

The Politics of Doubling in "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna"

Douglas Keeseey

When Pynchon's short stories were collected in *Slow Learner* (1984), his first--and, I think, best--short story was unaccountably left out.¹ "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" (1959) deserves to be better known, for, even though it shows to a still greater degree than his other stories the kind of self-conscious literariness Pynchon found to be a major flaw in his early work,² that very foregrounding of literary devices can help us see how style functions to convey Pynchon's critique of certain individuals and institutions. This essay examines the politics of doubling: the way Pynchon uses the double as a literary device to explain and to judge the complex relation between his protagonist and the institutions--family, college, army, government--which surround him. Although critics have often made passing mention of Pynchon's use of the double,³ no one has yet described its full complexity (Pynchon's doubles are also internally divided) or its systematic function in Pynchon's fiction. As I show here, the figure of the split double allows Pynchon to dramatize the force of hereditary and environmental influence upon character while at the same time insisting that that character is never without some remaining freedom of choice. Pynchon's use of the double may be self-consciously literary ("*Doppelgänger*," "*semblable*"), but the device enables him to present both a fully realized world and a nuanced critique.

The very first event in Pynchon's first short story is a confrontation between doubles, with the story's protagonist, Cleanth Siegel, being struck by the strange likeness between himself and one David Lupescu. Siegel, a diplomat, has been invited to a Washington, DC, party. He arrives, wearing his customary tweed coat and carrying a bottle of Scotch under one arm, and suddenly finds himself face to face with the host, Lupescu, who is also wearing tweed but who carries under his arm a pig foetus: "They faced each other like slightly flawed mirror images--different patterns of tweed, scotch bottle and pig foetus but no discrepancy in height--with Siegel experiencing a mixed feeling of discomfort and awe, and the word *Doppelgänger* had just floated into his mind" (197-98). Siegel tries to deny his connection with this strange double by muttering his own name, but Lupescu only

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The very first event in Pynchon's first short story is a confrontation between doubles, with the story's protagonist, Cleanth Siegel, being struck by the strange likeness between himself and one David Lupescu. Siegel, a diplomat, has been invited to a Washington, DC, party. He arrives, wearing his customary tweed coat and carrying a bottle of Scotch under one arm, and suddenly finds himself face to face with the host, Lupescu, who is also wearing tweed but who carries under his arm a pig foetus: "They faced each other like slightly flawed mirror images--different patterns of tweed, scotch bottle and pig foetus but no discrepancy in height--with Siegel experiencing a mixed feeling of discomfort and awe, and the word *Doppelgänger* had just floated into his mind" (197-98). Siegel tries to deny his connection with this strange double by muttering his own name, but Lupescu only

persists in pointing the similarity: "'*Mon semblable,*' Lupescu said, '*mon frère*'" (198).⁴

Siegel's attempt to deny his connection with Lupescu is his effort to avoid responsibility for the fate of the guests at the party, for what Lupescu keeps insisting is that Siegel take over as host. But the role of host is ambiguous, and if Siegel accepts it, he will face the dilemma of deciding what kind of host to be. As Lupescu says, detailing the word's disturbingly different etymological senses: "'You are now the host. As host you are a trinity: (a) receiver of guests--' ticking them off on his fingers-- '(b) an enemy and (c) an outward manifestation, for *them*, of the divine body and blood'" (199). Like Vincentio in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, who gives Angelo the role of acting duke ("In our remove be thou at full yourself / Mortality and mercy in Vienna / Live in thy tongue and heart" [1.1.43-45]), Lupescu passes to Siegel the god-like responsibility of determining the proper fate for the humans in his charge: should he show mercy or punish them with death?⁵

Lupescu is of little help in deciding what kind of host to be because Lupescu, whose role Siegel is filling, seems himself to have been an ambiguous host. He calls Siegel "'A sign, . . . a sign, and deliverance'" (198) without specifying what Siegel signifies or whom he is to deliver besides Lupescu himself--deliver him, that is, from the problem of being host by taking over that role. Lupescu refers to the pig foetus as a "'Symbol. God, what a symbol'" (199), but he never specifies what it is supposed to symbolize. Lupescu does say that he tacks the pig foetus above the door to the party in imitation of a "'Dada exhibit in Paris on Christmas eve, 1919,'" which "'used one in place of mistletoe'" (198). His action would thus seem to be a demonic inversion of the celebration of Christ's birth, suggesting that no merciful redeemer is coming, but only a terrible judgment. This would make Lupescu like Benny Profane in Pynchon's *V.*, who, while tacking condoms to the doors of rooms at a summer resort, feels "like the Angel of Death, marking the doors of tomorrow's victims in blood."⁶ Thus, even though Lupescu appears neutral in his presentation to Siegel of the latter's choice of roles as host (the list is merely alphabetical), in fact, Lupescu may exemplify a host inclined more toward mortality than toward mercy.⁷ Like the other doubles in the story who will serve Siegel as role models, Lupescu's ambiguity seems weighted more in one direction than in the other. Yet, despite his apparent propensity, Lupescu leaves the party without clarifying the role he expects Siegel to play.

Confronted with the ambiguous double, Lupescu, Siegel is split internally, faced with the dilemma of what kind of host to be. Doubling

leads to a split within the self when Siegel is forced to recognize that the schizoid host, Lupescu, whom he had wanted to see as entirely other, is in fact like himself.⁸ Siegel's impulse to avoid recognizing Lupescu as his double, to deny the split in himself, is especially strong because the same fearful experience of a doubling which is also a splitting has occurred throughout his life and he knows all too well its danger. When Siegel was thirteen, his cousin Miriam died despite all Doctor Zeit's attempts to save her. Zeit's name is an important clue in that this doctor, supposedly working against time and death, finds himself ineffective and at one with time (Zeit): he cannot save Miriam. Siegel's fear that his brother Mike will become, not a true healer, but "only a doctor" (196), that with all his sympathy for the sick, Mike will be able to do nothing but help time kill them, is a fear for himself. At an early age Siegel has been forced to recognize that Mike and Doctor Zeit are his doubles, forced to see that his self, like theirs, is split: when each thinks he is showing mercy, he may in fact only be the agent of mortality. All one's sympathy for the sick, every attempt to share the burden in order that others may have a lighter load and so survive, may be useless: the others may die, and the self too may be damaged or destroyed along with them, like Miriam's husband in his "rent garments," and like Siegel in his black necktie with a "symbolic razor slash" (196), whose torn clothes represent the loss of self each feels at Miriam's death.

Pynchon also describes the split within Siegel as springing from a dual inheritance. Born of a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, Siegel feels that he contains within him two incompatible beings, the Machiavel and the *mensch*. The *mensch* is the side of Siegel inclined to sympathize with the weak, but when this compassion, this *feeling with* the perhaps unsavable other, becomes too great a threat to the self, the Machiavel takes over. The Machiavel, a cunning manipulator like Siegel's mother, "ke[eps Siegel] from being either kicked around . . . or simply ineffective like so many of the other Jewish boys," but it also keeps Siegel from being something else: "conscious of guilt" (197). To ensure that his efforts at moral action will succeed, Siegel manipulates others; but to manipulate them effectively, Siegel must be devoid of any guilt that might make him question the morality of his actions. Like his Machiavellian counterpart, Victoria, in *V.*, Siegel finds that manipulation "became more effective the further divorced it was from moral intention" (V 198). The self that feels too much for the other may not be able to stop the other's pain from overwhelming the self and dragging them both down; but the self that denies its connection with the other's pain in order to save itself and presumably

better help the other may not be able to feel that the other needs help, may think that the only way to save the self is to deny the other.

This split in Siegel between the Machiavel and the *mensch* is impressed upon him at work as well as at home. Siegel's greatest fear as a diplomat is that all his efforts at peace between countries may come to nought. At times he would

become suddenly conscious of the weight of the briefcase and the insignificance of its contents and the stupidity of what he was doing out here, . . . following an obscure but clearly-marked path through a jungle of distraintments and affidavits and depositions; wondering why, in his first days with the Commission, he should have ever regarded himself as any kind of healer when he had always known that for a healer--a prophet actually, because if you cared about it at all you had to be both--there is no question of balance sheets or legal complexity, and the minute you become involved with anything like that you are something less; a doctor, or a fortune-teller. (195-96)

Prophets and healers are those through whom God speaks and works His miracles; for this reason the predictions of a prophet, like the cures of a healer, always prove true. Siegel fears that, because he may not have such a direct connection with God's knowledge and power, his efforts to connect people and countries could very likely fail. What looks like a "clearly-marked path" may turn out to be a "jungle" instead; there may be too many "complex" obstacles between himself and those he would help. Siegel the diplomat, with his briefcase clutched under one arm "against . . . a deadline" (195), could arrive too late and thus, like Doctor Zeit, really be time's own messenger--the Angel of Death.

We are now in a position to understand the full reason for Siegel's shock at seeing his slightly flawed mirror image, Lupescu, carrying, not a briefcase, but a "pig foetus under one arm" (197). It is as if Siegel were at that moment confronted with his greatest fear: that his belief in himself as a diplomat does not change the fact that he is really a carrier of death.⁹

Thus Siegel finds himself faced at the party with the same Machiavel/*mensch* split that had disturbed him as a diplomat and as a young man. In accepting from Lupescu the role of host, Siegel must decide whether to try to heal the guests, an effort fraught with danger for himself if he is not a true healer, or to destroy them before they can destroy him. He must either (a) receive his guests or (b) act as their enemy. Every attempt Siegel makes to refuse the role of host, to avoid responsibility, fails, as guests keep coming to him for counsel. They continually remark upon his resemblance to Lupescu, but even as they force him to recognize his double, they also compel him to face the split within himself, because Lupescu is always described as an ambiguous host, as a double whose self is internally split. While one

guest tells Siegel, "'you look like David, you have the same kind of sympathy for anybody who gets kicked around'" (203), she also says that Lupescu "'hates to get involved in anything'" (204). Because the *mensch* side of Siegel does sympathize, he does not want just to walk away from these people. But because Siegel feels too threatened by the possibility that taking on the problems of others will be more than he can handle, will not succeed in helping them and will probably result in his own destruction, he lets the Machiavel in him take over and destroy the guests.

Siegel's fear that he is not a prophet/healer who can bear man's sins and lighten the judgment of God leads to his own assumption of the role of a wrathful god, destroying mankind for sins from which he could not save them. But Siegel does not make this decision alone: throughout the story Pynchon takes pains to show how Siegel's choice is greatly influenced by those--people and institutions--around him. If Siegel fails to do the difficult but compassionate thing, it is not his failure alone. We have seen how Lupescu's dead pig foetus stands as an implicit argument in favor of mortality over mercy, not only in its suggestion that the true role of a host is to act more like an "enemy" than a welcoming "receiver," but also in its intimation that the possibly saving documents in Siegel's briefcase amount to only so much dead weight. As at work diplomats appear to be less than saviors, so at home Doctor Zeit's failure provides Siegel with another example of what must more and more seem to him almost an inevitability: the sympathetic do not succeed. Finally, his caring father is no match for his Machiavellian mother: not only environmentally predisposed to turn Machiavel, Siegel also seems genetically inclined to do so.

But there is yet another major influence on Siegel, another double whose ambiguity nevertheless tends in one direction: Irving Loon, the man Siegel incites to murder the party guests. As his name suggests, Irving/Loon is, like Cleanth/Siegel, a split self with a Machiavel and a *mensch* side. It is significant that, when Siegel is first introduced to Loon, he is simultaneously handed a drink of "ambiguous mixture" (206); like Lupescu, Loon functions as an ambiguous double of Siegel who forces the diplomat to see the split within his own self. Loon is an Ojibwa Indian whose past mirrors Siegel's own: "'The Ojibwa are trained, from childhood, to starve; the male child's entire upbringing is dedicated to a single goal: that of becoming a great hunter. Emphasis is on isolation, self-sufficiency. There is no sentimentality among the Ojibwa. It is an austere and bleak existence they lead, always one step away from death'" (208). Like the Ojibwa's, Siegel's upbringing was guided more by his "cunning" Jesuitical mother than by his sentimental *mensch* father; she, to preserve herself from the death-in-life of Hell's

Kitchen, went hunting for a man of means and trapped Siegel's father into marrying her. It is this "inherited" fear of death that has so often triumphed in Siegel over his paternal inheritance of a sympathy for others (197).

But Siegel resembles the Ojibwa in more than just his ambiguous inheritance: both find the same duality in the culture at large that they had discovered at home. Environment reinforces heredity; in each a supposedly self-preserving competitiveness overrides fellow feeling. Just as the Ojibwa's "'paranoid tendencies are further intensified by the highly competitive life of the summer villages at ricing and berry-picking time, or by the curse, perhaps, of a shaman with some personal grudge'" (208), so too is Siegel's paranoia increased by the kinds of competition in which his society expects him to take part: so-called diplomacy, where "intradepartmental scheming and counterscheming" seem to take precedence over improving foreign relations; army life with its "golden rule of Screw the Sergeant before He Screweth Thee"; and college, where Siegel finds a formal outlet for an inherited tendency to attack and possess the opposite sex -- "panty raids" allowing Siegel to do to women what his mother did to his father (196-97).

The Machiavellianism towards which Siegel's heredity and environment push him is a perfect match for what in the Ojibwa is called the "Windigo psychosis":

"Before he can attain to the state of manhood [an Ojibwa] boy must experience a vision, after starving himself for several days. Often after seeing this vision he feels he has acquired a supernatural companion, and there is a tendency to identify. Out in the wilderness, with nothing but a handful of beaver, deer, moose and bear between him and starvation, for the Ojibwa hunter, feeling as he does at bay, feeling a concentration of obscure cosmic forces against him and him alone, cynical terrorists, savage and amoral deities . . . which are bent on his destruction, the identification may become complete. When such paranoid tendencies are further intensified . . . the Ojibwa becomes highly susceptible to the well-known Windigo psychosis." (208)

The Windigo is "a mile-high skeleton made of ice, roaring and crashing through the Canadian wilderness, grabbing up humans by the handful and feeding on their flesh," and the Ojibwa Indian, when suffering from the Windigo psychosis, "identif[ies] with the Windigo and turn[s] into a frenzied cannibal himself, foraging around the boondocks for more food after he had gorged himself on the bodies of his immediate family" (208-09). Thus the Ojibwa, normally a hunter who risks his body and blood on expeditions to find food for his family, comes to feel that the risk is too great and that, to preserve himself, he must identify with the destructive forces and consume the body and blood of his own family. To eat the flesh of his own kind, the Ojibwa must

perceive difference where before he had seen similarity, must view other humans as essentially unlike himself, as beasts, not family: "Altered perception. Simultaneously, all over god knows how many square miles, hundreds, thousands of these Indians are looking at each other out of the corner of their eye and not seeing wives or husbands or little children at all. What they see is big fat juicy beavers. And these Indians are hungry" (209). It is as if the Ojibwa hopes, by denying his connection with humanity, to avoid the helplessness before cosmic forces that is humanity's fate and, by imitating the action of these destructive forces, to accede to their invincibility.

That an Ojibwa boy should succumb to the Windigo psychosis is obviously not the intent of a culture that prescribes as a rite of passage the survival of near starvation in the wilderness, but the effect is logical. This most extreme test of physical strength is met with a psychological compensation: unable to particularize the "obscure cosmic forces" the Ojibwa feels are directed against him and equally unable to locate the help he needs, the boy hallucinates a vision of power, gives power a visage (with) which he can identify. This giving of a face is then logically accompanied by a taking away, for, if the boy allows that his people look like him, this is tantamount to admitting that he is as susceptible to destruction as they. They, then, must not be seen as his *semblables*; they become the (in)human embodiment of the "obscure cosmic forces" which he, to prove his own identification with power, must defeat. The very "self-sufficiency" through "isolation" that the culture had intended to instill as a guard against forces challenging the society at large has turned back on that culture: extreme isolation in the wilderness has led to an apparent absence of human aid and thus to an imagined plenitude of supernatural support, a transfer of allegiance to the other side as against the human. By so vigorously discouraging "sentimentality," the culture has helped to form the very hardness it now finds turned against itself. The implication is that the culture itself--and not just certain "psychotic" members--was always, without realizing it, inherently cannibalistic: the utter lack of feeling with which the Ojibwa hunter was expected to kill and eat "beaver" is now, as a consequence of the society's own practices, directed against that society itself.¹⁰

As Ojibwa culture unwittingly provides the reason for its males' predatory vision of "wives" as mere "beavers" to be attacked and eaten, Siegel's society unknowingly encourages him to see women (among others) as "beavers" to be hunted and consumed as a way of ensuring his own male potency. As Irving Loon, under the influence of the Windigo psychosis created by his society and triggered by Siegel, turns to a woman at the party and says with appetite, "my beautiful

little beaver'" (211), so Siegel in his college environment had gone on "panty raids," getting a "running start" in the competition between men and women, as his Machiavellian mother had advised, and exposing women's (women as) "beavers" (197).¹¹ Siegel's view of women as sex objects is metaphorically at one with the Ojibwa Loon's view of women as "'Beavers. Succulent, juicy, fat'" (209): in each case the "obscure cosmic forces" feared by men have been imagined as a conquerable body--woman's. It is no coincidence that Siegel, who describes himself as a man "not particularly aware of destruction mainly because he was unable to give it a name or a face," appends to this the coda, "unless they were Rachel's" (his girlfriend's) (197). Throughout the story Siegel is tempted by how easy it would be simply to blame Rachel for all his troubles, to see all his nebulous discontent as concretized in her: if she had not induced him to come to this party, he would have no decision to make about what kind of host to be. It is also no coincidence that the Machiavellian joy Siegel gets from inciting Loon to kill the party guests is linked in his mind with "the same sense of exhilaration Siegel had once felt seeing five hundred hysterical freshmen advancing on the women's dorms" (213): the panty raid, in its self-aggrandizing violence and its objectification of the other as a threatening difference, is the prelude to murder. Of course, again like the Ojibwa, Siegel in a more sentimental mood sincerely "doubt[s]" that women or the party guests actually embody his destruction (197). His doubts reveal his doubleness, his internal division between a self-confident, finger- (and phallus-) pointing Machiavel and a frightened but caring *mensch*.

The Ojibwa Loon thus presents the American Siegel with another version of the same Machiavel/*mensch* split whose existence in himself Siegel had been trying to deny. Siegel finally realizes the truth of what his old anthropology professor once said: "all cultures were equally mad; it was only the form that differed, never the content" (208). We note that the professor speaks not merely of individuals but of whole "cultures" as "mad." Here Pynchon makes explicit what elsewhere has been merely suggested: not only the likeness between Irving Loon and Cleanth Siegel, but the similarity between their two cultures and the link between cultural and individual "madness." When Siegel, under the hereditary and environmental pressures of his culture, triggers the Windigo psychosis in Loon and causes the Ojibwa to shoot everyone at the party, it is as if Siegel himself has contracted the Windigo psychosis. Overwhelmed by the task of providing for his family of guests, Siegel turns to hunting them instead in order to preserve himself from destruction. Feeling that he is unable to serve as host-receiver, as the body and blood through which those seeking God's

help can find what they need ("an outward manifestation . . . of the divine body and blood"), Siegel becomes a host-enemy and, through Loon, feeds on his fellow humans. He works "A miracle involving a host, true, but like no holy eucharist. . . . Irving Loon would be the only one partaking of any body and blood, divine or otherwise" (212-13). At the end Siegel's split self is united when the Machiavel expels the *mensch*.

In becoming a manipulator rather than letting himself be kicked around, in doing to the other before the other does him in, Siegel attempts to isolate the others and their problems from himself and eliminate them. Through a kind of cannibalistic feast, he tries to make the weakness of others his strength: they serve as victims so he can feel himself the victor. Like his role model Lupescu, who chose to leave the party before "going native"--that is, before going insane as the party guests because of a futile attempt to care for them (201)--Siegel walks away, "shrugg[ing]" at the slaughter of people for whom he feels nothing (213), heeding at last Lupescu's warning that he only now unambiguously understands: "'Mistah Kurtz--he dead'" (199). Rather than die like Kurtz from his living connection with the natives,¹² Lupescu and Siegel choose to live apart, to live off the parts of others in an attempt to keep themselves whole. "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" is a *Measure for Measure* in which the good Vincentio does not return at the end to save society from the bad Angelo, who had been appointed temporarily to take the former's place. In Pynchon's story, the Dukes--Lupescu and Siegel--are doubles, and each is internally divided, with the tendency toward mortality winning out over mercy in each.

Allon White has argued that Siegel's attitude toward the murder at the end of the story should be taken as Pynchon's:

Any political critique of Pynchon should begin there: the shrugging off of murder. . . . The poignancy of 'Mortality and mercy in Vienna' is revealed in that shrug, which is the real centre to the story. It indexes perfectly an inability and unwillingness to intervene in a world in which mercy and mortality appear inseparable, and terrorism a kind of unfathomable justice. The shrug shows up the fine limits of Pynchon's story at the same time as revealing the moment (so often repeated in recent American history) when America's confused liberalism emerges as scandalously self-conscious indifference. (61-62)

White's charge against Pynchon fits well with a comment Pynchon has since made about himself as a young author: "A pose I found congenial in those days--fairly common, I hope, among pre-adults--was that of somber glee at any idea of mass destruction or decline" (*Slow Learner* 13).¹³

But despite Pynchon's admission of how close his own perspective was to that of his stories' protagonists, it seems to me that White is too quick to identify Pynchon with Siegel. In the comment above, Pynchon speaks of his attitude at the time as a "pose," suggesting that even then there was something behind the front of "scandalously self-conscious indifference." If Siegel is the "confused liberal" who cannot understand why in his society "mercy and mortality appear inseparable, and terrorism a kind of unfathomable justice," then Pynchon is the author who shows us step by step what hereditary and environmental pressures led to Siegel's confusion and formed the background to his pose of indifference. Siegel's family, college, army and government service provide the role models that shape his view of things: if "mercy and mortality" come to "appear inseparable," it is at least in part because that is the way others have shown them to Siegel. Examples of the futility of mercy have been played out before him from childhood on, and so too have success stories whose heroes are Machiavels ready to pass mortal sentence on others to save themselves. Murder can look like mercy when the self has already decided that the other is past saving, that any positive attempt to help would only threaten the self. And this is precisely the view of things Siegel finds presented to him by others: his mother, his fraternity brothers, his sergeant, his fellow "diplomats," Lupescu, and the mad Ojibwa, Loon. All, in the hopelessness with which they define the problem as well as in their assumption that live-or-die competitiveness and absolute self-sufficiency are the only answers, provide the blueprint for Siegel's desperate and murderous decision.

White argues that Pynchon's literary techniques are fundamentally escapist, a way to avoid facing up to the terrible problems that form the content of his story:

when the solution or resolution is a spiralling identification of madness and religion, unable to prise apart mortality and mercy, the identification is *neutral*—however full of 'modernist' suspensions it might seem to be. . . . Pynchon's story dissolves its revulsion and guilt about modern America into literary analogues and stylish paradox. It is an attempt to escape through the use of neutral formal equivalence, ironic equations of good and evil, and mythical and symbolic counterpoint. In fact, however, these devices only serve to make the helplessness of an ensnared liberalism all the more transparent. (61-62)

But Pynchon's literary devices are the very means by which he helps us understand Siegel's predicament and exactly why Siegel (not Pynchon) does not come up with a better solution. Pynchon does not "suspend" judgment of Siegel's murderous actions or of the terrible identification in Siegel's mind between mortality and mercy which leads to those actions. Every one of Pynchon's literary devices is directed

toward explaining what White claims these devices were intended to obscure: just how Siegel comes to make his identification of, for example, "madness and religion," and why this identification "spirals." But before we turn to religion and a last example of Pynchon's use of the double as a literary device, let us rephrase our argument to this point as a rebuttal of White.

We have seen how the double functions to reveal (not obscure) Siegel's relation to his family, college, army, work, and social environments: in each case the double represents an argument on the part of another character that Siegel should, for the good of everyone but particularly for his own good, be *like* that other character. The double's claim is always that he or she knows how to succeed in a particular environment and that, if Siegel wants to triumph, he should follow the double's advice (manipulate one's girlfriend, screw the sergeant, go on the panty raid). Pynchon's criticism of the negative influence of the people and institutions surrounding Siegel comes through strongly in this use of the double.

But each double is also internally divided: in this way Pynchon shows the uncertainty in each of these other characters, their own doubts about the validity of indifference as a solution (recall Lupescu's vacillation between "sympathy" for the weak and a "hat[red]" of getting involved). By representing his doubles as split selves, Pynchon shows that the influences upon Siegel are not quite monolithic: if the double's claim is always "be like me," there is always also some doubt--in Siegel's mind as in the double's--about just what that "me" is. The influences upon Siegel, then, can never be called *determining*, for he, like his doubles/role models, always has some choice: no matter how one-sidedly negative the influence of the people around him, there is always another side Siegel can read and identify with if he so chooses. Pynchon's literary device of the internally divided double makes his story more humanist than naturalist or determinist, despite its terrible conclusion.

The literary device of the double is thus the means by which Pynchon explains a complex situation and makes a complicated judgment. The identification in Siegel's mind between mortality and mercy "spirals" because he is confronted with double after double who has decided to make that connection and who influences Siegel to do likewise. But at no single point in the spiral is Siegel's fate completely determined by outside forces, because each of his doubles is always split, confronted like him with the possibility (however small) of choosing other identifications.

Perhaps the best illustration of Pynchon's use of the double comes before Siegel makes his identification of mortality with mercy.

At a time when Siegel is trying to decide whether to be a Machiavel or a *mensch*, a young woman at the party comes to him for help. Debby feels guilty about being a Machiavel--she has sexually "manipulated" men--but says she "'can't help it": if she didn't manipulate them, she fears they would manipulate her (209). Debby is clearly another split double, confronting Siegel with both an uncertainty that implies some remaining freedom of choice and a decision essentially already made--to become a Machiavel. Pynchon's description of Siegel's response is his fullest use of the figure of the double:

Siegel felt like saying, "Use a little less mascara or something," but was brought up short by an awareness which had been at the back of his mind since Lupescu had left: a half-developed impression about the role Lupescu had occupied for this group; and it occurred to him that his double would never have said anything like that. You might give absolution or penance, but no practical advice. Tucked snugly in some rectory of the mind, Cleanth Siegel, S.J., looked on with approval. (209)

Here, despite the negative influence of all the doubles in his past and that of the double he confronts now--Debby and her "I can't help it"--Siegel is still able to imagine establishing a close relation with the other (giving "practical advice") rather than keeping his distance (giving "absolution or penance"). But, just as he considers exposing himself to the risk of trying to help one internally divided double (and himself) expel the Machiavel, another split double--Lupescu--seems to recall the Machiavel to Siegel and stop him from getting too close to Debby for his own good. I say "seems" because it is Siegel himself who appears to make his "half-developed" impression of his split double Lupescu into a whole, Siegel himself who decides among the alphabetical list of possibilities what kind of host Lupescu expects him to be. Although probably negative, Lupescu is by no means unequivocally so, but Siegel chooses to listen to only one voice. The same ambiguity characterizes Siegel's inheritance, but again Siegel decides to heed his Jesuitical mother over his *mensch* father, to be the manipulative "Cleanth Siegel, S.J.,"¹⁴ rather than risk caring for Debby. It is immediately after Siegel resolves his ambiguous inheritance and his uncertain role as host that he thinks of inducing Irving Loon--resolving *his* doubleness--to kill the party guests, among them a Debby who will no longer be so disturbingly divided.

So the double as a literary device does not serve Pynchon as a way to "escape" explanation and judgment; it is the very means by which he clarifies the reasons for Siegel's "spiralling identification of madness and religion, . . . mortality and mercy," a clarification which leads to a complicated apportioning of blame--some to people and institutions for their negative influence on Siegel, but also some to Siegel himself for, still left with a portion of free will, choosing easy

indifference over the risk of caring. Pynchon's story does not "dissolve its revulsion and guilt about modern America into literary analogues and stylish paradox"; these literary techniques express revulsion and carefully attribute guilt. Doubling serves as a complex metaphor to describe Siegel's relation to people and institutions, to reveal the "madness" of an entire culture which Siegel is unwilling (not "unable") to challenge. The story may end with what White calls a "hilarious and sinister 'paradox'"¹⁵--the quotation marks around this last word show that in White's view Pynchon is more interested in style than in substance--but Siegel's identification between mortality and mercy is not Pynchon's. The very style in which Pynchon tells his story shows that it is not so.

"His double would never have said anything like that." Any attempt to understand Pynchon's politics must begin here, with his use of the double to criticize the negative effect on Siegel of particular people and institutions as well as Siegel's own weakness in so easily accepting that influence. It is no coincidence that Siegel's indifference about the murder of the party guests is directly linked to the influence of the government for which he works: "At the first floor landing, [Siegel] heard the first screams, the pounding of footsteps, the smashing of glass. He shrugged. What the hell, stranger things had happened in Washington" (213). Just as he had turned to his double Lupescu to condone his own choice of what kind of host to be (a host-enemy), here Siegel attempts to dissolve his guilt over the murder of his guests by seeing that murder as typical of Washington, as just the kind of thing (a double) that everyone knows goes on there--in fact, not quite as "strange" as certain other unnamed occurrences. Some critics have suggested that Pynchon may here intend an allusion to the government's military involvement in Korea;¹⁶ the "diplomat" Siegel would then be trying to justify his incitement of Loon to kill the party guests by seeing his action as the mere double of his government's backing of one group of Korean natives in their attack upon the other. Whether or not Pynchon's allusion should be taken as this specific, the doubling here between Siegel's action and occurrences in Washington functions as a criticism of both individual and institution: of the government for actions that make Siegel's slaughter of the people at the party look perfectly in tune with the times, and of Siegel for seeing and choosing to imitate only the darker side of Washington.

—Cal Poly

NOTES

¹ *Slow Learner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984). References to "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" are to *Epoch* 9 (1959): 195-213. Some may consider "The Small Rain," also published in spring, 1959 (*Cornell Writer* 6.2), Pynchon's first story.

² Judging from what Pynchon says in the introduction to *Slow Learner*, I would say that either the story's ostentatious literariness or its negative conclusion might have been for him reason enough to omit it from the collection. There is also the possibility of some copyright dispute.

³ I limit my list here to those critics who mention doubling in connection with "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna": Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Warner, 1974) 20-25; John O. Stark, *Pynchon's Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1980) 17; Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Methuen, 1982) 26-29.

⁴ Eliot's influence on Pynchon is well known. Siegel is here quoting *The Waste Land* 1.76, which is, of course, itself a quotation from the preface to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*. Like Eliot and Baudelaire, Lupescu and Pynchon want listeners to acknowledge their own involvement in humanity's predicament, their own responsibility for the problem and their own need to find a solution.

⁵ Allon White notes that the ambiguity of David Lupescu as host is figured in his very name: "although 'David' is the Shepherd, Lupescu is a Roumanian word meaning 'wolfish' (Lupescu is a Roumanian). David Lupescu is both shepherd and wolf, both guardian and destroyer of the flock" ("Ironie Equivalence: A Reading of Thomas Pynchon's 'Mortality and Mercy in Vienna,'" *Critical Quarterly* 23.3 [1981]: 57).

⁶ V. (1963; New York: Perennial, 1986) 29.

⁷ Another possible support for a reading of Lupescu's influence as negative is that, despite Siegel's confusion as if before a neutral list of choices, the definitions of "host" in Lupescu's list are linked by "and," not "or"; in the end, as we shall see, Siegel decides to see mortality and mercy as much the same thing, as Lupescu's list may have been suggesting he do.

⁸ For conceptual background on the idea of a "split double," see John T. Irwin's pioneering studies, *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975) and *American Hieroglyphics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980).

⁹ William Howarth has pointed out that Pynchon may be playing here with the notion of a pigskin briefcase. If so, this "joke" could have the serious intent of linking Siegel and Lupescu even more tightly: Siegel would then be *literally* as well as metaphorically, like Lupescu, a carrier of death.

¹⁰ Here Pynchon (or his "old anthropology professor") seems to have found in the Ojibwas' own Windigo myth a criticism of that very culture (as of ours). In what is probably the culturally authorized version of the myth, the story of the Windigo is supposed to serve a socially redeeming function, to point a moral: "He was excess who encouraged moderation. . . . Instead of alleviating his hunger, Weendigo, by his very act of eating, actually fostered more and greater hunger" (Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*

[Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984] 167, 166). But, as I argue above, Pynchon shows how the very society that warns against excess hunger was actually what encouraged that hunger in the first place. Consistent with his critical intention, Pynchon omits the wish-fulfillment fantasy ending of the socially ratified, moralizing version: "With Weendigo's death, his victims revived, Weendigo himself, though dead, continued to live on as an incorporeal being, the spirit of excess" (Johnston 167).

¹¹ "Beaver" is slang for the female genitals.

¹² Again Lupescu quotes a passage from Eliot that is itself a quotation: here the epigraph from "The Hollow Men," taken from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

¹³ Pynchon is actually discussing another of his short stories, "Entropy" (1960), when he makes this comment, but the context--the introduction to a collection of his stories, in which he discusses his "long" apprenticeship as a writer--allows it broad application.

¹⁴ "S.J." for Society of Jesus, the Jesuit order of the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁵ Allon White, "Pigs and Pierrots: The Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction," *Raritan* 2.2 (1982): 59.

¹⁶ See, for example, White, "Ironic Equivalence" 55.