

# Intertextualism: The Case of Pynchon and Patrick White

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But Stan Parker was silent, because he did not have anything to say. He sat . . . inside the rain, and waited for his first sight of the great river.

Till there it was at last.

Ah, they all said . . . becoming silent.

The great yellow mass, pricked and dimpled by the grey rain, was there before them where the plain had been. The world was water now. It went in at the windows of houses and swirled at the roots of a steeple. The heads of dead trees were weathercocked by perching birds. . . .

The world of water was very quiet. The rowers did not speak. . . . Their torn breath sounded against the hissing of rain on water, their hearts thumped with the monotony, and only the ultimate certainty of rowlocks.

. . .

It began to appear strange that they had been set afloat on the flood waters. It began to appear strange to everyone except Stan Parker, who by this time knew in himself that you can expect anything. . . . And as he rowed, accepting the strangeness and inevitability of their position, which nevertheless he could not have explained . . . the half-submerged world became familiar as his own thoughts. . . . The rowers rowed. He listened to their men's-breath, but from a distance. As they rowed under the liquid trees the sound of leaves, swishing, dipping into his wet skin, was closer to him.

It was not unexpected, then, when . . . there was something sort of round bobbing against the anthill on the right, and they eased in that direction, and turned up the rubber body of a man, in clothes that water had translated into uniform darkness, the smooth man's-face nibbled at by fishes. (White, TM 70-71)

There were half a dozen army personnel and as many civilians, sitting or standing, not talking; smoking or looking at the gray swamp which crawled by. . . . They chugged over Creole, past the top floors of the courthouse, toward the outlying farms that were still standing, which had not yet been searched. Occasionally a helicopter would chatter by overhead. The sun rose, weak through a thin overcast, heating the unstirred and reeking air over the swamp.

It was mostly this that Levine remembered afterward, the peculiar atmospheric effect of gray sun on gray swamp, the way the air felt and smelled. For ten hours they cruised around looking for dead. One they unhooked from a barbed wire fence. It hung there like a foolish balloon, a travesty; until they touched it and it popped, hissed and collapsed. They took them off roofs, out of trees, they found them floating or tangled in the debris of houses. Levine worked in silence like the others, the sun hot on his neck and face, the reek of the swamp and the corpses in his lungs, letting it all happen, not exactly unwilling to think about it nor quite unable; but realizing somehow that the situation did not require thought or rationalization. (Pynchon, SL 47-48)

Comparability, affinity, connection, influence, style, genre, coterie; allusion, reference, quotation, allegory, parody, plagiarism, theft; originator, iconoclast, innovator, heir apparent, acolyte, epigone, copyist; dialectic, counterpoint, interface, syzygy, crossover, offshoot, assimilation; learned, eclectic, reminiscent, imitative, pastiche, anachronistic, counterfeit. Such hyponymic spectra vividly evoke the connotational nuances of literary intertextuality. Indeed, on the one hand, the ardent and sometimes seemingly indiscriminate appropriation—or sampling, to borrow a term from contemporary popular music—of prior styles, modes, themes, plots, motifs, even characters and historical personages in much postmodern fiction has drawn the hostility and derision of many traditionalist critics. On the other, within postmodernist critiques, the literal and ethical demarcations between fiction and nonfiction—biography and autobiography, history, journalism, polemic and outright propaganda—are pushed further and further into an increasingly hazy and insecure middle distance, along with all apprehensions of the integrity of the literary artefact itself.

This conundrum can be amply illustrated. Perceiving the breadth of difference between the signature of George Eliot on Mary Ann Evans's manuscript of *Middlemarch* and that of Cleo Birdwell on *Amazons: An Intimate Memoir by the First Woman Ever to Play in the National Hockey League*, by Don DeLillo, or that of Wanda Koolmatrie on *My Own Sweet Time*, by Leon Carmen—as between the poems of Ern Malley and those of Thomas Chatterton, or Marlo Morgan's stories of Australian Aboriginal life and culture and those of B. Wongar—is intuitive and automatic. Similarly, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Norman Mailer's *Executioner's Song* and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* seem to distinguish themselves qualitatively from one another, while Balzac's "Sarrasine" and Barthes's *S/Z* also strive to remain categorically remote. However, postmodernist criticism—skeptical about

and taking deconstructive approaches to traditional categories of ethics, culture, fiction, author, text, even writing and reading, and relaxing traditional boundaries and critical protocols—is reluctant to make such distinctions. The critical sensibility which condemns or celebrates Helen Darville's *Hand That Signed the Paper* (originally published and publicized under the nom de plume Helen Demidenko, and lauded in critical and academic circles) or DeLillo's *Libra* or even Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*<sup>1</sup> is proscribed by postmodernist theories, revealed as a fiction, a master narrative itself. Indeed, in many of the critical constructions of postmodern fiction, instances of plagiarism, deception and authorial duplicity are envisaged not only as permissible but as characteristic or defining features of the mode.<sup>2</sup>

Steeped in the practices of perspectivism as espoused in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, postmodern fictions and postmodernist critiques alike illustrate and amplify the oft-cited Nietzschean dictum that "there are no facts, only interpretations." And subsequently, of course, interpretations of interpretations. Derrida's maxim that "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" reinforces Bakhtin's observations about literary communication in the Middle Ages:

The role of the other's word was enormous at that time: there were quotations that were openly and reverently emphasized as such, or that were half-hidden, completely hidden, half-conscious, unconscious, correct, intentionally-distorted, unintentionally-distorted, deliberately reinterpreted and so forth. The boundary lines between someone else's speech and one's own speech were flexible, ambiguous, often deliberately distorted and confused. Certain types of texts were constructed like mosaics out of the texts of others. . . . One of the best authorities on medieval parody, Paul Lehmann, states outright that the history of medieval literature and its Latin literature in particular "is the history of appropriation, re-working and imitation of someone else's property." (DI 69; see also Bakhtin, RW passim)

In the modern era, such processes of cross-fertilization are accentuated, becoming more deliberately and self-consciously an aspect of textual composition. According to Christopher Clausen:

Two factors have made those mutually enriching borrowings and influences more pronounced in the twentieth century than ever before: improved communications and the phenomenon of the international writer, the T. S. Eliot, Malcolm Lowry, Salman Rushdie, or Janette Turner Hospital who can be fitted only imperfectly into a single nation's literary heritage. (302-03)

In this context Clausen proposes a radical renovation of the precepts which determine the study of literature within the pedagogy:

The concept of "national literatures" in English has outlived its usefulness and should be abandoned, both as a way of thinking about literary history and as a way of organizing curricula. Whatever evaluation one makes of them as political phenomena, the nationalisms that gave rise successively to the concept of a distinctly British literature, then an American literature, and now Australian, Canadian, and a host of what are often described equivocally as "new literatures," constitute a barrier to clear thinking about what has long since become an international enterprise carried on in many cultural settings. As the medium that defines the horizon of intelligibility, language is a more principled and useful (though not absolute) basis than nationality for distinguishing one literature from another. . . . [This approach] rejoins conceptually what has been artificially fragmented, makes possible a genuine multiculturalism in English literary studies, entitles writers who are neither British nor American to more widespread attention, and helps us think more fruitfully about literary relations among authors, literary movements, societies, and periods. (301-02)

Indeed, this sensibility is manifest in many of the texts of postmodern fiction. For many writers and commentators, including Patrick White, William Gaddis and Pynchon in particular, defiance of the nationalist paradigm takes the form of outright social and political critique within their narratives. For example, Robert Holton comments in this respect on the "consistently radical rereading of European imperialism" in *V.*, Pynchon's first novel, published in 1963: "*V.* explores the aporias of epistemology at a series of specific and critical junctures in modern Western history, documenting the breakdown of white imperialist hegemony" (240, 217).

But the application of a similar deconstructive skepticism to themselves especially distinguishes the fictions of Gaddis and Pynchon as postmodern. These reflexive or self-reflecting texts incorporate metacommentary on the processes of literary imagination and composition which shape them, in the manner of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or the Spanish picaresque novel. The works acknowledge their propensity (and that of all text) to intertextualism, and often foreground instances.<sup>3</sup> Making extensive reference to poststructuralist, deconstructive and postmodernist critical theories and practitioners, John Johnston equates Gaddis's *Recognitions* with "Wyatt's 'forgeries,' which are not copies of any 'original' but bathe in the full ethos of the art of an earlier epoch," and concludes that the novel is itself "a 'forgery' of a modernist classic that calls into question the very

notion of a literary ‘original’” (177). Indeed, where *The Recognitions* illustrates the dilemma of intertextuality from aesthetic and theological standpoints, Gaddis’s later *Frolic of His Own* exposes the ambiguities and illogicality of contemporary public opinions about and legal definitions of originality and artistic integrity as well.

Both Gaddis and Pynchon, writers who DeLillo acknowledges have “set the standard” for postmodern fiction in America (qtd. in Leclair 22), engage with modern scientific theories of information exchange and cybernetics, to the point where the fictional text becomes something of “an artificial intelligence device” as a result of its self-conscious and reflexive narrative modes (Porush 21).<sup>4</sup> In Gaddis’s *JR*, for example, one character directs another to “read Wiener on communication” (403), and this earnest admonition embraces the reader also, a direct cue to the process of communication-transfer in decoding and interpreting the text of the novel. Pynchon employs much the same device—if anything, more blatantly—when narrative agency in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in one of several seemingly direct authorial interventions, pronounces of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*: “Great movie” (578). Soon afterward, in regard to intimations of a global conspiracy—the “Masonic Mysteries”—spanning centuries and continents, the reader is parenthetically exhorted: “(Check out Ishmael Reed. He knows more about it than you’ll ever find here.)” (588).<sup>5</sup> In one sense, by referring his audience in such an extradiegetic aside to a contemporaneous source, Pynchon reclaims the reader’s privilege in textual interpretation, an apparent reaction against the strictures and elitism of New Criticism, both its aesthetic theories and their sociopolitical implications, and against comparable critical prescriptions for literary communication. But such intrusions on the reader’s domain, along with other similar moments of excursus, thematic and stylistic, also draw the reader into the realms of paranoia, schizophrenia and indeterminacy in which the narrative’s protagonists are immersed. And, indeed, in this sense also an opposite tension—a dialectic, perhaps—emerges; as Nathalie Sarraute notes, such intrusions actually “dispossess the reader and entice him, at all costs, into the author’s territory” (93).<sup>6</sup>

Pynchon’s eclecticism is well documented in the critical etiologies as something of an archetype of American postmodern fiction. Commenting on *V.*, Tony Tanner refers to

Pynchon’s systematic stylistic evocation (often parodic) of previous writers as he deals with different episodes in different times and places. Conrad, Evelyn Waugh and Lawrence Durrell are in evidence in many of the historical and colonial episodes: Melville, Henry Adams, Nathanael West,

Djuna Barnes, Faulkner and Dashiell Hammett are among the American writers whose work is in some way detectable; Joyce and Nabokov are clearly present in the way the book is organized; and there is one of Borges's mysterious kingdoms at the heart of the book. This is not to suggest that the book is merely a pastiche, a collection of scrambled sources. Pynchon's point seems to be to remind the reader that there is no one writable "truth" about history and experience, only a series of versions: it always comes to us "stencillized." (171-72)

Peter L. Hays and Robert Redfield discern a "hidden source" for Pynchon's story "Entropy" (1960) in Fernando de Rojas's *Celestina* (1499), also known as *The Tragi-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, which "not only provided Pynchon with certain details of plot and structure, but, more importantly, reinforced his philosophical beliefs and suggested ways to express them" (327). Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, is steeped in American popular culture, and also contains leading references to both Wiener and Marshall McLuhan as well as parodic allusions to Greek and Egyptian myths, and echoes of Eliot's *Waste Land* and Melville's "Bartleby." Moreover, the plot of *The Crying of Lot 49* parallels that of Harry Mathews's novel *The Conversions* (1962). An international writer long associated with Georges Perec, Mathews was initiated in 1974 (in company with Italo Calvino) as the only American member of the OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*) group founded in 1960 in Paris. And, indeed, as Pierre-Yves Petillon suggests, the "fancy tricks" of *The Crying of Lot 49* felt very familiar to French readers: Mathews's novel, like Pynchon's, "strongly suggests . . . that the protagonist's fate inside the story is but a mirror-image of the reader's predicament as he (or she) works his (or her) way through the novel's labyrinths—that the novel inculcates a . . . reflexive game played through the process of reading itself" (128-29; see also Stonehill 107). In addition, *The Crying of Lot 49* recalls Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. The resurrection in the latter novel of the uniforms and raison d'être of the "Ghost Shirt Society," a native American guerilla force of the late 1800s, as a model for the quasi-Luddite insurgency and proletarian revolt waged on the premise that the "'world should be restored to the people'" (268-71ff.), resonates with the tale in *The Crying of Lot 49* of the Tristero riders who impersonated native Americans, disrupting Pony Express and Wells, Fargo mail services in the American West, forerunners of a 1960s anti-Establishment cabal communicating through an alternative postal system, W.A.S.T.E. (CL 62-64, 120ff.).

Oedipa Maas's nightmare journey through San Francisco also recalls the central scene in chapter 39, "The Eternal City," of Joseph Heller's

*Catch-22*, where Yossarian seeks Nately's whore in the ruins of Rome. And, perhaps most interesting, the introduction of Jesús Arrabal, "idly stirring his bowl of opaque soup with the foot of a chicken" (CL 82), invokes the name of contemporary Spanish playwright Fernando Arrabal (a follower of Samuel Beckett and Antonin Artaud), who coined the term *théâtre panique* in 1962 to describe his work. Elements and themes from his *Le cimetière des voitures* (1958, translated into English as *The Automobile Graveyard*), a mock Passion play in which life is envisaged as a used car dump, and from the surrealist *Pique-nique en campagne* (1960, *Picnic on the Battlefield*) seem to have cast ripples across the text of Pynchon's novella.<sup>7</sup>

Pynchon's next novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, also exhibits notable similarities to John Hawkes's *Cannibal*, set in the imaginary German town of Spitzen-on-the-Dein, and to *The Lime Twig*, set in England during and after the war. Marc Chénétier wonders whether, "in writing *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon borrowed the vocative games that characterize . . . *The Lime Twig*, along with the noxious, muggy atmosphere of a squalid London gutted by war," observing "that certain pages of the two novels appear interchangeable" (241). More contentious is Pynchon's perceived debt to *The Recognitions*. As early as 1971, Tanner remarked that "V. seems to . . . owe quite a lot to Gaddis" (393), and much critical energy has been expended on the debate in the years since. As Steven Moore observes, the novels

structurally, both consist of dual narrative lines that occasionally intersect; both indict masculine principles for a variety of modern ills and feature motherless sons attempting to restore the balance by aligning themselves with feminine principles; both alternate between Greenwich Village scenes and European locations; both are widely allusive, often to the same authors; both use comical names for some of their characters; and so on. (WG 140; see also Moore, PS)

Perhaps the key here is the wide allusiveness Moore notes, the ardent and self-conscious intertextuality of both authors. The influences on Pynchon that Judith Chambers lists—actual references in the fictions and in his few published nonfiction pieces, and a sampling of other sources discerned by critics (12)—overlap significantly with the works central to Gaddis's writing of *The Recognitions*.<sup>8</sup>

While many critics have drawn parallels, perhaps the parallelism results from common sources—Homer, the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, Melville, Rilke, Joyce, Eliot, Borges, Nabokov—and *The Recognitions* and *V.*, and *The Conversions* and *The Crying of Lot 49* are contemporaneous rather than derivative one from another in this

respect.<sup>9</sup> White's novels, too, are prototypical of Pynchon's, anticipating postmodernist thought and writing in general, and perhaps exemplifying a more nebulous form of stylistic development in literature than direct influence. To illustrate this point in the case of Gaddis, evidence of the supposed importance of *Ulysses* to *The Recognitions*<sup>10</sup> is rendered dubious by Gaddis's 1975 admission that he had never read that novel, apart from Molly Bloom's monologue, "'which was being circulated for salacious rather than literary merits.'" Gaddis remarks that "'anyone seeking Joyce finds Joyce even if both Joyce & the victim found the item in Shakespear [sic] . . . all of which will probably go on so long as Joyce remains an academic cottage industry'" (qtd. in Moore, WG 7; see also Moore, RG 75).<sup>11</sup> The volume of scholarship about (and the pedagogical appropriation of) Pynchon's texts, particularly since the stir which greeted *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973, have made Pynchon an academic cottage industry also.<sup>12</sup>

In speculating about sources and influences, the critic becomes akin to that "rare creature indeed" which Oedipa perceives herself to be in *The Crying of Lot 49*, "unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts" (72). Ultimately, as Oedipa discovers, such literary sleuthing is a self-defeating travail under the postmodernist aegis. Intertextuality is inescapable, but it is not only the writer's conscious and unconscious, deliberate and accidental allusions, nor the reader's conscious and unconscious, deliberate and accidental connections, but a combination and confusion of all by both which render critical interpretation a morass of subjectivity, coincidence and potential obfuscation.

The same might be said for comparisons of Pynchon's novels with those of White, who was awarded—in a tantalizing coincidence for any "indefatigable unraveller"—the Nobel Prize for Literature in the same year *Gravity's Rainbow* was published.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the younger American does appear to exhibit more than a passing familiarity with the Australian author's work, and specific echoes of White's vision and of his literary themes and techniques in Pynchon's texts invite closer analysis. Whether such stylistic evocation and actual borrowings are parodic, as Tanner might suggest, they remain carefully unacknowledged. The flood in White's *Tree of Man* (published in North America in 1955) is a climacteric event in Stan Parker's experience in that novel, as a flood is also for Nathan "Lardass" Levine in Pynchon's first published story, "The Small Rain." The striking image of the drowned man become merely an object, turned to "rubber" (TM 71), or a "foolish balloon" (SL 47), provides both protagonists with a sudden and somewhat cathartic recognition of human mortality. Their psychic responses are almost identical, subsuming the explicit biblical portent



of each passage. Neither can communicate what has happened, what he has seen and done. Stan does not inform Mrs Wilson that he has seen her dead father “stuck in the fork of a tree,” nor does he mention it to the other men in the boat (TM 72–74). Similarly, Levine cannot relate to Little Buttercup or Rizzo the extent of the devastation to the bayou the hurricane has wrought, or his own actions and feelings. In both cases the characters’ deeply-felt perception of the inexpressibility of the experience evokes their awestruck silence, but there is equally a picaresque attitude toward the blinkered vision of their fellows, and toward society and its priorities in general. Stan and Levine recognize that neither Mrs Wilson, nor O’Dowd, nor Little Buttercup, nor Rizzo will ever be able to comprehend or empathize with the insights to which they have been privy.

Further, in each text depictions of the flood foreground the ease with which human constructions are overturned or displaced by the forces of nature. In White’s text the steeple has “roots,” and birds on treetops are like weathercocks (TM 70). In Pynchon’s, the roofs and trees and wire and bodies are all of a piece, jumbled together, mere material elements in the composition of the swamp (SL 47–48). Reliance on sensory data, too, and synesthesia create intensity in both scenes: images of destruction and the stench of death predominate, along with the wetness and the heat. In each passage a dearth of human speech is juxtaposed to a veritable cacophony: the palpable and oppressive silence of the waters; oars in the rowlocks or helicopters passing overhead, sounds of man’s forlorn attempts to counter Nature’s fury; heartbeats of the men; leaves swishing in the floodtide. Nature speaks languages louder and more profound than mere human words. And, for both men, the sounds and the smells, absorbed through skin and lungs, communicate at a deeper, almost spiritual level. Stan and Levine experience revelation, personal, social and spiritual, which sets them apart from their fellows.

Although the specific influence of White, an Australian author, on American literature, and on Pynchon in particular, is no more than a matter for speculation, it is possible, as Michael Giffin comments, “that White has always been more widely read, and better understood, outside his own country” (250).<sup>14</sup> Each of White’s early novels, *Happy Valley* (1939), *The Living and the Dead* and *The Aunt’s Story*, was published in the United States, in 1940, 1941 and 1948, respectively. Indeed, the manuscripts of the latter two had been accepted by Ben Huebsch at Viking Press, and the novels themselves were in print before arrangements for their publication in either the United Kingdom or Australia were concluded. Each was reviewed favorably, particularly in the *New York Times Book Review*. In fact, in the first of many

reviews of White's work, James Stern acclaimed *The Aunt's Story*, making comparisons with Virginia Woolf, Ronald Firbank, Henry James and Flaubert:

While challenging anyone to call Theodora Goodman "dull," we will admit, and willingly, that her story is "hard to read"—fast. For, like Flaubert, Mr White believes that good literature, like good wine, should be sipped. The reader who drains the last drop from *The Aunt's Story* will feel he's had a full bottle chosen by a connoisseur. (qtd. in Marr 254)

White had met Huebsch on a visit to the United States in 1939, and their friendship continued until Huebsch's death in 1964. Huebsch was the publisher of Joyce's and D. H. Lawrence's early novels and a pioneering patron of the literary avant-garde—he had championed the work of Sherwood Anderson and Upton Sinclair in the mid-'20s, and published *Finnegans Wake* jointly with T. S. Eliot in 1939—so his admiration ensured a prestigious profile for White's novels in America and permitted a large print run there, with *Voss* (1957) achieving perhaps the most popularity. (Simon During submits, however, that "by the time *Riders in the Chariot* appeared in 1961, White was seen as a coterie writer in the U.S." [7].<sup>15</sup>)

So while White's legacy for Australian literature and society at large seems to have eventuated for the most part in personal and material terms,<sup>16</sup> his literary influence on American fiction of the period was conceivably rather more substantial. The tenacity of his fictive vision and the constant and fervent experimentation with and reflexive examinations of style and technique throughout his oeuvre; the relativism of his narratives, reminiscent at once of the great nineteenth-century realist tradition and of contemporary postmodern fiction; and the resistance to outright anarchy or despair in his novels certainly constitute an undeniable heritage of literary art. Indeed, his work provides the model, the genesis, of a vast creative vision, one which strives toward a reconciliation of art and experience.

During the 1950s (interrupted by a two-year stint in the United States Navy), Pynchon was an undergraduate at Cornell University, majoring for his first year in engineering physics but completing his studies in English literature. He is rumored to have known Nabokov, although reliable evidence that Nabokov was ever his professor is not currently available. He is reported to have declined an invitation to teach creative writing at Cornell after graduating in 1959 (Winston 259). "The Small Rain" was published in 1959 in *The Cornell Writer*. In his introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon refers to an array of influences on his early fiction, from which, as he puts it, he was "able

to steal, or let us say ‘derive,’” not only names and “details of . . . time and place,” but also “in more subtle ways” (SL 17–18):

Fascinating topic, literary theft. As in the penal code, there are degrees. These range from plagiarism down to only being derivative, but all are forms of wrong procedure. If, on the other hand, you believe that nothing is original and that all writers “borrow” from “sources,” there still remains the question of credit lines or acknowledgements. (SL 16–17)<sup>17</sup>

While the list of names, or credits, Pynchon acknowledges in this autobiographical essay is extensive, no mention is made of Patrick White (nor, indeed, of Reed, Mathews, Vonnegut, Hawkes or Gaddis, let alone Joyce or Nabokov). And yet, a tantalizing passage in *V.* introducing the history of Victoria Wren (the initial personification of *V.*) hints at something like a connection between the two authors. Altered only cosmetically from the version which appeared in “Under the Rose” (1961), this passage resonates as, perhaps, a concealed or private tribute to the Australian master, and a cryptic commentary on Pynchon’s own literary vision and mode:

She was Catholic; had been to a convent school near her home. This was her first trip abroad. She talked perhaps overmuch about her religion; had indeed for a time considered the Son of God as a young lady will consider any eligible bachelor. But had realized eventually that of course he was not but maintained instead a great harem clad in black, decked only with rosaries. Unable to stand for any such competition Victoria had therefore left the novitiate after a matter of weeks but not the Church: that with its sadfaced statuary, odors of candles and incense, formed along with an uncle Evelyn the foci of her serene orbit. The uncle, a wild or renegade sundowner, would arrive from Australia once every few years bringing no gifts but his wonderful yarns. As far as Victoria remembered, he’d never repeated himself. More important perhaps, she was given enough material to evolve between visits a private back of beyond, a colonial doll’s world she could play with and within constantly: developing, exploring, manipulating. Especially during Mass: for here was the stage or dramatic field already prepared, serviceable to a seedtime fancy. So it came about that God wore a wideawake hat and fought skirmishes with an aboriginal Satan out at the antipodes of the firmament, in the name and for the safekeeping of any Victoria. (*V.* 72–73; cf. SL 112)

The inclusion here of specifically Australian slang—“sundowner,” “yarns” and “back of beyond”—is striking. Furthermore, the gender-ambiguity of the name of Victoria’s uncle is on a par with that of

Theodora Goodman, the eponymous aunt in White's novel. Theodora's bittersweet relation with her niece, Lou Parrott, "both close and distant" (AS 129), provides many parallels with Victoria's circumscribed relation with her uncle Evelyn. In *Slow Learner*, Pynchon admits that his early stories betray "an unkind impatience with fiction I felt then to be 'too autobiographical.' Somewhere I had come up with the notion that one's personal life had nothing to do with fiction, when the truth, as everyone knows, is nearly the direct opposite" (SL 21). It is not improbable to imagine how the wonderful yarns of a novelist like White could prove serviceable to the seedtime fancy of a fledgling writer as perceptive and thoughtful as the young Pynchon must have been.

In light of Pynchon's remark about literary theft, critical conjecture about specific influences and inspirations becomes more acceptable, certainly more plausible. So it seems feasible that a detail in *The Living and the Dead*, where Mrs Standish offers a "box of small crystallized fruits" (180) to her guest-hostage, Connie Tiarks, became embellished in Pynchon's version of wartime London in *Gravity's Rainbow* as Mrs. Quoad's "Disgusting English Candy Drill" (118). Both novels begin somewhat esoterically with a character describing a departure from a large though unspecified London railway station—a blurredness and singularity of perception are palpable in each scene, a play on the Modernist technique of stream-of-consciousness or "train of thought," as it is explicitly phrased in White's novel (LD 11)—and both deal with certain similar aspects of prewar and wartime British society and culture. In fact, it is in the overarchingly iconoclastic attitude of each author toward the writing of the historical novel that a nearer affinity can be discerned. As Thomas S. Smith describes *Gravity's Rainbow*:

[T]here is an insurmountable difference between Pynchon and even the most unconventional professional historian. . . . For example . . . claims to present . . . readers with factual [historical] interpretations . . . Pynchon would ridicule as shams. . . . This same ironism also typifies Pynchon's differences with modernism. Pynchon's mock-encyclopedia, his mock-historical accounts, do not provide us with myths to live by—hence his break with modernism, his great humility. But this also reflects his great cynicism, for just as the collapsing crystal palace which begins his novel signifies the inability of science or technology to give us defining myths, the collapse of Pynchon's encyclopedic structure signifies the end of aestheticism as either a response or an alternative to modern life. The novel throws us, powerless, into a world of limitless and malevolent contingencies. (256)

Thus it is in particularities of person and place—the “smell of cabbage, old Second Reich, grandmothers’ cabbage” (GR 154), which still permeates the stale air of a squatters’ refuge in Weimar Berlin during the Depression—that historical correspondences are to be found between *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *The Living and the Dead*, set in prewar London:

There was a smell of cooking, of cabbage, of midday activity in the close streets. A huddle of identical houses. Like their tenants, they chose the uniform in which to ignore discrepancy. The women ladling cabbage in their kitchens were almost interchangeable, behind the skin the identical wishes, the pale hopes, the thin desires, spoke from the closed eyes of houses. (LD 286)

Most tellingly perhaps, the fate of the protagonist of each novel is uncertain. Closing scenes appear to usher in a new beginning for the focal character beyond the textual setting. The perspective also changes suddenly, narrative agency swerving into unfamiliar and intrusive modes, including a ubiquitous use of the second-person pronoun as a type of character (or narrative) self-address, a stylistic device which engenders an ominous ambiguity in both texts.<sup>18</sup> In Pynchon’s novel the narrative itself explodes into manic disarray as the world of the novel and the reader’s world mesh, poised on the verge of apocalypse. But in White’s much earlier work it is the character of Elyot Standish which becomes fragmentary. In fact, Elyot aspires to, actually seems to, “dissolve” into the English lives and houses and flow around him. As with Tyrone Slothrop in Pynchon’s novel, encompassed in Elyot’s final endorsement of anonymity and movement, his trance-like disavowal of personality and destination, is also a hint, however limited, of optimism and possibility:

The labels on buses expected a choice. He watched the coming and going of the buses, the meeting and flowing. He watched with a disbelief in the final destination of buses, Islington, Homerton, Camberwell. But there was the Chinese box, the infinity of boxes. . . . The buses became significant enough, the red threads that moved across the darkness, joining its component parts. There was no end to darkness, but there was no end also to its unity, watching the movement of the buses.

Faces peered from behind glass, gone before they had established their expressions, would be shuttled out in all directions, pale and unprotesting. But the faces in the night buses were potentially communicative. They huddled, face on hand. They swayed in the protective atmosphere of herded bodies, the peppermint drop with the steaming macintosh, the

mingling of heliotrope and sweat. They touched in a haze from the last pint that merged these ordinarily hostile smells and made them for the moment compatible. But soberly, by daylight, you lived a life of segregation, recovered the instinctive defences, the compartment of a face.

A bus received Elyot Standish. It was any bus. He was bound nowhere in particular. There were no reservations of time or place, no longer even the tyranny of a personal routine. It was enough to feel a darkness, a distance unfurling. There was no end to this in the bus, trundling down its dark tunnel, in which the faces smiled gravely out of sleep, the mouths almost spoke. If only to touch these almost sentient faces into life, to reach across the wastes of sleep and touch into recognition with your hand, to listen to the voices . . . the voices of people. (LD 334-35)

Elyot Standish achieves a definite sense of human communion: here at the end of the novel he sets out, like a picaro, on the first hesitant steps of his journey into society. There is a notion, too, of his rebirth in the final words of the text: "He felt like someone who had been asleep, and had only just woken" (335). Still, for Elyot in this awakening, it is "enough to feel a darkness," and his consciousness remains stolidly earthbound. Beyond reason and words as it is, the condition of spiritual enlightenment is something neither Elyot, nor White, can properly envisage or express at this stage. And although White is unable to relinquish the pretence of narrative structure entirely, and thus his renunciation of character and narrative is more oblique, the keynote of Elyot's newfound resolve at the close of *The Living and the Dead* is exactly the rejection of "aestheticism as either a response or an alternative to modern life" that Smith discerns in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

There are other comparisons to be made—specific as well as more general—between White's and Pynchon's literary modes. Indeed, thematic and stylistic evocations of White's work may be thoroughgoing in Pynchon's oeuvre. In *Mason & Dixon*, for example, the circumstances of Rebekah Mason's ghostly visitations to her husband, Charles, bear a striking resemblance to the circumstances of Laura Trevelyan's visitations to the German explorer Voss in *Voss*.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the surreality of Eliza Fields's experience when she is abducted by native Americans, as, "[I]like a Dream just before the animals wake up, the German farms pass'd flowing by" (M&D 512), closely resembles Ellen Roxburgh's loss of self-consciousness in *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) when she is captured by an Aboriginal tribe: "the self which had withdrawn was scarcely conscious" of the wounds and scratches on her body as she was led away through the forest by the black women (219). In each case this psychological withdrawal is an instinctual, protective response. Both women sublimate the traumas

of kidnap and captivity by retreating from the physical world for a time. And, ultimately, liberation—sexual, spiritual, emotional and social—follows for both Eliza and Ellen as a direct result of their removal into alien territories and cultures, their experiences of imprisonment and bondage. With liberation come a heightened recognition and absolute renunciation of the shackles they had borne previously in their normal married lives. In fact, the shame and debasement each woman suffers in her ordeals breed greater resolve in the two, bringing each to a deeper sense of self-understanding, of mortal humility.

Stylistically, rapturous descriptive passages, lush details, poignant ironies, shifting narrative vantage, conditional-tense arrangements and, also, a propensity for practical jokes and anticlimax pervade the fictions of both writers. In White's texts, as in Pynchon's, the predominance of ambiguous semantic contexts and rhetorical structures—subjunctive mood, passive voice, sudden and surprising shifts to second-person address, anacoluthon, syllepsis and zeugma, conditional and concessional adverbs, ellipsis, narratorial speculation and subjective accounts—and the fugitive narrative stance combine to create an overall tone of uncertainty or indeterminacy at even the literal level of meaning transfer. Narrative structure is thus constantly open-ended; often, more than one possible circumstance or interpretation is offered. The reader's task in decoding the text is far more complex, the readings more exotic and tentative, than is usual in either realist or Modernist fictions, with the exceptions, perhaps, of Faulkner's novels and *Finnegans Wake*. As Alan Lawson observes, "White's texts *perform* the problematics of reading, of the difficult and inconclusive nature of interpretation; there are always events . . . that *resist reading*, just as there are always experiences that resist description. Reading White is, in part, to experience that which cannot be read, only re-read" (xviii–xix). As in the picaresque narrative mode, the relations between writer (narrative agency), text and reader in White's and Pynchon's fictions fluctuate and are constantly elusive.

Both writers seem to revel in sequences of ornate, minutely-observed and symbolic description. Common themes and ideas recur: frustration with social interaction and communication; versions (and perversions) of human inertia; the aforementioned move away from any conventional type of historical novel; relativism and even a seeming moral ambivalence in attitudes toward character, motivation and event; acute narrative self-consciousness itself. Sequences of lofty allegory are juxtaposed with and undermined by taboo depictions of carnal urges and human excreta. Wide-ranging and varied mythic, philosophical and historical formulations are entertained; and a true globalism of plot and

setting is echoed by and reinforced in an ardent panglossia at the level of text.

An overall mood of cultural decline, a certain world-weariness or sense of ennui, often seeps into the narratives as well, certainly in the early works—White’s perhaps deriving from his youthful fascination with the writings of Oswald Spengler (Marr 151, 240; White, L 539), Pynchon’s from his studies in physics and thermodynamics—but this atmosphere is leavened by appeals to spiritualism and myth, and to Kant, Rilke and Kierkegaard. The painter Lieselotte, in *The Aunt’s Story*, proclaims to Theodora Goodman: “‘We have destroyed so much, but we have not destroyed enough. We must destroy everything, everything, even ourselves. Then at last when there is nothing, perhaps we shall live’” (176). In the inferno which engulfs the Hôtel du Midi, Lieselotte is destroyed; so too is the decadent European culture, symbolized in the burning piano (AS 263).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, only after such destruction is Theodora able to “live.” In *V.* a similar artistic allegory operates in the chapter “V. in Love,” set in Paris in July-August, 1913. As Theodora had envisaged herself Katina Pavlou’s protector, the mysterious “lady V.” makes the young prima ballerina Mélanie l’Heuremaudit her “fétiche.” After a rehearsal, the composer Porcépic, the choreographer Satin, the impresario Itague, and the “huge and homicidal [Russian expatriate] tailor” Kholsky, engage in political debate, as had Theodora, as Ludmilla, and “General” Sokolnikov in *The Aunt’s Story*:

“Porcépic,” grinned the tailor, “you’ll be surprised one day. At what we will do.”

“Nothing surprises me,” answered Porcépic. “If history were cyclical, we’d now be in a decadence, would we not, and your projected Revolution only another symptom of it.”

“A decadence is a falling-away,” said Kholsky. “We rise.”

“A decadence,” Itague put in, “is a falling-away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories.”

The girl and the woman had moved away from the stage’s one overhead light. They could hardly be seen. No sound came from up there.

. . .

“Your beliefs are non-human,” [Itague] said. “You talk of people as if they were point-clusters or curves on a graph.”

“So they are,” mused Kholsky, dreamy-eyed. “I, Satin, Porcépic may fall by the wayside. No matter. The Socialist Awareness grows, the tide is irresistible and irreversible. It is a bleak world we live in, M. Itague; atoms



collide, brain cells fatigue, economies collapse and others rise to succeed them, all in accord with the basic rhythms of History. Perhaps she is a woman; women are a mystery to me. But her ways are at least measurable." . . .

Outside they passed the woman, holding Mélanie by the arm. (V 405)

In *The Aunt's Story*, too, it is through Theodora that history, in this sense, is reified.

In *V.*, as in White's novel, history is not merely the chronology of an elite, and neither does it exist independently of interpretation. These lessons plague Herbert Stencil throughout his ventures and peregrinations, and instigate the "forcible dislocation of personality" (V 62) he constantly undergoes in assuming narrative agency. Stencil's sole quest, his *raison d'être*, is "V." Moreover, the act of pursuit itself defines his existence: should the quest end, then so will Stencil's purpose in life. He admits as much, realizing that "in this search the motive is part of the quarry" (386); and while in general his research and reconnaissance are painstakingly scrupulous and pedantic, he constantly evades one conspicuously central avenue of investigation: "the island Malta, where his father had died, where Herbert had never been and knew nothing at all about because something there kept him off, because it frightened him" (62). Stencil's eventual resolution to go to Malta sees this fear resurface, crystallize: "He had stayed off Malta. He was afraid of ending it; but, damn it all, staying here would end it too. Funking out; finding V.; he didn't know which he was most afraid of, V. or sleep. Or whether they were two versions of the same thing" (346).

Like Theodora Goodman's, Stencil's narrative agency is limited, and his foibles and inadequacies are always implicit in his "impersonations," and overtly documented by the text:

Stencil fell outside the pattern. Civil servant without rating, architect-by-necessity of intrigues and breathings-together. . . . Of course too there were his "leads" which he hunted down now lackadaisical and only half-interested, as if there were after all something more important he ought to be doing. What his mission was, however, came no clearer to him than the ultimate shape of his V-structure—no clearer, indeed, than why he should have begun pursuit of V. in the first place. He only felt (he said "by instinct") when a bit of information was useful, when not. . . . Naturally about drives as intellectualized as Stencil's there can be no question of instinct: the obsession was acquired, surely, but where along the line, how in the world? Unless he was as he insisted purely the century's man, something which does not exist in nature. (225-26)

Stencil's pretension in using the third person when speaking of himself paradoxically offsets the objectivity and reliability the third person seeks to convey. Members of the Whole Sick Crew dispute Stencil's "Problem":

It would be simple in Rusty Spoon-talk to call him contemporary man in search of an identity. Many of them had already decided this was his Problem. The only trouble was that Stencil had all the identities he could cope with conveniently right at the moment: he was quite purely He Who Looks for V. (and whatever impersonations that might involve). (226)

Stencil's is merely an "acquired sense of animateness" (55), and the (hi)stories he recounts (along with the "truths" they convey) are, "as Eigenvalue put it, Stencitized" (228).

White's Theodora Goodman similarly classifies herself with those "people as empty as a filigree ball," with a reservation, though, that these too "would fill at times with a sudden fire" (AS 136). At certain moments in Theodora's interlude at the *jardin exotique*, her inertia, her psychological torpor, becomes stultifying. As she waits, languishing on a seat in the overgrown garden, "time continued to disintegrate into a painful, personal music, of which the themes were intertwined" (174). The living, breathing Theodora is bewitched, lost in the dance of the fugue. Sokolnikov taunts her: "'It is difficult to escape from music. Music pursues'" (248). The meagre and incidental possessions which assure her identity are little solace (144-45). She too is seemingly unable to move, to do, to be.

But, as with Stencil's determination to go to Malta, when at last Theodora stirs to action, first endeavoring to speak, and then actually attempting to intercede on behalf of Katina Pavlou's chastity, Sokolnikov's sardonic and unmoving ambivalence annoys Theodora. What the General refers to as her "'indecent . . . haste'" (249), her awkward preparation for this unprecedentedly volitional act, is both comic and self-mocking, and Sokolnikov's cryptic response is profoundly disturbing to Theodora:

Theodora Goodman began to circumnavigate the furniture.

"At least my feet can move," Theodora said.

"Yes," said Sokolnikov. "And I do not wish to deter you. You can also create the illusion of other people, but once created, they choose their own realities." (250)

Theodora, typically, does "not take the direct road," choosing to struggle cross-country, "on the edge of the lavender hills" (250),

toward the coast and the "small round tower which has some connexion with Napoleon" (153ff.), where Katina Pavlou has given herself to the jaded English writer and teacher Wetherby. Though air and landscape conspire to "confuse . . . intentions still further" (250), she steels herself: "But I have come here for a purpose, Theodora said, if only to be confronted with my own inadequacy" (251). As for Stencil, this restoration of purpose, the quest itself, if not the actual attainment of her objective, is crucial for Theodora now.

Ultimately, it is in the process of doing that Theodora is redeemed from indolence, from the destructive self-involvement and moral bankruptcy of the *jardin exotique*:

"Then we can do nothing?" asked the dead voice of Lieselotte.

Her voice was grey smoke.

"Do? Yes, we shall do. Lieselotte?" Theodora called.

We shall do, Theodora heard her own thin voice promising smoke.

(259)

And although she cannot rescue Lieselotte from the fire, she does retrieve her mother's "ugly little ring" and is "glad to have her garnet," now recognized as "part of the flesh" (260). She has rediscovered herself and become reconciled to her heredity. The image of the "burning piano" (263) heralds Theodora's independence, her liberation from the fugue. She becomes "indifferent to . . . any dictatorship of the *jardin exotique*" (265).

Theodora's rhapsodies at the Hôtel du Midi also reflect her obsessions, the "painful, personal music" (174) which clairvoyance, her unique gift for fantasy-imaging, provokes. Theodora is "a sallow spinster of forty-five" (246), and this realization competes and intermarries with the fabulous fabulisms of which she is the source. Beyond the accustomed irony and anticlimaxes in White's depiction of her situation, her personal limitations are revealed and ridiculed. White also evokes her submerged sexual longings. In her quest to steal the coveted nautilus shell, itself something of an erotic emblem, Theodora is confronted by her own unfulfilled lusts (220-23). Alongside this is the blatant imagery used to preempt Katina Pavlou's impending loss of virginity:

The white kitten jumped off her lap and advanced to try his nose on a cactus, that Katina Pavlou watched with the agony of what she knew must inevitably happen. . . .

"Ah," cried Katina Pavlou, "it has happened."

Her own white cry followed the kitten through the cactus trunks. She followed with little cries of love, unwinding like a ball of white thread, infinite, but failing. . . .

Walking with her kitten, which she had retrieved from the dangers of the cactus forest, Katina Pavlou was very young, white, touching. As she walked, she inclined her head to avoid the attentions of the cactus pad, so that her neck was uncovered. . . .

And now her voice, white, furred, insinuated itself along the skin. It curled in the saucers of the body like a small white cat. . . .

But it left Katina Pavlou sitting with the kitten in her lap. The kitten's nose, smudged with first blood, sniffed at some fresh dubiousness in a revised universe. (183–86)

Since the narrative is under the sway of Theodora's psychical impulses, the imagery and the near-pornographic pun must be ascribed to her. By exposing Theodora in such a manner, dredging this image and its connotations from the deepest mires of her animus, so to speak, White again deliberately undermines the narrative and thwarts its significance for symbol, event and character. Wetherby (a clairvoyant too, it appears, verifies the vision as Theodora's), in his attempt at consolation, mocks the connection between Theodora's image of Katina and the spinster's own unfulfilled sexual longings:

"Tell me something, Miss Goodman. Tell me the truth. If I could have loved Katina Pavlou just as she leapt from your imagination, clothed in white, and all the nostalgia of what has never happened, then it might have been different."

But now Theodora trembled for the dark. Now the garden raised its swords. She avoided Wetherby, but Wetherby pursued.

"Perhaps in different circumstances I would have lain with my head in your lap, and discussed Tennyson and Morris." (245)

Like Pynchon, White is not beyond this sexual frankness and brutality of metaphor.

Sexual jealousy seeps through also in Herbert Stencil's bitter description of the antics of the Whole Sick Crew at Fergus Mixolydian's apartment, and the mocking tone persists as he imagines the course of Esther's seduction of Brad (V 58). Stencil's impersonations and forcible dislocations of personality in the interests of objectivity—like Theodora's—are constantly tinged by submerged emotions of his own. Disdain for his own youthful inertia and parasitical shiftlessness, and resentment of his father's filial remissness color many episodes in

which Stencil reflects on and embellishes his own biography and the contexts of his father's journal entries.

Other echoes, less portentous, are apparent in the works. The initial apparition of the "Demoiselles Bloch" in *The Aunt's Story* momentarily startles Theodora. Mademoiselle Berthe remarks that "'the likeness is so striking, we have often, we regret to say, made it the occasion for practical jokes'" (153). The ancient twins "giggle," then, "for many past crackers let off under the visitor's chair" (153). This last image is transformed in *Gravity's Rainbow* into "jokers around the table . . . sneaking Whoopee Cushions into the Siege Perilous, under the very descending arse of the grail-seeker" (GR 321) as the deracinated Schwarzkommando leaders, Oberst Enzian and his putative adversary, Josef Ombindi, bicker over the tribal destiny of the Hereros. Pynchon's more overtly reflexive incorporation of the metaphor is the only distinction between the references: in White's novel Theodora's role is rhapsode, both writer and reader of the text, whereas in *Gravity's Rainbow* the narrative is detached and appears to address the reader directly.

Practical jokesterism<sup>21</sup> like this, farce, comic understatement and other drolleries abound in the texts of both authors. Elements of tomfoolery and crudity are incorporated into both White's and Pynchon's narratives to undercut moments of heightened sentiment or emotional significance, or to undermine the grandiose and complex allegorical schemes and symbolism explicit in their fictions. White is a master of the elaborate verbal pun as well, as when Mrs Jolley makes her knowledge of Mrs Flack's infelicities quite clear in *Riders in the Chariot*:

Mrs Flack was in some distress.

"Pardon me!" she said. "It is the herrings. I have not been myself since we opened that tin. I should never ever touch a herring in tomato sauce."

"No, dear," Mrs Jolley agreed, "and you with a sour stomach; it is asking for resurrections." (RC 529-30)

This exchange reaffirms the parodic texture of the biblical allegory in the narrative; however, in White's later *Eye of the Storm* (1973), Elizabeth Hunter's apparent assumption to heaven while she is "on her throne" (ES 552) is a ribald double entendre which thoroughly undermines the ostensible intensity of her symbolic apotheosis. Pynchon's manipulation of the literal narrative to render an even more elaborate, and irrelevant, joke in *Gravity's Rainbow* similarly exemplifies just how far the primacy of narrative integrity is diminished in the postmodern idiom by the 1970s. The corny punchline here follows a

narrative sequence spanning some two or three pages: “For De Mille, young fur-henchmen can’t be rowing!” (GR 559) For both authors subversion of narrative form and literary register is sometimes the point in itself.

In both *Riders in the Chariot* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, humor also sometimes verges uncomfortably on racial stereotyping—or racist jokes—but it is through the narrative appropriation of characters’ viewpoints that ironic detachment is created and sustained. The denouement of White’s novel is comprised within the satiric vignette of a luncheon engagement for three elderly society matrons, tangentially associated with the events of the narrative on which they dwell, each woman by turns asserting and suppressing her own spiritual unease inspired by these events:

“I adore Europeans,” said Mrs Colquhoun, looking at the almost empty room.

She did, too. She collected consuls, excepting those who were really black.

It bewildered Mrs Wolfson. First she had learnt not to be, and now she must learn what she had forgot. But she would remember. Life, for her too, had been a series of disguises, which she had whisked on, and off, whether Sheila Wolfson, or Shirl Rosetree, or Shulamith Rosenbaum, as circumstances demanded.

So the black, matted girl settled herself inside the perm, behind the powdered cleavage, under the mutation mink. She was reassured.

“Speaking of miracles,” Mrs Chalmers-Robinson said, “Mrs Colquhoun lived for some years at Sarsaparilla.”

“Sarsaparilla!” exclaimed Mrs Colquhoun with some disgust. “One could not continue living at Sarsaparilla. Nobody lives at Sarsaparilla now.”

“But the miracle?” Mrs Wolfson dared, in spite of her foreboding.

“There was no miracle.” Mrs Colquhoun frowned.

She was most annoyed. Her mouth, her chin had almost disappeared.

“I understood,” Mrs Chalmers-Robinson murmured, her smile conveying disbelief, “something of a supernatural kind.”

She was too old, too charming, to allow that indiscretion on her part was indiscretion.

“No question of any miracle,” Mrs Colquhoun was repeating.

A stream of melted ice cream threatened to spill from one corner of what had been her mouth.

“Certainly,” she admitted, “there was an unpleasant incident, I am told, at Barranugli. Certain drunken thugs, and ignorant, not to say hysterical, women were involved. Both there, and later at Sarsaparilla. Only, there was no miracle. Definitely no miracle!”

Mrs Colquhoun was almost shouting.

"It is much too unpleasant to discuss."

"But the Jew they crucified," Mrs Chalmers-Robinson insisted in a voice she had divested deliberately of all charm; she might have been taking off her rings at night.

"Oÿ-yoÿ-yoÿ!" cried Mrs Wolfson.

The latter was frowning, or wrinkling up black, through all that beige powder. She was played upon again. She was rocked by those discords on bleeding catgut, which she did, did wish, and not wish, to hear. (RC 542-43)

In *Gravity's Rainbow* a similar comic effect is engineered in the account of Franz Pökler's career, filtered through Leni's perceptions:

Could anything with him ever have lasted? If the Jewish wolf Pflaumbaum had not set the torch to his own paint factory by the canal, Franz might have labored out their days dedicated to the Jew's impossible scheme of developing patterned paint, dissolving crystal after patient crystal, controlling the temperatures with obsessive care so that on cooling the amorphous swirl might, this time might, suddenly shift, lock into stripes, polka-dots, plaid, stars of David—instead of finding one early morning a blackened waste, paint cans exploded in great bursts of crimson and bottle-green, smells of charred wood and naphtha, Pflaumbaum wringing his hands, oy, oy, oy, the sneaking hypocrite. All for the insurance. (GR 159-60)

Beyond the idiomatic cliché, certain thematic contiguities are also conspicuous here. Like Sheila Wolfson, Leni adopts and discards a series of names and disguises: Leni Pökler (Franz calls her "Lenin"), Leni Hirsch, Solange. And in her apparently-imagined lesbian encounter with Rebecca, Leni focuses on the contrast between her own "fair skin, her look of innocence, and the Jewess's darker coloring, her rawness." Rebecca's "animal darkness" and her "face turned over a shoulder smiling in coarse delight" (156) reveal her ethnicity just as Sheila Wolfson's Semitism is conspicuously and inescapably physical: she is a "black, matted girl" despite the perm, beige powder and mutation mink with which she has attempted to conceal the fact. Moreover, when Leni complains to Peter Sachsa about the exploitation of motherhood under the yoke of capitalism, the emotional blackmail propagated to discourage civil disobedience, an external narrative agency observes, "her face darkened, Judaized by the words she speaks, not because it's out loud but because she means it." And "[a]gainst her faith, Sachsa can see the shallows of his own life" (219-

20). Within the political context of proto-Nazi Berlin, Leni's Communist fervor marks her as an enemy of the Reich as much as if she were a Jew. In both novels these women are, in effect, irrevocably branded as Jewish, alien; alterity has become a component of physiognomy itself.

Heroicomic anticlimax is another trait White and Pynchon share in their rendering of character, event and significance. At the imaginative peak of one of her fantasies in *The Aunt's Story*, Theodora has a sudden and irrelevant thought which deflates the vision entirely: "Heavy with gold and silver, the icon faces of many aunts smouldered with Ideas. Theodora remembered that she had forgotten to buy aspirin" (AS 185). All White's texts indulge in heavy-handed comedy at the expense of the central character. Indeed, White often incorporates satire and ridicule into the depiction of his heroes and heroines to distance himself from his protagonists<sup>22</sup>—a common strategy in Pynchon's fiction as well. White's capitalization of "Ideas" in the passage above is another familiar motif. A similar comic abreaction is wrought in the midst of Amy's "anticipation" of Stan's "immortality" in *The Tree of Man*: "As the crests of the trees bent over in an obeisance of silver, as dust flirted, as a young cow jumped in fear or pleasure, tossed her rump in the air, and farted" (TM 110). In *Gravity's Rainbow* the sequence is subtly transposed:

The sun makes the water sparkle. The housetops are red, the steeples are white. Everything is miniature, neat, gently pastoral, locked into the rise and fall of seasons. [. . .] The brink of autumn. A cow sez moo. The milkmaid farts. [. . .] The four envoys drink watered Moselle and talk mandalas. (GR 706)

Other elements from White's oeuvre seem to resurface in Pynchon's. Like Stencil's impersonations in *V.*, Pirate Prentice's "Condition" (GR 11ff.) in *Gravity's Rainbow*, his "odd talent for living the fantasies of others" (620), also mirrors Theodora's capacity in *The Aunt's Story*. In that novel White is Theodora Goodman, and Theodora is all the characters in the text. In the central section Theodora, "some bloke in skirts" (AS 69), quite simply lives out other people's fantasies. She has never been an active participant in the real lives and petty dramas about her, even within the sphere of her own family; but by some magic, some mystical transposition, she is able to reify the experiences of others. Throughout her extended stay at the Hôtel du Midi, she is a "mirror" (148), an interface, a surrogate, an agent provocateur. Her self-consciousness and skepticism inhibit her participation; however, she is, above all else, an immaculate spectator and listener, insightful and meticulous. Hers is an extempore role in the



revelation of character and narrative. She is at once passive and creative, all-knowing but sublimely innocent as well, like an author touched for the first time by literary inspiration:

In the *jardin exotique*, in spite of its impervious forms, of sword, and bulb, and the scarlet, sucking mouths, time continued to disintegrate into a painful, personal music, of which the themes were intertwined. So that it was not possible to withdraw into a comfortable isolation. Theodora sat. Confident her intuition would identify, she waited for Lieselotte to appear. (174)

An impostor herself, she brings the other "guests" (142ff.) to sudden and brutal realization of their own imposture: "The visible details of Elsie Rapallo's life were scattered like the visiting cards of important persons, on a silver salver, to be noticed. But there were also the private regrets, by which she was devoured" (199). It is these private spaces in the hearts and souls of others that Theodora imaginatively penetrates. Though in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pirate's similar "gift" has been coopted by "the Firm" (GR 12ff.), probably for sinister ends, he is as disconcerted and impotent as Theodora. Faithless, traitors, they remain apart from the carnivalized secret histories to which they are privy, and in which they are fated to serve as motive force.

Fulfilling the same function as the omniscient narrator in a realist novel, Theodora Goodman has a cathartic role in the development of plot in *The Aunt's Story*, despite her apparent immobility and detachment. As David Marr comments:

Theodora *becomes* the people she encounters. The writing shifts from the present to the past, from lives lived to lives imagined by the exiles in the hotel. Theodora Goodman discovers, invents and enters their lives, drawing on her small store of experience and a deep well of intuition. These are the hallucinations of a lonely traveller, but also a picture of White's technique as a writer. A name, a glance, a snatch of conversation overheard leads her into these vividly imagined existences. So it was with White, his imagination stimulated by a face in the street, tiny details of gossip, odd names discovered in a newspaper. "How many of us," she asks, "lead more than one of our several lives?" (240 qtg. AS 174)

In this sense Slothrop's story, rather than Pirate's, more closely corresponds to Theodora's psychological and physical passage,<sup>23</sup> and musical allusions figure prominently in both characters' quests, literally and metaphorically. As Slothrop's attempt to recover the harmonica he loses down the toilet in the Roseland Ballroom—"Either he lets the harp

go, his silver chances of song, or he has to follow" (GR 63)—becomes an ongoing index of his quest through the Zone for psychic and spiritual wholeness, the nomination of Theodora's fantasies in the *jardin exotique* as rhapsodies or fugues is apt.<sup>24</sup> Musical references often augur the imaginative transformations which proliferate throughout Theodora's European sojourn: the "*rêves* and *fièvres*" of *le petit*, the boy-waiter's tango, his "voice . . . brick-warm, supple as a cat" (AS 147, 144); the "descant of gold and silver" (158) for Sokolnikov; Mrs Rapallo's ostentatious entrance, "the opening bars, the rather stiff overture muffled by the velvet through which it played, the heavily encrusted bows just scraping the breaking gut" (161); Wetherby's face, "a 'cello," calling to Lieselotte (170ff.); the "sad sounds" of the "shells on the shores of Asia Minor," "faintly" and alliteratively echoing "the misfortune of Aunt Smaragda" (185); Mademoiselle Berthe, "a mouse in a piano picking at the bones of a gavotte" (202); and the "sure, and pure, and painfully transparent" notes of Katina Pavlou's own gavotte (247–48). The vicarious pleasures of these euphonies too quickly fade for Theodora, however, the ecstatic strains of the diapason invariably lost to commotion or, indeed, silence, as the perfidy of each composer is revealed. Theodora's pointed accusation of Sokolnikov results in just such an abrupt cessation of the rhapsody:

"Then you have deceived us, *Major*?" Theodora said.

"Deceit, Ludmilla, is a wincing word. I was a general in spirit, always.

If I was not in fact, it was due to misfortune, and the superior connexions of my subordinate officers. But how I have lived, in spirit. Such bugles!"

There was no further note in the Hôtel du Midi. It was quite still. (249)

The nonmusical connotations of both rhapsody and fugue inform these flights of fancy as well. There is a rhapsodic quality, a sudden and enthusiastic extravagance and emotional irregularity, in each character's revelation of self and circumstance to Theodora as priestess-confessor. The muted and often indirect references to Homer's *Odyssey*<sup>25</sup>—the name Meroë, George Goodman's vision of Ithaca (68–69), Theodora's dream of "the island" with herself as "Epaphroditos" (208–09), and her resolution to "return to Abyssinia" (265)—as well as to St. Paul and Tolstoy qualify Theodora as narrator as something of a rhapsode or even an epic poet, and match, to a degree, Slothrop's similar (and similarly ironized) incarnations as a modern-day Tannhäuser (GR 299, 364) or Orpheus (472, 622, 754). Fugue is also a state of oblivion, a psychological condition characterized by "loss of awareness of one's identity, often coupled with disappearance from one's usual environment" ("Fugue"),<sup>26</sup> and this

sense of the term is the most significant for Theodora (as for Slothrop), framing both her picaresque flight from the security of family associations in Australia to Europe and eventually America, and her apparent lapse into madness—or lucidity—at the close of the novel.

The last stage of Theodora's passage to lucidity is exemplified in her train journey across America, where "the full golden theme of corn" plays against "a whiter pizzicato of . . . telephone wires . . . a counterpoint of houses . . . [and] a smooth passage of ponds and trees." With spiritual insight comes psychic consolidation, and to achieve this condition Theodora must first discard all material trappings and the various identities she has assumed, her personae. Sight, memory and imagination combine for Theodora into a synesthesiatic and symphonic "integrity of purpose and of being." From her carriage window she sees that

[a]ll the square faces of the wooden houses, as they came, overflowed with solemnity, that was a solemnity of living, a passage of days. Where children played with tins, or a girl waited at a window, or calves lolloped in long grass, it was a frill of flute twisted round a higher theme, to grace, but only grace, the solemnity of living and of days. (AS 273-74)

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Slothrop's ultimate revelation of self is couched in much the same terms. He meditates, recalling

days when [. . .] he could *make it all fit*, seeing clearly in each an entry in a record, a history: his own, his winter's, his country's . . . instructing him, dunce and drifter, in ways deeper than he can explain, have been faces of children out the train windows, two bars of dance music somewhere, in some other street at night, needles and branches of a pine tree shaken clear and luminous against night clouds [. . .] laughter out of a cornfield in the early morning as he was walking to school. (GR 626)

But in both instances this experience of lucidity or enlightenment—transcendent states of numinous revelation both Theodora and Slothrop embrace—is conditional at best. Theodora's illumination is perceived as madness by her sister Fanny, and Mrs Johnson refers to her as "crazy Annie" (AS 271, 301), while Slothrop's apotheosis is similarly left in abeyance at novel's close, hope and doubt intact in equal measure (GR 742-44).

Slothrop as a physical character ultimately dissipates, seems to escape altogether from the narrative:

Slothrop, as noted [. . .] has begun to thin, to scatter. (509)

[B]y now—early Virgo—he has become one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell—*stripped*. Scattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be "found" again, in the conventional sense of "positively identified and detained." (712)

(Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering. [. . .] But knowing his Tarot, we would expect to look among the Humility, among the gray and preterite souls, to look for him adrift in the hostile light of the sky, the darkness of the sea. . . .) (742)

Another of White's illuminati, Miss Hare, of Xanadu, has been similarly "dispersed" by the close of *Riders in the Chariot*:

In the friable white light, she too was crumbling, it seemed, shambling as always, but no longer held in check by the many purposes which direct animal, or human life. She might have reasoned that she had fulfilled her purpose, if she had not always mistrusted reason. Her instinct suggested, rather, that she was being dispersed, but that in so experiencing, she was entering the final ecstasy. Walking and walking through the unresistant thorns and twigs. Ploughing through the soft, opalescent remnants of night. Never actually arriving, but that was to be expected, since she had become all-pervasive: scent, sound, the steely dew, the blue glare of white light off rocks. She was all but identified.

So Miss Hare stumbled through the night. If she did not choose the obvious direction, it was because direction had at last chosen her. (RC 493)

Her return to the family home, however, will be or has been thwarted by its occupation and demolition (519–26, 535–36), as Slothrop's home town of Mingeborough has also been occupied (GR 744); thus her apotheosis here in her final documented appearance is as uncertain as is Slothrop's own wine rush in Niederschaumdorf (GR 743).

Despite such pervasive conditionality, *Riders in the Chariot* is the novel where White most closely aligns the creative act with spiritual faith. The author and his chosen-though-preterite, elite-though-spurned characters are united in their parodic reenactment of Christ's Crucifixion and Deposition. (Such a celebration of preterition is one of the primary themes in *Gravity's Rainbow* also.) As White explained in a letter to his American publisher: "What I want to emphasise through my four 'Riders'—an orthodox refugee intellectual Jew, a mad *Erdegeist* of an Australian spinster, an evangelical laundress, and a half-caste aboriginal

painter—is that all faiths, whether religious, humanistic, instinctive, or the creative artist’s act of praise, are in fact one” (L 153). As well as various particularities of image and motif, a certain symmetry in the plot design of *Riders in the Chariot* is also repeated in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.<sup>27</sup> The four sons in that novel—Slothrop (the Westward-/Western man), Enzian, Tchitcherine and Gottfried—all approach the Holy Center, the Rocket, from their cardinal radii on the global compass, and the schematic Rocket mandala thus disclosed and reiterated throughout the novel is an archetype much rendered in White’s fiction also, particularly from the 1960s onward, in *Riders in the Chariot*, *The Solid Mandala* (1966) and *The Eye of the Storm*.<sup>28</sup>

Both *Riders in the Chariot* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* have recourse to Gnosticism and tribal ontologies. A more specific resonance—again, one which has been shifted slightly—is the theme of colonial exploitation, the hypocrisy and perversion clothed in the philanthropic trappings of Christianity and “civilization,” as revealed in episodes of pederasty in both novels. The nest of “witchetty grubs” which the Aboriginal Alf Dubbo discerns in the handful of “grey belly” seized in postcoital loveplay with his guardian and seducer, the Anglican rector Timothy Calderon (RC 373), echoes “the white worm stirring in the reverend pants” previously perceived by the boy (367), and this image becomes transformed into “the blunt maggot-faces” (407) of the white milieu he is eventually, and unhappily, assimilated into. In the Herero Enzian’s submission to the German Lieutenant Weissmann in Südwestafrika in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, tribal theosophy and the white man’s colonial legacy similarly merge:

The Herero boy, long tormented by missionaries into a fear of Christian sins, jackal-ghosts, potent European strand-wolves, pursuing him, seeking to feed on his soul, the precious worm that lived along his backbone, now tried to cage his old gods, snare them in words, give them away, savage, paralyzed, to this scholarly white who seemed so in love with language. (GR 99)

After their coupling too, Alf Dubbo and Timothy Calderon “lay upon the lumpy bed of words”; and Calderon’s “surge of words with which he . . . lamented his own downfall” (RC 372) resonates with Weissmann’s readings from Rilke, his “thirst for guilt [. . .] insatiable as the desert’s for water” (GR 323). Enzian, like Dubbo, is of mixed parentage, equally a bastardized and discarded product of colonial oppression. But most disconcerting to the European who takes him as a trophy is to realize his protégé “wants to fuck, but he is using the Herero name of God.” Enzian says to his master, neither a command nor a request: “*We make*

*Ndjambi Karunga now, omuhona*" (100); and his innocence and enthusiasm, and the sentimental love for his conqueror and sodomizer in which he perseveres throughout the narrative, are reminiscent of Alf Dubbo, who "did not resist physically" but "decided to embrace [Calderon's] intention" when it became manifest in a physical act. Like Enzian, young Dubbo meets the ardor of the older man—"his lover"—with equal, if not greater, relish for "the delirious throb and dribble of love" (RC 372, 379).

White's metaphors disclose Alf Dubbo's apparent moral and religious ambivalence: "he would examine the face of Humphrey Mortimer, for instance, with the same interest that he might have brought to bear on a flock of pastured maggots, or block of virgin lard" (512). But this irreligiousness belies Dubbo's deep spirituality, and the blasphemies of his art and imagination reveal an intense vision of the immanence of the divine in all things, illuminations which his own conscience can scarcely accept:

For there was no containing thoughts, unless you persuaded somebody—only a friend would be willing—to take an axe, and smash up the fatal box for good and all. How it would have scared him, though, to step out from amongst the mess, and face those who would have come in, who would be standing around amongst the furniture, waiting to receive. Then the Reverend Jesus Calderon, for all he raised his pale hand, and exerted the authority of his sad eyes, would not save a piebald soul from the touch of fur and feather, or stem the slither of cold scales. (415)

Enzian, ensconced in the feminine dark of the Erdschweinhöhle, is likewise haunted by the ritual trappings of both decadence and piety, the bitter recognition of the acculturated guilt and self-loathing Western Christianity has inculcated still plaguing his conscience even so:

At night down here, very often lately, Enzian will wake for no reason. Was it really Him, pierced Jesus, who came to lean over you? The white faggot's-dream body, the slender legs and soft gold European eyes . . . did you catch a glimpse of olive cock under the ragged loincloth, did you want to reach to lick at the sweat of his rough, his wooden bondage? Where is he, what part of our Zone tonight, damn him to the knob of that nervous imperial staff. (GR 324)

Alf Dubbo's painting of the Deposition from the Cross encompasses a like heresy:

The Christ, of course, was the tattered Jew from Sarsaparilla and Rosetree's factory. Who had, it was seen, experienced other lives, together with those diseases of body and mind to which men are subject. If Dubbo portrayed the Christ darker than convention would have approved, it was because he could not resist the impulse. Much was omitted, which, in its absence, conveyed. It could have been that the observer himself contributed the hieroglyphs of his own fears to the flat, almost skimped figure, with elliptical mouth, and divided, canvas face, of the Jew-Christ. (RC 511)

In both passages, full of personal ghosts as well as ghosts of tribal and acquired heritages, the gestures of sacrilege and iconoclasm (and the postcolonialist sensibilities) seem not to be the characters' alone.

White's "riders in the chariot," Mordecai Himmelfarb and his "fellow flotsam" (347), achieve glory through their humility; their base and absurd experiences are revealed as site and source of their virtue and redemption. The novel is surprising, brilliantly effective in rendering magnificence from the drabness and detritus of what appear to be less-than-ordinary, even reprehensible, human lives. The Crucifixion imagery in David Ireland's novels (such as *The Flesheaters* and *The Glass Canoe*), for example, pales by comparison, is a stale and tawdry overlay. White, like Pynchon, rescues such putatively worthless relics of the human condition from anonymity, retrieves their dignity, exalts them as divine ciphers. Manning Clark comments on White's literary gift of "changing the dross of anger to the gold of great art" (7). Pynchon's aspiration, in *Gravity's Rainbow* at least, can be expressed in much the same terms: "'All the shit is transmuted to gold'" (GR 440).

The two authors' styles do contrast, however. Pynchon depicts characters as cartoonish, often grotesque caricatures, whereas White relies more on naturalistic detail and complexity for his essentially similar satiric effect. Thus White's characterizations are much more subtle, and fewer. Pynchon's narratives tend to the episodic; White's are more temporally constant. White's proto-postmodern quest for a synthesis of art and life, creativity and faith, expresses itself in his language and style, and particularly in his manipulation of narrative vantage. The stream-of-consciousness mode developed throughout his oeuvre is a sign and symptom of this search. White's aesthetic aspiration is akin to Mrs Standish's "pursuit of the dissolving guitar" in *The Living and the Dead*: "the abstract world that eluded, that deluded her, which for so many years had distracted her attention from the comfortable, sensual details among which she felt herself at home" (LD 226). In the autobiographical essay "The Prodigal Son" (1958), White articulates the conception of spirituality at the heart of his literary

vision: “the state of simplicity and humility is the only desirable one for artist or for man. While to reach it may be impossible, to attempt to do so is imperative” (39). Many of White’s fictional narratives detail the physical and psychological progress of just such a quest, in a conscious parallel to the artist’s own aspiration. Often this progress takes the form of a gradual stripping away of the layers of identity, a dissolution of self. The physical twitching and alcohol-soaked reveries of Colonel Trevillick in the early (1937) story “The Twitching Colonel” are signs that both body and identity are “breaking up”: “I shall strip myself, the onion-folds of prejudice, till standing naked though conscious I see myself complete” (PWSW 6–7). This the Colonel finally achieves in a fiery ascension as, “dancing on the sky . . . climbing rope or smoke . . . the world dissolves” (10) at the close of the story. Miss Hare foresees her eventual apotheosis in similar terms in *Riders in the Chariot*. She is convinced that “[e]ventually I shall discover what is at the centre, if enough of me is peeled away” (RC 57).

Though the trope of *mise en abyme* never becomes quite as predominant a motif as it is in Borges, Nabokov, Mathews, Barth or Calvino, White and Pynchon occasionally use it as yet another representation of the mortal lurching after some hidden essence of mind or soul, and as a figure for the act of literary composition itself. Elyot’s vision of an “infinity” of Chinese boxes, an “infinity of purpose,” in *The Living and the Dead* (333), and the “stone Treppengiebel shapes,” the Escher-like “stairstep gables,” Slothrop “will allow to enter” late in *Gravity’s Rainbow* are characteristic. The reverberations with differential calculus and with “Askania films of Rocket flights, frame by frame,” in this latter sequence (GR 567) extend the trope, as does the metaphoric coupling of the differential function with the old sailor’s delirium tremens in *The Crying of Lot 49* (88–89). Oedipa’s confrontation with solipsism and paranoia in this novel—symbolized, literally and metaphysically, in the Remedios Varo painting she recalls from Mexico City and in a Varo reproduction in her Berkeley motel room, by the nymph sign and statuary at Echo Courts, and by the nightmare reverberations of each of these with her own mirrored reflections (CL 10, 13, 16, 52, 69–70, 117, 121)—is another example.

As Oedipa penetrates further into the Trystero mystery, she begins to experience a loss of social and personal identity, of geographical space:

Somehow Oedipa got lost. One minute she was gazing at a mockup of a space capsule, safely surrounded by old, somnolent men; the next, alone in a great, fluorescent murmur of office activity. As far as she could see in any direction it was white or pastel: men’s shirts, papers, drawing boards.



All she could think of was to put on her shades for all this light, and wait for somebody to rescue her. But nobody noticed. (58)

They are stripping from me, she said subvocally—feeling like a fluttering curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss—they are stripping away, one by one, my men. My shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself . . .; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved fifteen-year-old; my best guide back to the Trysterio has taken a Brody. Where am I? (105)

The onset of each of Oedipa's discoveries is a moment of terrifying enlightenment:

[S]he saw him framed in a long succession or train of doorways, room after room receding in the general direction of Santa Monica, all soaked in rain-light. . . .

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to—an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure. Afterward it is only this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (65–66)

She looked around, spooked at the sunlight pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the center of some intricate crystal. (64)

Oedipa is here tantalized by the possibility of a transcendent perspective beyond the narrow vantage of self and subjectivity. The intimation explicitly reveals the paradox at the heart of narrative agency in the Western novel (a pretension which grounds traditional religions, philosophies and ideologies as well), one which Oedipa embodies and to which she gives voice: "*Shall I project a world?*" she writes in her notebook. It is crucial that she *writes* this message, and that subsequently she *reads* it back to herself as well (56, 60).

In *The Tree of Man* the piece of crimson leadlight glass salvaged from the church by the orphan boy Amy Parker tries to adopt is another such reflexive cue. Amy brings "the piece of glass . . . to her face, so

that the whole room was drenched with crimson, and the coals of the fire were a disintegrating gold." Suddenly—through this crimson lens, as it were—Amy is able to share the boy's vision: "the purplish-crimson flood possessed her too, as she crouched on the pew with the child. There were dead things. There was almost the face that floated beneath the willows" (TM 94). The capacity for imaginative projection beyond the self, fleeting though it might be, is a psychic gift Amy shares with young Mary Hare in *Riders in the Chariot*. Mary's father encourages her "to expect a life of some ultimate revelation." Thereafter, the narrative agency allows that, if enlightenment for the recluse "in search of a concealed truth . . . would confirm rather than expound a mystery, the reason could be that, in the last light, illumination is synonymous with blinding" (RC 26). One of Miss Hare's first experiences of such illumination comes in the "excruciating crystal rain" of the imported chandelier her father shoots before taking his own life (37).

The bittersweet metamorphosis from mooncalf to cognoscente, both sought-after and dreaded, is elsewhere disclosed as the state of lucidity Theodora Goodman appears to achieve in *The Aunt's Story*:

The mountain began to relax. . . . It pricked with insects. A cone fell. You could hear the wings of birds parting the heat.

Theodora stood by the window. The struggle to preserve her own instrument for some final, if also fatal, music that Holstius must play, had been at times difficult and unpleasant, but at least it was preserved. She looked out. She was conscious of the immensity of her own possessions, her blaze of blue. . . .

Presently she went down through the trees to the place where the spring ran. She sat beside the brown water which welled out of the rusty tin, full of frog spawn and the skeletons of leaves. She decided that she would wait here for Holstius, where the formation of the land gave her a certain amount of protection, where the light and shade, tree and grass broke her body into less obvious shapes. . . .

She stirred the water, squinting through the light at her hand, which still wore its flesh. . . .

There was nothing that she did not know, only this had to be laid bare painfully. Holstius laid his hands on, and she was a world of love and compassion that she had only vaguely apprehended. Leaves glistened down to the least important vein. . . .

In the peace that Holstius spread throughout her body and the speckled shade of surrounding trees, there was no end to the lives of Theodora Goodman. These met and parted, met and parted, movingly. They entered into each other, so that the impulse for music in Katina

Pavlou's hands, and the steamy exasperation of Sokolnikov, and Mrs Rapallo's baroque and narcotized despair were the same and understandable. And in the same way that the created lives of Theodora Goodman were interchangeable, the lives into which she had entered, making them momentarily dependent for love and hate, owing her this portion of their fluctuating personalities, whether George or Julia Goodman, only apparently deceased, or Huntly Clarkson, or Moraïtis, or Lou, or Zack, these were the lives of Theodora Goodman, these too. . . .

She swept back a dark shadow from her face with her quite solid hand. Out of the rusted tin welled the brown circles of perpetual water, stirring with great gentleness the eternal complement of skeleton and spawn. (AS 297-300)

Theodora's spiritual quest, albeit contingent and perhaps even dubious, and its fragile and impermanent resolution thus betrayed are quite the same as Slothrop's in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Slothrop's sudden and momentary spiritual reconciliation with the natural world—a sequence also encompassing baptism, passion and sanctification, ersatz though these might be—is augured in the recovery of his lost harmonica:

Slothrop moseys down the trail to a mountain stream where he's left his harp to soak all night, wedged between a couple of rocks in a quiet pool. [ . . . ]

Through the flowing water, the holes of the old Hohner Slothrop found are warped one by one, squares being bent like notes, a visual blues being played by the clear stream. There are harpmen and dulcimer players in all the rivers, wherever water moves. Like that Rilke prophesied,

And though Earthliness forget you,  
To the stilled earth say: I flow.  
To the rushing water speak: I am.

It is still possible, even this far out of it, to find and make audible the spirits of lost harpmen. Whacking the water out of his harmonica, reeds singing against his leg, picking up the single blues at bar 1 of this morning's segment, Slothrop, just suckin' on his harp, is closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet, and he doesn't even know it. [ . . . ]

He's kept alone. [ . . . ] He's letting hair and beard grow, wearing a dungaree shirt and trousers. [ . . . ] But he likes to spend whole days naked, ants crawling up his legs, butterflies lighting on his shoulders, watching the life on the mountain, getting to know shrikes and capercaillie, badgers and marmots. Any number of directions he ought to be moving in, but he'd rather stay right here for now. [ . . . ]

He's been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose. [. . .]

Past Slothrops, say averaging one a day, ten thousand of them, some more powerful than others, had been going over every sundown to the furious host. [. . .]

At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagled at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection. [. . .]

[H]e became a crossroad, after a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural. (GR 622–26)

Music and light, asceticism and selflessness, naturism and immanence: in both instances these are disclosed as the necessary conditions for or pathways to spiritual realization, wholeness.

Such resonances aside, perhaps it is not so much a case of writers like White, Gaddis, Pynchon, Mathews and others consciously influencing or being influenced by one another as of their philosophical and literary inspiration deriving from similar sources. Thought, intellect, creativity: all exist within a finite range—a crucial recognition in the postmodernist ethos. A logical progression in the availability and refinement of ideas imbues culture and philosophy with the appearance of developmental stages. In the postmodern era the skeins of literary influence and intertextuality—manifest in both the writing and reading of literary texts—are sign and symptom of I. A. Richards's dictum that the "arts are our storehouse of recorded values" (32), or of Archimedes the dog's conceptualization of libraries as human "collective memory" (Ireland 16), both of those, perhaps, versions of the Jungian notion of a collective unconscious. Indeed, speaking of influence, the figure of "Father Jung" looms large over modern art and literature.<sup>29</sup>

For an author like John Updike, who ultimately refuses to look askance at the Modernist project of integration, art and life are separable and can be compartmentalized in terms of production and reception. His faith is (expressed) in fiction, whereas for White and Pynchon, no such assurances are to be found in the perennial unknowabilities of lives lived. Pynchon's narrative persona in *Mason & Dixon*, the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, says of the style of "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 14ff.) which both his creator and White purvey: "'Brae, your Cousin proceeds unerringly to the Despair at the Core of History,—and the Hope. As savages commemorate their great Hunts with Dancing, so History is the Dance of our Hunt for Christ, and how we have far'd'" (M&D 75). And yet,

despite the paraphernalia and peccadillos of Modernism, and premonitions of an emergent postmodernity, White's and Pynchon's novels are magnificent rococo flourishes at the tail end of the realist tradition, with which White at least allied himself most closely: "I feel that my novels are quite old-fashioned and traditional—almost Nineteenth Century. I've never thought of myself as an innovator" (Herring and Wilkes 139). Chapter mottos and epigraphs hark back to an earlier time of fiction, an era when the novel was revered as artefact. Indeed, in the self-conscious intertextuality and narrative reflexiveness of their fictions, White and Pynchon bring the literary aesthetic full circle, return to the beginnings of the tradition of the novel in the recollection of the picaresque mode of narrative discourse.

Most prominent in White's and Pynchon's literary visions are the elusive deliquescences and efflorescences, and the exuberant epiphanies experienced by their characters, often only hinted at, or revealed as phenomena beyond words. Such illuminations come to symbolize an ultimately extrusive, mystical and unattainable Faith. And in the almost-mocking euphemisms and paraphernalia—the jewels and feathers, makeup, garish clothes, rainbow lights and disguises, and all the conventions of polite, genteel, civilized society—is ever an admission of the essential emptiness of the human soul in its subjugation to the prevailing social regime and cultural vogues:

"He called himself 'Blicero.' [. . .] Things were falling apart, and he reverted to some ancestral version of himself, screamed at the sky, sat hours in a rigid trance, with his eyes rolled clear up into his head. Breaking without warning into that ungodly coloratura. White blank ovals, the eyes of a statue, with the gray rain behind them. He had left 1945, wired his nerves back into the pre-Christian earth we fled across, into the Urstoff of the primitive German, God's poorest and most panicked creature. You and I perhaps have become over the generations so Christianized, so enfeebled by Gesellschaft and our obligation to its celebrated 'Contract,' which never did exist, that we, even we, are appalled by reversions like that. But deep, out of its silence, the Urstoff wakes, and sings." (GR 465)

"But now we have *only* the structure left us, none of the great rainbow plumes, no fittings of gold." (722)

Theodora Goodman traverses just this "static, rigid . . . untouchable . . . *jardin exotique*" of a decadent and decaying European civilization:

There had been many goals, all of them deceptive. In Paris the metal hats just failed to tinkle. The great soprano in Dresden sang up her soul for love

into a wooden cup. In England the beige women, stalking through the rain with long feet and dogs, had the monstrous eye of sewing machines. Throughout the gothic shell of Europe, in which there had never been such a buying and selling, of semi-precious aspirations, bulls' blood, and stuffed doves, the stone arches cracked, the aching wilderness, in which the ghosts of Homer and St. Paul and Tolstoy waited for the crash. (AS 145–46)

For White's visionaries—Theodora, "thrown down by lightning on her twelfth birthday" (45), Stan Parker, Arthur Brown, Hurtle Duffield and Elizabeth Hunter—lightning has the "power to open souls" (TM 151), to wake the Urstoff, make it sing. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's "Polish undertaker in a rowboat, out in the storm tonight to see if he can get struck by lightning," searches for such illumination as these characters wordlessly experience: "All over Europe, it came to him one night in a flash (though not the kind he wanted), at this very moment, are hundreds, who knows maybe thousands, of people walking around, who have been struck by lightning and survived. What stories *they* could tell!" (GR 663). In the fiction of Patrick White, Pynchon's own Uncle Evelyn perhaps, some had, some already have.

—Sydney

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Both Dame Leonie Kramer and David Marr made the analogy between the critical furor surrounding the "Demidenko affair" and the fatwa pronounced against Rushdie by the Iranian ayatollah. The cases for and against Darville's *Hand That Signed the Paper* as a worthy work of fiction are perhaps best represented by Andrew Riemer and Robert Manne, respectively. For further commentary on the fraud and its volatile aftermath, see William Schaffer.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, Brian McHale legitimates examples of such "intertextual boundary-violation," and aligns them with "the space which Michel Foucault . . . has called a *heterotopia*" (17–18ff.). Helen Daniel, however, who had once championed Australian postmodern writers and grouped them among "liars," was, ironically, unable to accommodate Darville's charade in *The Hand That Signed the Paper* when it was uncovered. In editorials, reviews and forums during 1995 and 1996, Daniel, editor of the *Australian Book Review*, fostered a bitter campaign against the novel, and against the boards and judges of the Miles Franklin Prize and the Australian Literature Society awards who refused to rescind the novel's prizes.

<sup>3</sup>Neither Gaddis nor Pynchon, though, refers explicitly to specific precursors of his characteristic literary styles, themes and narrative strategies.

<sup>4</sup>Kurt Vonnegut's earlier *Player Piano* also refers to Wiener and cybernetic theory.

<sup>5</sup>Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), besides tracing the Masonic conspiracy back to the ancient Egyptian Atonists, contains many such extempore reading suggestions, so the aside in *Gravity's Rainbow* is also an ironized stylistic nod toward the earlier text. Pynchon's extraliterary endorsement also recalls Tristram Shandy's admonition to the reader regarding Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*: "you must read the book;—find it out yourself" (226). With such an overt acknowledgement of intertextuality, Pynchon actually preempts its advent as a critical vogue under the auspices of deconstruction and postmodernism. He places himself in that lineage Marc Chénétier describes as the "Rabelais-Cervantes-Sterne-Joyce connection that is so meaningful in the eyes of the 'postmodernists' [but] was in no way evident to preceding generations" (14).

<sup>6</sup>In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tantivy suggests the usefulness of "'operational paranoia'" (25), an instinctive and solipsistic form of self-preservation; Pirate Prentice advocates "'[c]reative paranoia [. . .] developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system'" (638). Gilles DeLeuze and Félix Guattari (52–53ff.), Fredric Jameson (25–31) and Jean-François Lyotard (83) make positive analogies between Jacques Lacan's diagnosis of clinical psychoses such as paranoia and schizophrenia, and postmodern modes of expression, analysis and resistance. Conversely, Jean Baudrillard describes the postmodernist schizophrenic as "the obscene victim of the world's obscenity" (27); and N. Katherine Hayles likewise contends that postmodern experience inevitably leads to "the denaturing of the human": "For those who live postmodernism . . . the denaturing of time means that they have no history. To live postmodernism is to live as schizophrenics are said to do, in a world of disconnected present moments that jostle one another but never form a continuous (much less logical) progression" (282).

<sup>7</sup>After coming to New York to accept a Ford Foundation award, Arrabal travelled extensively in the United States in 1959, the same year Pynchon applied for a Ford Foundation grant (see Weisenburger, TPTT).

<sup>8</sup>Chambers cites Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World*, Robert Graves's *White Goddess* and Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough* as influences on Pynchon's work. Moore also lists these three texts among Gaddis's primary sources (RG 54–58). There is also remarkable parity between *The Recognitions* and *Gravity's Rainbow* in references to Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, parity in number, frequency and even page placement. Most striking, in both novels page 622 contains a reference to the *Sonnets* as well as an echo of the line "Weißt du's noch nicht?" from "The First Elegy" (l 23). See Moore, RG 151, 211, 243, 245, and Steven Weisenburger, GRC 340. My thanks to Nathan Walters for alerting me to this apparent coincidence.

<sup>9</sup>According to Warren Leamon, Mathews's *Conversions*, "with its underpinning of myth borrowed from Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, owes much to Joyce and Eliot" (8). Moore notes that Mathews "modeled the title of . . . *The Conversions* . . . on that of Gaddis's first novel, though he didn't actually read *The Recognitions* until sometime in the 1970s" (WG 139). Finally, in his review of *V.* for the *New York Times Book Review*, George Plimpton identifies *V.* as an example of "American picaresque," along with Mathews's "generally overlooked though brilliant novel." Perhaps Pynchon—even if he was, as Plimpton has it, "a recluse" living in Mexico City (5)—was alerted to *The Conversions* by this review.

<sup>10</sup>Johnston comments that "in bringing together Sinisterra and Wyatt late in the novel, Gaddis offers a parodic commentary upon the meeting of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*" (76, 94, 177).

<sup>11</sup>Of course, the claim that Gaddis had not read *Ulysses* per se could be something of a dissimulation; it is inconceivable that he had not read about it before or during the writing of *The Recognitions*.

<sup>12</sup>In a conscious tribute, White took the title of his second novel from the last words of Joyce's *Dubliners*, while Gaddis's contemptuous mock-allegories in *The Recognitions* seem to resonate in White's *Riders in the Chariot*, further compounding and complicating these mooted skeins of influence and possible derivation.

<sup>13</sup>White used the phrase "indefatigable unravellers" to describe some of his Australian critics who sought to attach systematic symbolic signification to the appearance of colors in his fiction (Herring and Wilkes 140). White was short-listed for the Nobel Prize in 1969, 1970 and 1972, much to his chagrin on each occasion. When the 1972 prize was awarded to "the dreary" Heinrich Böll, White remarked: "If Mailer is even the faintest possibility the whole thing is a farce. And to pass over Borges and Nabokov!" White's response, when he was informed of his award in 1973, was "[b]ewilderment, alarm and cynicism" (qtd. in Marr 534, 536).

<sup>14</sup>The antagonism (and cultural cringe) of Australian critics is exemplified by John Frow (reviewing Simon During), who construes it as a "saving fact that despite his official status [White] 'remains more or less unread'" in Australia (8). See Patricia A. Morley (235n5) for a summary of the forms of critical opposition to White's work in Australia.

<sup>15</sup>Quoting sales figures for White's novels, During contends that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, "White's appeal was declining faster in the U.S. than in Britain and Australia" (8).

<sup>16</sup>White supported Australian writers such as David Ireland, Martin Boyd, Christina Stead, David Malouf and Elizabeth Riddell by private philanthropy and by the establishment of an award and bequest from his Nobel prize money. Brian Kiernan traces the public reception of White's work in Australia in less antipathetic terms than During uses, but he too notes that White's name had



“slipped from most minds” after 1945, and that *The Aunt’s Story* “attracted little notice” in Australia when it appeared there despite the author’s return. Kiernan concludes that White’s success in being simultaneously an international figure and undeniably Australian in many of his subjects and settings helped produce a climate in which other, particularly younger, writers felt encouraged to experiment formally and stylistically (66–67). However, comparable statements about White’s literary influence on succeeding generations of Australian writers and readers are conspicuously absent from Kiernan’s account.

<sup>17</sup>Jim Hall, a one-time acquaintance, recalls that Pynchon “‘was deathly afraid that he would plagiarize another author’” as he wrote portions of *Gravity’s Rainbow* in Manhattan Beach during the 1960s (qtd. in Johnson). A photograph of the small ground-floor apartment where Pynchon purportedly lived at the time appears with Johnson’s article.

<sup>18</sup>At times in *The Living and the Dead*, both Elyot Standish and his sister, Eden, conspicuously adopt a second-person mode of address whereby the narrative vantage of the text suddenly seems to seep between the characters’ streams of consciousness and detached omniscience. Pynchon uses the same narrative strategy, in much the same tone and to much the same effect, in both the 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article “A Journey into The Mind of Watts” and *The Crying of Lot 49* (8), as well as more extensively and aberrantly in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

<sup>19</sup>My thanks to Chris Karatnytsky for pointing out this similarity.

<sup>20</sup>*Gravity’s Rainbow* augurs a similar vision when Slothrop encounters the “great frontierless streaming” of Displaced Persons—adrift, weighed down by the burdens of materialism and nationality—“over the surface of the Imperial cauldron” in Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War: “so the populations move, across the open meadow, limping, marching, shuffling, carried, hauling along the detritus of an order, a European and bourgeois order they don’t yet know is destroyed forever” (549–51).

<sup>21</sup>Pynchon actually uses this phrase in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in a typically wry aside: “What the leaflet neglected to mention was that Benjamin Franklin was also a Mason, and given to cosmic forms of practical jokesterism, of which the United States of America may well have been one” (663–64).

<sup>22</sup>Marr remarks that White “acted all his characters at the typewriter, and in the theatre of his imagination he played everyone” (151). This performative narrative mode in White’s and Pynchon’s novels recalls that in which, in Helen Reed’s words, “Cervantes’ *pícaros* freely embark on their adventures like actors assuming roles” (19).

<sup>23</sup>The reference late in *Gravity’s Rainbow* to Slothrop’s future as “Uncle Tyrone” is a further connection (744).

<sup>24</sup>J. F. Burrows refers to White’s “fugal mode” (92ff.) and to the dual meaning of fugue, the musical and the “connotations of flight”: “To the extent

that Theodora's fugues are flights, it is as imaginative projections of herself into these other lives, and not as retreats from 'reality.' What she is doing is facing her own problems in the subtly altered perspectives that these other lives afford" (90).

<sup>25</sup>Thelma Herring (12ff.) and Burrows (99–101) amass extensive catalogues of Homeric allusions, some more readily apparent than others, in White's text.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Pynchon's meditation in "Entropy" on the contiguity of the two denotations of the term:

And as every good Romantic knows, the soul (*spiritus, ruach, pneuma*) is nothing, substantially, but air; it is only natural that warpings in the atmosphere should be recapitulated in those who breathe it. So that over and above the public components—holidays, tourist attractions—there are private meanderings, linked to the climate as if this spell were a *stretto* passage in the year's fugue: haphazard weather, aimless loves, unpredicted commitments: months one can easily spend *in fugue*, because oddly enough, later on, winds, rains, passions of February and March are never remembered in that city, it is as if they had never been. (SL 83)

<sup>27</sup>The fugal structure of *The Aunt's Story* provides a similar parallel.

<sup>28</sup>White's discovery of the Tarot in 1963 affords another point of comparison. The painter Lawrence Daws recalls how, when he introduced Tarot images to White, the two men discussed

"the possibility that they were archetypal images that we carried around and that, loosely, the images they evoked were common to all people. . . . Then onto Jung. The idea of making oneself *whole*, of making *a mandala of one's life* . . . appealed strongly to Patrick. . . . I think Jung clarified for Patrick the idea of the *whole* and the attempting to arrive at it as the real purpose of our lives." (qtd. in Marr 451–52)

<sup>29</sup>Alex Gray, White's postmodern anima in *Memoirs of Many in One*, refers to "dear old Father Jung who, I am told, I misinterpret" (54)—perhaps a wry rejoinder to David Tacey's suggestion that Jungian elements in White's fiction manifest subconsciously, or are imperfectly realized.

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