon much more than what goes on in the sub-microscopic world of matter.*

What is it about our culture then that does make

* Auden ("After Reading A Child's Guide to Modern Physics") expressed a humanist disdain for a preoccupation with "magnitude's extremes," celebrating the fact that the things of everyday experience at least are not subject to uncertainty: "Though the face at which I stare/While shaving it be cruel,/Since year after year it repels/ An aging suitor, it has,/ Thank God, sufficient mass/To be altogether there,/Not an indeterminate gruel/Which is partly somewhere else." (I don't know what he would have thought about nose jobs.)

modern and postmodern novels (I use these labels having only a vague idea of what novels they refer to) different from what went before? Well. I realize that to answer this would take a much broader knowledge of history and literature than I possess. For it won't do to say just that we have an increased sense of the precariousness of our lives (given the War to End All Wars, its successor, the knowledge of the Holocaust, the fear of nuclear war and the real possibility of the extinction of the human race); I suspect that such thoughts of precariousness would sound trite to a fourteenth-century peasant. Perhaps our concern has more to do with our knowledge of these things being ever renewed, in the face of increased expectations about the quality of life and increased awareness about life in other parts of the world. It becomes harder and harder to reconcile all the different facets of the world, but equally hard to ignore them. We must feel in less control of our own lives, and in more confusion about how we relate to the rest of the world (certainly a good enough subject for literature). As you say, we may be both spectators and participants in our own destruction, but why even think of, say, the dual nature of matter in this context when there are quite literal ways to analyze the dilemma? The 1960s, when *V.* was written, was the decade when war was introduced live-on-tape to television. In earlier decades, there were of course newsreels, but they tended to be more heavily produced, with a point of view, and TV is a truer mass medium. We were able to watch the Vietnam war even while paying for it. Now we watch made-for-TV movies that depict the human effects of a nuclear war with little regard for art but a high emphasis on realism; they are not just science fiction. As Tom Lehrer might say, if there are going to be any good movies to come out of WWII, we'd better make them now.

It is not just the course of history or even the effect of mass media that has made novels modern. I can only speculate on some other things briefly: the information explosion; the cinema (when we dream in jump-cuts, we know that film techniques have penetrated our consciousness in a deep way); the scientific scrutiny of human thought processes and the

widespread popular discussion (almost amounting to an obsession) thereof; the intrusion of popular culture into our daily lives. All these things involve technology in one way or another, and I maintain that they are all more important than quantum physics, and that the modern novel could be more profitably analyzed along lines suggested by these developments.

It must also be added that the novel probably tends to evolve in the direction of looking at the darker or at least less full explored corners of our experience--and its own artistic "space"--just because it can. All art does this. Should one blame Abstract Expressionism on field theory? Or the information explosion? We seem to be in a period of retrenchment now in all the arts. Perhaps that is a good thing, as they might have been perceived as approaching a state of maximum entropy. Perhaps they've gone about as far as they can go . . . but that's what they said about Kansas City.

I mentioned entropy. In thermodynamics, that most classical of sciences, one finds certain empirical laws that are based directly on observations on the laboratory scale. Conservation of energy doesn't seem to surprise anyone, but the production of entropy, with all its mathematical necessity, has been the cause of much comment, not all aspects of which (such as its relation to the direction of time) are relevant here. In contrast to quantum behavior, entropy has little meaning (as far as we know) on the subatomic scale. Only when one is describing ensembles large enough to be considered ordered or disordered does the Second Law emerge as a measurable driving force. If one is looking for ways to find insights from science into human problems, a study of entropy is, I think, more rewarding than quantum behavior. Of course, the simple fact that there is a natural tendency toward disorder is not news; rather, an understanding of the complexity of life and the entropy it strives against renews our wonder at this world. If one regards the chaos that tends to appear in one's life as an inevitable outcome of the laws of nature, however, there is some justification for this, as there is for regarding the tendency toward sameness as a poignant result of the same laws.

Pynchon has no monopoly on this subject (in fact, in the unnervingly humble introduction to Slow Learner, he remarks that he does not have a deep understanding of the mathematics). One story I am especially fond of, for its compressed, precise treatment, is "The Heat Death of the Universe," by P. A. Zoline. It has been anthologized more than once, usually for some reason in the science fiction genre, and is worth looking up if you don't know it.

In Pynchon's mind, it seems to be the information theory side of entropy that is the more interesting as one to be mined for meaning. He deals with both aspects directly, of course, in his short story "Entropy." In V., the references are oblique, but the whole novel is, on at least two levels, about the processing of information (by the characters and the reader). Hugh Godolphin, trying to make sense out of his Vheissu experience, wonders, "But why? Have you never been harrowed halfway to--disorder--with that single word? Why." Here the word "disorder" is to be taken as a euphemism for madness, but the choice of language is significant. The problem we have of assembling our information (which comes in abundance although there is never enough) into a meaningful picture of the world will either drive us crazy or lead us to the verge of some new insight. Later, Herbert Stencil, who is, if not insane, certainly a monomaniac, having finally come to Malta for further revelations, perceives that "Events seem to be ordered into an ominous logic." But he is untroubled by doubts about his sanity even though his ability to find meaning in his research is inferior to Godolphin's. The search for meaning as in "meaning of life" strains somewhat the information theory metaphor. Yet in V. the link is made stronger by Mondaugen's story, in which he records what he believes may be a coded message from atmospheric disturbances (a surrealistic proposition, but the relation between the medium and the message is provocative) and is unable to interpret it. That is left to Weissmann, one of the princes of the inanimate. The message, consisting of Mondaugen's name and "The world is all that the case is," is a curious blend of the overly

general and specific; it seems to mean little to him, even though he apparently has read Wittgenstein. Mondaugen's response to the horrors of Foppl's villa is to leave, but he does so without analysis. Later, he will work on Hitler's rockets, the particular horrors of which he does not have to view, and still later, on Chiclitz's. If the "world" had a message for him, it was lost not in electronic noise but somewhere in his brain.

In The Crying of Lot 49, the entropy motive is explicit, and again, information is of prime interest. The "sorting it all out" looks innocuous in that first sentence until we begin to find out what Inverarity's estate really implies. In the novel, Oedipa, after being sensitized by Metzger, collects information almost exclusively (it would make a poor movie). The abounding coincidences, which in a Dickens novel might foreshadow a proper, if contrived, resolution of the story lines, here mock the mundane expectations we might bring as readers. Although we are encouraged not to exclude middles, I don't think that means we have to accept the idea of simultaneous realities; rather, we are only to leave our minds open to the experiences the world provides, no matter how bizarre or uncomfortable (this, if anything, may be the real lesson revealed by a study of science--but not just modern physics, for heliocentrism and Darwinism caused even more discomfort).

The Second Law is confronted in scenes which do not notably advance the action, forcing us to consider their thematic intent. The most prominent of these is Oedipa's visit to Nefastis, in which the entropy problem is presented, along with a mythical solution, Maxwell's Demon. In her wanderings later, she observes a poker player who complains that he recovers better than 99% of his money but never makes any. In this otherwise pointless scene lies a clear reference to the Second Law: the first two laws of thermodynamics are sometimes popularly stated as: 1) you can't win, and 2) you can't even break even.

Even though Oedipa doesn't really have much faith in Nefastis's contraption, she finds herself "about to cry with frustration" when she cannot make it work.

One interpretation could be that the Second Law can indeed come as a depressing revelation, especially to someone like Oedipa, who is trying to sort out information of her own. But apart from this, might not Oedipa be frustrated with her own passivity? When the novel began, she was the "captive maiden" in the tower, attender of Tupperware parties. After her failure, Nefastis crudely tries to make her, and she flees. She would be justified in suspecting that the explanation of his machine is all just a very fancy line Nefastis uses to make women feel helpless and susceptible. Has the theme of passivity and assertiveness in the book been written about? Later, she participates in a strange ballroom dance where deaf people are all doing different steps. She allows herself to be led by her partner, yet the collisions she expects never occur. The dancers seem to be ordered ("a choreography where each couple meshed easy, predestined"), but in some way she cannot determine. By being a participant, she is "in" the Nefastis machine instead of an impotent observer outside it and is given a glimpse of the order of the world. But she is still a passive participant: is it this that causes her, at the end of the dance, again to flee?

The tantalizing symmetry of her research demoralizes her; but at the end of the novel, we leave her prepared to conduct an experiment which will, she hopes, at last demonstrate conclusively the existence of the conspiracy. Her choice is to shed her passivity, despite the obvious cost. She is standing her ground; she will not flee. Couldn't the zipper incident, with its sexual overtones, be, besides a last joke from Pynchon, an affectionate parody of an example from one of those self-help books? Oedipa's response is the healthy, assertive one.

It would now be logical for me to try to make a connection between the notions of entropy and assertiveness. I can almost do it. Our conventional understanding of entropy and disorder comes from a study of systems near equilibrium, that is, almost reversible. But actually, as Prigogine and Stengers point out in their book, a complete understanding of nature depends on understanding systems that are far from equilibrium

as well. It is in such systems that random fluctuations can lead to the evolution of radically differing paths, resulting in the breaking of symmetries and the creation of organization where none might have existed before. Far from equilibrium, random events can be a source of diversity. Sociologically speaking, America is probably the country furthest from equilibrium, having been a home for Puritans and Catholics, natives and slaves, libertarians and communists, and, who knows, conspiracies such as the Tristero. It would seem that we would have the resources for many kinds of lives and perhaps even realities, which explains why Oedipa is appalled at the end to think that the sinister Tristero is the only alternative to the suburbia she was a part of: "how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity?" (a lovely phrase).*

To quote a passage from the end of Order and Chaos: "We know now that societies are immensely complex systems involving a potentially enormous number of bifurcations exemplified by the variety of cultures that have evolved in the relatively short span of human history. We know that such systems are highly sensitive to fluctuations. This leads both to hope and a threat: hope, since even small fluctuations may grow and change the overall structure. As a result, individual activity is not doomed to insignificance. On the other hand, this is also a threat, since in our universe the security of stable, permanent rule seems gone forever. We are living in a dangerous and unstable world that inspires . . . qualified hope."

It is an oversimplification to think of entropy as a threat to us, as necessarily something to be fought

* One of the problems the book leaves us with is, where are those other alternatives? Oedipa has at least found one; the novel is short and compressed enough to suggest that others may be waiting out there. In his next novel, with its concern for "interface," Pynchon was to enumerate such possibilities, although the picture is not pretty. In fact, after Gravity's Rainbow, suburbia doesn't look so bad. But with the hands of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' clock at three minutes to midnight, is it an alternative?

against constantly--we are destined to fight it, of course, but not at every hour and every front. It is a fact of nature, locked into our universe through purely mathematical arguments as is perhaps no other fundamental law, and without it, we would be living in an unrecognizable world.

I wonder if the auctioneer who is the focus around which the San Narciso/Tristero symmetry may be broken, and who is described as a "descending angel," is meant as a counterpart to the Maxwell's Demon Oedipa fails to commune with in Nefastis's apartment. She has been resisting the clues about the Tristero which she has come upon almost at random, but she decides apparently on a whim (or fluctuation), "the courage you find you have when there is nothing more to lose," to follow up the stamp collection lead. It may be nothing, but she does have a plan. In the enclosed room, she is now an active participant in an entropy machine where she can make a difference. In the picture on Nefastis's machine, Maxwell "would not meet her eyes . . . he gazed away, into some vista of Victorian England," whereas Passerine "stared at her, smiling, as if saying, I'm surprised you actually came." There are many things in that smile, but not least is, I suspect, approval, even though the tone of the paragraph is one of dread. Instead of futilely trying to manipulate molecules in a worthless device or to conduct a well-defined but thermodynamically impossible procedure, she will take a much greater chance, which may lead to less predictable but useful results.

All this leads back around to your conclusions, which I basically agree with, about the importance of choice in these books. But I have made a case for looking at thermodynamics rather than quantum mechanics as the scientific thread in the tapestry. There is one more thing I want to quibble about: I can't see the use of "you"s in the endings as being related to the uncertainty principle. For one thing, in Gravity's Rainbow, there are some sentences addressed to "you" scattered throughout the book, although they may not refer to the reader, exactly. However, one passage, well before the end, does, unmistakably. In the scene where Slothrop takes leave of Bianca (Viking 472), we

are reminded that she was conceived during the filming of a pornographic movie. The viewers of that movie are implicated in her conception as well. "We" are accused not only of attending the movie and masturbating in public, but also of fathering and abandoning an illegitimate child. "You'll never get to see her. So somebody has to tell you." Now that's what I call involving the reader! It is especially effective since many readers probably have sat through at least one porno movie, or if not, we can always go to another level and say that probably everyone has accepted the benefits of some kind of exploitation of people, but not the consequences. For me, these are the most startling lines in the book.

In the "Orpheus Puts Down Harp" scene, it is tempting to me to read the "you"s as prepared reaction statements, appropriately enough of the kind often used in movie reviews, particularly those of Pauline Kael. The segment is actually written as a wire service report, by "your correspondent." Could it be, in part, a parody of this style of reviewing? Critics seem to like to write in that mode, in order to put us "in" the review as much as possible; maybe this is important because when we watch movies, we are "in" the movie (in our fantasy), and to read a review of someone else's reactions might seem too removed from the actual experience. (Movies which put "your guts in a spasm" are the kind Kael is fondest of.) The involvement of ordinary citizens with movies and TV and the identification with movie stars is a potent phenomenon, whose implications probably have not been fully explored. (Among other things, movies are a quick, easy--and very transient--way of jumping into the kind of other world that Oedipa works so hard to verify. Pynchon is very sensitive to the distinction between the earned and the vicarious, however, and plans to have harsh reality crash through our movie theater.) But whatever deep meanings we may discover behind this, I don't think we need go so deep as particle physics.

I guess I ought to stop before I start sounding like a broken record. I didn't realize this would go on so long. But like a polymer (my head is filled

with scientific imagery) one section just seemed to want to have another tacked on to it. I think it's reasonable to say that one of the beautiful things about Pynchon's novels is that there is so much to wonder about, and talk about.

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