

## PYNCHON'S *VINELAND*: FROM THE TEXT INTO THE STORY AND BACK AGAIN

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The reader of the British edition of *Vineland*<sup>1</sup> does not have to go very far into the book before coming to the first of some peculiar elements which characterize Pynchon's fourth novel: beneath the copyright notice can be read «The right of Thomas Pynchon to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988». This short paragraph becomes, in this way, the first indication of the always —present duality of anonymity-invisibility provided by a name, Thomas Pynchon, which has become for over two decades a sort of well-known signifier of unknown signified. The same condition may be applied to the already famous letter «v», with which was named the first novel of this author (*V.*, 1963) and almost named his third one (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 1973, centered on the German V2s). «V» comes back now, after many years of absence, to appear at the beginning of the title of the new book: *Vineland*.

Seventeen years have elapsed since Pynchon published his latest narrative and, once again, the reader may perceive a very conscious symbology which extends even to the time that the writer has chosen to disclose his latest literary work: the New Year of 1990, a very relevant date for the human being, measurer of Time, who insists on going on discovering reality by means of systems of symbols one of which, probably the most important, he names «language».

Apparently this time the invisible Pynchon has decided, once again, to use some of the old motifs present in his earlier narratives. Space and time are again distorted, life seems to be understood as a circuit whose energy may stop flowing at some end or electrode, the controlling «They» reappear to control or entropically destroy the system/s, comic —to a certain point meaningful— names come along with the obsolete Aristotelean and Newtonian principles of the either/or and cause/effect, music mixes or becomes noise ... all these elements are still here and

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pynchon *Vineland*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1990. All subsequent quotations from this novel refer to the same edition and will appear with the page number only.

could perhaps cheat the reader into thinking that, after seventeen years of keeping silent, Pynchon has come back with the same old topics. However, there are some ingredients which do not look so Pynchonian and, this time, the reader may even think of the possibility of having a happy end to the story: there are mythic suggestions at the beginning and end of the novel and *Vineland* provides the «listener» with some new echoes or literary registers coming from other writers' voices.

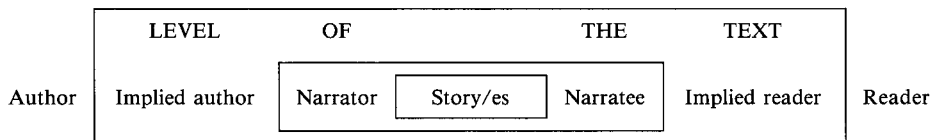
*Vineland*, the reader soon realizes, is not as difficult to understand as *Gravity's Rainbow* or *The Crying of Lot 49* but this fact does not mean that Pynchon's latest novel is not also based on a complex structure. Precisely to discover its technical complexities so that we can become more aware of the contemporary appeal and new elements present in this 1990 narrative, I will attempt a narratological analysis in two phases: the first one centered on the level of the text, especially on the use of the «voice»; and the second one on the level of the story, taking into account the —to my knowledge— most relevant Pynchonian motifs<sup>2</sup>.

## I

As the case has been with the other novels written by Pynchon, *Vineland* also shows a mixed narratorial voice which (tries to) establish a process of communication with the narratee<sup>3</sup>. The narrator's voice seems to be quite loose, relaxed and sympathetic, especially when referring to the activities and life of the oppressed characters of the story, a collection of outside types featuring from the old drug-smokers exhippies (and now FBI informers) to DL, the «nin-jette», or Takeshi, the Japanese detective investigating into worldwide paranoia. In fact, all along the pages, the narrator's voice proves to be the essential factor

<sup>2</sup> On the concepts of «text» and «story» as used here see Mieke Bal *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> If we take into account the narratological theories as expressed by Gerard Genette *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988; f.p. 1983), and *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980; f.p. 1972); M. Bal, op. cit.; and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), we could structure the communicative acts operating on the level of the text, from the author to the reader, as being composed of the following elements:



The narratee in this scheme would somehow coincide with Walter Gibson's «mock-reader» in his classic essay «Authors, speakers, readers, and mock-readers» (reprinted in *Reader-Response Criticism*, Jane P. Tompkins, ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1980). This figure could be defined as the explicit or implicit receiver to which the narrator addresses the telling of the story. A well-known example of explicit narratee is the comic «Sir» or «Madam» to whom Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* addresses the story of his «life and opinions».

to help the reader distinguish the «good» from the «bad» characters in the story. From the beginning he mixes his own narrating voice, time and space<sup>4</sup> with the characters' voices and the time and space of the story:

Uh-oh. Wasn't there supposed to be some loggers' bar around here someplace? (p. 5).

Here came Van Meter now, around the corner of the Cuke, wearing his trademark face,... (p. 10).

Instances of this type of free indirect discourse appear all along the novel. The narrator's voice mixes abundantly with those of the marginated characters such as DL, Zoyd, or Prairie and the effect can only be the one desired: through the narrator (classical mediator between the reader, and the story and its characters) the reader is attracted into the lives and problems of the outsiders. Focalization<sup>5</sup>, on the other hand, also starts usually from the narrator or from the oppressed characters and the result of this double manipulation is quite obvious: the reader is forced into feeling sympathy for a group of drug-consumers and, sometimes, even betrayers to their own friends and convictions.

The use of the free indirect discourse to attract the reader's feelings is not a new technique in Pynchon's narrative. On the contrary, the same narratorial voice seems to be, all along the years, the one which tells the reader the events which happen in *Slow Learner*<sup>6</sup> *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* and now *Vineland*, a main mixed and ironic voice which, the reader may believe, stands very close to Pynchon's own.

This peculiar sympathetic narrative voice often destroys our views of what a conventional «omniscient» narrator is. Pynchon's narrator is, certainly, «omniscient»; in Genettean terms he is extradiegetic —he narrates, from a superior level, the main story of the book— and heterodiegetic —he is not a character in the story he tells—<sup>7</sup>, but his is probably the best «impersonation»<sup>8</sup> in Pynchon's books; he sympathises with bums and outsiders, abandons a conventional «god-like» attitude and shows the reader that far from being the omniscient voice of old, he has also become a movie and T.V. addict, sharing his characters' habits and ways of talking:

<sup>4</sup> One of the main distinctions which a narratological analysis foregrounds is precisely the fact that the activity of narrating has its own time and space (even if they are not explicitly referred to in the text), not to be confused with the time and place in which the events of the story happened. This feature of all narrative texts is essential to understand the effects produced by the use of the free indirect discourse, in which voices, times and/or places from both the level of the text and the level of the story become confused. For a further analysis of the free indirect discourse, see M. Bal, *op. cit.*, p. 137-42, and S Rimmon-Kenan, *op. cit.*, p. 109-16.

<sup>5</sup> On the concept of focalization see M. Bal, *op. cit.*, p. 100-18. Cfr. G. Genette *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, *op. cit.*, p. 72-79.

<sup>6</sup> *Slow Learner*, a collection of Pynchon's early short stories introduced by himself (London: Picador, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> See G. Genette *Narrative Discourse*, *op. cit.*, p. 228-29 and 244-45.

<sup>8</sup> Using Pynchon's own term in *V*, (London: Picador, 1975; p. 61: f.p. 1963), when referring to one of Stencil's favourite activities.

«OK, OK, only thinkin' of the boys in uniform». So was Sasha, though Eddie and she were already four very fast bars into «Them There Eyes». She unbuttoned a button on her dress, took off her hat and draped her hair like Veronica Lake over one of them there eyes, and once more they got through together with nothing much going wrong. (p. 79)

This main voice, however, does not maintain this sympathetic —at times comic— mood all along the pages of the novel. On the contrary, following the path trodden by Eliot in classic Modernism and by Pynchon himself in earlier narratives (*V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*), the narrator changes his «register» on some occasions and the reader starts perceiving literary echoes of Steinbeck's narrator in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and even García Márquez's in *Cien años de soledad* (1967). As had already happened in *The Waste Land* (1922), explicit or implicit references to literary and artistic works appear once and again all through Pynchon's narrative. This technique, called «parody» by some critics and «hyper-textuality» by Genette<sup>9</sup>, has been pointed out as a relevant aspect of postmodernist literature<sup>10</sup>.

Such a literary device has a reason of its own to appear in Pynchon's fourth novel. However the fact is that in *Vineland* the narrator not only adopts different registers<sup>11</sup> and introduces characters who are film and TV addict like himself, he also delegates the narratorial voice and focalization into some characters (who subsequently tell and focalize their own stories), or introduces dreams or information coming out of a computer. Examples such as the following one abound in *Vineland*, suggesting the multifarious quality of this novel even on the act of narrating. After having seen the picture of her mother and DL, Prairie, still in the computer room of the Kuinochi

reached toward the power button, [and] she said good night to the machine.

«Why good night yourself, gentle User», it replied, «and may your sleep be in every way untroubled».

Back down in the computer library, in storage, quiescent ones and zeros scattered among millions of others, the two women, yet in some definable space, continued on their way across the lowlit campus, persisting, recoverable, friends by the time of this photo [...] In those days DL was just cruising up and down 101 looking for girl motorcycle gangs to terrorize...(p. 115)

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Burden «The Novel Interrogates Itself: Parody as Self-Consciousness in Contemporary English Fiction», in *The Contemporary English Novel*, M. Bradbury and D. Palmer, eds., London Arnold, 1979. And Linda Hutcheon *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, London; Methuen, 1985. Cf. Gerard Genette *Palimpsestes*, Paris; Seuil, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> See Patricia Waugh *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London Methuen 1984 (especially p. 4, 10-11, and Chapter 3). Cf. Brian McHale *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987) and his concept of «heteroglossia» (p. 166 *et seq.*) which would help us distinguish modernist from postmodernist texts: no wonder if the reader of McHale's book ends up thinking that Eliot's *Waste Land* (1922) or Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) are postmodernist texts!

<sup>11</sup> As this technique is so deeply related to some aspects of the story, I have thought it preferable just to point out here its presence on the text level and leave a further discussion of this device for the second part of this paper.

On page 114 Prairie was «fictionalizing» about what her mother and DL were talking and doing when the photo was taken. Now, through the machine, the narrator enters into the telling of another part of the story. In this way, following the process of association of ideas in the narrator's mind, the reader goes back and forward in time and space, listens to different voices, enters into iconic *mise en abymes*<sup>12</sup> and is assaulted by many references, suggestions or «echoes» coming out of the motion pictures or the TV set. Examples like the following one abound. Héctor Zúñiga talks, Frenesi focalizes, and the narrator ... narrates,

«You're an honest soldier, Frenesi, and we been out on so many of the same type calls over the years...» Here came some sentimental pitch, delivered dead-pan — cop solidarity, his problems with racism in the Agency, her 59 ¢ on the male dollar, may be a little «Hill Street Blues» thrown in, plus who knew what other licks from all that Tube, though she thought she recognized Raymond Burr's «Robert Ironside» character and a little of «The Captain» from «Mod Squad». (p. 345)

In a common contemporary device borders between narrative levels are crossed and even blurred<sup>13</sup>, the reader stops knowing where the «reality» of the story is and may start thinking about the possibility of everything within the text being a «fiction» even for the narrator. Only a final jump and the reader starts participating in the classic modernist epistemological quest: where is reality? how can I apprehend it? And, finally, how can I tell you about it?

People like Héctor, the FBI detective, or the narrator himself have become T.V. addicted and no wonder it happens in a country in which since you are a child the TV set has become your always present companion (p. 351). When Frenesi is not sure of Héctor's intentions, her little son prophetically announces:

«Don't worry about him, Mom», Justin told her, «he's the real thing, all right». «How do you know that?» «Can tell by the way he watches television». (p. 355)

Stories within the story, characters fictionalizing, TV offering a new «reality»: *Vineland* goes along the same narrative path on which Stencil fictionalized for half a novel (*V.*), Oedipa interpreted confusing signs (*The Crying of Lot 49*) or Slothrop dissolved after having been changed into a comic-strip hero (*Gravity's Rainbow*).

<sup>12</sup> On the concept of *mise en abyme* see Lucien Dallenbach *Le Récit spéculaire. Essai sur la mise en abyme*. Paris: Seuil, 1977. Cfr. Waugh, *op. cit.*; and McHale, *op. cit.* *Vineland* offers two very clear examples of this technique, which add to the epistemological suggestion of the impossibility of knowing: one at the beginning of the text, when TV cameras are ready to record what the reader reads Zoyd is about to do, and another one by the end, when Zúñiga supervises the shooting of a film, from his own viewpoint, on the political events which have constituted a substantial part in the book's story; the notions of truth and objectivity overtly escape from the text and, ultimately, from the act of reading itself.

<sup>13</sup> See P. Waugh, *op. cit.*, p. 28-34. Cf. Rosemary Jackson *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*.

A few decades have passed since Eliot suggested the impossibility of reaching reality by means of language in his epistemologically problematic *Waste Land*<sup>14</sup>. Now Pynchon's voices suggest once more that the civilized human being has a few new inventions to ponder about the nature of reality and the meaning of life. Drugs, dreams, television, motion pictures or computers are all powerful elements to further stress the narrator's distortion of his telling of a story in which old Pynchonian motifs appear again to draw a bridge into the new decade.

## II

In effect, from the very beginning of the story the reader may perceive Pynchon's fondness of the outsider and the dispossessed. When some readers had thought that Oedipa's «crying» or Pirate Prentice's «scream» at the dreamy beginning of *Gravity's Rainbow* had exhausted the (post-)modernist possibilities for extralinguistic revelation, and after seventeen years of keeping silent, ironically Pynchon begins his fourth novel «Later than usual...», and later than usual Zoyd (echo from the old «paranoids» and anticipation of the new «thanatoids») wakes from a dream. The exhippie musician and F.B.I. informer, and the old Pynchonian «invisible forces» will run together from the very first page of the novel:

Later than usual one summer morning in 1984, Zoyd Wheeler drifted awake in sunlight through a creeping fig that hung in the window, with a squadron of blue jays stomping around on the roof. In his dream these had been carrier pigeons from some place far across the ocean, landing and taking off again one by one, each bearing a message for him, but none of whom, light pulsing in their wings, he could ever quite get to in time. He understood it to be another deep nudge from forces unseen, almost surely connected with the letter that had come along with his latest mental-disability check, reminding him that unless he did something publicly crazy before a date now less than a week away, he would no longer qualify for benefits.

In this way, only in twelve lines, the reader finds again an outsider, a state of paranoia, a dream, the mythic symbol of the sea, and a system of communication: the keys to «understand» Pynchon's labyrinth are already here.

The exhippie but still drug-smoker Zoyd is one of a number of outsiders and dispossessed among whom the political system of America is always choosing its victims and scapegoats. However, this time Pynchon does not write only about a specific type of character but selects two whole groups of victims: the black-listed intellectuals of the fifties and the hippies of the sixties, although the sequels of the struggle will extend till the eighties (including Reagan's reelection).

<sup>14</sup> A narratological analysis of the famous poem discovers to what extent the notion of the impossibility of knowing via language is present in Eliot's text. On the poet's epistemological views at the time of writing *The Waste Land* see Louis Menand *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. See especially Chapter 2: «Problems About Objects».

In his *Waste Land* T. S. Eliot chose to present elements coming from both Western and Eastern cultures. Pynchon in *Vineland* offers the reader, together with the echoes of the wastage of the American land, also the duality West-East: references to Wayvone's western Mafia are counterbalanced with signs of the Yakuza, the powerful Japanese Mafia. And many more dualities, once again, invade the book's pages: Man is opposed by woman. Two are also the Federal detectives who fight back (?) the social victims: Federal Attorney Brock Vond, who certainly has a «license to kill» and a Rambo mood; and Héctor Zúñiga, a contemporary «Zorro» who does not behave in a knightly way any longer and has become a T.V. addict who wants to «personify» Ricardo Montalban. The reader may also perceive that the two evil male protagonists of the story are also counterbalanced by two female ones: exuberant FBI confidant Frenesi and invisible «ninjette» DL. The Campbellian «woman as temptress» and «woman as goddess»<sup>15</sup> certainly con-fuse in this all-comprehensive novel. Neither will the reader miss one of the most pervasive dualities in Pynchon's stories:

«OK [Prairie says] —my mom made movies for that Revolution you guys tried to have, she was on the run, warrants out on her, FBI put her pictures in the post office, Zoyd was her cover for a while, and then they had me ... and we were a family until the feds found out where she was and she had to disappear—go underground». There was a small defiant tremor in her voice.

Underground. Right. That's the story DL should have known they'd tell the kid. Underground. (p. 101)

The old frontier between «above» and «below» reappears in Pynchon's story to disappear immediately after: it is only a fictitious «story»; Frenesi did not have to go underground because she soon joined the FBI. However, if this frontier dissolves there are others —also old ones in Pynchon's narrative— to take its place: the either/or principle and the cause/effect law appear in this novel as further suggestions of a life which is not so simple as it may seem to human eyes. Even ninjette DL is trapped by the old dilemma which consumed Oedipa's brain:

Sometimes, waiting in her room, she'd wonder if this was all supposed to be some penance, to sit, caught inside the image of one she'd loved, been betrayed by, just sit ... Was it a koan she was meant to consider in depth, *or* was she finally lost in a great edge-to-edge delusion, having only read about Frenesi Gates once in some dentist's waiting room or standing in line at the checkout, whereupon something had just snapped and she'd gone on to make up the whole thing? (p. 141. Emphasis added)

In *The Crying of Lot 49* Oedipa thought about her possible paranoia, here DL seems to be more on the modernist side (influence of Henri Bergson or William

<sup>15</sup> On these concepts see Joseph Campbell *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968 (2nd ed.), p. 109-24. The archetypes of these two kinds of women are obviously quite old and worldwide. In American literature we can think of the romance figures of the blond and the dark ladies who clash in so many novels. In classic Freudian terms there comes to mind the duality prostitute/virgin (Marie = the Mother).

James) but the question still seems to be the same: how to know the truth. Frenesi can even imagine the ultimate structure of the world as a computer game with people «represented in a computer record by a long string of ones and zeros» (p. 90). She almost comes to a technological mystical experience to conclude that «[we] are digits in God's computer» (p. 91) but the reader is still trapped by the either/or principle and the Newtonian cause/effect because language can never be transcended in a novel and the human perceptual system cannot go beyond its own limited faculties<sup>16</sup>.

Takeshi, the Japanese detective, may suggest with his activities that there is a «further beyond» but, in this case, his job leads him —and the reader— to the discovery of those «invisible forces» which are even beyond the reach of Brock Vond's «They» or unknown leaders. Page 65 presents Zoyd «sequeing into the main title theme from *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (1956)» and the time comes for him to help Takeshi hide from the mysterious intruders from outer space. In this way the film reference becomes anticipatory of the second time in which the «invisible forces» appear in the form of an immense Godzilla-like «Saurian» footprint which stands now where a laboratory was before. Do these phenomena symbolize the forces of entropy operating on the world? So seems to think Salman Rushdie in one of the first reviews which appeared on Pynchon's novel<sup>17</sup>. In any case, references to entropy pervade the whole story in an explicit way.

To the assumptions that the Universe is running down of power and that the amount of available energy is becoming shorter (thermodynamic entropy) the reader can also add the notion of entropy in information flow<sup>18</sup> which is conveyed through the words of our old acquaintance Mucho Maas who, jumping out of the pages of *The Crying of Lot 49*, enters in *Vineland* to warn Zoyd about the controlling methods which the Government uses:

They had a look. «Uh-huh, me too. [I thought we] were never going to die. Ha! No wonder the State panicked. How are they supposed to control a population that knows it'll never die? When that was always their last big chip, when they thought they had the power of life and death. But acid gave us the X-ray vision to see through that one, so of course they had to take it away from us».

«Yeah, but they can't take what happened, what we found out».

«Easy. They just let us forget. Give us too much to process, fill up every minute, keep us distracted, it's what the Tube is for, and though it kills me to say it, it's what rock and roll is becoming — just another way to claim our attention, so that beautiful certainty we had starts to fade, and after a while they have us convinced all over again that we really are going to die. And they've got us again. It was the way people used to talk. (p. 313-14)

<sup>16</sup> For a further study of the role of the Newtonian vs. the new physics in the contemporary novel see Robert Nadeau *Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the Modern Novel*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981. See especially Chapters 1 and 2; and Chapter 7, entirely dedicated to Thomas Pynchon.

<sup>17</sup> *The New York Times Book Review*. January 14, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> On these two concepts of entropy and their use in Pynchon's earlier narrative see R. Nadeau, *op. cit.*, and Frank D McConnell *Four Postwar American Novelists*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977 (Chapter 4: «Thomas Pynchon and the Abreaction of the Lord of Night»).



Entropy, however, is not exhausted in its two usual variants of thermodynamics and information flow. In this novel the reader has to suffer, to a certain extent, the effects of this law thanks to the huge amount of information flowing from the pages of the book. It is not surprising, then, that a third alternative appears in *Vineland*: mental or Freudian entropy, which would refer to a psychological condition of relax or pull towards undifferentiation, opposing the principle of Eros and tending towards a final lack of movement or nirvana<sup>19</sup>. Literary suggestions from Eliot's land of the living-dead mix the contemporary importance of the Tube (capitalized all through the novel) and the reader ends up assisting to the apparition of the Thanatoids, whose first example is Ortho Bob Dulang:

«What's a Thanatoid. OK, it's actually short for 'Thanatoid personality'. 'Thanatoid' means 'like death, only different'»

«Do you understand this?» Takeshi asked DL.

«Near as I can tell, they all live together, in Thanatoid apartment buildings, or Thanatoid houses in Thanatoid villages. Housing's modular and pretty underfurnished, they don't own many stereos, paintings, carpets, furniture, knick-knacks, crockery, flatware, none o' that, 'cause why bother, that about right, OB?» (p. 170)

The narrator is so kind as to extend OB's definition in his own words and adds: «While waiting for the data necessary to pursue their needs and aims among the still-living Thanatoids spent at least part of every waking hour with an eye on the Tube» (p. 170-71). Thanatoids, as the narrator further explains, need to advance «into the condition of death» and it is here where Takeshi will become a «karmic adjuster» to help them recover their eastern karmic balance. As DL's words had suggested, these new modernist living-dead, become a common sight in the Californian landscape. They are, borrowing a concept from South-American literature, elements of magical realism<sup>20</sup>: fantasy has entered the down-to-earth setting of Pynchon's story and has been assimilated into the latter's «realism». In the context of the literature in the U.S.A. the Thanatoids represent a «step forward» from that previous Pynchonian society of the vulnerable<sup>21</sup> and the paranoid. In the first decades of the 20th century modernist writers tried to represent the enormous difficulties the human being has to apprehend reality and know the ultimate truth. Now, Pynchon seems to imply, the human condition has been further mediated and, in some cases, destroyed by the godlike Tube, new interpreter of reality and servant of Entropy.

<sup>19</sup> On this concept see R. Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 72-82.

<sup>20</sup> The notion of «realismo mágico» seems to be one of the new ingredients in Pynchon's fourth novel. For an analysis of this concept see A. M. Ocampo «Un intento de aproximación al realismo mágico», in *El Barroco en América*, 1, Madrid: Editorial de Cultura Hispánica, 1978. See also M. Gálvez Acero *La novela hispanoamericana del siglo XX*. Madrid: Cincel, 1981.

<sup>21</sup> On the concept of «vulnerability» in the American postwar novel see Josephine Hendin *Vulnerable People: A View of American Fiction since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Nonetheless, *Vineland* does not only represent a step forward in the entropic pull. On the contrary, there is another element on the level of the story which helps to counterattack the advance of the dissolving forces: this fourth novel is, so far, the clearest example of committed literature written by Thomas Pynchon. The condition of the U.S.A. and the politics of its capitalist regime had also been denounced in Pynchon's earlier narrative but it is now, in *Vineland*, where the reader visits again the old California of Steinbeck's: a false land of wine and refuge for the outcast and the dispossessed. The old American paradox —a «land of freedom» controlled by the liberal and repressive forces of a puritan State— comes back to operate as the axis of Pynchon's story. As already stated in the first part of this essay, the level of the text crosses the boundaries with the level of the story and the narrator's voice reproduces echoes coming from far away: from the American 1930s, a literary time of realism when the mythical grapes of promise have become the grapes of wrath. Echoes from Steinbeck's style may be perceived when the narrator tells the reader about the political struggle of the 1950's which ended in the black-list of American cinema (p. 288-90). Again, the hippie community may remind the reader of the old «Okies» and their proletariat cooperation («Zoyd left Prairie with some folks they'd come up with on the bus who'd all got into the habit of looking after each other's kids»-p. 318). Coming nearer the end of the book children and grandchildren come together to meet the older Traverses and Beckers, representatives of the different waves of social(ist) fighters of 20th century America. In their camp, mixing with the old Steinbeckean smells of family breakfast can be perceived the new Pynchonian music-noise sense of human collectivity:

Behind the mountains that climbed from here inland, morning-glory-blue light grew in the sky. Soon toasters and toaster ovens, wood fires, RV kitchen microwaves, gong-size skillet over propane flames, all working on bacon, links, eggs, flapjacks, waffles, hash browns, French toast, and hush puppies, were sending out branching invisible fractals of smell, reaching all over the place, flat smoke, charring spices, toasted bread, just-made coffee... (p. 323)

In effect, this group which represents the oppressed America can even bring restoration to a nearby Thanatoid village whose inhabitants «actually slept the night before» and consequently were able to wake (p. 324). Symbolism starts operating here in a more positive way: perhaps this new human collectivity will be able to bring restoration to the whole land.

The end of the novel comes, once again, as a crossing of boundaries. Echoes from a well-known Genesis video-clip featuring spitting-image Ronald Reagan (waking up from a dream of nuclear destruction) stop Vond's first attempt to abduct little Prairie (p. 376). Text and story, reality and fantasy mix again suggesting the impossibility of the either/or principle in the age of Einstein and quantum theory. García Márquez's magical realism, Amerindian mythology, a story within the story, and the narrator's good will combine to make Brock Vond disappear for ever:

As he drove, Vato told an old Yurok story about a man from Turip, about five miles up the Klamath from the sea, who lost the young woman he loved

and pursued her into the country of death. When he found the boat of Illasa, the one who ferried the dead across the last river, he pulled it out of the water and smashed out the bottom with a stone. And for ten years no one in the world died, because there was no boats to take them across (...) Across the river Brock could see lights, layer after layer, crookedly ascending, thickly crowded dwellings, heaped one on the other. In the smoking torch— and firelight he saw people dancing (...) «What is it?» he asked. «Please».

«They'll take out your bones», «Vato explained. «The bones have to stay on this side. The rest of you goes over. You look a lot different, and you move funny for a while, but they say you'll adjust. Give these third-worlders a chance, you know, they can be a lotta fun».

«So long, Brock», said Blood. (p. 379-80)

By the end the moral ambiguity of Prairie, who had intended to flirt with Vond (isn't he 007, after all?), dissipates when she wake up from her sleep in the last page of the novel and is saluted by the tongue of her dog Desmond «face full of blue-hay feathers, smiling out of his eyes, wagging his tail, thinking he must be home». The «mythic-abyme» cycle is closed: from Zoyd's to Prairie's dream, from blue-jaus to blue-jay feathers (but...has the dog eaten the little birds?).

In the context of Pynchon's narrative, *Vineland* comes to bring back the old motifs with which the invisible author has probably attempted, from the very beginning, to respond to the modernist quest for knowledge and locate it in the contemporary world. Epistemology, fictionalization, and the crossing of boundaries between the text and the story/stories, were all elements existing not only in Pynchon's earlier narrative but also in many other 20th century writers'. The addition of new literary echoes coming from García Márquez's magical realism (new crossing of the boundaries reality-fiction) and the more explicit emphasis paid now to the condition of America and its paradox make of *Vineland* the literary refuge it cannot be for the protagonists at the beginning of the story.

The writer can invent, fictionalize, and convince his readers that his narrator is only telling them a story. However, if life is ambiguous and we cannot comprehend its ultimate meaning, the novelist could perhaps consider again the possibility of giving our story a happy ending? And this is what the invisible man has done in *Vineland*: this is the first time in which a story written by Pynchon ends happily. As the author himself wrote at the end of his introduction to *Slow Learner*: «we all know, rock'n' roll will never die, and education too, as Henry Adams always sez, keeps going on forever. Perhaps that is Thomas Pynchon's latest tribute to contemporary literature.