

***Vineland* and Dobie Gillis**

Rhonda Wilcox

Towards the end of *Vineland*, many of the major characters find themselves (or do they?) at the Traverse-Becker family reunion. The gathering both represents the anti-traditional--because this long-time union family sees the California-sized faults in the American political structure in a way many do not--and yet is, by its very nature, a celebration of tradition. Of one of the oldest of traditions, the family meal, Pynchon writes: "It was the heart of this gathering meant to honor the bond between Eula Becker and Jess Traverse, that lay beneath, defined, and made sense of them all . . . they all kept an eye on the head of the table, where Jess and Eula sat together, each year smaller and more transparent . . ." (369). It is interesting and perhaps a bit discomfoting to note that Eula Becker is also the name of a character in a short story entitled "Love is a Fallacy," by Max Shulman. In fact, she is only referred to rather than presented; specifically, she is referred to as an example of the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy: "Eula Becker, her name is. It never fails. Every single time we take her on a picnic--[it rains]" (272).

Given the tendency of major characters in *Vineland* to confuse the causes and effects of love, the choice of name seems sadly apposite. Indeed, it seems to place in question one of the novel's central positive images, the Traverse-Becker solidarity displayed in the woodsy campsite where Zoyd and Prairie's dog, Desmond, long lost, finds Prairie as she has found her mother; he appears, in the last words of the novel, "the spit and image of his grandmother Chloe, roughened by the miles, face full of blue-jay feathers, smiling out of his eyes, wagging his tail, *thinking* he must be home" (385; emphasis added).

The narrator and main character of "Love is a Fallacy," the defender of the mythical Eula Becker (of course, the clan-mother Eula of *Vineland* is, in her way, mythical as well), is Dobie Gillis, that famed seeker after perfect love. Especially in the context of *Vineland's* multiple references to TV arcana and the dangers of dancing between illusion and (?) reality, Dobie Gillis's naive, telecast quests after the perfect love reflect on the difficulties of such characters as Zoyd Wheeler, Frenesi Gates, and even Brock Vond. All in all, "Eula Becker"

seems to be a multiply-encoded allusion which proves once again the pleasure of a Pynchon text.

--Gordon College

Works Cited

Pynchon, Thomas. *Vineland*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1990.

Shulman, Max. "Love is a Fallacy." *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis: Eleven Campus Stories*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1951. Rpt. *The Power to Persuade: A Rhetoric and Reader for Argumentative Writing*. Ed. Sally De Witt Spurgin. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985. 268-76.