

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL:
PYNCHON'S ECOLOGICAL GHOST STORIES

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It has long been recognized that the novels of Thomas Pynchon are filled with ghosts and revenants of all kinds, but few critics have ventured to offer an explanation of this fact. To fill the lack, Douglas Fowler has recently devoted an entire book to an investigation of this supernatural phenomenon; he argues that Pynchon's ghosts "adumbrate the malignant incursion into our world by a mysterious 'They,'" and he links Pynchon with writers like Ann Radcliffe and Bram Stoker whose main goal is to create an "effect" of "supernatural terror."² Throughout his book, Fowler argues against those critics who would naturalize Pynchon's ghosts into "metaphors" for "merely psychological" fears; he insists that the ghosts be seen as real embodiments of an evil supernatural force, as emissaries from an "Other Kingdom" whose mission is to destroy the human world.³

But there is a realm between the "merely psychological" and the "supernatural," a world that includes and links the two: the larger physical world or biosphere. In seeing Pynchon's ghosts as entirely supernatural and malignant, Fowler repeats the very mistake made by so many of Pynchon's characters: he fails to see the physical connection between the dead and the living, the spirits' affirmation of the interdependence of all things in this world. Pynchon has adapted the ghost story to the goals of the ecological movement in an effort to dramatize the interconnectedness of everything in the ecosphere and the urgent need for an understanding of this mutuality. Pynchon's ghosts represent a warning to the human race that, in destroying others in the physical world, one is really destroying oneself, for the lives of all species in the biosphere are interdependent and no single species in the system can be lopped off without shortening the life of those remaining. Pynchon's ghosts are thus supernatural emissaries from this--the natural--world, spirits of the murdered and of their murderers who are now also dead, revenants who return with the message that to kill is to be killed. These ghosts are not malignant, but only appear so to potential murderers, for they represent in a way that the murderers can dimly sense but not understand the fact that the killers sign their own death warrants every time they send another to death.

Thus Pynchon's ghosts only appear as wholly supernatural or merely psychological to one who misinterprets their affirmation of interdependence in the physical world as a malignant otherworldly force or as some entirely personal fear. But why would one's own natural alliance with the things of this world appear to one as an alien force, either as an other completely different from the self (supernatural) or as an otherness within,

a separateness from oneself (a psychological fear)? The answer shows us that in these ghost stories Pynchon is not merely concerned to promote an understanding of ecology, but also wants to attack the barriers to that understanding—for what distorts his characters' vision of their necessary dependence on others in this world is an ideology promoting division, a view of the whole earth as something to be divided up and devoured for the self's own gain. Whether in terms of imperialism abroad or consumerism at home, political, economic, and religious institutions are shown by Pynchon as constructing an individualist subject who sees himself as above and apart from certain "others" and as dependent for survival on their incorporation or elimination. These "others," whether colonized by the imperialistic subject abroad or bought, used, and discarded by the consumer-subject at home, are thus cast as aliens (foreign, consumable) from the very beginning, even before they return as ghosts. By attempting to cut the other off from the whole of which both it and the self are interdependent parts, the self inaugurates the very divisions whose forced closing will frighten it later on. The returning other looks alien only because the self, subject to various institutions and their ideologies of division, had originally designated the other as other; representing an ineluctable interdependence, these formerly living beings only return as death-dealing ghosts because the self killed them. The psychological fear that the self feels is indeed a return of the repressed, for these ghosts reassert a likeness which only looks uncanny because the self had itself denied it in the beginning. And their supernatural haunting only looks like an uncommon event because of the unnatural act of murder by which the self first attempted to divide nature in half.

That imperialist and consumerist ideologies are indeed self-destructive is thus the negative side of Pynchon's positive ecological message, as we shall see in the three ghost stories to be examined, the first a passage from *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and the latter two a combination of scenes, one embedded within the other, from *V.* (1963). I will also be making comparisons between these ghost stories and one of Pynchon's short stories, "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" (1959).⁴ It is still considered unusual to do an extended comparison of scenes from different works by the same author (in fact, most critical books and essays today are still unified around a single text);⁵ but I hope to show, not only that Pynchon's main themes have remained strikingly consistent from his first published short story (1959) to his last fiction to appear so far (1973), but also that even a minimal understanding of each work can only come from a realization of the interconnections among them all. This last is especially true in Pynchon's case because he writes a fiction of juxtaposition even more than of linear flow, and in juxtaposing scenes from different novels we can often see much more than we might in considering each as an isolated linear narrative.

We can begin by noting that the relation in *Gravity's Rainbow* between Frans Van der Groov and the dodoes has certain affinities with the relation between Siegel and the partygoers

in "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna." Frans, despite his sympathy for the dodoes indicated by the fact that he would give them a sporting chance ("don't I deserve a clumsy weapon for such a clumsy prey?" [GR 109]), nevertheless shoots hundreds of the birds as part of a Dutch hunting expedition on Mauritius. As with the murder of the partygoers, the dodoes are being killed because they cannot be "saved":

"If the species were not such a perversion," [Frans] wrote, "it might be profitably husbanded to feed our generations. I cannot hate them quite so violently as do some here. But what now can mitigate this slaughter? It is too late Perhaps a more comely beak, fuller feathering, a capacity for flight, however brief . . . details of Design. Or, had we but found savages on this island, the bird's appearance might have then seemed to us no stranger than that of the wild turkey of North America. Alas, their tragedy is to be the dominant form of Life on Mauritius, but incapable of speech."

That was it, right there. No language meant no chance of co-opting them in to what their round and flaxen invaders were calling Salvation. (GR 110)

To the Dutch imperialists, the native dodoes seem too alien to be part of God's creation; they are like no other birds the Europeans have ever experienced. There are not even any human--and thus fairly familiar--"savages" on the island who, speaking in explanation of the birds, might make the completely unfamiliar creatures seem less alien. The Dutch "make sense" of these seemingly unrecognizable animals by treating them as enemies of sense; the unknown other is "understood" as a threat to be eliminated,⁶ a threat to the order of the Christian universe and to every individual Christian dependent upon that order:

To some, it made sense. They saw the stumbling birds ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody argument against a Godly creation. Was Mauritius some first poison trickle through the sheltering dikes of Earth? Christians must stem it here, or perish in a second Flood, loosed this time not by God but by the Enemy. The act of ramming home the charges into their musketry became for these men a devotional act, one whose symbolism they understood. (GR 110)

Ironically, even if the dodoes had been familiar enough to be "saved," Christian salvation would have meant for them exactly the same thing that persecution as the instruments of Satan brings: "In both, eventually, the dodoes die" (GR 111), only as part of the Christian scheme the dodoes would have been killed as food provided by God for human Christians. Both justifications for murder find a parallel in Siegel's reasons for killing the

partygoers, whom he eliminates as beyond salvation and as too great a threat to the self, and whom he ingests (symbolically, through Loon), after seeing them not as "human" like himself but as edible "animals" ("beavers"). In these (non)relationships, the other is seen either as so alien to the self that it can and must be cut off, or as so compatible with and necessary to the self that it can and must be incorporated. There is either an extreme difference between self and other, or an absolute identification--nothing in between.

The point of these (non)relations between self and other is that they are meant to establish a (non)relation between the self and God. The identification in the minds of Siegel and the Dutch imperialists between themselves and God is dependent upon the destruction of the partygoers and the dodoes; Siegel and the Dutch imperialists divide self from other and decide the other's fate in order to feel that they, as God, can determine who will live (themselves) and who will die (the others). Thus the self, in killing the other in order to become God, destroys all relationships: the other is gone; the self is God. This is the self's attempt to introject all knowledge and power (I know and I determine who will live) by projecting ignorance and weakness onto the other who is to be killed. The party goers and the dodoes become the scapegoats by means of which Siegel and the Dutch imperialists attempt to embody their own mortality and put death to death.⁷

But one's own mortality cannot be isolated, separated, and put to death; destroying the other as scapegoat, establishing a (non)relationship, leads only to self-destruction because the self is, always and in all ways, dependent upon its relation with the other. The Dutch imperialist Frans, even as he joins his fellow Christians in shooting the dodoes, begins to feel haunted by voices whose message he cannot decipher: "The voices--he insomniac, southern stars too thick for constellations teeming in faces and creatures of fable less likely than the dodo--spoke the words of sleepers, singly, coupled, in chorus. The rhythms and timbres were Dutch, but made no waking sense. Except that he thought they were warning him . . . scolding, angry that he couldn't understand" (GR 109). It is significant that these ghostly voices, heard while Frans is awake yet making "no waking sense," are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. The voices belong to creatures "less likely than the dodo," and yet these creatures speak what is very like Dutch, while the dodoes cannot speak at all. What Frans experiences is the disturbing connection between almost unrecognizable beasts and almost intelligible language; if he could decipher the message, he might see that the ghost voices are trying to warn him that there is a closer connection between strange beasts and his fellow men, between dodoes and Dutch imperialists, than he has ever realized.

Like the voices, Frans' gun serves to point the connection which Frans nevertheless still fails to see:

Each hour he sighted down the barrel. It was then, if ever, he might have seen how the weapon made an axis potent as Earth's own between himself and this victim [the unhatched dodo], still one, inside the egg, with the ancestral chain, not to be broken out for more than its blink of world's light. There they were, the silent egg and the crazy Dutchman, and the hookgun that linked them forever, framed, brilliantly motionless as any Vermeer. (GR 109)

Before he shoots, before he uses the gun to destroy the link between himself and the dodo, Frans has the opportunity to see through the very instrument of destruction the importance of that link, to realize why it should be preserved. The dodo which Frans would separate from himself is in fact linked to Frans through their respective ancestral chains, both of which begin and end in the same place: the Earth. The Earth's axis is "potent" because it is that around which the Earth spins; the link between the Dutch imperialist and the dodo is potent because it is that which keeps both of them alive. The indivisible oneness which Frans would deny is that he and the dodo are parts of the single body of the Earth, no section of which may be cut off without damaging the other parts. The self's belief that it can become a self-sufficient body by killing the body of the other marks a failure to perceive the true whole, an attempt at self-preservation doomed to achieve its opposite because the entity destroyed is inside and vital to the body, not outside and dispensable.

The Dutch imperialists, then, fail to see the extent to which genocide is suicide. To kill the native dodo is not to break the link joining man and beast and become a god; to destroy these birds is to feel the chain pull with a vengeance, dragging the human species to the same undifferentiated mass to which the humans dragged the dodoes, the same Earth from which both species originally sprang. Like Siegel, the Dutch imperialists fail in their role as "host" when the only salvation they bring their flock is death; they fail in the very act of exercising the power over life and death that is supposed to connect them with God: "This furious host were losers, impersonating a race chosen by God. The colony, the venture, was dying—like the ebony trees they were stripping from the island, like the poor species they were removing totally from the earth. By 1681, Didus ineptus would be gone, by 1710 so would every last settler from Mauritius. The enterprise here would have lasted about a human lifetime" (GR 110).

The lives of human and dodo are connected in time as in space, for even as the Dutch imperialists abridge the dodoes' lifetime, they limit their own. Suddenly the species Didus ineptus will live no longer than its last individual member, whose life is further abridged to a minute or less: "egg of light into egg of darkness, within its first minute of amazed vision" (GR 109). The Dutch hunters do not realize that they and the dodoes share the same life line, belong to the same temporal

body, and that by cutting the line of Didus ineptus at this generation of dodos they are cutting their own species' life line at their own generation: the Dutch settlers' tenure on Mauritius is limited to "about a human lifetime." Thus Frans and the dodo face each other, through the barrel of a gun, as individual parts of the same spatial and temporal body, and when Frans shoots a dodo, he destroys the very relation between parts that allows each part to exist in space and time.

The way Pynchon describes Frans' failure to see his connection with the dodo places great emphasis on the fact that this failure, though very personally felt, is not Frans' alone, but typical of the many men like Frans who have been so thoroughly indoctrinated by imperialist ideology. As Pynchon makes clear, Frans' personal failure has its historical roots in the imperialism that conditions his view of the native as either a resource to be exploited for the white man's gain (flesh to be eaten) or a commodity to be discarded because he can find no use for it (a non-functioning limb to be amputated). The prevailing notion that individual survival depends on incorporating the other into oneself or on eliminating the other as a rival in a world of scarcity makes it very difficult for Frans even to imagine a relation with the "natives" that is not one of economic exploitation. And a crusading Christianity only reinforces the divisions between self and other fostered by imperialism: the White Man's Burden is either to civilize the natives, converting the other to one's own (faith), or to exterminate the brutes, who, because they cannot speak the white man's language, were obviously not made in the image of God (the white man). A certain natural sympathy for the dodos leads Frans to a fantasy of their having been given the "Gift of Speech" which makes them capable of salvation (GR 110), but the very assumptions that formed the basis of this fantasy are what make the real dodos appear unredeemable: that natives who cannot speak the word of God are damned. Unredeemable and irredeemable, the dodos are defined for Frans as ungodly and unmarketable; economic imperialism and crusading Christianity combine to darken any dim perception he may have of another possible relation with the dodos, to deafen his already unattuned ears to the meaning of their ghost voices.

Already in the first of these ghost stories the pattern is set: whatever small insight a character may have into the true meaning of the ghosts haunting him, ideological blinders seem always to occlude the ghosts' affirmation of interdependence and to distort this into a threat from an alien other. Despite the signs of a natural sympathy for the other running counter to the hegemonic ideology, the institutionalized view of things eventually displaces any other way of seeing the world, so that what might have appeared as the natural connection between Frans and the dodo can only be seen as a supernatural menace or a psychological fear. Representing the natural law according to which the self's unbounded acquisitiveness will leave it with less material and not more, these ghosts are then systematically misinterpreted by a materialist ideology that would deny their

physical force and render them merely immaterial (unearthly) or just imaginary (hallucinated). Frans shoots because the political, economic, and religious institutions framing him make his felt response to the ghost voices seem like senseless superstition or unreasonable fear. But the fact that the imperialistic slaughter of the dodos on Mauritius leads to the extinction of the very colonists who had sought to gain more space and time from the others' death shows that the ghost voices tell a truth stronger than any distorting materialist ideology; they speak of a reality that hegemonic discourse cannot so easily supernaturalize and conjure away, or psychologize and repress.

Our next two ghost stories bring the problem home. Set in America and in the near present, they communicate the same ecological message but focus their critique on the effects of materialist ideology as these are felt here and now. We can begin our discussion by considering some basic similarities between the previous scene from *Gravity's Rainbow* and the ones from *V.* to which we now turn; as before, references to "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" will also be brought in where they seem to clarify scenes that might remain opaque if considered alone.

Like Frans and Siegel, Benny Profane of *V.* is a reluctant hunter. Stalking alligators in New York sewers, Profane is given the same opportunity as Frans to see the necessary connection between himself and the other: "He rounded the bend, the light from the pink sky was lost: now there moved only a sluggish ellipse with him and the alligator at foci, and a slender axis of light linking them" (V 117). The light is from Profane's flashlight which, like Frans' gunsight, enables the hunter to see his prey, but which could, if only the hunter were to shift his focus, allow him to recognize the essential link between self and other. This kind of perception is what Pynchon calls, in another yet strikingly similar context, "see[ing] through, not through to but through through" (GR 688).⁸ It is characteristic of Pynchon to show how the very weapon by which self and other will be destroyed has that within it which, if recognized, could save them both.

If Profane does not recognize the meaning of the flashlight's "axis," he is also given strange lights similar to those unfamiliar constellations experienced by Frans:

Suddenly--so suddenly it scared him--there was light ahead, around a corner. Not the light of a rainy evening in the city, but paler, less certain. They rounded the corner. He noticed the flashlight bulb starting to flicker; lost the alligator momentarily. Then turned the corner and found a wide space like the nave of a church, an arched roof overhead, a phosphorescent light coming off walls whose exact arrangement was indistinct. (V 122)

The peculiar lights make the sewers resemble a church, make the alligator seem like a parishioner about to "receive the gift of tongues" (V 122); we recall that Frans had a similar vision of

the dodoes being blessed with the "Gift of Speech." If Profane understood the lights, he would see that they reveal the essential likeness of the supposedly other, the way the alligators, if only they could speak, would declare these sewers to be their church and themselves to be like human parishioners with lives worth saving.

And like Frans, Profane is haunted; where the Dutch hunter hears the voices of constellation creatures, Profane "fe[els] the eyes of ghost-rats" which seem to tell him that this sewer/church is "no place to kill" (V 122). To understand the full meaning of these ghost-rats, we must examine the scene Pynchon has embedded within this passage about Profane and the alligators. The embedded scene, set in the same sewers but about twenty years before Profane's arrival, concerns the strange relation between a Roman Catholic priest and a group of rats. Father Fairing has journeyed underground and adopted rats as parishioners because he believes that the humans of New York are past saving. Yet salvation for the rats is at least in part a cruel joke because it means that they are to be killed and eaten by their "savior": "Before long [Father Fairing] would be spiritual leader of the inheritors of the earth. He considered it small enough sacrifice on their part to provide three of their own per day for physical sustenance, in return for the spiritual nourishment he was giving them. [...] 'The livers,' he wrote, 'are particularly succulent'" (V 118).

We recall that the "salvation" the Dutch hunters would have brought the dodoes (could the birds only speak) and that the "salvation" Siegel brings the partygoers also involve killing and eating the "faithful." Whether killed for food like the Christianized rats and dodoes or destroyed as a threat like the alligators and Satanic dodoes, the other must die to ensure the self's survival. It is no wonder that the converted rat Veronica imagines guilt to be "a huge, white, lumbering beast, pursuing her, wanting to devour her" (V 121), for Father Fairing's idea of saving the rats is to instill in them a sense of sin and then to be himself the Satanic devourer from which he is supposed to deliver them. Fairing reports that after Veronica's guilt-dream he and the rat "discussed Satan and his wiles for several hours" (V 121), but what neither the priest nor Veronica sees is that "Satan"'s most effective deception is to make what Fairing offers the rats look like salvation--theirs, and his. Cannibalizing his parishioners does not save them or the priest: "Rat meat didn't agree with the Father, in the long run. Perhaps there was infection" (V 119). Fairing's cannibalistic form of salvation helps no one, least of all himself; it was "really only a necessary delusion to protect himself from the bleak truth that his pale and sinuous parishioners [the rats] might turn out no better than the animals [the humans] whose estate they were succeeding to" (V 119)--protect himself, that is, from the fact that he, like all the rest, was doomed.

That Fairing was self-deceived in his method of self-preservation is precisely what the ghost-rats are trying to tell

Profane. The ghosts, like Frans' voices, attempt to warn the hunter that his life is bound up with that of his prey. Yet, although Profane feels the same sympathy for his subjects as Fairing felt for his ("Father Fairing talked to rats. Profane talked to alligators"), still, like Fairing, "He fired" (V 123). Thus Profane, who was given the opportunity to learn from his predecessor's failure, learns nothing. Significantly, the flashlight by which Profane might have seen his vital connection with the alligator dies with the death of the beast, goes out as theirs becomes a non-relationship, and Profane is left benighted, unable to see the other or himself. Just prior to this symbolic darkness, Profane watches streams of the alligator's blood form "shifting patterns" (V 123) which make no more sense to him than did the phosphorescent lights or the eyes of ghost-rats--another warning from the dead that the living only doom themselves by killing the other.

But, as in the case of Frans' ecological illiteracy, Pynchon traces Profane's and Fairing's personal failure to read the signs of their mutual dependence on the other back to the negative influence of historical context. The materialist ideology that commodified baby alligators as "others" to be bought, used, and discarded by the self is the same institutionalized attitude that can only see these live beings, now full grown, as menacing aliens to be destroyed, as objects that have outlived their usefulness and now, perversely, continue to assert an unwarranted claim on their owner's attention:

Last year, or maybe the year before, kids all over Nueva York bought these little alligators for pets. Macy's was selling them for fifty cents, every child, it seemed, had to have one. But soon the children grew bored with them. Some set them loose in the streets, but most flushed them down the toilets. And these had grown and reproduced, had fed off rats and sewage, so that now they moved big, blind, albino, all over the sewer system. [. . .] Since the sewer scandal last year, the Department [of Sanitation or Waste Disposal] had got conscientious. They called for volunteers to go down with shotguns and get rid of the alligators. (V 42-43)

Thus Profane, who must work in order to live, has his job and attitude defined for him by larger institutions. Is it any wonder that he fails to see a connection which every structure of belief surrounding him militates against his seeing? The alligators are like King Kong in Gravity's Rainbow--ripped from their native habitat by imperialist conquerors and dragged to the city as exotic attractions for commercial exploitation. A callous consumerism is here revealed to be the internal-affairs complement to an imperialistic foreign policy; the story of Frans and the dodos and that of Profane and the alligators do indeed intermesh. The alligators' assertion of a menacing liveliness against the oppressors who tried to reduce them to marketable objects is very like Kong's uprising against his businessmen-

captors; and, in both cases, materialist ideology makes it extremely difficult for these animals to be seen any differently in the end from the way they were seen in the beginning: as "others" to be used till used up, collected for their exotic appeal, then ejected when this thrilling difference has been worn down to a dull sameness ("soon the children grew bored with them").

Profane's shooting of the alligators, like the climactic shooting of Kong, is thus the result of a more than personal failure to perceive likeness; it is triggered by a whole society's failure, an institutionalized distortion of perspective whereby other lives are misread as death threats, affirmation of interdependence misperceived as an otherworldly or nightmarish denial of the self's place in the world. Profane does not understand the message of the ghost-rats, the meaning of the ghost story he is told about Father Fairing and his rodent parishioners, because the very same divisive ideology that triumphs over Fairing's natural sympathy for the rats also extends its sway over Profane, making the rats appear as mere ghosts (supernatural, psychological) who seem to have nothing to do with the very physical relation between Profane and the alligators. This prevailing ideology occludes the fact that the ghost-rats embody a natural law: they appear to warn Profane that he has been led to mistake nature, to misunderstand the true nature of his relation to the rats and the alligators, which is one of mutual reliance rather than one of jaded consumer and waste product.

Even though Fairing and Profane are both disillusioned with society and want to see their life underground as a kind of refuge (Fairing believes that the humans above are past saving; Profane thinks that life above street level involves too many dangerous connections with people), nevertheless society reaches down to structure both men's attitudes toward the other without their knowing it. The socially induced despair that Fairing feels about the humans above ground leads to and works with the consequent fear for his own soul that leads him to flee into the sewers rather than risk staying with his suddenly alien own kind; both continue to influence his behavior once he is below with the rats. His tendency, like Siegel's, is to put self-preservation before the salvation of his flock, even while he tries to convince himself that it is really they he is saving ("He considered it small enough sacrifice on their part to provide three of their own per day for physical sustenance, in return for the spiritual nourishment he was giving them"). Besides retaining this murderously self-protective attitude, Fairing also remains under the influence of an ethnocentric religion like the one that exerts such a force on Frans and the Dutch imperialists: the only way Fairing can see to save the rats is to persecute them for committing sins that are entirely of his own religion's defining, to punish them for being other when he has himself in his role as priest defined them as such. Profane too finds himself persecuting alligators because the Department of Sanitation has defined them as waste; his street-level fear of

dangerous connections, acquired from a society that encourages treating others as objects who sometimes rebel against being so treated, persists in Profane's defensive firing at possibly threatening, seemingly disposable "things."

That a divisive ideology triumphs in having so thoroughly constructed Profane, Fairing, and Frans as its subjects that they fail to recognize their connection with the other shows how very pessimistic these stories are about the chances for a new outlook. In scene after scene what are not in fact "ghosts" (supernatural, psychological, frightening) are distorted to appear as such, trivialized by the very ideology that it is the import of the "ghosts" to challenge. And yet the dodo voices and the rat eyes, the alligator blood and the phosphorescent lights, combined now with the "ghosts" of Frans, Fairing, and Profane, still speak to us in Pynchon's fiction, trying to communicate a potentially affirmative message about ecological interdependence. If that message appears frightening, it is only because it foretells what will happen to a society that refuses to recognize the importance of ecological balance, to see that using and discarding the other as so much refuse can only lead to the self's own downfall:

For we are a nation that can, many of us, toss with all aplomb our candy wrapper into the Grand Canyon itself, snap a color shot and drive away; and we need voices like Oakley Hall's to remind us how far that piece of paper, still fluttering brightly behind us, has to fall.¹⁰

What Pynchon has said about the fiction of Oakley Hall applies equally well to his own work, to Pynchon's own voice and the ghost-voices in his fiction which disturb our aplomb, which speak a language of the dead that there is yet time for those still living to learn to understand.

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Notes

¹ Douglas Fowler, A Reader's Guide to Gravity's Rainbow (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1980) 9.

² Fowler 13.

³ Fowler 11.

⁴ References to Pynchon's works occur in parentheses in the text and are to the following editions: Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973; New York: Penguin, 1987); V. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1963; New York: Perennial, 1986); "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," Epoch 9.4 (1959): 195-213. I have placed brackets around my ellipses to distinguish them from Pynchon's.

⁵ A brilliant exception, clearly revealing the strengths of cross-comparison, is John T. Irwin's

discussion of The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! in Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975).

⁶ Michel Foucault writes about the persecution of those whom society quite literally "cannot understand" in Folie et deraison: Histoire de la folie a l'age classique (1961; Paris: Gallimard, 1972); see especially "La Grande Peur," 373-400. (Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Random House, 1973], "The Great Fear," 199-220.)

⁷ The idea of the other as a scapegoat for the self's mortality is discussed by John T. Irwin in American Hieroglyphics (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980).

⁸ The passage concerns John F. Kennedy and Malcolm X; Pynchon wonders if, when they were young men and "Red" Malcolm was shining shoes, "Jack" Kennedy ever saw not just "through to" the black shoes and black skin that marked Malcolm in most white eyes as a threatening other, but "through through" blackness, seeing through the connecting link between them (the black shoes) the basic likeness between black and white, their interdependence. But, like the stories discussed above, this one ends with the occlusion of natural sympathy by hegemonic ideology (here, racism) and with the death of both oppressor and oppressed: "did Red suspend his ragpopping just the shadow of a beat, just enough gap in the moiré there to let white Jack see through, not through to but through through the shine on his classmate Tyrone Slothrop's shoes? [...]. Eventually Jack and Malcolm both got murdered" (GR 688). Of course, the story is not entirely pessimistic because, as Pynchon takes great care to point out, "Slothrop's fate is not so clear."

⁹ See also Kenneth A. Thigpen, "Folklore in Contemporary American Literature: Thomas Pynchon's V. and the Alligators-in-the-Sewers Legend," Southern Folklore Quarterly 43.1-2 (1979): 93-105.

¹⁰ Thomas Pynchon, "A Gift of Books" [an appreciation of Oakley Hall's Warlock], Holiday 38.6 (1965): 164-65. Equally descriptive of Pynchon's own ecological ghost stories is his support notice for Peter Matthiessen's Far Tortuga (cloth: New York: Random House, 1975, dust jacket; paper: New York: Bantam, 1976, back cover [abridged]), where natural beauty is described as "haunting" with a very physical strength: "a masterfully spun yarn, a little other-worldly, a dreamlike momentum . . . It's full of music and strong haunting visuals, and like everything of his, it's also a deep declaration of love for the planet."