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BEYOND LINGUISTIC BARRIERS: THE MUSICAL FUGUE STRUCTURE OF THOMAS PYNCHON'S "ENTROPY".

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RESUMEN: Una de las historias cortas de Pynchon, "Entropy", metaforiza la preocupación modernista sobre la relatividad del lenguaje a la hora de transcribir la realidad externa. Para superar las dificultades que el lenguaje impone en el acto de la comunicación, Pynchon propone la música como código alternativo al mismo. La estructura musical de "Entropy", mediante un coherente juego entre forma y contenido, intenta resolver la falta de unión entre significante y significado lingüísticos. La historia sigue la estructura de una fuga: exposición, desarrollo y "stretto". Estas tres partes se desarrollan mediante la alternancia de dos voces/niveles: la fiesta de Mulligan (el sujeto de la fuga), y la casa de Callisto (la respuesta en contrapunto). Como acompañamiento musical, la lluvia, canciones, los ruidos de la calle, y voces secundarias modulan el desarrollo de la narrativa. A nivel textual, el narrador orquesta y dirige esta complicada estructura de sonidos, voces y otras referencias musicales.

ABSTRAT: One of Pynchon's short stories, "Entropy", seems to metaphorize the modernist preoccupation with the relativity of language when transcribing external reality. To overcome the difficulties that language imposes on the act of communication, music is used as an alternative code. In particular, "Entropy"'s musical fugue structure, by its coherent interplay of form and content, seems to fill the linguistic gap between signified and signifier. The story follows the three main parts of a fugue: exposition, development and stretto. These are developed through the alternation of two voices/levels: Mulligan's party (the subject of the fugue) and Callisto's hothouse (its contrapuntal answer). As a kind of musical accompaniment, rain, songs, street noises and secondary voices, modulate the flow of the narrative. At a textual level, the figure of the narrator orchestrates this intricate pattern of sounds, voices, and many other musical references.

The modernist concern with the barriers language imposes on the human being has always seemed to be one of the unifying motifs in Pynchon's narratives. It is not by chance that authors such as Eliot, Faulkner, Joyce, or Woolf dealt with problems of subjectivity and isolation which frequently came about as a consequence of a certain

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underpinning "nominalistic" stance[1]. If we are to believe critics such as Robert Nadeau, this modernist search for meaning was also highlighted by the new developments and discoveries in the scientific field. Einstein and his theory of relativity was certainly a very important factor in the consolidation of the new modernist cosmovision[2]. In fact, the source of Thomas Pynchon's interest in the overcoming of linguistic barriers to establish a satisfying communication could very well reside also in his studies on engineering physics at Cornell University. Pynchon's peculiar modernist conception of the paradoxical nature of physical reality seems to agree with what quantum mechanics, Einstein's space-time continuum, Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, or Boltzmann's theory of probability[3] posit.

Some other philosophical theories developed from the end of the 19th century onwards also come to the same conclusions. William James's concepts of the "specious present" and "the stream of consciousness", Berkeley's epistemological scepticism, or Henri Bergson's distinction between chronological and psychological time[4], are all arguments which seem to coincide with the new science theories about the relativity of both spatial and temporal coordinates. In other words, both science and philosophy — including psychology— conclude, from modernist times onwards, that ours is an uncertain, ungraspable cosmovision. In scientific terms, a world of randomness, constant change and fluidity.

In his collection of short stories, ***Slow Learner*** [5], Pynchon seems to document the apparent impossibility of using language as a tool to describe and comprehend such a chaotic ontology. Language is relative; it comes from the individual mind and is answered by other linguistic items coming from other minds, but there is no actual "going beyond" oneself, no possibility of transcendence even in the act of "communication"[6]. Pynchon seems to be aware —like other contemporary authors such as Fowles, Barth, Vonnegut...— that "the forms resident in our subjective realities are ill-equipped to describe or contain reality"[7].

Such modernist assumption of the inherent difficulties in fitting language to reality leads Pynchon to search for and construct alternative structures for his narrative

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1 See Louis Menand, ***Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context***. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; chapter 3.

2 See Robert Nadeau, ***Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the Modern Novel***. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981; chapters 1 and 2. For a brief analysis of the incidence of anthropology, psychology and the new physics in the modernist movement see Francisco Collado Rodríguez, "Modernismo: problemas en la frontera (on a violet hour in a certain waste land)", in ***Actas de las Primeras Jornadas de Lingüística y Literatura***, Logroño: Colegio Universitario de La Rioja, 1989.

3 On these concepts and their importance in Pynchon's narrative, see Nadeau, op. cit, chapter 7. For a further understanding of these scientific concepts see Paul Davies, ***The Cosmic Blueprint***, London: Unwin, 1987.

4 See Hazard Adams ed. ***Critical Theory Since Plato***. San Diego: Harcourt, 1971.

5 The collection of early short stories which Pynchon has edited himself (London: Cape, 1985). "Entropy" is the third story in the collection, although it was originally published in the ***Kenyon Review*** (Spring 1990).

6 It seems almost unnecessary to point out the parallelisms between this modernist stance and Derrida's well known thesis of the "differance". See J. Fisher Solomon, ***Discourse and Reference in the Nuclear Age***, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press,1988 (especially chapters 2, 12, and 14).

7 Nadeau, op. cit., p. 136.

creations. The belief that language is an imprecise code to transmit a fragmented gnoseology is clearly presented in all his stories and novels. All his works clearly suggest that our technological society has minimized the dimensions of our perceptions and limited the human possibility for communication among individuals. As A. Trachtenberg asserts:

> **The highest effect of modern technology, then, has been to shift consciousness away from its reliance on written words, on reading, and on the concomitant practice of thinking in logical sequence.**[8]

In this contemporary context, Pynchon presents a world of aimless signifiers and disconnected signifieds. Both characters and readers are drawn into a problematic area of semantic dubiety; a notion which he symbolically depicts as "labyrinths", "crossroads" and "tunnels" in ***Slow Learner***, as the "sewer" in ***V.*** , the "nightworld" in ***Lot 49*** , or the "zone" in ***Gravity's Rainbow*** . Nonetheless, and against this restrictive capacity to understand ontological issues, he offers the reader more feasible instruments to describe reality, alternative —perhaps more reliable— ways of showing a fragmented, unstable cosmovision: music, film, TV., literary references... All of them work as metalanguages, providing us with a different perspective of our multifarious reality.

In particular, it is in one of his first stories, "**Entropy**" (1960), that one of these metalanguages, music, acts out as a perfect link of fragments and images, of ideas and voices otherwise impossible to connect and understand. Apparently, music creates no barrier of meaning between sender and listener. On the contrary, it seems to enhance the plausible interrelatedness between both of them. Music helps to counterbalance the meaningless void of signifiers without signifieds by means of its factual pattern-based order. In an attempt to overcome an inevitable pull towards non-signification, musical structures become more suitable frames of reference, without which both the act of narrating and the process of reading could have no meaning, could be disconnected. The critic David Cowart points out how music in Pynchon's narratives goes beyond the limited capacity of language. This alternative language subtly conveys and hints at extradimensions of experience:

> **...musical allusions hint at orders of being far beyond the sober faculties of rational-minded 20th century man ... Pynchon's musical allusions tell us, finally, that we must discover and exercise whatever sense or senses have atrophied, in hopes that we may hear an "unthinkable order of music"**[9].

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8 In Daniel Hoffman, ed. ***The Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*** . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979; p. 40.

9 David Cowart, ***Thomas Pynchon. The Art of Allusion.*** Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980; p. 94-95.

The story of **"Entropy"**, I believe, both embodies and is embodied by one of the most successful musical metaphors ever conceived. Conventional narrative structures are ironically disrupted and, as a consequence, replaced by a more efficient pattern, a musical fugue[10]. That is, the fugue structure supports its narrative design and helps to clarify its own interpretation. In this way, the linguistic gap between signified and signifier seems to be surmounted by the musical interplay of form and content.

A fugue may be defined[11] as a musical piece made up of three main parts: exposition, development and stretto. In the first one, a subject (or main theme) is presented and then followed by its answer, called countersubject, and usually held in a contrapuntal way. Some other secondary elements —countertheme or countersubject, and coda[12]—, also appear successively. The second part of the fugue, the development, presents a cycle of nearby tonalities, developed by means of different episodes which modulate and link the successive entrances of the subject in such tonalities. The fugue's last part or stretto, is built upon a series of canons or stretti. Through them, some proceedings such as augmentation, diminution and contrary movements, as well as combination of themes, among others, are used.

Once we know how a fugue works in general terms, we can concentrate on the main voices of our story so as to draw the following parallelism. Considering "**Entropy**" as a staff[13], we could easily distinguish two main voices/levels: that from Mulligan's party (which works as the subject of the fugue), and that of Callisto's hothouse (its contrapuntal answer, also called countersubject). Some other noises, or rather "sounds" —to use proper musical terms—, are added to this staff-like house; they all work as a kind of musical accompaniment. In the upper level two recurrent motifs appear all through the story: constant, apocalyptic temperature, and rain. In the lowest level, an ample variation of street noises can also be noticed.

However, Pynchon also gives his finishing touch to this musical-literary work: the main narratorial subject is allowed to speak with the aim of orchestrating this magnificent variety of sounds and voices. It is the extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator[14], by means of his omniscient voice, who provides the short story/fugue pattern with a cohesive structural frame. The following graphic may help to clarify this intricate musical design:

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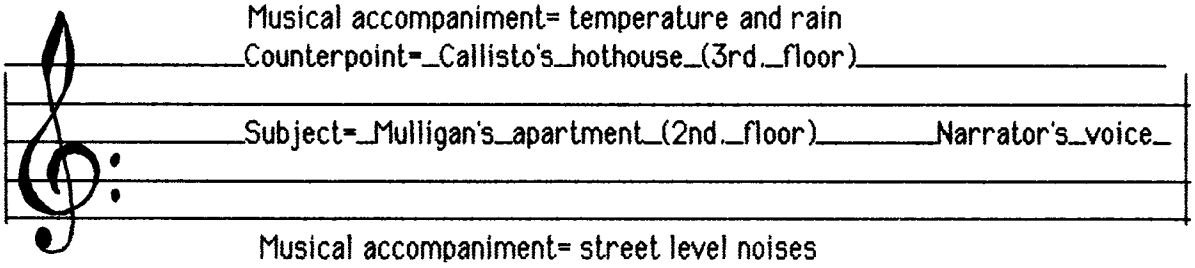
10 I have transcribed the whole musical structure of "Entropy" in the graphics shown at the end of this article so that the reader may follow in a minute way how Pynchon's short story brilliantly conforms to the structure of a musical fugue.

11 For the benefit of the possible readers who may not be acquainted with musical terminology, I have introduced some simple definitions extracted from well known works on musical theory such as Salvador Seguí, ***Teoría musical 1***, Madrid: Unión Musical Española, 1975; ***Teoría Musical 2***, Madrid: Unión Musical Española, 1978; and Stephen Dembski et al., ***International Vocabularary of Music***, Paris: Editions Transatlantiques, 1979.

12 Countertheme is the musical answer given to a short fragment or part of a musical work. Theme and countertheme are constituted by smaller parts called subject and countersubject. The latter also operates as the answer to the former. The coda is the final passage, often elaborate in style, that completes a piece of music. Further explanations can be found in Seguí, ***Teoría Musical 2***, op. cit.

13 Staff or stave is the set of five parallel lines on or between which notes are placed to indicate their pitch.

14 According to Gerard Genette's terminology in ***Narrative Discourse***. Ithaca: Comell University Press, 1980 (1972); p. 228-29, and 244-45.



A closer analysis of this complex network reveals to the reader that the story's musical pattern aims at implicitly conveying man's impossibility of an absolute transcription of physical reality through language. From the very beginning, a quick parallelism can be drawn just by looking at its physical disposition. Like an anacrusis[15] (see bar[16] no.1), Henry Miller's quote from ***Tropic of Cancer*** opens up the story-fugue. At the same time, we are also provided with a general outlook: a brief yet precise introduction to the sociocultural features of the period when the story was written. Together with a touch of inevitable fatalism —represented by a symbolically unchanging temperature— the 20th century civilization is metaphorically depicted:

> **..... The weather will continue bad, he says.**
> **Not the slightest indication of a change anywhere ...**
> **We must get into step, a lockstep toward the prison of death.**
> **There is no escape. The weather will not change.** (p. 81)

The presentation of the fugue's subject, which may also be divided into several parts, follows immediately afterwards. As a counterpoint to its theme (an overall description of Meatball Mulligan's lease breaking party and the jazz quartet listening to the ***Heroes' Gate at Kiev*** [bar 2]), the narratorial voice gives the reader both spatial and temporal coordinates of the story (bar 3), so that the reader-listener can locate the forthcoming events/sounds in a proper context/musical "rapport". To this, rain outside[17] (bar 4) works out both as an arpeggio[18] and as a modulating bridge[19] between the first and the second countertheme. As for the latter, I should notice that the narrator's association of ideas (bars 5 and 6), ends up, first of all, with a textually overt reference

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15 Note or group of notes with no accent on their own, that are placed at the beginning of an accentuated time or initial movement of a musical sentence.

16 Bar is the vertical line across the stave marking divisions of equal value in time. It also means one of these divisions and the notes in it. Here I consider this term in its second definition. In the diagrams showm at the end of this article, I have also ennumerated the bars which will later be referred to so as to clarify my explanations.

17 "Rain splatted against the tar paper on the roof and was fractured into a fine spray off the noses, eyebrows and lips of wooden gargoyles under the eaves, and ran like drool down the windowpanes." ("Entropy", in ***Slow Learner***, op. cit. , p.82)

18 The playing of the notes of a chord in either upwards or downwards succession.

to music: "a **stretto** passage in the year's fugue"(p. 83). Secondly, this perfectly coherent pattern of countertheme and coda can also be equated to another musical sign, a "slur", or mark used to show that two or more notes are to be executed with no separation between them (performed legato).

The countersubject of this fugue pattern is also built upon a firm, coherent structure. Its main theme is made up of three smaller parts. First of all, an exposition-description (bar 7) of Callisto's "hothouse jungle"(p. 83), as well as the other two minor characters inhabiting it, Aubade and the bird. Then, another arpeggio (bar 8), the sound of rain intertwined with "querulous morning voices of the other birds"(p.83) helps to connect the previously mentioned presentation of the third floor to its re-exposition or development (bar 9). It should be mentioned that almost all the re-expositions which appear all along the fugue are transposed to narrative terms in quite a logical way: here, from the narrator's description of Callisto's enclave, the reader is led to contemplate what the narratorial voice has just portrayed; as presented in bar 9, by means of the direct style the reader is allowed to know the characters' behaviours and acts in a deeper or, to be more precise, direct way.

Finally the countersubject ends up with a triple variation of counterthemes (bars 10, 11 and 12), all of them to be interpreted with a slur. The narrator, so as to be more specific, has modulated his voice in three different directions: from Aubade's description as the personification of order and harmony[20] (notice once more the excessive insistence on the use of musical terms), and a short reference to Henry Adams, to Callisto's description in terms of rhythm and absence of it:

> **Leery at omens of apocalypse, Callisto shifted beneath the covers. His fingers pressed the bird more firmly, as if needing some pulsing or suffering assurance of an early break in the temperature.** (p. 85)

The fugue pattern becomes even more complex in its second part. Subject and countersubject appear alternately, yet with intercalated variations of each of them. From Callisto's harmonious and ordered hothouse, a modulating bridge (bar 13) leads the reader back again to Meatball's apartment. As the narrator ironically adds, Callisto's wish for an early break in the constant apocalyptic 37 degrees Fahrenheit outside and inside is achieved by means of a sharp noise-note:

> **It was that last cymbal crash that did it.** (p. 85)

More noises contribute to disturb the artificially built harmony of the third floor.

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20 "... she was part French and part Annamese, and she lived on her own curious and lonely planet, where the clouds and the odor of poincianas, the bitterness of wine and the accidental fingers at the small of her back or feathery against her breast came to her reduced inevitably to the terms of sound: of music which emerged at intervals from a howling darkness of discordancy." (p. 84)

A "final hiss ... melted into the whisper of rain outside" (p.85) and Meatball's desperate, even dissonant "Aarrgghh" (p. 85) work out as perfect links for a new exposition and its development. As far as the latter is concerned, a new musical parallelism may be drawn: Krinkles and Meatball's conversation (bar 17) is reproduced in a stacatto[21]-like way. In the same way that musical signs in a stacatto are to be played with greater intensity and expression, this piece of dialogue is characterized by short, fragmented sentences, and a careless, inconsistent style:

> **"Jeez, Meatball," he said, "you don't want to do nothing no more.""Hair of dog," said Meatball. "Only hope. Any juice left?"...."No champagne, I don't think," Duke said. "Case of tequila behind the icebox." They put on an Earl Bostic side. Meatball paused at the kitchen door, glowering at Sandor Rojas. "Lemons," he said after a thought.** (p. 85)

After Sandor's announcement (modulating bridge [bar 18]) that a new musical interference —that of Saul's voice coming from the first floor— is going to appear, there comes a variation in tonality[22] of the main subject. With Saul's, new tonalities ("a sudden flurry of knocking at the front door" and the voices of "three Coeds from George Washington"[p. 86]) serve to introduce another intromission on the part of the main narrative voice (bars 21 and 22). His slur-like digression, this time centered on the description of a secondary character[23], is now developed in a more complex way. By means of the free indirect discourse, defined by S. Rimmon-Kenan[24] as the co-presence of two voices, the narrator's voice and the character's pre-verbal perceptions or feelings, the former intrudes into the mind of the latter, and describes him in explicit terms:

> ***Purche porti la gonnella, voi sapete quel che fa* . Like Pavlov's dog: a contralto voice or a whiff of Arpege and Sandor would begin to salivate.** (p. 87)

A few lines/bars later, a blank space in the text acts out as a musical rest[25] (bar 23). A new change of voice is clearly indicated: the countersubject or contrapuntal answer to the subject, that is, the sounds of the third floor.

Nonetheless, a closer analysis of the structure of the countersubject reveals its

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21 Musical mark which indicates that the sound on which it is situated must be executed with greater intensity and expression.

22 Having considered, in an arbitrary yet easier way, our fugue as being in C Major (tonality with no sharps nor flats), I symbolically represent this variation (Saul's voice) in tonality and the following variations to come by using the nearby tonalities to C Major, that is, G Major (with one sharp) and F Major (with one flat).

23 Sandor Rojas, as "...an ex-Hungarian freedom fighter who had easily the worst chronic case of what certain critics of the middle class have called Don Giovannism in the District of Columbia."(p. 86)

24 In ***Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics***. London: Methuen, 1983; p. 111 et seq.

intricate pattern to the reader. First of all, there is an exposition of the theme (bars 24, 25 and 26). Callisto, parodying the historian Henry Adams (let us remember how the narrator purposely referred to him before in the exposition) dictates to Aubade his own memoirs using the 3rd person to refer to himself. Meanwhile, a small, soft sound can also be perceived: the bird's "pitiful small heart fluttered against his own" (p. 88). Immediately afterwards the theme is varied by means of a melodic accompaniment (bar 27), a series of street-level noises which seem to be joined as notes in a chord[26] executed as a descending arpeggio[27] (descending arpeggiated chord). As the text explicitly shows:

> **Counterpointed against his [Callisto's] words the girl heard the chatter of birds and fitful car honkings scattered along the wet morning and Earl Bostic's alto rising in occasional wild peaks through the floor.** (p. 88)

After the secondary theme's new appearance (bar 28) there follows, first, a countertheme (bar 29) where the narrator ironically explains Callisto's diction and his narrow knowledge of scientific concepts, and second, a re-exposition in direct speech (bar 30), which is ended up in a sharp, abrupt way. Callisto's autobiography finishes with the verb "cease" and immediately after, like a musical rest, the narrative symbolically announces that "the rain has stopped" (p. 89). With this explicit indication —both in narrative and musical terms— of a change of voice, Saul's retrospective account is allowed to be heard. Like an arpeggiated chord, his narration about the discussion with his wife can be divided into four consecutive notes: rain outside, the ***Handbook of Chemistry*** she throws at him, the sound of the window when it breaks, and her crying (bar 32):

> **"Oh Meatball, it was a lovely fight. She ended up throwing a *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics* at me, only it missed and went through the window, and when the glass broke I reckon something in her broke too. She stormed out of the house crying, out in the rain."** (p. 89)

By and large, Saul's account in Meatball's house can be considered as a second variation on the subject. Besides, it is further developed through a conversation between Saul and Meatball (bar 33), which may easily be transcribed into musical signs. Their speeches are centered on the idea of entropy in information flow[28]. This scientific

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26 The word "chord" represents the combination of three or more notes sounded together in harmony. It may also refer to the simultaneous production of different sound in those intruments whose own construction allows it, such as keyboard ones (the organ, the piano or the harmonium) or the string ones (the violin, the harp, the guitar, etc).

27 As I explained before, an arpeggio is the playing of the notes of a chord in order that by the end of its execution the whole chord could be heard. Arpeggiated chords are written preceded by a vertical waving line all along the notes of the chord. The sounds of the chord are executed upwards, according to the way they are placed in the staff. If they are played downwards, they are called descending arpeggiated chords.

28 On this concept and its use in Pynchon's narrative see Frank D. McConnell, ***Four postwar american novelists***. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977; p. 173-74.

concept states that the more information one receives, the more difficult it is to understand the message. Once more, communication through language turns out to be impossible. Music, therefore, attempts to surmount language barriers. If we analyse each sentence we can easily come to their musical equivalents. Saul's "a kind of leakage" (p. 90) suggests a constant movement or flow; musically speaking, a note which ought to be maintained for a while. Thus, a hold[29] would perfectly suit this purpose. "Noise screws up your signal, makes for disorganization in the circuit" (p. 91) is a paragraph which goes back to the idea of information flow or, in musical terms, to a succession of brief-duration notes (f.i., demisemiquavers[30]). And so the text follows:

> **"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." Meatball fell silent. "I'll take that drink," Saul said after a while.** (p. 91)

Sentences become incomplete, unfinished. "**Entropy**"'s eponimous concept seems to turn communication into a complete source of misunderstanding. Literal silence, represented with a rest, seems to stress the idea of entropic undifferentiation. The final words of the conversation symbolically indicate that the following words/notes are irrelevant, that their attempt at communicating has completely failed. Besides, more "noises" ("five enlisted personnel of the U.S. Navy"[p. 92]) increase the entropic chaos that the useless linguistic code produces. Yet, they soon become suffocated by another rest/blank space, which clearly hints at a new change of voice. This time, what is going to be varied is not the main subject, but the countersubject. Back to Callisto's domains, a mordent[31]-like quick reference to the threatening 37 degrees Fahrenheit outside (bar 37) gives way to Aubade's physical description, which is described in terms of music:

> **In the hothouse Aubade stood absently caressing the branches of a young mimosa, hearing a motif of sap-rising, the rough and unresolved anticipatory theme of those fragile pink blossoms which, it is said, insure fertility.** (p. 92)

As the reader may perceive, musical terminology becomes increasingly allusive both in the description of her sense of order and in the factual invasion of chaotic noises

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29 Musical mark represented with a semicircle and a full stop. It indicates that the sound of the note should be maintained.

30 Name of the musical note which is equal to the 32th. part of the semibreve (or the longest musical note in common use).

31 Complementary notes which are to be executed in the fastest possible way. They are represented by small semiquavers joined to the main note by means of a slur. They do not have any temporal value on their own, and therefore, they have to take it from the figures which either precede or follow them.

coming from the partygoers of the second floor. Her personification of harmony and even a kind of orchestra conductor is later displayed through a brilliant mastery of musical terms. Like a trill[32]-note modulating up and down (bar 39), Aubade tries to preserve herself from the noises of the lower floor:

> **That music rose in a tangled tracery: arabesques of order competing fugally with the improvised discords of the party downstairs, which peaked sometimes in cusps and ogees of noise.**(p. 92)

After an explicit reference to the fugue motif, the improvised discords of Mulligan's party also modulate up and down, yet in an **ad libitum** , non-ordered way. These noises may thus be represented as a fioritura[33], as if they were to be interpreted without any fixed, predetermined rhythm or speed. It should also be pointed out how the narrator has finally merged both theme and countertheme together. Furthermore, his masterful handling of music is given its final touch in the description of Aubade's and Callisto's actions:

> **The sound of his voice generated in the girl an answering scrap of melody. Her movement toward the kitchen, the towel, the cold water, and his eyes following her formed a weird and intricate canon; as she placed the compress on his forehead his sigh of gratitude seemed to signal a new subject, another series of modulations.** (p. 93-94)

The narrator's virtuosity is being displayed as the fugue develops. Now, a whole series of variations on the main subject (bars 42-48) in different tonalities —or, to use narrative terms, in different voices— follows. On the one hand, Meatball talks to the U.S. personnel. On the other hand, Duke's quartet, playing without instruments, has some problems. As the text explains, Paco is in G sharp, while the rest are in E flat. In the kitchen, two girls and some sailors sing ***Let's All go Down*** and ***Piss On the Forrestal***. Saul drops paper bags with water, Slab is butted, "the **morra** players were nose-to-nose, screaming **trois, sette** at the tops of their lungs"(p. 96), and the girl of the sink announces that she is drowning. Noises, the narrator says, have reached almost a climactic point:

> **The noise in Meatball's apartment had reached a sustained, ungodly crescendo.** (p. 96)

This incessant loudness has been gradually accelerated as if it were modified by an

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32 Trill is the quick alternation of two notes a tone or a semitone apart.

33 Fragment of a musical work which is executed with no excessive metrical stricture, but according to the personal

affrentando or a swell[34] (bar 48). From pianissimo sounds, we have come to a fortissimo intensity.

Nevertheless, the narratorial voice makes use, once more, of the technique of free indirect style in order to present Mulligan's thoughts in a more intimate way. Through this narrative device, an expository yet piano voice is allowed to flow, suspending the gradual quickening of the rhythm. It should also be stressed that the character's mental digressions [(a)(b)(a)] represent a vicious circle pattern which could be equated to a mordent (bar 49). Meatball's decision to calm down his guests is suggestively followed by a final rest. The second part of the fugue structure, the development, has just finished. There only remains the stretto to be accomplished, a musical part which comprises a series of canons or stretti. In it, and for the first time in the story, sounds coming from both floors, from both subject and countersubject, are significantly "con-fused". The faint beat of the bird begins "to slacken and fail" (p. 97). In musical terms, a swell would indicate this shift from piano to pianissimo intensity (bar 51). Meanwhile, high-pitched voices —a girl's scream, an overturned chair, glass dropped on the floor, ...— from the lower flat seem to impose over the tiny heartbeat of the bird. This time, intensity of the sounds/words is varied right up in the opposite direction. That is to say, from forte to fortissimo (bar 52). To further contribute to this **affrentando** movement, the narrative explicitly states that Callisto's "pulse began to pound more fiercely"(p. 97).

However, as a kind of counterforce, the narrator announces that the bird's "heartbeat ticked a graceful diminuendo down at last into stillness"(p. 97). Its musical parallelism cannot be more precise: a series of quick, brief-duration notes followed by a rest, at the same time being modified by a swell from piano to pianissimo intensity (bar 54). Finally, the narrative itself is symbolically left suspended, as if it were modified by a hold (bar 55). Callisto's questions, unanswered and even unfinished, seem to convey the absolute impossibility to comprehend external reality through words:

> **Callisto raised his head slowly. "I held him," he protested, impotent with the wonder of it "to give him the warmth of my body. Almost as if I were communicating life to him, or a sense of life. What has happened? Has the transfer of heat ceased to work? Is there no more ..." He did not finish.** (p. 97-98)

It is also highly significant that Aubade, as "harmony", finally dominates and controls the confrontation of the opposing outside and inside worlds; or in the fugue's structure, the external noises of both street and lower flat, and the silence of the hothouse. In this respect, she performs the last cadence[35] (bar 56), which may be divided into two

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34 "Affrentando" is a musical term which indicates that there should be a gradual quickening of the movement that is being played. "Swell" is a musical mark which means that there should be a gradual increase in the volume of sound. Although these two terms at first appear to be almost similar, the first refers to the rhythm whereas the second is related to the intensity of the sounds.

clearly cut, definitely accentuated[36] sounds: the tearing of the drapes and the smashing of the window. The latter should be considered as the last sforzando-note in intensity of the fugue. In the same way any musical structure usually finishes with a movement from the dominant to the tonic[37], the narrative brilliantly shows the use of such musical terms so as to arrive at the final rest, at the very end of the fugue:

> **... until the moment of equilibrium was reached, when 37 degrees Fahrenheit should prevail both outside and inside, and forever, and the hovering, curious *dominant* of their separate lives should resolve into a *tonic* of darkness and the final absence of all motion.** (p. 98, emphasis added)

Language has dissolved. Communication through linguistic signs has also failed. With the blank of the page, the acts both of narrating and reading have inevitably finished. The narrative's open end may suggest, or rather, invite the reader/listener to await for other sounds to appear, for a "crying"[38] or a "screaming across the sky"[39]. Perhaps the answer to the paradoxical, ambivalent quality of language and the desire to surmount all linguistic barriers should be found in Pynchon's ***Vineland*** , his latest literary creation, and in its inherent wish for a **harmonious** world: a desire "to harbor in Vineland, Vineland the Good"[40]. However, it is also painfully clear that a linguistically structured narrative can only suggest transcendence, even if it also incorporates an elaborated musical metalanguage, as happens in "**Entropy**". Perhaps Pynchon's attempts to overcome the linguistic barrier may eventually help the reader to realize why we are (still) living in the era of Post-**modernism**.

36 Accent is the musical symbol which indicates that the note above which it is placed should be executed with greater emphasis. Seguí further explains it as follows: "El acento se indica con un pequeño ángulo colocado encima o debajo de la nota afectada y cuyo vértice está siempre en la parte opuesta de la nota; su ejecución se realiza acentuando con fuerza el sonido afectado y manteniendo su duración en la totalidad del valor representado." (***Teoría Musical 1***, op. cit., p. 81)

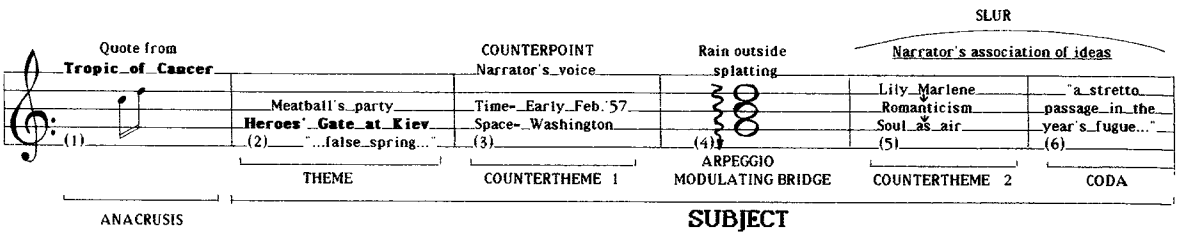
37 Dominant and tonic are, respectively, the fifth and first notes of a scale. The last cadence (conclusive cadence) or final bars in a musical work are built by linking the chord of dominant or subdominant to the chord of tonic. In the first case, it is called "cadencia perfecta" (Seguí 1978:59), and perfect is also the case of the end of Pynchon's story.

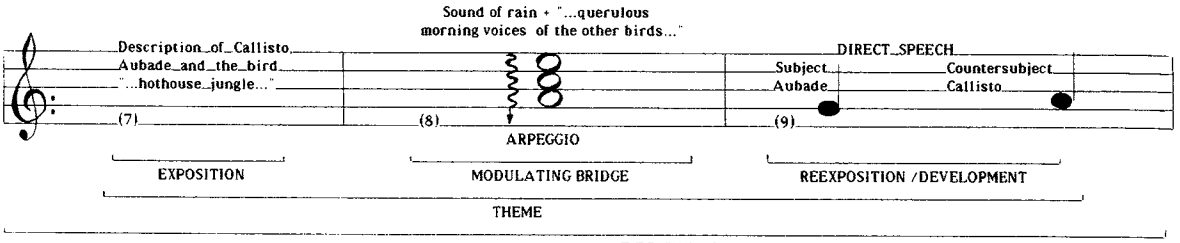
38 As in Pynchon's second novel ***The Crying of Lot 49***. London: Picador, 1966.

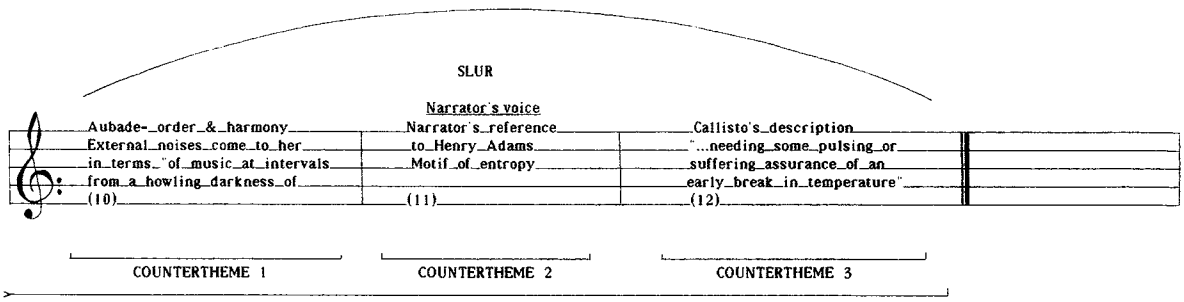
39 "A screaming comes across the sky" marks the beginning of Pynchon's third novel ***Gravity's Rainbow***. London: Picador, 1973.

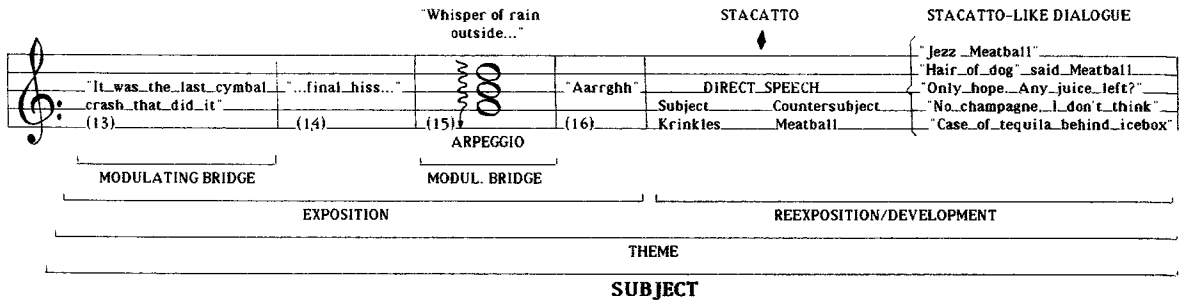
40 ***Vineland***. London: Secker & Warburg, 1990: p. 322.

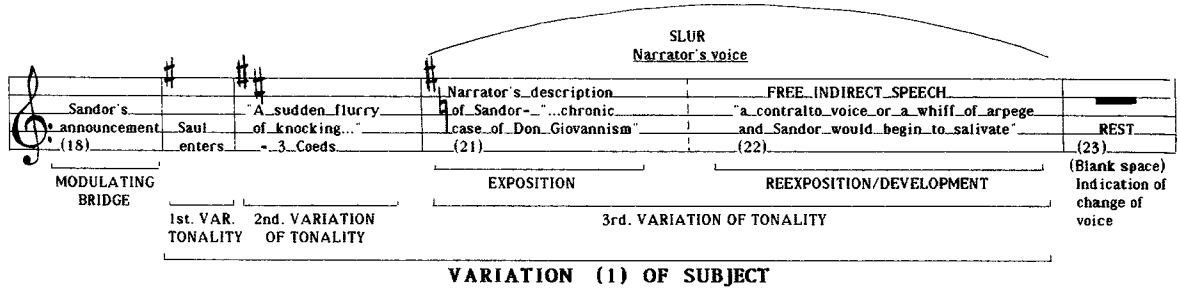
THE MUSICAL FUGUE STRUCTURE

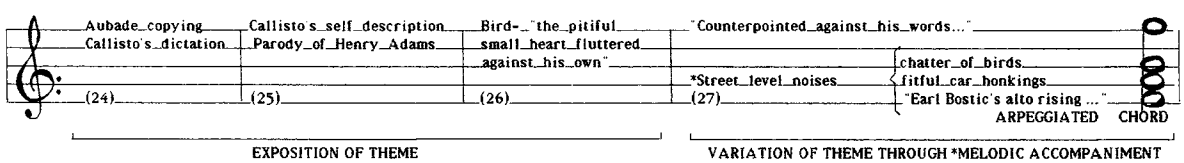












CARMEN PÉREZ-LLANTADA AURÍA

