HENRY ADAMS AND THOMAS PYNCHON:
THE ENTROPIC MOVEMENTS OF SELF, SOCIETY AND TRUTH

DISSERTATION

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* * * * *

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This dissertation is entitled "Henry Adams and Thomas Pynchon: the Entropic Movements of Self, Society and Truth." In it I examine two American writers whom I feel present certain intellectual parallels when dealing metaphorically with the concept of entropy. These parallels concern the breakdowns of self, society and Truth in the twentieth century.

The dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter clarifies what I mean when I say that both writers deal metaphorically with the concept of entropy, starting with a definition of metaphor and linking that definition to Henry Adams' use of "images" and to the "scientific constructs" of Henri Poincaré. Showing entropy to be such a construct, I then establish the difference between entropy and the larger entropic movement, isolating a number of examples of this movement from Pynchon and Adams.

The second chapter examines the entropic movement of self in both Henry Adams and Thomas Pynchon. With Adams I isolate examples from his correspondence and his literary works which show that he was very much aware of the progressive diffusion of his own identity. I then turn to the characters of Thomas Pynchon, specifically the characters in V. and Gravity's Rainbow, who seem to me to illustrate exactly the sort of diffusion which Adams describes.

In the third chapter I examine the entropic movement of society, defining what Pynchon and Adams feel is a coherent society.
and then showing how that coherence has yielded to multiplicity in the
writing of both authors. My basic thesis in this chapter is that the
further men move away from instinct and toward rationality in Adams
and Pynchon, the more diffuse society becomes. Lacking an Ideal, some
object of instinctive veneration, the citizens in Adams' writing and
the characters in Pynchon's fictions begin to drift apart.

Chapter four examines the entropic movement of Truth, and in
it I attempt to show why men in Pynchon and Adams can no longer locate
an Ideal to worship, some Truth around which they can build coherent
societies. This chapter presents what Pynchon and Adams see as the
inherent weaknesses of the rational processes.

Instead of these rational processes, Pynchon and Adams, as I
argue in the conclusion, turn to their art as a means of coping with
diffuse reality. Imagination gives them an opportunity to create an
order in an orderless world, and although that order may only be a
"momentary stay against confusion," it is nonetheless an order and
their own.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: HOPEFUL METAPHORS

A large part of Henry Adams' artistic career can be considered attempts by a poetic mind to explain scientifically the great historical truths. In this Introduction, the relationship between Adams' poetic mind and science will be examined, so as to show that while his methods were not those of a practicing scientist, they yielded him an imaginative approach to reality, and they yield to me a critical approach to Adams.

At the end of the Education, Adams provides a statement which points toward our parallel approaches:

Images are not arguments, rarely even lead to proof, but the mind craves them, and of late more than ever, the keenest experimenters find twenty images better than one, especially if contradictory; since the human mind has already learned to deal in contradictions. *

These images that Adams describes are a good deal more than simple tropes; they are a sort of inclusive metaphor, describing one phenomenon in terms of another. For example, in one section of the Education, Adams describes science as being "adrift on a sensual raft in the middle of a supersensual chaos" (p. 432). This is one of Adams' images, metaphorical because it relates science to a raft, and symbolic because it

posits an imaginative relationship between a definable human activity and a chaotic nature. The meaning of the image is far from precise, and might be very confusing to scientists, but it says a good deal about the mind of Henry Adams.

Adams recognized that his images were not arguments, but he saw in them a convenient way to present a similarity which could further contemporary or stimulate future thinking. So driven was he to influence this thinking that he sometimes emphasized his metaphorical amalgams at the expense of the details of his observation. As he says, "accuracy is relative. I care very little if my details are exact, so long as my ensemble is in scale." Adams realized his tendency to underplay details, and he was continually warning readers in his correspondence not to take his pronouncements too seriously. In a letter to his brother Brooks concerning "The Rule of Phase Applied to History," Adams said,

you may do what you like with the paper I sent you, which was, in my point of view, only a sort of jig-saw puzzle, put together in order to see whether the pieces could be made to fit. Too well I knew the inadequacy of the public mind, to let me imagine that anyone could derive amusement from such trifles. The fools begin at once to discuss whether the theory was true. I cannot, even here, after months of search, find a physicist who can be trusted to tell me whether my technical terms are all wrong. The technologists cannot go beyond their laboratory materials. The American mind refuses even to amuse itself. It is a convention as flat as the surface of the ocean.

The statement points to an explanation of Adams' imagistic expression and it also demonstrates how he felt about those individuals who could see nothing but details, who lacked the mind for serious intellectual
play. Adams sought, as he said in the Education, not absolute truth, but only "a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it. Among indefinite possible orbits, one sought the orbit which would best satisfy the observed movements of the run-away star Srombridge, 1838, commonly called Henry Adams" (p. 472).

Adams' insistence on the convenience of his truths as opposed to their absolute significance comes essentially from the theoretical writings of Henri Poincaré; Adams' copies of his books, painstakingly underlined, can still be consulted in the Massachusetts Historical Society. In the book which most directly concerns us here, Science and Hypothesis, Poincaré argued that classical science, especially classical physics, was wrong-headed when it asserted that all of Nature could be reduced to a small number of absolute laws. Poincaré felt that in order to make real scientific progress, scientists needed to ignore the inviolable precepts of classical science and derive their own answers from their own observations. One of the ways Poincaré felt such answers could be derived was through the use of hypothesis, the construction and verification of a theory, a guess.

Henry Adams read Poincaré, but he apparently read him selectively. For example, in the following statement, with which Adams would probably agree, Poincaré says,

All generalization is a hypothesis. Hypothesis, then, has a necessary role that no one has ever contested. Only, it ought always, as soon as possible and as often as possible, to be subjected to verification. And, of course, if it does not stand this test, it ought to be abandoned without reserve.3
It has already been noted that in his later years Adams preferred his ensemble to the accuracy of his details, the generalization to the facts employed to evolve that generalization. He was more than willing to see quotations such as the last one urging scientists to be more poetic, more imaginative in forming hypotheses and generalizations, while underplaying Poincaré's insistence on the necessity for disciplined observation and the verification of hypotheses in controlled experimentation. Too often Adams' own observations came to him second-hand, through the cursory reading of a physics book or through answers from his friends, such as Samuel Langley. Even the most elemental science requires painstaking first-person observation, but this requirement was one of the "details" Adams overlooked in his attempt to create a convenient "ensemble." Henry Adams read *Science and Hypothesis* and felt that Henri Poincaré was giving scientific justification to a process at which Adams' mind excelled: the production of images.

To isolate one of Adams' hypothesis-images, and to illustrate Adams' periodic rush to ensemble, one has only to turn to his reading of another of the great scientists of his day, Lord Kelvin, who was one of the first to grapple with the implications of the Second Law of thermodynamics. Adams wrote to his friend Charles Milnes Gaskell and said, "The last thermo-dynamics--fetches me out on sea-level within ten years. I'm sorry Lord Kelvin is dead. I would travel a few thousand miles to discuss with him the thermo-dynamics of socialist society."
Had Adams actually been able to make the trip, he would probably have been greeted by a very confused scientist. Kelvin had posited a scientific construct—a kind of hypothesis—about the actions of molecules which illustrated the Second Law of thermodynamics. A construct, or as Percy Bridgman, Nobel prize winner in Physics, calls it, a "paper and pencil operation," is a mechanical model of a sub-mechanical phenomenon. In other words, it attempts to present some unknown, unobservable phenomenon in terms of some known and observable operation. The model of the round atom, for example, with its charges and orbiting bodies, is a construct which attempts to illustrate what the atom does by comparing its movement with planetary motion. Viewed in this way the scientific construct becomes a hopeful metaphor. The scientist sets up a hypothetical relationship between known and unknown components, hoping that the relationship will be close enough for him to gain some insight about both components.

Both Kelvin and Poincaré would argue for the necessity of hypotheses, whether they be called generalizations, images, or hopeful metaphors. Where they would disagree with Adams, and the major reason Lord Kelvin would have been confused by Adams' imagined visit, is in Adams' assumption that if a law seemed to work for the smaller units of a scientific construct, such as the molecules in the concept of entropy, the Second Law, it must also hold true for human beings, the "units" of a socialist society. To be fair to Adams, there is a good deal more to his argument than this irresponsible extension, but for now it is important to realize that in his use of the scientific
construct, the equivalent of the metaphor in literary art, Henry Adams tended to ignore some of the most vital requirements of scientific procedure.

There are problems with Adams' approach to science, and yet to assume that because his method is suspect his speculations are useless would be as large a logical blunder as Adams ever made. I will be approaching Henry Adams through the scientific construct of entropy, but I will be approaching him through his own statements, not searching for absolute truths but seeking truths of convenience, stopping occasionally along the way to examine what may be an illogical but nonetheless beautifully crafted image. It is William Jordy, in his Henry Adams: Scientific Historian, who provides a timely warning for those about to analyze Adams' scientific writing:

Whether or not Adams correctly interpreted his scientific evidence is in itself unimportant, since on the score of exactitude the literary man has always enjoyed considerable leeway. But where scientific data comprise the stuff out of which the image appears, and without which no image would exist, it is certainly mandatory to examine the choice made, the basis of the choice and the effects of this choice on the intended imagery. In Adams' instance his pattern of selection has particular importance, for he sought a tension between the scientific fact, the emotional image, and the personal reference. So must his critic. 6

I find this tension most aptly expressed in terms of scientific construct, specifically of the construct of entropy, the conceptualization of the Second Law of thermodynamics. Scientists would consider it presumptuous for anyone to attempt to explain entropy without mathematics, but for my purposes the formula for the Second Law is
unnecessary. Although Adams was aware of the mathematical formulations of entropy (and Thomas Pynchon, who studied engineering at Cornell, is so aware), neither writer is really interested in its thermodynamic application. Both remove it from the context from which the scientist might justifiably argue it could not be removed and employ it for their own purposes.

To present entropy as Adams saw it, in its metaphorical sense, we may turn to a book not of physics but of literary criticism, written by Wylie Sypher, a trained scientist who for years was Professor of Literature at Simmons College. In *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art*, Sypher defines entropy by saying,

Physicists have had a good deal to say about entropy, a notion that is as anti-romantic as the marketing orientation. In effect entropy is the tendency of an ordered universe to go over into a state of disorder. This is another way of saying that the behavior of things tends to become increasingly random; and in any system tending toward the random there is a loss of direction. The universe as we have thought of it from Aristotle to Einstein was a system controlled by laws that produced a cosmos instead of chaos—that is, the universe was highly structured; but entropy is a drift toward an unstructured state of equilibrium that is total.

The meaning of entropy is illustrated in Boltzmann's theory that with the passage of time there is a gradual transition in nature from the systematic to the random because the universe suffers a leveling of energy until all distinctions are obliterated....The future is more random than the present or the past. Jacob Bronowski compares the future to a stream of gas shot from a nozzle; the farther the gas is propelled from the nozzle, the more random the motion of the molecules. The gas diffuses; it loses direction. Thus during the course of time entropy increases. ...Technically entropy is spoken of as a drift toward thermodynamic equilibrium—a squandering of energy into a permanent state where no observable events occur. Every isolated system increases in entropy until it reaches a condition of rest. One meaning of time is the drift toward inertia.
A physicist or mechanical engineer would no doubt consider this definition as scientific as a literary critic would find dramatic a mathematical formula. Physicists have, however, presented entropy essentially in Sypher's terms. Percy Bridgman, for example, describes entropy generally as a process occurring in a closed system which is settling down "more or less asymptotically into a dead level of quiet and uniformity from which it can be aroused only from some sort of action from outside—that is, only by breaking the condition that the system be isolated." This is not to say that Bridgman would approve of either Adams' or Sypher's extension of the Second Law; it is only to say that they differ with regard to the definition of system.

Henry Adams clearly feels that almost anything can qualify as a closed system for thermodynamic study. Each of my next three chapters will take one of the "systems" he has isolated and attempt to examine his justification for classifying self, society and history as closed systems. In his one work which deals specifically with the Second Law of thermodynamics, A Letter to American Teachers of History, Adams' metaphorical extension of entropy is often substantiated by quotations from other intellectuals and scientists who clearly have extended the Second Law beyond thermodynamics. For example, Adams uses the following statement by James Dwight Dana at one point in his argument:

The claim that Reason must be classed as an energy of the highest intensity is itself unreasonable. On the contrary, Reason is the last in time, and therefore the lowest in
tension. According to our Western Standards, the most intense phase of human energy occurred in the forms of religious and artistic emotion,—perhaps in the Crusades and Gothic Churches;—but since then, though vastly increased in apparent mass, human energy has lost intensity and continues to lose it with accelerated rapidity, as the church proves. 10

In this quotation Dana is clearly equating rational and thermodynamic energy, a linkage which would require, among other things, that man be a closed system. Science has not shown man to be a closed system by any definition, whether sensate, intellectual or energetic. This apparently does not bother Adams, who uses a myriad of similar quotations to buttress his argument. Quoting Dana once again, Adams asserts that man has but one function, "that of accelerating the second law of thermodynamics." 11 The individual can accomplish this acceleration in several ways, but according to Adams, one of the best ways is through entertainment; drinking, for example:

[man's] chief pleasures, so far as they are his own invention, consist in gratifying the same unintelligent passion for dissipating or degrading energy, as in drinking alcohol, or burning fireworks, or firing cannon, or illuminating cities, or deafening them by senseless noises. 12

The connection between Sypher and Adams should be a little clearer now. As Sypher's definition leaves the purely molecular sphere, dealing with processes and units far beyond the thermodynamic realm, so Adams, using the arguments of Dana and others, sees rationality, self and society as 'systems' amenable to thermodynamic description. In A Letter Adams portrays the individual citizen as the
isolated society as undergoing the same sort of process a closed system undergoes, a movement from a high to a low energy potential and a movement from some form of 'order' or cohesion to some form of 'disorder' or chaos.

This movement, which brings us back to Sypher and through him to Bridgman, is detailed in A Letter, again by the felicitous editing and conjoining of quotations that William Jordy calls Adams' "abracadabra of authoritarianism."\(^{13}\) In one section of A Letter, for example, Adams quotes the last paragraph from Gustave Le Bon's Physiologie des Foules:

That which formed a people, a unity, a block, ends by becoming an agglomeration of individuals without cohesion, still held together for a time by its traditions and institutions. This is the phase when men, divided by their interests and aspirations, but no longer knowing how to govern themselves, ask to be directed in their smallest acts; and when the State exercises its absorbing influence. With the definitive loss of the old ideal, the race ends by entirely losing its soul; it becomes nothing more than a dust of isolated individuals, and returned to what it was at the start,—a crowd.\(^{14}\)

This quotation demonstrates the metaphorical nature of Adams' grasp of the Second Law of thermodynamics, how he was more than willing to extend the law if he thought his own insights warranted the extension. As a scientist Percy Bridgman is justifiably upset with the sloppy use of terms and highly questionable equations, but Adams and Sypher recognize the poetic applicability of change in entropy.

One final qualification needs to be made here. I have been dealing with the explicit uses which Henry Adams makes of entropy, those times when he consciously links some social movement or individual with the Second Law of thermodynamics. Throughout his literary career,
though, Henry Adams continually saw society and individuals in terms of decay and dissolution, and he presented them in this fashion before he was even aware of the Second Law. These earlier examples I will be covering under the general heading of entropic movement, but it must be clear that I, rather than Adams, am doing the linking with entropy. As an example of this entropic movement, there is the statement Adams makes in the Education dealing with the progression of society, a statement which will serve as the basis for my third chapter:

Any schoolboy could see that man as a force must be measured by motion, from a fixed point. Psychology helped here by suggesting a unit—the point of history when man held the highest idea of himself as a unit in a unified universe. Eight or ten years of study had led Adams to think he might use the century 1150-1250, expressed in Amiens Cathedral and the Works of Thomas Aquinas, as the unit from which he might measure motion down to his own time, without assuming anything as true or untrue, except relation. The movement might be studied at once in philosophy and mechanics. Setting himself to the task, he began a volume which he mentally knew as "Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres: a Study of Thirteenth-Century Unity." From that point he proposed to fix a position for himself, which he could label: "The Education of Henry Adams: a Study of Twentieth-Century Multiplicity." With the help of these two points of relation, he hoped to project his lines forward and backward indefinitely, subject to correction from anyone who should know better. (pp. 434-5)

This example, as I say, is not entropic in the sense that Adams explicitly links it to the Second Law of thermodynamics. It is entropic in my sense of the term because it deals with the kind of dispersion which Adams was to link with that law in A Letter. The distinction may seem picayune, but I have to agree with Melvin Lyon when he says, criticizing two Adams scholars,
Jordy and Hochfield have also listed similarities between the versions of the theory [Adams' Dynamic Theory of History]. Jordy shares what seems to me the error of most critics up to his time—and some since... of reading all the versions as if the second law of thermodynamics were central to each and therefore exaggerating the likeness and the lack of differences between the versions.15

I am not saying the Second Law of thermodynamics is central to Adams' world view. What I am saying is that Adams' later unscientific view of entropy beautifully captures the kind of decay he saw around him throughout his life. Adams himself felt the logical relevance of the Second Law to his pessimistic world view and was moved to write a book extending the analogy, his *Letter*. For Henry Adams, though, the Second Law was but another way of expressing the truth which he saw around him, a truth centering around the decay in self, society and historical reality. He continually presented his insights as to the nature of this truth as movements from the coherent to the chaotic, from the potential to the inert, from the ordered to the disordered. In that sense, in Sypher's sense, the general movement I shall be examining in the work of Henry Adams is entropic.

It might seem a difficult task to establish a transition from an explication of Henry Adams as entropic writer to an examination of a contemporary writer of fiction, but Thomas Pynchon himself supplies such a transition in his short story "Entropy," published in the Spring, 1960, issue of the *Kenyon Review*. The story establishes an especially effective transition for my purposes because it deals explicitly with the Second Law of thermodynamics, its metaphorical extension and
At one point in "Entropy," Callisto, one of the major characters, is musing over Henry Adams' relationship to the dynamo, saying, "Henry Adams, three generations before his own, had stared aghast at power; Callisto found himself now in much the same state over Thermodynamics, the inner life of that power..." The inner life of that power is, of course, the sub-mechanical units of which Bridgman speaks, the molecules which actually "act out" the process of entropy. Callisto does not, however, limit entropy to the physicist's definition. As he states, always referring to himself, as Adams did, in the third person,

Callisto had learned a mnemonic device for remembering the Laws of Thermodynamics: you can't win, things are going to get worse before they get better, who says they're going to get better. At the age of 54, confronted with Gibbs' notion of the universe, he suddenly realized that undergraduate cant had been oracle, after all. That spindly maze of equations became, for him, a version of ultimate, cosmic heat-death. He had known all along, of course, that nothing but a theoretical engine or system ever runs at 100 per cent efficiency; and about the theorem of Clausius [should be Clausius], which states that the entropy of an isolated system always continually increases. It was not, however, until Gibbs and Boltzmann brought to this principle the methods of statistical mechanics that the horrible significance of it all dawned on him: only then did he realize that the isolated system--galaxy, engine, human being, culture, whatever--must evolve spontaneously toward the condition of the More Probable.

Callisto seems more than willing to remove the Second Law from its thermodynamic context, but his are not the only metaphorical extensions of entropy in the story. In another plot line, concerned with a wild lease-breaking party in Callisto's apartment building, the relevance of entropy to language and love is implied. Meatball Mulligan,
the owner of the as-yet-unbroken lease, and Saul, a guest, have the following discussion. Saul has been describing the problems of people from different cultures interacting and Meatball attempts to summarize his argument:

"Language barrier," Meatball suggested.

Saul jumped down off the stove. "That," he said, angry, "is a good candidate for sick joke of the year. No ace, it is not a barrier. If it is anything it's a kind of leakage. Tell a girl: 'I love you.' No trouble with two thirds of that, it's a closed circuit. Just you and she. But that nasty four-letter word in the middle, that's the one you have to look out for. Ambiguity. Redundance, Irrelevance, even. Leakage. All this noise. Noise screws up your signal, makes for disorganization in the circuit.

Meatball shuffled around. "Well, now, Saul," he muttered, "you're sort of, I don't know, expecting a lot from people. I mean you know. What it is is, most of the things we say, I guess, are mostly noise."

"Ha! Half of what you just said, for example."

"Well, you do it too."

"I know," Saul smiled grimly. "It's a bitch, ain't it."

"I'll bet that's what keeps divorce lawyers in business.

Whoops."

"Oh, I'm not sensitive. Besides," frowning, "you're right. You find, I think, that most 'successful' marriages—Miriam and me, up to last night—are sort of founded on compromises. You never run at top efficiency; usually all you have is a minimum basis for a workable thing. I believe the phrase is Togetherness."

"Aarrrghhh."

"Exactly. You find that one a bit noisy, don't you. But the noise content is different for each of us because you're a bachelor and I'm not. Or wasn't. The hell with it."

"Well, sure," Meatball said, trying to be helpful, "you were using different words. By 'human being' you meant something that you can look at like it was a computer. It helps you think better on the job or something. But Miriam meant something entirely—"

"The hell with it."

In the first part of this discussion we see an example of what might be called semantic or informational entropy. The word "love" is
treated by most people as a closed denotative system, but Saul points out that when the word is communicated, it "leaks" or dissipates into infinite connotations. Because so many people have so many definitions of the word, it really can be said to have no concrete significance, only noise.

In the second part of the quotation marriage itself is treated as a kind of system, never running at "top efficiency" because it is founded on compromises which are diffusions of individual will. Each partner controls his selfish desires so as to insure the harmony of the relationship, thus weakening the energy potential of each member and the system which they seek to establish. Meatball immediately realizes that Saul's basic premise, that human beings can somehow be encapsulated in a mechanistic metaphor, is incorrect, but Saul simply ends the discussion. Entropy is specifically mentioned in neither one of these systems, but both examples suggest the Second Law of thermodynamics and the kind of metaphorical extension which both Pynchon and Adams occasionally employ.

Moving up to a larger kind of metaphorical extension, we can examine the orgy which consummates the lease-breaking party. As the party continues, the guests' ability to perform useful tasks decreases as their blood alcohol content increases. The party can be seen as a closed system breaking down, wearing out. At the very end of the orgy, Meatball steps back and attempts to determine what action he, as host, should take:
Meatball stood and watched, scratching his stomach lazily. The way he figured, there were only about two ways he could cope: (a) lock himself in the closet and maybe eventually they would all go away, or (b) try to calm everybody down, one by one. (a) was certainly the more attractive alternative. But then he started thinking about that closet. It was dark and stuffy and he would be alone. He did not feature being alone. And then this crew off the good ship Lollipop or whatever it was might take it upon themselves to kick down the closet door, for a lark. And if that happened, he would be, at the very least, embarrassed. The other way was more a pain in the neck but probably better in the long run.

So he decided to keep his lease-breaking party from deteriorating into total chaos: he gave wine to the sailors and separated the mura players; he introduced the fat government girl to Sandor Rojas, who would keep her out of trouble; he helped the girl in the shower to dry off and get into bed;...This is what he did until midnight, when most of the revelers had passed out....

Meatball mentally removes himself from the chaos, Dana's drunken dissipation, to assess the situation, and then he returns to straighten things out. This notion of going outside the system and then returning seems to me to be related to the statement Bridgman makes in The Nature of Thermodynamics, in which he examines the sequence of entropy:

All these sequences have this in common, that after initial stages, which may be of various degrees of violence, the system settles down more or less asymptotically into a dead level of quiet and uniformity from which it can be aroused only by some sort of action from outside—that is, only by breaking down the condition that the system is isolated.

Mulligan disturbs the isolation of the 'system-party' by rousing the dissipated revelers back to consciousness.

"Entropy" explicitly or implicitly deals with the metaphorical extensions of entropy I have mentioned, but the entire story can be
seen as a metaphor for all of Pynchon's other works. "Entropy" is clearly related thematically to Pynchon's three major works, \textit{V.}, \textit{The Crying of Lot 49}, and \textit{Gravity's Rainbow}. The story is linked to if not excised from the 1963 novel \textit{V.} I say this not because Meatball Mulligan and a number of other characters appear in both works, but because of certain thematic juxtapositions. "Entropy" stands almost as a distilled \textit{V.}, free from the impurity of plot lines which can make \textit{V.} hard slogging for the unengaged. The major thematic juxtaposition has to do with the bipolar reality which is so carefully halved and then compared in both \textit{V.} and "Entropy." The halves of this reality, as Tony Tanner notes in his \textit{City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970}, are the reality of the "hothouse" and the reality of the "Street."

In "Entropy" the hothouse reality belongs to Callisto, who is determined to escape the enervation and chaos outside his apartment, determined to create an order in the midst of an increasing disorder. Callisto's apartment is described:

...patches of scarlet, yellow, and blue laced through this Rousseau-like fantasy, this hothouse jungle it had taken him seven years to weave together. Hermetically sealed, it was a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the vagaries of weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder. Through trial and error Callisto had perfected its ecological balance, with the help of the girl its artistic harmony, so that the swayings of its plant life, the stirrings of its birds and human inhabitants were all as integral as the rhythm of a perfectly executed mobile. He and the girl could no longer, of course, be omitted from that sanctuary; they had become necessary to its unity. What they needed from outside was delivered. They did not go out.\textsuperscript{21}
The reality of the Street is the reality of Meatball Mulligan's party and the incredible celebrations of Pig Bodine and Benny Profane in V. This is the reality of the eternal present, of the hedonism which Adams, Dana and Le Bon deplored, seeing it as nothing more than the acceleration of social entropy. Although Adams would be quick to point out the wasted energy of the revelers, Pynchon makes no such statements, because he, unlike Adams, is not a groper after a theory of history. Pynchon simply juxtaposes the two realities, or rather the two aspects of the same reality, and allows the reader to draw his own conclusions. This juxtaposition occurs in all his major works, and the connections, it seems to me, are too close to be coincidental. 22

"Entropy" and V., for example, are related to both The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow. In The Crying of Lot 49, there is the usual overlapping of specifics from Pynchon's other works—Voyodyne for example, a toy-cum-defense plant, appears in both V. and The Crying, as does the idea of a competing mail system—but more germane to my focus is the thematic connection which has each of the main characters in Pynchon's works attempting, in what are clearly dying societies, to make sense of his own individual, social and historical existence. This attempt I shall be examining in detail throughout the dissertation, but I can provide a bare thesis by saying that Herbert Stencil in V., Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49, and Tyrone Slothrop in Gravity's Rainbow, as well as many other characters in Pynchon, embark on quests which parallel Henry Adams' attempts to find unity in a decaying world. While Adams was attempting to find the key to history, desperately
turning to the Second Law of thermodynamics, Stencil seeks V., a female master of disguise who somehow holds the key to his identity. While Oedipa Maas drives through California trying to determine whether W.A.S.T.E. and Yoyodyne are really massive conspiracies or creations of her own paranoia, Callisto is developing his own ecological enclave, trying desperately to stave off the inevitable. While Fausto Majstral somehow finds cohesion in art, Tyrone Slothrop slowly disintegrates. All these characters seek order; all of them ask Oedipa's question: "Shall I project a world?"* Most important for this dissertation, though, is the fact that all of these characters define, in what I have called entropic terms, the kind of disorder from which they flee.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I


2 Ibid., p. 639.

3 Henri Poincaré, Science and Hypothesis (New York: The Science Press, 1905), p. 107-8. This was the edition Adams read.


9 There are a number of places in Bridgman's now classic book, *The Nature of Thermodynamics*, when Bridgman, although not dealing directly with Sypher's definition, calls into question some of the generalizations which Sypher makes. For instance, Bridgman specifically questions the extension of the concept of entropy to the universe:

Another question by which we are led naturally by letting our ordinary verbal impulses have free play is as to the meaning of the "entropy of the entire universe." Of course our original definitions have no application, for they were limited to reversible processes in isolated systems, and the universe is not isolated, nor are its processes reversible. To justify this [extension of entropy] one would have to think of the universe as a finite nucleus of matter, surrounded by an expanding aura of radiation in empty space, with a region of radiationless and fieldless space always surrounding the occupied part. Recent cosmological speculations remove some of the inevitable naturalness from this picture, to say the least. (p. 148)

The speculations which Bridgman mentions deal with whether or not the universe is finite or whether it is, as some astronomers suggest, an expanding radiation field. If it is a radiation field, constantly expanding, then it is not a closed system and it is difficult to say
that the universe is "losing" energy. Bridgman, in other words, is willing to accept the entropy of the universe as a hypothesis in Poincaré's sense of the term, with the provision that the final determination of the truth be left to a time which can with finality discuss the nature of the universe.

Perhaps the chief difference between Sypher's definition of entropy and Bridgman's discussion in The Nature of Thermodynamics concerns Sypher's insistence that the movement in entropy is from order to disorder. Bridgman questions whether the molecules with which entropy is concerned can ever really be considered to be in any discernable order, since they can be observed neither before entropy takes place nor after the process is completed. He phrases his objections to the use of such words as order and disorder in a way that Adams would have liked, through a comparison with a deck of unshuffled cards:

It is not easy to give a logically satisfying definition of what one would like to cover by "disorder," and it has been a favorite topic for discussion. The naive idea seems simple enough. Everyone knows what it means to "shuffle" a pack of cards, and would be willing to claim that the cards for a particular hand had or had not been "well shuffled." But the situation is not so plain when one begins to look at it. Can one describe the shuffling as "good" when only the operation of shuffling is specified, and must one also know the result of the shuffling before one can say that it was good? One natural definition of a "good" shuffling is one that puts the cards in disorder, and whether the cards are in disorder or not can be told only by an inspection of their actual distribution. But B. N. Lewis has justly pointed out that it would be possible to formulate the rules of some card game so that any arrangement of the cards whatever would be a regular arrangement from the point of view of that game. "Disorder" is therefore not an absolute, but has meaning only in a context. What is the context which gives meaning to the disorder of the physicist when he talks about entropy as a measure of disorder?

The context, it seems to me, can be nothing less than the whole complex of operations which we employ in thermodynamics. These operations may be operations of the laboratory or paper and pencil operations. (pp. 166-7).

About these "paper and pencil operations," (my 'constructs') Bridgman states the essential problem with metaphorical hypotheses: "it would appear that there is a rather large verbal element in the coupling of 'disorder' with entropy, and...this coupling is not always felicitous" (p. 174). He clarifies this lack of felicity when he says,
the "disorder" which is the occasion of entropy is
not a disorder in the parameters in the "mechanical"
group. It is rather a disorder in the group of
"submechanical" parameters which are the origin of the
"thermal" behavior and properties of a body. From the
point of view of thermodynamics such parameters are
entirely in the paper and pencil domain. This is as
it should be, because "disorder" is not a thermodynamic
concept at all, but is a concept of the kinetic-statistical
domain. A problem which the kinetic-statistical point of
view has to solve is where to draw the line between
"mechanical" and "sub-mechanical" parameters. As always,
I do not believe the line can be made sharp. This again
is to be expected. There is a fuzziness about the
common-sense notion of "disorder" which makes it not
always altogether suited as an intuitive tool in dis-
cussing the second law. (pp. 175-6)

If I read Bridgman correctly he is here saying that there is
no real way to determine how close our paper and pencil operations are
to the molecular reality of the Second Law, and that to extend the
law may be justifiable, but certainly not on purely scientific grounds.
He seems to be saying that since we cannot know the nature of the
molecules undergoing changes in entropy, we have to be continually
conscious that even our words, such as "order" or "disorder,"
are themselves hypotheses, hopeful metaphors describing an unob-
servable process.

in The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma, edited by Brooks Adams

11. Ibid., p. 230.

12. Ibid., p. 217.


15. Melvin Lyon, Symbol and Idea in Henry Adams (Lincoln:

16. Thomas Pynchon, "Entropy" in Twelve From the Sixties,
p. 25.


18. Ibid., pp. 29-30.


22 There remains to be done a great deal of work on the interrelatedness of Pynchon's work, not only on the characters which appear in the three novels and the stories, but also on the recurring motifs, such as weather mirroring a static society, the animate moving toward the inanimate and vice versa, and the impulse toward the suicidal. It is interesting to note that Adams was interested in most of these themes.
CHAPTER II
THE ENTROPIC MOVEMENT OF SELF

Ed Howe, one of the now unread Hoosier humorists, was once reported to have said that "Henry Adams was the only man in America who could sit on a fence and watch himself go by." Seldom has America produced a writer so severely self-analytical as Henry Adams, so consistently concerned with the existence and definition of his own identity. This section of my dissertation deals with Henry Adams' view of the entropic self, especially his feelings about the slow dispersal of coherent identity.

Even in his earliest years, as he notes in the Education, "the boy [Adams] was accustomed to feel that, for him, life was double. Winter and summer, town and country, law and liberty, were hostile, and the man who pretended they were not, was in his eyes a schoolmaster—that is, a man employed to tell lies to little boys" (p. 9). This sense of a dual reality was part and parcel of Adams himself. Several pages before making the above statement, Adams described the temper of mind which could lead to both constant introspection and the belief that he and reality were more than one:

his [Adams'] nerves were more delicate than boys' nerves ought to be. He exaggerated these weaknesses as he grew older. The habit of doubt; of distrustig his own judgment and of totally rejecting the judgment of the world; the tendency to regard every question as open; the
hesitation to act except as a choice of evils; the
shirking of responsibility; the love of line, form,
quality; the horror of ennui; the passion for compan-
ionship and the antipathy to society—all these are
well-known qualities of New England character in no
way peculiar to individuals but in this instance they
seemed to be stimulated by the fever, and Henry Adams
could never make up his mind whether, on the whole,
the change of character was morbid or healthy, good
or bad for his purpose. His brothers were the type;
he was the variation (p. 6).

This acute sensitivity led Adams to question everything, even
the coherence of his own identity. Henry Adams spent most of his life
sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, obsessively analyzing
himself and the world around him. Even though his analysis seemed
to yield him nothing more than meanings more aqueous, more incoherent,
than those from which he started, his strength of character would not
allow conscience to make a coward of him. He continued to dive until
the very day of his death. Part of this diving was no doubt an aspect
of Adams' pose as a posthumous man, idly picking through the ruins
of western civilization, but Adams cannot be "dismissed" as nothing
more than an ironic poseur. In his constant descent into his own mind,
there was more than the playful.

There are two aspects of this descent which especially concern
us here, the descent he made in life, the rational attempt to define
himself both historically and individually, and the descent he finally
makes in the Education and in a work such as "The Rule of Phase Applied
to History," in which he relates his own questing for identity to the
questing of all men. One way to interpret most of Henry Adams' later
works, and especially the Education, is as a series of attempts to find
a self which could effectively deal with the incoherence of the modern world.

As examples of Adams' failure to locate this coherent self in life, we need only look at two of his attempts to isolate an effective persona, first Adams' trying to view the arena of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the eyes of the eighteenth-century moralist, and then a short look at his longer-lived attempt to deal with the world through rational analysis.

In his mammoth History of the United States Henry Adams all too often blames a man's personal failure on his lack of character, rather than taking into account the particular forces by which that man might have been confronted. As William Jordy notes, Adams "placed too high a value on personal character, too little on public platform." The weakness in this attitude, particularly for a historian, was that it tended to judge men by an absolute morality rather than through the more relative focus of political expediency. As Jordy says,

Moral standards tend toward absolutism, and notably so for all the Adamses. If some of Henry Adams' strictures against the leaders of the Jeffersonian era seem unduly harsh, their severity is due in part to the rigorous, even impossible, moral standards which he maintained.

Jordy sees this attempt to judge men absolutely as an inescapable part of Adams' heritage, an attempt to define himself through a past which he felt sanctioned an absolute morality. As Jordy comments,

the interest in public morality remained throughout life ....Apparent in the young secretary's letters from London, obvious in his reform articles and in the History, the theme eventually made a chapter in the Education and
formed the basis of Adams' condemnation of the world in which he lives....Reading intensified the morality of the family heritage. For his historical development, his reading of the moral historians of the eighteenth century and the extension of eighteenth-century morality into nineteenth-century history were particularly important.4

Jordy here mentions the chapter on political morality in the Education, which is useful as a guide to the change in Adams' thinking. Privately printed in 1907, some ten years after the staggered printing of the History, the Education shows how far Adams had moved from the notion of an absolute morality. The chapter, "Political Morality," ostensibly deals with the Civil War machinations of Lord John Russell, Gladstone and Lord Palmerstone; but more importantly, it details Adams' recognition that political morality, at least in the absolutist eighteenth-century sense of the term, was useless as a means of judging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The three British ministers had clearly compromised the truth while representing the position of England in the Civil War. As Adams says about the incident, "this lesson was to be crucial; it would decide the law of life. All these gentlemen were superlatively honorable; if one could not believe them, Truth in politics must be ignored as a delusion" (p. 159).

Adams was not saying that these men had simply lied, but that truth, absolute truth, was simply a chimera to be sought only by the foolish. His conclusion in cynical:

All the world had been at cross-purposes, had misunderstood themselves and the situation, had followed wrong paths, drawn wrong conclusions, had known none of the facts. One would have done better to draw no conclusions at all. One's diplomatic education was a long mistake (pp. 161-2)
This is a long way from the confident attitude which allowed him to judge the character and actions of Thomas Jefferson. This is not to say that Henry Adams ever completely relinquishes the frame of mind of the eighteenth-century moralist; it was too much a part of his heritage. He did, however, see the limitations of absolutism in the modern world and strove to control the absolutist side of his personality. His success was limited.

His attempt to live the life of the teacher and writer after the Civil War was crowned with far greater success than his attempt at absolute moralism, but the problem Adams faced with the persona of the intellectual was just as serious for his development. Instead of seeing simply the limitations of morality, Adams as intellectual began to doubt the effectiveness of the rationality on which teaching, writing, and morality were predicated. Adams could not "alienate himself from his own consciousness,"5 a consciousness so acute that he had difficulty writing or making an assertion the truth of which he did not immediately question. Instead of offering him the Truth, some coherence around which he could unify his dispersing identity, rationality said to him that all truths were relative, and that his identity, as a kind of truth, was doomed to be chaotic. It was the futility of his findings that led Adams to question the value of intellectual endeavor, and especially of teaching. He reasoned that if one cannot be finally sure of one's own interpretations, how can one possibly communicate them to other people as Truth? And if one did not presume to seek Truth, why bother to communicate at all?
Henry Adams, as was the case with so many nineteenth-century American intellectuals, chafed at his inability to deal with final meanings, especially in history. History for him became a matter of opinion, and "For him, all opinion founded on fact must be error, because the facts can never be complete, and their relations must always be infinite" (Ed., p. 410). Adams found himself questioning the assertions he was making in his history classes at Harvard, and he came to a conclusion: "In essence incoherent and immoral, history had either to be taught as such—or falsified" (Ed., p. 300). Adams was again checked; he recognized the limitations of his intellectual self and yet he could divine no other faculty save rationality to aid him in his quest for coherence.

The moralist and the intellectual are two attempts which Henry Adams made to isolate an effective persona, both of which ended in confusion. As a twentieth-century man he found a reality which made his eighteenth-century absolutes and his nineteenth-century rationality laughable. These two attempts can serve as a model for Adams' whole life. He was continually attempting to isolate a coherent world. He failed, but he did not stop trying. At the same time he realized in the Education that his identity was really a "theatre of simultaneous possibilities," 6 he created his most lasting persona, that of "Henry Adams."

In the latter part of the Education, when Adams is trying to delineate his dynamic theory of history, he presents a number of images of his own sense of self. His most prominent image was the Jamesian "stream of consciousness" image, but among the more interesting of his
own images was that of a bicyclist:

To his Adams' mind the compound výř took at once the form of a bicycle rider, mechanically balancing himself by inhibiting all of his inferior personalities, and sure to fall into the sub-conscious chaos below, if one of his inferior personalities got on top. The only absolute truth was the sub-conscious chaos below, which everyone could feel when he sought it (Ed., p. 433).

The second important image which Adams uses transforms these personalities into energetic particles:

As for himself, according to Helmholtz, Ernst Mach, and Arthur Ralfour, he was henceforth to be a conscious ball of vibrating motions, traversed in every direction by infinite lines of rotation or vibration, rolling at the feet of the Virgin at Chartres or of M. Poincaré in an attic at Paris, a center of supersensual chaos (Ed., p. 460).

In what seems a Freudian notion, identity is seen in these images as composed of infinite particles. The will, or the "inhibitor of the inferior personalities," the shaper and motive force for all the sub-conscious chaos, slowly weakens as all "energies" weaken, through the agency of the Second Law of thermodynamics. As the will weakens, the personality becomes a mass of conflicts between these particle-personalities. The problem which Henry Adams faces in the Education was not that he lacked a self; it seems clear that he thought his real problem lay in the overabundance of selves he had at his disposal. As Ernest Samuels notes, "Adams saw the essential naivete of the romantic conception of the ego as a unitary, indestructible, and unchanging self. Personality was more like a council of anarchists." The question of self returns, then, to the super-sensual chaos below, to the knowledge supposedly below consciousness.
In "The Rule of Phase Applied to History" and at the end of the Education, Adams attempts to define exactly what this knowledge is, and in the attempt he points out the general movement of man as perceiver, both of his own identity and of history. In "The Rule of Phase Applied to History," Adams, using another hopeful metaphor, treats thought as a solution, and shows its successive phases, asking,

If every solid is soluble into a liquid, and every liquid into a gas, and every gas into corpuscles which vanish in an ocean of ether, --if nothing remains of energy itself except potential motion in absolute space, --where can science stop in the application of this fecund idea? 8

The phases of thought, the phases of solution, indeed, the phases of all reality are encompassed in the following succession: solid, fluid, gas, vapor, electricity, ether, space, hyper-space or hyper-thought. The solid can be broken down into smaller and smaller particles until it reaches hyper-thought:

No phase of hyper-substance more subtle than thought can be conceived, since it could exist only as his own thought returning into itself. Possibly, in the inconceivable domains of abstraction, the ultimate substance may show other sides or extensions, but to man it can be known only as hyper-thought,--the region of pure mathematics and metaphysics,--the last and universal solvent.

There even mathematics must stop. Motion itself ended; even thought became merely potential in this final solution. 9

In this approach thought itself becomes the closed system, and hyper-thought becomes the ultimate solution, the "molecules" of thought at rest, at equipotential. Identity is no longer a matter of coherence, because coherence is a rational measure, and the human mind has gone beyond rationality, as it had previously gone beyond
instinct. Identity in hyper-thought is not a matter of "I" and "you" or "my self" and "your self." Identity is collective, the energy needed for coherence merely potential. In hyper-thought the concept of self has been diffused; chaos reigns.

Adams saw the entropic movement of self in historical and personal terms. Over the millennia he saw instinct turning into thought eventually turning into hyper-thought because of entropy; in his own life he saw a parallel movement from sense to confusion. As the author of the *Education*, his problem was to merge the personal and historical movements of self so as to present neither a confession nor as allegory, but an amalgam which would allow Adams to say something about the truth he felt through his own experience.

Part of the truth which Adams felt was that truth itself was relative, and that in the midst of this relativity, each man must evolve his own "formula for the universe." Adams is almost Yeatsian in his insistence that he cannot know truth but that he might be able to embody it. In this sense the *Education* is the most hopeful metaphor of all. And unless it is approached as a metaphor, as an amalgam of truth and art, Adams' views on the personal and allegorical self may be misinterpreted, seen either as purely factual narration or as a kind of modern *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Adams left ample warning to the critic who might fail to see the *Education* as metaphor. Perhaps the most blatant of these is in the Preface to the *Education*, signed by Henry Cabot Lodge but the work of Adams himself. Warning his readers not to take "Henry Adams" at face
value, "Lodge" states,

As educator, Jean Jacques [Rousseau] was, in one respect, easily first; he erected a monument of warning against the Ego. Since his time, and largely thanks to him the Ego has steadily tended to efface itself, and, for purposes of model, to become a manikin on which the toilet of education is to be draped in order to show the fit or misfit of the clothes. The object of study is the garment, not the figure. The tailor adapts the manikin as well as the clothes to his patron's wants....The manikin, therefore, has the same value as any other geometrical figure of three or more dimensions, which is used for the study of relations. For that purpose it cannot be spared; it is the only measure of motion, of proportion, of human conditions; it must have the air of reality; must be taken for real; must be treated as though it had life. Who knows? Possibly it had (Ed., p. xxiv)!

In this statement it seems to me that Henry Adams is stating the donnée which must be granted to the Education, the acceptance that the manikin is a contrived self which is used to present one man's search for a coherence which is not contrived. With his artistic skill, Adams infuses that search with almost mythic significance. As John Brunner notes in an unpublished dissertation, Henry Adams: his Decline and Fall,

the manikin that lived and breathed through the pages of the Education was manipulated by the strings of an artist. The myth of failure, the split personality, the Byronic despair, the exaggerated ennui, and the mysterious reticence hinting at an esoteric knowledge—all these had value as a revelation of Henry Adams' character only insofar as a work of art revealed the psyche of its creator....The mannered picture of Henry Adams that emerged from the pages of the Education was clothed in stage attire for a role in a cosmic drama.10

This cosmic drama Adams was later to detail in "The Rule of Phase Applied to History." In the Education Adams created the "Henry Adams," the persona who had been shaped and was still to be
shaped by the forces of solution. Perhaps the best way to view the hand of the artist at work, creating a self, is by noting the sections of his own life which Adams did not write about in the Education. If Adams were simply intent on writing about his actual life, he would not have ignored the years 1872-1891, probably the most productive of his entire life. During these years Adams was editor of the North American Review, he became an influential journalist, he wrote the History, he was married and his wife Clover committed suicide.

Henry Adams, whose reserve was on a par with Henry James', was not the sort to write a confession, or even a "straight" autobiography, if such a thing exists. This is not to say that the manikin of the Education had no relation to his creator—perhaps he had—but that a primarily autobiographical approach to the Education ignores Adams' stated intent in the Preface. Henry Adams fabricated in prose a kind of Carlylean tension between his real identity and that of the manikin, a fabrication which stands as one of those hopeful metaphors he loved so much. This tension, which existed not only between Adams' real identity and his persona but also among the various identities Adams assumes in the Education, such as the moralist and the intellectual, allowed Adams to make very personal statements without descending into the overly subjective; it was a literary device which a writer such as William Butler Yeats, with his doctrine of "masks," was later to use almost continually.

The Education is a genre study in itself; it seems to be an autobiography, but it is an autobiography which deals, through the
metaphor-manikin "Henry Adams," with one man's attempt to find coherence in the modern world. The difficulty arose when the American public failed to discriminate between the manikin and the man, and took the book as nothing more than factual statement. The public, however, was not entirely to blame for this misinterpretation. Even in his public life Adams carefully maintained his persona, his roles. It is only in the correspondence to his closest friends that a reader can see the real Adams, crushed by his wife's suicide, the writer terribly disappointed by the lack of criticism his History receives, the intellectual whose passion for knowledge maintains itself through all.

Does this mean that the entropic movement of self is nothing more than a literary device, another contrivance? Not entirely. Although the movement of self was not as dramatic as the movement pictured in the Education and "The Rule," the roles not as clearly defined as he made them, they formed an ineluctable part of Adams' existence. Even in his final days, writing to his close friend Charles Milnes Gaskell, the moralist, the rationalist, and the posthumous gentleman vie with each other:

Not the ignorance seems to matter! I come back here [Paris] constantly renewing my astonishment at the vastness of our placid ocean of ignorance that drowns me on all sides, and that I cannot even sink in. I cry wildly for help, but no one brings it, and my fellow voyagers on these dim seas, say as a placid matter-of-course, that I need not expect to be taught. There are only workers, but no teachers. 11

This letter can, of course, be taken as nothing more than posing, posing which his friends had come to expect from him. And yet the pose was maintained so long, and in so many different genres was the
disintegrating self detailed, that such a self seems to me central to the perception of Henry Adams as man and writer. Henry Adams saw his own self dissipating at the same time he saw the conception of the self changing. Before Freud gave the subconscious chaos the sanction of psychoanalysis, Adams recognized it. He saw this dissipating self moving toward "the great ocean equi-potential," and even predicted in the "Rule" that "Thought would reach to the limit of its possibilities in the year 1921."13

If the entropic movement of self was slowing up the perception and the expression of man, though, it was not immediately evident in the work which Henry Adams produced in the years up to his death in 1918. In fact, if anything, the thought of equi-potential seems to have spurred him on to even greater outlays of intellectual energy, and instead of being depleted by these outlays, Adams' mind seems to have been constantly charged. It points to the complexity of Adams' character, the jumble of optimism and pessimism, of reality and fabrication, that while predicting the complete end of all rationality for all men he could harness his own rationality to create essays, books and letters which are still read for their insight and expression.

Reading Thomas Pynchon after immersing one's self in Henry Adams, one gets the feeling that many of Pynchon's characters are bits and pieces of Henry Adams' assumed identities. One need only look, for example, at Herbert Stencil, one of the major characters in V., who is
a quester in history searching for individual significance in a chaotic world. At one point in V., Pynchon describes the situation of Stencil's identity:

Herbert Stencil, like small children at a certain stage and Henry Adams in the Education, as well as assorted autocrats since time out of mind, always referred to himself in the third person. This helped "Stencil" appear as only one among a repertoire of identities. "Forcible dislocation of personality" was what he called the general technique, which is not exactly the same as "seeing the other fellow's point of view"; for it involved, say, wearing clothes that Stencil wouldn't be caught dead in, eating foods that would have made Stencil gag, living in unfamiliar digs, frequenting bars or cafes of a non-Stencillian character; all this for weeks on end; and why? to keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person.

Around each seed of a dossier, therefore, had developed a nacreous mass of inference, poetic license, forcible dislocation of personality into a past he didn't remember and had no right in, save the right of imaginative anxiety of historical care, which is recognized by no one.*

Stencil, like Adams, thinks himself a "vibrating ball" of identities. Stencil, like Adams, is uncomfortable with the use of "I" and assumes personae, searching for a self that would allow him to say "I". In V. Stencil finds a note of his father which suggests to him that this self is somehow related to a mysterious lady named V. whom he (Stencil senior) had met in Malta. Stencil sets out on a quest to find her, a quest which Pynchon clearly presents as having roused Stencil out of a progressive enervation. Pynchon describes this enervation and the movement from it by saying,

he [Stencil] began to discover that sleep was taking up time which could be spent active. His random movements before the war had given way to a great single movement from inertness to—if not vitality, then at least activity. Work, the chase—for it was V., he hunted—far from being a means to glorify God and one's own godliness (as the Puritans believe) was for Stencil grim, joyless; a conscious acceptance of the unpleasant for no other reason than that V. was there to track down.

Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to Stencil had become directed entirely inward, toward the acquired sense of animateness. Having found this he could hardly release it, it was too dear. To sustain it he had to hunt V.; but if he should find her, where else could there be to go but back into the half-consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid (p. 44).

In the "animated" quest for V., Stencil is forced to seek a history he did not live, a past he did not know. He does some research clearly, but what he most often does when he cannot find an answer or specific fact is to project himself imaginatively into the sensibilities of people whom he creates in far-off times and places, a kind of historic New Journalism. Chapter three of V., for example, presents Stencil's imaginative quest to Africa, Vienna, and World War One and is called "In which Stencil, a quick change artist, does eight impersonations."

It is in the imaginative projection of a persona, a dislocated personality, that Herbert Stencil is most like Henry Adams. Although Adams projected two fictional worlds in Esther and Democracy, his two novels, the persona is better examined through the focal characters of both Mont-Saint-Michel and the Education. In Mont-Saint-Michel, as we shall be seeing in the next chapter, the "Uncle" exists to guide other moderns through what Adams felt to be the social coherence of the
thirteenth century. In the Education, the persona was Adams' attempt, among other things, to present one man's efforts in grappling with the incoherence of modern reality.

The manikin of the Education is, in fact, very similar to the idea of a character called Stencil. A manikin and a stencil are figures in outline, mechanical creations for the artist's own purposes. The purposes of the manikin have already been examined. The purposes of Stencil seem to me similar, except that there is virtually no way to determine the autobiographical relationship of the character to Pynchon. Stencil is a character who searches in history, a character who impresses aspects of his own mind on historical situations, "Stencillizing (p. 211)" the facts by looking at them through the stencil of his own imagination.

Both Herbert Stencil and Henry Adams projected themselves into history to make some sense of their present situations. Both depended on a literary device—the persona—which is at the same time radically egocentric and removed from the actual self. And both used history for their own purposes, Adams omitting years in the Education and overlooking the chaos of the social situations in thirteenth-century France, and Stencil more interested in his imaginative quest than in the historical actuality of the Lady V. And both apparently started their quests because they had to. In a self suffering from entropy, from dispersal, in a society which also seems to be dispersing, the need for coherence apparently either forces the individual into some sort of activity or into the slow death from which Stencil was roused.
This questing can be related more directly to entropy by turning to Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Wiener, a mathematician interested in the increasing similarities between the mental processes of human beings and the actions of machines, makes a statement about entropy which relates to the examination of self:

while the universe as a whole, if indeed there is a whole universe, tends to run down, there are local enclaves whose direction seems opposed to that of the universe at large and in which there is a limited and temporary tendency for organization to increase. Life finds its home in some of these enclaves.14

This quotation relates to Percy Bridgman's quotation that the verbal element in mathematics is always a little slippery. In describing a closed system which is running down, we say that it is cooling, the energy dispersing. Our words cover the whole system, when in fact, because we cannot see the molecules, there is a good chance that not all of them are cooling, slowing down. Given the tremendously large numbers of molecules in even the smallest closed system and the mathematical probabilities against all cooling or even all cooling at the same rate, there is a good chance that some of the molecules are not cooling but are getting hotter, moving faster. These are the enclaves which Wiener describes, although his system is a good deal larger. To extend my metaphor, life, or small bits of it, go on, although the dominant tendency seems to be the movement toward the inanimate, the inert, chaos. "If we wish," says Wiener, "to use the word 'life' to cover all phenomena which locally swim upstream against the current of increasing entropy, we are at liberty to do so."15
Henry Adams' and Herbert Stencil's attempts to assume selves might be considered anti-entropic in the sense that they are attempting to organize their identities in a world where all distinctions are rapidly being obliterated. And even though both Stencil and Adams seem to realize that no real and final identity, as no real and final Truth, is possible, they are not deterred from their respective quests. Indeed, the very fact that no final meaning is possible drives them to depend more and more on the meaning their quests can provide for them.

We can re-examine some of the statements which Pynchon makes about Stencil's quest and see that it is described in essentially anti-entropic terms. In his quest he finds "animateness"—life. Indeed, he finds so much animateness in his search for V. that, as Don Hausdorf says, "The quest...is all that he has to sustain him, and he would rather not think about successful completion because that would mean larger failure."16

This larger failure is the reason that the words "Approach and avoid" appear at the end of the quotation on page 38, in which Stencil describes the quest. Stencil will search for V., but he is unwilling to return to Malta, where his father met V., because he is afraid that he will find her. Completion of his quest would mean failure on a personal level, as it would immediately deprive him of a reason for being, his animateness, his attempt to organize, but it would also be a failure in a much larger sense, as Hausdorf notes. Stencil is searching for V. because he is sure that she holds the key to the confusion which is his existence. What seems clear from the novel is that V.
herself is no key, but an infinite number of doors leading nowhere. If Stencil were to find her he would literally and figuratively find nothing, and he would lose everything. He is unwilling to lose the quest because he realizes that in an entropic world any meaning is better than no meaning, and his quest provides such a meaning. In a world which has no final significance, Pynchon seems to be saying, imaginative significance can have a compelling attraction. It can give a self.

If Stencil's identity can be considered as existing primarily in his quest, Henry Adams' search to find an education can be interpreted in much the same way. As William Jordy states at the very end of *Henry Adams: Scientific Historian*:

A tourist of the imagination, he [Adams] bundles his readers beside the nieces in the tonneau and sets off on a quest part whimsical and part serious, part rational and part aesthetic, part comic and part tragic. The journey, not the destination, was important, although in travel as in life direction suggests destination, while becoming may suffice for arrival. But suppose the sense of direction was only apparent? Suppose it was mere movement? The motion of the dynamo, of molecules, of society through time, of the tourist through space, and of thought through both: suppose movement without direction summarized personal and historical experience? Such was the challenge of the disillusioned Comtist, whose Mercedes brought him and his passengers to a phase where he, for one, could travel no further.  

Henry Adams was, in other words, a man who sensed deeply the chaos of reality and who initiated personal quests in order to find a direction in the chaos, a direction he hoped would counter the dispersal
of his own identity. As Adams moved closer to the final dispersal of death, he grew more cynical about his ability to find this direction. This cynicism, instead of leading to intellectual enervation, spurred him to greater quests, because in questing he seemed not so aware of his own futility. As Jordy says in a statement which could apply to both Adams' and Stencil's quest for self, "The journey, not the destination, was important."

Fausto Majstral is another character in V. who seems to be a section of one of Henry Adams' discarded identities. He is probably the most interesting character in V., so far as the dispersal of identity goes. He clearly recognized successive phases in his own personality, called himself Fausto I, II, III and IV throughout his sections of the book. His journal, which he sends to his daughter as her lost heritage, could easily be looked at as a kind of Education of Fausto Majstral, because in it he makes a number of comments specifically dealing with self which Adams himself might have made. For example, at one point Majstral says,

We can justify any apologia simply by calling life a successive rejection of personalities. No apologia is any more than a romance--half a fiction--in which all the successive identities taken on and rejected by the writer as a function of linear time are treated as separate characters. The writing itself even constitutes another rejection, another "character" added to the past. So do we sell our souls: paying them away to history in little installments. It isn't so much to pay for eyes clear enough to see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with "reason" (p. 286).
Fausto, like Adams, recognizes the lie of the integrated personality, even the lie of linear experience signifying a self which reality must act upon. On the next page in V. Maijstral amplifies his sense of futile searching in the past:

Now memory is a traitor: gilding, altering. The world is, in sad fact, meaningless, based as it is on the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous. A man has no more right to set forth any self-memory as truth than to say "Harrett is a sour-mouthed University cynic" or "Dnubietna is a literal and madman" (p. 287).

If there is no coherent personality, then there is no coherent memory: different personas and different feelings will at different times alter memory, as they may have altered initial perception. It was exactly this kind of realization which led Henry Adams to applaud a fire at the state capitol at Albany, New York, which destroyed thousands of irreplaceable historical documents. In his avuncular and posing way he felt that history had been aided by the loss because now historians would no longer be burdened by the lies of the past. Adams' position here is that to presuppose order in existence, or to presuppose that if it exists a dispersing mind can locate it, is mere foolishness. Henry Adams has moved a long way from the young historian who felt confident enough to judge the Truth and the character of Presidents of the past. In the Education the cynicism about truth becomes explicit: "The historian must not try to know what is truth, if he values his honesty; for, if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts" (p. 457).
Fausto Maijstral shares this attitude. While for Adams history sometimes stood as a kind of "nursery tale" (Ed., p. 412), to Maijstral history exists as a species of "colorful whimsy" (p. 287). Maijstral laughs at those men who assume that they have the Truth of history, or the Truth of selfhood, because both Maijstral and Adams question whether such final coherence exists. Both Adams and Maijstral see history, or man's progression through time, as a movement toward dispersal and inanimateness, and both note that general progression by citing their own experience. Here is Fausto detailing his successive identities:

Before 1938, then, came Fausto Maijstral the First. A young sovereign, dithering between Caesar and God. ...I was slated to be a priest...Maijstral the Second arrives with you, child, and with the war. You were unplanned for and in a way resented...Fausto Maijstral III was born on the day of the 13 air raids. Generated: out of Elena's death, out of a horrible encounter with one we only knew as the Bad Priest. ...The journal for weeks after was nothing but gibberish to describe that "birth trauma." Fausto III is the closest any of the characters comes to non-humanity. Not "Inhumanity," which means bestiality; beasts are still animates. Fausto III had taken on much of the non-humanity of the debris, crushed stone, broken masonry, destroyed churches and auberges of his city (p. 286).

The parallels between Henry Adams and Fausto Maijstral are manifold. Both felt their identity, and the identity of twentieth-century man dispersing. Both wrote journals encapsulating that feeling through the use of literary personae. Both finally recognize the super-sensual chaos behind man's dream for order. And both, as we shall see in the conclusion, turned toward art as a possible salvation, an attempt to stave off chaos.
Fausto Maijstral has one major purpose in writing his journal: to let his daughter Paola know that she, too, has a heritage, a historical identity, however confused it might be. Fausto has not let his daughter, now in America, know of his existence for twenty years, partly because he is ashamed of leaving her and partly because he doesn’t know what he can tell her that will make any sense. He finally, however, decides to send Paola his journal and a letter of explanation. In his explanation, Fausto details his own sense of dispersing identity, and also describes what he fears may be occurring with Paola, "a fracturing of personality such as your father has undergone. May you be only Paola, one girl: a single given heart, a whole mind at peace. That is a prayer, if you wish" (p. 294).

As it happens, Fausto's concern for his daughter's identity is well-placed, for Paola Maijstral assumes and divests herself of a number of identities throughout V. At one point she is a hanger-on of a group known as The Whole Sick Crew. At another point she is a Black prostitute named Ruby, girl friend to the jazz musician McClintick Sphere. She may or may not be any one of a number of Puerto Rican girls appearing throughout the novel.

At the end of V, both Paola and Herbert Stencil come to Malta, where Paola is reunited with Fausto and where Stencil hopes to pick up the last clues to the mystery of V. and her relationship with his father Sidney. As it happens, Paola is the only character who finds any heritage on Malta, because she finds her father's love. Stencil
appears to find nothing more than further permutations of V., one of which may be his own mother.

Because Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* defines herself somewhat differently from the Maijstrals and the Stencils, we can approach her from a slightly shifted perspective. While Herbert Stencil and Paola Maijstral go on what could be called egocentric quests, which will hopefully establish for them their own identities, the quest of Oedipa Maas is much less selfish. Oedipa attempts to define herself through her relations with other people, taking the Buberian position that she is not a whole person unless established in a relationship with another human being. Oedipa is different from Stencil because she loves, or attempts to love, in a world destroying the possibility of love.

The second difference between Stencil and Oedipa is that while Stencil found his meaning in the quest itself, Oedipa loses those whom she loves, her meaning, while the quest is occurring. In losing those people she loses parts of herself, and at the end of the book she stands at a postage stamp auction, bereft of all who had loved her, hoping to buy a packet of counterfeit stamps which will prove to her she is not crazy, that there is some kind of plot which is slowly causing herself and her world to disperse.

At the beginning of the novel, Oedipa sees herself as a prisoner in the tower of her own self, yearning to make contact with another individual, or at least with the power that makes such contact impossible.
In a statement which echoes certain aspects of Henry Adams' fears, Pynchon states,

What did she so desire to escape from? Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all. Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere, and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else (p. 11)?

It is Tony Tanner in his City of Words: American Fiction 1950–1970, who best interprets this passage:

One form of narcissism is to regard one's particular form of fantasy of the world as the definitive reality, and it is part of Oedipa's growing agony that she cannot be sure to what extent she herself is guilty of this. In the past she had, we gather, seen herself rather in the role of the maiden imprisoned in the tower, waiting for the knight who would invite her to let her hair down and so deliver her. She had let down her hair for Pierce Inverarity, who had made Oedipa his executrix, "but all that had then gone on between them had never really escaped the confinement of that tower." Then follows a long and crucial passage based, once again, on a painting. The painting was entitled "Borando el Nanto Terrestre" and showed a number of girls imprisoned in a tower where they were working on an endless tapestry which they allowed to flow out of the windows, "seeking hopelessly to fill the void." In the painting, "the tapestry was the world": it contained all you could see outside the tower. The picture makes Oedipa cry. It makes her feel that although she may travel to Mexico she will never really escape from the tower of her lonely self.
Oedipa tries throughout the book to escape from this tower of her lonely self, to link up with another human being, but she is continually frustrated by Fate or chance; she cannot tell which. Whichever it is, though, malignant or accidental, it forces her to go on the quest alone, and it is the solitary nature of her quest which seems about to undo her at the end of the book. As she stands at the stamp auction she stands alone, because all of the men who could have helped her have in one way or another disintegrated. Pierce Inverarity has literally died and in so doing has initiated her fantastic quest for meaning.

Oedipa's husband Mucho, a disk jockey at station KCUF in Kinneret-Among-The-Pines, California, is probably the purest example in Pynchon of the entropic movement of self. At one point Oedipa becomes desperate for help and she returns to find Mucho. She is greeted by an engineer and the following conversation takes place:

"Frankly," confided Pynch, "since you left, Wendell hasn't been himself."
"And who," said Oedipa, working herself into a rage because Pynch was right, "pray, has he been, Ringo Starr?" Pynch cowered. "Chubby Checker?" she pursued him toward the lobby, "the Righteous Brothers? And why tell me?"
"All of the above," said Pynch, seeking to hide his head, "Mrs. Maas."
"Oh, call me Edna. What do you mean?"
"Behind his back," Pynch was whining, "They're calling him the Brothers N. Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people, you know? He's a walking assembly of men" (p. 104).

Oedipa is unwilling to take Pynch's word for her husband's dissolution, so she confronts Wendell herself. In an explanation
almost indecipherable in its zen-like mechanism, Wendell explains that all people who say "rich chocolaty, goodness" are the same person:

"I noticed it the other night hearing Rabbit doing a commercial. No matter who's talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. So you and Rabbit have something in common now. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But the time is arbitrary. You pick your zero point anywhere you want, that way you can shuffle each person's time line sideways till they all coincide. Then you'd have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus saying 'rich chocolaty goodness' together, and it would all be the same voice."

"Mucho," she said, impatient..."Is that what Pynchon means when he says you're coming on like a whole roomful of people?"

"That's what I am," said Mucho, "right. Everybody is" (p. 106).

Mucho's is not a vision of shared humanity. Better perhaps than any of Pynchon's characters, he illustrates what happens when what Adams calls the "inferior personalities" the "subconscious chaos," takes over the will. Identity becomes impossible or merely potential; what we have here is Adams' hyperthought in fictional terms. Mucho has translated himself and all other people into little more than sonal spectra, into forms of energy which are indistinguishable. In denying the possibility of individuality, Mucho undermines Oedipa's quest and she leaves him, seeing that neither can help the other. As Pynchon says, "She could not quite get it into her head that the day she'd left him for San Narciso was the day she'd seen Mucho for the last time. So much of him already had dissipated" (p. 108).
The third and fourth males who could help Oedipa are Metzger, Inverarity's lawyer, and Randy Driblette, a director.

Metzger runs off with a fifteen year old girl, destroying his practice and his life, and Driblette commits suicide. In desperation Oedipa turns to her psychiatrist, only to find that he has been unmasked as an ex-Nazi and is being taken back to Israel by Jewish security guards. Oedipa comments on her inability to make contact with human beings, to establish true selfhood, and its possible connection to conspiracy:

They are stripping from me, she said subvocally—feeling like a fluttering curtain in a high window moving up to them out over the abyss—they are stripping away, one by one, my men. My shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself, and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved fifteen year old; my best guide back to Trystero has taken a Brody. Where am I (p. 114)?

Pynchon does not say where she is, but he lets us know that her increasing alienation from the society with which she seeks to make contact is having a direct effect on her own sense of identity. In a dying society she is attempting to assert her own self, her own life, and in doing so is in trouble. As Tony Tanner states,

For the self to hold out against the drift of the surrounding environment and society may...become an act of life, a counter-entropic gesture. The risk involved in that gesture is that to secure the self against the coercions and intrusive persuasions of society, the individual may inadvertently turn himself into an 'isolated system' and then entropy increases inside him.
Oedipa does turn into this isolated system as *The Crying of Lot 49* progresses. At the end of the book she has great difficulty integrating either reality or her own identity and she fears mental breakdown. In the last scene she stands ready to bid for the packet of stamps, hoping for some evidence of conspiracy which will validate her own sanity, her own identity. She waits to bid for lot 49, which may contain "her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof" (p. 138), and she waits on the edge of madness, or total entropy of self.

These characters, the Maases, the Maistras, and Herbert Stencil, all undergo the entropic movement of self described in Henry Adams' *Education* and specifically isolated in "The Rule of Phase Applied to History." Each starts like the persona of the *Education*, not entirely sure of his own identity, but a great deal more certain than at the end of each character's book. They start, using the terms of the "Rule," as semi-coherent solids and slowly but inevitably move toward hyper-thought, some of them, like Munch Maas, giving up to the sub-conscious chaos and actually making it; others, such as Fausto, coming close but not giving up. Each of the characters who do not give up, though, Oedipa, Herbert Stencil and the persona in the *Education*, faces the recognition that he is finally a "vibrating ball of identity." Each in his own way feels impelled to integrate himself before he can deal with the much larger chaos of the entropic movement of society, the focus of my next chapter.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER II


3 Ibid., p. 67.


9 Ibid., pp. 273-4.


12 Ibid., p. 541.

13 Ibid., p. 308.


15 Ibid., p. 46.


17 Jordy, p. 228.


19 Ibid., p. 147.
CHAPTER III
THE ENTROPIC MOVEMENT OF SOCIETY

If we return briefly to Wylie Sypher's conceptualization of the Second Law of thermodynamics in *Loss of the Self*, we note that he likens entropy to the dispersion of a gas. In the preceding chapter on self, the dispersing particles were personae, inferior identities and impulses fighting in the minds of Henry Adams and of the characters of Thomas Pynchon. The focus of this chapter is the entropic movement of society, and the dispersing particles are correspondingly larger. They are, in fact, the collective citizens themselves.

These citizens begin to diffuse, to separate from each other, because they no longer have any coherent meaning around which to form a unity. Henry Adams and Thomas Pynchon see the twentieth century as ruled by the rational mind and the dynamo, neither of which, they feel, offers the possibility of social coherence. Adams therefore looked longingly backward to medieval France, to a time in which he thought coherent meaning was possible and less longingly forward, to a time when mind might pass beyond rationality, to some new phase which would once more allow for coherence.

Like Adams, Pynchon seems to realize that whatever else rationality is, it is not a basis for social coherence. One of his recurrent subjects is a society based on rationality in which "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the
world." This anarchy stems in part from the inability of rationality to reach any sort of definitive conclusion, around which a coherent society could form. This weakness of analysis is the major topic of a conversation between Roger Mexico and Major Pointsman in Gravity's Rainbow. Mexico says:

"I wonder if you people aren't a bit too--well, strong, on the virtues of analysis. I mean, once you've taken it all apart, fine, I'll be the first to applaud your industry. But other than a lot of bits and pieces lying about, what have you said?"

...Pointsman...glances sharply at this young anarchist in his red scarf. "Pavlov believed that the ideal, the end we all struggle toward in science, is the true mechanical explanation. He was realistic enough not to expect it in his lifetime. Or in several lifetimes more. But his hope was for a long chain of better and better approximations. His faith ultimately lay in a pure physiological basis for the life of the psyche. No effect without cause, and a clear train of linkages."

"It's not my forte, of course," Mexico honestly wishing not to offend the man, but really, "but there's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go. That for science to carry on at all, it must look for a less narrow, a less...sterile set of assumptions. The next great breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle."*

This discussion deals entirely with science, but the rationality it examines, because it cannot reach a truth on which all men will agree, cannot serve as a basis for social coherence. What analysis leaves the analyzer with is "bits and pieces," not Truth, not "the direct epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (Crying, p. 87).

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Because such Truth has not been isolated, the assumption on which
nineteenth-century science was based, that reality was rational,
governed by the laws of cause and effect, is sterile. Instead of
leading man to Truth and to true community, the relativity of ra-
tionalities has led man to follow the hard or to turn inward. Analysis,
as Adams says in "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres," frustrates those
who yearn "to look beyond the piecework of our tasks."¹

In that same poem Adams paints a picture of himself and mankind
as still yearning for Truth but shackled by Reason. In the poem he
addresses the dynamo:

...Within the finite sphere
That bounds the impotence of thought
We search an outlet everywhere
But only find that we are here
And that you are—are not!²

In the poem Adams had been discussing how much he would like to
worship the dynamo, a feeling he reiterates in the Education. He wants
to worship it because it, like the Virgin, symbolizes the primary forces
of its age. But he recognizes that while the dynamo offers a symbol
of unified forces, the forces are themselves chaotic. The unity, in
other words, is chaos, a chaos which mocks his rational pretensions to
know it. We are here and the dynamo is here, as the last two lines say;
but the dynamo, because it really exists on a level different from our
rational minds and because it does not really offer us any hope for a
unified sensible universe, is not really there. It does not answer our
needs, as Adams felt Mary did in thirteenth-century France. In the two
stanzas which precede the stanza above, Adams makes his futility explicit:

We know not whether you are kind,
   Or cruel in your fiercer mood;
But be you matter, be you mind,
We think we know that you are blind,
    And we alone are good.

We know that prayer is thrown away,
   For you are only force and light;
A shifting current; night and day;
We know this well, and yet we pray,
   For prayer is infinite. \(^3\)

The dynamo is a hoarder of chaotic forces, beyond rationality, beyond the moral schema of good and bad. Man cannot penetrate the chaos which is reality, and yet he keeps trying. At the end of Mexico’s statement from *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon seems to take a position similar to Adams’, that final meaning, progress in Truth, may be approached only when rationality and all it stands for are transcended, and the next intellectual phase has been accomplished. Both authors feel that the present possibility for isolating final meaning, and through that meaning, a coherent society, is nil. The rationality on which such a coherence would now have to be built does not guide so much as confuse, does not lead so much as follow the whims and situations of men and forces.

Certainly this sense of futility was one of the reasons Adams made his imaginative journey to thirteenth-century France in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*; he wanted to see exactly what society had lost since Chartres was built. He returned and found what he felt
to be a true community, a body of citizens who agreed on certain assumptions, Truth which offered coherence. At the center of these assumptions was the Church: "Barring her family quarrels, Europe was a unity then, in thought, will and object. Christianity was the unit" (MSM, p. 32). This unity, though, was not simply denominational. Adams' main emphasis in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres was on the relationship of the medieval worshipper and artisan to Mary, the mother of God.

The most important part of Adams' interpretation of this relationship was his insistence on the instinctive veneration of the medieval artisan. It is important because it points to the phase of mind before rationality. Instead of being limited to analytical processes which resulted in "bits and pieces," Adams felt that this instinct was a sub-rational phenomenon, somehow allowing man to attain Truth. In Adams' romantic interpretation, instinct transcended reality, giving man a Truth around which he could build a coherent and unified society.

That this truth was not rational, not circumscribed by the mind of man, is continually emphasized in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres. Adams stated that it was useless to even attempt to appeal by Reason to Mary because she was "by essence illogical, unreasonable and feminine"(p. 259). To someone as relentlessly self-analytical as Adams, though, this illogicality is not to be taken as a criticism. To Adams, the Virgin, who seemed to him above Reason, stood quite literally for a peace which passeth all understanding.
In a similar way Mary offered peace to the medieval citizen, because she alone in Heaven could love and in loving overturn a heavenly decree. As Adams said about the medieval worshippers, they yearned for protection, pardon and love. This was what the Trinity, although omnipotent, could not give. Whatever the heretic or mystic might try to persuade himself, God could not be love. God was Justice, Order, Unity, Perfection; he could not be human and imperfect, nor could the son of the Holy Ghost be other than the Father. The Mother alone was human, imperfect, and could love; she alone was Favour, Duality, Diversity (p. 260-1).

Henry Adams yearned for a faith, an extra-rational belief, which could be effective in the modern world. He sees the medieval worshipper in France as having such a belief and he yearns for the wholeness which such a belief entails. This wholeness is best embodied for Adams in the great cathedrals, whose symbolic unity provides the organizational principle for Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres. On the last few pages of the book Adams spoke of the theology of Thomas Aquinas and of the cathedral at Beauvais, linking them by calling them both "art" and by saying that the essence of such art, "the despotic central idea—was that of organic unity both in the thought and in the building....The method was the same for both, and the result was an art marked by a singular unity, which endured and served its purpose until man changed his attitude toward the universe" (pp. 376-7). This organic unity Adams saw as the basis for the social coherence of the thirteenth century. It is organic because it occurs in a sphere which transcends Reason, which encompasses both the existence
of the Virgin and the supreme creative moment. That this position can be labelled Romantic Adams is at no pains to deny. He specifically linked the medieval artisan with Wordsworth's "eternal child" (p. 87) who is somehow closer to the great life forces because his mind is undeveloped--reason has not yet taken charge. The medieval artisan, in Adams' words, was "so simple and yet so complicated; he sees so much and so little" (p. 87). He is open, in Adams' interpretation, to the deepest sort of natural impulse, an impulse which could stand as the basis for social coherence.

All this is not to say that Adams ignored the self-conscious skill it took to build the great cathedrals. He was simply more interested in the impulse to create and construct such a work, because in that impulse he thought he saw what the twentieth century was lacking. For Henry Adams, the tourist of history, medieval religious art stood as a kind of embodied instinct, a crystallization of what Henri Bergson, in another context, called the *elan vital*. Medieval art was for Adams a transcending of the rational self, a comingling of being with pure being, a pure being most readily embodied for Adams and for the artisans in the figure of the Virgin.

The major link, then, between the medieval artisan and Mary was instinct, an instinct which allowed for a transcendent association of sensibility. Instead of the split between feeling and thought which T. S. Eliot bemoaned at the beginning of the twentieth century, the thirteenth century, In Adams' view, contained citizens who could feel a religious impulse and live a religious impulse and manifest a
religious impulse at the same moment—the moment of creation. Adams felt that at that moment they lost the self-consciousness which was his own curse and the curse of the twentieth century and became a part of organic nature.

This is essentially the society which Adams found in thirteenth-century France, coherent because it sustained a faith and contained an instinct which gave people certain absolutes around which to form a unity. The journey from this unified society to the chaotic society of the twentieth century is a journey between phases of mind. From the instinct of medieval France Adams moves to the rationality of modern man, whose relativity of interpretation seems to him to promise only chaos, the futility he presents in "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres."

As early as the latter part of the thirteenth century, Adams notes in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, the instinctual unity was beginning to move toward the phase of Reason, which killed it as surely as frost kills a bud. Instead of worrying simply about beauty, about the veneration of Mary, some late thirteenth-century artists were becoming "reasonable" and actually worried about expense. As Adams says, "The great cathedrals after 1200 show economy, and sometimes worse. The world grew cheap, as worlds must" (p. 9).

To Adams, worlds grow cheap because the energy, the instinct which keeps them together, which gives them significance, begins to disperse, as energy within a closed system disperses. We can find this interpretation made explicit in the Letter, when Adams quotes James Dwight Dana on the difference between Reason and instinct:
The claim that Reason must be classed as an energy of the highest intensity is itself unreasonable. On the contrary, Reason is the last in time, and therefore the lowest in tension. According to our western standards, the most intense phase of human energy occurred in the forms of religious and artistic emotion,—perhaps in the Crusades and Gothic Churches;—but since then, though vastly increased in apparent mass, human energy has lost intensity and continues to lose it with accelerated rapidity, as the Church proves....Man has, indeed,—or had,—in a few of his stems, some faculty for artistic expression, not nearly so strong as that of some plants, or some birds, but more varied. This instinct he probably inherited from an earlier, more gifted animal; but as a creative energy he inherited next to nothing. The coral polyp is a giant beside him. As an energy he has but one dominant function:—that of accelerating the operation of the second law of thermodynamics.\(^4\)

Adams is herein presenting what amounts to the foundation for the unity he found in France and the multiplicity he finds in modern Paris. The mind of man is a closed system and the energy inside it is slowly losing potential. At one time man was a part of Nature and his energy was at the highest possible level, but as man progressed, he moved away from Nature, and the farther he moved, and the closer he came to Reason, the more ineffectual he became. Dana's statement highlights the dispersing movement from the medieval church, the movement away from intuitive "whole" knowledge to a rational, fragmented knowledge. This is the movement to an infinite relativity in Truth, a movement typified in the social scene by continuing separation among citizens. Adams embodies this insight with a quotation from Gustave LeBon:

That which formed a people, a unity, a block, ends by becoming an agglomeration of individuals without cohesion, still held together for a time by its traditions and institutions....but with the definitive
loss of the old Ideal, the race ends by entirely losing its soul; it becomes nothing more than a dust of isolated individuals, and returns to what it was at the start,—a crowd.5

This quotation from A Letter effectively encapsulates what I have called the entropic movement of society. As man's cognitive energies decrease, he is less able to recognize the absolute, the Ideal which can give man and society unity. Once this instinctual ability is lost, the soul of the race is lost, and people become little more than anarchic particles.

In Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres Adams details this slow loss of energy by examining what man was able to do artistically in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and then by pointing to what he felt was man's progressive inability to respond to the creative impulse. Adams felt that since medieval days taste had become deadened or superseded by rationality and other extra-instinctual considerations. The process of devolution from instinct, the progressive "rationalization" of man, accelerated in the twentieth century, according to Adams. In Mont-Saint-Michel he states, "the feebleness of our fancy is now congenital, organic, beyond stimulant or strychnine, and we shrink like sensitive-plants from the touch of a vision or a spirit" (p. 127). The point seems clear: unless a man can recognize and respond to a vision or spirit, he cannot "know" the deep creative impulse, and unless he can know such an impulse, he is destined to be limited by his own feeble mind. Adams sees the citizens of the twentieth century as so limited.
From the Virgin of Medieval France to the dynamo of the twentieth century, from venerative instinct to rationality, Adams follows the movement of man and society in the *Education*. In the twentieth century science is seen not so much as the glory of man but as an admission of his futility. Even as Adams turned to science for an answer to the dispersion he felt and saw around him, he knew that rationality alone could only yield him chaos. This realization is brought home most effectively when Adams tours the Paris Exposition of 1900 with Samuel Langley, a trained scientist, at whose "bequest, the Exposition dropped its superfluous rags and stripped itself to its skin" (*Ed.*, p. 379). Adams has just admitted in the *Education* that cause and effect is a fallacy in historical studies and he comes to a conclusion about the path of his future studies:

Satisfied that the sequence of men led to nothing and that the sequence of their society could lead no further, while the mere sequence of time was artificial, and the sequence of thought was chaos, he turned at last to the sequence of force; and thus it happened that, after ten years' pursuit, he found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines at the Great Exposition of 1900, his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new (p. 382).

Adams stands before the dynamo in the Gallery and he yearns to penetrate its meaning, but what he finds from Langley is that the actions of the forces he wants to study are beyond rationality and point to a final reality which is simply inexplicable, far beyond the primitive notions of cause and effect:
he [Langley] constantly repeated that the new forces were anarchical, and specifically that he was not responsible for the new rays, that were little short of parricidal in their wicked spirit toward science....Radium denied its God—or, what was to Langley the same thing, denied the truth of his Science. The force was wholly new.... X-rays played no part whatever in man's consciousness, and the atom itself had figured only as a fiction of thought. In these seven years man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old. He had entered a supersensual world, in which he would measure nothing except by chance collisions of movements imperceptible to his sense, perhaps even imperceptible to his instruments, but perceptible to each other, and so to some known ray at the end of the scale. Langley seemed prepared for anything, even for an indeterminable number of universes interfused—physics stark mad with metaphysics (p. 381).

Adams felt that these rays are the highest forces, whose understanding would bring him an understanding of the universe. He felt that "Susceptibility to the highest forces is the highest genius" (p. 475), but he recognized that the modern rays and forces were beyond his comprehension, and beyond the comprehension of science. Science called the actions of such forces unified, but Adams could see the lie of this. The unity which the dynamo, with its uncontrollable forces, betokened, was chaos: "the scientific synthesis commonly called Unity was the scientific analysis commonly called Multiplicity. The two things were the same, all forms being shifting phases of motion" (p. 431). Adams had turned to science for a key to reality, some truth he could hang onto and find security in, and at the Paris Exposition he found forces and a reality beyond the limitations of his rationality.

The Virgin was an absolute fact in medieval France, whose love for man was continually being manifested and whose being provided man
with a basis for social coherence. But at the end of the nineteenth century, as Adams said in the Education, the Virgin stood for little more than the "stupendous failure of Christianity" (p. 482). In a world of savagery, the Virgin had lost her motive power, and the dynamo offered only chaos. Prayer to it was "thrown away," as Adams said in "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres." To consider the dynamo as a basis for social coherence was laughable.

Adams was sure that the dynamo was the symbol for the forces of the modern world. He yearned to pray to it, and did, but even as he prayed he recognized that he would not be answered, for the dynamo was "only force and light; a shifting current; night and day;" the dynamo offered him no Truth, no coherence on which to build a perception of the world. Its truth was manifold and anarchic, going far beyond medieval instinct and modern rationality, and it pointed to a world less and less controlled by logic and more and more controlled by chance. In a world such as this meaning itself seemed predicated on coincidence, the possibility of knowledge at best fleeting and partial, and the opportunity for community non-existent.

We can see why Adams wrote dejectedly to Albert Cook in 1910 that "our present society, its ideals and purposes, [are] drags and fragments of some primitive, essential instinct now nearly lost." The path from the Virgin to the Dynamo is the path of social entropy, a movement from society unified by instinct and ideal to a society lacking both, composed of individuals, a crowd, almost random members recognizing little but their own petty fears and desires. This is a
society heading toward equipotential, no longer existing in a meaning-
ful way because coherent meaning no longer exists. Adams could only
look hopefully to the far future, when man's mind might again change,
and some new Newton would rise in society and give it Truth once more.

Adams was at the same time hopeful and pessimistic about the
possibility of a new Newton; Thomas Pynchon is almost wholly pessimis-
tic. In his fiction society is portrayed as much nearer equipotential,
and at least part of the reason is that man lacks an Ideal or even the
sort of mind which could recognize an Ideal. Very seldom does Pynchon
point to a prior time, when such a mind and such an Ideal existed,
but in one of the few times he does, in Gravity's Rainbow, he describes
the creative impulse which led to the Gothic cathedral:

They [a group of technicians] are approaching now a
lengthy brick improvisation, a Victorian paraphrase
of what once, long ago, resulted in Gothic cathedrals
—but which, in its own time, arose not from any need to
climb through the fashioning of suitable confusions
toward any apical God, but more in a derangement of
aim, a doubt as to God's actual locus (or, in some, as
to its very existence), out of a cruel network of sen-
suous moments that could not be transcended and so bent
the intentions of the builders not on any zenith, but
back to fright, to simple escape, in whatever direc-
tion, from what the industrial smoke, street excrement,
windowless warrens, shrugging leather forests of drive
belts, flowing and patient shadow states of the rats
and flies, were saying about the chances for mercy
that year (p. 46).

As Adams juxtaposed the Virgin and the Dynamo, Pynchon here
juxtaposes the Gothic cathedral and a Victorian improvisation. The
difference in the two buildings can be traced directly to the unity
or lack of unity in the impulse which led to their construction. We have already described the unity of instinctive veneration; God existed for the medieval worshipper, as did Mary, and They gave the world coherence. This instinctive veneration no longer has any motive force in Pynchon's world. "Sensuous moments" can no longer be transcended in times of creation or worship. Man is left with his senses and with brute reality, which offers him little chance for "mercy." As faith resulted in a miraculous unity of artistic and architectural vision in the middle ages, so the modern fear of a blind and purposeless reality has led to an architecture gone berserk, with wings and rooms seemingly seeking to escape all threats at once.

If this blind anarchy is at the center of Pynchon's social vision, then Benny Profane, a central character in V., is at the center of the anarchy, a purposeless wandering individual in a decaying society. A great deal of Profane's time in V. is spent yo-yoing, "shuttling on the subway back and forth underneath 42nd Street, from Times Square to Grand Central and vice versa" (p. 27). He is a character that recognizes no goals, no values and no love. It would be difficult to portray more effectively a member of Gustave Le Bon's "crowd."

In V., Pynchon's crowd, what society has degenerated into, is composed of sailors, perverts, members of minority groups, and a cadre of self-styled intellectuals called The Whole Sick Crew, all of whom are moving inexorably toward Pynchon's own equipotentiality. Pynchon is as oblique as Adams in his presentation of this equipotentiality, but it is clearly linked in his mind with the inanimateness
which would result from the heat death of the universe. This vision
makes explicable a peculiar scene which occurs early in V, in which
Profane attempts to deal with the after-effects of a monumental drunk:

By the time the sun was going down they'd nearly
finished the case between them. Profane was bale-
fully drunk. He got out of the car, wandered off
behind a tree and pointed west, with some intention of
pissing on the sun to put it out for good and all,
this being somehow important for him. (Inanimate
objects could do what they wanted. Not what they
wanted because things do not want: only men. But
things do what they want, and this is why Profane
was pissing at the sun) (p. 17).

Here is a drunken Profane, dimly aware that man is not in control of
things, that things have a will of their own. He wishes to piss on
the sun, and although his motivations remain drunken and unclear, at
least part of his reason is to put out the sun so that the unjust
universe would die, and with it the realization of his own limitations.
Profane seems to be exemplifying James Dwight Dana's statement in
A letter that man's dominant function is "that of accelerating the
operation of the second law of thermodynamics." Profane would bring
all the earth to inanimateness in one drunken release.

He fails in his attempts, as one might expect, but as he learns
later, what he was attempting is slowly happening of its own accord.
Profane is hired as a night watchman at Anthroresearch, a plant which
makes robots, and he begins to have a series of imaginary dialogues
with a robot named SHROUD. In them SHROUD continually points to the
reification of mankind, the slow movement toward the inanimate, death.
SHROUD says:
Remember, Profane, how it was on Route 14, south, outside Elmira, New York? You walk on an overpass and look west and see the sun setting on a junkpile. Acres of old cars piled up ten high in rusting tiers. A graveyard for cars. If I could die, that's what my graveyard could look like.

"I wish you would. Look at you, masquerading like a human being. You ought to be junked. No burned or cremated."

Of course, like a human being. Now remember, right after the war, the Nuremberg war trials? Remember the photographs of Auschwitz? Thousands of Jewish corpses, stacked up like those poor car-bodies. Schlemihl: It's already started.

"Hitler did that. He was crazy."

Hitler, Eichman, Mengele. Fifteen years ago. Has it occurred to you there may be no more standards for crazy or sane, now that it's started?

"What, for Christ sake (pp. 274-5)?"

SHROUD does not answer; nor does it need to. The German "solution" to the Jewish problem is a perfect example of the deadening of fellow feeling, of true community. Human beings were treated as things by other things, both victims and perpetrators dehumanized in the process. Profane tried to consider Hitler as an aberration, but SHROUD says that in order to identify aberration, one has to know what normality is, and there are no absolute standards. The moral sense, in other words, is atrophying just as quickly as Adams thought the aesthetic sense was. The workings of the Second Law are slow but inexorable; society in the twentieth century, lacking an Ideal, a Truth, is slowly separating, dispersing, human values and dignity dying with every innocent.

At one point in V this social decadence is clearly defined:

"A decadence," Itague put in, "is a falling away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories" (p. 380).
Profane is clearly at the center of Pynchon’s vision of decadence, and he foists off his humanity on SHROUD, but V., Stencil’s prey, offers an interesting thematic parallel to Profane’s reification. As V. progresses, and Stencil’s search broadens, V. becomes progressively more inert, progressively more prosthetic. At first she is a young girl in Egypt, Victoria Wren, whose innocence is emphasized. The next time she is seen as a human being (she may or may not be Veronica the sewer rat) is as Vera Meroving under siege in Africa in 1921. At this time she has a glass eye. Disguised as a priest in Valletta, Malta, during the second World War, V. is pinned by a falling timber during a bombing raid, and, in one of the most harrowing scenes in V., she is slowly dismantled by Maltese children. They remove her false teeth, her glass eye, and a star sapphire in her navel. But this is not the final time we see V. She appears once more in one of the mind-trips of Stencil, who dreams of her now, at age seventy-six; skin radiant with the bloom of some new plastic; both eyes glass but now containing photoelectric cells, connected by silver electrodes to optic nerves of purest copper wire and leading to a brain exquisitely wrought as a diode matrix could ever be. Solenoid relays would be her ganglia, servo-actuators move her flawless nylon limbs, hydraulic fluid be sent by a platinum heart-pump through butyrate veins and arteries. Perhaps—Stencil on occasion could have as vile a mind as any of the Crew—even a complex system of pressure transducers located in a marvelous vagina of polyethylene; the variable arms of their Wheatstone bridges all leading to a single silver cable which fed pressure-voltages direct to the correct register of the digital machine in her skull. And whenever she smiled or grinned in ecstasy there would gleam her crowning feature: Eigenvalue’s precious dentures (pp. 396-7).
V. is at the symbolic center of the novel, and her transformation to the inert points to the larger movements of the book. V. is in one sense the record of a dying society; the characters are examined to see what sort of response they will make. Their response defines them but does not arrest the decay, the dissolution, which is seen time and time again in entropic terms. Fausto Maijstral for example, defines decadence in the novel, saying:

Decadence, decadence. What is it? Only a clear movement toward death or, preferably, non-humanity. As Fausto II and III, like their island, became more inanimate, they moved closer to the time when like any dead leaf or fragment of metal they'd be finally subject to the laws of physics. All the time pretending it was a great struggle between the laws of man and the laws of God (p. 301).

Fausto's position seems to be close to Henry Adams' here, that man is subject to the Second Law, that the cognitive energy necessary to isolate coherence, to discern the Truth, is wearing down, and the rationality man is left with can only give him glimmers of meaning. Human society dissipates because citizens are no longer able to agree on the Truth, and in desperation, they form their own groups. But the coherence they find in Pynchon is as limited as the rationality with which they search.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* there is the same movement from the vital to the inert; incoherence is ever lurking. Early in the book the narrator states that "Decline and fall works silently on this landscape" (p. 67), and Pynchon is careful to embody this decay in social terms. There is, however, a slightly different focus in *Gravity's Rainbow*. 
While it, like V., is interested in the individual’s reaction to a dispersing society, Gravity’s Rainbow is more concerned with the kinds of groups which individuals form to escape social decay. Although the final message is essentially the same, that the human race is slowly moving to equipotential, Gravity’s Rainbow is a book more interested in collectives.

In one sense Gravity’s Rainbow is a criticism of the corporate structure. The groups examined in the book are seemingly different—military, industrial, religious and sexual—but almost every one of them is governed by chain of command and committee parliamentarianism. Although this forming of groups seems to contradict Pynchon’s position that social structure is deteriorating, what must be emphasized is that Pynchon does not feel that these corporate structures allow for true community, that they are based on the limited rationality he is so careful to criticize elsewhere in Gravity’s Rainbow.

There are any number of reasons for Pynchon’s feeling that a corporation denies true community, but the two major reasons, it seems to me, are the lack of individual responsibility which corporate decision-making fosters, and the inordinately higher valuation which corporate structures place on function.

Of the first weakness there is abundant evidence in Gravity’s Rainbow. A corporation delegates responsibility to committees, which can make a decision for which no single member is responsible. As Tyrone Slothrop says, describing a corporate America, “Decisions are
never really made--at best they manage to emerge, from a chaos of peeves, whims, hallucinations and all-around assholery" (p. 676).

Pynchon's opinion of committees is most effectively presented when one of them makes a decision which separates Roger Mexico from Jessica, the woman he loves. The committee has decided that the relationship is interfering with the efficiency of the two soldiers, and Mexico reacts to it by running into the committee room and leaping onto the table:

Roger has unbuttoned his fly, taken his cock out, and is now busy pissing on the shiny table, the papers, in the ashtrays and pretty soon on these poker-faced men themselves, who, although executive material all right, men of hair-trigger minds, are still not quite willing to admit that this is happening, you know, in any world that really touches, at too many points, the one they're accustomed to...."Pointsman [Mexico's direct superior]...I've saved you for last. But--goodness, I don't seem to have any urine left, here. Not even a drop. I'm so sorry. Nothing left for you at all. Do you understand? If it means giving my life," the words have just come out, and maybe Roger's exaggerating, but maybe not, "there will be nothing anywhere for you. What you get, I'll take. If you go higher in this, I'll come and get you, and take you back down. Wherever you go....I'll always be just outside. You will never cancel me" (pp. 636-7).

There is a certain logic in Mexico's indiscriminate pissing here. The standard defense of a committee member is to say that he alone is not responsible for a decision. By his actions Mexico says that while that is true, so is the converse, that there is no one there who is not responsible for the decision. Mexico tramps, and wets, the committee members in the very logic by which committees hope to avoid responsibility.
Mexico realizes the gravity of the decision which the committee has made, that it has as much as told him that he will have no personal life, that he is nothing more than what the committee collectively says he is. But he refuses to surrender his humanity, telling them that they will not cancel him out. This cry resounds through Gravity's Rainbow as the various corporate structures attempt to assimilate their workers to the technological imperatives of efficiency and obedience to superiors. Mexico makes his assertion, but the victory is Pyrrhic; the security guards take him away. The workers have a voice, but the committees have the power.

In the story of Franz Pökler, one of the most moving in Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon shows that the corporate structure has no real political ideology, that it thrives alike in dictatorships and the "free" world. Pökler is a dedicated German scientist and technician, working on the Nazi war machines. He has never questioned the morality of his function, always obeying his superiors. His wife has tried to explain to him the immorality of his position, saying, "They're using you to kill people....That's their only job, and you're helping them" (p. 400), but Pökler remains oblivious to the morality of his vocation until his wife and child are separated from him, so as to insure his continued efficiency. Pökler then realizes, like Mexico, that his function has superseded his identity in the corporate structure. As he thinks to himself: "Behind this job-like-any-other-job seems to lie something void, something terminal, something growing closer, each day, to manifestation" (p. 415).
What is moving closer to manifestation is equipotential, in which all men will be dehumanized, when the word "dehumanized" will no longer be meaningful. Pökler realizes that he no longer has any value unless he conforms to his corporations' expectations of him. He has become his function. As he says, "He was expected to behave a certain way—not just to play a role, but to live it. Any deviations into jealousy, metaphysics, vagueness would be picked up immediately: He would either be corrected back on course, or allowed to fall" (p. 417). At the end of this statement the metaphor of identity and function becomes explicit: He refers to himself as the Rocket, the V-2, on which he is working. He is being subsumed by a Rocket which is as much an embodiment of the modern lack of community as Chartres was an embodiment of instinctive veneration and wholeness.

The love between Pökler and his family, the love between Jessica and Roger, indeed, all love in Pynchon, is denied because such feelings interfere with the efficiency of what Pynchon calls the "Operation." The love one finds in V., Gravity's Rainbow and The Crying of Lot 49 is almost uniformly sexual and perverse. When it begins to verge on the romantic, when it seems that two people are actually beginning to acknowledge their separate existences and are willing to merge in extrosexual ways (to put this in the language of technology), the relationship is terminated. There is, for example, the relationship of Katje and Slothrop. When Katje is called in to spy on Tyrone at the French resort where Pointsman is holding him prisoner, she is
ordered to make love to him, and the dehumanization of her role becomes vividly evident in her face:

He lies on top of her, sweating, taking great breaths, watching her face turned 3/4 away, not even a profile, but the terrible Face That Is No Face, gone too abstract, unreachable: the notch of eye socket, but never the labile eye, only the anonymous curve of cheek, convexity of mouth, a noiseless mask of the Other Order of Being, of Katje's being—the lifeless nonface that is the only face of hers he really knows or will ever remember (p. 222).

I do not think it a forced interpretation to see this facial change as a thematic counterpart to the later attempted castration of Slothrop: as technology and the corporate structure attempt to castrate men, "cancelling" them in Mexico's phrase, so that same structure sees woman as nothing more than means to some end, yet another technique, which view robs them of all that is human and could lead to community.

What happens to Katje, though, is that she really begins to care for Slothrop. They are standing together by the sea and "He looks down, trying to see into her eyes, and is puzzled to find tears coming up to fill each one, soaking in among her lashes, mascara bleeding out in fine black swirls...translucent stones, trembling in their sockets" (p. 225). These tears betoken the first genuine emotion seen in Katje, and they are enough for Pointsman to take her off the assignment. Love is a variable and variables are the enemy of Pointsman, who must manipulate people as efficiently as corporations produce automobiles.

It is easy to see why a recurring slogan in Gravity's Rainbow is AN ARMY OF LOVERS CAN BE BEATEN. In order for efficiency to prosper,
it is necessary for people to dedicate themselves to their functions, not to their hearts. The corporate technological society, in order to exist, has to emphasize function over all. As the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* says, speaking about the forced separations I have been discussing,

The War, the Empire, will expedite such barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The war does not even appear to want a folk-consciousness, not even of the sort the Germans have engineered, ein volk ein Führer—it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness but a complexity... (p. 130).

The entropic movements of society in Pynchon and Adams take essentially the same course: the movement begins in a coherent society of feeling and custom (Adams' and Pynchon's France, a society which allowed for the instinctual, for "folk-consciousness") and moves to a state in which loss of individuality, massification and denial of the irrational occur. In such a state, both authors would agree, a productive life is impossible, and while neither writer is terribly concrete about what this productive life would entail, it is not difficult to isolate the implications of their arguments. With both men a productive social life clearly involves at least the opportunity for the irrational or atechanical emotions, such as love, hate or whim. Both men view the rationality on which the efficient corporate society is built as a self-limiting approach to reality, because experience seems more to them than axioms following self-evident principles. In this sense they are both Romantics. The engineers who run Adams' dynamos and the technologists working for Pynchon's corporations would deny the
inner life, assigning functions instead of allowing the individual to evolve his own function. Both men opt for the inviolability of the human spirit in a world which seems to be conspiring to circumscribe that spirit. Neither author will be cancelled.

In Henry Adams, the Virgin stood for the primacy of the instinctual, the irrational, over the laws of God and man. Mary offered salvation because she was essentially "illogical, unreasoning and feminine," because, in other words, she could love. The Virgin as symbol was a concentration of Adams' love for precisely those traits which the massifying society was slowly obliterating. These traits Adams felt to be the only sure basis for both a realized human personality and a realized human community: unless a man had both the self and the opportunity to love, there could be no unified society.

In his own way Tyrone Slothrop, the central character in Gravity's Rainbow, stands for those qualities for which Henry Adams yearned. Granted, Slothrop shares some of the least likeable traits of V.'s Benny Profane—his aimlessness and his anti-intellectualism—but in a society which is totally dominated by technological aim and mathematical intellect, Slothrop seems the only character with even a chance for life, for identity outside the technological infrastructure. Tyrone is a particle that does not seem to be a part of the society which technology has evolved, and that is the major reason Pointsman spends most of the book trying to track him down, to control him, why Pointsman can say, "there can be no doubt that he is, physiologically, historically, a monster. We must never lose control.
The thought of him lost in the world of men, after the war, fills me with a deep dread I cannot extinguish" (p. 144). This quotation deals partially with Tyrone's early conditioning at the hands of the German scientist László Jánó, but it also emphasizes his ability to feel. Whatever else Tyrone is, he is a person who can love, and love is as much an independent variable to Pointsman as the Virgin was to Adams. But while Adams gloried in the irrationality of the Virgin, Slothrop's randomness terrifies Pointsman, because the latter is attempting to limit all activity to conditioned behavior. In the quotation which started this chapter he affirms his allegiance to Pavlov.

Although Tyrone's actions have a randomness and spontaneity demonstrated by no other character in the book, I do not wish to leave the impression that I consider him the hero of _Gravity's Rainbow_. Pynchon's book is very contemporary in its unwillingness to recognize the heroic. Because Tyrone refuses to align himself to any organization for any length of time, he lacks a human community to sustain him, and he undergoes the entropic movement of self examined in Chapter II. Pynchon illustrates this movement by first establishing a symbol for Slothrop's identity, saying, "He's been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose..." (p. 623). Then, in the chaotic last section of _Gravity's Rainbow_, Pynchon discusses what has happened to Slothrop. He has been alone, wandering in occupied Germany, "as properly constituted a state as any other in the Zone," (p. 291) but he is no longer coherent: "Tyrone...has become one plucked albatross."
Plucked, hell...stripped. Scattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained.' Only feathers..." (p. 712). Tyrone becomes legend as he passes into the equipotentiality of self: "Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering" (p. 724).

With Slothrop the entropic movements of self and society are merged. Tyrone is in one sense a state, an organization, a closed system, and like society he is undergoing entropic movement. As someone struggling to escape massification, Slothrop is faced by the choice which the corporate technological society gives everyone: "He has to choose between his life and his death. Letting it sit for a while is no compromise, but a decision to live on Their terms..." (p. 713). The problem here is that to choose life and the randomness that life requires, Tyrone must cut himself off from any human community, a situation similar to that of Cedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49. Tyrone realizes this, and finds it an interesting question as to "which is worse: living on as Their pet, or death?" (p. 713). Because his choice is impossible, because he can find no basis for productive action, he is slowly disintegrating.

Does Pynchon, then, see no chance for social coherence in his work? Is there any chance to regain the folk-consciousness which the technicians would deny, which is presumably less limited than rationality? Apparently not. The one place where Tyrone does come into contact with
something resembling folk-consciousness is in a "German coastal town, near Wismer" (p. 567). Here he is selected to play Plechazuaga, the pig hero of the annual pig festival. The celebration is successful for a while, as everyone partakes in the ritual; there are some rare moments of peace in this novel. At the end of the celebration, though, the crowd begins to form eddies and little groupings of its own, to capitalize: "These little vortices appearing in a crowd out here usually mean black market. Weeds of paranoia begin to bloom, army-green, among the garden and mid-day tranquilities" (p. 569). The police break up the crowd.

Here is a society with a mythic past facing the capitalistic technological present. Its myth is denigrated to the point where it exists as an opportunity to barter, to seek money instead of roots. The wholeness that ritual might offer is perverted, and men literally and figuratively become animals, pigs and lemmings hurling themselves to a death in life. In this interpretation Slothrop bears a great similarity to Ursula, the pet lemming who somehow lives alone, cut off, like Slothrop, from his fellows and wandering in the Zone.

That lemmings appear occasionally in Gravity's Rainbow points, I think, to Pynchon's feeling that wherever the twentieth century is heading, it is not heading to a time in which all men can think and feel and act for themselves. Much closer to his idea of the nearing equipotential, the social type which signifies the death of coherence, is the Russian army compound on "Usedom" (p. 500) which is holding prisoner one Gerhardt von Gzell, movie director, otherwise known as
the Springer. The camp is composed entirely of homosexuals and is a
gross parody of a Nazi compound. There are the weapons, emblems
and uniforms, but the emphasis is on perverse, i.e., non-procreative,
sex, rather than on military discipline. The name of the isle on
which the compound is located is fitting: these men have been used
by their government, desexed and turned into obedient lap dogs. The
society on Usedom stands in a way for the completely evolved technolo-
gical state for which the innocent Pökler originally yearns, "A
Corporate City-state where technology was the source of power, the
engineer worked closely with the administrator, the masses labored
unseen far underground, and ultimate power lay with a single leader
at the top, fatherly and benevolent and just, who wore magnificent-
looking suits" (p. 578). This is the "City Dactylic...where every soul
is known, and there is no place to hide" (p. 566). This is the society
which Pynchon sees in the future.

The irony of Pynchon's portrayal of societies is that in Gravity's
Rainbow he does present a society which has an Ideal, a mythic rather
than a rational approach to reality. This is Enzian and his band of
Black Nazis, the Schwartzkommandos. The irony in this society is that
the Ideal it worships is death, its totem the V-2; they find their
wholeness in the contemplation of their own annihilation. Their myth
will be more fully investigated in the final chapter, but for now it
is enough to say that they see in the Rocket what Henry Adams saw in
the dynamo, but instead of hesitating they worship the chaotic forces
leading them to silence. Death seems to be the only Ideal which Pynchon
will allow in the corporate society, and it can hardly be said to offer a promising beginning to those looking for social coherence.

The conceptualization of social entropy in Henry Adams and Thomas Pynchon is almost identical: both men see the human mind as somehow changing from medieval times to the present, a change which means less susceptibility to instinct and greater reliance on rationality, which offers relativity instead of Truth, multiplicity instead of unity. Both men believe that in his mindless entertainments and in his mania for efficiency, man in the twentieth century accelerates the operations of the Second Law, bringing society ever closer to a time in which no human community will be possible and in which no productive work can be accomplished. This is equipotential, when men, become nothing more than a crowd, lemmings, accede to the destructive impulse. Before they die these men might point to the progress they made over the centuries, the technological expertise, the abundance of creature comforts, their seeming management of powerful forces. But the Education speaks to their presumption of progress, social or otherwise, and in a sentence Henry Adams shows how little ground they have really covered with their expertise. Looking at the massive steam dynamos in the Great Hall at Paris, those massive machines which symbolized for him the century ahead, Adams says "All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres" (p. 388). All the progress, all the energy, all the expertise, could not result in a unity of vision. For that one either had to go backward, to see a unified society, or
to go forward, hoping against hope that man's mind would change once more, and that a society will arise which "sensitive and timid nature [can] regard without a shudder" (Ed., p. 505).
NOTES FOR CHAPTER III


2Ibid., p. 351.

3Ibid.


5Ibid., p. 252.


CHAPTER IV
THE ENTROPIC MOVEMENT OF TRUTH

In the second chapter of this dissertation I examined the possibility of coherent personality, finding that both Adams and Pynchon felt that the energy needed to keep personality unified was weakening, identity dissipating. The possibility of a coherent society was examined in the third chapter; both Pynchon and Adams felt that the force needed to bring such a society together, a force such as a common body of opinion or belief, was also weakening, the societies in their respective work becoming crowds. In this chapter I will be analyzing why such a common body of opinion or belief cannot exist in the world posited by Pynchon and Adams. In other words I will be examining the possibility of coherent Truth, a reality in which all men can believe.

Although it is difficult to state with precision the attitudes which Henry Adams took toward Truth at any given moment in his life, the general movement seems to be away from the faith that he could, "by the severest process of stating, with the least possible comment," using "such facts as seemed sure, in such order as seemed rigorously consequent...fix for a familiar moment a necessary sequence of human movement" (Ed., p. 382). The position to which he moved questioned both the possibility of facts and the possibility of sequence, and seems best captured in Mont-Saint-Michel when he says "Truth indeed
may not exist; science avers it to be only a relation" (p. 376).

The above quotation from the Education describes Adams' attitude toward Truth at the time of his History, and it is to the History, especially the earlier volumes, that one must go to isolate Adams' early faith that Truth could be captured. Note the optimism in the following statement, from volume three of the History, in which Adams compares the studies of law and history:

The quarrel between law and history is old, and its source lies deep. Perhaps no good historian was ever a good lawyer; whether any good lawyer could be a good historian might be equally doubted. The lawyer is required to give facts the mold of a theory; the historian need only state facts in their sequence (p. 45).

The "need only" is the phrase which needs emphasis here. The statement really sees no difficulty in isolating such facts or such a sequence. The position here taken is that if one had the evidence, one could write factual history; one could capture the truth about some incident. William Jordy makes much of this in his Henry Adams: Scientific Historian. Jordy feels that Adams' optimism stemmed from his belief in the historical facts as hard cores of certainty existing outside the mind of the historian. The historian gathered his certainties. He arranged them; or rather he maintained that they suggested their own arrangement. His only function was that of providing the minimum of commentary required to explain their relation.¹

Adams felt that his facts were "hard cores of certainty," their "organic" arrangement leading necessarily to Truth in history. In this view the historian's role was essentially passive, supplying some
transitional elements between the facts in order to give the narration some smoothness. But once this historian had produced his smooth, organic, factual narrative, the Truth had been captured. This faith in the ability of the historian to capture Truth is why Adams could refer to the History in a letter as "a fixed and documented starting point" for the study of all American history. He felt that other historians, following his lead, the Truth which he felt he had isolated in the History, could chart the course of America from pre-history to the future.

Although my statements do, I think, capture one side of Adams' feelings about the Truth, I do not wish to leave the impression that his optimism about the availability of Truth was without qualifications. For example, in 1875, some fifteen years before the publication of the first volume of the History, Adams makes two important qualifications of his optimism in a review of John Richard Green's Short History of the English People:

Absolute truth in history is a thing which cannot be, at least so long as to err is human. But the more the historian's task is limited, the better is the chance of mastering every detail; in a compendious history of England, absolute mastery of detail is simply impossible. Possibly no educated American has read Mr. Green's History without the feeling that the American chapters, though admirably done, show only superficial study.²

This statement shows the difficulty of stating with precision Adams' feelings about the Truth at any given moment. It seems to say that Adams does not believe in historical absolutes; on the other hand there is his statement of faith that details can be mastered in the
short run, a feeling which caused him to limit his own nine volume study to roughly seventeen years at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This seeming contradiction cannot be argued away, because it is an inextricable part of Adams' dual personality. Adams sometimes believed that Truth could be mastered, in a limited time period and with scrupulous attention to detail. Once this was accomplished, other historians could try the same thing, and soon the great generalization which would explain all history would appear. This was the sort of generalization, the sort of Truth, for which the Romantic Adams yearned. In his 1894 essay, "The Tendency of History," for example, Adams is at his most optimistic, calling for history to isolate the Truth: "Any science of history must be absolute, like other sciences, and must fix with mathematical certainty the path which human society has got to follow." At almost the same time the Romantic Henry Adams was exhorting his fellow historians, the Intellectual Henry Adams was writing his brother Brooks, explaining why he no longer wrote history himself: "I have waded all my life in such an ocean of historical hogwash that I would admit anything to be right or wrong or both right and wrong, or neither right nor wrong, or, in short, anything and everything, rather than smell the old reek again." He echoes this same sense of futility in the Education: "The Historian must not try to know what is truth, if he values his honesty; for, if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts" (p. 457).
Given the two sides of Adams' personality, and his willingness to take and contradict a position in two pieces of writing at roughly the same time, I still feel that there is an overall movement to his sense of historical reality, and that this movement is entropic, gradually relinquishing the possibility of coherence, or an intellectual energy strong enough to recognize all aspects of the Truth. This gradual yielding had a number of causes, but chief among them were the deaths of Adams' sister and his wife, and his gradual realization that facts were not as easily mastered as he had thought.

In the Education the death of Adams' sister is presented as "the first serious consciousness of Nature's gesture—her attitude toward life" and this consciousness was to have a profound effect on the optimism which sometimes characterized Adams' historicism. Instead of seeing nature as being bound by certain rational rules, amenable to human analysis, Adams, after his sister's death, saw nature as a phantasm, a nightmare, an insanity of force. For the first time, the stage-scenery of the senses collapsed; the human mind felt itself stripped naked, vibrating in a void of shapeless energies, with resistless mass, colliding, crushing, wasting, and destroying what these same energies had created and labored from eternity to perfect...The usual anodynes of social medicine became evident artifice. Stoicism was perhaps the best; religion was the most human; but the idea that any personal deity could find pleasure or profit in torturing a poor woman, by accident, with a fiendish cruelty known to man only in perverted and insane temperaments, could not be held for a moment. For pure blasphemy, it made pure atheism a comfort. God might be, as the Church said, a Substance, but He could not be a Person (pp. 288-9).

Reality in this view becomes a matter of chance and possibly malevolence; with either one of these qualities in control, though,
the Truth would be beyond human ken. Malevolence would not let man know the Truth, unless the truth could hurt him. Chance would offer no pattern for man to follow. Instead of seeking for a Truth, some rational explanation for the death of his sister, Adams in the Education finds something a good deal more terrifying in his grief, the thought that the inmost core of existence was chaotic and pointing toward nothingness. He presents his fear through the image of Mont Blanc:

For the first time in his life, Mont Blanc for a moment looked to him what it was—a chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces—and he needed days of repose to see it clothe itself again with the illusions of his senses, the white purity of its snows, the splendor of its light, and the infinity of its heavenly peace (p. 289).

To Adams, as to the Romantic poets at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Mount Blanc was a natural wonder, a thing of beauty. His sister's senseless death, though, stripped the skin from nature, leaving a horrifying body. The appearance said that nature was calm and somehow benificent; the reality he saw in grief said that nature was purposeless, anarchic, uncaring. It is only with time that he is able to look at the mountain and once more see majesty.

The death of his wife Clover in 1885 Adams did not describe in the Education. Her suicide had an effect on him like nothing else in his long life. If he questioned the existence of a god at the death of his sister, his pain in the eighteen-eighties led him to more than questioning. His avuncular posing after 1885 was a good deal more
than theatricality; he had the temperament of a histrion but the
pain he endured at Clover's loss made him consider the best part of
his life as gone. He began to see what he felt to be the senselessness behind existence, and the more he sensed it, the more he was
driven to try and explain it away, by evolving some explanation
which would prove his sick heart wrong.

The major difficulty he confronted in this search was the
limitation of his own rationality. Perhaps the foremost difficulty
Adams faced as a historian was his inability to say with perfect
certainty what was a fact. After the History had been published,
Adams found that many of his "hard cores of certainty" were a good deal
softer than he had imagined. Documents, for example, on which he had
based most of the History, were never absolutely objective. At some
point, either in presentation or in the selection of material, human
subjectivity would creep in. The most pertinent example here occurs
four years after the first volume of the History appeared, in an essay
Adams wrote for the first volume of the American Historical Review in
1895. The article is entitled "Count Edward de Crillon" and in it
Adams admits that one of his hard cores of certainty was a good deal
less than that. Crillon had been a minor but fascinating figure in the
History, and in the 1895 essay Adams admits that some of his conclusions
about Crillon had been incorrect. What is more important for the
argument here, though, is that in the essay Adams mulls over the possi-
bility of mastering details, of isolating a coherent Truth, and the
position he takes is far different from the earlier optimism:
According to mathematicians, every man carried with him a personal error in his observation of facts, for which a certain allowance must be made before attaining perfect accuracy. In a subject like history, the personal error must be serious, since it tends to disturb the whole subject, and to disturb the relations of every detail. Further...some allowance must be made for every authority cited by the historian. Each has his personal error, varying in value, and often unknown to the writer quoting him. Finally, the facts themselves carry with them an error of their own: they may be correctly stated, and still lead to wrong conclusions. Of the reader's personal error, nothing need be said. The sum of such inevitable errors must be considerable. At the most moderate estimate the historian can hardly expect that four out of five of his statements of fact shall be exact. On an average every history contains at least one assertion of fact for every line. A history like that of Macaulay contains much more than one hundred and fifty thousand assertions or assumptions of fact. If the rule holds good, at least thirty thousand of these so-called facts must be more or less inexact. In regard to the events of earlier history, the necessary error must be much greater...Some historians are more, some less, inaccurate; but the best must always stand in terror of the blunders which no precaution and no anxiety for truth can save him from committing.5

This statement emphasizes the relativism of the intellectual Adams, the position to which he was slowly moving. The idea of Truth was slowly breaking down for Henry Adams, the possibility of finding a man whose intellectual energy could isolate the Truth slowly lessening. In the quotation facts are no longer hard cores of certainty; nor are they entirely outside the observer. Instead, Adams takes the position that Ralph Waldo Emerson takes in "Experience," that Temperament is all, that in some cases—perhaps in all cases—a man's mind cannot move beyond its own delusions. Adams had always admitted that some historians were inaccurate in their reporting, but he had blamed them; now he
wondered whether anyone could really be accurate in the profound way in which he defined the term. Truth in this later formulation loses the capital T and moves ever closer to an absolute relativism, his plans for the charting of American history becoming nothing more than pipe dreams. Indeed, just after the quotation from the Education in which Adams expresses the hope he had for the History, he acknowledges the change in his own historicism. He states that he now considers the History a failure, because instead of isolating a sequence, a Truth, to which all men could assent, he had written a book in which he "saw sequence [but] other men saw something quite different, and no one saw the same unit of measure" (p. 382).

In this relativistic notion of history, Truth could not be captured. All a quester in history could do would be to isolate his own truth through the haze of his own limited perception. The idea of coherent Truth, a Truth which would give mankind something for which to live, is shelved for the more relative goal of personal validity, a logical game which might have no relation to the true reality. In A Letter Adams says, "history can be written in one sense just as easily as in another."6 This is not the Adams of the History, confident in the existence of the Truth and of man's ability to isolate the Truth. This is a man who senses that any truth he isolated will say more about himself than about the universe.

As we have seen, though, Adams had difficulty remaining at the extreme position for long. In the midst of his most pessimistic musings, when he felt that truth was entirely relativistic, chaotic,
there was an anti-entropic movement in his thought which emphasized assimilation, consolidation, and the possibility of understanding. At the same time Adams was saying that there was no such thing as an absolute Truth, in A Letter, for example, he was actively pursuing such a Truth, and attempting to base a theory of history on it. It is this Romantic yearning for the Truth which caused him periodically to ignore what his rational mind was saying—that truth is relative—and to suggest that history, with just a little more effort on the part of historians, could be as precise and accurate as Adams had originally imagined science to be.

But Adams would accept neither position completely. He could not emotionally accept chaos and he could not intellectually accept order. He found himself suspended between his mind and his feelings, yearning for a coherence he knew to be impossible. The general movement in Henry Adams' historicism was a movement in which he gives up on any form of rational epistemology. He moved from an optimistic faith in his ability to discern the truth to a position which seems to hold that truth is entirely contingent on the temperament of the observer, although at any given time in that movement he may move from one of these extremes to the other. As his sense of identity moved from what he considered to be the possibility of coherence to a recognition of warring, subordinate selves, and as his sense of society moved from the possibility of medieval coherence to a recognition of the chaotic crowd, so Henry Adams' historicism moved from his earlier faith in the factual, in man's ability to find and state the Truth, to the realization of infinite plurality of
meaning. This realization took him from the historicism of the History, in which the historian was essentially the passive gatherer of facts, to his later gropings at the dynamic theory of history, in which the significance of facts took on new meanings in geometric progression, and to autobiography, a genre in which the author becomes his own Truth.

In Thomas Pynchon, history and historicism are ever present. In all three of Pynchon's novels and in his shorter works, a character attempts to make some sense of his or her own situation, and he/she generally tries to do it as Adams did, by examining social and historical contexts. And like Adams, Pynchon's characters are continually frustrated by their inability to know the Truth about experience. As David Robinson says in his unpublished dissertation, Unaccommodated Man: the Estranged World in Contemporary Fiction: Nathanael West, Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon, "his questing characters...are left without having attained a final, satisfactory accommodation with their world or even the faith that such an accommodation is possible."

This fruitless quest is perhaps the major similarity between Adams and Pynchon. Time and time again in Pynchon's fiction, there are characters who seem to be repeating both Adams' quest and Adams' failure, who seek the Truth and end up with confusion. This assertion is most easily substantiated by examining Pynchon's shortest novel, The Crying of Lot 49. In that book Oedipa Maas searches in the past and in the present for some sort of meaning, some fact she can hang on to and know as Truth. Her quest also presents a preeminent example
of the entropic movement of one person's sense of truth.

At the beginning of Crying Oedipa Maas is presented as an American housewife, "shuffling through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be the first to admit it?) more or less identical ..." (p. 2). She is presented as a child of the fifties, a young Republican, educated

at a time of nerves, blandness and retreat among not only her fellow students but also most of the visible structure around and ahead of them, this having been a national reflex to certain pathologies in high places only death had the power to cure...Where were Secretaries James and Foster and Senator Joseph, those dear daft numina who'd mothered over Oedipa's so temperate youth?... Among them they had managed to turn the young Oedipa into a rare creature indeed, unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts (p. 76).

Oedipa is a whiz at research because she was educated during a time which believed in both the power of rationality and the effectiveness of research. Senator McCarthy, for example, the Joseph of the quotation, was a man who sometimes had an unlimited faith in his ability to ferret out the truth. As one of the "numina" of the fifties, McCarthy stands for the reality which said that we were the good guys and the communists were the bad guys, the reality which stated that rationality was preeminent in man and universe.

This faith in a rational universe, the belief that the Truth exists and that it can be grasped through human intellect, is finally what keeps Oedipa questing, attempting to make sense out of the tangled holdings of Pierce Inverarity. As the book progresses, though,
Oedipal begins to get fewer and fewer answers to the questions she keeps asking, and she begins to expect fewer and fewer answers. By the end of the book it seems to me that Oedipa has come face to face with the limitations of the reality of Senator McCarthy and the fifties. She realizes she has somehow changed and asks herself, "Where was the Oedipa who'd driven so bravely up here from San Narcissac? That optimistic baby who had come on so like the private eye in any long-ago radio drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from hidebound cops' rules, to solve any great mystery" (p. 91).

In The Crying of Lot 49, Oedipa faces a mystery which refuses to be solved; the realization she makes as the book progresses is that rationality, both in man and the universe, is a lie, and whatever the truth is, it is unlikely to be grasped by the human intellect. The realization is gradual, arising from a series of experiences Oedipa has in which she receives completely illogical answers to perfectly reasonable questions. For example, after the suicide of Randy Dribblette, the director of The Courier's Tragedy, Oedipa has a conversation with Professor Emory Bortz. She wants to know Dribblette's reason for killing himself. She feels the reason may have something to do with a line which Dribblette has added to the play, and she muses:

"Then," Oedipa concluded, "something must have happened in his personal life, something must have changed for him drastically that night, and that's what made him put the lines in."

"Maybe," said Bortz, "maybe not. You think a man's mind is a pool table?"

"I hope not" (p. 115).
A man's mind is not like a pool table. For every action there is not an equal and opposite reaction. Instead of being rational at heart, men are collections of "inferior personalities" in Adams' terms, a confusion which could at any time erupt and swallow the will, as it does in the cases of both Dribble and Mucha Haas. Oedipa realizes that the meanings men find are as fragmented as the men themselves.

Like Henry Adams, Oedipa moves from faith to despair, faith that she can capture the truth to despair at her inability even to locate it. The reality which Oedipa discovers in her wanderings around California is not the bipolar reality of the fifties, ready to see things as bad which are not good, things false which are not true. It is a reality full of possibilities, multi-levelled, and at one point she feels herself "trapped at the center of some intricate crystal" (p. 67). This opalescent reality does not, however, force Oedipa to abandon the quest. As was the case with Henry Adams, the more complex the meanings become, the more Oedipa is driven to explain them, to deal with them in rational terms. Her rationality fails her time and time again as it confronts a reality which is good and bad, true and false all at the same time. In the Education, Henry Adams almost seems to be addressing himself to Oedipa and her dilemma when he says, "Evidently the new American would need to think in contradiction, and instead of Kant's famous four antinomies, the new universe would know no law that could not be proved by its anti-law." (p. 497).

In other words, man must be prepared to face the fact that there are no absolute laws, that whatever he says can only be taken as a
contingent statement in a contingent universe. That there is no such thing as objective coherent reality is not a comfortable conclusion. Both Pynchon and Adams, though, face the confusion of reality squarely and attempt to deal with it through their art. Pynchon places his characters in almost exactly the same situation in which Adams found himself and he gives the confusion just enough shape so that it no longer is confusion but is certainly not yet meaning. In The Crying of Lot 49, for example, Oedipa finds herself hopelessly confused and she attempts, as Adams did, to locate her "hard cores of certainty":

Fallopian watched her, nothing if not compassionate. "You ought," quietly, "really, you ought to think about it. Write down what you can't deny. Your hard intelligence. But then write down what you've only speculated, assumed. See what you've got. At least that."

"...Verify my sources, I suppose," Oedipa kept on pleasantly. "Right?"

He didn't say any more (p. 126).

The difficulty which Oedipa has is that her sources either die, are destroyed, commit suicide, or are beyond her powers of discrimination. As Adams had, Oedipa comes to see that facts are not something you can hold on to, that every individual has a certain margin for error. At one point she gives up on her ability to know the historical truth at all and allows Emory Bortz to act as her Stencil, projecting what might have happened in the seventeenth century to Tristero, the vast conspiratorial organization for which she may be searching. Bortz turns history into a Kirk Douglas movie, but at that moment it seems to her as real as any of the other possibilities she has confronted.

As these possibilities start to multiply geometrically, Oedipa does try
to verify her sources, facing what could be considered the antinomies of her new universe:

Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness and concealed density of dreams; onto a network by which X numbers of Americans are truly communicating whilst retaining their lies, recitations of routines, and betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even into a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of every American you know, and you, too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you...Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull.

Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives. Those symmetrical four. She didn't like any of them, but hoped that she was mentally ill; that that's all it was. That night she sat for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, O God, was the void. There was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world. They were all on something, mad, possible enemies, dead (p. 128).

Oedipa confronts this void as Adams confronted hyperthought, seeing it as the end of all human aspiration. She hopes that she is not right about the chaos underlying reality; she hopes that she is mentally ill. In the face of this chaos, though, she is thrown back on her own mind, which seems to her totally ineffectual for sorting out the true from the false. Indeed, because the truth is so intertwined with the false, and is sometimes even the same thing, such sorting, such absolute discrimination between dream and actuality, is impossible. In such a confusing reality, communication, rational endeavor or Truth are beyond human ken. This reality seems to be the chaos which Adams faced and named, but like Adams, Oedipa at the end
of *The Crying* is still determined to make some sense of her world. In the *Education* Adams almost seems to be describing Oedipa when he describes the difficulty of finding patterns in a chaotic world:

"Every man with self-respect enough to become effective, if only as a machine, has had to account to himself for himself somehow, and to invent a formula of his own for the universe, if the standard formulas failed" (p. 472).

The standard formulas of the fifties have failed for Oedipa, but she has self-respect enough to try to make sense of the reality which confronts her. Her struggle to find meaning in an apparently meaningless world is as determined as Henry Adams' quest, and probably as allegorical. The movement in Henry Adams and the movement in Oedipa is the movement from a bipolar reality, from facts as "hard cores of certainty" to contingent reality, in which facts and truths and meanings are infinite, slowly moving toward the stasis of hyperthought. In this sort of world linear logical history or analysis is a lie.

In *V*, linear logical history is also seen as falsification or impossibility. Herbert Stencil is the quester in this novel, searching for the mysterious lady V. He is clearly the reader's guide to history, and he is just as clearly an unreliable guide. Pynchon makes it clear that Stencil "does not see the difference between event and image" (p. 431) and that he is aware that instead of hard evidence, "Most of what he has is inference" (p. 140). This lack of evidence, though, does not keep him from "grouping the world's random caries into cabals" (p. 139), from evolving elaborate historical hypotheses about V.
Stencil's position is confusion offset by dream, and it leaves the reader knowing as little as Stencil about what has gone on and what is going on.

Stencil is aware that his facts are only versions of facts, combinations of the notions and needs of his witnesses, but still he searches. The facts are even gilded by his memory, or as Dudley Eigenvalue calls the process, they are "Stencilled" (p. 211). Stencil even faces the possibility that Oedipa faces, that everything he has researched is nothing but the workings of his own diseased mind: "What a joke if at the end of this hunt he came face to face with himself afflicted by a kind of soul-transvesticism" (p. 210). Through Stencil, Pynchon makes a point about history which he has continually stressed in his writing, that, as David Robinson says, "History...is entirely solipsistic, relativistic; since there may be placed upon the facts of the past as many interpretations as there are people, no single or 'right' version of history can be agreed upon."  

This lack of coherent, final meaning in history is emphasized when Stencil comes to Dudley Eigenvalue for information and evidence. From Eigenvalue we get a general statement about history and those who search in history which relates to both Stencil and Oedipa, and to Henry Adams as well:

Perhaps history this century, thought Eigenvalue, is rippled with gathers in its fabric such that if we are situated, as Stencil seemed to be, at the bottom of a fold, it's impossible to determine warp, woof, or pattern anywhere else. By virtue, however, of existing in one gather it is assumed there are others, compartmented off into sinuous cycles each of which comes to
assume greater importance than the weave itself and destroy any continuity... We are accordingly lost to any sense of a continuous tradition. Perhaps if we lived on a crest, things would be different. We could at least see (p. 141).

At the end of this quotation Pynchon holds out the possibility of seeing the map and end of history, of somehow living on a crest, from which the vast pattern would be visible. But Pynchon gives us no characters so elevated; all his characters are presented as being at the bottom of a fold, unable to see beyond that part of the pattern in which they are trapped; Stencil, Oedipa, and Tyrone Slothrop, Pynchon's three main questers, really do not discover meaning so much as they do their own inability to discover meaning. They then impose a meaning on the chaos which confronts them. In imposing this meaning, their consciousness becomes more important than any pattern which might really be there, the individual "Cycle" becoming more important than "the weave itself." Because Pynchon's characters cannot get beyond the confusion of their own consciousness of history, of reality, there can be no sense of continuity, because continuity would require coherence. Instead of the pattern lying before them, the meaning waiting to be traced, they see only snatches, hints, glimmers of the possible meanings of history. Pynchon seems to be saying that this is all any man can know of the Truth.

In Gravity's Rainbow, Tyrone Slothrop is presented as one of those trapped at the bottom of a fold: "Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing
on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity" (p. 582). This quotation seems to me to be as close as Pynchon comes to defining the history in which his characters quest.

Tyrone travels in history to discover, like Stencil and Oedipa, his heritage as an individual and an American. He first travels back to William Slothrop, a Puritan ancestor whose theological works had been written to prove that "the Preterite, the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation," were also holy, that without them there would be no elect. But William also believes that

what Jesus was for the elect, Judas Iscariot was for the Preterite. Everything in the Creation has its equal and opposite counterpart. How can Jesus be an exception? Could we feel for him anything but horror in the face of the unnatural, the extracreational? Well, if he is the son of man, and if what we feel is not horror but love, then we have to love Judas too. Right (p. 555)?

Here is a law proved by its anti-law, in Adams' phrases, and it illustrates Pynchon's unwillingness to make a firm statement about history. William Slothrop is a part of a theological history made familiar by American historians, and yet by coming at that theology from a completely different angle, he has evolved what appears to be a valid thesis which somehow seems unchristian. Pynchon again takes no position in the argument, but what seems clear is that William's position is just as valid as the positions taken by the other authorities.

That he is unable to go beyond validity, beyond the constructions of logic, to Truth, is what irritates Slothrop and all the other questers in Pynchon. They want history to be reasonable so they will
know where the Truth lies; the more they search, though, the greater their sense of futility becomes. Pynchon will not allow the questers or the reader to see the pattern in the carpet. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Herr Rathenau, an engineer, is discussing history and its relation to science, and he makes a statement which could have come straight from the *Education*:

> All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic. Useful to you, gentlemen, but no longer so to us here. If you want the truth—I know I presume—you must look into the technology of these matters. Even into the hearts of certain molecules—it is they after all which dictate temperatures, pressures, rates of flow, costs, profits and shapes of towers (p. 167).

The point stressed here, and the point to which Adams grudgingly comes in the *Education*, is that history springs from the anarchic activity of the atom, an activity which transcends rational analysis. Rathenau says that chance is at the center of all those historical actions which are studied so as to give the truth of a particular time. The "shapes of towers" figure at the end of the quotation points to the dream tower of Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Chance is behind the tower which people construct for themselves, the reality or delusion which they call their own. Chance also places a person in a particular fold of a carpet, in one part of the overall pattern.

To those who might argue that Rathenau is describing only what he calls secular history, and that there must therefore be a divine history, with some sort of god providing a purpose, Pynchon presents
a god which is a far cry from the benevolent Christian father. As the bipolar reality of good and bad has been transcended in each of Pynchon's novels, so the goodness of God and the evil of Satan have been transcended. "God," in the presentation of Pynchon, "is creator and destroyer, sun and darkness, all sorts of opposites brought together, including black and white, male and female..." (CR, p. 100). But Pynchon goes one step further, linking the actions of this God with the actions of the molecule: "There was no difference between the behavior of a god and the operations of pure chance" (CR, p. 323). In this universe, in this reality, causation and rationality have broken down. God is dead and we are left to our own devices.

All of Pynchon's questing characters are located at the bottom of a fold, unable to determine the warp and weft of history. All of them recognize their own roles as questers and assume that there is some sort of pattern to the actions of men and time. Each of the questers, attempting to find a meaning outside himself, is unable to go beyond his own consciousness, and so imposes a meaning on the events he finds around him. The quests are therefore more a matter of imposition than discovery. And Pynchon seems to be saying that imposition is all that men can do in this world, because at its very foundations the world is not amenable to logic, but based on pure chance.

It seems to me that each of the previous conclusions can apply to Henry Adams, and that the best way to substantiate this similarity is by examining what each writer calls the "situation." Both Pynchon
and Adams agree that if history, the reportage of past events, is at all possible, it is possible only in a very limited sense. One of the reasons that Truth cannot be managed by man is the force of situation. Edward A. Chalfant, in his unpublished dissertation *Henry Adams and History*, notes that "Situation, for him, [Adams] is one of the deciding elements of human action."⁹ Chalfant defines this situation by saying that it is the complex of actions within which men move. The important distinction here is that men at one time thought this situation passive, while Adams feels that it is active, and at least partially in control of human actions. Statements from Adams' letters and from the *History* can make this point more effectively than I:

> But a political situation is always stronger than all the wishes and wisdom of man.¹⁰

> ...intrigue now rules the whole situation....a situation is always stronger than man's will.¹¹

Everywhere the situation was confused, irritable, and hard to understand. A general system of cross-purposes seems to govern the political movements of the world.¹²

And in a statement which has often been quoted from the *History*, Adams demonstrates that even the great man has no real power against the torrent of history:

> The workings of human development were never more strikingly shown than in the helplessness with which the strongest political and social forces in the world followed or resisted at haphazard the necessities of a movement which they could not control or comprehend. Spain, France, Germany, England, were swept into a vast and bloody torrent which dragged America, from Montreal to Valparaiso, slowly into its movement; while the familiar figures of famous men—Napoleon, Alexander, Canning, Godoy, Jefferson, Madison, Talleyrand, emperors, generals, presidents, conspirators, patriots, tyrants, and martyrs by the thousands,—were borne away
by the stream, struggling, gesticulating, praying, murdering, robbing; each blind to everything but a selfish interest, and all helping more or less unconsciously to reach that new level which society was obliged to seek.\textsuperscript{13}

...we've now reached the point...when our acts...decide themselves mechanically, not of consequences of will or thought, but of a situation.\textsuperscript{14}

In his dissertation Chalfant says, "Adams does not regard these situations as necessarily and alone determinative. He simply supposes that an act is unintelligible apart from apprehension of the situation in which it was undertaken."\textsuperscript{15} I think Chalfant's caution is solipsistic: what the quotations in their context make clear is that Adams did feel that acts by themselves were impossible to understand, and that situations in the same way were beyond human comprehension. If the situation cannot be understood, the action cannot be understood, and humans are seemingly at the mercy of the situations in which they find themselves. If Adams' position is not deterministic here, it seems to me so close to determinism as to be indistinguishable from it. I think the deterministic streak in Adams' history is undeniable, as undeniable as his constant attempts to transcend that determinism.

As David Robinson points out, the character in \textit{V.} who most concerns himself about the situation is Sidney Stencil, Herbert's father and a spy for a number of governments. Sidney has outlived his usefulness, but while he was a spy, he saw the world change from a seemingly comprehensible place in which a spy could really learn and report a fact, to a world in which knowledge seems impossible. What Robinson does not deal with is the fact that Sidney's later wisdom is presented
in almost exactly the same terms which Adams uses to describe his own futile searches. Indeed, some of the quotations from V. which follow are almost interchangeable with some of Adams' assertions:

"The Situation is always bigger than you, Sidney. It has like God its own logic and its own justification for being, and the best you can do is cope" (p. 455).

Stencil gritted his teeth. Oh, the Situation. The bloody Situation. In his more philosophical moments he would wonder about this abstract entity the Situation, its idea, the details of its mechanism. He remembered times when whole embassiesful of personnel had simply run amok and gibbering in the streets when confronted with a Situation which refused to make sense no matter who looked at it, or from what angle" (p. 173).

...he hoped devoutly that Demivolt's appearance was merely chance; and not a signal for the reactivation of the same chaotic and Situational forces at work in Florence twenty years ago.

For Fairing's prediction of massacre, and its attendant politics, had all the earmarks of a Situation-in-the-process-of-becoming. He had changed none of his ideas on the Situation. He had even written an article, pseudonymous, and sent it to Punch: "The Situation as an N-Dimensional Mishmash." It was rejected.

"Short of examining the history of each individual participating;" Stencil wrote, "short of atomizing each soul, what hope has anyone of understanding a Situation? It may be that the civil servants of the future will not be accredited unless they first receive a degree in brain surgery" (pp. 422-3)!

What the Situation betokens for both Adams and Pynchon, what is so frightening to Sidney Stencil, is that chance is the principle in control of the universe. Not rationality, not organism—nothing but the turn of a card. When the idea of cause and effect goes, when the ability to generalize goes, we have Henry Adams at his most pessimistic, ringing out the old universe and ringing in Einsteinian physics:
The gentle mathematicians and physicists still cling to the laws of thermo-dynamics, and are almost epileptic in their convulsive assurances that they have reached there a generalization which will hold good. Perhaps it will. Who cares? Already it is like all the rest of our old structures. It explains nothing. Science has given up the whole fabric of cause and effect. Even time sequence is beginning to be threatened. I should not at all wonder if someone should upset time. As for space, it is upset already. We did that sixty years ago, with electricity. I imagine that in another sixty years, if my $x$-sequence works out regularly, we must be communicating throughout space, by $x$-rays, with systems infinitely distant from us, but finitely distant from each other; a mathematical problem to be solved by non-Euclidian methods.\textsuperscript{16}

Here is Adams writing in 1903, questioning the very thermodynamics which he will himself suggest as a basis for historical study seven years later, in \textit{A Letter}. The emphasis in the quotation should be placed on the "non-Euclidian methods" in the last sentence. The methods have to be non-Euclidian because Adams is facing a world in which generalizations or axioms are no longer possible, a world which, if absolutely anything, is absolutely relativistic. In Henry Adams and Thomas Pynchon we have the parallel movements of history, science and logic in the twentieth century, the movement from the affirmation of coherence to the recognition of relativity at all levels. The movement is entropic in the sense that it started in the nineteenth century with a faith both in man and in his ability to locate the truth, and then evolved to the position that man was little better than a chaos in a chaos who could only grope for some sort of significance. The truth is no longer seen as an objective reality, seen as absolute from all sides and by all spectators. It has become the Situation, which "only exist[s]"
in the minds of those who happen[] to be in on it at any specific moment" (V., p. 174).

As was the case with the entropic movements of self and society, in the matter of Truth, Pynchon almost seems to be following Adams' lead, turning his speculations into fiction. Both writers apparently agree that man cannot attain Truth and both writers agree on the major reasons such attainment is impossible: Pynchon and Adams feel that final reality is chaotic, beyond the limited rationality of men, and that it is somehow malevolent, randomly smashing at human aspirations, among them the aspiration to know.

The statements which Henry Adams makes about Mount Blanc after his sister's death bring home his feelings about ultimate reality. He saw the mountain, Nature, as "a chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces" (p. 289). In the Education, Adams has little but contempt for those who attempted to see order, or kindness, in the action of molecules. To make his point he once quotes from Karl Pearson's The Grammar of Science:

the historian had no interest in the universal truth of Pearson's or Kelvin's or Newton's laws; he sought only their relative drift or direction, and Pearson went on to say that these conceptions must stop: "Into the chaos beyond sensations, in the 'beyond' of sense-impressions, we cannot infer necessity, order or routine, for these are concepts formed by the mind of man on this side of sense-impressions"; but we must infer chaos: "Briefly chaos is all that science can logically assert of the supersensuous." The kinetic theory of gases is an assertion of the ultimate chaos. In plain words, Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man (p. 451).
"...chaos is all that science can logically assert of the supersensuous" (emphasis mine). Adams and Pearson did not feel that a man can project his own orders such as kindness or rationality into molecules. Such imposition both men considered the "pathetic fallacy" of science up to the nineteenth century. "We cannot know the actions of molecules, Adams says, because they follow no pattern. It is clearly the randomness of the chaos that frightens Adams as much as anything, that he could lose a sister and a wife for no apparent purpose. In the Education, for example, he describes the action of chaos, saying "Blindly some very powerful energy was at work, doing something nobody wanted done" (p. 338). Although Adams is here talking about a financial crisis, the energy to which he refers appears again and again, as both denying real progress and guaranteeing the dissolution of the race.

While optimists trumpeted social progress, Adams saw little more than progressive chaos. If man was getting more humane, there was little evidence. Adams, like Pynchon, focused on the wholesale slaughter of men by men to show that human perfectibility is but another pipe dream:

he watched mankind march on, like a train of packhorses on the Snake River, tumbling from one morass into another, and at short intervals, for no reason but temper, falling to butchery, like Cain. Since 1850, massacres had become so common that society scarcely noticed them unless they summed up hundreds of thousands, as in Armenia; wars had been almost continuous, and were beginning again in Cuba, threatening in South Africa, and possibly in Manchuria; yet impartial judges thought them all not merely unnecessary, but foolish—induced by greed of the coarser
class, as though the Pharaohs or the Romans were still robbing their neighbors. The robbery might be natural and inevitable, but the murder seemed altogether archaic (Ed., p. 352).

Instead of becoming more amenable to rational persuasion, man had become more animalistic, needing no purpose whatever to lash out and destroy. Because man's actions had become as mindless as the actions of molecules, Adams made the connection, seeing a working through mankind of the purposeless savagery of some cosmic force. It was impossible for men to deal with this force because it was beyond rational explanation. It simply was.

It seems to me that Pynchon presents exactly the same sort of human decay and emphasizes Adams' point that "Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man" (Ed., p. 445). Note Fausto Maijstral writing about man's belief in the ordered universe:

while others may look on the laws of physics as legislation and God as a human form with beard measured in light-years and nebulae for sandals, Fausto's kind are alone with the task of living in a universe of things which simply are, and cloaking that innate mindlessness with comfortable and pious metaphor so that the "practical" half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie, confident that their machines, dwellings, streets and weather share the same human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness as they (V., p. 305).

Adams would agree with Pynchon that at the center of reality is this "innate mindlessness" typified by the random movement of molecules, that "Any Situation takes shape from events much lower than the merely human" (V., p. 455). Both writers feel that "The inert universe may have a quality we call logic. But logic is a human
attribute after all; so even at that it's a misnomer. What are real
are the cross-purposes" (V., p. 455). A world in which mindlessness
reigns is a world of terror, the terror of "anarchic and purposeless
forces" (Ed., p. 289).

Once a reader recognizes the inanimate chaos at the center of
Pynchon's vision, some of his sections become a good deal clearer.
There is, for example, the long descriptive section in V., of which I
give only a part:

Twenty days before the Dog Star moved into conjunction
with the sun, the dog days began. The world started to
run more and more afoot of the inanimate. Fifteen were
killed in a train wreck near Oaxaca, Mexico, on 1 July.
The next day fifteen people died when an apartment house
collapsed in Madrid. July 4 a bus fell into a river
near Karachi and thirty-one passengers drowned. Thirty-
nine more were drowned two days later in a tropical
storm in the central Phillipines. 9 July the Aegean
Islands were hit by an earthquake and tidal waves,
which killed forty-three. 14 July a MATS plane crashed
after takeoff from McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey,
killing forty-five. An earthquake at Anjar, India,
21 July, killed 117. From 22 to 24 July floods ram-
paged in central and southern Iran, killing three hun-
dred. 28 July a bus ran off a ferryboat at Kuopio,
Finland, and fifteen were killed. Four petroleum tanks
blew up near Dumas, Texas, 29 July, killing nineteen.
1 August, seventeen died in a train wreck near Rio de
Janeiro. Fifteen more died the 4th and 5th, in floods
in southwest Pennsylvania. 2161 people died the same
week in a typhoon which hit Chekiang, Honan and Hopeh
Provinces. 7 August six dynamite trucks blew up in
Cali, Colombia, killing about 1100. The same day there
was a train wreck at Prerov, Czechoslovakia, killing
nine. The next day 262 miners, trapped by fire, died
in a coal mine under Marcinelle, in Belgium. Ice
avalanches on Mont Blanc swept fifteen mountain climbers
into the kingdom of death in the week 12 to 18 August...

These were the mass deaths. There were also the
attendant maimed, malfunctioning homeless, lost. It
happens every month in a succession of encounters between
groups of living and a congruent world which simply
doesn't care. Look in any yearly Almanac, under
"Disasters"—which is where the figures above come from. The business is transacted month after month after month (p. 270).

The "congruent world" simply does not care. It goes on in its own way, mowing down at random those in its path.

It is interesting that Mont Blanc figures in both the visions of Pynchon and Adams as a symbol for the chaotic forces destroying the dreams of mankind. Henry Adams and the characters of Thomas Pynchon seek the Nature, the Truth, which they have been taught to expect, a Nature of order, measure, balance, rationality. What they find instead is a Nature which lacks coherence, which is void of concern for mankind.

At the very end of V., the narrator describes the twentieth century, and the horror at its center:

"V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth. Whose emissaries haunt this century's streets. Porcépic, Mondaugen, Stencil père, this Maijstral, Stencil fils. Could any of them create a coincidence? Only Providence creates. If the coincidences are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but something far more appalling (pp. 423-4).

If the coincidental rather than the rational is at the center of existence, there is no way that Truth, in the nineteenth-century sense of linear logical truth, can be captured. History, as an explanation of reality, is simply a lie, a false order imposed on chaos.

It was exactly this realization which led Henry Adams to give up his earlier optimism about attaining the Truth, to give up his historian's presumption to Knowledge. He could not give it up entirely, because his need to synthesize and search was greater than his rational
conclusions, but at the end of his life, all the drifts of history which he isolated, or imposed, pointed to one thing, the utter decay and annihilation of aspiration, mind and Truth. From the possibility of Truth he moves to hyperthought.

Pynchon's implicit historicism, his attitude toward the possibility of Truth, is expressed through his characters and points to a similar hyperthought, a time in which men will be little better than rocks. As Benny Profane says to SHROUD in V.:

"What do you mean, we'll be like you and SHOCK someday? You mean dead?"
"Am I dead? If I am then that's what I mean."
"If you aren't then what are you?"
"Nearly what you are. None of you have very far to go (p. 267).

The energy which had allowed man to intuit the Truth and to create masterpieces from that intuition is slowly dying, and man is decaying like radium. One by one Pynchon's characters face the fact that they will never know the Truth about themselves and their history. Herbert Stencil, finding no Truth, creates and lives in his own reality. Mucho Maas depends on LSD for altered perception, while his wife hovers on the brink of madness. Tyrone Slothrop, unable to find a truth to hold onto, slowly disintegrates. Both Pynchon and Adams face this decay and turn to art because art allows and encourages them to embody a Truth they cannot know.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV


8Ibid., p. 217.


11Ibid., p. 214.

12History, V, p. 147.

13History, IV, p. 301.


15Chalfant, pp. 204-5.

CHAPTER V

ART AS RESPONSE

Both Thomas Pynchon and Henry Adams go out of their way to avoid any "Here is the answer to the problem I am discussing" approach; indeed, as I have emphasized, a great deal of their effort has gone into the affirmation that no real solutions exist for the chaos they describe. Both men do, however, take certain directions in responding to the difficulties they see, directions which I believe are similar and which will further this examination of entropic movement.

My central contention is that they both respond to chaos through their art. In the face of a shifting reality, they both seem to feel that some form of imaginative reality, of illusions, is vital for sanity, because it can provide a purpose in the midst of purposelessness. Henry Adams and Pynchon's characters are driven to make some sense of existence, and their "rage for order," to use Wallace Stevens' phrase, is at the very center of the modern Western literary tradition. That tradition, although hardly codified, says that in a dying world, a world of constantly changing values and realities, the mind can still create "supreme fictions." These fictions may lack absolute meaning, but they can provide, in the words of Robert Frost, "a momentary stay against confusion."

Henry Adams, disgusted by the limitations of the rationality at the foundations of both history and science, progressively headed
for the more subjective bastions of art, an activity which encouraged the sort of sensitivity which he felt was slowly disappearing in the twentieth century. Similarly, Pynchon's characters face, one by one, the finiteness of their own mental processes and almost all of them turn to the imagination for a reality to which they can cling. Both writers play down the intellectual search for truth, and both lean toward the anarchic, the instinctual, the random and mystical process of imaginative creation.

For Adams, as we have seen, the process of creation was at its highest level in the Middle Ages, when men could embody the faith they held for God and the Virgin Mary. Adams yearned for the wholeness on which such a vision was predicated, and he tried to capture it by turning to his writing. Adams' strongest desire as he grew older, it seems to me, was to represent his own sense of reality as effectively as Chartres cathedral represented the sense of reality of the medieval artisan. He knew that this representation could not come about through intellectual endeavor. As he says in the Education, "For some things ignorance is good, and art is one of them" (p. 215). This ignorance, as should now be clear, is not simple mindlessness, but a transcendence of the rational into that instinctive sphere where he, too, could know coherence.

Adams' sense that art could offer him coherence is probably best expressed in a number of quotations from the Education and from one of his least studied books, The Life of George Cabot Lodge, published in 1911. In the Education, Adams seems to account for both 
himself and a great number of Pynchon's characters when he says,

Every man with self-respect enough to become effective,
if only as a machine, has had to account to himself
for himself somehow, and to invent a formula of his
own for the universe, if the standard formulas failed.
There, whether finished or not, education stopped (p. 472).

To those who might argue that this quotation is a prelude to
Adams' science rather than to his art, I question the absolute dis-
tinction. Adams' mind, as I said in the Introduction, was primarily
poetic, his formulas as much "supreme fictions" as scientific hypo-
theses, constructed as much out of his imagination as out of experi-
mentation and observation. It seems clear that Adams was seldom at a
loss for potential formulas for himself and his universe. The Education
itself, as we have seen, was such a formula. Adams' problem, though,
was that as soon as the formula was begun, he saw its weakness. No
answers existed for him except the undermined variety—undermined by
the mind which was not to be transcended.

In a second quotation from the Education we can see exactly
how Adams saw art as a response to the chaos he felt:

In such labyrinths [of existence], the staff is a force
almost more necessary than the legs; the pen becomes a
sort of blind-man's dog, to keep him from falling in
the gutters. The pen works for itself, and acts like
a hand, moulding the plastic material over and over
again to the form that suits it best. The form is
never arbitrary, but is a sort of growth like crystal-
ization, as any artist knows too well; for often the
pencil or pen runs into side-paths and shapelessness,
loses its relations, stops or is bogged. Then it has
to return on its trail, and recover, if it can, its
line of force. The result of a year's work depends
more on what is struck out than what is left in; on the
sequence of the main lines of thought, than on their
play or variety (p. 389).
The most important part of this section for my purposes is Adams' assertion that art is a staff to lean on, a blind man's dog to "keep him from falling into the gutters." Confronted by a confusing universe, Adams turned to art as an assertion of primal self, his way of making contact with the absolute. As he said in his Lodge, "From the beginning of life, the poet and artist have gone on, surprising themselves always afresh by the discovery that their highest flights of poetry and art end in some simple and primitive emotion." Adams presented Lodge himself as making that poetic journey for which he yearned, and actually making contact with the life force he sought: "Commonly this instinct of unity with nature dies early in American life; but young Lodge's nature was itself as elemental and simple as the salt water." Adams presented Lodge as diving in his best poetry and finding meaning; one of Lodge's main images in Cain was the healing power of woman, and specifically the Virgin. Both men valued instinct, but apparently only Lodge was able to give himself over to it wholly, or so Adams said.

Adams was well aware of the ultimate futility of the artistic gesture, but he nonetheless makes his statement, as he says any self-respecting man must. Adams' art is a form of humanism in a world which values the specifically human less and less. Like Pynchon he was aware that art itself was losing ground. As he said in Lodge, "The twenty-five years between 1873 and 1898—years of astonishing scientific and mechanical activity—were marked by a steady decline of literary and
artistic intensity, and especially of the feeling for poetry." Adams was very much aware of the ways in which art can be destroyed by commercialism and power interests. Writing about poetic creation, Adams said "Society could safely adopt it as a form of industry, as it adopted other forms of bookmaking." Art gave Adams a basis for self-respect in a world which no longer valued the self or its excretions, and he took it.

Even as Adams turned to art, though, he yearned for the great synthesis which would explain the universe. To emphasize Adams' quest, in all its irony and all its heart-felt sincerity, we need only turn to this statement in the Education:

Adams proclaimed that in the last synthesis, order and anarchy were one, but that the unity was chaos. As an anarchist, conservative, and Christian, he had no motive or duty but to attain the end; and, to hasten it, he was bound to accelerate progress; to concentrate energy; to accumulate power; to multiply and intensity forces; to reduce friction, increase velocity and magnify momentum, partly because this was the mechanical law of the universe as science explained it; but partly also in order to get done with the present which artists and some others complained of; and finally--and chiefly--because a rigorous philosophy required it, in order to penetrate the beyond, and satisfy man's destiny by reaching the largest synthesis in its ultimate contradiction (pp. 406-7).

Here Adams specifically says he is looking for an answer which is not an answer, in common terms, a synthesis based not on logic but on some ultimate contradiction. This ultimate contradiction appears to be the final phase of entropic movement, the hyperthought which Adams usually saw as the end of all human aspiration. In this statement he
is tired of the waiting, tired of his own complaining, and he yearns for this phase, because, as he says, a rigorous philosophy requires it. The quotation is of course posing; had Adams wanted to bring about the next phase he could easily have found an activity more wasteful of vital energy than wishing in print. The part of him which is not posing, though, is the man dreaming of a Truth which logic cannot approach, the sort of Truth which both he and Pynchon feel is unavailable to man, or, if available, available only in random glimmers.

The parallels of Adams' situation to the situations of Pynchon's characters are inescapable. Tyrone, Oedipa, Stencil, Callisto, all seem to recognize the limitations of both rationality and bipolar reality and they embody with great accuracy some of the difficulties which Adams said that technological and atomic progress would bring to the world. In essence, Adams seems to have predicted the bases for Pynchon's vision, the dehumanization under corporate technology and the "...non-human energies increasingly imprison[ing] man."  

When I say that Pynchon's characters should be identified with Adams, I am not indulging in speculation. Pynchon himself identifies Callisto and Stencil with Adams in "Entropy" and V. respectively, seeing in them aspects of Adams' personality. Not only do these characters embody some of the final stages of Adams' theories, but they point to Adams' determination to deal with those final stages imaginatively. Adams and Pynchon's characters seem to agree on the imposibility of stating the Truth with precision, and Pynchon has most of them turn
to imaginative reality, to illusion, as a means of coping with existence.

I believe I can substantiate these parallels most effectively by starting with a quotation from Raymond Olderman's *Beyond the Waiste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties:* "What Pynchon has made clear is that in the face of the wasteland of this century some kind of illusion is necessary for man to remain human—and that some illusions are better than others." 6

Olderman's assertion is very close to the advice which Dr. Hilarius gives to Oedipa Maas when she is very near madness. She has come to him to rid herself of what she hopes are delusions, but Dr. Hilarius tells her that fantasy is all that humans have and says, "Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be" (p. 103). Although Hilarius is less discriminating than Olderman says Pynchon is, the message is clear: find an illusion and hold onto it, because it will keep you human. The rest of this section will deal with a number of these illusions in Pynchon, their potential glories and their massive limitations.

As examples of the potential glories of illusion, there are those characters in Pynchon who move toward the reicization which frightens Hilarius and who then come back, apparently through the power of some powerful illusion, such as love or art. Pynchon never allows us, though, to say *here* is the specific reason this reanimation occurred,
because in presenting these positive illusions, he makes it clear that
the journey back to humanity was a chance occurrence. In Pynchon, as
we have noted, causation breaks down; when the random rules there will
be random good things as well as random bad. Take, for example, Fausto
Ilegal, whom we left in Chapter II. At that point he was Fausto
III. "the closest any of the characters comes to non-humanity....Fausto
III had taken on much of the non-humanity of debris, crushed stone,
broken masonry, destroyed churches and broken auberges of his city"
(p. 286).

Fausto does return from rockhood, though, and becomes Fausto IV,
but the means of his rehumanizing are not at all clear:

Of Fausto III's return to life, little can be said.
It happened. What inner resources were there to give
it nourishment are still unknown to the present Fausto.
This is a confession and in that return from the rock
there was nothing to confess. There are no records of
Fausto III except for some indecipherable entries (p. 323).

At least one of the "reasons" for Fausto's return to humanity has to do
with his returning to his art, writing, and I do not think it accidental
that once he returns to humanity, his main activity is writing. Fausto
IV's surfacing is presented in terms that seem to link his humanizing
to art:

His successor, Fausto IV, inherited a physically and
spiritually broken world. No single event produced
him. Fausto III had merely passed a certain level of
consciousness or humanity. That curve is still rising.
Somehow there had accumulated a number of poems (at
least one sonnet cycle the present Fausto is still
happy with); monographs on religion, language, history;
critical essays (Hopkins, Eliot, di Chirico's novel
Hedgerow). Fausto IV was the "man of letters" and
the only survivor of the Generation of '37...(p. 286-7).
The only facts we have here are that Fausto III passed a
certain level of consciousness, and that he was apparently creating
while he passed that level. We cannot say for sure that art is the
cause of Fausto III's rehumanization: the quotation specifically says
that "no single event produced him." The rehumanization occurred and
art was there. It seems to me, though, that by making Fausto IV a
"man of letters" while specifically stating that he was becoming more
and more human ("That curve is still rising.") Pynchon is saying that
art as illusion has more productive possibilities than the history
which tried to capture truth or life in the eternal concrete present.
The key to my statement is possibility. Art need not be the way toward
a firmer humanity, as I will attempt to show in my next example. It does,
however, in the case of Fausto, at least reinforce the movement away
from decay. In that sense the art of Fausto IV may be seen as anti-
entropic, a pocket of life.

My task would be a great deal easier if I could simply say
that Pynchon regards art as the solution to entropic movement, but it
seems clear from V. and especially from Gravity's Rainbow that art is
only a kind of key for certain individuals at certain times and in
certain situations. After so many qualifications art may not seem to
apply at all, but there is the inescapable example of Fausto. His
personal art seems at least to have had a bend in bringing him back
to the human community.

Another example in Pynchon of art re-establishing the lost
humanity, the lost sense of community, is the jazz played by Black
musicians. This is an art form which somehow grants the artist special knowledge. Most important for purposes of illustration here is Thomas Pynchon's only "non-fiction" piece, an essay written the the New York Times Magazine called "Journey Into the Mind of Watts." In that essay Pynchon describes the human and material waste of the ghetto, and then he starts to describe pockets of non-waste, such as music and rioting.

In fact, he compares the two, saying:

Others remember it [the 1965 riot] in terms of music; through much of the rioting seemed to run, they say, a remarkable empathy, or whatever it is jazz musicians feel on certain nights; everybody knowing what to do and when to do it without needing a word or a signal: "You could go up to anybody, the cats would be in the middle of burning down a store or something, but they'd tell you, explain very calm, just what they were doing, what they were going to do next. And that's what they'd do; man, nobody had to give orders."7

What jazzmen and rioters have is the kind of instinctual understanding which Pynchon can embody but cannot know. There is the scene in The Crying of Lot 49, for example, in which Oedipa stumbles upon a ball for deaf mutes, and which emphasizes the connection between music and instinct:

Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance? There would have to be collisions. The only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined. Something they all heard with an extra sense atrophied in herself. She followed her partner's lead, limp in the young mute's clasp, waiting for the collisions to begin. But none came (p. 97).
Musicians are artists and artists in Pynchon can seemingly reach into that instinctual creative force which Henry Adams makes so much of in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*. The artist somehow transcends the general atrophy of sense and becomes a kind of unconscious conduit for the larger forces, returning to the essential or transcendental self. I think such an interpretation explains a scene such as the following, which occurs in *Entropy*:

"...it occurred to me, in one of these flashes of insight, that if the first quartet of Mulligan's had no piano, it could only mean one thing."

"No chords," said Paco, the baby-faced bass.

"What he is trying to say," Duke said, "is no root chords. Nothing to listen to while you blow a horizontal line. What one does in such a case is, one thinks the roots."

A horrified awareness was dawning on Meatball. "And the next logical extension," he said.

"Is to think everything," Duke announced with simple dignity. "Roots, line, everything."

Meatball looked at Duke, awed, "But," he said.

"Well," Duke said modestly, "there are a few bugs to work out."

"But," Meatball said.

The scene seems to me to say that if the jazz musicians are "together" in a quasi-mystical sense, there really need be no expression of music—the music would be entirely cerebral and would be understood by the other musicians. In this sense art becomes absolutely internalized, and in that absoluteness both Pynchon and Adams seem to see a kind of aid in a relative universe.

As is usually the case with Pynchon, though, the productiveness of the illusion is undermined. In *Journey Into the Mind of Watts,* for example, Pynchon shows that while jazz is an assertion of self, a
way of bringing together the shattered persona, it is also a means of sublimating the energies which could be used for social change. Pynchon presents the city of Los Angeles as being more than willing to invest in a Watts cultural festival, because the city knows that such a festival will keep the lid from blowing off the ghetto. In this sense jazz becomes similar to the movies, which continually appear in Pynchon's fiction as a technique which can numb people to their own despair. If the art is the technique of others, it loses the ability to liberate.

Majjstral's writing and Black jazz are two forms of illusion which offer at least a momentary respite from incoherence and decay. For a short while they allow the individual artist to feel whole, a part of a coherent community. But the negative illusions take up a good deal more space in Pynchon's fictions. These are the illusions which typify the societies he portrays and they all, in one way or another, lead to the death of humanity and fellow feeling.

In *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, two of the prime examples of negative illusions are the ideas of mythic and official history. In both these books the near annihilation of Blacks by Germans in the campaigns of 1904 and 1922 is thematically crucial. *V.* focuses on the Germans doing the killing, while *Gravity's Rainbow* examines the attempt at genocide from both the point of view of the Germans and of the decimated Herero tribe. The Hereros in *Gravity's Rainbow*, under the command of one Enzian, roam the zone of occupied Germany in a grim parody of the Nazis, relating the tale of their destruction as a kind of myth. Their story, however, lives on in official German
history as a tale of magnificent conquest by the fatherland.

Entian and his Schwarzkommando were profoundly affected by the German massacres; their decimation was psychic as well as physical.

As the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow notes:

"Inside the Schwarzkommando there are forces, at present, who have opted for sterility and death....They call themselves Otukunguru. Yes, old Africa hands, it ought to be "omukunguru," but they are always careful--perhaps it's less healthy than care--to point out that omu- applies only to the living and human. Otu- is for the inanimate and the rising, and this is how they imagine themselves. Revolutionaries of the Zero, they mean to carry on what began among the old Hereros after the 1904 rebellion failed. They want a negative birth rate. The program is racial suicide. They would finish the extermination began in 1904 (p. 316).

The Herero have come so close to annihilation, in other words, that they begin to worship it. This wishing for death explains their obsessive emphasis on all forms of non-procreative sex and also explains, obliquely, their love of the Rocket, which they struggle to rebuild. The Rocket is at the same time a symbol for perverse sex--the phallic thrust into the sky is continually emphasized--and of the technology of death. The Schwarzkommando take it as their totem; it also is "inanimate, and ...rising." The Herero build a Rocket and worship it. They alone among Pynchon's societies have found an Ideal which gives them coherence. The irony is that the Ideal is death, a sure end to any coherence. Their mythical history leads them inevitably toward the grave.

The second view of the German massacre does not come from the German history books, but from a pageant which Franz Pöklter sees at a
German amusement park, Zwölfkinder. His trip through the park with the girl the Nazis have told him is his daughter is detailed: they walk from ride to ride,

along the miniature railway, between the corrugated nine legs of steel mesh dinosaurs, down to the patch of African desert where every two hours exactly the treacherous natives attacked an encampment of General von Trotha's brave men in blue, all the parts played by exhuberant boys, and a great favorite with children of all ages (p. 421-2).

This is the "official" version of the Southwest campaign, packaged for the German people. It also leads to a kind of death, the death of common humanity. I believe there is a certain irony in Pynchon's words when he says that the pageant appealed to "children of all ages."
The phrase is hackneyed, but it could well be saying that an adult would see the pretense, and would see the truth of the pageant, whereas a child, an unthinking person at any age, would see nothing more than a kind of entertaining western.

It is important to realize that Pynchon is not simply anti-German, but that he is attacking all human beings who ignore human ends for corporate technological or political purposes. In sections of V. and Gravity's Rainbow he attacks the Americans at Hiroshima, the British in Pointsman's outfits, and even the colonizers of South America, all of whom committed unconscionable acts which later received the official justification of their states.

The two versions of the massacres in Africa are illusory. In both cases men are holding onto illusions because they have to. The Schwarzkommandos see no purpose in a world where von Trothas have power;
the Germans cannot face a reality which includes their own inhumanity. The illusions give a meaning to life, but it is a meaning which leads toward the death of humanity. In the case of the Hereros, it leads to a literal death; in the case of the Germans it leads to a death of love.

In my second chapter on self, there is a section on the unproductive illusion of Herbert Stencil. The pursuit of V. gives him a direction but it is a direction which slowly turns the world and all other human beings into a dream, thus isolating him from any sort of human contact. In V., though, there is another illusion juxtaposed against Stencil's, the illusion of Benny Profane. Where Stencil lives in the past, Profane lives on the Street, Pynchon's symbol for the eternal present. Profane is unable to deal with the inanimate and is unwilling to deal with the animate in other than perfunctory ways. His life can best be defined as a collection of needs. Instead of love, Profane has lust; where real love is concerned he considers himself a virgin, and his fondest dream is the creation of an all-mechanical woman who would service him without creating any emotional ties:

Someday, please God, there would be an all-electronic woman. Maybe her name would be Violet. Any problems with her, you could look it up in the maintenance manual. Module concept: fingers' weight, heart's temperature, mouth's size out of tolerance? Remove and replace, that was all (p. 361).

What seems clear from the portrayal of Profane is that his approach to reality, his random existence in the present, is leading him
inevitably toward reicization. Yearning for the robot woman, he effectively denies his own humanity.

These are two unproductive illusions, defining reality so as to slowly isolate the definer. Such illusions abound in Pynchon. Tyrone Slothrop tries to live a random existence, and succeeds, but like Profane, he is slowly disappearing. Oedipa Moss searches for a vast conspiracy and like Herbert Stencil she becomes more and more disengaged from other people, her reality becoming almost entirely subjective. There is Major Pointsman, whose "l'état c'est moi" attitude leaves human beings as nothing more than pawns for his vast plotting; and there is Sidney Stencil, who finally realizes that men such as Pointsman, whom he had thought knew what was going on, do not know. Sidney realizes that he is a cipher in a world of ciphers. All these defined realities are illusions, dreams which Dr. Hilarius says we have to hold onto, and all are in one sense or another non-productive.

Thomas Pynchon seems dead-set against offering any but the undermined answer. He will seem to give a solution to the problems he is discussing, such as jazz, but he is careful to present jazzmen like Mr. McAfee in "The Secret Integration" to whom the superior insight has given nothing but misery. He will speak of the importance of illusions through one character, and will then turn around and show the effect that persistent "illusioning" has on people: Stencil becomes less and less human as his quest continues, a reicization matched by V.'s progressive disintegration. Tyrone searches for the rocket and something to hang onto and he slowly dissolves in the Zone.
Oedipa searches for Tristero and we are not sure if she finds conspiracy or her own paranoia. In Pynchon the characters are not allowed to live by someone else's illusion, because that would be coping out on self, but when a character does try to live by his own illusions, he cuts himself off from other human beings.

We return to Pynchon's insistence on the unconnectedness of events and the impossibility of living a human life on this earth at this time. Through jazz, fantasy, random action and irony, one can bide his time before the inevitable reification or dissolution, but Pynchon gives no hope so far as final answers go. James Joyce, also portraying a dying world, at least allows for the possibility of moments of insight, but to Pynchon, "...there are no epiphanies on Malta this season, no moment of truth" (V., p. 316). In Pynchon good things happen, but for no discernible reason and for no great length of time.

As Pynchon says in Gravity's Rainbow,

just as there are, in the World, machineries committed to injustice as an enterprise, so too there seem to be provisions active for balancing things out once in a while. Not as an enterprise, exactly, but at least in the dance of things (p. 580).

Pynchon's vision, I believe, ultimately focuses on this "dance of things" and his characters' attempts to deal with that dance. They try illusion, love, irony, jazz, meditation, art, all of the usual panaceas offered by writers and psychologists, and none of them works for long. No one is exactly sure what the tune is that everyone is dancing to, as was the case with Oedipa and the deaf mutes, but there
is no doubt in anyone's mind that the dance will soon end for the individual dancers.

It seems to me that the short story "Entropy" is a metaphor for the vision which I have been describing. The story takes place in two apartments in the same building. In one of these apartments are Meatball Mulligan and his wild lease-breaking party, as we have seen. In the other are the bird girl Aubade and Callisto, the scientist who has created a perfect ecological balance, so that he and the girl can no longer leave the apartment. Outside the building the weather does not change, and what is clearly happening is the death of the sun, cooled off because it, too, is under the control of the Second Law of thermodynamics.

The world is dying and the two apartments present what Pynchon feels are the two major responses humans are likely to make to the dance of things. Callisto's response is what I have called the response of the enclave and what Pynchon calls the "hothouse" reality—the individual, through his own efforts, creates his own reality. Mulligan's response is the random response, what Pynchon calls the response of the "Street." As he says in V., to which "Entropy" is integrally related,

"If there is any political moral to be found in this world," Stencil once wrote in his Journal, "it is that we carry on the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street. The Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated
mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future.

"What of the real present, the men-of-no-politics, the once-respectable Golden Mean? Obsolete; in any case, lost sight of." (pp. 440)

This quotation is at once a criticism of the bipolar reality already alluded to and, as Tony Tanner notes in City of Words, an explication of the symbolism in "Entropy." Mulligan is the modern man, treading his way to oblivion. In Pynchon his place is taken at times by Benny Profane, Mucho Maas, and Tyrone Slothrop, all living a more or less random existence and all becoming less and less alive. Callisto is the man of imagination who creates his own reality-illusion. His place is taken in the other works by Herbert Stencil, Major Pointsman, the children in "The Secret Integration," and possibly Oedipa Maas. These characters make their own choice, but the choice really does not matter that much, because in the end they all die anyway—at the end of "Entropy" Aubade can stand it no longer and she breaks the seal of the apartment; death takes them.

The episode which does not fit this interpretation of "Entropy" is Meatball Mulligan's final act, that of helping the drunken partygoers back to sobriety. As Pynchon says, "...he decided to try and keep his lease-breaking party from deteriorating into total chaos."6 If Mulligan is living a random existence, typified by the party, why does he exert himself to stay the chaos he has helped create? It is unlikely that Benny Profane would have bothered. Why does Mulligan?

Following my interpretation so far, the only answer that could really be given is "why not?" We are once again searching for an
answer in a vision devoid of answers. And yet Mulligan's action has
a certain dignity which is not found in Pynchon's other random charac-
ters. If we return to Norbert Wiener for a minute, we find a discussion
of almost the exact situation in "Entropy:"

To those of us who are aware of the extremely limited
range of physical conditions under which the chemical
reactions necessary to life as we know it can take place,
it is a foregone conclusion that the lucky accident
which permits the continuation of life in any form on
this earth, even without restricting life to something
like human life, is bound to come to a complete and
disastrous end. Yet we may succeed in framing our values
so that this temporary accident of living existence,
and this much more temporary accident of human existence,
may be taken as all-important positive values, notwith-
standing their fugitive character.

In a very real sense we are shipwrecked passengers
on a doomed planet. Yet even in a shipwreck, human de-
cencies and human values do not necessarily vanish, and
we must make the most of them. We shall go down, but
let it be in a manner to which we may look forward as
worthy of our dignity.9

Although Mulligan's act can be seen as nothing more than a
random action, it also might be seen as a response to entropic movement.
In this case death is the mother of beauty because, although the ter-
mination is sure, it gives rise to an act of kindness. The act itself
is meaningless to the forces bringing about the destruction, but it
gives a certain dignity to the actor. It seems to me that throughout
Pynchon's work love and human dignity are valued. Neither of them is
enough to stem the tide of entropy for long, but each can brighten the
existence of the characters involved. There is no fulfilling or
all-encompassing love in Pynchon which lasts, as there is no purveyor
of human dignity who lasts, but there are moments of dignity and love
which just might be "...things to hold onto" (GR, p. 663).

I want to make sure I am understood here. I am not contradicting myself when I say that Pynchon's is a vision of randomness and then say that love and dignity appear to be valued in that vision. It is finally the reader who does the valuing, who makes the poem by preferring one sort of action over another. I recognize fully that love and dignity are not "answers" or solutions to the kinds of problems Pynchon is posing. The reader of Pynchon, as the character in Pynchon, is forced to make choices as to which actions are most valuable in a grotesque caricature of the reader's world. He makes choices which may have no basis but personal preference, but in choosing he defines and limits himself and his reality. In that sense it seems to me that critics are entirely justified in considering Pynchon a most subversive writer.

All of this may seem to be an apology for fuzzy writing on Pynchon's part, but it is not. Pynchon seems to know exactly what he is doing. His is a vision of declarative sentences, all terminating with an understood question mark. Pynchon turns to art because it allows him to show a reader that reality--his reality--is more a matter of predisposition than rational choice based on irrefutable evidence. Pynchon seems to be saying that our lives are based on coincidence, our purposes illusions.

But he is an artist, not a polemicist. I do not wish to leave the impression in the foregoing that each day Thomas Pynchon sits down
to write and asks himself, "What are the most effective means of
embodying the heat death of the sun and the eventual reicization of
mankind?" Although I believe Pynchon's art is response, it is far
from the predominantly grim response such topics would seem to require.
If anything, there is abandon and joy in the presentation of some of
his most serious themes. Having Profane piss on the sun points to
the heat death of the universe, and the move toward reicization is
effectively captured in the limerick sequences in Gravity's Rainbow,
but neither of these presentations points, I think, to an entirely
desperate man. An entirely desperate man does not stage Hawaiian
numbers in the midst of meditations.

Richard Poirier is surely right about many modern literary
creations when he says, in The Performing Self, that "If a poem
expresses grief, it also expresses— as an act, as a composition, a
performance, a 'making,'—the opposite of grief; it shows or expresses
what a hell of a good time I had writing it." 10 There is just that
sense of having a hell of a good time in Pynchon's writing. While
imaginatively manipulating what are literally cosmic themes, Pynchon
remains unperturbed, or rather he is much more involved with the fact
that he can manipulate such themes. For example, his books say
explicitly that technology and the corporate structure are going to
eventually take over mankind, but through his act of creation, Pynchon
has taken over them, using them for his own imaginative purposes.
There is in Pynchon's pyrotechnic style and riotous invention a sense of the power of imagination which does not at all jibe with his repeated theme of a lessening of creative energy. *Gravity's Rainbow* is a masterpiece of modern fiction, and one of the reasons is Pynchon's technical skill: he is able to deal with some of the most serious of human problems in a form resembling that of a berserk musical comedy. In Pynchon the vision and the presentation of the vision predominate over traditional novel form, decorum, politics, the technological imperatives, all else. Pynchon, it seems, might very well agree with Richard Poirier when he says that "Literature has only one responsibility—to be compelled and compelling about its inventions."11 *Gravity's Rainbow* is so compelling.

In this riot of invention, Pynchon does not take a position and defend it, because that would involve the very rationality his imagination does not want to be bothered with. Even in his "non-fiction" piece, "Journey Into the Mind of Watts," Pynchon develops mainly in terms of metaphor and symbols. Pynchon's writing apparently gives him a way to deal with the anarchy which is experience; fiction, in other words, is the illusion which he is hanging onto. He does not seem to have many pretensions about his art—*Gravity's Rainbow* was not written to change the world—as he does not seem to have any pretensions about the illusions of his characters. Art, as was the case with Robert Frost, is but a momentary stay against confusion. But fiction is his momentary stay, his anti-entropic movement.
Poirier's statement about art as performance can also be applied to Henry Adams. As was the case with Thomas Pynchon, Adams continually wrote about the slow dispersal of creative energy, all the while showing no diminution of power in his own work. The Education, for example, generally taken to be Adams' masterpiece, was written fairly late in his life, near the change of phase which Adams predicted would bring an end to all creative activity. I cannot help thinking that he must have enjoyed the irony of turning phrases in the Education which said in essence that such turning was no longer possible. There is, amid the pessimism and despair of the Education, a sense of what a hell of a good time Adams had writing it.

In the Education and in Gravity's Rainbow I would say that the authors' primary obligation was to their own vision. This is not to say that the content of their books has no relation to "real life"—perhaps it does—but that the act of expression has a good deal more interest for Adams and Pynchon than any rational position they might take. This is perhaps less true for Adams, as the end of the Education says that it is setting up a dynamic theory of history, but what must be recalled is that Adams thought this theory a failure because he could not state it properly. Does a desperate man, seeing hyperthought fast approaching, worry about his phrasing? If he is primarily an artist, as Adams was, he does.

This sense of obligation to vision, perhaps the most important similarity in Adams' and Pynchon's feeling for art as response, can
best be examined in the respective forms of Gravity's Rainbow and the Education. It seems to me that the form of both these works mirrors the entropic movement I have been discussing and it also serves as a springboard for compelling invention.

While form is a difficult thing to describe concretely, to examine the form of Pynchon's and Adams' masterpieces, all we need do is to go back to Sypher's description of what molecules do when there is a change in entropy. They disperse, which is exactly what happens to what might be considered the narrative lines of force in Gravity's Rainbow and the Education. In Gravity's Rainbow the plot lines multiply and convolute until the end of the book becomes 150 pages of material sometimes seemingly unrelated to the novel.

The last section of Gravity's Rainbow has been attacked by a number of critics for being nothing more than a pastiche, a collection of items and undeveloped story lines which Pynchon was unable to fit into his other novels. I would argue that each of the two, three or ten page items fits thematically into the book, but the reader must do the fitting. Pynchon's novel is not like Middlemarch, in which the writer supplies the strands of narrative and then neatly ties them together at the end of the book. In its last 150 pages Gravity's Rainbow simply unravels, and forces the reader to do his own thematic knitting with narrative items as disparate as organic chemistry, a disquisition on "shit and shinola" and suicide by V-2. The reader makes his own poem of the ending of Gravity's Rainbow, relating the
bits and pieces to his own interpretation. Pynchon, I would argue, refuses to be too positive about the ending of his book because he would then be putting too much shape on the vision he is creating. He is not Herbert Stencil, creating a world which must be reality. In *Gravity's Rainbow* he undermines his own vision, but that undermining keeps the book alive for the reader who is alive.

The title of the last section of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "The Counterforce," could very easily be interpreted as the art which I have been saying is at least a potential answer for Pynchon. The reader must use his own art, his own ability to synthesize and relate themes, in order to conclude the book. The reader, in accomplishing this synthesis, can see whether his own reality tends more to the Hothouse than the Street. The novel, I am arguing, undergoes its own entropic movement, and the reader is asked to supply the anti-entropic imagination with which to end the book. Once that imaginative energy is expended, though, Pynchon's book is not so much ended as is the reader's reality defined. The open-endedness of *Gravity's Rainbow* points at the same time to the open-endedness of reality and to the imagination which Pynchon seems to be saying is a counterforce which can at least partially and momentarily close that reality. *Gravity's Rainbow* seems to me a perfect case of form following function.

As the dispersion at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* finds its coherence in Pynchon's vision and a potential coherence in the imagination of the engaged reader, so the dispersion at the end of the *Education*
points finally to the coherence of Adams' vision. After presenting his life in a series of what might be called narrative waves, Adams skips twenty years in his narrative and starting on page 314 attempts to give the meaning of history, against which his own life might be judged. The meaning he presents, as we have seen, is that man is slowly losing vital energy and moving to hyperthought.

Certain parts of this final section are atypical of Adams' writing, in that they might be used to substantiate his assertion that creative energy is lessening. Periodically his control and clarity leave him. It seems almost as if the confusions about which he has been writing, the multiple self, the entropic society and the situational forces, conspire in this final section to make certain assertions almost inexplicable. Adams gives answers that are not answers, conclusions which do not conclude. There are bits and pieces of a logical argument here, but things fall apart; the center cannot hold.

It almost seems as if the entropic theory which Adams was later to present in A Letter is presaged by the formal movement of the Education. To put this movement into entropic terms, the linear narration of the earlier sections of the Education begin to disintegrate, or to multiply geometrically, and the narrative lines of force seem to take on a life of their own, like molecules. The irony that Adams has controlled so well snaps as he attempts to deal rationally with what he admits to be a subrational phenomenon.
But it is not rationality which gives the final section its overall coherence in the face of these shifting narrative lines. The conclusion which Adams reaches in this section is a paradox, that "in the last synthesis, order and anarchy were one and that the unity was chaos" (p. 406). This statement is very much like a Zen koan, the main purpose of which is to transcend the rational, but like the koan, it does not transcend the imaginative. Adams found a unity in the twentieth century; he located the principle at the very center of reality; it was chaos. But in that realization, and in his presentation of that find, Adams transcended it, much as Pynchon transcends the difficulties of the corporate technological state in Gravity's Rainbow. The writing in the final section of the Education is an assertion of the unity and power of imagination to deal with chaos. At the same time it is a recognition of chaos and an affirmation of vision.

The Education, like Gravity's Rainbow, is open-ended, and as was the case with Pynchon's book, the open-endedness points at the same time to the open-endedness of reality and to the potential of the synthesizing mind. At the end of the Education this shaping power is probably not seen to its best advantage, but even the attempt to find the key to all of history in 150 pages shows a magnificent faith in the author's own mind, in the human mind. Adams used that power to attempt to go beyond the "chaos of sense impression" to an order which he hoped he was discovering but which he knew he was imposing. To be trapped between this knowledge and this hope was Adams' fate.
Both Thomas Pynchon and Henry Adams see and present the world as disintegrating, and both see that disintegration in specifically entropic terms. Although Adams poses and Pynchon satirizes exactly the sort of research I am doing here, there is nonetheless entropic movement in the self, society and Truth of both writers. All three of these entities are related to the limitations of human reason and both writers either yearn themselves or have characters who yearn for some way out of the searching, some path off the treadmill. This yearning makes them both Romantics, but they are Romantics with a difference. Their yearning is not blind; it is the breadth and clarity of their vision which finally makes them great writers. They may irritate with their unwillingness to answer, but they irritate only the reader who is himself so Romantic as to expect answers. In the absence of such answers, Thomas Pynchon and Henry Adams turn to art. In an entropic world, art is their homeostasis.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER V


SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


