

Jissom on the Reports: A Thoroughly Post-Modern Pynchon

Louis Mackey

Writing Pynchon: Strategies in Fictional Analysis, by Alec McHoul and David Wills.
Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990. 239 pp. \$29.95; pb \$12.95.

Writing Pynchon (hereafter WP) proclaims itself the first and so far only critical work to approach Pynchon's texts from the standpoint of "CLT." CLT is the authors' abbreviation for "contemporary literary theory," by which they mean deconstruction. The identification is tendentious to say the least, since the authors of WP (hereafter MW) must know that contemporary literary theory is a near-chaotic hodge-podge of reader-response views, new historicism, new pragmatism, French and other Freudianisms, several varieties of Marxism and feminism, structuralism, hermeneutics, and a welter of other non-deconstructive models and methodologies. But never mind. Convinced that a deconstructive reading of Pynchon was long overdue, I entered WP with sanguine expectations. A first reading dashed my hopes, so I read it again. The second reading confirmed the first. MW seem breathlessly eager to display their own deconstructive ingenuity (look what we can do with texts!) and rather lackadaisical about understanding Pynchon. No doubt they would insist that "understanding Pynchon" is a misunderstanding from the p. o. v. of CLT. But I am not so easily intimidated.

WP consists of an introduction and eight chapters: two (1 and 8) on *Gravity's Rainbow*, three (2-4) on *The Crying of Lot 49*, one (5) on Pynchon's introduction to *Slow Learner*, and two (6 and 7) on *V*.¹ The introduction distinguishes WP's deconstructive take on Pynchon from that of virtually all previous criticism, here stigmatized as naively logocentric. What these "exegetical pastimes" (WP 2) fail to note is that Pynchon's texts are, "quite simply . . . Writing" (WP 6), in the not quite so simple sense that word has in Derrida. Therefore, the only undeluded way to read them is--presumably in the Barthesian sense--to write them. Hence: *Writing Pynchon*.

Chapter 1 proposes and rejects a number of "rhetorical" readings of *Gravity's Rainbow* (hereafter GR)--characterological, linguistic, and cinematic--in which the signifiers of the text are taken as oblique figures of a transcendental signified that inspires them, orders them,

and provides them with fulfilling significance. (Shades of Calvinism!) Readings of this sort are ruled out on the plausible ground that it is impossible, given only the text, to distinguish textual signs from the realities they purport to signify. In place of these futile hermeneutic exercises we are offered a "post-rhetorical" reading of GR as a text in which "the arbitrariness of the signifier is accepted for what it is and is no longer a cause for sustained humanist angst" (WP 51). (So much for paranoia.) The signifier/signified relation, and the associated binaries that seem to organize the surface of GR (us/Them, reality/fantasy, etc.), are not reconciled in a higher unity but "overridden" by a "material substance" (Slothrop, cinema, etc.) that prolongs the chain of signifiers without returning them to a transcendental ground. "Substance, that is, supplants rhetoric--though all this, need we stress, is accomplished within and as the play of signs, in themselves, of course, nothing but material points" (WP 61). Do not expect, therefore, anything like a moral or ontological meaning to emerge from a perusal of GR. Ain't nobody here but us signifiers: the signifiers of a text that is itself an essay in the endless and endlessly arbitrary supplementarity of signification.

WP's readings of *Lot 49* "bookmatch" (WP 11-12)² Pynchon's text with texts of Derrida ("Envois" and *Of Grammatology* in particular), examine Oedipa's/Pynchon's attempt to locate an escape route (the space of an "athetical ethics" [WP 90]) between the horns of the deadly double-bind,³ and finally, in order to "discover something that [criticism] didn't set out to find in the first place" (WP 109), enter *Lot 49* (and *Of Grammatology*) through their typographical errors. The bookmatching (chapter 2) turns up some Kute Korrespondences, but never quite manages to mock up a blue guitar. The search for an "athetical ethics," which the philosopher John Caputo has been conducting for some time in the works of (*inter alios*) Derrida,⁴ remains (in chapter 3) an unfulfilled and perhaps frivolous promise. And the digression on typos, expressed purpose to the contrary notwithstanding, is yet another "conspiracy-to-succeed" (WP 109) in which the critical argument (of chapter 4) finds in the letter of the text just what it set out to find: the reflection of its own exceedingly clever countenance.

Invoking and complicating the Freudian concept of transference, WP's discussion of the introduction to *Slow Learner* (chapter 5) predictably kicks around the problem of the author (a dead horse) and (confronted by an embarrassingly straightforward and un-Pynchonian text) magnifies the duplicity of autobiographical self-representation. In chapter 7, V. provides MW the occasion to compare the feminist theories of Alice Jardine and Teresa de Lauretis. The question that is

up for grabs in these pages--are there actual historical women or only the representation of woman?--is real and serious. But the discussion does little to explain (though that it will offer feminists any liberating surprises. The brief and epilogic chapter 8 ("Fall out") juxtaposes GR with two eschatological texts of Derrida ("No apocalypse . . ." and "Of an apocalyptic tone . . .") to adumbrate the notion of the literary text as the prophecy of an end that is always arriving and has never yet arrived. Well, all right.

MW's fascination with themselves as strategists in fictional analysis pervades the entire book. And does not, I think, improve it. Much of it, if you're interested in Pynchon, is not all that interesting, and the trendier-than-anyone manner is more often than not just tiresome. But I hasten to add that the first chapter on V. (chapter 6) is an exception to the rule. MW's reading distinguishes V. (the novel), V. (the signifier), and V (the object of Stencil's quest). V of course is never found. All that Stencil gets is a series of V.'s and things (mostly women) that begin with V. If V is the transcendental signified and V. the material signifier, then V., the text, is the deconstruction of the V.-to-V signification. Stencil's search for V is motivated by an elliptical mention (or is it a use?) of the signifier V. in a paternal text--plus the invincible implication that where there's a V. there must be a V lurking somewhere in the crevices of history. There's gotta be a pony. However, V the signified does not materialize, and the quest in that sense fails. But the inference if Sr then Sd, always disappointed, is never finally discredited by the succession of Srs (V.'s). Naturally enough:

V is the transcendental signified which V. deconstructs, in the writing, so that there is henceforth none. V is the necessity and impossibility of such a notion. . . . Every case of V is a case of the fall. (WP 183)

It is the desire for V that generates the (potentially) endless proliferation of V.'s and the repeated frustrations that infinity entails. And vice versa: the interminable procession of V.'s ceaselessly rekindles the lust (for V) that it ceaselessly fails to gratify.

It is true that the sign never succeeds in referring. But it is, as sign, the intention to refer. That intention is both the effect and the constitutive essence of the sign. Analogously, while the relation of Sr and Sd is irreducibly differential, neither is intelligible save in terms of the other, and both together are not intelligible at all. V. is, most spectacularly, the textual demonstration--the "reality," so to speak--of this self-deconstructing relationship. To the extent that it situates its reading in this troublesome dialectic, WP says what needs to be said

on the subject: "If *V* is the end of Stencil's search, then *V*. is about there being no end to it" (WP 181).⁵

The reading of *V*. in chapter 6 succeeds as well as it does because its understanding of deconstruction is more sophisticated than the strategies deployed in its name by other sections of this book. Not that it's easy to say just what "deconstruction" means. The intentions of the founder are not always clear. As for the critics who march behind its banner, it is all too often the case that *quot homines tot sententiae*. Far be it from me to claim that I'm the one who finally got it right. But I think I can point to some ways MW get it wrong. Conservative foes of deconstruction view it (with alarm) as a kind of theoretical nihilism that authorizes irresponsible critical practice: since the text itself means nothing at all, the deconstructive critic is free to make it mean anything s/he pleases. Enemies both right and left agree that deconstruction, evacuating the human (moral, social, political, historical, religious) substance of literature, is nothing but a frivolous play with deracinated signifiers. I think the opponents of deconstruction are wrong on both counts. But I fear that CLT as wielded by MW does nothing to discourage and much to confirm their suspicions.

A few instances, ranging from the commonsensical to the literary-theoretical, may suggest what I have in mind. My response to many of MW's pronouncements is agreement-with-demurrer: yes, but. . . . For example, they sweep practically all earlier Pynchon criticism clean off the board. Unreconstructed--or unredeconstructed--hermeneutics, all of it. I concede (with a yawn) that much of what has been written about Pynchon is critically inert: unimaginative, unexciting, and unilluminating. The few works MW exempt from the general condemnation are also, by and large, my favorites. Nevertheless, pedestrian though they be, there is something to be said for the many thematic studies, source studies, background studies, interlinear glosses, and the like turned out by the Pynchon industry. Like the readings of GR offered and retracted by MW themselves (chapter 1), they are not adequate, exhaustive, or final. Not properly criticism but propadeutic to criticism, they do not (MW are right about this) reckon with the textuality of Pynchon's text. But they are not for all that worthless. These pre- or sub-deconstructive studies contribute information and insight to the ongoing critical examination of his corpus. Information and insight--this is the point I would underscore--that is essential to the continued reading of Pynchon even by the strategies of deconstruction. Whatever novel theories future critics may come up with, deconstructive reading can subsist only on the basis of, and in continuing dialectical interaction with, more

conventional modes of literary analysis--logocentric, hermeneutic, rhetorical, what have you. Deconstructive reading is a product of the most recent turn of self-reflection in philosophy and critical theory, and it is not treasonable to observe that newreading is therefore parasitic not only on its subject text but also and more urgently on the entire history of oldreading.⁶

The dead father is still your old man, and you're never rid of him.⁷ Take history. MW make much of the impossibility of ordering GR chronologically. That is certainly the case. Many of its episodes cannot be dated, and--even if we make allowance for all the analepses and analepses-within-analepses, the drug-induced hallucinations, expeditions into the world beyond, etc.--the events that make up the novel cannot be arranged so as to yield beginning-middle-end. MW rightly note, in opposition to the confident pronouncements of many readers, that we do not really know the identity of the rocket that is descending on the Orpheus Theatre at the end of the book (WP 214-15). Is it the 00000, the 00001, Blicero's raving, or some never-to-be-imagined apocalypse-to-come? No answer. The text won't compute. Be that as it may, the action of GR is situated at the end of WW II, and the larger curve of the narrative takes us from December, 1944, to (at least) the fall of the first bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. Achronology is the dialectical opposite of chronology and cannot be recognized as such otherwise. A failure/distortion of temporal sequence is always the failure/distortion of a particular sequence already taken as normative. Else there were no failure, no distortion. This does not demonstrate the "reality" of the supposed normative nor the "unreality" of its other. But it does mean that, while the book resists, almost successfully, standard narrative parsing, any reading of GR that ignores its historical positioning and its movement from the Battle of Britain through V-E Day and beyond is courting bad faith.

"Actual" history and "fictionalized" history define each other. To insist (correctly) on the textuality of both does not obliterate the difference between them, though it certainly renders it undecidable. MW (WP 47) protest too much. One can identify--and many readers have usefully identified--the historical counterparts of persons, events, and objects in GR.⁸ To be sure, such identifications do not yield the assurance that history : text :: real : fictional, for history itself and not just the history in GR is always only the representation of history. What we call history is what we call history. It is not the transcendental signified intended by the signifiers of the text, and cannot therefore be taken as (the source of) the meaning of GR. Nevertheless, the presence of historical allusions in the text is not without significance. No reader, even if s/he were to do all the

research Pynchon is rumored to have done, could confidently distinguish historical fact from Pynchonian fiction.⁹ The tension between history and fiction (created by the narrative's historical placement and its manifold historical references) plus the impossibility of sorting out fact and fancy (the effect of their common textuality) constitutes a major part of the overall impact of GR. Only a weak misreading of the novel would elide this paradox. The textual dissonance¹⁰ of history and fiction--"Outside and Inside interpiercing one another too fast, too finely labyrinthine, for either category to have much hegemony any more" (GR 681)--makes "history" (the larger narrative in which we think we live) more bizarre than the wildest fantasy and "fiction" (the story we think we're reading) more intimidating than the evening news. "'The glozing neuters of the world' have no easy road to haul down, Wear-the-Pantsers . . ." (GR 677).

The history/fiction case is exemplary. CLT in the hands of MW has a lot (almost everything) to do with deconstructing binary oppositions. Well and good. However, while Derrida suggests¹¹ that you deconstruct binaries by first inverting them and then displacing them into the order of textuality, MW are apparently determined to obliterate them. And that's a different kettle of Fish. Displacement is not levelling. MW tell us that "*Gravity's Rainbow* handles or plays with dualistic differences" in such a way "that they are overcome by making any dilemma's dual aspects appear identical" (WP 54; my emphasis). Just say No to "overcome" and "identical." All binary oppositions instantiate the structure of the sign: signifier(signifying)signified. Uncritically accepted, they prescribe a rhetorical understanding of the text and authorize a logocentric hermeneutic. Deconstruction as practiced by MW topples the hierarchies, leaving us with a clutter of insignificant signifiers, and "signs, in themselves," are "nothing but material points" (WP 61). Razing the structure in this way, MW belie the textuality of the text: the play of *différance* that produces the effect of meaning even in the absence of the transcendental signified. Reducing the sign to a "material point," they occlude its character as trace: the intention-to-signify which continues to define it as sign even when the relation of signification is terminally solicited. Deconstruction is not destruction, the signifier is unmotivated but not (as MW would have it) arbitrary, and the end of the book is, like every apocalypse, an end that is ever coming but never here. GR tried to warn them: the war is never over, and it is always too soon to go romping in the ruins.

For reasons such as these I feel that MW have given aid and comfort to the enemies of deconstruction. There is no escape from

rhetoric. Deconstruction does indeed put rhetoric at risk, and radically so, but it does not thereby sanction irresponsible word-play. And there is no release from "sustained humanist angst." Deconstruction makes plenty of trouble for humanism, but it does not take the gravity out of *Gravity's Rainbow* nor (in general) deprive fiction of its imminence for "the ends of man."¹² It certainly doesn't, for example, license the textual insensitivity and the failure of sensibility that is capable of describing Roger's and Jessica's Advent experience as "cutesy"¹³--an adjective that is perhaps better applied to WP than to anything Pynchon ever wrote.

The problem of reading, from a deconstructive point of view, is not that texts are without meaning. If that were the case, one might (as MW appear to think one can) arrest the *mise en abyme* and come to rest in the material signifier as a field of "writerly" play (WP 57-61). The problem is that the meaning of the text is undecidable, so that reading remains and must remain a rhetorico-ethical activity. Granted, no reading can justify itself by appealing to the pure intentions of an authorial origin, nor may it hope for a textually mediated epiphany in which the reality intended by the signs definitively declares itself. MW recognize that "plainly, not just any reading will do." But it is not the case that "we have no idea what the criteria of acceptability are any more" (WP 48). We may not have "narratorial authority" (WP 48), but we have, *en effet*, the text. And the fictional text, *qua* fictional (every text is fictional at some level), is simply the determinate representation of the indeterminate representationality of language. It projects, as its effect, not one single and fully determinate meaning, nor an infinite variety of indeterminable meanings, but a determinate though indeterminable plurality of possibilities of meaning. Actualized by the reader, the text continually generates the differences that constitute (rhetorically) the reading and repeatedly defers the arrival at a referent that would constitute (ethically) its closure. So conceived, every reading is at once and as such a writing, and vice versa. So engaged, the reader-collaborator bears the responsibility (rhetorical) for the production of meaning and (ethical) for sustaining the exposure to alterity that makes responsibility possible.

At the very outset of their discussion MW suggest that "Pynchon's fiction may be more contribution to CLT than 'object text' for it" (WP 2). I wouldn't go so far as "more than," but I would subscribe to "as much as." GR, for example, is rather obviously a novel, and one hell of a novel. Maybe even the long-awaited Great American Novel. It is also a skeptical essay on the novel: what it is and how to read it. Both novel and theory of the novel, it enacts the death (or deconstruction) of the novel.¹⁴ The pervasive presence in GR

of Calvinism and its attendant paranoia seems to sponsor a logocentric reading. Calvinism is essentially a hermeneutic, and the conventional hermeneutic of fiction is simply a critical form of paranoia.¹⁵ At the same time GR disappoints the paranoid expectations it arouses: paranoia is again and again interrupted by anti-paranoid misgivings. And the question--paranoia or anti-paranoia?--is never decided by the text but handed (along with his ass) to the reader--"Now everybody--" (GR 760)--who can't make the decision either. You can't read the book, and (since anti-paranoia is blocked by paranoia as surely as arsy-versy) you can't write it. Nor can you stop doing both. If that's not a double-bind doubly-bound, I don't know what is.

In opting for a deconstructive reading of Pynchon in place of all other kinds of reading (hermeneutic, rhetorical, etc.), MW undercut their project and frustrate their purpose. Deconstructive reading exists only in opposition to logocentric reading and is dialectically defined by this opposition. But the opposition itself begs deconstruction *ad infinitum*, so that a deconstructive reading is not only never done, it is never done with logocentrism. Deconstruction does not escape logocentrism; it inhabits it and solicits it from within like an imp of the perverse.¹⁶ The effect of deconstruction is not to terminate logocentrism, but to inaugurate its endless closure. Therefore the opposition (logocentrism/deconstruction) that defines MW's approach to Pynchon and sanctions the dismissal of every other approach is yet another binary that has to be deconstructed. By making it the armature of a critical text and using it as a criterion of critical propriety, MW relapse into a form of the critical orthodoxy they decry and from which they think themselves liberated. Unmistakably, WP proclaims itself the right way (at last) to read Pynchon.

Alas, MW read Pynchon all too little and all too seldom. They remark the tendency of Pynchon's critics to return again and again to the same proof texts (WP 108), but these texts (and in this context) are almost the only texts of Pynchon cited in the pages of WP. MW seem to be systematically avoiding any detailed attention to the works they purport to be writing.¹⁷ The sole example of sustained close reading is the dilation on typos in chapter 4. For people who believe that Pynchon's texts make important contributions to contemporary literary theory, MW are surprisingly uninterested in learning anything from them. Their overriding purpose, so it seems, is to use (on a darker day I might have said "abuse") the text (or pretext) of Pynchon to advance their own literary-theoretical project. It is odd (to say the least) that their strategies in fictional analysis owe so little to the body of writings that supposedly inspire them. One suspects (to say the most) that the works of Pynchon serve only as *exempla* of the critical

presuppositions MW bring to them. For they discover (to say the best) very little they didn't set out to find in the first place.

The (old) New Critics thought they were responding to the poem itself as an exquisitely formed verbal object--a well-wrought urn. Their preoccupation with interpretation goes a long way toward explaining their avoidance of all but occasional and *ad hoc* excursions into theory. It is clear in retrospect that their concept of the "poem itself" was organized by a whole system of more or less unexamined theoretical assumptions. Nevertheless--meticulously attentive to the language of the text, sensitive to matters of tone and feeling--the New Critics did encourage the altogether wholesome habit of close reading. No one succeeds in reading with an innocent eye, least of all those who think they do so. But the New Critics did try, in a way virtually unprecedented in the history of criticism, to let the text interpret itself. And however naively misguided it may be to suppose that one can simply learn from poems what poems are and what they do, the New Critical project is not to be casually discarded in favor of the latest fashion in CLT. On the contrary, close reading of the New Critical variety is a necessary presupposition of deconstructive reading. Close reading, like logocentrism, is not an affliction we have finally been cured of, but a piece of our critical heritage that has to be comprehended and corrected in the context of a deeper theoretical self-understanding. As Derrida points out, conventional interpretation does no more than delimit the range of responsible readings and ward off egregious misunderstandings.¹⁸ But this preliminary fencing in and fending off prepares the ground on which a deconstructive reading can track the illogic of the signifier as it crosses and doublecrosses the logic of the signified. In the theory and practice of Paul de Man (not mentioned in WP), it is a matter of attending to the way the rhetoric of the text undercuts its grammar. But you can't pay your sin tax unless you know your syntax.

If I have been excessively hard on WP, it is just that my disappointment was proportioned to my expectations. The texts of Pynchon underwrite a deconstructive reading. More than that, they instruct their readers in the art of reading deconstructively. Paul de Man remarked, in connection with Derrida's reading of Rousseau, that the deconstructive reading of a literary text is initiated by the text itself.¹⁹ The same might be said of Pynchon. My regret is that MW did not follow Pynchon's lead when they planned and executed their analytic maneuvers. Had they done so, their understanding of deconstruction might have been better informed and their writing of Pynchon more creatively engaged with the texts that recommend it.

--University of Texas at Austin

Notes

¹ *Vineland* appeared while WP was in press.

² Bookmatching is a process used by manufacturers of stringed instruments. A single piece of wood is sliced down the middle, opened like a book, and used to form the front or back of, for example, a violin or guitar. The result is symmetrical grain and even seasoning. MW treat the texts of Pynchon and those of CLT as a single piece, slice them down the middle, etc.

³ MW and possibly Mrs. Oedipa Maas seem to be confusing the double-bind with the excluded middle. As any schizophrenic knows, the double-bind is a bitch. But (pace Oedipa) excluded middles are not bad shit. They're good shit. Middles are supposed to be excluded, just as ass is supposed to be backward. Though she may be hip to metaphor, Oedipa obviously hasn't checked out Aristotle's logic. If she had, she'd know that Excluded Middle [A v -A] is one of the fundamental laws of good ole logocentric thought. (The other two are Contradiction [-(A.-A)] and Identity [A = A]. But all three come to the same thing, like the Persons of the Trinity. Anyway,) excluded middles--the middles that aren't there--are right on. What's bad is an included middle--the middle that is there:

a()b look here (WP 62, 88).



What MW are asking us to look for, there in that hole (and on this reading of *Lot 49*), is an included middle.

⁴ Cf. John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) ch. IX.

⁵ Incorporated into the text of chapter 6 are replicas of a letter (M to W), a postcard (W to M), a cartoon (M), and pages from the scratch pad (anonymous). These exhibits, which do nothing to advance the reading of *V.*, give a narcissistic twist to an otherwise exemplary discussion.

⁶ To judge from their *obiter dicta*, MW seem to think the only alternative to CLT (= deconstruction) is a critical practice that locates the meaning of a literary work in (a) the intentions of the author and/or (b) the reality signified by the words of the text. But just as deconstruction is only one of many current critical strategies, so CLT (*in toto*) has to be understood against the background of the whole history of criticism from which it has emerged and of which it is the latest episode. MW's simplistic opposition (deconstruction vs. traditional criticism) lacks historical depth and nuance.

⁷ So far as I am aware, no one has ever suggested Donald Barthelme's novel *The Dead Father* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975) be read as an allegory of criticism. But it might be worth it.

⁸ The latest and most thorough handbook of this sort is Steven Weisenburger's *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988).

⁹ Cf. Weisenburger's occasional non-committal gloss in the *Companion* on a reference he could not trace: unknown or fictional. But even Pynchon wasn't always

sure. According to Jules Siegel, Pynchon discovered that the muted posthorn, which he had invented for *Lot 49*, was actually the symbol of a private postal service in the middle ages ("Who is Thomas Pynchon . . . and why did he take off with my wife?" *Playboy* [Mar. 1977]: 172).

¹⁰ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973) 676-77.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 41-43.

¹² Cf. Derrida, "The Ends of Man," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 111-36.

¹³ The expression occurs in Alec McHoul, "Gravity's Rainbow's Golden Sections," *Pynchon Notes* 20-21 (1987): 38.

¹⁴ I am presently working on an essay that will try to justify the equation: GR = Great American Novel = essay on the novel = death of the novel.

¹⁵ Frank Kermode, "The Use of the Codes," *Approaches to Poetics*, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Columbia UP, 1973) 68-74. Kermode is speaking of *Lot 49*, to which my remarks also apply.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 24.

¹⁷ There are a number of factual errors in WP. For example, Osbie Feel is not (pace WP 25, 39) the secret cameraman who takes the film of Katje that is shown to octopus Grigori (GR 92). Who he is we never learn, though it is clear (GR 113) that Webley Silvernail is the projectionist involved. Item: Roger and Jessica do not attend a Christmas service but an Advent service (WP 27). Item: what MW identify as the "Old Firm Convention" (WP 27) is more likely a gathering of the Preterite in Hell (GR 537-48). And one more (there may be others): MW (WP 45) miss the allusion (GR 723) to the televised moon landing of 1969. GR is a dense and difficult text, and it is easy to make mistakes of this sort. But a devotion to the material signifier would seem to call for extra scrupulosity in such matters.

¹⁸ *Of Grammatology* 157-60. It should be kept in mind that deconstruction in the hands of Derrida himself is a subtle and supple instrument. His readings, though often shocking to a traditional sensibility, are almost always responsive to the movements of the subject text. MW's deconstructive forays into Pynchon mimic the playful-perverse moments in Derrida but not his serious philosophical argumentation nor his careful tracking of texts.

¹⁹ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd Ed. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) ch. VII. More seduction than rape, deconstruction is not something the reader does to the text but a movement-against-itself induced in the text by the reading.